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# Improving seed germination of native species for camel rangeland restoration: effects of cold stratification and temperature

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## ► To cite this version:

Mériem Marfoua, Elise Buisson, Samia Bissati-Bouafia, Amar Eddoud, Ahmed Benchettouh. Improving seed germination of native species for camel rangeland restoration: effects of cold stratification and temperature. *Botany Letters*, 2023, 170 (2), pp.303-317. 10.1080/23818107.2023.2176356 . hal-04042316

**HAL Id: hal-04042316**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04042316>**

Submitted on 23 Mar 2023

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1 **Improving seed germination of native species for camel rangeland**  
2 **restoration: effects of cold stratification and temperature**

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33 **Running title**

34 Germination of Saharan native plants

35 **Data availability statement**

36 The data that support the findings will be available in Zenodo at [<https://zenodo.org>]  
37 following a [6 month] embargo from the date of publication.

38 **Improving seed germination of native species for camel rangeland**  
39 **restoration: effects of cold stratification and temperature**

40 Native plants of the Sahara are remarkably resistant to prolonged droughts and  
41 are important sources of forage, food, and medicine. Their regeneration from  
42 seeds after strong anthropogenic disturbances is a challenging step toward their  
43 conservation and to mitigate desertification. We studied the germination  
44 responses of 43 dominant native species of the Sahara desert that could be  
45 propagated from seeds for future ecological restoration projects, exploring the  
46 effects of cold stratification and temperatures on seed germination. Seeds were  
47 stratified at 4°C for 3 days and then tested for germination at 5, 10, 15, 20, 25,  
48 30, 35, and 40°C. While cold stratification negatively affected four species, it  
49 improved the germination of 36 species. Five of these species required cold  
50 stratification to germinate. Temperatures during the germination trial  
51 significantly influenced seed germinability. Twenty-three species (54%)  
52 germinated to higher percentages at intermediate temperatures (20 to 30°C)  
53 similar to the maximum temperatures of the rainiest months, when germination in  
54 the field is high. Thirteen species (30%) also germinated at a higher temperature  
55 (40°C). Seven species (16%) germinated best at low temperatures (5 to 10°C).  
56 Our results suggest that cold stratification is an efficient and easy treatment to  
57 apply prior to sowing seeds in the field for restoration.

58 **Keywords:** native plants; camel rangelands; ecological restoration; Sahara desert;  
59 seed germination; seed dormancy.

60 African Plant Database (version 3.4.0). Conservatoire et Jardin botaniques de la  
61 Ville de Genève and South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria, from  
62 <http://africanplantdatabase.ch>

63 **Introduction**

64 Desertification is a gradual process of soil and vegetation degradation, often attributable  
65 to climate change and/or to direct human activities such as overgrazing and  
66 deforestation. Desertification threatens biodiversity and the survival of human  
67 populations, and is considered one of the environmental issues of greatest concern for  
68 the twenty-first century. The United Nations has set up a Convention to Combat  
69 Desertification (UNCCD), one of whose objectives is mitigating drought effects by  
70 restoring degraded land (UNCCD 2014).

71 Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem  
72 that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed (Gann et al. 2019). To improve degraded  
73 areas and fight against desertification, vegetation cover can be increased by sowing or  
74 planting a local and diversified set of species adapted to an arid climate (Toumi et al.  
75 2017). Moreover, a pre-requisite for all ecological restoration projects is the use of  
76 native species (Gann et al. 2019), which requires accurate information on plant  
77 establishment and growth conditions, starting with seed germination.

78 Restoration success fundamentally depends on knowledge of seed biology, seeds  
79 being the primary tool for plant reintroductions (Gann et al. 2019). However, seeds are  
80 not always available and there is often a lack of information on the conditions required  
81 for germination and seedling establishment (Broadhurst et al. 2008; Dayrell et al. 2016).  
82 Seed germination is a crucial stage in the life cycle of plants, enabling the establishment  
83 of new individuals (Bewley and Black 1982; Baskin and Baskin 2014; Gurvich et al.  
84 2017; Penfield 2017). In desert environments, temperature is a key factor in seed  
85 germination (Flores and Briones 2001; Pérez-Sánchez et al. 2011; Baskin and Baskin  
86 2014; Gurvich et al. 2017). It affects, mainly or incidentally, dormancy-break and  
87 germination percentage (Baskin and Baskin 2014; Gurvich et al. 2017; Fallahi et al.

88 2017; Ostadian Bidgoly et al. 2018). Seed dormancy, defined as the inability of seeds to  
89 germinate under apparently favorable conditions, helps limit seed germination in a  
90 given habitat to the most appropriate time for seedling survival and plant development.  
91 At maturity, the seeds of most Mediterranean and desert species are dormant, which  
92 prevents germination immediately after dispersal (Schütz and Milberg 1997) and thus  
93 allows for unpredictable rainfall events. Naturally, dormancy-break occurs either *via*  
94 dry ripening at high summer temperatures or during cold (moist) stratification in winter,  
95 depending on the species and its life cycle. Temperature is therefore a major factor  
96 controlling dormancy-break. After dormancy is broken, temperature is also important in  
97 determining when seeds germinate, provided that the soil is moist. If seeds become non-  
98 dormant during the winter, they germinate in spring, which in desert areas is a time  
99 when rain is likely. Knowing seed requirements for germination is therefore essential to  
100 making optimal use of this important resource. This applies particularly to the seeds of  
101 unstudied species, such as a wide range of desert and Saharan species.

102         The North Saharan xeric steppe and woodland ecoregion acts as a transition  
103 zone between the North African Mediterranean ecosystems and the Sahara desert (Naia  
104 and Brito 2021). In Algeria, the largest country in Africa (2 381 741 km<sup>2</sup>), the various  
105 Saharan ecoregions occupy about 4/5 (2 000 000 km<sup>2</sup>) of the country. Among the main  
106 native ecosystems are open camel rangelands composed of native vegetation. When  
107 well-conserved, these rangelands are characterized by a great diversity of native  
108 Saharan plants, many endemic (Quézel and Santa 1962-1963; Ozenda 2004; Chehma  
109 2006), which are used as medicines and nutritive fodder (Abdelguerfi 2004; Chehma  
110 2005; Senoussi and Bensemaoune 2011; Baameur et al. 2015; Telli et al. 2016). In this  
111 area, the risk of desertification comes from drought combined with anthropogenic  
112 activities, such as overgrazing, clearing of rangelands, and the installation of cereal

113 center-pivot irrigation plots (Marfoua et al. 2010; Eddoud et al. 2018), all of which put  
114 certain plant species at risk of disappearing (Ayyad 2003; Darkoh 2003).

115 In the Saharan regions, there are few reliable data on the recovery of natural  
116 ecosystems after degradation (Aronson et al. 1993a; Aronson et al. 1993b). After  
117 overgrazing, arid and semi-arid rangelands may not recover for several years post-  
118 fencing against livestock (Kassahun et al. 2009). In situations where the degradation of  
119 rangelands has reached an irreversibility threshold and where resilience is no longer  
120 possible (e.g. after cereal cultivation), restoration actions *via* seeding or planting are  
121 necessary. Most attempts to seed rangelands with introduced herbaceous species and  
122 exotic shrubs have failed due to poor adaptation of these species to local environmental  
123 conditions (Ben Salem et al. 2008).

124 Because the restoration needs in this region are huge and urgent, research on the  
125 seed biology of native species is vital: their phenology, development, maturation,  
126 viability, and dormancy need to be explored to optimize restoration outcomes (Merritt  
127 and Dixon 2011). This study sought to define the germination ecology of 43 Saharan  
128 dominant native plant species from open camel rangelands, aiming to improve  
129 germination rates for future restoration projects in the northern Algerian desert. We  
130 focused on determining the effects of cold stratification and incubation temperature on  
131 these species' seed germination.

## 132 **Material and methods**

### 133 *Study area*

134 Our study area was located in Ouargla province in the Northeastern Algerian Sahara  
135 (Figure 1). Camel rangelands in the area are characterized by large areas of sand called  
136 *Oriental Ergs*, *Hamadas* (rocky plateaus), *Regs* (gravel zone), depressions (*Daya*, *wadi*

137 *beds, Sebkhah and Chott*), and valleys (fossil valley from Oued Mya and Oued Righ  
138 Valley) (Ozenda 2004).

139 To characterize the climate of the study area, we selected a reference station  
140 (#31750: 31°41'28.321" N, 5°0'0" E) providing data over a 35-year period from 1979  
141 to 2014 (Table 1). Temperatures are very high in summer (June to August in the range  
142 of 30.8°C and 32.5°C, respectively). The monthly average of the hottest month (July) is  
143 33.0°C while that of the coldest month (January) is 10.67°C. The thermal amplitude  
144 between January and July is 37.3°C. Annual total precipitation is 59.2 mm. Most of the  
145 precipitation occurs from January to March, varying between 0.1 mm and 10.6 mm  
146 (February is the wettest month and July the driest) (Global Weather Data 2018).

#### 147 ***Seed collection***

148 We gathered seeds of 43 native species dominant in camel rangelands of the study area  
149 (Table 1) along three transects (Figure 1). The species included 18 families and 38  
150 genera. The predominant families were Asteraceae (six species), Amaranthaceae,  
151 Brassicaceae, Fabaceae (five species each) and Poaceae (four species). Three species  
152 belonged to the Caryophyllaceae family and two species to Apiaceae, Boraginaceae and  
153 Zygophyllaceae. Only one species each belonged to Asclepiadaceae, Asphodelaceae,  
154 Cistaceae, Cleomaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Geraniaceae, Neuradaceae, Plantaginaceae and  
155 Plumbaginaceae.

156 Mature fruits containing seeds were gathered at random from 5-10 mother plants  
157 of each species with pruning shears and placed in paper bags. Each sample was labeled  
158 with the site, the name of the species, the date and place of harvest (*Oueds, Erg*, etc.).  
159 Species identification was performed using floras, namely Quézel and Santa (1962-  
160 1963), Ozenda (2004) and Danin and Fragman-Sapir (2022).



161           The seeds were transported to the laboratory and stored under ambient  
162 laboratory conditions (18–30 °C, 20–30% relative humidity) until used. Germination  
163 tests were conducted during the month following the gathering. For *Atriplex*  
164 *dimorphostegia*, since each plant carries several types of seeds with different dormancy  
165 (Sukhorukov 2007), we used humped seeds (*sensu* Koller 1957) after removing the  
166 bracts.

### 167 ***Classification according to seed dormancy***

168 We classified 43 species according to Baskin and Baskin (2004) in different seed  
169 dormancy classes based on a literature search, as follows: Non-Dormant, Morphological  
170 Dormancy, Morphophysiological Dormancy, Physiological Dormancy, Physical  
171 Dormancy, Combinational Dormancy. When we could not find a species, we looked at  
172 other species of the same genus (Table 3).

### 173 ***Germination trials***

174 First, the seeds were cleaned of all impurities (plant debris, infected or empty seeds),  
175 either manually or using tweezers or, for very small seeds such as *Ifloga spicata*  
176 (Forssk.) Sch.Bip. (Asteraceae), using the binocular magnifier or the stereoscope. Then,  
177 the seeds were disinfected as per Ouhaddach et al. (2014), by soaking them in dilute  
178 sodium hypochlorite solution (10%) for 10 minutes then rinsing 3 times with distilled  
179 water to remove all traces of sodium hypochlorite. Seeds were checked to determine  
180 whether they contained any embryos.

181           To determine the effects of cold stratification on dormancy-break and  
182 germination, half the seeds were stratified at 4°C: they were placed on a wet substrate,  
183 i.e. filter paper moistened with water, in darkness, for three days. After this period of  
184 cold stratification, cold-treated seeds and control seeds (i.e. not subjected to a cold

185 stratification treatment) of the 43 species (Table 2) were placed in sterile Petri dishes,  
186 90 mm in diameter and 15 mm in height, containing two layers of filter paper  
187 previously soaked in distilled water. There were 10 seeds / Petri dish and three  
188 repetitions. The seeds were incubated in phytotrons (SNIJDERS Labs Economic Lux  
189 Chamber VF 475, The Netherlands) in a growth chamber (Laboratory of Plant  
190 Physiology, University of Laghouat). The germination temperatures tested were: 5, 10,  
191 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, or 40°C, with a photoperiod of 12/12 h regime. Germination was  
192 monitored daily for 8 weeks. Seeds were considered germinated when the seed radical  
193 (primary root) grew to 2 mm (Nin et al. 2017). The effect of each treatment (with or  
194 without cold stratification) on seed germination was measured as the seed Germination  
195 Percentage (GP %) (Ranal and Santana 2006; Ranal et al. 2009; Soltani et al. 2015). It  
196 was calculated according to the following formula (A):

$$197 \quad \text{Germination Percentage in each Petri dish} = (\text{GS} / \text{TS}) * 100 \quad (\text{A})$$

198 Where: **GS** is the number of the Germinated Seeds; **TS** is the Total number of sown  
199 seeds = 10.

## 200 *Statistical analyses*

201 Seed germination was analyzed using Generalized Linear Models (GLM) fitted with a  
202 quasibinomial error distribution. The factors were “temperature” and “cold  
203 stratification”. Then pairwise comparisons were performed with a Tukey adjustment.  
204 All statistical analyses were performed using the R 3.6.0. statistical package (R Core  
205 Team 2020).

## 206 **Results**

### 207 *Germination without cold stratification (control experiment)*

208 Five out of the 43 species (12%, from five different families) did not germinate without  
209 cold stratification and eight species (19%) had a very low germination rate without cold  
210 stratification (Table 3). Twelve species (28%) displayed bell-shaped germination  
211 percentage curves with increasing temperature, germinating better at intermediate  
212 temperatures (between 15°C and 35°C depending on the species) (Figures 2 to 8). Seven  
213 species (16%) germinated better at lower temperatures (5°C to 20°C), while ten species  
214 (23%) germinated better at higher temperatures (30°C to 40°C) (Table 3).

### 215 *Germination improved by cold stratification treatment*

216 Overall, seed germination was significantly improved by cold stratification ( $F=64.9$ ;  
217  $P<0.001^{***}$ ) and was best at between 20°C and 35°C ( $F=52.0$ ;  $P<0.001^{***}$ )  
218 (Supporting information Figure S1). Cold stratification significantly increased the  
219 germination percentage of the 13 species that germinated <20% in the control  
220 experiment (Table 3) (Figure 2, 3). Among the five species that did not germinate  
221 without cold stratification, *Echium trygorrhizum*, *Fagonia glutinosa*, and *Neurada*  
222 *procumbens* had a better germination percentage at intermediate temperatures while  
223 *Pergularia tomentosa* and *Perralderia coronopifolia* germinated better at temperatures  
224 above 30°C (Figure 3). Among 13 species germinating <20%, eight (62%) had a  
225 significantly lower germination percentage at low (5, 10, 15°C) and very high (40°C)  
226 temperatures (Table 3; Figures 2, 3). Three species (*Foeniculum vulgare*, *Pergularia*  
227 *tomentosa*, and *Perralderia coronopifolia*) had a significantly lower germination  
228 percentage at low temperatures (5, 10, 15°C) but germinated well up to 40°C (Figures 2,  
229 3). Finally, two Amaranthaceae species (*Agathophora alopecuroides* and *Cornulaca*

230 *monacantha*) germinated better at low temperatures (10°C to 15°C) (Figure 2).

231         Among the 30 species that germinated better under cold stratification (>20%;  
232 Table 3), the germination increase was significant for 23 species (77%; Figures 4 to 6).  
233 Eight (8) of these 23 species (35%) displayed bell-shaped germination percentage  
234 curves with increasing temperature, germinating best at intermediate temperatures  
235 (between 15°C and 35°C depending on the species) (Figures 4 to 6). Another eight  
236 species (e.g. *Eremobium aegyptiacum*, *Henophyton deserti*) showed significantly lower  
237 germination at low temperatures (5, 10, 15°C) and germinated well at a higher  
238 temperature (40°C) (Figures 4 to 6). Finally, six species (e.g. *Scorzonera laciniata*)  
239 germinated better at low temperatures (10°C to 15°C) (Figures 4 to 6).

#### 240 ***Germination not improved by cold stratification treatment***

241 Among the 30 best-germinating species (>20%; Table 3), cold stratification did not  
242 affect the germination of *Helianthemum lippii* and *Stipagrostis pungens* (Figure 8). It  
243 had mixed effects on *Asphodelus tenuifolius*, where germination percentage after cold  
244 stratification increased when incubated at 10°C and 25°C and reduced when incubated  
245 at 5°C and 30°C (Figure 8). Cold stratification reduced the germination rate of *Launaea*  
246 *nudicaulis* at 5°C and 25°C, of *Limoniastrum guyonianum* at between 5°C and 15°C  
247 (Figure 7), of *Erodium glaucophyllum* at 25°C, and of *Paronychia arabica* at 30°C  
248 (Figure 7). Overall, these four species germinated better at 25-30°C (Figure 7).

## 249 **Discussion**

### 250 ***Effect of cold stratification on seed germination***

251 Cold stratification is known to break physiological dormancy, i.e. cold treatment  
252 increases the growth potential of the embryo, enabling it to push open the seed coat

253 (Baskin and Baskin 2014). In our study, the germination of some species with  
254 physiological dormancy appeared to be positively affected by cold stratification. Similar  
255 effects have been reported in the literature for *Atriplex dimorphostegia* (Koller 1957),  
256 *Peganum harmala* (Hammouda and Bakr 1969), and *Spergularia salina* (Bakker et al.  
257 1985). Our results are also consistent with a study on *Peganum harmala* where  
258 dormancy was broken by cold stratification (Zhen et al. 2011). In addition, cold  
259 stratification has been found to have a positive effect on other species, likely because  
260 their seeds share the physiological dormancy documented for species of the same  
261 genera (Table 3): *Agathophora* (Khan et al. 2011), *Cleome* (Sen and Chatterji 1968;  
262 Hammouda and Bakr 1969; Cane 2008; Muasya et al. 2009; Baskin and Baskin 2014),  
263 *Echium* (Carqué-Álamo et al. 2003), *Euphorbia* (Baskin and Baskin 2014), *Fagonia*  
264 (Sen and Chatterji 1968; Hammouda and Bakr 1969), *Takhtajaniantha pusilla* (Tang et  
265 al. 2009), *Pergularia*, *Plantago* and *Sisymbrium* (Baskin and Baskin 2014).  
266 Physiological dormancy is also documented for the seeds of several *Stipagrostis*  
267 species, such as *Stipagrostis ciliata* (Neffati et al. 1996) and *Stipagrostis pennata*  
268 (Bahrani and Khartegh 2006). In our study, one *Stipagrostis* species, *Stipagrostis*  
269 *plumosa*, responded positively to cold stratification, indicating the physiological  
270 dormancy of its seeds, while *Stipagrostis pungens* was not affected. Finally, *Asphodelus*  
271 *tenuifolius* was little affected by cold stratification although this species was shown to  
272 have morpho-physiological dormancy (Koller 1957). Most of the species that we  
273 classified as having physiological dormancy in this study likely come into the non-deep  
274 physiological dormancy category, since our short cold-stratification treatment improved  
275 their germination (Baskin and Baskin 2004; Table 3).

276 Cold stratification can also make seeds with physical dormancy (i.e., a water-  
277 impermeable seed coat) sensitive to dormancy-break when temperatures increase in

278 spring (Van Assche et al. 2003). In our study, cold stratification positively affected the  
279 germination of one species with physical dormancy: *Argyrolobium uniflorum* (Neffati et  
280 al. 1996). A positive effect of cold stratification has previously been found for species  
281 whose seeds likely share the physical dormancy of other species of the same genera:  
282 *Astragalus* (Hammouda and Bakr 1969) and *Launaea* and *Scorzonera* (Baskin and  
283 Baskin 2014). Zhou et al. (2012) showed that cold stratification doubled the  
284 germination rate of *Astragalus mongholicus* seeds. In our study, *Helianthemum lippii*,  
285 with physical dormancy (Neffati et al. 1996), did not respond to cold stratification,  
286 consistent with the findings of Zaman et al. (2009). While several species of the genus  
287 *Erodium* are documented as showing physical dormancy (*E. boissieri*, *E. botrys*, *E.*  
288 *cicutarium*, *E. malachoides*, *E. moschatum*, *E. stephanium*); Baskin and Baskin  
289 2014), *Erodium glaucophyllum* here responded negatively to cold stratification.

290 All the species classified as non-dormant (Table 3) responded positively to cold  
291 stratification. One species with morphological dormancy, *Foeniculum vulgare* (Thomas  
292 1994), also responded positively to cold stratification, consistent with the study of  
293 Tahaei et al. (2016) where moist cold stratification at 4°C applied for 15 days improved  
294 germination.

295 Regarding the seven species in which cold stratification produced either a  
296 negative effect (*Erodium glaucophyllum*, *Launaea nudicaulis*, *Limoniastrum*  
297 *guyonianum*, *Paronychia arabica*), no effect (*Helianthemum lippii*, *Stipagrostis*  
298 *pungens*), or a mixed response (*Asphodelus tenuifolius*), we may have applied  
299 insufficiently cold temperatures for insufficiently long durations. Weather data show  
300 that the coldest winter months are December, January, and February. Each year on  
301 average during these 90 days, while there is less than one day when minimum  
302 temperatures are below 0°C, there are eleven days when minimum temperatures are

303 between 0°C and 2.99°C and twenty days when minimum temperatures are between  
304 3°C and 4°C. It is therefore possible that colder temperatures or longer cold  
305 stratification treatment would yield better germination results.

### 306 *Effect of temperatures on seed germination*

307 In our study area, the rainy season ranges from January to March, accumulating in three  
308 months half the total annual rainfall (27.32 mm) (Table 1). During that rainy season,  
309 minimum temperatures range from 5.4°C to 10.2°C and maximum temperatures from  
310 16°C to 23.9°C.

311 In this experiment, seven species germinated at relatively low temperatures.  
312 Three of them belong to the Amaranthaceae family, whose species have been shown to  
313 germinate fast to take advantage of temporarily favorable conditions for germination  
314 (Parsons 2012). *Scorzonera laciniata* and *Asphodelus tenuifolius* are eurymediterranean  
315 species (Eddoud et al. 2018), which may germinate at lower temperatures than most  
316 Saharan species. On the other hand, *Savignya parviflora* subsp. *longistyla* and *Plantago*  
317 *ciliata* are Saharo-Arabian species (Eddoud et al. 2018), meaning that they may  
318 germinate in the colder months (December through February; Table 1) better than most  
319 naturally co-occurring species, although this would need to be confirmed by further  
320 research.

321 Ten species germinated well at high temperatures (30, 35, 40°C). All these  
322 species, except *Foeniculum vulgare*, are Saharan or Saharo-Arabian species, most likely  
323 adapted to germination at high temperatures. These species may germinate outside the  
324 main rainy season, but this would need to be confirmed in the field. The months with  
325 maximum temperatures (between 30°C and 40°C) but still some rainfall are April, May,  
326 September, and October.

327           Finally, most of the species (17) germinated best at intermediate temperatures  
328 (between 20°C and 35°C, depending on species). This may be because these species'  
329 optimum germination temperatures coincide with the average rainy season temperatures  
330 of their local habitats (Gurvich et al. 2017), which in our study area range from 19.0°C  
331 to 23.9°C in February and March, respectively.

### 332 **Conclusion**

333 The timing of seed germination in the field determines the conditions to which seedlings  
334 will be exposed immediately after germination, thus strongly influencing the success of  
335 seedling establishment. This makes pre-treatments to overcome seed dormancy essential  
336 to the successful use of direct seeding in restoration projects. Our results demonstrate  
337 that cold stratification has a positive effect on the germination of more than 80% of the  
338 studied species. Thus, we recommend a cold stratification treatment prior to sowing,  
339 expect for *Erodium glaucophyllum*, *Launaea nudicaulis*, *Limoniastrum guyonianum*,  
340 and *Paronychia arabica*. We acknowledge that programming seed sowing at optimal  
341 germination temperature, and thus at three different dates according to the three species  
342 groups identified (those germinating well at low, intermediate, or high temperatures),  
343 may not be practical. Nevertheless, studying germination in the field could confirm the  
344 benefits of such a protocol. An easier alternative would be to sow all species in January,  
345 so that the relatively short rainy season in the study area can ensure their germination  
346 and establishment. In any case, these three species categories classified by ideal  
347 germination temperatures can be applied in plant propagation.

348           Most of the best-germinating species also germinated over a wide range of  
349 temperatures, and are perennials: *Limoniastrum guyonianum*, *Polycarpaea robbairea*,  
350 *Eremobium aegyptiacum*, *Helianthemum lippii*, and *Moltkiopsis ciliata*. Other studies



351 have shown that species with these characteristics can become dominant in landscapes  
352 and can be particularly important in ecological restoration projects, especially where the  
353 aim is to protect the soil from erosion. Depending on species establishment in the field,  
354 the percentage of such species in the seed mix can be adjusted to the desired cover.

355 As part of future projects to restore and preserve the biodiversity of the Saharan  
356 spontaneous flora, further studies are needed to determine the ecological requirements  
357 of the seeds of other Saharan species. For the species studied here, germination in the  
358 field should also be investigated along with distinctive features, such as seed  
359 heteromorphy (e.g. *Atriplex*; Sukhorukov and Danin 2009), which can lead to  
360 differences in germination conditions.

361

## 362 **Acknowledgements**

363 We would like to thank Carol Baskin for her advice on setting up the experimental trial and  
364 Marjorie Sweetko for reviewing the English.

365

366

## 367 **Disclosure statement**

368 No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

369

370

## 371 **Funding**

372 This work was supported by the University of Amar Téliidji [no grant number].

373

## 374 **Author contributions**

375 MM, SBB, AE conceived and designed the research; AB helped with GIS and maps;  
376 MM conducted the experiment; MM, EB analyzed the data; MM, EB wrote the  
377 manuscript; all authors contributed to revision of the text.

378

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578 70.  
579



580 Table 1. Climate data for the study area, from station (#31750: 31°41'28.321" N, 5°0'0"  
 581 E) (Global Weather Data 2018).

582

583

<b>Month</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Max Temperature (°C)</b>	16.0	19.0	23.9	28.9	34.2	39.7	42.7	42.0	36.9	30.3	22.2	16.9
<b>Min Temperature (°C)</b>	5.4	7.0	10.2	13.7	17.8	21.9	23.3	22.9	20.2	15.6	9.9	6.3
<b>Precipitation (mm)</b>	9.3	10.6	7.4	5.7	5.2	1.4	0.1	0.3	2.4	6.0	6.0	4.7
<b>Relative Humidity (%)</b>	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6
<b>Solar radiation (kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/d)</b>	12.4	16.0	20.5	24.9	27.0	27.8	27.8	25.6	21.6	17.2	13.2	11.4

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Table 2. List of species studied for the effect of cold scarification on seed germination and dormancy. **Chorotypes:** T = Therophyte, C = Chamaephyte. The nomenclature follows version 3.4.0 (2014) of the African Plant Database. Chorotypes and life forms come from (Quézel and Santa 1962-1963; Ozenda 2004; Danin and Fragman-Sapir 2022).

Family	Updated scientific name *	Chorotypes	Habitat	Seed collection
<i>Amaranthaceae</i>	<i>Agathophora alopecuroides</i> (Delile) Fenzl ex Bunge	C	Sandy, gravelly ground of <i>Regs</i> .	March-July
<i>Amaranthaceae</i>	<i>Anabasis articulata</i> (Forssk.) Moq.	C	Stony soils.	October-November
<i>Amaranthaceae</i>	<i>Atriplex dimorphostegia</i> Kar. & Kir.	T	Silty areas, wetlands and oases of the northern Sahara.	February-May
<i>Amaranthaceae</i>	<i>Bassia muricata</i> (L.) Asch.	T	Common throughout the Sahara, especially in clay soils.	February-June
<i>Amaranthaceae</i>	<i>Cornulaca monacantha</i> Delile	C	Sandy areas and <i>Regs</i> , in isolated individuals and in populations.	August-November

<i>Apiaceae</i>	<i>Ammodaucus leucotrichus</i> Coss. & Durieu	T	Sandy beaches, <i>Oued</i> beds and rocky bottom depressions.	April
<i>Apiaceae</i>	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> Mill.	C	<i>Batha</i> , <i>Phrygana</i> , Disturbed habitats	July-November
<i>Asclepiadaceae</i>	<i>Pergularia tomentosa</i> L.	C	Common throughout the northern Sahara	February-April
<i>Asphodelaceae</i>	<i>Asphodelus tenuifolius</i> Cav.	T	Rocky soils, in <i>Oued</i> beds and silted depressions	February-April
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Cotula cinerea</i> Delile	T	Depression, Saharan <i>Oueds</i>	April
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Ifloga spicata</i> (Forssk.) Sch.Bip	T	Stony soils of depressions and beds of <i>Oueds</i>	March-May
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Launaea capitata</i> (Spreng.) Dandy	T	Stony land, in depressions and beds of <i>Oueds</i>	March-April
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Launaea nudicaulis</i> (L.) Hook. F.	C	Uncultivated fields and pastures in desert regions	April-May
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Perralderia coronopifolia</i> Coss.	C	Rocky areas	April
<i>Asteraceae</i>	<i>Scorzonera laciniata</i> L.	C	Sandy habitats	April
<i>Boraginaceae</i>	<i>Echium trygorrhizum</i> Pomel.	T	Stony soils of depressions and beds of <i>Oueds</i>	April
<i>Boraginaceae</i>	<i>Moltkiopsis ciliata</i> (Forssk.) I. M. Johnst.	C	Sandy habitats	March-May

<b>Brassicaceae</b>	<i>Diplotaxis harra</i> (Forssk.) Boiss.	T	Clay-sandy soils of depressions and beds of <i>Oueds</i>	January-May
<b>Brassicaceae</b>	<i>Eremobium aegyptiacum</i> (Spreng.) Asch. & Schweinf. ex Boiss.	C	Sandy habitats	March-April
<b>Brassicaceae</b>	<i>Henophyton deserti</i> Coss. & Durieu	C	Desert rockeries, gypsum	April
<b>Brassicaceae</b>	<i>Savignya parviflora</i> subsp. <i>longistyla</i> (Boiss. & Reut.) Maire	T	Saharan pasture	January-April
<b>Brassicaceae</b>	<i>Sisymbrium reboudianum</i> Verl.	T	Saharan pasture ( <i>Reg</i> , Depression), Saharan <i>Oueds</i>	April
<b>Caryophyllaceae</b>	<i>Paronychia arabica</i> (L.) DC.	T	Sandy habitats	February-May
<b>Caryophyllaceae</b>	<i>Polycarpaea robbairea</i> (Kuntze) Greuter & Burdet	T	Salty habitats, Saharan <i>Oueds</i>	January-April
<b>Caryophyllaceae</b>	<i>Spergularia salina</i> J. & C.Presl	T	Salty habitats	March-June
<b>Cistaceae</b>	<i>Helianthemum lippii</i> (L.) Dum. Cours.	C	Desert pastures, rock gardens, sand	February-April
<b>Cleomaceae</b>	<i>Cleome africana</i> Botsch.	T	Sandy habitats	April

<b><i>Euphorbiaceae</i></b>	<i>Euphorbia guyoniana</i> Boiss. & Reut.	C	Sandy habitats	April
<b><i>Fabaceae</i></b>	<i>Argyrolobium uniflorum</i> (Dc) Jaub. & Spach	C	Common throughout the northern Sahara.	March-April
<b><i>Fabaceae</i></b>	<i>Astragalus arpilobus</i> subsp. <i>hauarensis</i> (Boiss.) Podlech	T	Sandy habitats	February-March
<b><i>Fabaceae</i></b>	<i>Astragalus boeticus</i> L.	T	Common throughout the northern Sahara	February-April
<b><i>Fabaceae</i></b>	<i>Astragalus gombo</i> Bunge	C	Sandy habitats	April
<b><i>Fabaceae</i></b>	<i>Astragalus mareoticus</i> Delile	T	Steppes, Saharan <i>Oueds</i>	April
<b><i>Geraniaceae</i></b>	<i>Erodium glaucophyllum</i> L'Héritier	C	Rocky clay soils	March-April
<b><i>Neuradaceae</i></b>	<i>Neurada procumbens</i> L.	T	<i>Oued</i> beds and sandy bottom depressions	February-April
<b><i>Plantaginaceae</i></b>	<i>Plantago ciliata</i> Desf.	T	Sandy and rocky ground of <i>Oued</i> beds and depressions	March-April
<b><i>Plumbaginaceae</i></b>	<i>Limoniastrum guyonianum</i> Boiss.	C	Sandy habitats	April

<i>Poaceae</i>	<i>Centropodia forsskalii</i> (Vahl) Cope	TH	Sandy habitats	April
<i>Poaceae</i>	<i>Sphenopus divaricatus</i> (Gouan) Rchb.	TH	Desert, Salty habitats	March-April
<i>Poaceae</i>	<i>Stipagrostis plumosa</i> (L.) Munro ex T. Anderson	CT	Sandy habitats.	April-May
<i>Poaceae</i>	<i>Stipagrostis pungens</i> (Desf.) De Winter	CH	Sandy habitats	April
<i>Zygophyllaceae</i>	<i>Fagonia glutinosa</i> Delile	TH	Sandy habitats	March-May
<i>Zygophyllaceae</i>	<i>Peganum harmala</i> L.	CH	Sandy habitats	March-April

Table 3. Germination results for the 43 studied species. **Germination (%)** is the average germination percentage over all treatments (with or without cold stratification, germination temperature). **Effect of treatment interaction** = cold stratification \* temperature. **Effect of cold stratification** can be negative (lower germination after cold stratification compared to control), positive (higher germination after cold stratification compared to control), positive\* (no germination in control) or mixed (positive and negative effects depending on temperature). **Germination temperature** can be highest at low temperatures (5 to 20°C), intermediate temperatures (20 to 35°C) or high temperatures (30 to 40°C). Species are classified in three groups: dark gray indicates species with a germination percentage above 40; light gray, species with a germination percentage between 40% and 20%; white, species with a germination percentage below 20%. Within these groups, species are listed in alphabetical order. **Seed dormancy classes** : ND = Non Dormant, MD = Morphological Dormancy, MPD = Morphophysiological Dormancy, PD = Physiological Dormancy, PY = Physical Dormancy, PY+PD = Combinational Dormancy (Baskin and Baskin 2004), \* Type of dormancy is inferred. TBD = To be determined. \*\* For *Atriplex dimorphostegia*, since each plant carries several types of seeds with different dormancy (Sukhorukov 2007), we used humped seeds (*sensu* Koller, 1957) after removing the bracts.

Species	Germination (%)	Effect of treatment interaction	Effect of cold stratification	Germination temperature (°C)	Dormancy class	References	Physiological dormancy level
<i>Asphodelus tenuifolius</i>	40.0	p<0.001***	mixed	low	MDP	<i>Asphodelus tenuifolius</i> (Koller 1957)	NA
<i>Bassia muricata</i>	52.0	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PD	<i>Bassia scoparia</i> (Davis et al. 2016), <i>Bassia dasyphylla</i> (Li et al. 2006)	non-deep
<i>Diploaxis harra</i>	47.5	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	ND	<i>Diploaxis harra</i> (Tlig et al. 2008)	NA
<i>Eremobium aegyptiacum</i>	59.0	p<0.001***	positive	high	TBD	TBD	NA

<i>Helianthemum lippii</i>	59.6	no effect	no effect	intermediate	PY	<i>Helianthemum lippii</i> (Neffati et al. 1996)	NA
<i>Henophyton deserti</i>	46.2	p<0.001***	positive	high	ND	<i>Henophyton deserti</i> (Gorai et al. 2014)	NA
<i>Launaea nudicaulis</i>	44.7	p<0.001***	negative	intermediate	PD & ND	<i>Launaea cornuta</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	TBD
<i>Limoniastrum guyonianum</i>	66.1	p<0.001***	negative	intermediate	TBD: PD*		TBD
<i>Moltkiopsis ciliata</i>	57.8	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	ND	<i>Moltkiopsis ciliata</i> (Tielbörger and Prasse 2009)	NA
<i>Peganum harmala</i>	45.8	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PD	<i>Peganum harmala</i> (Hammouda and Bakr 1969)	non-deep
<i>Polycarpaea robbairea</i>	64.4	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	TBD: ND*		NA
<i>Scorzonera laciniata</i>	40.3	p<0.001***	positive	low	PD	<i>Takhtajaniantha pusilla</i> (Tang et al. 2009, as <i>Scorzonera pusilla</i> )	non-deep
<i>Stipagrostis pungens</i>	46.5	p<0.001***	no effect	intermediate	PD	<i>Stipagrostis ciliata</i> (Neffati et al. 1996), <i>Stipagrostis pennata</i> (Bahrani and Khartegh 2006)	TBD
<i>Ammodaucus leucotrichus</i>	22.1	p<0.001***	positive	high	TBD: PD*		non-deep
<i>Anabasis articulata</i>	23.3	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	TBD: ND*		NA
<i>Argyrolobium uniflorum</i>	25.1	p<0.001***	positive	high	PY	PY: <i>Argyrolobium uniflorum</i> (Neffati et al. 1996)	NA
<i>Astragalus arpilobus</i>	22.6	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PY	PY: <i>Astragalus</i> (Hammouda and Bakr 1969)	NA
<i>Atriplex dimorphostegia**</i>	35.4	p<0.001***	positive	low	PD	PD: <i>Atriplex dimorphostegia</i> (Koller 1957)	non-deep



<i>Centropodia forsskalii</i>	35.9	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	TBD: ND*		NA
<i>Cleome africana</i>	37.0	p<0.001***	positive	high	PD	PD: <i>Cleome</i> (Sen and Chatterji 1968; Hammouda and Bakr 1969; Cane 2008; Muasya et al. 2009; Baskin and Baskin 2014)	non-deep
<i>Cotula cinerea</i>	34.9	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	ND	ND: <i>Cotula coronopifolia</i> (van der Toorn 1980)	NA
<i>Erodium glaucophyllum</i>	29.1	p<0.001***	negative	high	PY	PY: <i>Erodium boissieri</i> , <i>E. botrys</i> , <i>E. cicutarium</i> , <i>E. malachoides</i> , <i>E. moschatum</i> , <i>E. stephaniumum</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	NA
<i>Euphorbia guyoniana</i>	20.6	p<0.001***	positive	high	PD (rarely ND)	<i>Euphorbia</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	non-deep
<i>Ifloga spicata</i>	28.0	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	TBD		NA
<i>Paronychia arabica</i>	39.5	p<0.001***	negative	intermediate	TBD: PY*		NA
<i>Plantago ciliata</i>	26.9	p<0.001***	positive	low	PD	PD: <i>Plantago</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	non-deep
<i>Savignya parviflora</i>	32.0	p<0.001***	positive	low	PD	PD: <i>Savignya parviflora</i> (Bhatt et al. 2020)	non-deep
<i>Sisymbrium reboudianum</i>	29.5	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PD	PD: <i>Sisymbrium</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	non-deep
<i>Spergularia salina</i>	29.4	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PD	PD: <i>Spergularia salina</i> (Bakker et al. 1985)	non-deep
<i>Stipagrostis plumosa</i>	34.7	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PD	PD: <i>Stipagrostis ciliata</i> (Neffati et al. 1996), <i>Stipagrostis pennata</i> (Bahrani and Khartegh 2006)	TBD

<i>Agathophora alopecuroides</i>	12.5	p<0.001***	positive	low	PD	PD: <i>Agathophora</i> (Khan et al. 2011)	non-deep
<i>Astragalus boeticus</i>	5.6	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	PY	PY: <i>Astragalus</i> (Hammouda and Bakr 1969)	NA
<i>Astragalus gombo</i>	18.5	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate			
<i>Astragalus mareoticus</i>	7.1	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate			
<i>Cornulaca monacantha</i>	9.2	p<0.001***	positive	low	ND	ND: <i>Cornulaca monacantha</i> (Tielbörger and Prasse 2009)	NA
<i>Echium trygorrhizum</i>	3.1	no effect	positive*	intermediate	PD	PD: <i>Echium</i> (Carqué-Álamo et al. 2003)	non-deep
<i>Fagonia glutinosa</i>	13.2	no effect	positive*	intermediate	PD	PD: <i>Fagonia</i> (Sen and Chatterji 1968; Hammouda and Bakr 1969)	non-deep
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	17.1	p<0.001***	positive	high	MD	MD: <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> (Thomas 1994)	NA
<i>Launaea capitata</i>	5.5	p<0.01**	positive	intermediate	PD & ND	<i>Launaea cornuta</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	TBD
<i>Neurada procumbens</i>	15.4	no effect	positive*	intermediate	TBD: PD*		non-deep
<i>Pergularia tomentosa</i>	5.7	no effect	positive*	high	PD	PD: <i>Pergularia</i> (Baskin and Baskin 2014)	non-deep
<i>Perralderia coronopifolia</i>	8.0	no effect	positive*	high	TBD: PD*		non-deep
<i>Sphenopus divaricatus</i>	19.2	p<0.001***	positive	intermediate	TBD: ND*		NA

Figure 1. Location of the study area.

Figure 2. Mean germination percentages of the eight species with a low germination rate (<20%) which were positively affected by cold stratification. A. and B. Species germinating better at low temperatures; C. to G. Species germinating better at intermediate temperatures; H. Species germinating better at high temperatures.

Figure 3. Mean germination percentages of the five species with a low germination rate (<20%) for which cold stratification was a pre-requisite to germination. A. to C. Species germinating better at intermediate temperatures; D. and E. Species germinating better at high temperatures.

Figure 4. Mean germination percentages of the eight species with a high germination rate (>40%) which were positively affected by cold stratification. A. Species germinating better at low temperatures; B. to F. Species germinating better at intermediate temperatures; G. and H. Species germinating better at high temperatures.

Figure 5. Mean germination percentages of the eight species with a germination rate of between 20 and 40% which were positively affected by cold stratification and which germinated better at intermediate temperatures.

Figure 6. Mean germination percentages of the seven species with a germination rate of between 20 and 40% which were positively affected by cold stratification. A. to C. Species germinating better at low temperatures; D. to G. Species germinating better at high temperatures.

Figure 7. Mean germination percentages of the four species for which cold stratification had a slight negative effect. A. and B. Species with a germination rate of above 40%; C. and D. Species with a germination rate of between 20 and 40%.

Figure 8. A. and B. Mean germination percentages of the two species for which cold stratification had no effect. C. Mean germination percentage of the one species for which cold stratification had mixed effects.

Figure 1

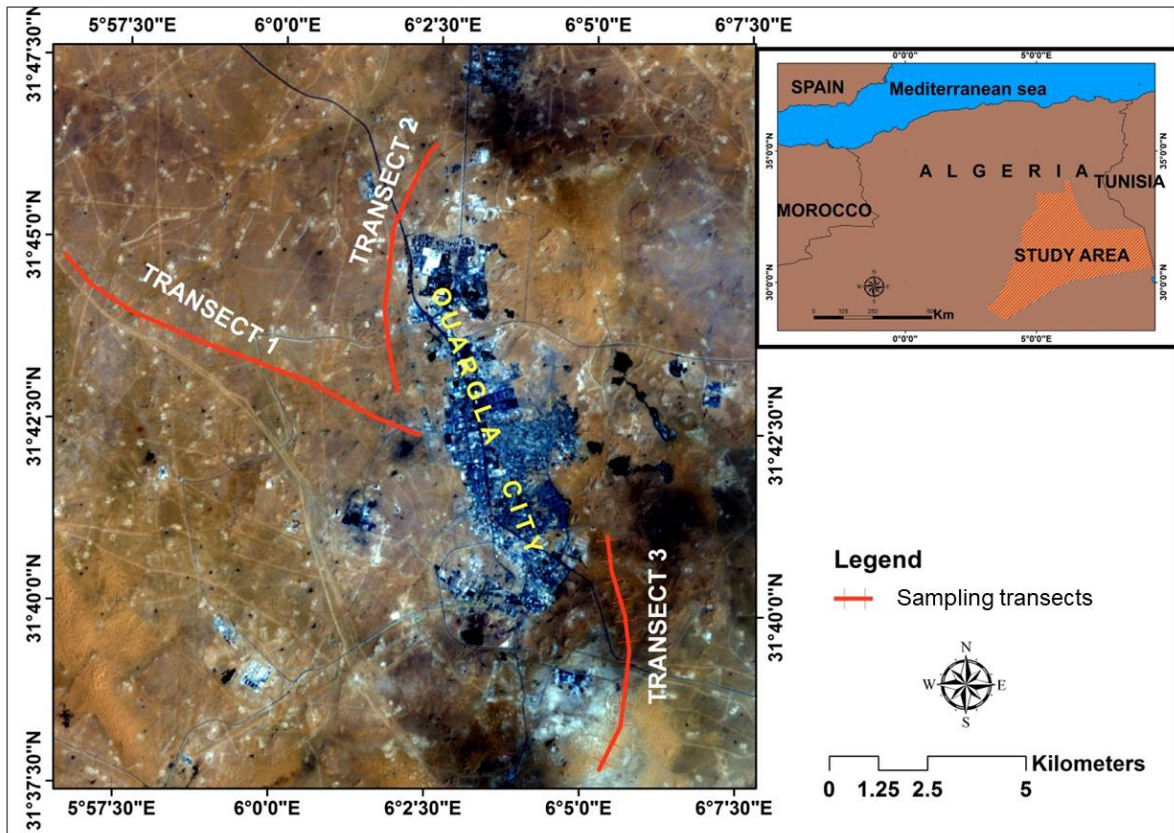


Figure 2

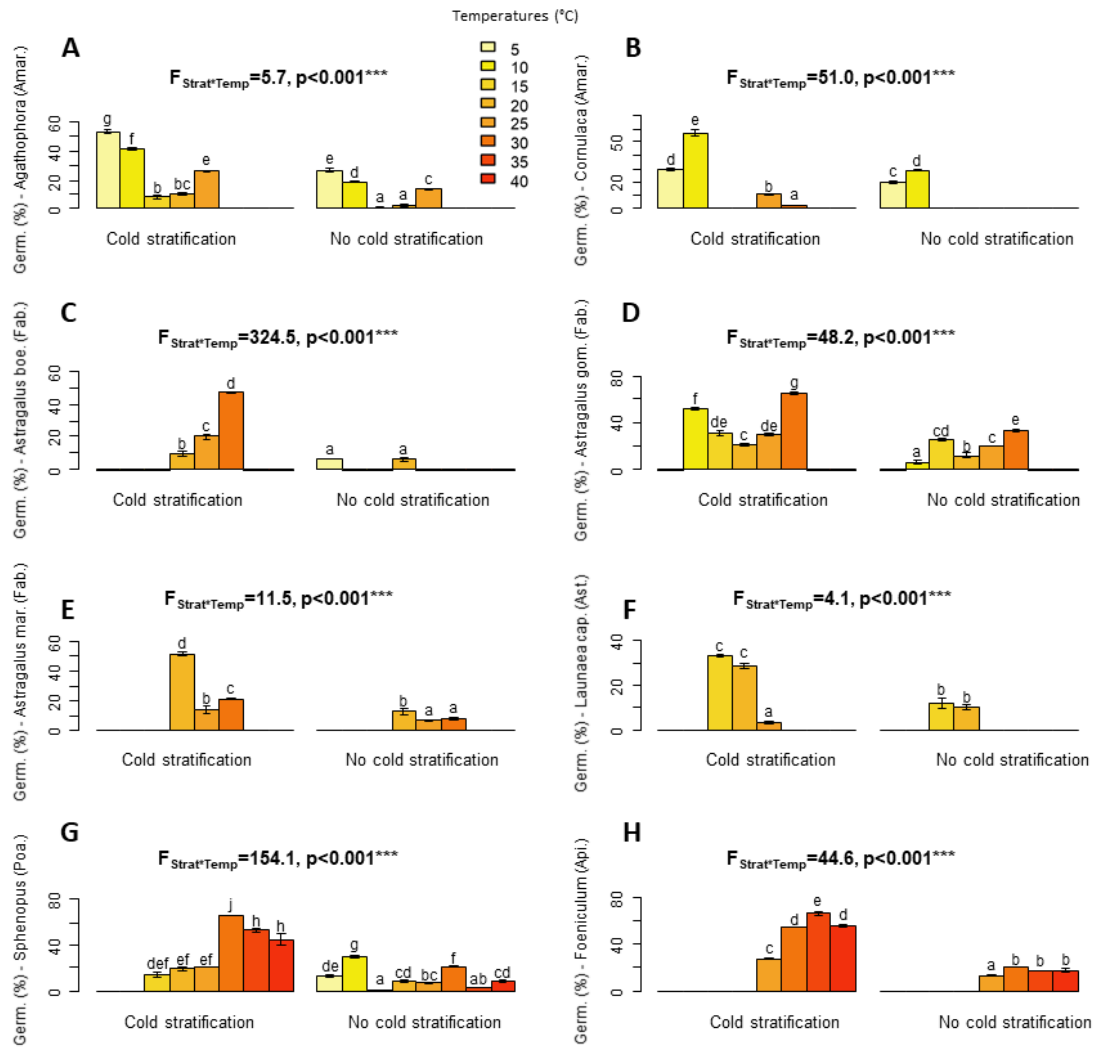


Figure 3

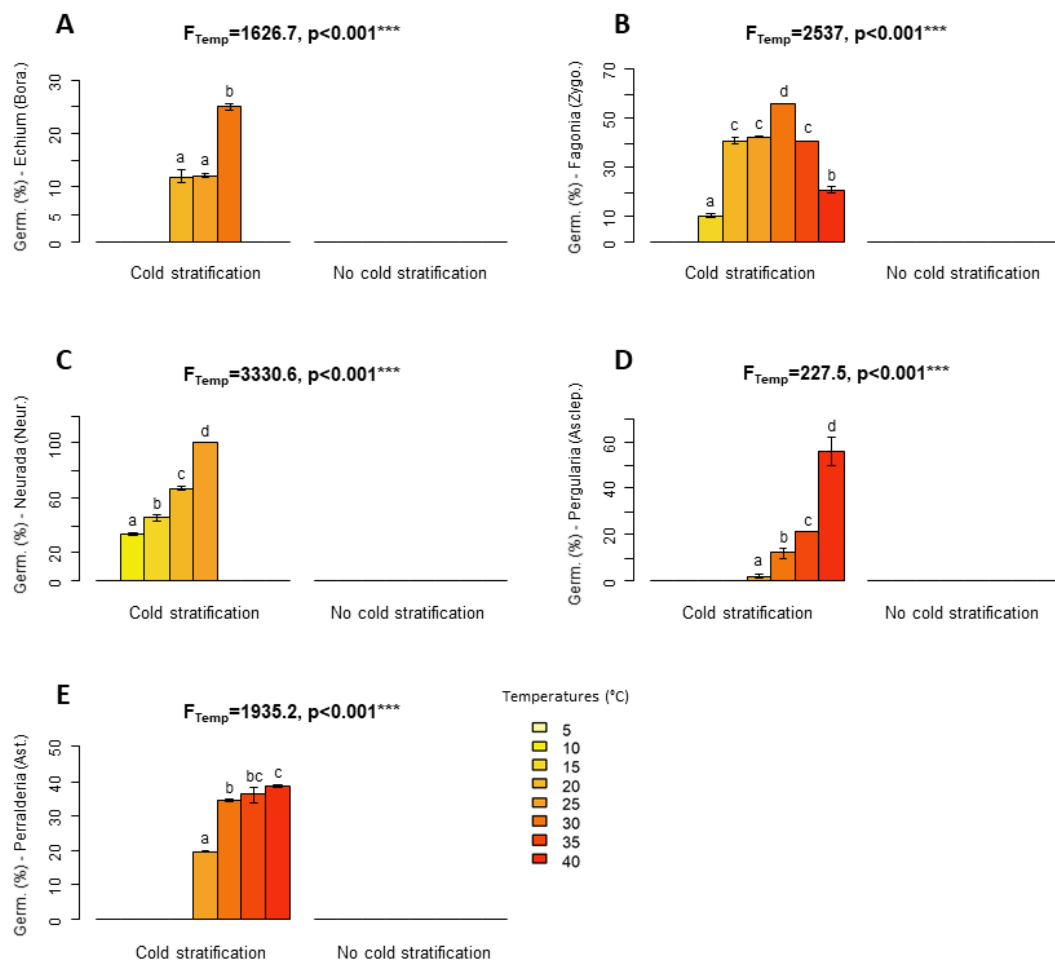


Figure 4

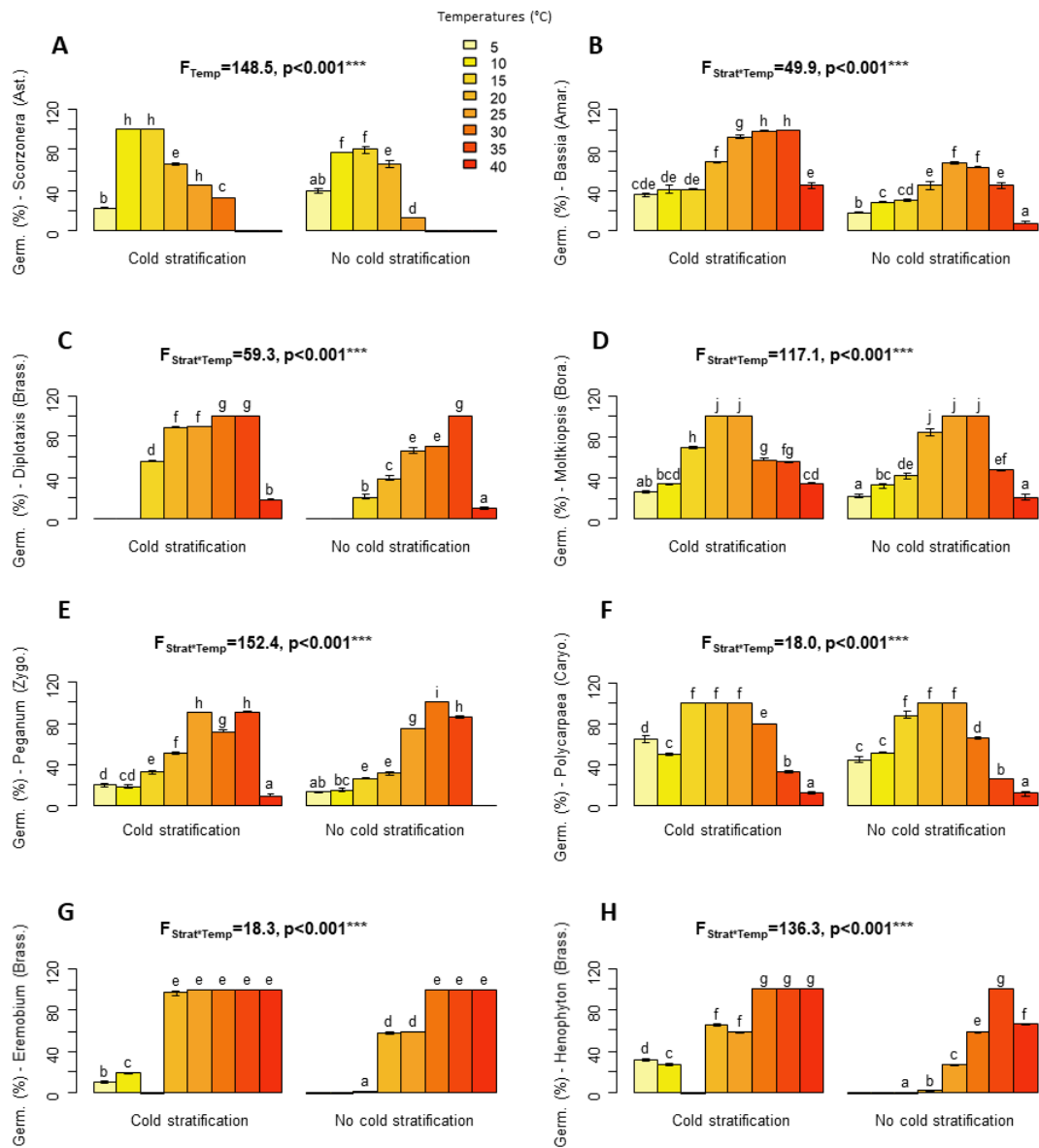


Figure 5

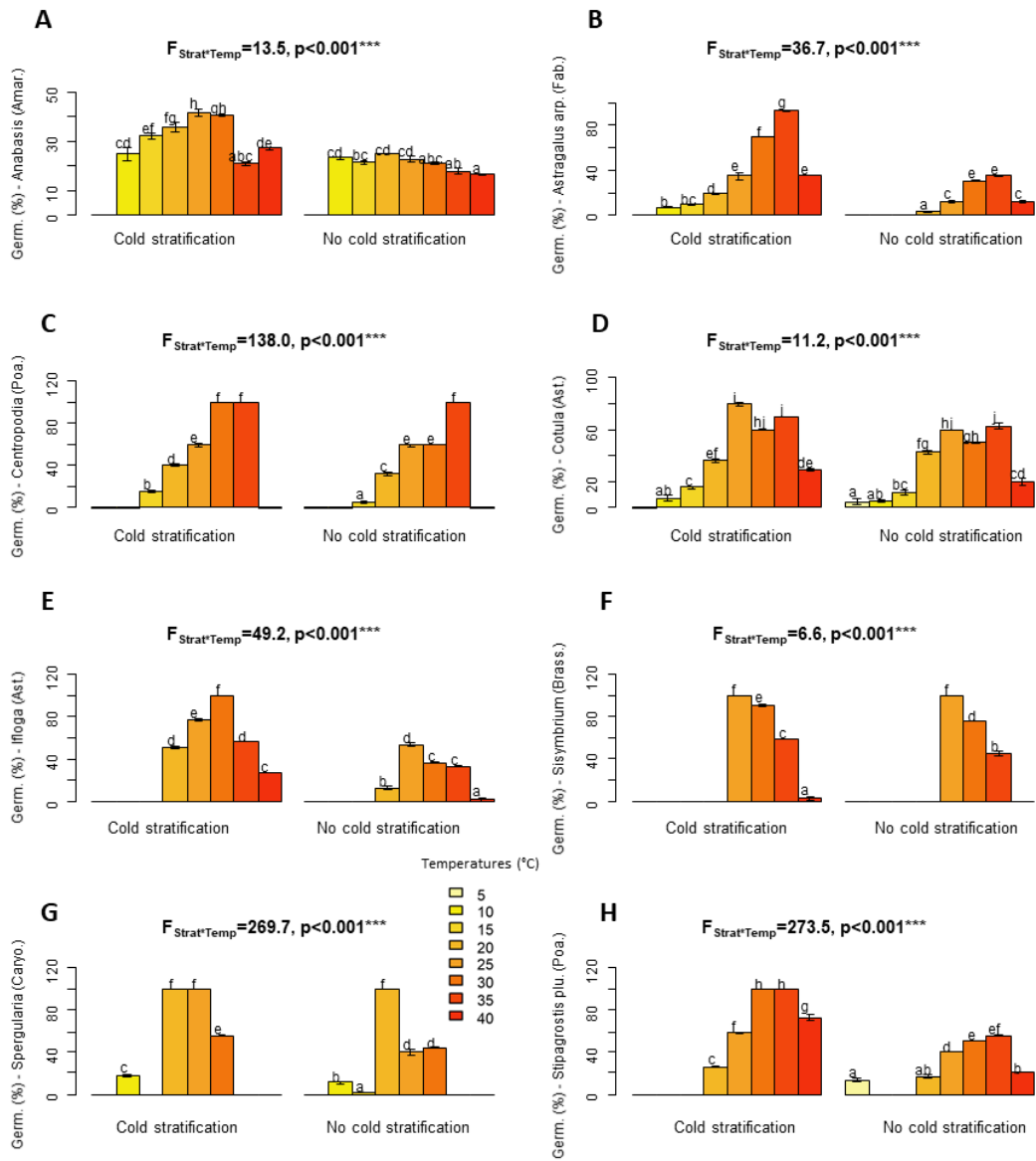




Figure 6

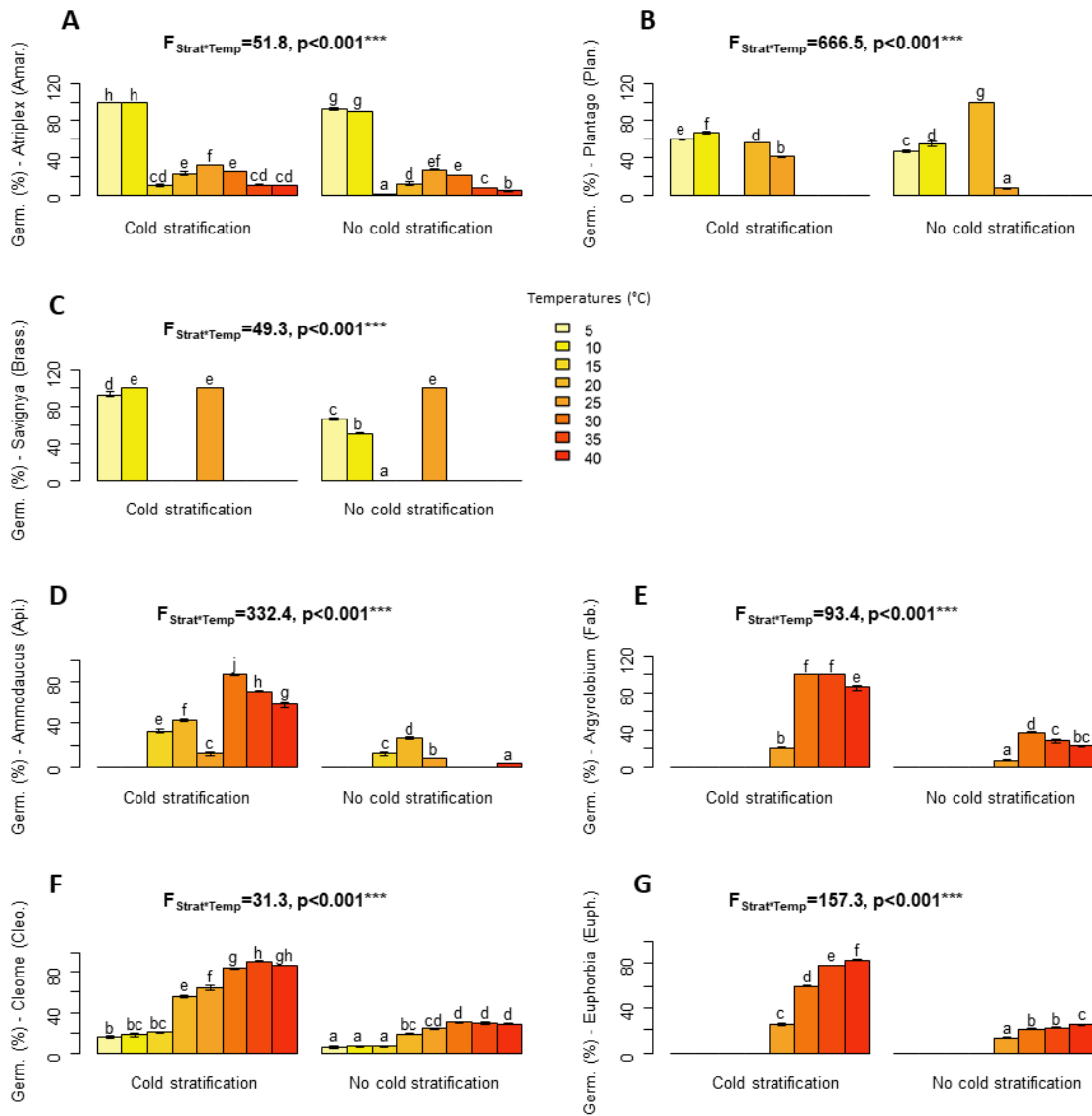


Figure 7

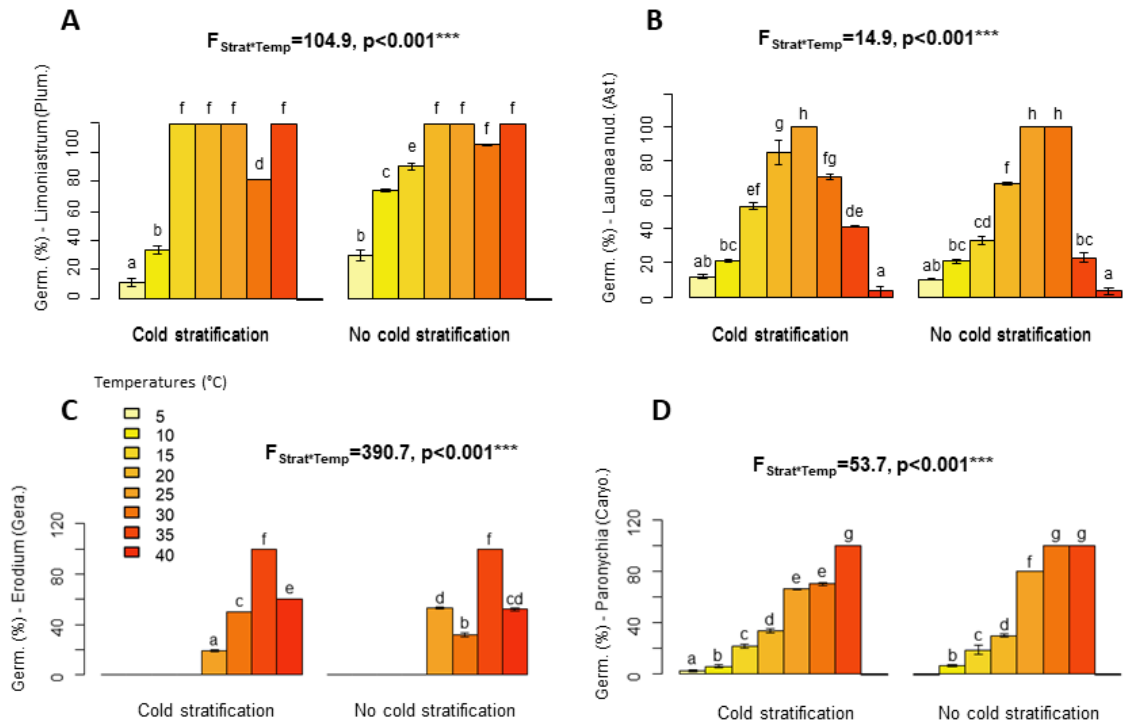
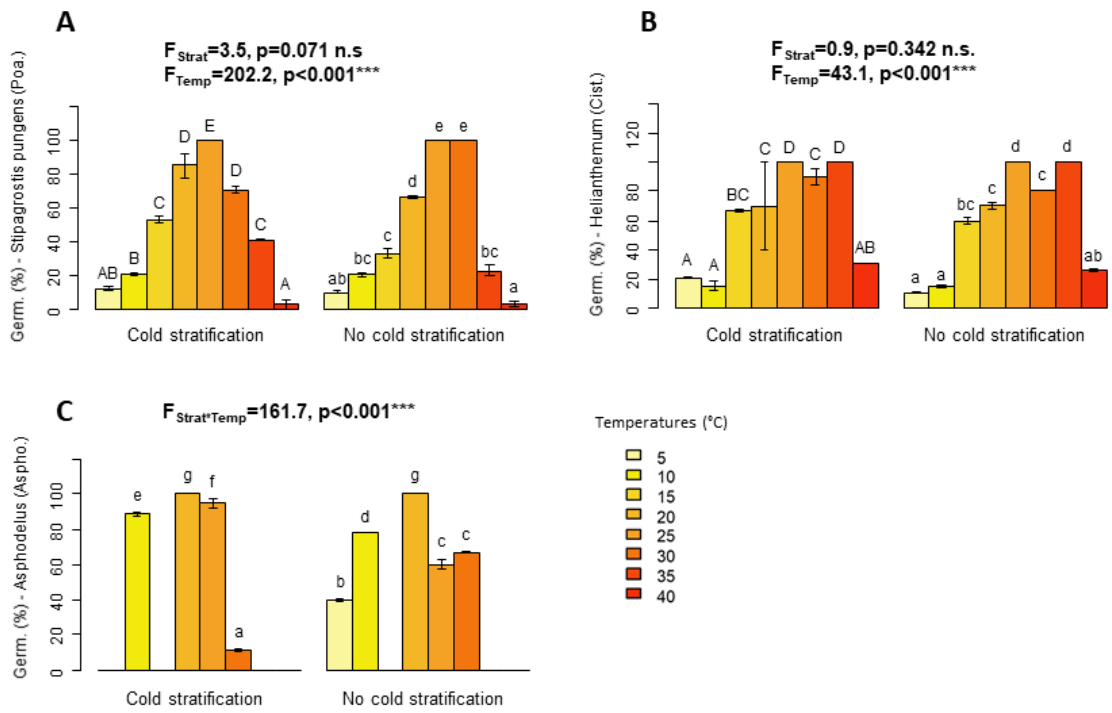


Figure 8



## Supporting information

### 1. Overall effect of cold stratification and temperatures

Figure S1. Mean germination percentages of all 43 studied species depending on whether or not subjected to a cold stratification treatment prior to germination and on temperatures during the germination trial.

