

A review of the pharmacological potential and phytochemical profile of weeping Fig - *Ficus benjamina* L.

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Abstract

The genus "Ficus" is an individual from the Moraceae family, growing in tropical and subtropical districts and incorporates more than 800 plant species. *Ficus benjamina* L., is a medium size tree with a few spreading branches from the base usually called "sobbing fig", is found in the neighborhood of South Africa, Australia, tropical focal Africa and West Africa. It is known for its restorative ability and people make use of this plant to manage and/or treat skin ailments, infections, intestinal illnesses, and retching. In addition, they are commonly used as anti-microbial, anti-pyretic and anti-nociceptive agents. The leaves, barks and roots contain bioactive compounds such as cinnamic acids, lactose, naringenin, quercetin, caffeic acid and stigma sterol with documented pharmacological properties.

Keywords: Africa, nociceptive, Moraceae, cinnamic acids, quercetin, infection

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1. Introduction

Essential oils are complex mixture of hydrophobic volatile organic compounds extracted from different plant species having high medicinal importance and extreme therapeutic potentials [1-16]. Weeping fig (*Ficus benjamina* L.) is an annual tree belonging to the family mulberry (Moraceae). It has been used for thousands of the years as an ornamental and hedge plant [17-24]. *Ficus* is a large genus of about 40 genera and 1000 species of trees, shrubs, lianas, or rarely herbs and many varieties are native to Asia, Australia, and parts of the Pacific region [24-25]. The uncertainty in the exact number of species within the genus is largely attributed to the great variability among the constituents. Weeping fig cross-pollinates very easily that result in its diversity and variation [26]. For pollination, wasps play an important role for reproduction of this species. Members of this genus are hard to differentiate by their flowers, but can be distinguished by their pattern, whether they are weeping fig or not, by leaf shape, and by their fruits [27-28]. *Ficus benjamina* is known by different names depending on the geographical distribution. The common English names are famously as Benjamin tree, or oval leaf fig, Benjamin fig and weeping fig tree [29-30]. Common vernacular names are 'balete' or 'salisi'. In India specifically, it is best known as 'pukar'. In Chinese it is called 'Chui ye rong' or 'Cong Mao Chui ye rong'. In

different regions of Brazil is known by different names beringan and *Figueira benjamina*. In Germany, it is known as 'Benjamin Feige'. In Indonesia, it is famous by the name of 'beringin', 'wariengin'. In Israel, it is called 'ficus ha'shderot'. In Myanmar, it is called 'nyaung thabye'. In Netherlands, it is known as 'Baniaanboom'. In Thailand, it is called 'sai yoi bai laem' [31-33].

Ficus benjamina is the most diverse species within the range. Large numbers of cultivars are available, but the exact numbers are unknown. The cultivars also vary in flavors and uses. *Ficus benjamina* is a tree reaching 30 meters under natural conditions [34]. Leaves are ovate-elliptic, slender-pointed, thin leathery, dark green and shiny, glossy and 2-5 cm long. Flowers are insignificant and minute; and sometimes borne in a hollowed out stem in axils but these flowers are not showy [17]. Wide range of the species is due to the glossy oval foliage. The plant is available as a natural looking bush and grow as an ornamental plant in different places such as parks and across the roadside [35].

Different factors like plant part, maturity of the plant part and agro-climatic conditions affects the percentage yield of the extracts. *Ficus benjamin* of fruits, leaves and bark contains various bioactive components like stigma sterol, quercetin, cinnamic acid, and lactose naringenin [36].

2. History/Origin

Ficus benjamina is found in Asia, Australia, and Pacific region. The species is reportedly unusual at the Marshall Islands, with just one tree found developing close to a village. This plant has been growing on Earth for an exceptionally prolonged time and fossil remains have been located as 30 million years old. Its common English name 'weeping fig' refers to its drooping branches as well as its aerial roots which descend from the branches to the ground [37].

3. Demography/Location

Ficus benjamina can grow in moderate amount of water during the warm season and requires only small amount of the water enough to shield it from drying out during the rest of the year. Total figure for weeping fig generation are hard to get. However, the world production of crude fig in 2013 was 1.1 million tones, led by Turkey with 0.3 million tones. The estimated production of other countries was as follow: Egypt 0.15 million ton, Algeria 0.12 million ton and Iran 0.08 million ton [38].

4. Botany/Morphology/Ecology

Ficus benjamina is one of the most popular houseplants. Shiny oval leaves can be categorized into following classes depending on the species; plain green, creamy yellow, marked with burgundy, green, yellow or pink, and silver-white patterns. *F. benjamina* plant is available as natural looking bush, however; it also grows on trunks that can be twisted, straighten or interwoven. Generally, branches droop slightly by providing it a graceful green appearance. Leaves are oblong ovate, leathery, 6-9 cm long, having noticeable and somewhat slender point, rounded base. Petioles are 5-10 mm long while fruit is solitary, axillary, dark-purple, stalk less and fleshy when mature, rather spherical and 1 cm in diameter [39].

5. Chemistry

Banyan is traditionally known for flavonoids. Banyan tree have diverse compounds in various parts of plant [40].

5.1. Chemical composition

Weeping fig contains little amount of fatty oil and have less calorific value. *Ficus benjamina* demonstrated the presence of phenolics, carbohydrates, saponins, flavonoids, alkaloids, proteins, and tannins. Chlorogenic, ferulic and syringic acids are present in root. Chlorogenic, p-coumaric, and ferulic acids are present in stems, and leaves contains caffeic acid (Figure 1.) [23].

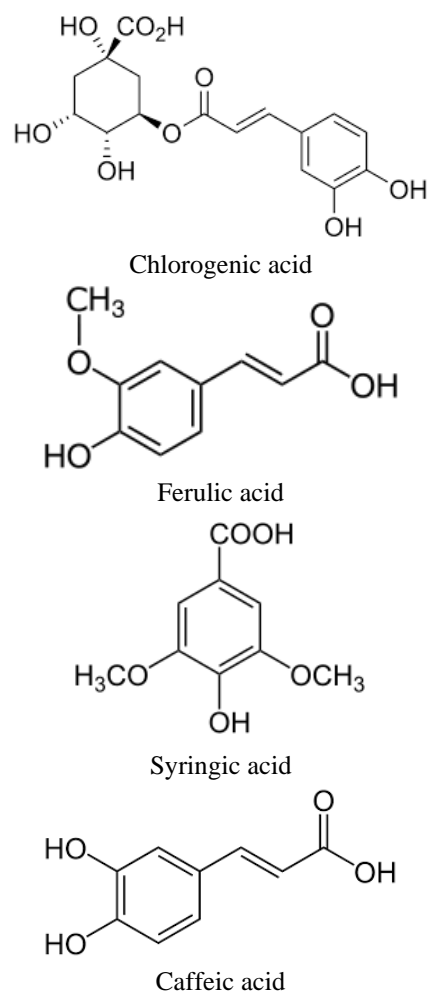
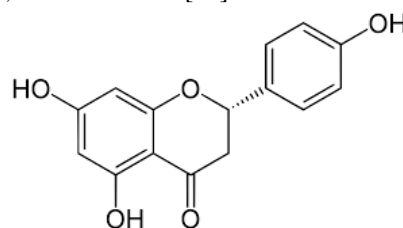


Figure 1: Fatty acids present in weeping fig.

5.2. Phytochemistry

Ficus benjamina has specific aromatic odor because of the existence of essential or volatile oil [1-16], which is largely confined in green leaves. These oils are generally characterized by gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GC-MS) analysis [41-46]. This scented volatile oil from leaves is chiefly comprised of alkaloids, saponins, flavonoids and tannins [47-49]. The oil extracted from seeds is mainly composed of naringenin, quercetin and cinnamic acid (Figure 2). The leaf oil of *Ficus benjamina* collected during the day, contained high contents of alpha-pinene, abietadiene, cis-alpha-bisabolene, reticuline, calycanthidine, anabasine, tomatidine, acridine derivative, sophocarpine, neblinine, harmine, obscurinervinediol, ergoline, ellipticine, indicine, matridine, scoulerine, hydroxyl morphine, aspidospermidine, nicodicodine, adenocarpine, lycocernuine, isoclaurine, dasycarpidan, retronecine, and clemastine [50].



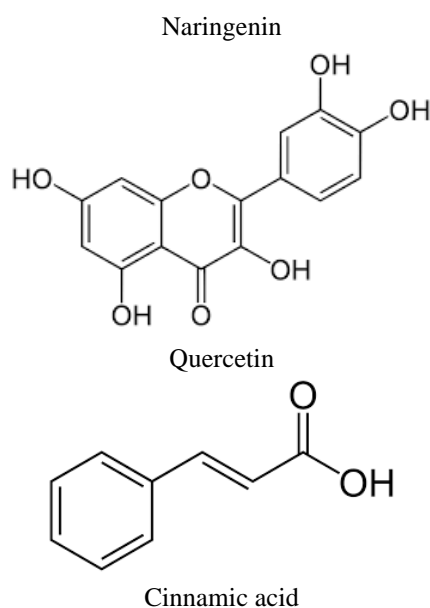


Figure 2: Compounds present in the weeping fig seed oil

6. Post-harvest technology

Conventionally, the best harvesting time of *Ficus benjamina* is early in the morning, just after the evaporation of dew before the day temperature start increasing. It has been observed that the essential oil activity is strong in the morning. Main method of this plant storage is air-layering method. Weeping fig is stored for a week or less [51]. Weeping fig should be dried under shade instead of sun drying otherwise it will lose aroma due to essential oil volatility [52-53].

7. Processing

Ficus benjamina, like other natural plant, is consumed in a variety of methods and for numerous purposes. In addition to its fresh leaves, other common processed kinds of weeping fig encompass entire dry leaves, powdered leaves, and extracted essential oils. Fresh and mature leaves of *F. benjamina* are collected and washed very well with water before drying (room temperature). Leaves needed to be dried straight away after harvest as they darken if left uncovered in open air for prolonged period. Dried leaves of weeping fig can be stored for 12 months when saved blanketed from warmth, mild and moisture [54].

8. Value addition

Different parts of weeping fig are used in various medicines after careful processing.

9. Uses

Ficus benjamina and other spices contribute significantly for the ornamental purpose. Latex of this plant is toxic and should be kept away from children. Twigs can be used to control insects in field. Leaf juice can be used as bug and flea repellent. Latex can be applied on the boils as this plant has number of anti-oxidants. Free radicals are

responsible for the several clinical disorders like cancer, diabetes mellitus, degenerative disease, renal failures as they disturb the natural defense mechanisms. However, natural anti-oxidants present in the body provides defense against these diseases. It is well known now that plant extracts strengthen the anti-oxidant defense system of human. *Ficus benjamina* is used in several important medicines. It is used in medicine for malaria, influenza, dysentery, airways inflammation (bronchitis), acute enteritis, whooping cough (pertussis) and hot seizures in children [55].

9.1. General therapeutic uses

Ficus benjamina has various uses ranging from culinary to religious; its uses are often high in ritual. There are a number of curious beliefs associated with the historical uses of weeping fig. The presence of various types of alkaloids in *Ficus* species is responsible for the potent biological activities like, anti-oxidant, anti-cancer, anti-microbial and anti-muscarinic activities [56].

9.2. Pharmacological uses

F. benjamina has showed potent anti-oxidant activities. Methanolic extracts of *F. benjamina* also showed cytotoxic activities in brine shrimp lethality assay. Phytochemical screening of methanolic extract of *F. benjamina* confirmed the presence of excessive levels of phenolics (4.006 mg gallic acid equivalence/gm) and flavonoids (16.005 mg quercetin acid equivalence/gm) compounds responsible for its anti-oxidant activity. The study of *Ficus* spp. shows the presence of numerous compounds including alkaloids, triterpenes, ascorbic acid, and flavonoids [57].

9.2.1. Anti-bacterial activity

Essentials oils obtained from various plants generally showed good anti-microbial activity [58-59]. Anti-bacterial effect of plant extract was observed on various bacterial species *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella pneumonia*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Salmonella typhi* [60].

9.2.2. Anti-oxidant activity

F. benjamina exhibits strong anti-oxidant activity in various assays [61]. The root and leaves showed good anti-oxidant activity, whereas stem extract and fractions revealed good anti-microbial activity [23].

9.2.3. Hemolytic activity

Ficus benjamina stem, leaves and root demonstrates strong hemolytic actions [62].

9.2.4. Anti-fungal activity

Ficus benjamina has shown strong activity to inhibit *Aspergillus niger* (ATCC 10595) [63].

9.2.5. Insect repellent activity

Ficus benjamina twigs are used as insect repellent by keeping them under the beds. Its leaves have some active compounds that repel the insects. It is also used to repel the insect from kitchen and other places.

9.2.6. Pollution removal activity

Ficus benjamina tree leaves have ability to depollute the contaminated environments.

9.2.7. Anthelmintic activity

It showed anthelmintic activity against grown-up Indian night crawler *Pheretima posthumous*. *Ficus benjamina* activity was dose dependent [63].

10. Summary

Ficus benjamina, commonly known as "weeping fig", "benjamin fig" or "figus tree", and often sold in stores as just "figus", is a species of flowering plant in the family Moraceae, native to Asia and Australia. The genus *Ficus* belongs to Moraceae family growing in tropical and subtropical areas and includes more than 800 species. *F. benjamina* L., is a medium size tree with a few spreading branches from the base usually called "sobbing fig". *F. benjamina* activities are due to presence of cinnamic acids, lactose, naringenin, quercetin, caffeic acid and stigma sterol.

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