

1 **Involvement of ethylene in color changes and carotenoid biosynthesis in loquat**
2 **fruit (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl. cv. Algeria)**

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19 **Short title:** Ethylene, coloration and carotenoid metabolism in loquat fruit

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22 **Abstract**

23 In loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl cv. Algerie) fruit, despite the non-climacteric ripening
24 behaviour, evidence suggest that ethylene may participate in the regulation of several ripening-
25 and postharvest-related processes. Color changes and carotenoid profile were analyzed in fruit
26 at three developmental stages (breaker, yellow and colored fruits). At early stages, the fruit peel
27 contained phytoene, phytofluene and other typical chloroplastic carotenoids that decreased
28 during ripening, to accumulate β -carotene, violaxanthin and β -cryptoxanthin in mature fruits. In
29 the pulp, carotenoid concentration increased during ripening to become predominant phytoene,
30 followed by β -carotene and β -cryptoxanthin. Expression of the carotenoid biosynthetic genes
31 (*PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS*, *CYCB* and *BCH*) was downregulated in the peel during maturation, but
32 increased in the pulp with the exception of *BCH*. The involvement of ethylene in the regulation
33 of pigmentation was further evaluated by treating fruits at the three ripening stages with
34 ethylene or its action inhibitor 1-MCP. At breaker fruit, ethylene accelerated and 1-MCP
35 delayed fruit coloration, but the effect was progressively lost as fruit matured. Ethylene and 1-
36 MCP produced different changes in carotenoids content and gene expression in peel and pulp.
37 Application of ethylene enhanced β -carotene content in both tissues whereas β -cryptoxanthin
38 was only stimulated in the pulp. 1-MCP suppressed these changes in carotenoid composition in
39 the pulp but had little effect in the peel. A differential transcriptional level the pulp was more
40 responsive to downregulated gene expression than the peel. Collectively, results indicate that: 1)
41 ethylene is involved in the regulation of pigmentation and carotenoid biosynthesis in loquat
42 fruits, 2) a differential regulation of carotenoid biosynthesis and response to ethylene appear to
43 operate in the peel and the pulp, and 3) β -carotene hydroxylase (*BCH*) is a key step in the
44 regulation of carotenoid content and composition in both tissues of loquat fruit.

45

46 **Keywords:** carotenoids, ethylene, fruit, loquat, physiology, postharvest 1-MCP.

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48 **1. Introduction**

49 Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica* L.) belongs to the *Rosaceae* family, is native of Southern
50 China and is currently cultivated in more than 20 countries, being China and Spain the main
51 producers (Calabrese, 2006). Ripening of loquat fruits has been classified as non-climacteric
52 with a virtual absence of a rise in the respiration rate and autocatalytic ethylene production
53 (Jiang et al., 2011, Pech et al., 2012; Reig et al., 2016). Furthermore, the transcriptional
54 regulation of ethylene biosynthetic and perception genes reinforces the notion of a non-
55 climacteric ripening behavior (Alós et al., 2017). However, several studies in loquat have
56 revealed the involvement of ethylene in some ripening-related events or during storage, such as
57 accumulation of sugars, the reduction of acids, flesh browning, polygalacturonase (PG) activity,
58 lignin accumulation and the appearance of chilling injury lesions (Cai et al., 2006; Wang et al.,
59 2010, Liguori et al., 2015). In addition, experiments involving the application of ethylene or 1-
60 methylcyclopropene (1-MCP), an inhibitor of ethylene action, in loquat fruits revealed that
61 ethylene seems to be required to sustain the expression of certain genes of its own biosynthesis
62 (Alós et al., 2017).

63 External color is one of the main parameters of fruit quality and in loquat has been
64 established as the main determinant for the harvest date (Cautín et al., 2006). Depending on the
65 coloration of the flesh at mature stage, loquat fruits can be divided into two types: the white-
66 and the red/orange-fleshed cultivars. The distinctive coloration of the fruit of the different
67 varieties is due to the differential accumulation of specific carotenoids. The carotenoid
68 biosynthetic pathway is well established in some fleshy fruits and the main metabolic steps have
69 been characterized and extensively studied (Lado et al., 2016). Hence, carotenoids are formed
70 from the 2-methyl-erythritol-phosphate (MEP) pathway which generates geranylgeranyl
71 diphosphate (GGPP) that is then used to synthesize phytoene via phytoene synthase (PSY), the
72 first committed step in carotenogenesis (Fig. 1). Subsequently, a series of desaturation and
73 isomerization reactions catalyzed by phytoene desaturase (PDS), ζ -carotene desaturase (ZDS),
74 ζ -carotene isomerase (ZISO), and carotenoid isomerase (CRTISO), lead to the formation of

75 lycopene, the red-colored carotenoid. Lycopene β -cyclase (LCYB) and lycopene ϵ -cyclase
76 (LCYE) together synthesize α -carotene or alternatively, a lycopene β -cyclase (LCYB) or a
77 chromoplast-specific lycopene β -cyclase (CYCB) (Ronen et al., 2000; Alquézar et al., 2009)
78 synthesize β -carotene (Fig. 1). The cyclization of lycopene to produce α -carotene or β -carotene
79 leads to the bifurcation of the pathway into the α - and the β -branch, respectively. Then, the
80 hydroxylation of α -carotene and β - carotene by β - and ϵ -carotene hydroxylases (BCH, CYP97A
81 and B) generate yellow xanthophylls of lutein in the α -branch and zeaxanthin in the β -branch.
82 The epoxidation and de-epoxidation of zeaxanthin by zeaxanthin epoxidase (ZEP) and
83 violaxanthin de-epoxidase (VDE) constitute the so-called xanthophyll cycle. The conversion of
84 violaxanthin into neoxanthin by neoxanthin synthase (NSY) concludes the core biosynthetic
85 pathway (reviewed in Giuliano, 2017; Sun et al., 2017, Fig. 1).

86 The genetic and transcriptional regulation of the carotenoid biosynthetic pathway in
87 fruits of loquat genotypes with different carotenoid accumulation patterns has been recently
88 addressed. Studies on loquat cv. Luoyangqin (LYQ) and cv. Baisha (BS) with orange- and
89 white-fleshed fruits, respectively, revealed significant differences in carotenoid content and
90 composition in peel and pulp tissues between both cultivars associated with the differential
91 expression of the carotenoid biosynthetic genes: *PSYI*, *CYCB* and *BCH* (Fu et al., 2012; Fu et
92 al., 2014). Recently, Hadjipieri et al. (2017) analyzed the carotenoid composition and the
93 expression of several carotenoid biosynthetic genes during on-tree maturation of the red/orange-
94 fleshed cv. Obusa. During maturation, lutein content in the peel decreased progressively and
95 increased the concentration of β -carotene, while β -cryptoxanthin and β -carotene were the main
96 carotenoids in the pulp. Analysis of gene expression in peel and pulp of fruits at six
97 developmental/maturation stages revealed that these changes in carotenoid content were linked
98 to the coordinated upregulation of *CYCB* and the repression of *LCYB* and *LCYE* genes
99 (Hadjipieri et al., 2017). Therefore, the shifting from the β,ϵ to β,β branch of the carotenoid
100 biosynthesis pathway and the hydroxylation of β -carotene appear to be key steps in the
101 regulation of carotenoid accumulation in loquat fruits.

102 Carotenoid synthesis and accumulation in fruits are influenced by different
103 developmental and environmental factors (Lado et al., 2016). In climacteric fruits, ethylene
104 plays a key role in the regulation of fruit coloration and carotenoid biosynthesis (Grierson,
105 2013). In non-climacteric fruits, however, the absence of an upsurge of ethylene production
106 during maturation does not discard the involvement of the hormone in the regulation of fruit
107 coloration. Indeed, in *Citrus* fruit, in which application of ethylene is commercial used
108 worldwide to degreen early harvested cultivars (Porat, 2008), it has been suggested that ethylene
109 action is required for the expression of carotenoids biosynthesis genes and peel coloration
110 (Rodrigo and Zacarías, 2007; Rodrigo et al., 2013). Moreover, inhibition of ethylene perception
111 by postharvest application of 1-methylcyclopropene (1-MCP), an inhibitor of the ethylene
112 action, is a valuable experimental tool to clarify the role of endogenous ethylene on several
113 ripening-related events, including fruit pigmentation (Watkins, 2008; Li et al., 2016). In
114 particular, application of 1-MCP to loquat has been shown to reduce the incidence of
115 postharvest disorders as chilling injury (internal browning and leatheriness) and decay (Pareek
116 et al., 2013; Li et al., 2016) and also to delay ripening (Liguori et al., 2015). Together, these
117 observations indicate that ethylene may be involved in specific aspects of the postharvest
118 performance of loquat fruits. However, the involvement of the hormone in the regulation of fruit
119 coloration and carotenoid biosynthesis in this fruit, and whether 1-MCP may be commercially
120 used to manipulate fruit coloration, have not been elucidated. Hence, in the present study we
121 have addressed two objectives: 1) to analyze carotenoid content and expression of key
122 biosynthetic genes in peel and pulp of loquat (cv. *Algerie*) fruit during on-tree maturation, and
123 2) to investigate the effects of ethylene and 1-MCP during postharvest on color changes and
124 carotenoid biosynthesis in both peel and pulp tissue of loquat fruits cv. *Algerie*, the predominant
125 cultivar in Spain. Overall, the data suggest that, despite the non-climacteric ripening of loquat,
126 coloration and carotenoid accumulation can be manipulated by modulation of ethylene action,
127 most likely throughout transcriptional changes in carotenoid biosynthetic genes, but the effect
128 appears to be tissue- and maturation stage-specific.

129

130 **2. Materials and Methods**

131 *2.1. Plant material and treatments*

132 Fruits were harvested from 6 adult (20-25 years old) trees of loquat cv. Algeria
133 (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl.) grown in a commercial orchard in Callosa d'En Sarriá, (Alicante,
134 Spain), the main area of loquat production in Spain. This cultivar was selected by the excellent
135 quality of its fruit and because it is the one with highest production in the Mediterranean basin.
136 Trees were budded onto loquat seedling rootstocks, grown in a loamy-clay soil, pH 7.5–8.0,
137 planted 4 × 4 m apart, with drip irrigation (2 drippers per tree), and pruned to a vase shape.
138 Fertilization, annual pruning, thinning, as well as pest and disease management, were carried
139 out in accordance with standard commercial practices.

140 Fruits were sampled at breaker (BK), yellow (Y) and full color stages (FC),
141 corresponding to the stages 801, 803, and 809 on the BBCH scale, respectively (Martínez-Calvo
142 et al., 1999) or to the stages S3, S4 and S5, respectively, according Hadjipieri et al. (2017).
143 Fruits were harvested and immediately delivered to the laboratory for tissue sampling. Twenty
144 fruits were selected for uniformity and the absence of any lesion or injury. Peel and pulp color
145 was determined on three locations around the equatorial plane of the fruit, using a Minolta CR-
146 330 colorimeter. Color index was expressed as the *a/b* Hunter ratio (referred to as color index,
147 Alos et al., 2017), which is negative for green fruit, around 0 for yellow fruit at color break and
148 positive for orange-colored fruit. Peel and pulp were separated with a scalpel, immediately
149 frozen in liquid nitrogen, ground to a fine powder and stored at -80°C until RNA and pigment
150 analysis.

151 Moreover, the effect of exogenous ethylene and of the ethylene action inhibitor, 1-MCP,
152 on pigment accumulation and gene expression in peel and pulp was also evaluated in yellow-
153 colored fruits (Y) at the growth stage 803 on the BBCH-scale. Fruits were divided into three
154 lots, containing three replicate samples of 20 fruits each, and treated in air (control), ethylene or
155 1-MCP as previously described by Alos et al. (2017). After 0, 2 and 6 days of treatment, peel
156 and pulp color of 20 fruits was determined and fruit tissue processed for RNA and pigment
157 extractions as described above.

158

159 2.2. Chlorophyll and carotenoid extraction

160 Peel (0.5 g fresh weight) and pulp (1.5 g fresh weight) fruit pigments were extracted as
161 previously described (Rodrigo et al., 2004; Carmona et al., 2012). The total chlorophyll (a+b)
162 content was determined by measuring the absorbance at 644 and 662 nm and calculated
163 according to the Smith and Benitez equations (Smith and Benitez, 1955). After chlorophyll
164 measurements, the pigment ethereal solution was dried and saponified using a 10% methanolic
165 KOH solution. Carotenoids were extracted and samples dried under N₂ and kept at -20° C until
166 analysis. All operations were carried out on ice under dim light to prevent photodegradation,
167 isomerisation and structural changes of carotenoids.

168

169 2.3. Carotenoid analysis by HPLC

170 Prior to HPLC analysis, carotenoid extracts were dissolved in acetone and incubated
171 overnight at -20° C to precipitate sterols which could interfere in the carotenoid analysis and
172 subsequently dried under N₂. The carotenoid composition of each sample was analyzed by
173 HPLC with a Waters liquid chromatography system equipped with a 600E pump and a model
174 996 photodiode array detector (PDA), and Empower software (Waters). A C30 carotenoid
175 column (250 × 4.6 mm, 5 μm) coupled to a C30 guard column (20 × 4.0 mm, 5 μm) (YMC
176 Europe GmbH) was used. Samples were prepared for HPLC by dissolving the dried carotenoid
177 extracts in CHCl₃: MeOH: acetone (3:2:1, v:v:v). A ternary gradient elution with MeOH, water
178 and methyl *tert*-butyl ether (MTBE) was used for carotenoid separation reported in previous
179 works (Carmona et al., 2012). Briefly, the initial solvent composition consisted of 90% MeOH,
180 5% water and 5% MTBE. The solvent composition changed in a linear fashion to 95% MeOH
181 and 5% MTBE at 12 min. During the next 8 min the solvent composition was changed to 86%
182 MeOH and 14% MTBE. After reaching this concentration the solvent was gradually changed to
183 75% MeOH and 25% MTBE at 30 min. Final composition was reached at 50 min and consisted
184 of 50% MeOH and 50% MTBE. Initial conditions were re-established in 2 min and re-
185 equilibrated for 15 min before next injection. The flow rate was 1 mL min⁻¹, column

186 temperature was set to 25 °C and the injection volume was 20 µl. The photodiode array detector
187 was set to scan from 250 to 540 nm, and for each elution a Maxplot chromatogram was
188 obtained, which plots each carotenoid peak at its corresponding maximum absorbance
189 wavelength. Carotenoids were identified by comparison of the spectra and retention time with
190 those of authentic standards, when available, or by matching the observed versus literature
191 spectral data and retention time under or similar identical chromatographic conditions (Rodrigo
192 et al., 2004). The carotenoid peaks were integrated at their individual maxima wavelength and
193 their content were calculated using calibration curves of β-cryptoxanthin (Extrasynthese), lutein
194 (Sigma), violaxanthin for violaxanthin isomers, luteoxanthin, zeaxanthin (Extrasynthese) and β-
195 carotene (Sigma) for β-carotene isomers. Standards of phytoene and phytofluene for
196 identification and quantification were obtained from extracts of sweet orange fruits cv. Pinalate,
197 which accumulate large amounts of these compounds (Lado et al., 2015), and neoxanthin
198 isolated from spinach extracts (Britton, 1995). Samples were extracted at least twice and each
199 analytical determination was replicated at least once. All operations were carried out on ice
200 under dim light to prevent photodegradation, isomerisations and structural changes of
201 carotenoids.

202

203 *2.4. RNA extraction and cDNA synthesis*

204 Total RNA was isolated from the fruit tissues using RNeasy Plant Mini Kit (Qiagen)
205 and subsequently treated with DNase I (DNA free, DNase treatment & removal, Ambion). The
206 amount of RNA was measured by spectrophotometric analysis (Nanodrop, Spain) and its quality
207 was verified by agarose gel electrophoresis and ethidium bromide staining. The absence of
208 DNA contamination was checked by performing a no-reverse transcription assay which
209 consisted of a PCR with each RNA sample using the *ACTIN* primers (Fu et al., 2012). No
210 amplified products were detected which confirmed the purity of the RNA extracts. The
211 transcripts present in 5 µg of total RNA were reverse-transcribed using the SuperScript III
212 Reverse Transcriptase (Invitrogen) in a total volume of 20 µL. One µL of a 10-fold diluted first-
213 strand cDNA was used for each amplification reaction.

214

215 2.5. Gene expression analyses by real time PCR

216 Gene expression analyses were performed following the MIQE guidelines (Bustin et al.
217 2009). Quantitative real-time PCR was carried out on a LightCycler 480 instrument (Roche),
218 using the LightCycler 480 SYBRGreen I Master kit (Roche). Reaction mix and conditions
219 followed the manufacturer's instructions with some modifications. The PCR mix contained 1 μ L
220 of diluted cDNA, 5 μ L of SYBR Green I Master Mix, 1 μ L of 3 μ M primer F and 1 μ L of 3 μ M
221 primer R, being the final volume of 10 μ L. The sequences of the primers (PSF purified, Isogen,
222 The Netherlands) for the amplification of *PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS*, *LCYB*, *CYCB*, *BCH* and *ACTIN* were
223 obtained from Fu et al. (2012). The cycling protocol, for all genes, consisted of 10 min at 95 °C
224 for pre-incubation, then 40 cycles of 10 sec at 95 °C for denaturation, 10 sec at 59 °C for
225 annealing and 10 sec at 72 °C for extension. Fluorescent intensity data was acquired during the
226 extension time with the LightCycler 480 Software release 1.5.0, version 1.5.0.39 (Roche) and
227 were transformed into mRNA levels by using specific standard curves for all analyzed genes.

228 The specificity of the PCR reaction was assessed by the presence of a single peak in the
229 dissociation curve performed after the amplification steps followed by the sequencing of the
230 amplicon. The expression levels relative to values of a reference sample were calculated using
231 the Relative Expression Software Tool (REST, <http://rest.gene-quantification.info>; Pfaffl et al.
232 2002). The reference sample was the expression value obtained for each gene on the pulp of the
233 loquat fruits at the yellow stage which was arbitrarily given the expression value of 1. Results
234 were the mean of at least 3 independent replicates.

235

236

237 3. Results

238 3.1. Evolution of color index and pigment concentrations during on-tree loquat fruit maturation

239 Color index (CI) data showed that fruit peel was greener than the pulp at BK stage (-
240 0.33 and -0.13, respectively, Fig. 2A and B). As fruit maturation progressed, external
241 pigmentation and CI increased, being higher in the peel than in the pulp (Fig. 2A and B). Total

242 carotenoid and chlorophyll content was also measured at these maturation stages and indicated a
243 higher pigment concentration in the peel than in the pulp. Total carotenoids in the peel were
244 almost the same in Y and BK fruits, and decreased at FC stage, while in the pulp carotenoid
245 concentration increased from 1 to 9 mg kg⁻¹, from BK to FC fruits, respectively (Fig. 2C). The
246 concentration of total chlorophylls in the peel decreased dramatically from the BK to the Y
247 stage (51 to 18 mg kg⁻¹, respectively) while in the pulp at these two stages was around 1 mg kg⁻¹.
248 Chlorophyll was not detected in peel and pulp of full-colored fruits (Fig. 2D).

249 Twenty-four different carotenoid-like peaks were detected by HPLC coupled to a PDA
250 in the peel and pulp extracts of 'Algerie' loquat fruit (Table 1). Ten carotenoids, 15-Z-phytoene,
251 phytofluene, all-*E*-neoxanthin, all-*E*- and 9-*Z*-violaxanthin, lutein, zeaxanthin, β-cryptoxanthin,
252 α-carotene and β-carotene, were unambiguously identified by comparing chromatographic and
253 spectroscopic characteristics with those of authentic standards. Luteoxanthin, a putative artifact
254 derived from violaxanthin, several -isomers of β-carotene and phytoene-like were tentatively
255 identified. The remaining carotenoid-like compounds showed the characteristic carotenoid
256 absorption spectrum but were not ascribed to a specific carotenoid. The main carotenoid in the
257 peel of BK and Y fruit was 15-*Z*-phytoene with concentrations close to 40 mg kg⁻¹ followed by
258 β-carotene (between 8 and 12 mg kg⁻¹) and lutein (between 9 and 6 mg kg⁻¹), whereas in FC
259 fruit it was β-carotene followed by lutein and 9-*Z*-violaxanthin (Fig. 3). In the peel of fully ripe
260 fruit, the concentration of 15-*Z*-phytoene was markedly lower (6 mg kg⁻¹), being β-carotene and
261 its *Z*-isomers the predominant carotenoids, reaching values close to 25 and 6 mg kg⁻¹,
262 respectively. Other xanthophylls like lutein or violaxanthin (9*Z* and all-*E* isomers) were also
263 abundant (5 mg kg⁻¹) in the peel of FC fruit (Fig. 3). The concentration of all individual
264 carotenoids, except that of β-cryptoxanthin, was lower in the pulp than in the peel at all fruit
265 stages and, in addition, the pattern of accumulation of the carotenes 15-*Z*-phytoene and
266 phytofluene was opposite between both tissues. Hence, whereas 15-*Z*-phytoene and phytofluene
267 decreased in the peel during maturation, they increased in the pulp (Fig. 3). The concentrations
268 of carotenoids with provitamin A activity, as β-carotene, their isomers, and β-cryptoxanthin

269 were enhanced during maturation of both tissues, whereas violaxanthin (all isomers detected)
270 were relatively stable in the peel and increased in the pulp. It is worth to note that lutein was one
271 of the most abundant carotenoids in the peel while it was barely detectable in the pulp at any
272 stage analyzed (Fig. 3). Zeaxanthin was only detected at trace levels (data not shown). At FC
273 stage, the predominant carotenoid in the pulp was 15-Z-phytoene (3 mg kg⁻¹) followed by β -
274 carotene and β -cryptoxanthin, with concentrations around 1.5 mg kg⁻¹ (Fig. 3).

275

276 3.2. Expression of genes involved in carotenoid biosynthesis during on-tree loquat fruit 277 maturation

278 The expression profile of six key genes of the carotenoid biosynthetic pathway in the
279 peel and pulp of 'Algerie' loquat fruit at the three maturation stages was measured by RT-
280 qPCR. These genes included the first committed step of the carotenoid pathway *PSY*, the two
281 subsequent desaturation activities prior to cyclization, *PDS* and *ZDS*; the chromoplast specific
282 *lycopene β -cyclase* (*CYCB*), and *β -carotene hydroxylase* (*BCH*). The expression the *lycopene β -*
283 *cyclase* (*LCYB*) gene, which participates together with *LCYE* in the formation of β - and α -
284 carotene (Fig 1), was also analyzed but their expression levels were negligible in both tissues
285 throughout the whole process studied (data not shown).

286 The relative expression levels of *PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS* and *CYCB* were higher in the peel than
287 in the pulp at BK and Y stages, but not at FC stage, for which the transcript levels of all genes
288 analyzed was higher in the pulp. It is interesting to note that the pattern of expression of these
289 genes was different for the two tissues, peel and pulp (Fig. 4). In general, transcript
290 accumulation in the peel decreased during maturation, whereas abundance of the *PSY*, *PDS*,
291 *ZDS* and *CYCB* transcripts significantly increased in the pulp at BK stage, declined at Y stage
292 and increased again at FC stage. Expression of the *BCH* gene was the exception, since it was
293 lower in the peel, and its maximum level in the pulp was attained at the BK stage, decreasing
294 gradually during fruit maturation (Fig. 4).

295

296 *3.3. Effect of ethylene and 1-MCP on color and carotenoid content in peel and pulp of loquat*
297 *fruit during postharvest storage*

298 In order to gain insights on the role of ethylene in the regulation of carotenoid
299 biosynthesis and accumulation in loquat, fruits at three maturation stages were incubated during
300 postharvest in an ethylene atmosphere ($10 \mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) up to 6 days at $20 \text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ and 85–90% RH in the
301 dark, or treated with the inhibitor of ethylene action 1-MCP ($1 \mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) for 16 h, and then
302 exposed to air in the dark.

303 The effects of exogenous ethylene and 1-MCP were firstly evaluated by measuring
304 changes in peel and the pulp color of fruits 2 and 6 days after the exposure to these treatments
305 (Fig. 5). In the peel of fruits at the BK stage (initial a/b ratio of -0.34) degreening was well
306 patent in non-treated fruit, and accelerated by ethylene (Fig. 5A). However, 1-MCP
307 considerably delayed fruit coloration and 6 days after treatment fruit became greener than non-
308 treated fruit (Fig. 5A). The pulp of these fruits displayed similar responses to ethylene and 1-
309 MCP, accelerating and delaying, respectively, degreening with respect to untreated fruits (Fig.
310 5A). In Y fruits, the responses to ethylene and 1-MCP were less pronounced than in BK fruits,
311 and interestingly similar in peel and pulp (Fig. 5B). In colored fruits (FC stage), ethylene and 1-
312 MCP did not induce significant differences compared to untreated fruits (Fig. 5C). Collectively,
313 these results indicated that ethylene action appears to be involved in color changes of loquat
314 fruit at the onset of fruit coloration, and as fruit matures the effect is progressively lost.

315 In order to understand the mechanisms of ethylene in the regulation of carotenoids
316 biosynthesis and accumulation, carotenoid content and gene expression were studied in peel and
317 pulp of Y fruit, because they retained significant effects of ethylene and 1-MCP and also it is
318 the stage of commercial harvest in loquat. Total carotenoids content was 15-fold higher in the
319 peel than in the pulp, with phytoene, β -carotene and lutein predominating in the peel, and
320 phytoene, β -carotene and β -cryptoxanthin in the pulp (Fig. 6A and B). Two and 6 days after
321 incubation in air, carotenoid content in the peel declined by about 60%, mainly by the reduction
322 of phytoene, but the composition was almost the same. Ethylene doubled the content of β -
323 carotene (all-E and Z-isomers), compared with freshly harvested or air-treated fruits, while

324 concentration of other carotenoids did not change significantly (Fig. 6A). The treatment with 1-
325 MCP almost did not affect the composition of carotenoids in the peel respect to untreated (air)
326 fruits (Fig. 6A).

327 In the pulp of freshly harvested fruits at Y stage, phytoene accounted for about 48% of
328 the total carotenoids, and after 2 and 6 days in air, a 10- and 20-fold reduction, respectively, was
329 registered (Fig. 6B). These changes were paralleled by an increase of β -carotene, β -
330 cryptoxanthin and 9-Z-violaxanthin (Fig. 6). Ethylene increased around 40% the concentration
331 of β -carotene and β -cryptoxanthin concentration at day 6, whereas the inhibitor of ethylene
332 action markedly reduced the content of carotenoids in the pulp at day 2, specially β -carotene, β -
333 cryptoxanthin and violaxanthin. At day 6 the, total carotenoids content increased again and the
334 composition was similar to that of untreated fruits, although with lower values (Fig. 6B).

335

336 3.4. Effect of ethylene and 1-MCP on the expression of carotenoid biosynthetic genes in peel 337 and pulp of loquat fruit

338 The expression of carotenoid biosynthetic genes in peel and pulp of control, ethylene-
339 and 1-MCP-treated in Y fruit were analyzed. The transcript levels of *PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS* and *CYCB*
340 were lower in the pulp than in the peel in all the dates analyzed. In contrast, *BCH* transcription
341 level was higher in the pulp (Fig. 7). As in previous experiments, *LCYB* transcripts were not
342 detected in any sample analyzed.

343 In the peel of air-treated fruits, *PSY* transcript experienced a 1.75-fold increase at day 6
344 (Fig. 7). Ethylene provoked a 2-fold induction at day 2 compared to freshly harvested fruit, that
345 was sustained at day 6. By contrast, 1-MCP initially repressed *PSY*, that nevertheless was
346 restored at day 6. The expression of *PDS* was slightly increased at day 2 in the peel of ethylene
347 and 1-MCP-treated fruits, while no important changes were observed in air-treated fruit (Fig.
348 7). *ZDS* and *CYCB* presented similar expression profiles, increasing in air and enhanced by
349 ethylene, whereas 1-MCP diminished it (Fig. 7). The expression of *BCH* gene in the peel was
350 temporally (day 2) reduced in untreated (air) and in 1-MCP-treated fruits, while no important
351 changes were detected in ethylene-treated fruits (Fig. 7).

352 In the pulp, accumulation of *PSY* transcript was virtually unaffected in air- and
353 ethylene-treated fruits, while 1-MCP produced a marked repression (Fig. 7). *PDS* was also
354 constitutively expressed in air, and repressed in both ethylene and 1-MCP treatments at the end
355 of the experiment (Fig. 7). *ZDS*, *CYCB* and *BCH* gene expression was increased by air and
356 ethylene compared to freshly harvested fruits, while they were practically unaffected by 1-MCP
357 (Fig. 7).

358

359

360 **5. Discussion**

361 In loquat, changes in coloration, i.e. in carotenoid content and composition in peel and
362 pulp, during fruit maturation, are mainly due to transcriptional regulation of carotenoid
363 biosynthetic genes (De Faria et al., 2009; Fu et al., 2014; Hadjipieri et al., 2017). Despite recent
364 evidence that indicate a non-climacteric ripening behavior of loquat fruit, other results also
365 suggest that several ripening-related processes could be potentially manipulated by either
366 exogenous ethylene or by inhibitors of its action (Cai et al., 2006; Li et al., 2016; Alós et al.,
367 2017). Thus, treatment of loquat fruits with 1-MCP has been reported to reduce the incidence of
368 a number of physiological disorders and to maintain other parameters of internal fruit quality
369 (Pareek et al., 2013; Liguori et al., 2015; Li et al., 2016), suggesting that these processes may
370 be, at least under postharvest storage, partially regulated by ethylene. However, the effects of
371 either 1-MCP or ethylene on color changes and carotenoid composition and biosynthesis in
372 loquat is not fully understood. Our rationale to address these objectives was, first, to study
373 changes in carotenoid content and in the expression of key biosynthetic genes during natural
374 maturation at three stages (breaker, yellow and light colored-fruit), and second, to analyze the
375 effect of ethylene (10 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) and 1-MCP (1 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) on these parameters in peel and pulp of
376 loquat fruit harvested at the yellow stage.

377 Total carotenoids were similar in the peel of BK and Y fruits, but the presence of
378 chlorophylls in the former masked the orange coloration associated with carotenoids (Fig. 2).
379 Moreover, at both maturation stages, phytoene, a colorless carotene, was more than 50% of total

380 carotenoids that may explain the lower coloration in the peel than in the pulp (Fig. 2 and 3). In
381 more mature fruits (FC), color was similar in pulp and peel (a/b ratio close to 0.2) although total
382 carotenoids were 5-times lower in the pulp (Fig. 2). It is interesting to note that at this stage, β -
383 carotene, an orange colored carotene, accounted for nearly 50% of the total content in the peel,
384 while in the pulp orange-colored carotenoids (β -carotene plus β -cryptoxanthin) were about
385 35%, and phytoene and phytofluene accounted for the additional 40% (Fig. 3). These data
386 highlight the fact that color measurements (usually as a/b Hunter parameters) in peel and pulp of
387 loquat fruits are not well related to carotenoid concentrations, being more likely related to the
388 complement in specific carotenoids. In fruit of other loquat cultivars, as 'Obusa', it has been
389 also found that peel and pulp color of overripe fruits was identical while total carotenoid
390 concentration was 6-times higher in the peel (Hadjipieri et al., 2017).

391 During on-tree maturation, striking differences in total carotenoid content were detected
392 between loquat fruit tissues, being more abundant in the peel than in the pulp (from 5- up to 82-
393 fold, Fig. 2C), similarly to that observed in other loquat cultivars ('Obusa', 'LYQ' and 'BS')
394 (Fu et al., 2012; 2014; Hadjipieri et al., 2017) or other carotenogenic fruits, such as tomato or
395 citrus (Carrillo-López and Yahia, 2014; Lado et al., 2016). These observations are in agreement
396 with the higher expression levels of most carotenoid biosynthetic genes in the peel than in the
397 pulp (Figs. 2 and 4).

398 Total carotenoid content varies greatly among cultivars, deepening on the red/orange
399 coloration of the flesh. For example, the peel of ripe fruits of cv. 'Algerie' contains intermediate
400 amount of total carotenoids (50 mg kg⁻¹), compared with those of 'LYQ' (70 mg kg⁻¹) and
401 'Obusa' (24 mg kg⁻¹). By contrast, differences in total carotenoid contents in the pulp among
402 varieties are less pronounced, ranging from 9 mg kg⁻¹ in 'Algerie' (Fig. 2), 12-13 mg kg⁻¹ in
403 'Obusa' and 'LYQ' (Hadjipieri et al., 2017), 15 mg kg⁻¹ in 'Centenaria' (Fu et al., 2012) to 20
404 and 30 mg kg⁻¹ in Brazilian cultivars ('Mizauto', 'Mizuho' and 'Mizumo') (De Faria et al.,
405 2009).

406 The concentration of individual carotenes and xanthophylls in peel and pulp of 'Algerie'
407 loquat fruit followed different patterns during maturation. The evolution in the peel was similar

408 to a transition from a chloroplastic to a chromoplastic tissue, with increases in β -carotene
409 (including its *Z*-isomers) and β -cryptoxanthin and reduction in lutein, like in other cultivars (Fu
410 et al., 2014; Hadjipieri et al., 2017). It is noteworthy the elevated concentration of phytoene in
411 the peel at BK and Y stages and the sharp reduction at FC stage (Fig. 3). In the pulp, by
412 contrast, the concentration of phytoene increased during maturation, becoming the main
413 carotenoid in mature fruits. In general, little attention has been previously paid to colorless
414 carotenes although are commonly present in many fruits, and increasing evidences suggest they
415 provide health-related benefits (Meléndez-Martínez et al., 2015). In fruits of other loquat
416 cultivars, the presence of colorless carotenes has been described but data are fragmentary and
417 only at specific maturation stages (De Faria et al., 2009; Fu et al., 2014; Hadjipieri et al., 2017).
418 Thus, it will be interesting to consider these carotenes when carotenoid composition in loquat
419 samples are analyzed to better understand how their biosynthesis and accumulation is regulated.

420 The increase in β,β -carotenoids and the reduction of the linear phytoene and
421 phytofluene in the peel during maturation suggest that colorless carotenes are metabolized into
422 downstream carotenoids. Consistent with this is the progressive decrease in *PSY*, the first
423 committed step of the pathway, and the maintenance or slight reduction of *CYCB* and *BCH*
424 levels during maturation, that may explain the decrease in phytoene and the accumulation β -
425 carotene and β -cryptoxanthin (Figs. 3 and 4). By contrast, all the individual carotenoids
426 increased in the pulp concomitantly with maturation, except luteoxanthin. The expression
427 profile of *PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS* and *CYCB* in the pulp was rather stable in BK and Y stages, and
428 increased significantly at FC, when the highest carotenoids concentration was reached (Figs. 3
429 and 4). The expression of lycopene β -cyclase (*LCYB*) was not detected in the samples analyzed,
430 in agreement with the results reported for fruits of other cultivars at similar maturation stage (Fu
431 et al., 2012, Hadjipieri et al., 2017). Interestingly, in the pulp of cv. ‘Algerie’ the expression of
432 *BCH* decreased to a very low level in mature fruits, showing an inverse relationship with the
433 accumulation of the direct substrate, i.e. β -carotene (Figs. 3 and 4). These results reinforce the

434 key role of this step regulating carotenoid composition in the pulp of loquat fruit (Fu et al.,
435 2014; Hadjipieri et al., 2017).

436 Accumulation of β -cryptoxanthin, a carotenoid with provitamin A and high
437 bioavailability, is limited to a few number of fruits, as mandarins, sweet oranges or papaya
438 (Lado et al., 2016). The xanthophyll β -cryptoxanthin is an intermediate product in a two-step
439 hydroxylation by *BCH*, and has been proposed to accumulate predominantly under reduced or
440 insufficient *BCH* activity, favouring monohydroxylation of β -carotene (Sun et al., 1996; Ikoma
441 et al., 2016; Lado et al. 2016). Our results suggest that the accumulation of β -cryptoxanthin in
442 loquat appears to be also governed by a similar mechanism, in which the downregulation of
443 *BCH* expression as fruit matures would reduce hydroxylase activity and enhance accumulation
444 of the intermediate product β -cryptoxanthin. Taking together, a differential regulation of
445 carotenoid biosynthesis appears to operate in peel and pulp of loquat fruit, and *BCH* is likely a
446 limiting step determining carotenoid composition in the pulp.

447 The involvement of ethylene in the regulation of loquat fruit coloration was firstly
448 assessed by analyzing its effect and that of its antagonist 1-MCP on color changes in the peel
449 and pulp at three maturation stages (Fig. 5). While ethylene accelerated fruit coloration,
450 particularly at BK and being less effective at Y stage, 1-MCP delayed it regarding to the air-
451 treated fruit, but a negligible effect was found in colored fruit. These results suggest that
452 ethylene appears to be involved in the regulation of loquat fruit coloration and the BK stage
453 (breaker) develops the optimum response, which is progressively lost as natural maturation
454 progress. This situation resembles that referred to as ‘competence to ripen’ in climacteric-type
455 fruit in which maximum sensitivity to ethylene-induced ripening changes is attained at a
456 specific developmental stage, as breaker in tomato fruit (Klee and Giovannoni, 2011). Since
457 loquat fruit is commercially harvested at a peel color around breaker to yellow, commercial
458 treatment with 1-MCP to modulate color development and marketability may be feasible.

459 The effect of ethylene and 1-MCP on carotenoid content and composition, and on the
460 expression of the biosynthesis genes in detached fruit, revealed differential regulation of the

461 pathway and responses to the hormone between peel and pulp (Figs. 6 and 7). At harvest,
462 phytoene represented around 60% of total carotenoids content in both tissues, and only after 2
463 days of storage in air it disappeared or was severely reduced in the peel and pulp, respectively
464 (Fig. 6). This reduction of phytoene content paralleled an increase of that of β -carotene and β -
465 cryptoxanthin in the pulp, but not in the peel that remained almost unaltered. Interestingly, in
466 ethylene-treated fruit, these changes in carotenoid composition were magnified with large
467 increments of β -carotene in both tissue (with the exception of pulp at day 2) and in β -
468 cryptoxanthin in the pulp and, in a lower extent, in the peel. The pulp seems to be more
469 sensitive to the 1-MCP-induced changes in carotenoid content and composition than the peel.
470 These changes suggest that, 1) differences in the decrease of phytoene content in the peel and
471 pulp appears to be an ethylene-independent event provoked probably by fruit harvest, 2) the
472 accumulation of β -carotene and β -cryptoxanthin is stimulated by ethylene in both tissues, and 3)
473 ethylene-dependent factors seems to operate in the accumulation of these carotenoids during
474 natural coloration of the pulp. Taken together, these observations reinforce the hypothesis that
475 ethylene is, at least in part, involved in the regulation of carotenoid accumulation in loquat, with
476 a differential response in peel and pulp tissues.

477 With the exception of *BCH*, most of the carotenoid biosynthetic genes evaluated in the
478 current study were more highly expressed and more responsive to treatments in the peel than in
479 the pulp. Nevertheless, the gene expression trends induced by ethylene and 1-MCP were, in
480 general, similar in both tissues (Fig. 7), and in agreement with the changes promoted by both
481 treatments in carotenoid content and composition. After fruit harvest and incubation in air, *PSY*,
482 *ZDS* and *CYCB* were upregulated in the peel. In the pulp, *ZDS*, *CYCB* expression was slightly
483 increased, whereas that of *BCH* experienced a major increment (about a 3-fold increment with
484 respect to the pulp of freshly-harvested fruit) (Fig. 7). Ethylene accelerated these changes and,
485 in general, the effects were higher in the peel than in the pulp. In other non-climacteric fruits,
486 such as *Citrus*, it has been also reported that *lycopene β -cyclase* was upregulated by postharvest
487 ethylene treatments (Rodrigo et al., 2007; Matsumoto et al. 2009). Therefore, the rapid and

488 substantial induction of *PSY*, especially in the peel, suggests the conversion of the linear
489 carotene phytoene into subsequent downstream products of the pathway, and explains its
490 decline in the peel of detached fruit. Other downstream genes of this pathway were also
491 upregulated, but *BCH* suffered only minor changes and, then, it is likely that the enhanced
492 metabolites flow would not be efficiently metabolized and, therefore, the substrate of this step,
493 β -carotene, accumulated in the peel. Since ethylene enhanced the expression of *PSY*, *ZDS* and
494 *CYCB*, without virtual effect on *BCH*, β -carotene may accumulate to a larger extent than in air-
495 treated fruits. The reduced effect of 1-MCP on the expression of these genes may justify that the
496 content and complement of carotenoids were similar to control fruit.

497 Comparison of the expression of carotenoids biosynthetic genes between peel and pulp
498 revealed that, whereas most of the transcripts were more highly expressed in the peel than in the
499 pulp, only *BCH* transcript accumulated to higher levels in the pulp (Fig. 7). This remarkable
500 difference between both loquat fruit tissues may be related to the differential carotenoid
501 complement. It is reasonable to assume that the moderated increase in the expression of genes
502 upstream *BCH* (*PSY*, *ZDS* and *CYCB*) would challenge the metabolic flow through the pathway,
503 increasing the concentration of β -carotene, and the important stimulation of *BCH* activity would
504 favor an efficiently conversion of β -carotene into β -cryptoxanthin. This scenario may explain
505 the increase in β -cryptoxanthin only in pulp of loquat fruit. Increasing expression of *BCH* has
506 been also associated with the accumulation of β -cryptoxanthin in persimmon (Zhou et al.,
507 2011). These results reinforce the concept that *BCH* is a key step in the regulation of carotenoid
508 content and composition in both peel and pulp of loquat. However, the involvement of other
509 genes and post-transcriptional modifications that are still unknown in the regulation of
510 carotenoid biosynthesis should not be discarded, as it has been demonstrated in *Arabidopsis*,
511 and tomato and other fleshy fruits (Fu et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2015; Chan-León et al., 2017;
512 Rodríguez-Concepción et al., 2018).

513 Finally, application of 1-MCP also revealed a differential regulation of carotenoid
514 biosynthetic genes by endogenous ethylene between peel and pulp. In the pulp *PSY*, *ZDS*, *CYCB*

515 and *BCH* transcript levels were decreased significantly with respect to air-treated fruits, whereas
516 in the peel only *ZDS* and *BCH* displayed a consistent reduction by 1-MCP (Fig. 7). These
517 results suggests that endogenous ethylene is mediating the regulation of carotenoid biosynthesis
518 in loquat fruit, but responsiveness to the hormone is different in both tissues. This situation
519 appears not to be specific for carotenoid biosynthesis since in a previous report it was shown
520 that inhibition of ethylene perception severely affected ethylene biosynthetic genes expression
521 in the pulp of loquat while in peel the effect was less significant (Alós et al., 2017). Therefore, it
522 can be speculated that in loquat fruit the pulp may be more sensitive to ethylene than peel tissue.
523 The pulp of loquat also responds markedly to 1-MCP in the modulation of other postharvest
524 processes, such as reduction of flesh browning and storage-induced loss of firmness (Cai et al.,
525 2006, Liguori et al., 2015). It would be interesting to further investigate the role of ethylene in
526 the development chilling injury in loquat upon storage at low temperatures.

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529 **7. Acknowledgements**

530 Dr. E. Alos was recipient a post-doctoral contract JAE-Doc-CSIC (Fondo Social Europeo). The
531 financial support of the research grants FP7-PEOPLE-2011-CIG-2011-303652 (Marie Curie
532 Actions, European Union), AGL-2015-70218 (Ministerio Economía y Competitividad, Spain),
533 GV/2012/036 (GeneralitatValenciana, Spain) and PROMETEO-II 2014/27 (Generalitat
534 Valenciana) are gratefully acknowledged. MJR and LZ are members of Eurocaroten
535 (COST_Action CA15136) and CaRed (Spanish Carotenoid Network, BIO2015-71703-REDT
536 and BIO2017-90877-REDT).

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669 **Table 1.** Spectroscopic characteristics of the main carotenoids identified in the peel and pulp of
670 loquat fruit ‘Algerie’ during ripening. The letter ‘s’ indicates that there is a shoulder in the
671 spectrum. Bold letters indicate the carotenoids identified by using a standard, and carotenoids
672 with asterisk are tentatively identified.
673

		Observed	Reference
	Carotenoid	λ_{max} (nm)	λ_{max} (nm)
1	All-E-Neoxanthin	417,439,469	412,434,464
2	Not identified	400,421,445	
3	All-E-Violaxanthin	412,438,469	414,442,472
4	Not identified	S,432,459	
6	Not identified	401,422,447	
5	Not identified	413,435,464	
7	Luteoxanthin*	397,420,448	400,422,450
8	Not identified	405,439,467	
9	Not identified	398,401,425	
10	Phytoene-like*	285	
11	9-Z-Violaxanthin	(Z)325,415,435, 464	(Z)326,416,440,465
12	Not identified	398,418,443	
13	Not identified	402,438,469	
14	Lutein	420,444,472	421,445,474
15	Zeaxanthin	427,450,477	428,450,478
16	15-Z-Phytoene	285	276,286,297
17	Phytoene isomer*	285	
18	Phytofluene	330,347,364	331,348,367
19	All-E-βCryptoxanthin	427,450,477	428,450,478
20	Not identified	(Z)338,s,450,s	
21	13-Z- β Carotene*	(Z)337,s,444,470	(Z)338,s,444,470
22	α-Carotene	420,445,470	422,450,473
23	All-E-βCarotene	s,452,478	s,450,477
24	9-Z- β Carotene*	(Z)340,s,447,473	(Z)339,445,473

674

675 **Figure legends**

676 **Figure 1.** Overview of the carotenoid biosynthetic pathway in plants. Some steps are omitted
677 for simplification. The gene expression of the underlined enzymes has been measured by real
678 time PCR. Geranylgeranyl diphosphate, GGPP; phytoene synthase, PSY; phytoene desaturase,
679 PDS; ζ -carotene desaturase, ZDS; lycopene β -cyclase, LCYB; chromoplast specific lycopene β -
680 cyclase, CYCB; lycopene ε -cyclase, LCYE; β -carotene hydroxylase, BCH; β -carotene
681 hydroxylase; ε -carotene hydroxylase, ECH; violaxanthin de-epoxidase, VDE; zeaxanthin
682 epoxidase, ZEP; and neoxanthin synthase, NSY.

683

684 **Figure 2.** External and internal appearance (A), color index (expressed as Hunter a/b , B), total
685 carotenoids (mg kg^{-1} , C) and chlorophylls (mg kg^{-1} , D) of loquat fruit cv. *Algerie* (*Eriobotrya*
686 *japonica* Lindl.) at breaker, yellow, and full color stages (BK, Y, FC). These ripening stages
687 correspond to the stage 801, 803 and 809 of the BBCH-scale. Black and grey bars represent the
688 data for the peel and the pulp, respectively. Color index data are the mean \pm S.E. of 20 fruits.
689 The pigment concentrations are means \pm S.E of at least 3 replicates.

690

691 **Figure 3.** Carotenoid concentration in peel (black bars) and pulp (grey bars) of loquat fruit cv.
692 *Algerie* (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl.) at breaker (BK), yellow (Y) and full color stages (FC)
693 expressed as mg kg^{-1} . The data are means \pm S.E of at least 3 replicates. For clarification
694 purposes the plots were arranged following the carotenoid biosynthetic sequence in the pathway
695 and geometric isomers for the same carotenoid are located at the same level. The 13-Z- β -
696 carotene and 9-Z- β -carotene have been added and presented as Z-isomers of β -carotene Tr,
697 traces; nd, not detected..

698

699 **Figure 4.** Relative expression of genes involved in carotenoid biosynthesis in peel (black bars)
700 and pulp (grey bars) of loquat fruit cv. *Algerie* (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl.) at breaker, yellow
701 and full color stages (BK, Y, FC). These ripening stages correspond to the stage 801, 803 and

702 809 of the BBCH-scale. The genes measured were: *PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS*, *CYCB* and *BCH*. The plots
703 were arranged following the carotenoid biosynthetic sequence in the pathway. An expression
704 value of 1 was arbitrarily assigned to the values obtained in the pulp of fruits at yellow stage.
705 The data are means \pm S.E of at least 3 replicates. Within each tissue, different letters for a given
706 gene indicate statistically significant differences ($P \leq 0.05$).

707

708 **Figure 5.** Effect of ethylene (ET, 10 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) and 1-MCP (MCP, 1 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) on color index
709 (expressed as Hunter *a/b*) of peel (black bars) and pulp (grey bars) of loquat fruit cv. Algerie
710 (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl.) harvested at breaker (A), yellow (B) and full color (C). Pictures of
711 the fruits were taken at the beginning of the experiment (left) and after 6 days of incubation in
712 air, ethylene or 1-MCP (right). Data are the mean \pm S.E of at least 20 replicates.

713

714 **Figure 6.** Effect of ethylene (ET, 10 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) and 1-MCP (MCP, 1 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) on the carotenoid
715 content of peel (A) and pulp (B) of loquat fruit cv. Algerie (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl.)
716 expressed as mg kg^{-1} . Fruits were treated at the yellow stage, corresponding to 803 of the
717 BBCH-scale, and measurements were made at the onset of the experiment (day 0, 0d) and 2 (2d)
718 and 6 (6d) days after treatment. The data are means \pm S.E of at least 3 replicates.

719

720 **Figure 7.** Effect of ethylene (ET, 10 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) and 1-MCP (MCP, 1 $\mu\text{l L}^{-1}$) on the expression of
721 carotenoid biosynthetic genes in peel (black bars) and pulp (grey bars) of loquat fruit cv. Algerie
722 (*Eriobotrya japonica* Lindl.). Fruits were treated at the yellow stage, corresponding to 803 of
723 the BBCH-scale and measurements were made the onset of the experiment (day 0, 0d) and after
724 2 (2d) and 6 days (6d) after the treatment. Expression of the following genes was determined:
725 *PSY*, *PDS*, *ZDS*, *CYCB* and *BCH*. The plots were arranged following the carotenoid biosynthetic
726 sequence in the pathway. The data are means \pm S.E of at least 3 replicates. Within each tissue,
727 different letters for a given gene indicate statistically significant differences ($P \leq 0.05$).













