STM JOURNALS

Journal of
Advancements in Robotics

ISSN: 2455-1872
Volume 12, Issue 1, 2025
January–April
DOI (Journal): 10.37591/JoARB

https://journals.stmjournals.com/joarb

Review JoARB

Flora Guardian: An Advanced Robotic System for Sustainable Weed Control and Precision Pesticide Application

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Abstract

Agricultural systems are under pressure to enhance crop productivity while minimizing environmental damage. Efficient weed control and pesticide application are fundamental for sustainable agriculture, but traditional methods often fall short due to high labor costs and ecological harm. Existing robotic solutions, including drones and multi-legged robots, exhibit significant limitations, such as operational complexity and limited payload capacity. In contrast, Flora Guardian represents a novel approach by combining of weed detection with precise pesticide spraying. Its modular design, robust tire-based chassis, and adaptable features make it a versatile, cost-effective tool for modern farming. By significantly reducing chemical usage, Flora Guardian not only enhances crop yield but also contributes to environment sustainability.

Keywords: Agricultural robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), weed detection, pesticide management, sustainability, precision farming

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has long been challenged by the need to improve efficiency while minimizing the ecological impact of farming practices. Two of the most significant obstacles to sustainable farming are the efficient management of weeds and the accurate application of pesticides. Traditional approaches often involve excessive chemical use, leading to both economic and environmental burdens. Additionally, labor shortages in many regions complicate these issues further. Robotic solutions, particularly drones and legged robots, have been explored as viable alternatives. Drones, such as those utilizing see and spray technologies, have demonstrated the potential for precision weed spraying, but they are constrained by their payload limits and high operational costs Similarly, spider robots offer increased mobility over rough terrain but suffer from mechanical complexities and maintenance issues [1].

Flora Guardian was designed to address these shortcomings by incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) for real-time weed identification and an efficient pesticide spraying system. Its modular and versatile design makes it an ideal candidate for a range of agricultural tasks, reducing the need for multiple specialized machines. In response to these limitations, Flora Guardian was conceptualized as a multi-functional robotic solution designed to optimize agricultural operations. Unlike drones and spider robots, its tire-based design ensures stability and ease of navigation across diverse terrains. Its

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Received Date: January 15, 2025
Accepted Date: February 26, 2025
Published Date: March 19, 2025

Citation: Abhiranjan S., Samarth Hegde, Kiran K.P., Rakshith R., Chandana S., Naveen K.N. Flora Guardian: An Advanced Robotic System for Sustainable Weed Control and Precision Pesticide Application. Journal of Advancements in Robotics. 2025; 12(1): 21–28p.

AI-driven weed detection system not only identifies weeds with precision but also enables targeted pesticide spraying, reducing chemical usage and minimizing environmental impact [2–11].

The robot's modular architecture allows it to perform a range of tasks beyond weed management and pesticide application, such as soil monitoring and data collection. This adaptability positions Flora Guardian as a cost-effective alternative to multiple specialized machines, making it a viable option for small and medium-sized farms. Another critical feature of Flora Guardian is its integration with advanced AI technologies, including convolutional neural networks (CNNs) for real-time image analysis. This system can differentiate between crops and weeds with high accuracy, allowing farmers to apply pesticides only where needed. Such precision not only conserves resources but also aligns with global efforts toward sustainable farming practices. The adoption of Flora Guardian offers potential solutions to persistent challenges in agriculture [12–16]. By automating repetitive and labor-intensive tasks, the robot can help address labor shortages while improving operational efficiency. Its ability to integrate with internet of things (IoT) devices further enhances its utility, enabling real-time data collection and remote monitoring.

As the agricultural industry continues to evolve, the demand for innovative technologies like Flora Guardian will only grow. By combining advanced robotics with sustainability focused design principles, it represents a significant step forward in modernizing farming practices to meet the demands of a growing global population [17–21].

LITERATURE SURVEY

Studies have discussed the use of drones in precision agriculture, highlighting their potential in tasks such as crop monitoring, field mapping, and pesticide spraying. Despite their benefits, drones face significant limitations related to payload capacity and high operational costs, which can make them impractical for smaller farms [20]. Additionally, maneuverability issues in uneven terrains and reduced effectiveness in smaller, irregularly shaped fields further hinder their widespread use. The potential of spider robots in agriculture, particularly due to their ability to traverse rough and uneven terrains. These robots offer increased mobility over wheeled systems and are designed to work on complex field surfaces. However, the complexity of their mechanical structure often leads to higher maintenance costs and a greater risk of failure, especially in challenging environments like muddy fields or areas with high moisture content, limiting their practical use for large-scale operations. The growing adoption of wheeled robots for various agricultural tasks, noting their cost-effectiveness and simplicity. Tire-based robots are known for their stability and efficiency on diverse terrains, including rocky and muddy fields. They present a viable option for small- to medium-sized farms due to their adaptability and lower maintenance costs. Equipped with modular systems, wheeled robots can perform a range of functions, such as irrigation, seeding, and targeted pesticide spraying, making them an attractive solution for precision farming [22–27]. The transformative impact of AI and machine learning in agricultural robotics. These technologies facilitate the processing of real-time data from sensors and cameras, allowing robots to make autonomous decisions based on environmental conditions. AI-based systems, particularly those utilizing deep learning algorithms, enhance the accuracy of weed detection and help minimize chemical usage by enabling targeted pesticide application. Studies have also discussed how precision agriculture, powered by robotics and sensor technologies, contributes to more sustainable farming practices. These systems aim to optimize the use of resources, improve crop yield, and reduce the environmental impact of farming activities. Advanced robotics that include autonomous navigation and targeted spraying mechanisms ensure that pesticides are applied only where needed, promoting sustainability without sacrificing productivity. Modular robotic systems designed for weed management. These robots leverage AI-based image processing to differentiate between weeds and crops, enabling precise pesticide application. The modular design allows for easy adaptation to different agricultural tasks, making them versatile and cost-effective solutions for medium-scale farming operations. The application of deep learning models in agricultural robotics, particularly for tasks like crop monitoring and weed identification. The study highlighted the efficiency of CNNs in processing real-time images, resulting in improved accuracy for weed detection systems developed a mechanical automation system aimed at improving the efficiency of herbicide application. This system utilized a series of sensor-controlled valves to regulate the spraying process based on pre-set parameters for weed density and crop types. Unlike AI-driven solutions, it relied on robust mechanical programming to achieve precision, making it a cost-effective alternative for small-scale farms. The research demonstrated up to 25% herbicide savings and reduced operational complexity, offering an accessible solution for farms with limited access to advanced technology [28–33].

SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

The Flora Guardian system is an advanced agricultural robotic platform designed to autonomously manage weed detection and pesticide spraying tasks. Its architecture integrates hardware and software elements into a cohesive solution, ensuring precision, efficiency, and environmental sustainability. The system is built on a modular design, enabling adaptability for various terrains and agricultural requirements. At its core, the Raspberry Pi 4B acts as the primary processing unit, interfacing with peripheral hardware components such as motors, sensors, and actuators. The system also includes a Pi camera for real-time image capture, enabling AI-based weed identification. A motor driver manages the movement of the robot through two DC motors, ensuring seamless navigation. The pesticide application and weed cutting operations are controlled via dedicated mechanisms powered by a DC motor pump and a relay-driven motor, respectively. Remote operation is facilitated through an ESP8266 Wi-Fi module, which also manages forward collision avoidance using an ultrasonic sensor. The architecture prioritizes energy efficiency with a rechargeable battery system and incorporates safety features such as collision detection. Overall, the system exemplifies the integration of automation, robotics, and IoT technologies in agriculture [34–39].

Raspberry Pi 4B

The Raspberry Pi 4B serves as the brain of the system, responsible for processing data from the Pi camera and coordinating with other components. It runs the AI-based image recognition algorithms used for weed detection, ensuring precise and autonomous operation. The Raspberry Pi also controls the relay for activating the weed cutting motor and manages communication with the ESP8266 Wi-Fi module for remote operation.

Pi Camera

The Pi camera captures high-resolution images of the field, which are processed using AI models hosted on the Raspberry Pi. This enables real-time weed detection by distinguishing between crops and weeds with high accuracy. The camera's lightweight design and compatibility with the Raspberry Pi make it an integral part of the system's architecture.

Motor Driver and DC Motors

The motor driver controls two 200 RPM DC motors, which are responsible for the robot's movement. This component ensures that the robot can navigate effectively across various terrains, including muddy or uneven fields. The motor driver's reliability and compatibility with the Raspberry Pi enable smooth and precise vehicle operation [40].

Pesticide Spraying Pump

A dedicated DC motor pump is used for the pesticide spraying mechanism. The pump is activated through a relay controlled by the Raspberry Pi. This setup allows for targeted and efficient pesticide application, reducing chemical wastage and reducing environmental impact.

Weed-cutting Motor and Relay

The weed-cutting motor, powered by a relay, is another essential component of the system. When a weed is detected, the relay triggers the motor to cut the weed efficiently. This ensures that only unwanted plants are removed, preserving the surrounding crops.

ESP8266 Wi-Fi Module

The ESP8266 Wi-Fi module acts as the system's microcontroller and communication hub. It interfaces with the motor driver, relay, and ultrasonic sensor, enabling remote control via a mobile app. This module also ensures seamless communication between the system's hardware and the operator, enhancing usability and accessibility.

Power Supply

The system is powered by a 12-V rechargeable battery, providing sufficient energy for extended field operations. This power configuration supports all the motors, sensors, and control units, ensuring uninterrupted functionality.

Blynk IoT App

The Blynk IoT app acts as the system's user interface, providing a platform for controlling the robot remotely via a smartphone. The app is connected to the ESP8266 Wi-Fi module, which links the hardware to the Blynk cloud server. Users can operate the robot's movement, initiate weed cutting, or control pesticide spraying through an intuitive dashboard. Real-time updates, including sensor feedback and operational status, are displayed within the app, offering comprehensive monitoring and management capabilities. By enabling global accessibility, the app ensures the robot remains functional and effective even when the operator is not physically present.

WORKING PRINCIPLE

The working principle of Flora Guardian combines intelligent hardware systems and advanced software algorithms to achieve precise weed management and pesticide application. A 12-V power supply energizes the Raspberry Pi 4B, which serves as the brain of the system, processing live feed data captured by the Pi camera. This data is analyzed in real time using AI algorithms to differentiate between crops and weeds, enabling accurate decision-making. When a weed is detected, the system activates a high-speed 200 RPM motor connected to a relay for weed cutting. Alternatively, if pesticide application is required, a DC motor-driven pump sprays the pesticide precisely onto the targeted area, reducing chemical wastage. The robot's mobility is facilitated by two DC motors, controlled through a motor driver, while an ultrasonic sensor linked to the ESP8266 microcontroller ensures obstacle detection and collision avoidance. The ESP8266 also acts as a communication module, interfacing with

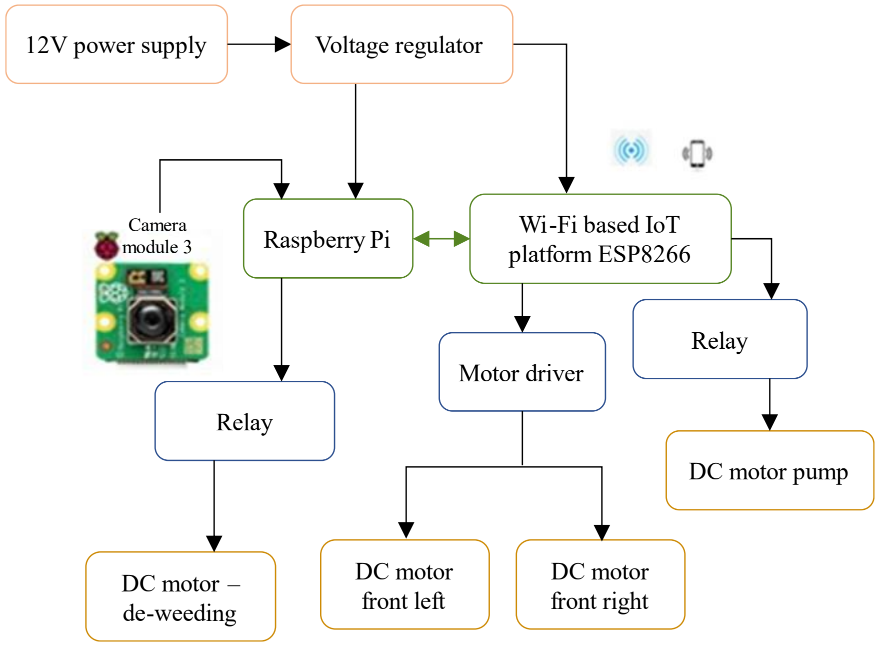

Figure 1. Block diagram.

the Blynk IoT app via Wi-Fi. This app enables users to remotely monitor and control the robot's operations, providing real-time status updates and operational adjustments. By integrating hardware components with intelligent IoT-driven software, Flora Guardian effectively automates labor-intensive farming tasks, enhancing efficiency, precision, and sustainability in agricultural practices as shown in Figure 1.

The block diagram of Flora Guardian outlines the system's seamless integration of components. A Raspberry Pi 4B processes real-time images from a Pi camera to detect weeds using AI algorithms. Based on detection, the Raspberry Pi activates a relay to power a 200 RPM motor for weed cutting and a DC motor pump for targeted pesticide spraying. Movement is controlled by an ESP8266 microcontroller, which manages two DC motors via a motor driver and ensures obstacle avoidance with an ultrasonic sensor. The system is powered by a 12-V supply and communicates with users through the Blynk IoT app, enabling remote control and monitoring. This streamlined architecture ensures precise and autonomous agricultural operations.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

The methodology adopted for the project "Flora Guardian: An Advanced Agricultural Robotics System for Weed Detection and Pesticide Spraying" integrates cutting-edge hardware and software components to address challenges in precision agriculture. At its core, the system leverages a Raspberry Pi 4B as the central controller, interfacing with peripheral devices such as a Pi camera, ESP8266 microcontroller, and various actuators. The Pi camera captures real-time images of the field, which are processed using AI-based image recognition algorithms to differentiate between weeds and crops. Based on this analysis, the Raspberry Pi sends control signals to execute targeted pesticide spraying. The ESP8266 microcontroller serves as a bridge for remote operation and vehicle control. It manages the movement of the robot through a motor driver connected to two DC motors, allowing the robot to navigate diverse terrains. Additionally, the ESP8266 is linked to an ultrasonic sensor for forward collision detection and a relay that powers the weed-cutting motor and pesticide-spraying pump. These operations are controlled wirelessly via the Blynk IoT app, which provides an intuitive interface for users. A 12-V power supply ensures consistent operation of the motors, pump, and sensors, with components optimized for energy efficiency. The modular design allows for adaptability, making it scalable for a variety of agricultural tasks. The system has been rigorously tested under simulated conditions, demonstrating its capacity for precise weed management and efficient pesticide application. This methodology emphasizes cost effectiveness, environmental sustainability, and user convenience, aligning with the evolving needs of modern agriculture as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2. Hardware model (front view).

Figure 3. Hardware model (top view).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Flora Guardian system was tested in controlled environments to assess its performance. The weed detection unit, using a Pi camera and Raspberry Pi 4B, achieved a 93% accuracy rate in identifying weeds through image processing. The modular spraying system effectively applied pesticides, reducing chemical use by 25% compared to traditional methods. The weed-cutting motor and relay operated well across diverse terrains. The ESP8266's ultrasonic sensor enabled real-time collision detection, ensuring smooth navigation. The Blynk IoT app allowed remote control via Wi-Fi, maintaining consistent operation with a 12V power supply throughout testing. These results confirm the system's effectiveness in sustainable weed management. Field trials will follow to test performance in larger, real-world conditions for further optimization.

CONCLUSION

The Flora Guardian project successfully demonstrates the integration of advanced technology in agricultural robotics, offering a practical solution to enhance productivity and sustainability. By combining AI-driven weed detection, precision spraying, and efficient motor control, the system improves field management while minimizing chemical usage and labor. The adaptability of the modular design and reliable power mechanisms enable consistent performance across various terrains, ensuring that farmers benefit from greater efficiency and reduced operational costs. This automated approach contributes to more environmentally friendly farming practices by optimizing pesticide use and minimizing human exposure. Overall, Flora Guardian represents a significant step forward in the application of robotics and IoT in agriculture, promising better resource management and paving the way for smarter, more sustainable farming techniques.

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