Plant Archives Vol. 25, Special Issue (ICTPAIRS-JAU, Junagadh) Jan. 2025 pp. 817-821
e-ISSN:2581-6063 (online), ISSN:0972-5210

Plant Archives

Journal homepage: http://www.plantarchives.org
DOI Url : https://doi.org/10.51470/PLANTARCHIVES.2025.v25.SP.ICTPAIRS-117

IMAGE-BASED PROTOCOL FOR AUTOMATED LEMON GRADING: A TECHNOLOGICAL APPROACH

Gunvantsinh D. Gohil*, P. R. Davara, G. S. Kharadi

Junagadh Agricultural University, Junagadh - 362001(Gujarat), India.
*Corresponding author E-mail: gunvantsinh@jau.in

ABSTRACT

The grading system for lemons takes into account various characteristics such as size, color, shape, defects, and internal quality to categorize them effectively. The goal of this research is to classify lemons into three categories—Immature, Intermediate, and Mature—based on their size and color. The research is divided into three phases: creating a dataset of lemon images, extracting and analyzing features, and simulating the grading process. To build the dataset, lemon images are captured in a controlled setting, adhering to specific parameters like the height of capture, background color, resolution, and viewpoints. The grading simulation is executed in the MATLAB environment. Initial image processing steps, such as binarization and cropping, are applied to the lemon samples. Features are extracted from these processed images, and size-based grading is determined by specific thresholds: small (<=183), medium (>183 and <=240), and large (>240). Additionally, color classification is based on the relative hue (rH) values: immature lemons (rH> 16), intermediate lemons (0.6 <rH< 16), and mature lemons (rH<= 0.6). The established protocol effectively sorts lemons into distinct categories that meet commercial standards, offering a reliable method for classifying lemons by size and color, which is useful for various applications.

***Key words*:** Color classification, Feature extraction, Image processing, MATLAB, Lemon grading, Size classification

Introduction

In the agricultural sector, the grading of produce, particularly fruits like lemons, is essential to ensure quality and uniformity before reaching the consumer market. Grading plays a significant role in sorting products into different categories based on specific quality attributes such as size, color, shape, and surface defects. These attributes are critical for determining the market value and consumer acceptance of the produce (Jones & Smith, 2022). Traditionally, grading has been performed manually by trained inspectors. However, manual grading is inherently subjective, time-consuming, and prone to human error, which can result in inconsistent grading outcomes and increased operational costs (Nguyen *et al.*, 2023).

With the rapid advancement in technology, the agricultural industry is increasingly adopting automated systems for grading to improve accuracy and efficiency. Automated grading systems leverage image processing techniques to analyze visual attributes of fruits and vegetables, providing a more consistent and objective approach to grading (Patel & Mehta, 2023). The need for such systems is particularly evident in citrus fruit markets, where maintaining uniformity in quality is crucial for consumer satisfaction and compliance with market standards (Wang & Zhao, 2023).

Image processing has emerged as a powerful tool for developing automated grading systems. Various studies have explored different approaches to using image processing for fruit grading. For instance, RGB (Red, Green, Blue) color space is commonly used in image analysis for its simplicity and effectiveness in distinguishing between different colors and shades (Ahmed & Lee, 2023). By analyzing RGB values, it is possible to categorize fruits based on their maturity stages, which is particularly relevant for fruits like lemons that change color as they ripen. The RGB-based approach is advantageous because it requires minimal computational resources and is relatively easy to implement, making it suitable for small-scale agricultural operations (Singh & Kumar, 2022).

The choice of image processing techniques for automated grading systems depends on several factors, including the type of produce, desired accuracy, and available resources. While advanced techniques such as deep learning have been employed for more complex applications, they require extensive computational power and large datasets, which may not be feasible for all users (Li & Zhang, 2023). In contrast, simpler techniques based on RGB color analysis can offer a cost-effective solution with sufficient accuracy for many grading tasks. For example, RGB-based methods have been successfully used to classify fruits such as tomatoes, apples, and oranges into different ripeness stages based on color distribution (Tan & Wong, 2022).

Recent studies have also explored using simple image processing techniques for defect detection. Zhang *et al.* (2023) applied basic color segmentation methods to detect blemishes on lemons, achieving satisfactory results under controlled lighting conditions. These methods, while less sophisticated than machine learning approaches, offer a pragmatic solution for on-site grading where computational resources are limited. Other researchers have investigated the use of morphological operations combined with RGB analysis to improve the robustness of defect detection (Chen *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, innovative approaches such as the use of hybrid models combining RGB and grayscale analysis have shown potential in enhancing the grading accuracy for fruits with complex textures and color gradients (Lee & Kim, 2023). This method allows for a more nuanced understanding of fruit surface characteristics, which can be critical for distinguishing between closely related quality grades (Wang *et al.*, 2023).

Another advancement includes the integration of edge detection techniques with RGB analysis to improve the identification of fruit edges, which is essential for accurate size measurement (Park & Lee, 2023). This combination has proven effective in minimizing errors caused by overlapping fruits or uneven lighting, which are common challenges in agricultural settings (Huang & Zhou, 2023).

Building on these findings, the current study proposes a straightforward RGB-based image processing approach to automate lemon grading. The focus is on leveraging basic image attributes—such as color and size—derived from RGB values to classify lemons into different maturity stages. This method is designed to be both cost-effective and easy to deploy, making it accessible for a wide range of users, from small-scale farmers to larger agricultural enterprises.

Related Work

Numerous studies have demonstrated the potential of image processing techniques for fruit grading, focusing primarily on color analysis and size measurement. Earlier research primarily relied on traditional image processing methods such as color segmentation and thresholding to identify different fruit qualities (Wang & Zhao, 2023). These methods, although effective in controlled environments, often faced challenges with varying lighting conditions and complex backgrounds, which could significantly affect the accuracy of the grading results (Jones & Smith, 2022).

Several researchers have explored the use of RGB color analysis to classify fruits based on their ripeness and quality. Ahmed *et al.*, (2023) utilized RGB color values to classify tomatoes into different ripeness stages, demonstrating high accuracy in distinguishing between mature and immature fruits. Singh and Kumar (2022) applied a similar approach to grade apples based on their surface color, employing simple thresholding techniques to differentiate between different grades.

Additional studies have investigated the effectiveness of RGB-based methods in citrus fruits. For example, Choi *et al.*, (2022) used RGB color space analysis to grade oranges and lemons, highlighting the method's reliability in distinguishing different maturity stages. They reported that such techniques could achieve accuracy rates comparable to more complex methods under certain conditions. Similarly, Sharma and Gupta (2023) developed a color-based algorithm for sorting lemons, achieving high accuracy by optimizing color thresholds and enhancing image preprocessing steps.

Other studies have focused on using color and size as combined criteria for grading. For example, Li and Zhang (2023) developed a method to detect bruises on apples by analyzing color deviations in RGB images, while also considering size as an additional factor for classification. This dual-criteria approach improved the robustness of the grading system, particularly in distinguishing between fruits of similar color but different sizes.

Advances in imaging techniques, such as high-resolution cameras and controlled lighting environments, have further enhanced the capabilities of RGB-based grading systems. Kumar *et al.*, (2023) emphasized the importance of standardizing imaging conditions to reduce

Table 1: Main Results of Lemon Grading Based on Size and Color.

Maturity Stage	Size Classification (Pixels)	Color Classification (rH Value)	Number of Samples	Accuracy (%)
Immature	Small ($\leq$183)	rH > 16	150	92.5
Intermediate	Medium (>183 and $\leq$240)	0.6 < rH < 16	120	89.0
Mature	Large (>240)	rH $\leq$ 0.6	180	94.3

variability and improve feature extraction accuracy. Their study proposed using diffused lighting and a standardized background to minimize shadows and reflections, which are common challenges in image-based grading.

In addition to these methods, some studies have explored the integration of multiple image features, such as texture and shape, to enhance grading performance. Chen and Liu (2023) investigated the use of texture analysis in conjunction with color features to improve the classification accuracy of citrus fruits. Their findings suggested that combining multiple features could provide a more comprehensive assessment of fruit quality, particularly in complex grading scenarios where single-feature analysis might be insufficient.

Further exploration into simple image processing techniques like RGB analysis shows promise for specific agricultural applications. For instance, Lu and Song (2022) conducted a study on using RGB and HSV (Hue, Saturation, Value) color models to differentiate between various stages of mango ripeness, showing that simpler models can still yield high accuracy rates. This aligns with the current study's objectives, highlighting the practicality of RGB-based approaches for grading tasks where computational simplicity and cost-effectiveness are prioritized.

Recent developments also include using synthetic datasets to train grading algorithms, enhancing their robustness against diverse real-world conditions (Kim *et al.*, 2023). These synthetic datasets can simulate various lighting, shadowing, and orientation scenarios, making the algorithms more adaptable and accurate in different environments.

Moreover, the adoption of IoT devices in combination with image processing for fruit grading has been explored. By connecting cameras to IoT networks, data on fruit quality can be processed in real-time, allowing for immediate grading and sorting decisions (Miller *et al.*, 2023). This integration offers significant benefits in terms of scalability and speed, particularly in large agricultural operations.

Other recent studies, such as those by Zhang and Li (2023), have explored the potential of applying machine vision techniques with basic image processing for sorting other agricultural produce, such as grains, suggesting that the methodologies developed here could be expanded for broader applications in agriculture.

In addition, tools like feature extraction through histograms and color moments have shown their relevance in enhancing grading accuracy by providing additional dimensions of analysis (Xu & Sun, 2023). These methods, when combined with RGB-based analysis, can lead to more robust grading systems that can handle a wider variety of conditions and produce.

Material and Methods

The proposed methodology for lemon grading is structured into three main phases:

Lemon Dataset Creation

A comprehensive dataset of lemon images is created by capturing samples under controlled lighting conditions, using a standardized setup to maintain consistency. The images are taken against a neutral background to minimize the influence of external factors. Parameters such as capture height, camera resolution, and angles are standardized to ensure uniformity across all samples. This controlled setup helps reduce variability in image analysis and improves the reliability of the grading process (Patel & Mehta, 2023).

Image Pre-processing and Feature Extraction

Image preprocessing involves converting the captured RGB images into a suitable format for analysis. This phase includes several steps:

- **Image Binarization:** Converting RGB images to grayscale and applying binary thresholding to differentiate lemons from the background (Kim *et al.*, 2023).
- **Cropping and Resizing:** Focusing on the lemon region of interest (ROI) by cropping and resizing the images to a standard size for further analysis (Xu & Sun, 2023).
- **Color Analysis:** Using RGB values to analyze the color distribution within the lemon ROI. The red channel is particularly important for determining the maturity stage, as lemons change color from green to yellow as they ripen (Ahmed & Lee, 2023).
- **Size Measurement:** Calculating the size of lemons in pixels from the binary images to

classify them into size categories (Chen *et al.*, 2023).

Grading Simulation

Based on the extracted features, lemons are graded into three maturity stages:

- **Immature:** Lemons with high green content (high values in the green channel) and small size.
- **Intermediate:** Lemons with a mix of green and yellow hues (moderate values in both the red and green channels) and medium size.
- **Mature:** Lemons predominantly yellow (high values in the red channel) with a larger size.

Thresholds for color and size are defined based on a calibration dataset, ensuring the grading criteria align with commercial standards. The grading simulation is implemented using MATLAB, where image processing functions are used to automate the feature extraction and grading process (Sharma & Gupta, 2023).

Results and Discussion

The proposed grading methodology successfully categorizes lemons into three maturity stages based on size and color attributes. The integration of image processing techniques significantly enhances the accuracy and consistency of the grading process compared to traditional methods. The study's results demonstrate that the developed protocol meets commercial standards and provides a reliable method for classifying lemons, which can be adapted to other agricultural products.

The grading process achieved high accuracy rates across all categories, indicating the effectiveness of the proposed method. The integration of size and color features, alongside advanced image processing techniques, provides a robust framework for lemon grading that meets commercial requirements.

Future Research Direction

Future research could explore integrating additional image features, such as texture or shape, to enhance grading accuracy (Chen & Liu, 2023) [9]. Additionally, the incorporation of multispectral imaging could provide more detailed information about lemon characteristics, potentially improving the robustness of the grading system (Garcia *et al.*, 2023).

Developing more sophisticated calibration techniques to account for varying lighting conditions and backgrounds could also enhance system performance in more diverse environments (Kumar *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, research could focus on developing lightweight, portable versions of the grading system that can be easily deployed in different agricultural settings, including small farms and orchards. Exploring the integration of low-cost hardware, such as Raspberry Pi or Arduino-based systems, could make the technology more accessible to farmers with limited resources (Sharma & Gupta, 2023). There is also potential in exploring simpler machine vision techniques combined with RGB analysis to maintain low-cost and high-efficiency systems suitable for resource-constrained environments (Tan & Wong, 2022).

Exploring the potential of leveraging data from other non-visual sensors, such as moisture and temperature sensors, to complement visual data could also provide more comprehensive grading criteria (Nelson *et al.*, 2023) [24]. Additionally, research could explore integrating augmented reality (AR) systems for real-time feedback and decision-making, enhancing the user experience and grading accuracy in real-world applications (Zhou & Ma, 2023).

Conclusion

This study presents an effective, RGB-based image processing approach for automated lemon grading, providing a simple, cost-effective solution suitable for commercial applications. The proposed protocol leverages basic image processing techniques to classify lemons into different maturity stages based on color and size, demonstrating the potential for improving grading consistency and efficiency in the agricultural sector. Future enhancements and research directions are proposed to further refine the system and expand its applicability.

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