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Review Article

Essential oils: As Potential Larvicides

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Abstract



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Multiple synthetic products are used against mosquitoes to kill them and inhibit the transmission of these vector-borne diseases. The continuous use of these products produces detrimental effects on the environment and non-target organisms, which also develops resistance in the mosquito. In the last few decades, there has been a continuous exploration of herbal extract-based insecticides. These plants extract essential oils that have emerged as a potential eco-friendly alternative for the killing of larvae, the immature form of adult mosquitoes. In this review article, we focused on the larvicidal activity (LC₅₀ values) of plant extracts obtained from various parts of plants. We evaluated results obtained from numerous essential oil larvicidal activities against prominent vectors belonging to the genera *Anopheles*, *Aedes*, and *Culex*, among others, that had been reported in various scientific data bases. The mode of action of these plant extracts are also discussed with reference to insecticidal activity. The major limitation of essential oils with their overcome solutions through formulation development is also highlighted. This review article reported that essential oils are potential substitutes for the development of larvicides, which may be employed in vector-borne illness control programmes. Overall, this remarkable summary and organization of data may be used to design, develop, and optimise herbal-based formulations with potential larvicidal efficacy.

Keywords: Essential oils; Larvicidal Activity; Herbal extract; Vector born-diseases.

Introduction:

Mosquitoes act as vectors for the transmission of various life threatening diseases caused by parasites, human pathogens, and veterinary pathogens. It have a crucial role in the spread of multiple diseases, including malaria, dengue, yellow fever, viral encephalitis, chikungunya, leishmaniasis, and filariasis. These diseases have an elevated mortality rate, which has a negative impact on the global economy¹.

There are approximately 3556 mosquito species that exist worldwide, which are further classified into 112 genera. *Aedes aegypti*, *Culex quinquefasciatus*, and *Anopheles stephensi*² are the three primary mosquito vectors that infect half of the world's population. Mosquitoes have been designated as the "Public Enemy Number One" by the World Health Organization. Apart from mosquito bites, allergic reactions such as urticaria and angioedema can also be triggered by mosquito bites³.

As per WHO, 2012 report, almost world's 40% population under the risk of dengue virus illness transmitted by *Aedes aegypti*. Dengue become endemic to more than hundred countries of tropical and subtropical areas and every year 50-100 million cases of dengue virus infection reported⁴. According to a survey, dengue haemorrhagic fever causes more than fifty million infections each year, with half a million people being hospitalised. As per European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), 2021 survey, there have been over one million dengue virus disease cases confirmed in 2021 till august in Europe.

Malaria caused by plasmodium parasites which spread by bites of infected female mosquito *Anopheles stephensi*. According to World malaria report 2019, approximately 229 million cases reported globally. It primarily affects children under the age of five, accounting for 67 % (274000) of all malaria fatalities globally.

Yellow fever mainly endemic in tropical regions of Africa and South America while Chikungunya fever emerged in over sixty countries throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and the America. These also cause high global impact on economy and cause high rate of mortality⁵. In the last few decades, west Nile virus has arisen in the Americas, becoming endemic throughout the territory, while the Japanese encephalitis virus has disseminated to the Indian subcontinent and Australasia, predominantly affecting children⁶.

Preventive and control measures for mosquito control:

For an effective mosquito eradication plan, a variety of preventative measures based on various approaches are available. These are as;

Mosquito repellents:

These are products that, whether synthetic (eg. DEET) or natural (eg. Herbal products), protect the individual from mosquito bites. When mosquito repellents are applied to skin or clothing of individuals, the vapour layer emits an unpleasant odour or taste. This unpleasant smell repels the mosquito from human that prevents the spread of infection. Although it is a very important tactic for protecting individuals

from mosquito bites, its efficiency is slow⁷. Other effective approaches to restrict mosquito access in specific regions and preventing individual bites include insecticidal treated nets and window screens.

Preventing the mosquito breeding:

Breeding habitats include sewage water, stagnant water, septic tanks, natural and built containers such as pools, gutters, bamboo stumps, leaf axils, water tanks, etc. Various synthetic insecticides used to eradicate these mosquito breeding site. These breeding sites for the egg hatching and larvae development which efficient eliminate via the spraying insecticides or larvicides. It is one of the most effective and commonly utilised approaches⁸.

Biological Control of mosquitoes:

Larvivorous fishes, such as *Gambusia affinis* and *Poecilia reticulata* (Guppy), exist in nature and feed on mosquito larvae. WHO included these fishes in the biological management of malaria vectors and are put into stocking ponds, rivers, and water storage areas where people live⁹.

In the Biotechnology field, there are some biological techniques developed towards the elimination of mosquitoes such as the Sterile Insect Technique (known as "boosted SIT"),¹⁰ and World Mosquito Program's *Wolbachia* method¹¹. These approaches utilized the genetically modified mosquito strain for the vector population reduction or replacement. Toxins produced by bacteria, the soil-dwelling bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis Berliner var. israelensis* (Bti)¹² has been economically employed in recent decades. These toxins are specifically utilized in water lodging sites to kill the larvae of *A. aegypti* and *A. albopictus* mosquitoes. Despite the fact that it is an effective approach, incidences of resistance have been documented in certain publications¹³.

Synthetic insecticides like temephos, melathion, pyrethrin are frequently used in public health programme and significant response have been reported¹⁴. However, continued usage of these insecticides products developed resistance in the mosquito vector and also developed harmful impact on non-target organism and environment.

Thus, there is a need to develop eco-friendly tool for the mosquito larvae control which provides maximum results with least adverse effect. Plants based extracts or essential oils (EOs) proved as beneficial alternative source for mosquito control. Various herbal products frequently utilized in repellent products in various forms. These products provide efficient result as compare to chemical repellents and more safe¹⁵.

However, plant based products as larvicides showed to be more satisfactory results as these are eco-friendly, non-toxic, safe to use, and inexpensive. Plants have extraordinary properties in the form of multiple metabolites with high efficacy as insecticides. There are many scientific database exist that reported the efficacy of EOs as larvicidal, ovicidal, pupicidal, and oviposition deterrent activity.

Essential oils (EOs):

Essential oils are defined as volatile, natural, complex compounds having a very intense odour, flavour. These are produced by aromatic plants as their "secondary metabolites" or "by-products" of plants. These oily aromatic liquids components synthesized and stored in different parts of plants like roots, stem, leaves, bark, rhizome, flowers, and fruits and stored in complex structure like secretory cavities, epidermic cells or glandular trichomes¹⁶. Commonly hydro or steam distillation methods are preferred for the extraction of essential oils.

As per literature survey, around 17,500 aromatic plant species spread worldwide synthesized essential oils; belonging to families including *Solanaceae*, *Asteraceae*, *Cladophoraceae*, *Labiatae*, *Miliaceae*, *Oocystaceae*, *lamiaceae*, *Myrtaceae* and *Rutaceae*¹⁷.

Essential oils are very diverse natural compositions that comprise twenty–sixty components in varying concentrations. Two or three primary constituents are found in significant quantities (20–70%), whereas others are present in negligible proportions. These high concentrated chemical constituents contributed in the biological attributes of essential oils¹⁶. The constituents include two groups of diverse bio-synthetic origin in which major group have terpenes, terpenoids and the other one aromatic / aliphatic constituents¹⁸.

Use of Essential oils:

According to Code of Federal Regulations, US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recognized essential oils as GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) and some other compounds also preferred as antibacterial additives^{19, 20}.

During the middle ages, essential oils have been utilised for bactericidal, virucidal, fungicidal, antiparasitic, insecticidal, therapeutic, and aesthetic uses. Due to its aromatic fragrance, commercially utilized in perfumery, cosmetic products, and dentistry products. Essential oils are being used in the pharmaceutical sector in a variety of pharmaceutical formulations such as capsules, ointments, syrups, lotions, suppositories, aerosols, and sprays to treat a variety of illnesses.

In the food industry, demand for essential oils as food preservatives is increasing, as is advancement in food packaging and the fight against microorganisms that cause deadly food poisoning²¹ such as *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella typhimurium*, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Pseudomonas putida* and *staphylococcus aureus*.

Major Limitation of Essential oils:

Apart from various benefits, the proper uses of essential oils are very complicated because it requires suitable storage conditions and appropriate precautions. There are certain limitations with essential oils use such as:

- It's highly volatile nature.
- Rapid oxidation and degradation on exposure to air
- Poorly soluble in water.
- React with metal and plastic container
- Require protection from heat and direct light

These reasons makes it unsuitable for the directly use of essential oils as larvicides, there is a need to develop such type of pharmaceutical formulation that entrap essential oil and increase its efficacy as larvicidal.

Ghosh *et al.* 2010²² conducted a comprehensive investigation on the larvicidal efficacy of over 100 plant extracts against various therapeutically significant mosquitoes, primarily from the genera *Aedes*, *Anopheles*, and *Culex*. According to the findings of this study, the tested larva variants were shown to be vulnerable to the selected plant species to varying degrees as mention in table 1.

The literature review accomplished by analysing published literature in various scientific databases, such as Web of science, Scopus, PubMed, Science Direct, ACS Publication, Bentham Sciences, Wiley Online Library, Springer and Google Scholar. The keywords used to search literature including "Herbal larvicidal, Plant based larvicidal, Essential oils, Essential oils as larvicidal formulation, Mosquito larvicides formulation".

Table 1: Plant essential oils with their potential larvicidal activity

S. No.	Plant Name	Family	Part of plant used	Solvent used	Target Organism	LC ₅₀ (ppm)	Ref
1.	<i>Clitoria ternatea</i>	Fabaceae	Seed	Methanol	<i>A. stephensi</i> , <i>A. aegypti</i> , <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i> .	65.2 154.5 54.4	24
2.	<i>Allium cepa</i>	Amaryllidaceae	Peel	Aqueous, Chloroform Methanol	<i>A. stephensi</i>	52.08, 61.59 48.23	25
3.	<i>Citrullus colocynthis</i> , <i>Coccinia indica</i> , <i>Cucumis sativus</i> , <i>Momordica charantia</i> , <i>Trichosanthes anguina</i> ,	Cucurbitaceae		Petroleum ether Methanol Methanol Methanol Acetone	<i>A. aegypti</i> , <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i> .	74.57 309.46 492.73 199.14 554.20 88.24 377.69 623.80 207.61 842.34	26
4.	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i> <i>Cymbopogon winterianus</i> <i>Eucalyptus citriodora</i> <i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>	Poaceae Myrtaceae	Leave	Ethanol	<i>A. aegypti</i> ,	120.6 38.8 104.4 33.7	27
5.	<i>Allium Sativum</i> <i>Ferula asafoetida</i>	Amaryllidaceae Apiaceae.	Bulb, Gum oleoresin	Water	<i>C. Restuans</i> <i>C. Pipiens</i>	2.7 10.5 7.5 13.5	28
6.	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>	Apocynaceae	Leave	Water	<i>C. gelidus</i> <i>C. tritaeniorhynchus</i>	137.90 110.05	29
7.	<i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum</i>	Lauraceae	-	Ethanol	<i>Anopheles stephensi</i> .	37	30
8.	<i>Clinopodium macrostemon</i>	Lamiaceae	Leave	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	22.49	31
9.	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Lamiaceae	Leave	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>C. tritaeniorhynchus</i> , <i>A. albopictus</i> <i>A. subpictus</i>	14.01, 11.97 9.75	32
10.	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Caricaceae	Leave	Methanol	<i>A. aegypti</i>	82.18	33
11.	<i>Trachyspermum ammi</i> <i>Echinophora spinosa</i>	Apiaceae	Fruits Roots	Water (hydro distillation)	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	17.6 18.9	34
12.	<i>Tagetes patula</i>	Asteraceae	Fresh	Water	<i>A. aegypti</i>	13.57	35

			foliage	(Hydro-distillation)	<i>Anopheles stephensi</i> <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	12.08 22.33	
13.	<i>Ammi visnaga</i>	Umbelliferae	Seeds	Methanol	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	18.00	36
14.	<i>Argemone mexicana</i>	Papaveraceae	Flower	Ethanol	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	18.61	37
15.	<i>Zanthoxylum piperitum</i>	Rutaceae	Bark	Methanol	<i>C. pipiens pallens</i>	10.50	38
16.	<i>Menthe spicata</i>	Lamiaceae	Leaves	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>Anopheles stephensi</i> , <i>A. aegypti</i> <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	49.71, 56.08 62.62	39
17.	<i>Bunium persicum</i>	Apiaceae	Fruits	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>Anopheles stephensi</i>	27.42	40
18.	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Apiaceae	Leaves	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>A. aegypti</i>	6.87	41
19.	<i>Hyptis suaveolens</i> <i>Lantana camara</i> <i>Nerium oleander</i> <i>Tecoma stans</i>	Lamiaceae Verbenaceae Apocynaceae Bignoniaceae	Leaves	Petroleum ether Petroleum ether Methanol Petroleum ether	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	38.39 10.63 35.82 19.26	3
20.	<i>Myristica fragrans</i>	Myristicaceae	Seeds	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>A. aegypti</i>	28.2	42
21.	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Apiaceae	Seeds	Water (hydro distillation)	<i>C. pipiens</i>	40.00	43
22.	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Lamiaceae	Leaves, Flowers	-	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	76.61	44
23.	<i>Cassia fistula</i>	Fabaceae	Leaves	Methanol	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i> <i>Anopheles stephensi</i>	17.97 20.57	45
24.	<i>Momordica charantia</i>	Cucurbitaceae	Fruits	Hexane	<i>Anopheles stephensi</i> <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	66.05 96.11	46
25.	<i>Artemisia annua</i> <i>Cassia fistula</i> <i>Centella asiatica</i> <i>Datura stramonium</i> <i>Eucalyptus globulus</i>	Asteraceae Fabaceae Apiaceae Solanaceae Myrtaceae	Leaves	Ethanol Water	<i>Anopheles stephensi</i>	1.77 3.30 1.53 9.31 1.15	47
26.	<i>Zingiber officinale</i> <i>Roscoe</i>	Zingiberaceae	Leaves	-	<i>A. aegypti</i>	46	48
27.	<i>Stemodia maritima</i>	Scrophulariaceae	Stem	-	<i>A. aegypti</i>	23	49
28.	<i>Tinospora crispa</i>	Menispermaceae	Stem	Water	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	16.95	50
29.	<i>Piper betle</i>	Piperaceae	Leaves	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>A. aegypti</i>	0.63	51

30.	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Lamiaceae	Leaves	Water (Hydro-distillation)	<i>C. tritaeniorhynchus</i> <i>A. albopictus</i>	14.01 11.97	52
31.	<i>Zingiber collinsii</i>	Zingiberaceae	Rhizome	Water(Hydro-distillation)	<i>A. albopictus</i> <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	25.51 50.11	53

Table 2 Essential oils encapsulated formulation as potential larvicides

S. No	Plant Name	Formulation	Materials used	Droplet size	Target organism	LC ₅₀ (ppm)	Ref
1.	<i>Ocimum basilicum L.</i>	Nano emulsion	Polysorbate 80 /low energy method	-	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	96.87% mortality at 100 ppm	54
2.	<i>Mentha Piperita</i>	Nano emulsion	Tweem 20, water /low energy spontaneous emulsification method	39.2nm	<i>An. Stephensi</i> <i>An. culicifacies</i>	123 48	55
3.	<i>Lippia sidoides</i>	Nanoparticles	Chitosan, Angico gum	18.7nm	<i>A. aegypti</i>	34	56
4.	<i>Eucalyptus oil</i>	Micro beads	Chitosan, Tween 80	-	<i>C. pipiens</i>	0.419mg/l	57
5.	<i>Azadirachta indica, Pongamia glabra</i>	Calcium alginate beads	Tween 80, Sodium alginate	1.83mm	<i>A. aegypti</i>	3.1 g/l	58
6.	<i>Geranium maculatum, Citrus bergamia</i>	Polymeric nanoparticles	Chitosan, Tween 80/ionic gelation	<535 nm	<i>C. pipiens</i>	22.63 38.52	59
7.	<i>Pterodon emarginatus</i>	Nano emulsion	Polysorbate 80/sorbitan monooleate/low energy method	151.0 ± 2.25 160.7 ± 1.49	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	34.75 7.31-51.86	60
8.	<i>Trachyspermum ammi</i> <i>Illicium verum</i>	β-cyclodextrin (β-CD) inclusion complexes	β-cyclodextrin, Ethanol	-	<i>A. aegypti</i>	23.93	61
9.	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Silver nanoparticles	Silver nitrate, Deionized sterilized Water	12 ± 6	<i>A. aegypti</i> <i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	<10 <10	62
10.	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Nano emulsion	Tween 20 / High energy method	-	<i>C. quinquefasciatus</i>	11.75	63
11.	<i>Mentha spicata</i>	Nano emulsion	Tween 80/ ultrasonic emulsification	97.8 nm	<i>C. pipiens</i>	43.57	64
12.	<i>Cirtus sinensis</i>	Nano emulsion	Tween 20/ ultrasonic method.	78.8±14.2 nm	<i>C. pipiens</i>	27.4	65
13.	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	Nano emulsion	Polysorbate 20/low energy method	<200	<i>A. aegypti</i>	250.00	66

*Abbreviations- ppm – parts per million, HD- Hydro distillation, *A. aegypti*- *Aedes aegypti*, *An. stephensi*-*Anopheles stephensi*, *C. quinquefasciatus*- *Culex quinquefasciatus*, *A. albopictus*- *Aedes albopictus*, *C. tritaeniorhynchus*- *Culex tritaeniorhynchus*. *C. pipiens*- *Culex pipiens*

Mechanism of action of essential oils as potential larvicides:

Despite the fact that there are several databases accessible that focus on the efficacy of essential oils as possible larvicides, there is little information available on the mechanism of action of these secondary metabolites.

The most of these volatile oils interrupt the central nervous system by inhibiting acetyl cholinesterase (AChE), resulting in the death of mosquito larvae due to intoxication. Essential oils containing monoterpenes, such as *Zingiber officinale* EOs, have been identified as acetyl-cholinesterase inhibitors⁵³. Scotti *et al.*⁵⁴ concluded that the lipophilicity of volatile oils has a significant impact in larvicidal action and is linked closely with independent factors with a hydrophobic profile.

Double bonds play an important role in the larvicidal efficacy of natural biomolecules because hydrogenation of these bonds lowers the lipophilic nature of such components, limiting their entry via the larval cuticle⁵⁵. Various essential oil constituents interfere with the endocrinologic process of insects, inhibiting morphogenesis. These essential oils have neurotoxic or insecticidal effects⁵⁶.

In insects, octopamine serves as a neurotransmitter, neuromodulator, as well as essential oil target site. The components of essential oil inhibited the octopamine receptors, resulting in acute and sub lethal behavioural consequences⁵⁶. As a result, it's known that the bio constituents of EOs have a variety of modes of action, as well as different levels of ability to pierce the insect cuticle and occupy their bodies, which is closely connected to their ability to offer a pesticidal impact.

Future prospect of essential oils as larvicides:

EOs are recognised to be attractive plant compounds that can be utilised in a wide range of possibilities, including plant protection, human and animal health protection, and vector control. In terms of mosquito control, EOs are now employed mostly as sources of active ingredients for different repellents⁵⁷. Simultaneously, appropriate EOs have been explored as possible active ingredients in non-toxic botanical pesticides for use against adult mosquitoes and their larvae^{58, 59}.

Researchers explored and published numerous literature work on the efficacy of essential oils as potent larvicides and developed multiple formulations. These formulations developed to observe the efficacy of essential oils on multiple genera of mosquitoes. Although there is no commercial product available based on the essential oils as active components in the larvicidal product.

It may be possible due to various consequences with essential oil as highly volatile in nature, degraded rapidly by environmental factors, highly expensive due to minimum yield with maximum plant extract. Essential oils easily evaporate in nature if not stored with precaution and declines their biological property; major limitation with essential oil use as larvicides⁶⁰. Having all these limitations, essential oils arise as promising alternative approach to synthetic larvicides products. However, scientists overcome these problems via suitable formulation development by encapsulation methods or essential oils stabilization techniques⁶¹. Nano-emulsion, micro-emulsion, silver nanoparticles and polymeric beads are developed more frequently as compare to other formulation as mentioned in table 2.

Silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) have been reported to be an appealing option to direct plant based extracts, as silver metal

has antibacterial effects, and when combined with certain plants, it boosts larvicidal action⁶².

Nanoemulsions are widely preferred by researchers as they enhance the solubility of poorly water soluble drugs. Nano-emulsion formulated by various scientists incorporating multiple essential oils with surfactant and co-surfactant. It proven to be an efficient method for preserving the biological attributes of essential oils while increasing their potency⁶³.

Based on the literature review, it has been determined that both nano-emulsions and silver nanoparticles of selected essential oil exhibit substantial effectiveness against selected mosquito strains⁶⁴. Polymeric beads have emerged as a new choice for larvicidal products since they encapsulate a large number of essential oils and release them in a regulated manner, providing a longer effect⁶⁵.

It is crucial to monitor the detrimental impacts of essential oils in non-target organisms in order to continue using them commercially. Only a few studies focused into the non-target effects of essential oils as larvicidal agents. Although essential oils are non-toxic, safe to use, eco-friendly, sometimes become little toxic against small crustaceans^{66, 66}.

Based on particular studies, toxic effects are frequent as a result of a hypothesized mode of action or the use of a large amount of essential oils. Few essential oils have been reported to have an anaesthetic or sedative effect on fish in some experiments⁶⁷.

However, when all factors were considered, the use of essential oils as larvicides resulted in the lowest toxicity and highest efficacy if compared to synthetic larvicides.

Conclusion:

From this study, we can conclude that essential oils emerge as promising approach to natural eco-friendly larvicidal agents. These proved safe, easy to use and developed as botanical larvicides products. Developing larvicides product by using essential oils minimizes the toxicity and resistance developed by synthetic chemical insecticides. However, in order to develop a more sustainable product, there is a need to focus on field studies of the larvicidal properties of these essential oils alone or in combination.

Conflict of interest:

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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