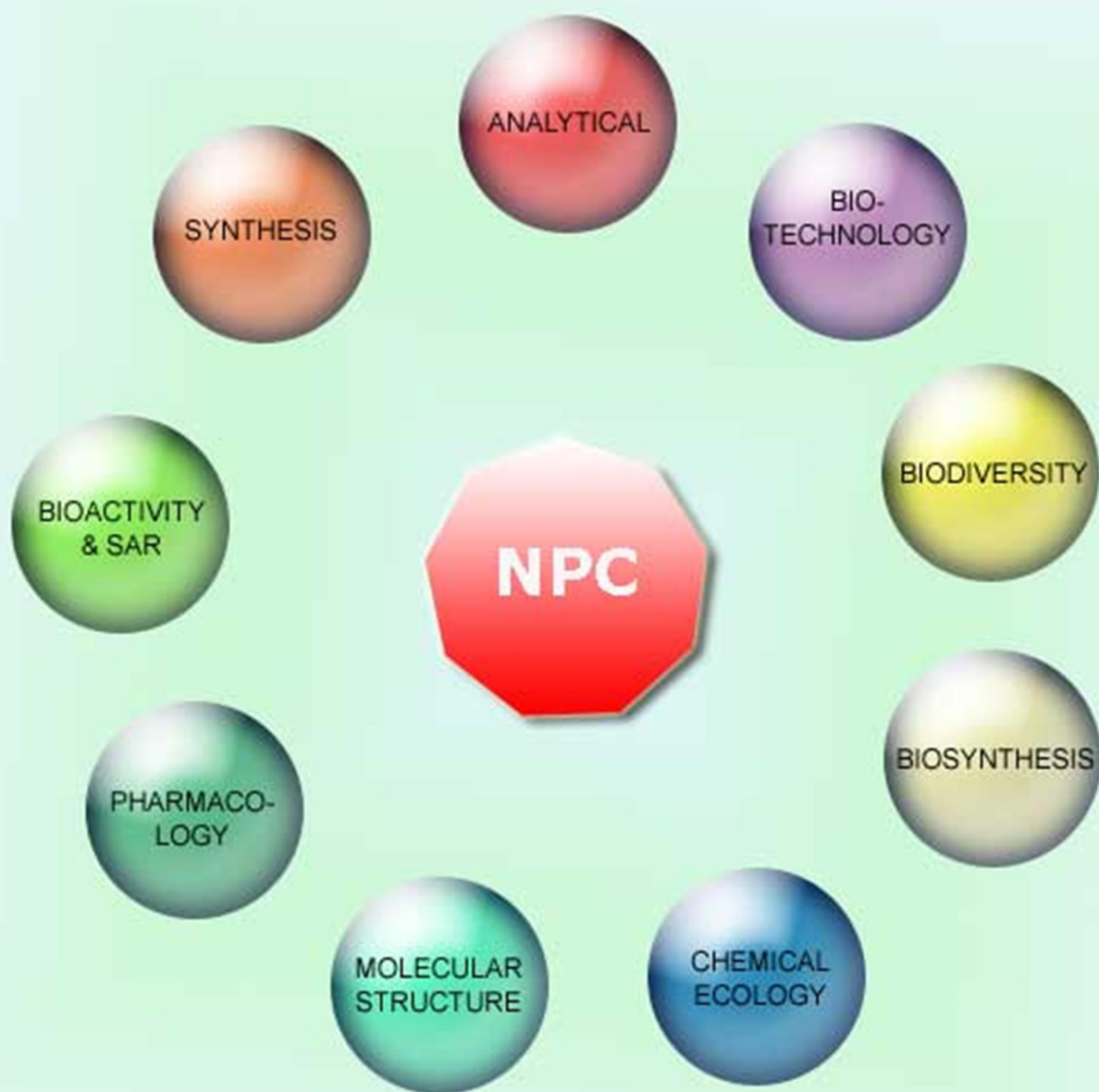


# NATURAL PRODUCT COMMUNICATIONS

An International Journal for Communications and Reviews Covering all  
Aspects of Natural Products Research



Volume 8. Issue 10. Pages 1353-1506. 2013  
ISSN 1934-578X (printed); ISSN 1555-9475 (online)  
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## Identification of a Xanthine Oxidase-inhibitory Component from *Sophora flavescens* using NMR-based Metabolomics

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Received: June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013; Accepted: July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013

We demonstrate that NMR-based metabolomics studies can be used to identify xanthine oxidase-inhibitory compounds in the diethyl ether soluble fraction prepared from a methanolic extract of *Sophora flavescens*. Loading plot analysis, accompanied by direct comparison of <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra exhibiting characteristic signals, identified compounds exhibiting inhibitory activity. NMR analysis indicated that these characteristic signals were attributed to flavanones such as sophoraflavanone G and kurarinone. Sophoraflavanone G showed inhibitory activity towards xanthine oxidase in an *in vitro* assay.

**Keywords:** *Sophora flavescens*, Xanthine oxidase, NMR-based metabolomics, Flavanone.

A traditional drug, the root of *Sophora flavescens* (Sophorae Radix), is used because of its antifebrile, anodyne and anthelmintic activities [1]. Comprehensive chemical studies have revealed that the major active constituents of the root of *S. flavescens* are matrine alkaloids and a series of prenylated flavonoids [2, 3]. In our previous report, we demonstrated that nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR)-based metabolomics could be used to identify the country of growth (Japan or China) of this plant. Principal component analysis (PCA) conducted on extracts of *S. flavescens* grown in China provided data distinct from that of the extracts of plants grown in Japan. Moreover, loading plot analysis showed compounds characteristic of Japanese *S. flavescens* [4].

Metabolic profiling techniques were used to find possible correlations between the metabolic profile of a compound and its biological activity [5, 6]. Loading plot analysis comprises a useful strategy for the identification of biological compounds. NMR is a powerful method for such analysis because it allows the simultaneous detection of diverse groups of primary and secondary metabolites [7]. In addition, NMR can provide much more structural information about metabolites than other analytical techniques such as mass spectrometry (MS).

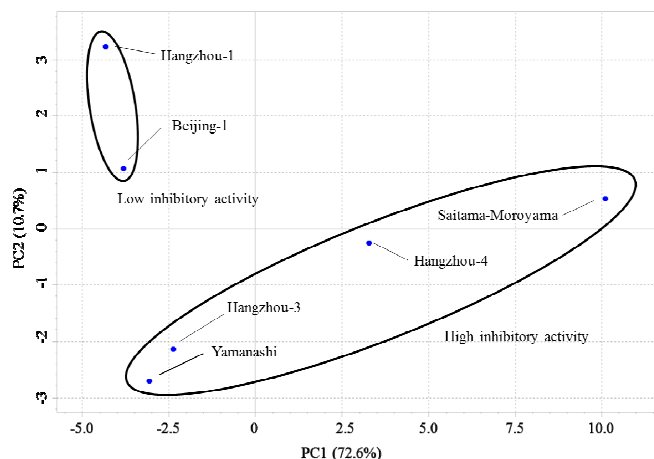
In this paper, we used <sup>1</sup>H NMR-based metabolic analysis to evaluate differences in xanthine oxidase-inhibitory activity of *S. flavescens* roots grown in various geographical locations. Methanolic extracts of the roots were partitioned between diethyl ether and H<sub>2</sub>O. The diethyl ether soluble fractions were dissolved in dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO)-*d*<sub>6</sub> at a concentration of 10 mg/mL for <sup>1</sup>H NMR measurements. These diethyl ether soluble fractions were also examined for inhibitory activity against xanthine oxidase according to a previous report [8, 9]. During the last step of purine metabolism, xanthine oxidase catalyzes the oxidation of xanthine and hypoxanthine into uric acid [10]. Superoxide anion radicals generated by xanthine oxidase are involved in various pathological

**Table 1:** Twenty batches of roots of *S. flavescens* and their inhibitory activity against xanthine oxidase.

No.	Sample name	Growing area	Harvest time (Month. Year)	Inhibition (%)
1	Hangzhou-1	China	10.2010	2.8
2	Hangzhou-2	China	3.2011	48.5
3	Hangzhou-3	China	3.2008	79.3
4	Hangzhou-4	China	9.2009	93.7
5	Beijing-1	China	10.2010	1.5
6	Beijing-2	China	10.2010	26.8
7	Beijing-3	China	3.2010	54.9
8	Shanghai-1	China	10.2010	38.1
9	Shanghai-2	China	10.2010	38.7
10	Shanghai-3	China	3.2011	46.7
11	Kujin	China	----	27.9
12	Yamanashi	Japan	3.2008	62.6
13	Kagoshima	Japan	10.2010	84.0
14	Tokushima	Japan	10.2010	7.9
15	Shiga	Japan	10.2010	30.7
16	Kanagawa	Japan	3.2011	14.7
17	Chiba	Japan	7.2011	38.5
18	Saitama-Ogose	Japan	7.2012	17.6
19	Saitama-Moroyama	Japan	7.2012	98.2
20	Seoul	Korea	8.2011	19.5
21	Allopurinol			70.7

states such as hepatitis, inflammation, ischemia-reperfusion, carcinogenesis, and aging [11]. Therefore, a xanthine oxidase inhibitor could be a candidate therapeutic agent against not only hyperuricemia, but also lifestyle-related diseases caused by superoxide anion radicals. Twenty batches of *S. flavescens* roots harvested from plants growing in different areas were used in this research (Table 1).

<sup>1</sup>H NMR spectral data were processed using the program 'Alice2 for Metabolome' version 5.0 (JEOL). This program can integrate NMR spectroscopy and multivariate pattern-recognition methods such as PCA into a single interface.



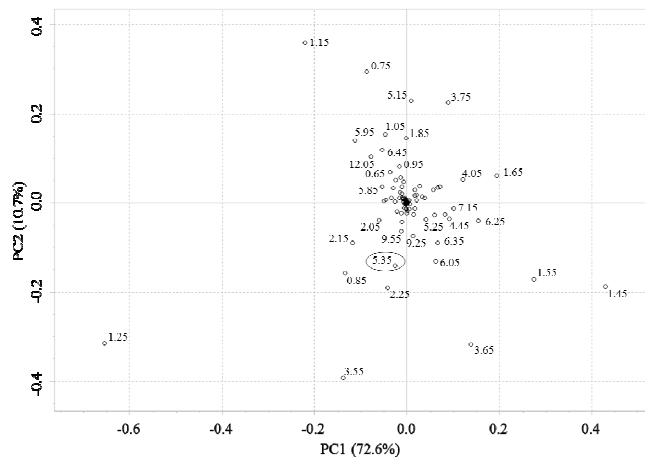
**Figure 1:** PCA score plot of PC1-PC2, in which 138 variables were equally accounted for in the data sets.

The present study is a part of a series of analyses of crude material mixtures obtained from natural sources. We previously reported the categorization of *Sophorae Radix* [4] and mulberry leaves by NMR-based metabolomics [12], the identification of *Glycyrrhiza* species using direct analysis by real time mass spectrometry (DART-MS) [13], and the analysis of chalcones from *Angelica keiskei* by applying diffusion ordered spectroscopy (DOSY) and relaxation ordered spectroscopy (ROSY) [14].

We investigated the xanthine oxidase-inhibitory activity of diethyl ether soluble fractions of methanolic extracts from *S. flavescens* harvested from various places. The results in Table 1 show that the fraction listed as “Saitama-Moroyama” prepared from *S. flavescens* grown in Moroyama Town, Saitama prefecture (Japan), showed the strongest inhibitory activity, whereas the fraction listed as “Beijing-1” prepared from a plant grown in Beijing (China) showed very little inhibitory activity (Table 1). A previous paper reported that methanol extracts of *S. flavescens* did not show inhibitory activity against xanthine oxidase [8]. As the results of our present study indicate, the inhibitory activity of extracts from *S. flavescens* towards xanthine oxidase may depend on their place of cultivation and the time of harvest.

To identify the inhibitory active components, the diethyl ether soluble fractions were subjected to NMR-based metabolomics studies. We selected four diethyl ether soluble fractions showing inhibitory activity (Hangzhou-3, Hangzhou-4, Saitama-Moroyama and Yamanashi) and two that did not (Beijing-1 and Hangzhou-1). The  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra were subjected to PCA. All 138 variables in the bucketed regions (see Experimental Procedures) were equally accounted for in the data sets. The PCA score plot of principal component (PC) 1 (the greatest variance in the data) and PC 2 (the second greatest variance in the data, orthogonal with PC1) showed clear independent cluster formation (Figure 1). The scores of PC1, PC2, PC3 and the residuals were 72.6, 10.7, 9.3 and 7.3%, respectively. The values of PC1 and PC2 were used to identify the inhibitory components against xanthine oxidase in each batch of roots. The score sum of PC1 and PC2 was 83.1%, which was sufficient to identify active components. Loading plot analysis was proposed for identifying potential components exhibiting inhibitory activity towards xanthine oxidase in *S. flavescens* extracts.

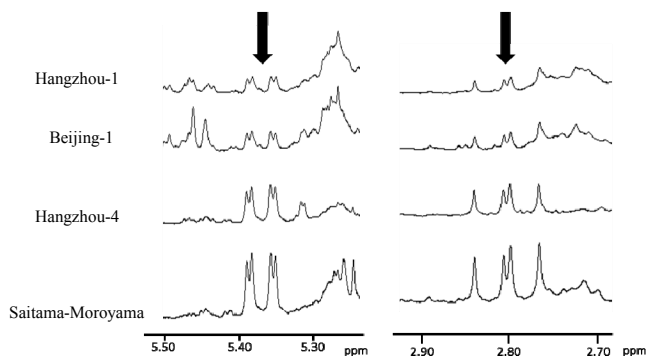
As shown in Figure 2, loading plot analysis showed the most relevant variables for the two clusters in the PCA score plot. We have searched for characteristic signals using data present in



**Figure 2:** Loading plot derived from the  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra of *S. flavescens* indicating low and high inhibitory activities against xanthine oxidase.

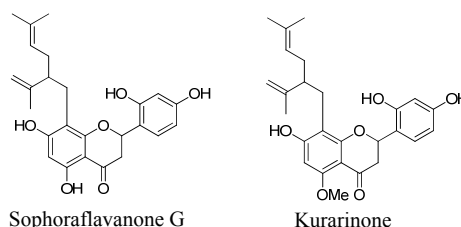
Figure 2, that appeared only in diethyl ether soluble fractions showing high inhibitory activity against xanthine oxidase. Direct comparison of their  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra was conducted based on the results of loading plot analysis.

The signal at  $\delta$  5.35 (circled in Figure 2) was observed clearly in  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra of inhibitory active fractions (Figure 3). The signal at  $\delta$  2.80 was also detected selectively in  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra of active fractions. This signal appeared near the DMSO signal ( $\delta$  2.49). The integrated region from 2.30–3.50 ppm contained solvent signals that were removed for PCA. Thus, the  $\delta$  2.80 signal was not detected in the loading plot. The signals indicated with arrows in Figure 3 are characteristic of H-2 and H-3 in flavanones, as already reported [15].



**Figure 3:**  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra of the diethyl ether soluble fraction of *S. flavescens*. Arrows indicate signals characteristic of the flavanone structure. Hangzhou-4 and Saitama-Moroyama showed high inhibitory activity against xanthine oxidase.

In previous studies several flavanones, for example, sophoraflavanone G and kurarinone (Figure 4), were isolated from *S. flavescens* [15].



**Figure 4:** Structure of sophoraflavanone G and kurarinone.

**Table 2:** Xanthine oxidase inhibitory activities of flavanones.

	Inhibition (%)		
	1 $\mu$ M	10 $\mu$ M	100 $\mu$ M
Sophoraflavanone G	25.4	35.6	53.8
Kurarinone	0	0	36.4
Allopurinol	69.4	—	—

Thus, sophoraflavanone G and kurarinone were examined for their inhibitory activity against xanthine oxidase. As shown in Table 2, sophoraflavanone G provided 53.8% inhibition (100  $\mu$ M).

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that analysis of the component pattern of *S. flavescens* is a useful tool for finding active compounds that inhibit xanthine oxidase.

## Experimental

**Sample collection:** Twenty batches of roots of *S. flavescens* were collected from different regions (Table 1). All the voucher specimens, identified by Professor Yoshiaki Shirataki and Dr Tatsuo Fukuda, were deposited in the laboratory of Pharmacognosy & Natural Medicines, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Science, Josai University, Japan. Sample No. 11 (*Sophorae Radix*, Kujin) was purchased from UCHIDA WAKANYAKU Ltd (Tokyo, Japan).

**Preparation of *S. flavescens* root extracts for NMR analysis:** Each of 20 batches of dried root of *S. flavescens* was extracted in methanol for 3 h under reflux. The methanolic extract was evaporated *in vacuo* and the residue dissolved in water. The aqueous soluble fraction was partitioned with diethyl ether. After evaporation of diethyl ether, DMSO- $d_6$  was added to provide a residue concentration of 10 mg/mL. The samples were analyzed using  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectroscopy.

**NMR spectroscopy:**  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra were recorded at room temperature on a 400 MHz Agilent-400MR-vnmrs 400 spectrometer (Agilent). Each spectrum consisted of 65,536 complex data points and a spectral width of 6,410.3 Hz, obtained by 16 scans with a repetition time of 5.0 sec and a relaxation delay of 1.50 sec per scan. The detection pulse flip angle was set at 45°.

**NMR data reduction procedures and pattern recognition analysis:** Each NMR spectrum was regimented into 150 regions, 0.1 ppm wide, over the range -1.50 to 13.5 ppm. Each segment of the spectral regions (bucket) was integrated. Any integrated regions from 2.30 to 3.50 ppm that contained solvent and water signals were eliminated from the data table, then the total data were

reduced to 138 regions. The remaining integral values of each spectrum were normalized over 100 total summed integrals to compensate for any differences in concentration between *S. flavescens* extracts. Spectral processing was performed using ALICE2 for Metabolome version 5.0 software (JEOL).

**Assay of inhibitory activity towards xanthine oxidase:** Xanthine oxidase inhibitory activity was assayed under aerobic conditions, based on the procedure reported by Noro *et al* [9]. Assay mixtures consisting of 10  $\mu$ L of test sample solution, 230  $\mu$ L of 70 mM phosphate buffer (pH 7.5), and 85  $\mu$ L of enzyme solution (0.01 units/mL in 70 mM phosphate buffer, pH 7.5) were prepared. After preincubation at 25°C for 15 min, the reaction was initiated by the addition of 170  $\mu$ L of substrate solution (150  $\mu$ M xanthine in 70 mM phosphate buffer, pH 7.5). The assay mixture was incubated at 25°C for 30 min. The reaction was stopped by adding 70  $\mu$ L of 1N HCl, and the generated uric acid was measured by HPLC analysis. A blank control was incubated without the enzyme solution. After the addition of 1N HCl to stop the reaction, the enzyme solution was added. Xanthine oxidase inhibitory activity was expressed as the percent inhibition, calculated as  $(1-B/A) \times 100$ , where A and B are the activities of the enzyme without and with test sample, respectively. The crude extracts were dissolved in DMSO to give final concentrations of 50  $\mu$ g/mL. Allopurinol, a known inhibitor of xanthine oxidase, was dissolved in phosphate buffer at a final concentration of 1  $\mu$ M. Experiments were carried out in duplicate.

**Apparatus and HPLC analysis conditions:** A Shimadzu LC20A system comprised a quaternary solvent delivery system, an on-line degasser, a column temperature controller, and a PDA detector coupled with an analytical workstation. A PEGASIL ODS SP100AQ column (Senshu Pak, 5  $\mu$ m, 150  $\times$  4.6 mm) was used. The sample injection volume was 10  $\mu$ L. The detection wavelength was 254 nm, the flow rate was 1.0 mL min<sup>-1</sup>, and the column temperature was maintained at 30°C. Gradient elution was achieved with solvent A (20 mM phosphate buffer) and solvent B (60% aqueous methanol). The gradient program was: 0% solvent B for 5 min, 0% to 25% over 15 min, further increased from 25% to 100% over 1 min, and then 100% B for 10 min.

**Acknowledgments** - The authors would like to express appreciation to Professor Kazuo Koike (Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Toho University) for providing *S. flavescens* cultivated in Chiba prefecture, Japan.

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<b>Inhibitory Effects of Stilbene Derivatives from <i>Parthenocissus tricuspidata</i> on Adipocyte Differentiation and Pancreatic Lipase</b> Sang Hoon Lee, Qing Liu, Bang Yeon Hwang and Mi Kyeong Lee	1439
<b>HPLC-PDA Analysis and Anti-inflammatory Effects of Mori Cortex Radicis</b> Chang-Seob Seo, Hye-Sun Lim, Soo-Jin Jeong, Hye-kyung Ha and Hyeun-Kyoo Shin	1443
<b>Development of HPLC Fingerprint for Quality Assessment of Bulbus Lili</b> Kunming Qin, Hao Cai, Lijuan Zheng, Miao Zhang, Xinghai Zhang, Jie Gu and Baochang Cai	1447
<b>Antifungal and Antioxidant Pyrrole Derivative from <i>Piper pedicellatum</i></b> Chandan Tamuly, Partha P. Dutta, Manobjyoti Bordoloi and Jayanta Bora	1451
<b>Quorum Sensing: A Non-conventional Target for Antibiotic Discovery</b> Varsha Naik and Girish Mahajan	1455
<b>An Alkenylresorcinol Derivative from <i>Hakea sericea</i> Fruits and their Antimicrobial Activity</b> Ângelo Luís, Carla Cruz, Ana Paula Duarte and Fernanda Domingues	1459
<b>Glucosinolates in Two Endemic Plants of the <i>Aurinia</i> Genus and their Chemotaxonomic Significance</b> Ivica Blažević, Gina Rosalinda De Nicola, Sabine Montaut and Patrick Rollin	1463
<b>Proteinaceous Protease Inhibitor from <i>Lawsonia inermis</i>: Purification, Characterization and Antibacterial Activity</b> Arvind Dabhade, Priti Patel and Ulhas Patil	1467
<b>Essential Oils Composition of <i>Croton</i> Species from the Amazon</b> Nathalie A. Turiel, Alcy F. Ribeiro, Elisângela Elena N. Carvalho, Vanessa D. Domingos, Flávia Cristina A. Lucas, Léa Maria M. Carreira, Eloisa Helena A. Andrade and José Guilherme S. Maia	1471
<b>Comparative Analysis of the Essential Oil Composition of <i>Murraya paniculata</i> and <i>M. exotica</i></b> Hai-Ning Lv, Xiao-Yu Guo, Peng-Fei Tu and Yong Jiang	1473
<b>Chemical Composition of the Essential Oil of <i>Erechtites valerianaefolia</i> from Mérida, Venezuela</b> Johanna Hernández, Ismer Bracho, Luis B. Rojas-Fermin, Alfredo Usubillaga and Juan Carmona	1477
<b>Effect of Different Drying Methods on the Essential Oils of Mint (<i>Mentha haplocalyx</i>)</b> Yachun Shu, Yajun Chen, Kunming Qin, Hao Cai, Li Wu, Huan Li, Lijuan Xu and Baochang Cai	1479
<b><i>Juglans regia</i> and <i>J. nigra</i>, Two Trees Important in Traditional Medicine: A Comparison of Leaf Essential Oil Compositions and Biological Activities</b> Prajwal Paudel, Prabodh Satyal, Noura S. Dosoky, Samjhana Maharjan and William N. Setzer	1481
 <b><u>Review/Account</u></b>	
<b>Natural Compounds against Flaviviral Infections</b> Md Abubakr, Subhash C Mandal and Sugato Banerjee	1487
<b>Microwave-Assisted Techniques (MATs); a Quick Way to Extract a Fragrance: A Review</b> Antonios K. Kokolakis and Spyridon K. Golfopoulos	1493



# Natural Product Communications

## 2013

Volume 8, Number 10

### Contents

<u>Original Paper</u>	<u>Page</u>
<b>Guaioi - A Naturally Occurring Insecticidal Sesquiterpene</b> Tao Liu, Chun-Juan Wang, Hui-Qin Xie and Qing Mu	1353
<b>3-Oxoabolene and 1-Oxocurcuphenol, Aromatic Bisabolanes from the Sponge <i>Myrmekioderma</i> sp.</b> Afsaneh Yegdaneh, Sumaitt Putchakarn, Supreeya Yuenyongsawad, Alireza Ghannadi and Anuchit Plubrukarn	1355
<b>Acanthoic Acid Inhibits Melanogenesis through Tyrosinase Down-regulation and Melanogenic Gene Expression in B16 Melanoma Cells</b> Weon-Jong Yoon, Young-Min Ham, Hun Seok Yoon, Wook-Jae Lee, Nam Ho Lee and Chang-Gu Hyun	1359
<b>Cembranoids from the Cultured Soft Coral <i>Simularia gibberosa</i></b> Hsiu-Fen Lin, Huey-Jen Su, Nai-Lun Lee and Jui-Hsin Su	1363
<b>Major Constituents of <i>Boswellia carteri</i> Resin Exhibit Cyclooxygenase Enzyme Inhibition and Antiproliferative Activity</b> Sami I. Ali, Chuan-Rui Zhang, Amal A. Mohamed, Farouk K. EL-Baz, Ahmad K. Hegazy, Maimona A. Kord and Muraledharan G. Nair	1365
<b>Cucurbitane-type Triterpenes from <i>Citrullus lanatus</i> (Watermelon) Seeds</b> Takashi Kikuchi, Rina Okada, Yu Harada, Kenji Ikushima, Takahiro Yamakawa, Takeshi Yamada and Reiko Tanaka	1367
<b>A New Taraxerol Derivative from the Roots of <i>Microcos tomentosa</i></b> Sutin Kaennakam, Jirapast Sichaem, Suttira Khumkratok, Pongpun Siripong and Santi Tip-pyang	1371
<b>Two New Triterpenoids from <i>Gelsemium elegans</i> and <i>Aglaia odorata</i></b> Bing Liu, Lin Yang, You-Kai Xu, Shang-Gao Liao, Huai-Rong Luo and Zhi Na	1373
<b>Inhibition of Tumor Cells Multidrug Resistance by Cucumarioside A<sub>2</sub>-2, Frondoside A and their Complexes with Cholesterol</b> Ekaterina S. Menchinskaya, Dmitry L. Aminin, Sergey A. Avilov, Aleksandra S. Silchenko, Pelageya V. Andryjashchenko, Vladimir I. Kalinin and Valentin A. Stonik	1377
<b>Anticholinesterase and Antioxidant Activities of Fucoxanthin Purified from the Microalga <i>Phaeodactylum tricornutum</i></b> Arthitaya Kawee-ai, Ampin Kuntiya and Sang Moo Kim	1381
<b>Impact of Ploidy Change on Secondary Metabolites and Photochemical Efficiency in <i>Solanum bulbocastanum</i></b> Immacolata Caruso, Fabrizio Dal Piaz, Nicola Malafronte, Nunziatina De Tommasi, Riccardo Aversano, Cristian Wulff Zottele, Maria-Teresa Scarano and Domenico Carputo	1387
<b>Alkaloids from an Endophytic <i>Streptomyces</i> sp. YIM66017</b> Hao Zhou, Yabin Yang, Jucheng Zhang, Tianfeng Peng, Lixing Zhao, Lihua Xu and Zhongtao Ding	1393
<b>Novel Decaturin Alkaloids from the Marine-Derived Fungus <i>Penicillium oxalicum</i></b> Pei-le Wang, Dan-yi Li, Lei-rui Xie, Xin Wu, Hui-ming Hua and Zhan-lin Li	1397
<b>Monanchomycalin C, a New Pentacyclic Guanidine Alkaloid from the Far-Eastern Marine Sponge <i>Monanchora pulchra</i></b> Ksenya M. Tabakmakher, Vladimir A. Denisenko, Alla G. Guzii, Pavel S. Dmitrenok, Sergey A. Dyshlovoy, Hyi-Seung Lee and Tatyana N. Makarieva	1399
<b>Antiinflammatory and Antioxidant Flavonoids from <i>Helichrysum kraussii</i> and <i>H. odoratissimum</i> Flowers</b> Percival B. Legoale, Mahlori J. Mashimbye and Teunis van Ree	1403
<b>Antiproliferative Effect of Flavonoids from the Halophyte <i>Vitex rotundifolia</i> on Human Cancer Cells</b> You Ah Kim, Hojun Kim and Youngwan Seo	1405
<b>Identification of a Xanthine Oxidase-inhibitory Component from <i>Sophora flavescens</i> using NMR-based Metabolomics</b> Yuiichiro Suzuki, Yuka Hasuike, Moeka Hirabayashi, Tatsuo Fukuda, Yoshihito Okada and Yoshiaki Shirataki	1409
<b>Flavone C-Glycosides from <i>Lychnis senno</i> and their Antioxidative Activity</b> Hari Prasad Devkota, Kumiko Fukusako, Koji Ishiguro and Shoji Yahara	1413
<b>Anti-oxidative and DNA Protecting Effects of Flavonoids-rich <i>Scutellaria lateriflora</i></b> Madhukar Lohani, Manuj Ahuja, Manal A Buabeid, Dean Schwartz, Dennis Shannon, Vishnu Suppiramaniam, Barbara Kemppainen and Muralikrishnan Dhanasekaran	1415
<b>Polyphenolic Compounds from Callus Cultures of <i>Iris pseudacorus</i></b> Darya V. Tarbeeva, Sergey A. Fedoreyev, Marina V. Veselova, Anatolii I. Kalinovskiy, Ludmila D. Seletskaya, Tamara I. Mazurok and Victor P. Bulgakov	1419
<b>Pterocarpanes from the Root Bark of <i>Aeschynomene fascicularis</i></b> Edgar Caamal-Fuentes, Rosa Moo-Puc, Luis W. Torres-Tapia and Sergio R. Peraza-Sanchez	1421
<b>Cytotoxic Constituents of <i>Pachyrhizus tuberosus</i> from Peruvian Amazon</b> Olga Leuner, Jaroslav Havlik, Milos Budesinsky, Vladimir Vrkoslav, Jessica Chu, Tracey D. Bradshaw, Jana Hummelova, Petra Miksatkova, Oldrich Lapcik, Irena Valterova and Ladislav Kokoska	1423
<b>(+)-Rumphiin and Polyalthurea, New Compounds from the Stems of <i>Polyalthia rumphii</i></b> Tian-Shan Wang, You-Ping Luo, Jing Wang, Meng-Xiong He, Ming-Guo Zhong, Ying Li and Xiao-Ping Song	1427
<b>Citriquinones A and B, New Benzoquinones from <i>Penicillium citrinum</i></b> P. K. Vinitha Ranji, S. Chandrani Wijeyaratne, K. Hector Jayawardana and G. M. Kamal B. Gunaherath	1431
<b>Potent Microbial and Tyrosinase Inhibitors from Stem Bark of <i>Bauhinia rufescens</i> (Fabaceae)</b> Aminu Muhammad and Hasnah Mohd Sirat	1435

Continued inside backcover