



UNIVERSITY  
of SOPRON

# 11<sup>th</sup> Hardwood Conference

30-31 May 2024  
Sopron

**11<sup>TH</sup> HARDWOOD CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

Róbert Németh, Christian Hansmann, Holger Militz, Miklós Bak, Mátyás Báder



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**Sopron, Hungary, 30-31 May 2024**

**Editors: Róbert Németh, Christian Hansmann, Holger Miltz,  
Miklós Bak, Mátyás Báder**



**UNIVERSITY OF SOPRON PRESS**

**SOPRON, 2024**

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ISBN 978-963-334-518-4 (pdf)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.35511/978-963-334-518-4>

ISSN 2631-004X (Hardwood Conference Proceedings)

Constant Serial Editors: Prof. Dr. Róbert Németh, Dr. Miklós Bak

Cover image based on the photograph of Dr. Miklós Bak, 2024

The manuscripts have been peer-reviewed by the editors and have not been subjected to linguistic revision.

In the articles, corresponding authors are marked with an asterisk (\*) sign.

[University of Sopron Press](#), 2024 (Bajcsy-Zsilinszky 4, 9400 Sopron, Hungary)

Responsible for publication: Prof. Dr. Attila Fábián, rector of the [University of Sopron](#)

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# Content

## Preface to the 11<sup>TH</sup> HARDWOOD CONFERENCE

*Róbert Németh*..... 9

## Plenary Session - Keynotes of the 11<sup>TH</sup> HARDWOOD CONFERENCE

The role of black locust ( <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> ) in Czechia <i>Ivan Kuneš, Martin Baláš, Přemysl Šedivka, Vilém Podrázský</i> .....	11
Engineered wood products for construction based on beech and poplar resources in Europe <i>Joris Van Acker, Liselotte De Ligne, Tobi Hallez, Jan Van den Bulcke</i> .....	23
The situation in the hardwood sector in Europe <i>Maria Kiefer-Polz, Rainer Handl</i> .....	60

## Session I - Silvicultural aspects and forest management of hardwoods

Monitoring xylogenesis as a tool to assess the impact of different management treatments on wood formation: A study case on <i>Vitis vinifera</i> <i>Angela Balzano, Maks Merela, Meta Pivk, Luka Krže, Veronica De Micco</i> .....	62
The History of Forests - Climate Periods of the Middle Ages and Forestry <i>Emese Berzsenyi, Dóra Hegyesi, Rita Kattein-Pornói, Dávid Kazai</i> .....	63
Climate change mitigation aspects of increasing industrial wood assortments of hardwood species in Hungary <i>Éva Király, Zoltán Börzsök, Attila Borovics</i> .....	71
Uncovering genetic structures of natural Turkey oak populations to help develop effective climate change strategies for forestry <i>Botond B. Lados, László Nagy, Attila Benke, Csilla É. Molnár, Zoltán A. Köbölkuti, Attila Borovics, Klára Cseke</i> .....	78
Ash dieback: infection biology and management <i>Nina E. Nagy, Volkmar Timmermann, Isabella Børja, Halvor Solheim, Ari M. Hietala</i> .....	86
The Role of Industrial Hardwood Production Plantations and Long-Term Carbon Sequestration in a Circular Economy via the New <i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i> ‘Turbo Obelisk’ Varieties <i>Márton Németh, Kálmán Pogrányi, Rezső Solymos</i> .....	95
Initial growth of native and introduced hardwoods at the afforested agricultural lands – preliminary results <i>Vilém Podrázský, Josef Gallo, Martin Baláš, Ivan Kuneš, Tama Abubakar Yahaya, Miroslav Šulitka</i> .....	102

## Poster Session

Light response curve analysis of juvenile Püspökladányi and Üllői black locust <i>Tamás Ábri, Zsolt Keserű, József Csajbók</i> .....	111
Revealing the optimum configuration of heat-treated wood dowel joints by means of Artificial Neural Networks and Response Surface Methodology <i>Bogdan Bedeleian, Cosmin Spîrchez</i> .....	115
Artificial neural networks as a predictive tool for thrust force and torque during drilling of wood-based composites <i>Bogdan Bedeleian, Mihai Ispas, Sergiu Răcășan</i> .....	121

Research on the value retention of hardwood products in the spirit of sustainability <i>Daniel Bodorkós, József Zalavári, Péter György Horváth</i> .....	126
Abrasive Water Jet Cutting vs. Laser Jet Cutting of Oak Wood Panels <i>Camelia Cosoreanu, Gheorghe Cosmin Spirchez, Antonela Lungu, Sergiu-Valeriu Georgescu, Alexandru Catalin Filip, Sergiu Racasan</i> .....	131
Polyphenol content of underutilized wood species from Hungary <i>Tamás Hofmann, Haruna Seidu, Kibet Tito Kipkoror</i> .....	136
Wood quality evaluation of 32 grafted clone linages of Keyaki ( <i>Zelkova serrata</i> ) plus trees 12 years after planting <i>Kiyohiko Ikeda, Shigehiro Yamamoto</i> .....	141
Influence of the number of belts over vibrations of the cutting mechanism in woodworking shaper <i>Georgi Kovatchev, Valentin Atanasov</i> .....	146
The impact of litter forest fires on the internal structure of wood from stem of beech trees <i>Elena-Camelia Musat, Costin-Ovidiu Vantoiu, Emilia-Adela Salca</i> .....	153
Analysing innovative wood joints crafted by laser cut spline curves <i>László Németh, József Garab, Péter György Horváth</i> .....	158
Dynamic fatigue tests of hardwoods <i>Gábor Orbán, Antal Kánnár</i> .....	163
Restoration of an old painted oak boardsign - A case study <i>Gabriel Calin Canalas, Emilia-Adela Salca, Elena-Camelia Musat</i> .....	168
Some physical properties of native and thermo-treated <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> timber <i>Cosmin Spirchez, Aurel Lunguleasa, Alin Olărescu, Camelia Coşoreanu, Bogdan Bedelea</i> .....	173
The surface morphology of sanded curly maple in comparison with straight grain maple selected for musical instruments <i>Mariana Domnica Stanciu, Lidia Gurau, Florin Dinulica, Catalin Constantin Roibu, Cristian Hiciu, Andrei Mursa, Marian Stirbu</i> .....	178
Analysis of changes in the composition of beech as an important industrial raw material in Hungary <i>Katalin Szakálosné Mátyás, Attila László Horváth</i> .....	183
Investigation of old hardwood structure element <i>Fanni Szőke, Antal Kánnár</i> .....	187
An investigation of the influence of coating film thickness on the light induced colour changes of clear coated maple ( <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> ) wood surfaces with natural aspect <i>Mihai-Junior Torcătoru, Maria Cristina Timar</i> .....	192
Composite Material Manufacturing from Plantation Paulownia Wood with Using Microwave Technology: Technical and Cost Analyses <i>Grigory Torgovnikov, Peter Vinden, Alexandra Leshchinskaia</i> .....	198
Thermal modification of wood as a tool for changing the colour of hardwoods <i>Vidholdová Zuzana</i> .....	203
High termite resistance of kempas ( <i>Koompassia malaccensis</i> ) hardwood protected with a novel vegetal extracts-cypermethrin wood preservative under outdoor aboveground tropical environment <i>Messaoudi Daouia, Wong Andrew H.H.</i> .....	209
Comparison of wood properties of pedunculate oak and non-native northern red oak from an anthropogenic site <i>Aleš Zeidler, Vlastimil Borůvka</i> .....	214
Acoustic Parameters of Pioneer Wood Species <i>Petr Horák, Vlastimil Borůvka</i> .....	219
Determination of Elastic Parameters of Birch and Oak Wood Using Optical Method <i>David Novák, Vlastimil Borůvka, Petr Horák, Tomáš Kytka</i> .....	224

Preliminary study on climate change impacts on annual wood growth development in Hungary <i>Péter Farkas, Zsolt György Tóth, Huba Komán</i> .....	230
Combustion characteristics of Russian olive ( <i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i> L.) <i>Szabolcs Komán, Krisztián Töröcsi</i> .....	236
Withdrawal capacity of Green ash ( <i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i> Marsh.) and Box elder ( <i>Acer negundo</i> L.) <i>Szabolcs Komán, Boldizsár Déri</i> .....	241
Formaldehyde emission from wood and wood-based products <i>Szabolcs Komán, Csilla Czók, Tamás Hofmann</i> .....	246
Finite element analysis of heat transfer of Turkey oak ( <i>Quercus cerris</i> ) <i>Sándor Borza, Gergely Csiszár, József Garab, Szabolcs Komán</i> .....	250
Possible alternative to creosote treated railway sleepers, Fürstenberg-System Sleeper (FSS) <i>Szabolcs Komán, Balogh Mátyás Zalán, Sándor Fehér</i> ,.....	255
Investigation of bendability characteristics of wood-based polymer composites <i>S. Behnam Hosseini, Milan Gaff</i> .....	260
Comparing the blossoming and wood producing properties of selected black locust clones <i>Alexandra Porcsin, Katalin Szakálosné Mátyás, Zsolt Keserű</i> .....	266
The influence of two different adhesives on structural reinforcement of oak-wood elements by carbon and glass fibres <i>Andrija Novosel, Vjekoslav Živković</i> .....	271
Investigating Kerf Topology and Morphology Variation in Native Species After CO <sub>2</sub> Laser Cutting <i>Lukáš Štefančín, Rastislav Igaz, Ivan Kubovský, Richard Kminiak</i> .....	272
Comparison of fluted-growth and cylindrical hornbeam logs from Hungarian forests <i>Mátyás Báder, Maximilián Cziczzer</i> .....	279
Thermal modification affects the dynamic vapor sorption of tree of heaven wood ( <i>Ailanthus altissima</i> , Mill.) <i>Fanni Fodor, Lukas Emmerich, Norbert Horváth, Róbert Németh</i> .....	285
How conditions after application affect the depth of penetration of gel wood preservative in oak <i>Jan Baar, Štěpán Bartoš, Anna Oberle, Zuzana Paschová</i> .....	290
The weathering of the beech wood impregnated by pigmented linseed oil <i>Jakub Dömény, Jan Baar</i> .....	294
Examination of the durability of beeswax-impregnated wood <i>Miklós Bak, Ádám Bedők, Róbert Németh</i> .....	299
Preparation of pleated oak samples and their bending tests at different moisture contents <i>Pál Péter Gecseg, Mátyás Báder</i> .....	304
Bending test results of small-sized glued laminated oak timber consisting of 2, 3 and 5 layers <i>Dénes Horváth, Sándor Fehér</i> .....	308
Homogenized dynamic Modulus of Elasticity of structural strip-like laminations made from low-grade sawn hardwood <i>Simon Lux, Johannes Konnerth, Andreas Neumüller</i> .....	314
Impact of varnishing on the acoustic properties of sycamore maple ( <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> ) panels <i>Aleš Straže, Jure Žigon, Matjaž Pavlič</i> .....	319
The effect of wood and solution temperatures on the preservative uptake of Pannonia poplar and common spruce – preliminary research <i>Luca Buga-Kovács, Norbert Horváth</i> .....	325

## Session II - Hardwood resources, product approaches, and timber trade

Birch tar – historic material, innovative approach <i>Jakub Brózdowski, Monika Bartkowiak, Grzegorz Cofa, Grażyna Dąbrowska, Ahmet Erdem Yazici, Zbigniew Katolik, Szymon Rosołowski, Magdalena Zborowska</i> .....	330
Beech Wood Steaming – Chemical Profile of Condensate for Sustainable Applications <i>Goran Milić, Nebojša Todorović, Dejan Orčić, Nemanja Živanović, Nataša Simin</i> .....	336
Towards a complete technological profile of hardwood branches for structural use: Case study on Poisson's ratio <i>Tobias Nennung, Michael Grabner, Christian Hansmann, Wolfgang Gindl-Altmutter, Johannes Konnerth, Maximilian Pramreiter</i> .....	342
Low-value wood from non-native tree species as a potential source of bioactive extractives for bio-based preservation <i>Viljem Vek, Ida Poljanšek, Urša Osolnik, Angela Balzano, Miha Humar, Primož Oven</i> .....	349
Hardwood Processing - do we apply appropriate technologies? <i>Alfred Teischinger</i> .....	357

## Session III - Surface coating and bonding characteristics of hardwoods

Influence of pretreatments with essential oils on the colour and light resistance of maple ( <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i> ) wood surfaces coated with shellac and beeswax <i>Emanuela Carmen Beldean, Maria Cristina Timar, Dana Mihaela Pop</i> .....	365
Oak timber cross-cutting based on fiber orientation scanning and mechanical modelling to ensure finger-joints strength <i>Soh Mbou Delin, Besseau Benoit, Pot Guillaume, Viguiet Joffrey, Marcon Bertrand, Milhe Louis, Lanvin Jean-Denis, Reuling Didier</i> .....	376
From Phenol-Lignin Blends towards birch plywood board production <i>Wilfried Sailer-Kronlachner, Peter Bliem, Hendrikus van Herwijnen</i> .....	386
Flatwise bending strength and stiffness of finger jointed beech lamellas ( <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> , L.) using different adhesive systems and effect of finger joint gap size <i>Hannes Stolze, Adefemi Adebisi Alade, Holger Militz</i> .....	395
Mode I fracture behaviour of bonded beech wood analysed with acoustic emission <i>Martin Capuder, Aleš Straže, Boris Azinović, Ana Brunčič</i> .....	402

## Session IV - Hardwood structure and properties

Compression strength perpendicular to grain in hardwoods depending on test method <i>Marlene Cramer</i> .....	410
Compensatory Anatomical Studies on <i>Robinia</i> , <i>Sclerocarya</i> and <i>Ulmus</i> <i>Fath Alrhman A. A. Younis, Róbert Németh, Mátyás Báder</i> .....	420
The influence of the type of varnish on the viscous-elastic properties of maple wood used for musical instruments <i>Roxana Gall, Adriana Savin, Mariana Domnica Stanciu, Mihaela Campean, Vasile Ghiorghe Gliga</i> .....	426
XRF investigation of subfossil oak ( <i>Quercus</i> spp) wood revealing colour - iron content correlation <i>Nedelcu Ruxandra, Timar Maria Cristina, Beldean Emanuela Carmen</i> .....	435
Investigating the Development of Heartwood in <i>Quercus robur</i> in Denmark <i>Andrea Ponzeccchi, Albin Lobo, Jill Katarina Olofsson, Jon Kehlet Hansen, Erik Dahl Kjær, Lisbeth Garbrecht Thygesen</i> .....	445

Modelling tensile mechanical properties of oak timber from fibre orientation scanning for strength grading purpose <i>Guillaume Pot, Joffrey Viguier, Benoit Besseau, Jean-Denis Lanvin, Didier Reuling</i> .....	452
Green oak building – small diameter logs for construction <i>Martin Huber, Franka Brüchert, Nicolas Hofmann, Kay-Uwe Schober, Beate Hörnel-Metzger, Maximilian Müller, Udo H. Sauter</i> .....	461
An evaluative examination of oak wood defect detection employing deep learning (DL) software systems. <i>Branimir Jambreković, Filip Veselčić, Iva Ištok, Tomislav Sinković, Vjekoslav Živković, Tomislav Sedlar</i> .....	466
Comparison of surface roughness of milled surface of false heartwood, mature wood, and sapwood within beech wood <i>Lukáš Adamčík, Richard Kminiak, Adrián Banski</i> .....	467

## Session V - Hardwoods in composites and engineered materials

Developing Laminated Strand Lumber (LSL) based on underutilized Hungarian wood species <i>László Bejő, Tibor Alpár, Ahmed Altaher Omer Ahmed</i> .....	475
Feasibility study on manufacturing finger-jointed structural timber using <i>Eucalyptus grandis</i> wood <i>Adefemi Adebisi Alade, Hannes Stolze, Coenraad Brand Wessels, Holger Militz</i> .....	481
A novel approach for the design of flame-retardant plywood <i>Christian Hansmann, Georg Baumgartner, Christoph Preimesberger</i> .....	486
The use of beech particles in the production of particleboards based on recycled wood <i>Ján Iždinský, Emilia Adela Salca, Pavlo Bekhta</i> .....	493
Thermal properties of highly porous wood-based insulation material <i>Kryštof Kubista, Přemysl Šedivka</i> .....	501

## Session VI - Modification & functionalization

Quantitative and qualitative aspects of industrial drying of Turkey oak lumber <i>Iulia Deaconu, Bogdan Bedeleian, Sergiu Georgescu, Octavia Zeleniuc, Mihaela Campean</i> .....	508
Changes in properties of maple by hygrothermally treatment for accelerated ageing at 135-142°C <i>Tobias Dietrich, Herwig Hackenberg, Mario Zauer, Holger Schiema, André Wagenführ</i> .....	518
Change of chemical composition and FTIR spectra of Turkey oak and Pannonia poplar wood after acetylation <i>Fanni Fodor, Tamás Hofmann</i> .....	525
Change of cellulose crystal structure in beech wood ( <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> L.) due to gaseous ammonia treatment <i>Herwig Hackenberg, Tobias Dietrich, Mario Zauer, Martina Bremer, Steffen Fischer, André Wagenführ</i> .....	535
Evaluation of weathering performance of acetylated hardwood species <i>Rene Herrera Diaz, Jakub Sandak, Oihana Gordobil, Faksawat Poohphajai, Anna Sandak</i> .....	539
Unlocking a Potential Deacetylation of Acetylated Beech ( <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> L.) LVL <i>Maik Slabohm, Holger Militz</i> .....	544
Fork and flying wood tests to improve prediction of board stress development during drying <i>Antoine Stéphane, Patrick Perré, Clément L'Hostis, Romain Rémond</i> .....	549
Modification of different European hardwood species with a bio-based thermosetting resin on a semi-industrial scale <i>Christoph Hötte, Holger Militz</i> .....	557



## Comparing the blossoming and wood producing properties of selected black locust clones

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**Keywords:** black locust, cultivars, blossoming, growth

### ABSTRACT

Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* L.) is a tree species introduced from North America, and it's well known for its positive economical and negative ecological properties, making it one of the most widely distributed tree species in European countries. Despite its rapid growth, its wood is hard and weather-resistant so it can be used, for example, as sawn wood products, barked or belted poles and vineyard posts among others and also as planting material for short rotation energy plantations. Its nectare producing ability is excellent as well, black locust honey can make up to 50% of the whole honey production of Hungary. Unfortunately, increasingly hectic weather conditions, late frosts and the rising frequency of destructive storms caused by climate change, which are nowadays more and more noticeable, have a negative impact not only on nectar production but also on the shape of stem (Jovanović 1967, Herman 1971, Vajda 1974, Rîțiu et al. 1988). Consequently, fast-growing species with good stem suckers and high nectar production potential are recommended, taking into account the variable future distribution of black locust in Europe (Boer 2013, Kutnar & Kobler 2013, Guoqing et al. 2014, Giuliani et al. 2015, Dyderski et al. 2017). To decide which cultivars can be used to help the beekeepers as well as foresters, which ones are more resistant to climate change and the biotic and abiotic damages, we need to compare their growth and their blossoming properties. The height of the tree is determined firsthand by genetics, the diameter at breast height is defined by growth space according to most authors but in a recent study Ábri and Keserű (2023) found that the linkage wasn't significant in terms of juvenile black locust cultivars. There is a trade-off in most plants regarding growth and generative reproduction on the edges of distribution unrelated to whether it's the dry (South) or the cold (North) end of it (Willy and Buskirk 2022). We must therefore need to find the correlation breakers which won't show the traits of not only these trade-offs, but those regarding resistant and resilient traits and can be selected by phenotype.

### INTRODUCTION

Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* L.) is native to the eastern parts of North America and is imported into Europe from only a small number of populations (Bouteiller et al. 2018). Within Europe, it was mainly introduced by human activity in the 17th and 18th centuries, which led to its expansion in e.g. Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic one century later (Hegi 1924, Nožička 1957, Böhmer et al. 2001, Bartha et al. 2008). The last boost to its spread in Europe came from the devastation of the world wars (Kohler & Sukopp 1964). In terms of its ecological requirements, black locust is highly drought tolerant in Europe and can survive with only 500-550 mm of total annual precipitation instead of the 1020-1830 mm usually required in its original distributional area (Nicolescu et al. 2020). The decline in the allelic diversity of black locust in its new habitat following its introduction into Europe was also driven by its small population size, which included only a few import activities (Uller & Leimu 2011, Bouteiller et al. 2018). This allelic decline may have implications for its future response to climate change (Enescu & Dănescu 2013).

Black locust is demanding on soil aeration, grows sluggishly on compacted clayey soils, and does not tolerate waterlogging (Rédei 2020). Future alternatives to the areas currently occupied by beech and

silver fir will include the expansion and planting of black locust, red oak, turkey oak, and fluttering elm species if the predicted northward shift occurs due to a temperature increase of 2.9°C or 4.5°C (Thurm et al. 2018). Despite its rapid growth, black locust wood is hard and weather resistant. Black locust covers up to 24% of the forested area in Hungary. It provides a livelihood for tens of thousands of people in the forestry, sawmill, and beekeeping sectors, but the native range of North American black locust populations are located 5-10° further south (Bartha et al. 2008) than the current habitat in Hungary. The increasing frequency of late frosts and destructive storms exert negative impacts on both nectar production and stem structure (Jovanović 1967, Herman 1971, Vajda 1974, Riđiu et al. 1988). This sensitivity usually results in second flowering, drastically reducing the annual black locust honey production. Increasingly volatile, climate change-induced weather conditions are the main problem facing black locust today. Consequently, fast-growing species with good stem suckers and high nectar production potential are recommended. The economic aspects of using black locust include the widespread belief of a trade-off phenomenon between the long and abundant flowering of the species and its ability to produce quality wood for the sawmill industry. Trade-off is based on the observation that the life cycles of organisms are paired, so they can only enhance one at the expense of the other. Nevertheless, we must mention that no one has found any significant correlation in the case of tree species like pines or poplars. The hypothesis of this study is that there is no trade-off phenomenon between the intensive flowering capacity and the height growth of black locust when it's not on the dry edge of its distribution, using height as a measuring point since it is mostly determined by genetics.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

We performed the measurements in four forest subcompartments, namely Isaszeg 8/C, Isaszeg 8/E, Debrecen 17/C and Kecskemét-Méheslapos. The two subcompartments at Isaszeg are both located outside of the Gödöllő Arboretum, near the former Forest Research Institute's (hereinafter: FRI) experimental station. The plots at the Gödöllő Arboretum are at 200–220 m altitude, the subcompartment near the city of Debrecen is at an altitude of 121 m and Kecskemét-Méheslapos is at 105 m. All four subcompartments contain state-approved cultivars, candidate cultivars, clones selected for timber production, apiculture purposes, or a combination of both. Using the flowering and timber production values of the commercial black locust individuals in the plots as standard, we can measure the economic advantage of the selected clones and cultivars. The planting network is 2.5 x 1.0 m in all the subcompartments. There is a significant correlation between the average intensive flowering period (which occurs when the flowering is in its third or fourth stage and the average length of flowering (Isaszeg 8/C  $p=0,879773$ , Isaszeg 8/E  $p=0,918902$ ) (Porcsin et al. 2021). The common black locust trees were planted from seedbed plants.

There are four different clones in the *Debrecen 17/C* subcompartment. We marked 30 stems altogether with the common black locust on the area. These include a clone (*R. p. 'Guth-189'*), a previously state-approved clone (*R. p. 'Szajki'*), and state-approved cultivars (*R. p. 'Appalachia'* and *R. p. 'Nyírségi'*). The state approved cultivars and the *R. p. 'Szajki'* clone were planted from root suckers; the clones are planted from micropropagated planting material.

There are two subcompartments in the Gödöllő Arboretum, *Isaszeg 8/C* and *Isaszeg 8/E*. We marked 78 stems in these plantations. The age difference isn't significant (3 years), so we can assume their flowering capacity is the same. Since there isn't common black locust in the Isaszeg 8/E subcompartment, we use the data from the Isaszeg 8/C one. The state-approved cultivars were planted from root suckers as well as some of the clones registered as state-approved in previous years, but not listed as them in 2024. The candidate cultivars (*R. p. 'Oszlopos'*, *R. p. 'Homoki'*, *R. p. 'Szálás'*, *R. p. 'Vacsi'*) and the clones (*R. p. 'Nyírségi-12'*, *R. p. 'PV-BORZ'*, *R. p. 'PV 201 E 2/3'*, *R. p. 'Rózsaszín-A'*, and *R. p. 'Rózsaszín-B'*) have been planted from micropropagated planting material.

The Kecskemét-Méheslapos subcompartment was planted in 1996 and expanded by 5 clones in 2000 and added 8 more in 2002. We marked 48 stems in it. This place clearly shows the signs of the dry end of the black locust's distribution area, since from the 45 parcels we found living plants (at least 3 to mark for study) only in 31. Besides climate change, the main reason for this was probably the damage which was caused by the locust digitate leafminer (*Parectopa robiniella*) and *Phyllonorycter robiniella*. The clones have been planted from micropropagated planting material as well as in the other experimental areas.

## Methods

During the measurements, we observed the flowering stages and the extent and abundance of blossoming in May and June and recorded tree height and diameter outside of the vegetation period. Measurements of the flowering stages and the abundance should occur at the same time every day to ensure accuracy, preferably from more than one angles at least every two days. The stems were around 20 m in height, so we measured the flowering qualities with a telescope. The method follows the work of Imre Csiha.

The extent of flowering of the stems was determined based on the following criteria:

- I. extent: No flower (no inflorescence is visible in the crown of the stem).
- II. extent: Few flowers (flowering can be seen on 1/3 of the crown of the stem).
- III. extent: Medium amount of flowers (the inflorescence can be seen on 2/3 of the crown of the stem).
- IV. extent: Abundant flowers (the flowers are visible on the whole crown of the stem).
- V. extent: Abundant flowering on each branch of the tree

The criteria below separate the flowering stages:

*First flowering stage:* Only green buds in a closed stage are visible.

*Second flowering stage:* The white ends of the flowers are visible at the end of the buds.

*Third flowering stage:* Most of the flowers are white and in an open-bud stage.

*Fourth flowering stage:* The flowers are fully open, and the entire inflorescence is white.

*Fifth flowering stage:* Wilted flowers appear in the crown; the white and brown colors are mixed and the petals beginning to fall. Scattered fallen flowers appear on the ground.

We used a Vertex height-measuring instrument with a measuring unit and an associated transponder to measure tree height. We employed a  $\pi$ -tape to measure the diameter at breast height (DBH) because it allowed us to read the measurement immediately.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The criteria to be classified as “better” is to reach a flowering period that is at least two days longer and to have a higher height than the common black locust stems. We took common black locust stem volume to be 100% to determine the superiority of the clones and cultivars (Table 1). We used different values to determine the clones’ volumes because of their straighter trunk shape and smaller crowns (Veperdi 2001).

**Table 1: Performance of the clones compared to common black locust in their subcompartment**

Subcompartment	Name of the clone	Average flowering period (day)	Intensive blooming period (day)	Average diameter at breast height (cm)	Average height (m)	Performance (%)	Average volume (m <sup>3</sup> )	Performance (%)
	Common black locust	18	7	12.9	16.3	100	0.12	100
Isaszeg 8/C	<i>R. p. 'Oszlopos'</i>	22	11	14	16.5	101	0.14	117
	<i>R.p. 'PV-BORZ'</i>	23	11	14.6	17.4	107	0.16	133
	<i>R.p. 'Váti-46'</i>	23	10	15.5	18.7	115	0.22	183
	<i>R.p. 'PV 201 E 2/3'</i>	21	10	16.6	18.1	111	0.21	175
Isaszeg 8/E	<i>R.p. 'PV 201 E 2/3'</i>	22	10	12.9	16.3	100	0.14	117

The comparing revealed that only cultivars from the two Isaszeg subcompartments showed greater values than the common black locust in the same area. There weren't any clones that would fit the criteria of greater volume and 2 days more of average and intensive blooming period length. These results show that the area of Kecskemét-Méheslapos and Debrecen aren't and won't be valuable for black locust cultivars to plant. Regarding the two still valuable plots, *R. p. 'Oszlopos'*, *R. p. 'PV-BORZ'*, *R. p. 'Váti-46'* and *R. p. 'PV 201 E 2/3'* is better for both wood harvesting and beekeeping reasons. These clones can also be the so-called correlation breakers. As the results show, there is no trade-off phenomenon between the intensive flowering capacity and the height growth of black locust when it's not on the dry edge of its distribution, so our hypothesis is true. The correlation between height (m),

volume (m<sup>3</sup>), length of average flowering and blooming period (day) weren't strong to begin with, but in the drier ends of the areas (Debrecen and Kecskemét) and correlation was even smaller or slightly negative (Table 2). We can assume that this is because of the trade-off examined in other plants between growth and sexual production.

**Table 2: Correlation between height, volume and flowering period lengths**

<i>p values</i>	Kecskemét	Debrecen	Isaszeg 8/C	Isaszeg 8/E
Volume - Average flowering period	0.22707	0.23085	0.34986	0.28350
Height - Average flowering period	0.23134	-0.09791	0.32140	0.38735
Volume - Intensive flowering period	0.64479	-0.01117	0.15220	0.35298
Height - Intensive flowering period	0.56200	0.07032	0.28363	0.18355

The Kecskemét-Méheslapos subcompartment has a strong correlation between volume, height and intensive flowering period length but this occurs because all the numbers were lower regarding these qualities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Several factors influence the quality of flowering and stem characteristics. Climate factors influence blossoming the most. The length of the flowering also depends on stand structure, stand age, the number and direction of the gaps and lanes, and the altitude of the population (Fritsch 2012). According to Guoqing L. et al. (2014) and Valeriu-Norocel N. et al. (2020) and an EUSTAT map (2024), it will no longer find its optimum in the southern east planes of Hungary and as our results show this is already happening. Instead, in the next 20-50 years it will spread to our northwest regions where our hills and mountains are. We can predict that since the average temperature will be higher but also the number of days with average temperature below zero will increase, the flowering period will start earlier and will be shorter than nowadays. This will have a devastating effect on our beekeeping industry. While the criteria of the site optimum of different poplar clones and cultivars have been made, no such assessment was made for black locust clones. Although the propagules are vegetatively made (via micropropagation or using root suckers), the generative reproductive capacity of the species may be an indication in future decision-making to maintain allelic diversity and adaptability (which will play a huge role in the face of climate change). We need to work on a cheaper and more effective method of growing black locust and select clones that can tolerate the effects of an even drier but more volatile climate if we want to maintain our beekeeping sector's income and micropropagation may help us in this task.

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