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A review on water mint (*Mentha aquatica* L.): Phenolic compounds and essential oils

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ABSTRACT

Mentha aquatica L. (water mint) is a medicinal plant with many novel compositions. The phenolic compounds and essential oils in *Mentha aquatica* L. played an important role in many types of diseases treatments such as flatulence, anorexia, indigestion, ulcerative colitis, etc. However, there are still little data concerning these compounds and their functions. This study aimed to review the biological activities, phenolic compounds, and essential oils in *Mentha aquatica* L.

Keywords: biological activities, essential oil, herbal plant, *Mentha aquatica* L., phenolic compound, water mint

1. Introduction

Medicinal plants and their derived compounds (phytochemicals) have been used for 60,000 years. Plants have become responsible for more than 30% of all medicines. Plant materials play an important role in primary care or disease treatment (Tafrihi et al., 2021).

Anticancer pharmaceuticals, antibiotics, and immunomodulatory drugs are only a few of the many drugs developed from plants. Herbs also have a pleasant flavor and can be used as flavoring, seasoning, and food in the kitchen (Tafrihi et al., 2021).

Mentha is a genus of aromatic and medicinal plants that belongs to the Lamiaceae family (El Hassani, 2020). There are around 42 species of *Mentha*, 15 hybrids, and hundreds of subspecies and cultivars (Salehi et al., 2018).

For example, *Mentha arvensis* L., *Mentha aquatica* L., *Mentha spicata* L., *Mentha longifolia* L., and *Mentha suaveolens* Ehrh., have produced 11 hybrids (Mamadalieva et al., 2020).

Many essential oils and biologically active substances are found in the epidermal glands of *Mentha* plants, including phenolics, tannins, terpenes, terpenoids, quinones, coumarins, flavonoids, alkaloids, sterols, and saponins (El Hassani, 2020).

Mentha aquatica L. is a perennial herbaceous rhizomatous plant that belongs to the Lamiaceae family. *Mentha aquatica* L. is known as a medicinal plant and is a therapy for many types of disorders (Do et al., 2015). Although this plant has many novel compositions for the food, pharmaceutical, and cosmetic industries, there are still little data concerning its phenolic composition, essential oil, and other constituents. The main objective of this review is to introduce *Mentha aquatica* L. with its biological characteristics, phenolic compounds, and essential oil.

2. Biological characteristics

Mentha aquatica L. is a perennial plant in the *Mentha* genus that can be found in Europe, Northwest Africa, and Southwest Asia (Boz et al., 2013; Do et al., 2015). It grows in temperature and humid areas (Safaiee et al., 2019). It also grows along the banks of running water and in lakes (Boz et al., 2013).

The rhizomes have fibrous roots and spread widely. The stems which bear leaves are green or purple and spread on the ground. Flowers are tiny, dense, tubular, and pinkish to lilac in color (Do et al., 2015).

Mentha aquatica L. is a member of the section *Mentha*, genus *Mentha*, family Lamiaceae, subfamily Nepetoideae, order Lamiales (Harley, 1963; Takhtadzhian et al., 1997), according to a survey of *Mentha* species conducted by Sanja Carva et al. (2021).

Because of features such as phenotypic plasticity, genetic variability, and due to most species can produce hybrids by crossing, the fact that it is difficult to identify species in the *Mentha* genus (Harley and Brighton, 1977). According to Harley and Brighton (1977) and Chambers and Hummer (1994), most species in the genus *Mentha* are polyploid, only five of which are diploid. The chromosome of *Mentha aquatica* L. is octaploid, which is one of the most common ploidy levels in this species (Bunsawatt, 2002).

Mentha aquatica L. is a species of wide distribution. This species is native to much of Europe, southwest Asia, northwest Africa and was introduced to Australia, Madeira, South, and North America (Bunsawatt, 2002; Hamed Karami, 2017). It is a fast-growing, invasive, and distributed pattern along river banks, on the banks of flowing waters, ponds, and lakes, and in wet habitats nearby, but prefers calcareous soils (Guşuleac, 1961; Andro Anca Raluca, 2011; Ivan A. Schanzer, 2012).

TABLE 1. Traditional classification schemes of *Mentha aquatica* L. (Bunsawatt, 2002)

Briquet (1897)	Harley & Brighton (1977)
Genus <i>Mentha</i> L.	Genus <i>Mentha</i>
Subgenus <i>Menthastrum</i> Coss	
Sect. <i>Capitatae</i> L.	Sect. <i>Mentha</i>
<i>Mentha aquatica</i> L.	<i>Mentha aquatica</i> L.

Mentha aquatica L. is a perennial herbaceous rhizomatous plant with a height of up to 90cm. The stems have a square cross-section, are purple or green, smooth or hairy, and are frequently branching at the base. Rhizomes expand widely, rooting at lower nodes and bearing fibrous roots. The opposing, green, or purplish leaves are oblong to oval-lanceolate, 2 to 6cm long and 1 to 4cm wide, toothed, and hairy to nearly hairless (Mastelic, 2001; Do et al., 2015). Flowers are tiny white or purplish, pinkish to lilac in hue, tubular, densely crowded, in single or branched clusters, with 5-6 flowers each ring, flowering from mid to late summer (Mastelic, 2001; Do et al., 2015).

3. Phenolic compounds

Phenolic compounds are secondary metabolites found mostly in plant species with a wide range of structural diversity (Huyut et al., 2017; Alara et al., 2021). They are mainly polymerized or monomer structures and can be found as glycosides or aglycones (Brahmi et al., 2017), matrix, or free-bound molecules (Alara et al., 2021). Furthermore, these chemicals are not evenly distributed in plants, and their stability varies (Alara et al., 2021). (Oluwaseun Ruth Alara et al., 2021).

Phenolic is found mainly in fruits, vegetables, tea, wine, legumes, and coffee (Riachi et al., 2015; Alara et al., 2021) and is responsible for the organoleptic properties of plant foods (Alara et al., 2021). They comprise an important group of natural antioxidants (Huyut et al., 2017). Among the plants, the classes of phenolics include 53% flavonoids, 42% phenolic acids, 2.5% lignans, and stilbenes (Riachi and De Maria, 2015). The most abundant phenolics are rosmarinic acid (caffeate dimer) (Ćavar Zeljković et al., 2021), eriocitrin, eriodictyol-glycopyranosyl-rhamnopyranoside, and luteolin 7-O-rutinoside (Riachi and De Maria, 2015; Brahmi et al., 2017).

The genus *Mentha* is particularly rich in phenolic compounds (Huyut et al., 2017), especially in phenolic acids and flavonoids (Fialová et al., 2015; Bahadori et al., 2018; Mamadalieva et al., 2020). Regarding phenolic acids, caffeic acid and its derivatives, chlorogenic and rosmarinic acid are abundant. Flavonoids are flavones, flavanones, flavonols, flavanols, anthocyanins, and isoflavones. In *Mentha* plants, flavonoids are mainly in flavones and flavanones (Brahmi et al., 2017; Alara et al., 2021).

Luteolin and its derivatives are the main flavones in *Mentha* species. The components

eriodictyrin, naringenin-7-O-glucoside, luteolin-7-O-glucoside isorhoifolin, luteolin, eriodictyol, and apigenin were identified in the extracts from *Mentha* species. Areias et al. reported that the main ingredient in *Mentha* aqueous extract was the glycoside eriodictyrin (Brahmi et al., 2017). External lipophilic methylated flavonoids have been recovered from dried leaves of *Mentha aquatica* L. in a previous study (Brahmi et al., 2017), and the study demonstrates that this plant was also rich in flavanones based on ethanol extraction.

Pereira et al. (2012) figured that there were 50% eriodictyol-7-O-rutinoside (MW 594 Da), 15% hesperitin-7-O-rutinoside (MW 610 Da), and 8% naringenin-7-O-rutinoside (MW 580 Da) of the total quantified phenolic compounds in *Mentha aquatica* L. (Pereira et al., 2012). Additionally, other flavonoids have been identified in *Mentha aquatica* L. which names 5-hydroxy-6,7,8,4'-tetramethoxyflavone (gardenin B) (Brahmi et al., 2017). In another research, the major extracted phenolic compounds from this plant are luteolin-7-O-glucoside, eriodictyrin, and rosmarinic acid, whereas hesperidin, luteolin-7-O-glucoside, eriodictyrin (Alu'datt et al., 2018).

In some previous studies, they focused on the effects of phenolic extracts on biological properties (Alu'datt et al., 2018). It has been reported that phenolic and flavonoid compounds play an important role in antioxidants to treat antiallergic, antidiabetic, antithrombotic antimicrobial, antipathogenic, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and vasodilatory effects and prevent diseases such as cancer, heart problems, and Alzheimer's (Dhifi et al., 2011; Salehi et al., 2018). In addition, the phenolic compounds have been shown to reduce chronic diseases by reducing the oxidative damage of DNA, lipids, and proteins (Alu'datt et al., 2018).

Moreover, rosmarinic acid displayed superior antioxidant activity compared to other phenolic acids (Gonçalves et al., 2020), for example, 20% of rosmarinic acid in *Mentha aquatica* L. was found in Europe (Pereira et al., 2012). In another study, rosmarinic acid and eriodictyol-O-rutinoside which considered the major phenolic compounds of this plant in Portugal were $68 \pm 7 \mu\text{g}/\text{mg}$ and $145 \pm 2 \mu\text{g}/\text{mg}$, respectively (Pereira et al., 2019). These different phenolic components are probably responsible for their different antioxidant properties. In various researches, *Mentha aquatica* L. extract exhibited high antioxidant activity in chemical models (Dhifi et al., 2011; Pereira et al., 2019).

Even though *Mentha aquatica* L. is one of the most important *Mentha* species, little is known about its essential oil composition and other constituents such as phenolic compounds. In traditional South African medicine, dried leaves of this plant are used to treat colds and respiratory issues. They are also utilized as astringent, stimulant, and emetic (Dhifi et al., 2011). The chemical composition and biological activity of *Mentha aquatica* L. are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. The chemical composition and biological activities of *Mentha aquatica* L. (Mamadalieva et al., 2020)

Chemical contents	Documented biological activities of the plant used
Phenolics and flavonoids: Apigenin, acetin, and luteolin (Zaidi, 1998), 5,6-dihydroxy-7,8,3',4'-tetramethoxyflavone, 5-O-desmethylnobiletin, apigenin, acetin, xanthomicrol, pebrellin, salvigenin, gardenin, 6- and 4'-O-methylated derivatives of sorbifolin, and thymusine (Voinir, 1999); caffeic acid, eriocitrin, luteolin-7-O-glucoside, isorhoifolin, rosmarinic acid, eriodictyol, luteolin, and apigenin (Dorman, 2003).	Antimicrobial, antioxidant, allergenic, analgesic, antipyretic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, anxiolytic, carminative, decongestant, deodorant, diaphoretic, digestive, diuretic, antiemetic, insecticides, sedatives, stimulatory, and vermifuge actions (Dorman, 2003; Getahun, 2008; Andro, 2013; Do et al., 2015; Golestan, 2016; Park, 2016)

4. Essential oils

Essential oils are natural secondary compounds and are highly volatile, aromatic, and composed of many complex compounds. Many species of *Mentha* are grown for the production of essential oils. Indeed, essential oils from mint species are the most used in the world with their production value exceeding 400 million per year (Brahmi et al., 2017).

Many mono- and sesquiterpenes are found in the essential oils isolated from *Mentha aquatica* L. (Jäger et al., 2007). It seems that the essential oil in this plant exhibits variations in chemical composition depending on the nutrition, different parts of the plant, and county origin of it (Castro et al., 2010; Do et al., 2015) This is due to differences in environmental factors: altitude, temperature, light, soil, interactions between plants and animals, and anthropogenic factors that can affect the metabolic pathways of the plant (Agostini et al., 2009).

Morteza-Semnani et al. (2006) identified 29 oil components in the flowering aerial portions of *Mentha aquatica* L. collected in Iran, accounting for 99.3% of the total composition. The essential oil of this plant is rich in monoterpenoids (64%), followed by sesquiterpenoids (33.6%) and non-terpenoids (1.7%). 1,8-cineole (27.2%), menthofuran (23.2%), β -caryophyllene (12.8%), and limonene (5.2%) were the main components of the essential oil (Morteza-Semnani et al., 2006).

Nextly, Getahun et al. (2008) identified 34 essential oil compounds (accounting for 99.4%) of the essential oil of *Mentha aquatica* L. growing in Ethiopia with the main compounds as menthofuran (70.5%), limonene (9.2%), and p- menthone (7.2%) (Getahun et al., 2008). Similarly, in Corsica, 35 essential oil compounds (31 monoterpenes and 4 sesquiterpenes), accounting for 97.0% of the essential oil, were identified in wild-growing *Mentha aquatica* L. Among them, menthofuran (50.7%) was considered to be the major component of the essential oil. 1,8-cineole (5.9%), limonene (5.3%), and borneol (3.5%) were present in smaller amounts (Sutour et al., 2011). In

contrast, in the study by Agostini et al. (2009), menthone (77.76%) was the major compound in the essential oil extract of *Mentha aquatica* L. growing in Southern Brazil, followed by pulegone (14.39%), linalool (2.01%), and 1,8-cineole (1.49%) (Agostini et al., 2009). In 2014, the result recorded 43 oil components corresponding to 97.8 % of the total oil in *Mentha aquatica* L. The major compound in the essential oil of this plant is linalyl acetate (26.1 %), followed by α -pinene (22.7 %), linalol (13.755%), α -terpineol (3.42%), and geranyl butyrate (3.39%) (Chaker et al., 2014).

The composition of essential oils also varies with different parts of the plant. In the stem essential oil of *Mentha aquatica* L. from Iran, β -caryophyllene (22.4%), viridiflorol (11.3%), and 1, 8-cineole (10.9%) were recognized as the main component whereas the major compounds of the leaf oil of this plant were piperitenone oxide (25.7%), β -caryophyllene (12.0%), and 1.8-cineole (10.3%) (Esmaeili et al., 2006).

At variant times of the growing cycle, the compound of the essential oil in *Mentha aquatica* L. can also be different. Boz et al. (2013) extracted essential oils from this plant at three different growth stages and the research indicated that 41 essential oil compounds were identified, of which 20 were common in all samples collected in all three periods. The main substances were limonene (5.94 to 12.06%), menthofuran (51.26 to 58.59%), ledol (3.01 to 4.06%), trans- β -ocimene (5.59 to 6.10%), and β -caryophyllene (2.923 to 3.557%) (Boz et al., 2013).

The essential oil of *Mentha aquatica* L. has many remarkable properties such as antioxidant, antibacterial, fungicidal, and skin-protective activities (Mimica-Dukić et al., 2003; Chang et al., 2019). In the study of Getahun et al. (2008), the essential oil had significant antibacterial activity against gram-positive bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus* 29737, *S. aureus* ML267, *Sarcina luteus* 9341, and *Bacillus pumilus* 8241 with minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) values less than 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{mL}$. This essential oil also has good free radical scavenging by 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) and deoxyribose degradation tests (IC_{50} was 11.2 and 3.74 $\mu\text{l}/\text{mL}$, respectively) (Getahun et al., 2008).

Mentha aquatica L. essential oil showed that suppressor activity against skin carcinogenesis by suppression of keratin 14 and COX-2 overexpression in 7,12-dimethylbenz[a]anthracene/12-*O*-tetradecanoylphorbol-13-acetate (DMBA/TPA)-induced two-stage carcinogenesis mouse models (Chang et al., 2019).

Mentha aquatica L. essential oils reduced the *Staphylococcus aureus* viable count below 5 log CFU g^{-1} after 4 days; however, the population of *Lactobacillus reuteri*, *Bifidobacterium animalis* and *Clostridium perfringens* decreased < 1 log CFU g^{-1} during the storage time. *Mentha aquatica* L. is related to the least deteriorative effect on the lactic acid bacteria. As the results of organoleptic studies, kashk samples containing *Mentha aquatica* L. EO at 1500 and 2500 ppm were the most preferred samples (Golestan et al., 2016).

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this review was to introduce the promising of *Mentha aquatica* L. in the pharmaceutical, food, and cosmetic industries. In general, the use of antioxidant properties is mainly due to their phenolic compounds and essential oil. Antioxidant capabilities may play a role in antibacterial, fungicidal, and skin-protective properties, as well as cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease (Mimica-Duki et al., 2003; Dhifi et al., 2011; Salehi et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2019). Future work should therefore focus on the application of *Mentha aquatica* L. in food additives or functional foods.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared that the present study was performed in absence of any conflict of interest.

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