RESEARCH PAPER

Poplar miR472a targeting NBS-LRRs is involved in effective defence against the necrotrophic fungus Cytospora chrysosperma

Yanyan Su1, Hui-Guang Li1, Yonglin Wang2, Shuang Li1, Hou-Ling Wang1, Lu Yu2, Fang He1, Yanli Yang1, Cong-Hua Feng1, Peng Shuai1, Chao Liu1, Weilun Yin1 and Xinli Xia1,*

1 Beijing Advanced Innovation Center for Tree Breeding by Molecular Design, College of Biological Sciences and Technology, National Engineering Laboratory of Tree Breeding, Beijing Forestry University, Beijing 100083, China
2 College of Forestry, Beijing Forestry University, Beijing 100083, China

* Correspondence: xiaxl@bjfu.edu.cn

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Abstract

The hemibiotroph Colletotrichum gloeosporioides and the necrotroph Cytospora chrysosperma cause poplar foliage and stem disease, respectively, resulting in substantial economic losses. In this study, Populus trichocarpa ptc-miR472a was down-regulated in leaves treated with salicylic acid, jasmonic acid (JA) or bacterial flagellin (flg22). Here, ptc-miR472a and a short tandem target mimic (STTM) of miR472a were overexpressed in P. alba × P. glandulosa, and overexpression lines of miR472a and silenced lines of STTM472a were generated. Compared with the STTM472a and wild type lines, lower reactive oxygen species accumulation was detected in miR472a overexpressing plants treated with flg22, C. gloeosporioides or C. chrysosperma. In addition, the miR472a overexpressing lines exhibited the highest susceptibility to the hemibiotroph, C. gloeosporioides, but the highest effective defence response to the necrotroph, C. chrysosperma. The JA/ethylene marker gene ERF1 was rapidly up-regulated in miR472a overexpressing plants. Furthermore, five phased, secondary, small interfering RNAs (phasiRNAs) were confirmed in the miR472a overexpressing and STTM472a lines, triggering phasiRNAs predicted to enhance NBS-LRR silencing. Taken together, our results revealed that ptc-miR472a exerts a key role in plant immunity to C. gloeosporioides and C. chrysosperma by targeting NBS-LRR transcripts. This study provides a new strategy and method in plant breeding to improve plant disease resistance.

Keywords: Colletotrichum gloeosporioides, Cytospora chrysosperma, microRNA (miRNA), NBS-LRR, phasiRNA, Populus, redox oxygen species.

Introduction

Plants inhabit environments thronging with infectious microbes that pose frequent threats to their survival. Accordingly, plants have evolved effective defence systems against the microbes. In these systems, resistance (R) proteins have a pivotal role in response to pathogen infections, and can induce oxidative bursts and the expression of pathogenesis-related (PR) genes and programmed cell death (PCD) (Jones and Dangl, 2006; Wu et al., 2014; Zou et al., 2018). NBS-LRR proteins, which contain a nucleotide-binding site and leucine-rich repeat domains, are the largest class of known R proteins. NBS-LRR