The effect of seed coat color grading on height of one-year-old container-grown Scots pine seedlings planted on post-fire site

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Abstract. The basis for the present research is an alternative hypothesis about the existence of significant differences between morphometric parameters of Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris L.) seedlings of different color-seed races. The experiment was established by planting of one-year old Scots pine container seedlings under Kolesov's sword. Ten rows in a 90-fold repetition were planted on 24th October 2017 on the site of the left-bank forestry training Voronezh State University of Forestry and Technologies (coordinates of the nodal point: N 51°49'40.3" E 39°21'49.7", altitude 100.8 m asl). Seedlings were produced from the seeds, previously separated based on seed coat color and size, in the nursery by a standard rotation cycle for Scots pine container seedlings. The planted seedlings were measured for height three times during the first growing season after the field planting on a post-fire site. The results show a significant difference in one-year-old container produced Scots pine seedlings height with white seeds producing the highest seedlings after one year growth in the field. Our results indicate the potential use of seed sorting on seed coat color for improvement of both, production of forest reproductive material and reforestation success.

1. Introduction

The basis for the present research was the previous reports on geographical [1] and genetic [2, 3] variability of seed coat color of Scots pine, and its potential use for seed selection and improvement of production of forest reproductive material. There are many studies of the growth of Scots pine at the juvenile stage [4-9]. There are many methods for improving the seed quality [10-16] aiming to improve seedlings performance (survival and growth), as it is shown for Scots pine [13]. Facing the ultimate goal of improvement of seedling performance after field planting, there is a constant need of improvement of seed quality, resulting with introducing of, among others, innovative biophysical methods [17-20] for assessing the seed quality.

However, there is very little information about the effect of seed coat color on the growth of seedlings after field transplanting. Thus, the purpose of this study was to provide information on the effect of seed coat color and size on the growth of one-year-old container seedlings of Scots pine and to assess future potential in the development of sorting seeds by color.

2. Methods and Materials

Seedlings used in this study were grown in the Voronezh forest nursery between 02nd May 2017 and 23rd October 2017 by implementing a standard rotation cycle for the container seedlings of Scots pine


(*Pinus sylvestris* L.). Seeds (harvested from Pavlovsk forestry of Voronezh region, Russia) were divided by the color of the seeds coat, with the help of a photoseparator (Sapsan Series, Smart Grade LLC, Voronezh, Russia), into three seed batches: white (1), brown (2), and black (3). After that, each seed batch was further divided based on the size – seed diameter, by using a sieve unit (BCC AB, Landskrona, Sweden), into two fractions with the maximum seed size of 2.5 mm (small) and 3.25 mm (large), respectively. The 200 seeds for each fraction were then sown by using an automatic seeding line (BCC AB) in HIKO 12 SS 40-cell containers (BCC AB), filled with peat substrate. Containers were installed in greenhouses with automatic temperature and humidity maintenance.

The produced seedlings were planted manually under the sword of Kolesov on 24th October 2017 on the site of the left-bank forestry training Voronezh State University of Forestry and Technologies (coordinates of the nodal point: N 51°49′40.3" E 39°21′49.7", altitude 100.8 m asl). As a total, ten rows in 90-fold repetition were planted. The experimental facility is based on the methodology proposed by Konovalov and Pugach [3], in order to create natural conditions.

![A one-year-old container grown seedlings of Scots pine planted under the Kolesov’s sword.](image)

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3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the height growth dynamics of Scots pine seedlings obtained from seeds sorted by color and size. The table also describes height values and the main statistical parameters: mean deviation, dispersion, standard deviation (SD), coefficient of variation (CV) and survival rate, %.
Table 1. Results of measurements of Scots pine seedlings growth at the first growing season after the field planting on a post-fire site.

| Sample code | Seed characteristics (a priori) | Parameters | Date of measurement |
|-------------|--------------------------------|------------|---------------------|
|             |                                |            | 25 May 2018 | 28 Jun 2018 | 31 Jul 2018 |
| 1           | white                          | average height, mm | 74.63       | 97.93       | 117.08      |
|             |                                | mean deviation, mm | 16.96       | 15.74       | 20.64       |
|             |                                | dispersion   | 498.11      | 412.31      | 762.33      |
|             |                                | standard deviation (SD) | 22.32       | 20.31       | 27.61       |
|             |                                | coefficient of variation (CV) | 0.30        | 0.21        | 0.24        |
|             |                                | survival rate, % | 94.3        | 83.9        | 82.8        |
| 2           | brown                          | average height, mm | 58.85       | 68.83       | 94.10       |
|             |                                | mean deviation, mm | 14.21       | 14.47       | 18.56       |
|             |                                | dispersion   | 352.04      | 404.27      | 630.74      |
|             |                                | standard deviation (SD) | 18.76       | 20.11       | 25.11       |
|             |                                | coefficient of variation (CV) | 0.32        | 0.29        | 0.27        |
|             |                                | survival rate, % | 79.5        | 75.9        | 73.5        |
| 3           | black                          | average height, mm | 61.37       | 72.57       | 98.75       |
|             |                                | mean deviation, mm | 12.89       | 11.82       | 16.39       |
|             |                                | dispersion   | 263.86      | 241.38      | 429.69      |
|             |                                | standard deviation (SD) | 16.24       | 15.54       | 20.73       |
|             |                                | coefficient of variation (CV) | 0.26        | 0.21        | 0.21        |
|             |                                | survival rate, % | 95.3        | 87.1        | 84.7        |
| 1-2.5       | white - small                  | average height, mm | 60.63       | 77.40       | 100.45      |
|             |                                | mean deviation, mm | 10.88       | 12.74       | 15.71       |
|             |                                | dispersion   | 212.11      | 290.00      | 418.46      |
|             |                                | standard deviation (SD) | 14.56       | 17.03       | 20.46       |
|             |                                | coefficient of variation (CV) | 0.24        | 0.22        | 0.20        |
|             |                                | survival rate, % | 89.5        | 88.2        | 88.2        |
| 1-3.25      | white - large                  | average height, mm | 61.64       | 84.05       | 106.53      |
|             |                                | mean deviation, mm | 14.54       | 15.05       | 18.40       |
|             |                                | dispersion   | 366.04      | 349.78      | 575.44      |
|             |                                | standard deviation (SD) | 19.13       | 18.70       | 23.99       |
|             |                                | coefficient of variation (CV) | 0.31        | 0.22        | 0.23        |
|             |                                | survival rate, % | 84.4        | 82.2        | 78.9        |
| 2-2.5       | brown - small                  | average height, mm | 57.04       | 76.35       | 104.89      |
|             |                                | mean deviation, mm | 14.75       | 16.45       | 22.35       |
|             |                                | dispersion   | 358.95      | 425.77      | 777.21      |
|             |                                | standard deviation (SD) | 18.95       | 20.63       | 27.88       |
|             |                                | coefficient of variation (CV) | 0.33        | 0.27        | 0.27        |
|             |                                | survival rate, % | 79.4        | 70.6        | 66.2        |
The seeds with white seed coat show the highest growth rate and maintained the advantage in height over the black and brown seeds, respectively, during the first growing season (Table 1 and Figure 2a). The differences between mean values of height for different seed color groups are statistically significant (p=0.000018). This difference in height growth of seedlings from different seed colors indicates a strong genetic control of both, seed coat color and seedling vigor, having in mind that seed color is not a reliable measure of maturity [21]. In the study [22] of correlations between the germination capacity and selected physical properties of Scots pine seeds, it was found no significant differences between seeds of different colors, although the gray seeds showed in general higher values of measured parameters compared to black and “other” colors. Opposite to this report, similar to findings of Mukassabi et al. [23], that dark seeds of Scots pine exhibited high values of mass and viability, Udval and Batkhuu [24] found a significant differences in germination between different seed colors, with black seed exhibiting the highest germination capacity, followed by brown, and with light color seed showing the lowest germination capacity. The fact that our results show the highest growth of white colored seeds, while other reports show that black and dark seeds are of better quality compared to light colored seeds, indicates the need for further research. Our results also show that brown seeds resulted in the lowest survival rate, much lower than black and white seeds.
Figure 2. The growth of Scots pine seedlings in the first juvenile period.

Figure 2b illustrates the growth of seedlings over a specified period in the following groups: 1-2.5, 1-3.25, 2-2.5, 2-3.25, 3-2.5 and 3-3.25 (encoding of groups from Table 1). The distribution of the average height for the entire period of time by color groups occurs in decreasing order: from groups (1-2.25; 1-3.25) through groups (2-2.5, 2-3.25) up to groups (3-2.5; 3-3.25). By the end of the period under review, the difference in growth within the groups (1-2.25; 1-3.25) and (3-2.5; 3-3.25) increases, while the one within groups (2-2.5, 2-3.25) is reduced. However, the height of seedlings in groups (2-
2.5, 2-3.25) exceeds the height of seedlings in the group 1-2.5. The greatest oscillation of the elevation values is presented in groups 1-2.5 and 3-2.5.

4. Conclusion
The results of the presented study show a significant difference in one-year-old container produces Scots pine seedlings height after the first growing season in the field conditions, indicating the potential use of seed sorting on seed coat color for improvement of both, production of forest reproductive material and reforestation success. Combining the grading on seed size with sorting on color it is decreased the differences in mean values indicating the potential of using both methods for seed quality assessment and improvement. Further researches need to use more holistic approach to this issue investigating: 1) genetic control of seed color, germination and subsequent seedling growth, 2) relation between seed color and seed quality, 3) relation between seed color and seedling quality in the nursery, and 4) relation between seed color and performance after planting in the field.

Acknowledgments
The research was carried out with the support of the internal grant in Voronezh State University of Forestry and Technologies named after G.F. Morozov (VSUFT).

The authors acknowledged the Voronezh Forest Containerized Nursery (VFN) and Educational-experienced leshkhoz (EEL) of VSUFT for the opportunity to conduct research. Special thanks to PhD in Agriculture V. Malyshev (VFN), and PhD in Economics A. Topcheev (EEL of VSUFT) for their constructive feedback. I acknowledged comments and reviews from the editor of FORESTRY-2018 and the reviewer.

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