

A HYBRID IOT AND DEEP LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR REAL TIME PLANT LEAF DISEASE DETECTION IN SMART AGRICULTURE

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Abstract: The rapid growth of the global population and increasing demand for food security have accelerated the adoption of smart agriculture technologies. Among the most critical challenges in modern farming is the early and accurate detection of plant diseases, which significantly reduce crop productivity and threaten sustainable agricultural practices. This research proposes a hybrid framework integrating Deep Learning (DL) and the Internet of Things (IoT) for real-time plant leaf disease detection. The system employs Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) fine-tuned through transfer learning to classify plant leaf images captured using IoT-enabled cameras and sensor networks. Lightweight CNN architectures such as MobileNetV2 are deployed on edge devices to enable fast, resource-efficient inference in field environments, while high-capacity models including ResNet50 and DenseNet121 operate in cloud servers for large-scale analysis and continuous retraining. Environmental sensor data (temperature, humidity, soil moisture) are also incorporated to contextualize disease prediction. Experimental evaluation was conducted using benchmark leaf disease datasets combined with IoT field-simulated inputs. Results demonstrate that DenseNet121 achieved the highest classification accuracy of 97.8%, while MobileNetV2 provided competitive performance (94.6%) with significantly reduced inference latency, making it suitable for edge deployment. The hybrid edge–cloud architecture ensures scalability, reduced response time, and improved accessibility for both smallholder and industrial farms. This work contributes to precision agriculture by addressing affordability, interpretability, and real-time scalability challenges in plant disease management.

Keywords: Deep Learning; IoT; Plant Disease Detection; Edge Computing; Transfer Learning.

1. Introduction

Agriculture is the foundation of global food security and economic stability, supporting billions of people while driving trade and rural development. However, the United Nations projects the world population will reach 9.7 billion by 2050, necessitating a sharp increase in productivity. Consequently, modern agriculture must prioritize sustainable practices, yield optimization, and loss reduction to meet these escalating demands [1] [2].

Traditional plant disease diagnosis depends largely on manual inspection, where farmers or experts identify infections through leaf discoloration and abnormal growth patterns [6]. However, this method is often labor-intensive and subjective, as overlapping symptoms between different diseases can lead to misidentification. In resource-constrained regions, a lack of accessible agricultural extension services further delays timely intervention. These barriers highlight an urgent need for automated, scalable, and cost-effective detection tools that provide real-time support to farmers [7] [8]

The rise of smart agriculture—powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and edge computing—has revolutionized farm monitoring and data-driven management. By deploying interconnected sensors, drones, and cameras, IoT systems facilitate real-time data collection on critical factors such as soil moisture, temperature, and light intensity. Because these environmental variables directly influence pathogen development, integrating sensor-based insights with visual inspections allows for a more holistic view of crop health. This digital transformation empowers farmers to move from reactive manual checks to proactive, real-time disease prevention [9].

Deep Learning (DL), specifically Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), has revolutionized image classification in fields ranging from medical imaging to precision agriculture. Unlike traditional machine learning, which requires handcrafted feature extraction, CNNs automatically learn a spatial hierarchy of features directly from raw image data. This capability allows them to identify discriminative patterns—such as subtle texture abnormalities and lesions—even in complex field environments. Recent studies consistently report high accuracy in disease classification, cementing the role of deep architectures in the future of sustainable farming [10] [11].

Despite their potential, training CNNs from scratch presents significant hurdles, including the need for massive datasets, high-performance computing, and extensive training periods. These requirements often clash with the reality of agricultural regions where infrastructure is limited and labeled data is scarce. Furthermore, the unpredictable nature of field environments—characterized by shifting light, background noise, and leaf orientation—can hinder a model's ability to generalize. Consequently, current research is shifting toward strategies that enhance the efficiency and robustness of deep learning for practical, real-world deployment [12].

Edge computing eliminates cloud dependency by moving AI inference to field-deployed devices like the NVIDIA Jetson Orin series. This setup allows for instant diagnostics, crucial for stopping fast-spreading crop diseases. When paired with efficient models like MobileNetV3-Small, edge devices provide a powerful yet low-energy solution for continuous monitoring. For small-scale farmers, this represents a cost-effective path to precision agriculture without the need for expensive, stable internet infrastructure [13].

For AI to be truly useful in the field, farmers must understand the 'why' behind its predictions. Currently, most deep learning models offer little explanation for their results, creating a trust gap that hinders the adoption of digital tools. This is where Explainable AI (XAI) becomes essential. Using tools like Grad-CAM, the system can generate 'heatmaps' on leaf images, showing exactly where it detected disease. This visual proof not only confirms the model's accuracy but also gives farmers the confidence to make costly management decisions, such as targeted pesticide application [14].

This research introduces a hybrid IoT–Deep Learning framework designed to bridge the gap between real-time responsiveness and high-capacity analytics. The major contributions of this study include: 1. The development of a three-layer IoT–DL architecture integrating perception, edge processing, and cloud analytics. 2. Deployment of MobileNetV2 on edge devices for low-latency disease detection in real farm environments. 3. Integration of ResNet50 and DenseNet121 on cloud servers for high-accuracy classification and large-scale analytics. 4. Experimental evaluation demonstrating robust performance, scalability, and efficiency of the hybrid framework. 5. Incorporation of Explainable AI tools to improve transparency, interpretability, and farmer trust.

2. Methodology

2.1 System Overview

The proposed methodology presents a hybrid framework that integrates Internet of Things (IoT) technologies with Deep Learning (DL) models to establish an intelligent, real-time plant leaf disease detection system. The main objective of the system is to provide early diagnosis of crop diseases by analyzing leaf images captured directly from agricultural fields. The framework is designed to ensure scalability, affordability, and rapid response, making it suitable for both smallholder farmers and large-scale agricultural industries.

2.2 Perception Layer: Data Acquisition Using IoT Devices

The perception layer serves as the foundation of the framework, focusing on collecting high-quality data from farms using IoT-enabled devices. This layer ensures continuous monitoring of crop health and environmental conditions.

2.3 Edge Processing Layer: Real-Time Disease Detection

The edge processing layer is responsible for performing near real-time inference directly at the farm site. This layer reduces dependence on cloud infrastructure and minimizes response time.

2.4 Cloud Analytics Layer: Advanced Classification and Model Retraining

While the edge layer provides immediate diagnosis, the cloud analytics layer supports deeper analysis, large-scale monitoring, and continuous learning.

High-Capacity CNN Models

Advanced deep learning architectures such as ResNet50, DenseNet121, and InceptionV3 are deployed on cloud servers.

Transfer Learning and Fine-Tuning

To reduce training costs and improve generalization, transfer learning is employed. Pre-trained CNN models trained on ImageNet are fine-tuned using labeled plant disease datasets such as PlantVillage.

Continuous Model Adaptation

The cloud infrastructure stores incoming data streams, forming an expanding dataset for periodic retraining. This ensures that the models remain adaptive to: Emerging disease strains, New crop varieties and Seasonal environmental changes. Such continuous learning enhances long-term system reliability and robustness.

2.5 Data Flow and System Integration

The system ensures seamless interaction between layers through the following workflow:

1. Image and Sensor Capture: Leaf images and environmental readings are collected through IoT devices.
2. Edge Preprocessing and Inference: Lightweight CNNs provide rapid preliminary diagnosis.
3. Cloud Analytics and Retraining: Advanced models perform deeper classification and continuous improvement.
4. Feedback Delivery: Farmers receive alerts, treatment guidance, and risk forecasts through mobile dashboards. This hybrid integration balances speed, accuracy, scalability, and affordability.

3. Results and Analysis

This section presents the experimental evaluation and performance analysis of the proposed IoT–Deep Learning hybrid framework for real-time plant leaf disease detection

3.1 Model Accuracy Comparison

The first evaluation focused on comparing the classification accuracy of different CNN architectures. Table 1 summarizes the achieved accuracy scores.

Table 1: Accuracy Comparison of CNN Models

Model Architecture	Deployment Layer	Accuracy (%)
MobileNetV2	Edge	94.6
ResNet50	Cloud	96.9
DenseNet121	Cloud	97.8

The results indicate that DenseNet121 achieved the highest classification accuracy (97.8%), demonstrating its superior ability to extract complex disease patterns.

3.2 Precision, Recall, and F1-Score Analysis

Beyond accuracy, additional metrics were analyzed to ensure balanced performance across disease classes. Table 2 presents precision, recall, and F1-score values.

Table 2: Performance Metrics of CNN Models

Model	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)
MobileNetV2	93.8	94.2	94.0
ResNet50	96.3	96.5	96.4
DenseNet121	97.5	97.6	97.5

DenseNet121 achieved the highest precision and recall values, confirming that the model effectively minimized both false positives and false negatives.

3.3 Edge vs Cloud Inference Efficiency

A major contribution of this work is the hybrid edge–cloud architecture, designed to balance speed and accuracy. Inference latency was measured for each model, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Inference Time Comparison

Model	Deployment	Inference Time (ms)	Hardware Platform
MobileNetV2	Edge	38	Raspberry Pi / Jetson
ResNet50	Cloud	85	GPU Cloud Server
DenseNet121	Cloud	92	GPU Cloud Server

MobileNetV2 achieved the lowest inference time (38 ms), enabling near real-time disease alerts directly at the farm site. Although DenseNet121 achieved higher accuracy, it required more processing time due to its deeper architecture. These findings highlight the importance of combining edge-based rapid detection with cloud-based advanced analytics.

4. Conclusion

This research proposed a hybrid Internet of Things (IoT) and Deep Learning-based framework for real-time plant leaf disease detection, addressing one of the most critical challenges in modern smart agriculture. Lightweight CNN models such as MobileNetV2 were deployed on edge devices to enable rapid, low-latency inference directly in farm environments. At the same time, high-capacity models such as ResNet50 and DenseNet121 were implemented in cloud servers to achieve higher classification accuracy, support large-scale monitoring, and enable continuous retraining through transfer learning. This

hybrid edge–cloud strategy effectively balances computational efficiency and diagnostic robustness. Experimental results demonstrated that DenseNet121 achieved the highest accuracy of 97.8%, while MobileNetV2 delivered competitive performance with significantly faster inference time, making it suitable for real-time deployment.

Overall, this study contributes to the advancement of precision agriculture by offering an efficient, interpretable, and scalable plant disease detection solution. Future work may focus on expanding datasets to include more crop varieties, integrating multimodal sensor fusion for improved prediction, and developing fully automated disease management systems. The proposed framework has strong potential to reduce crop losses, enhance sustainable farming practices, and support global food security.

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