

## Research Article

# Antioxidant Flavonoids from *Nicotiana plumbaginifolia* Viv. Leaves

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## Abstract

Plant derived phenolics and flavonoids exert profound antioxidant effects due to their ability to scavenge free radicals. *Nicotiana plumbaginifolia* Viv. leaves are known to produce large quantities of phenolics and flavonoids. Here we report antioxidant activities of a methanol extract of *N. plumbaginifolia* leaves and its isolates, 3,3',5,6,7,8-hexamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone (1), 3,3',4',5',5,6,7,8-octamethoxyflavone (exoticin) (2), 6,7,4',5'-dimethylenedioxy-3,5,3'-trimethoxyflavone (3) 3,3',4',5,5',8-hexamethoxy-6,7-methylenedioxy-flavone (4) and 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone (5) against 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) and NO radicals. This is the first report of 5 from *N. plumbaginifolia*. The structure of 5 was determined by using high-field <sup>1</sup>H and <sup>13</sup>C-NMR and by comparison with previously reported values. Amongst the tested materials, the extract and compound 5 produced considerable radical scavenging activity against DPPH and NO radicals, which were comparable to the reference standard, ascorbic acid. All extractives were then evaluated for their toxicity profiles by means of brine shrimp lethality assay. While the methanol extract was lethal against brine shrimp nauplii, the isolated compounds were relatively non-toxic. Thus, our findings suggest that the functionalized flavonoids could be suitable candidates for developing antioxidant drugs with minimal or no cytotoxicity.

**Keywords:** Antioxidant; Cytotoxicity; *Nicotianaplumbaginifolia*; Polymethoxyflavone; Solanaceae

## Introduction

Reactive free radicals that are frequently generated in cells cause oxidative damages to biological macromolecules and form various toxins. In severe cases, supplementary antioxidants are required to maintain the free radical contents in the body as part of the innate defense mechanism [1]. Aberrant regulation of free radicals has been linked to pathogenesis of many diseases including cancer and inflammation [1,2]. However, the therapeutic implications of current synthetic antioxidants are somehow limited [3]. Natural product derived phenolics and flavonoids can potentially scavenge free radicals via H- or electron-transfer with concomitant production of stable radicals bearing an odd electron [4,5]. This newly generated radical is far more stable as the odd electron

can delocalize over the aromatic system containing an extended conjugation [6]. In addition, there is evidence that the antioxidant properties of phenolics and flavonoids often contribute to anticancer effects [7,8]. As part of our continuous impetus in identifying potential antioxidant/ anticancer compounds from natural sources, we investigated *Nicotiana plumbaginifolia* Viv. (Fam. Solanaceae), a plant that is known to contain phenolics and flavonoids.

*N. plumbaginifolia* Viv. is an herb found in weedy habitats of Bangladesh and is used in the traditional medicine for the treatment of toothache [9], piles [10], wounds [11], parasitic infection [12], pyrexia [13] and rheumatic swelling (amongst others). Leaves are used in the management of nausea, travel sickness [14], insecticide [15] and vermicide [16]. In addition to phenolics and flavonoids, the plant contains a wide range of secondary metabolites including alkaloids, saponins, tannins, glycosides, steroids and terpenoids [14,17-19].

## Materials and Methods

### Chemicals and Reagents

Except for sodium chloride (Merck Co., Darmstadt, Germany), ammonium molybdate (Merck, Mumbai, India) and sodium nitroprusside (Loba Chemie, Mumbai, India), all solvents and reagents including *n*-Hexane, chloroform, methanol, toluene, ethyl acetate, sulfuric acid, phosphoric acid, DPPH (2,2-Diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl), vanillin, dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), ascorbic acid, sulfanilamide, N-(1-Naphthyl)ethylenediamine dihydrochloride were from BDH (U.K.) or Sigma (St. Louis, MO, USA) Chemicals. Vincristine sulfate was a gift from Beacon Pharmaceuticals Limited, Bangladesh.

### Extraction and Isolation of Compounds 1-5

Plant collection and extraction of *N. plumbaginifolia* Viv. leaves were conducted as described [17]. Successive chromatographic purification yielded twelve fractions (F1-F12) of which fraction 12 (4.58 g) lead to the isolation of **1-5**. Compounds (**1-4**), which we have reported previously were identified as 3,3',5,6,7,8-hexamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone (**1**), 3,3',4',5',5,6,7,8-octamethoxyflavone (exoticin) (**2**), 6,7,4',5'-dimethylenedioxy-3,5,3'-trimethoxyflavone (**3**) and 3,3',4',5,5',8-hexamethoxy-6,7-methylenedioxyflavone (**4**) [17]. Compound **5** (17.4 mg), which is a new report from *N. plumbaginifolia*, was isolated from the same fraction (F12) using preparative TLC (mobile phase, toluene: ethyl acetate, 4:1,  $R_f$  = 0.91) on repeated development. The compound was re-crystallized from  $\text{CHCl}_3$ -MeOH (98:2) as pale-yellow needles.

### 5-Hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone (**5**)

Pale-yellow needles; m.p. 186-187 °C;  $^1\text{H}$  NMR (400 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ ):  $\delta$  (ppm) 12.36 (1H, s, 5-OH), 7.54 (1H, d,  $J$  = 1.2 Hz, H-2'), 7.42 (1H, d,  $J$  = 1.6 Hz, H-6'), 6.09 (2H, s, 4', 5'-O- $\text{CH}_2\text{-O}$ ); 4.13 (3H, s, 7-OMe), 4.01 (3H, s, 8-OMe), 3.99 (6H, s, 6-OMe, 3'-OMe), 3.91 (3H, s, 3-OMe);  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR (100 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ ):  $\delta$  (ppm) 179.3 (C-4), 155.4 (C-2), 153.0 (C-7), 149.2 (C-5), 149.1 (C-5'), 147.0 (C-9), 144.8 (C-6), 143.6 (C-3'), 141.6 (C-3), 139.3 (C-4'), 138.0 (C-8), 124.6 (C-1'), 114.1 (C-10), 109.2 (C-2'), 102.9 (C-6'), 102.2 (4', 5'-O- $\text{CH}_2\text{-O}$ ), 62.1 (8-OMe), 61.7 (6-OMe), 61.2 (7-OMe), 60.2 (3-OMe), 56.7 (3'-OMe).

### NMR Spectroscopy and Melting Point Determination

$^1\text{H}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}$  NMR of compound **5** were recorded in  $\text{CDCl}_3$  with respect to the residual solvent at 400 and 100 MHz on AVANCE DRX 400 and ASCENDTM 400 (Avance III HD NanoBay), Bruker, Germany, respectively. Melting point of **5** was recorded on a Stuart SMP30 melting point apparatus. The plateau temperature was set at 300°C and ramp rate was set at 0.5°C/min.

### DPPH Free Radical Scavenging Assay

The scavenging of DPPH free radicals by the crude extract or compounds (**1-5**) was evaluated as described [24]. Briefly, 1.6 mg of standard (ascorbic acid), plant extract or isolates was dissolved in methanol and diluted to obtain the concentrations of 1.5625 - 400  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ . An 0.1mM DPPH solution was prepared in methanol. 2 ml of DPPH solution was then added to 2 ml of tested materials. The mixture was mixed well and left for 30 min in a dark area at the room temperature. The final absorbance of the mixture was measured at 517 nm using a spectrophotometer (HACH, DR 5000™, Shanghai, China) with respect to DPPH blank solution. Each experiment was carried out in triplicate. The inhibition of DPPH free radicals was measured as percent (%) using the following equation:

$$\text{Inhibition of DPPH free radicals (\%)} = 1 - \frac{\text{Absorbance of test sample or standard}}{\text{Absorbance of blank}}$$

The concentration required for scavenging 50% of DPPH free radicals ( $\text{IC}_{50}$ ) was determined from the % of inhibition.

### NO Scavenging Assay

The assay was conducted as described [25]. Briefly, 1.6 mg of plant extract, isolates (**1-5**) or standard (ascorbic acid) was dissolved in methanol to obtain solutions ranging from 1.5625-400  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ . 1 ml of sodium nitroprusside (5 mM) was then thoroughly mixed with 4 ml of each solution and incubated for 2 h at 30°C. The final absorbance of the mixture was measured at 550 nm followed by the addition of 1.2 ml of Griess reagent (1% sulfanilamide, 0.1% naphthylene diamine dihydrochloride in 2%  $\text{H}_3\text{PO}_4$ ).  $\text{IC}_{50}$  values were calculated from % scavenging of NO radicals. The assay was done in triplicates.

### Brine Shrimp Lethality (BSL) Assay

The assay was conducted as described [23]. Briefly, 1 mg of the methanol extract, its isolates (**1-5**) or standard (vincristine sulfate) was dissolved in 60  $\mu\text{l}$  of DMSO. For each of standard, control and experimental groups, ten brine shrimp nauplii were taken in a graduated test tube containing 5 mL simulated sea water. 30  $\mu\text{L}$  of the test solution was then added to the test tubes leading to final concentrations ranging from 100 - 0.195  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ . 30  $\mu\text{L}$  DMSO served as a control. Following 24h of the transfer, each test tube was observed for the number of survived brine shrimp nauplii. The concentration of each sample responsible for the 50% lethality of the brine shrimp nauplii ( $\text{LC}_{50}$ ) was determined by Probit analysis. A mean  $\text{LC}_{50}$  value was obtained by performing the experiment in triplicate.

### Statistical Analysis

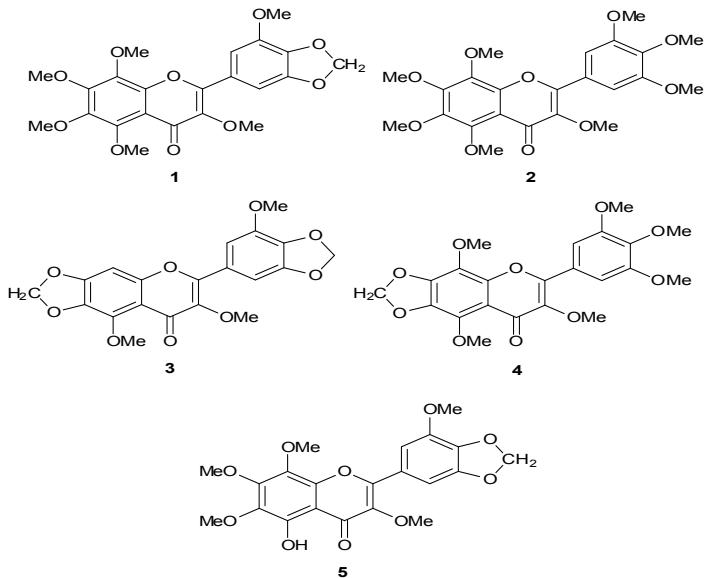
Data are presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM ( $n = 3$ ).  $\text{IC}_{50}$  values

were determined using GraphPad Prism 6.05, USA. The multiple comparison between the groups were determined from Tukey's post-hoc test using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Version 22, IBM Corporation, USA), where  $p < 0.05$  was considered as statistically significant.

## Results and Discussion

Repetitive chromatographic purification led to the isolation of **5** from the leaves of *N. plumbaginifolia*. Its flavonoid nature was evident from a characteristic dark blue and fluorescent blue colored spot on TLC plate under  $UV_{254nm}$  and  $UV_{366nm}$  light, respectively and a yellow color spot upon vanillin- $H_2SO_4$  treatment followed by heating at 11°C. The  $^{13}C$  NMR spectrum (100 MHz,  $CDCl_3$ ) of **5** revealed 21 carbon signals that are characteristic of a polymethoxyflavone: five methoxyl (-OCH<sub>3</sub>) at  $\delta_c$  56.7, 60.2, 61.2, 61.7, 62.1, one methylenedioxy (O-CH<sub>2</sub>-O) at  $\delta_c$  102.2, two methines (-CH) at  $\delta_c$  102.9, 109.2 and thirteen quaternary carbons, including a carbonyl group (C=O) at  $\delta_c$  179.3. The  $^1H$  NMR spectrum (400 MHz,  $CDCl_3$ ) of **5** displayed signals for five methoxyl groups at  $\delta$  3.91 (3H), 3.97 (6H), 4.01 (3H), 4.13 (3H) and a chelated -OH group at 12.36 (1H). The  $^{13}C$  and DEPT spectra revealed that three out of the five -OCH<sub>3</sub> were downfield between  $\delta_c$  61.2 - 62.1, suggesting their attachment to quaternary carbons. Comparative analysis of  $^1H$  and  $^{13}C$ -NMR of **5** with similar polymethoxy flavones for the substituted ring A enabled assignment of three -OCH<sub>3</sub> groups [17,20]. The  $^1H$  NMR spectrum further showed two aromatic signals at  $\delta$  7.54 (1H) and 7.42 (1H) for two meta-coupled protons, which were attributed to H-2' and H-6', respectively. The  $^1H$  NMR signal at  $\delta$  6.09 integrated for two protons, revealed the presence of a methylenedioxy (O-CH<sub>2</sub>-O) group which was further supported by the oxygenated methylene carbon at  $\delta_c$  102.0. The remaining two -OCH<sub>3</sub> at  $\delta$  3.91 ( $\delta_c$  60.2) and  $\delta$  3.99 ( $\delta_c$  56.7) were ascribed to C-3 ( $\delta_c$  141.6) and C-3' ( $\delta_c$  143.6) respectively.

Based on the above analyses, the structure of compound **5** was determined to be 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone, which was previously reported from *Polygonum orientale* [21]. All the  $^1H$  and  $^{13}C$  NMR resonances of the compound were unambiguously assigned by comparison with the previously reported low resolution data (60 MHz) [21]. The melting point of **5** (186-187°C) was almost identical to that published for 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone [21], which further supported our structure determination. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report of a complete assignment of high-resolution  $^1H$  and  $^{13}C$ -NMR of 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone (**5**) (Figure 1), and the first report from *N. plumbaginifolia*.

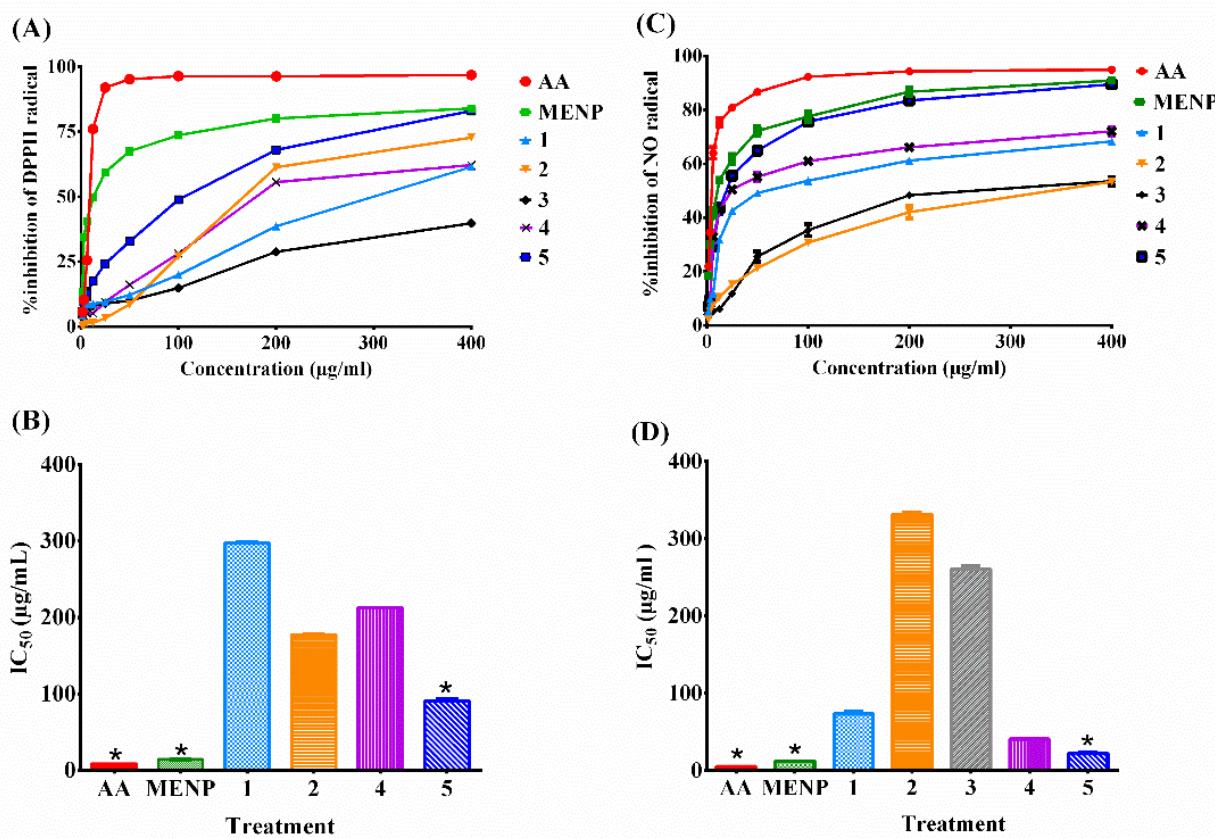


**Figure 1:** Chemical structures of compounds **1-5**.

**1** = 3,3',5,6,7,8-hexamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone,  
**2** = 3,3',4',5',5,6,7,8-octamethoxyflavone (exoticin),  
**3** = 6,7,4',5'-dimethylenedioxy-3,5,3'-trimethoxyflavone,  
**4** = 3,3',4',5,5',8-hexamethoxy-6,7-methylenedioxyflavone,  
**5** = 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone.

The plant extract and the isolated compounds (**1-5**) were then tested for their ability to scavenge the DPPH and NO radicals. The methanol extract and compound **5** produced statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) DPPH and NO radical scavenging activity compared to the control. In both assays, they produced concentration dependent effects (Figure 2). In DPPH radical assay, the extract and compound **5** exhibited 84 and 83% scavenging at 400  $\mu$ g/ml with the  $IC_{50}$  values of 14.3 and 90.7  $\mu$ g/ml, respectively. As compared to **5**, compounds **1**, **2**, **3** and **4** produced 61, 73, 40% and 62% scavenging effect at 400  $\mu$ g/ml (Figure 2A) with substantially higher  $IC_{50}$  values of 297.0 (**1**), 177.6 (**2**), 212.5 (**4**)  $\mu$ g/ml (Figure 2B), respectively.  $IC_{50}$  for **3** could not be measured as it produced <50 % inhibition of DPPH radical at the maximum tested dose. The standard (ascorbic acid) produced >95% scavenging effect at 50-400  $\mu$ g/ml (Figure 2A) with an  $IC_{50}$  value of 8.7  $\mu$ g/ml, which was comparable to that of the methanol extract (Figure 2B). As shown in figure 2C, the extract and compound **5** showed strong NO scavenging activity of 91 and 90%, respectively which was comparable to the standard, ascorbic acid (97% at 400  $\mu$ g/ml).

Compounds **1**, **2**, **3** and **4** exhibited maximum NO scavenging effect of 68, 53, 54 and 72%, respectively. The lowest  $IC_{50}$  value of NO scavenging was again shown by the extract (11.6  $\mu$ g/ml), which was comparable to the ascorbic acid (4.8  $\mu$ g/ml). Compound **5** revealed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) lower  $IC_{50}$  value (22  $\mu$ g/ml) in NO scavenging assay compared to other isolated compounds (Figure 2D). It has been preceded that -OH groups significantly increase the anti-radical potentiality of flavonoids possibly via enhancing H-transfer to free radicals whereas -OCH<sub>3</sub> groups reduce radical scavenging ability [22]. However, care should be taken to interpret the in vitro data as one of the caveats using the flavonoids is cell permeability. In fact, it is likely that -OCH<sub>3</sub> may facilitate cell permeability, which may undergo metabolic deprotection to produce free -OH in cells. Thus, although the presence of an additional -OH group in compound **5** apparently contributes to greater activity in our in vitro assays compared to other isolated flavonoids, further studies are required to validate the results in cells.



**Figures 2(A-D):** Antioxidant activity of the methanol extract of *N. plumbaginifolia* (MENP) and its isolated compounds (**1-5**). Panels (A) and (B) show % scavenging effect and  $IC_{50}$  values using DPPH free radical scavenging assay as indicated. Note,  $IC_{50}$  value for **3** could not be measured as it displayed <50 % inhibition of DPPH radical at the maximum tested dose. Panels (C) and (D) depict % scavenging effect and  $IC_{50}$  values using NO scavenging assay. Data are presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM ( $n = 3$ ). \* $p < 0.05$  compared to control for the compound **1**, **2**, **3**, **4** and **5** treatments. AA = ascorbic acid,

**1** = 3,3',5,6,7,8-hexamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone,  
**2** = 3,3',4',5',5,6,7,8-octamethoxyflavone (exoticin),  
**3** = 6,7,4',5'-dimethylenedioxy-3,5,3'-trimethoxyflavone,  
**4** = 3,3',4',5,5',8-hexamethoxy-6,7-methylenedioxyflavone,  
**5** = 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone.

Because antioxidant compounds are often toxic to cells, we evaluated the extract and the isolates for their cytotoxicity using a simple Brine Shrimp Lethality (BSL) assay [23]. The plant extract was substantially lethal to brine shrimp nauplii with an  $LC_{50}$  value of 8.6  $\mu$ g/ml (Table 1), as compared to the standard drug, vincristine sulfate (1.4  $\mu$ g/ml). The isolated compounds (**1-5**) were relatively non-toxic against the organism as evident by significantly higher  $LC_{50}$  values ranging from 66.2 to 75.5  $\mu$ g/ml (Table 1). The observation that the methanol extract was substantially more toxic compared to the isolated compounds imply that there are potentially more cytotoxic principles in the *N. plumbaginifolia* leaves that we were unable to isolate.

Treatment	$LC_{50}$ ( $\mu$ g/ml)
Vincristine sulfate	1.42 $\pm$ 0.48*
MENP	8.55 $\pm$ 1.65*
1	74.92 $\pm$ 0.95
2	69.29 $\pm$ 3.09
3	72.78 $\pm$ 1.43
4	75.50 $\pm$ 2.22
5	66.23 $\pm$ 3.09

Data are presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM (n = 3). \*p < 0.05, compared to **1, 2, 3, 4** and **5** treatments. MENP = methanol extract of *N. plumbaginifolia* leaves.

**1** = 3,3',5,6,7,8-hexamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone,  
**2** = 3,3',4',5',5,6,7,8-octamethoxyflavone (exoticin),  
**3** = 6,7,4',5'-dimethylenedioxy-3,5,3'-trimethoxyflavone,  
**4** = 3,3',4',5,5',8-hexamethoxy-6,7-methylenedioxyflavone,  
**5** = 5-hydroxy-3,3',6,7,8-pentamethoxy-4',5'-methylenedioxyflavone.

**Table 1:** Cytotoxicity of the methanol extract and its isolated compound (**1-5**) in brine shrimp lethality assay.

## Conclusion

Our results suggest the occurrences of considerable antioxidant principles in the *N. plumbaginifolia* leaves including the polymethoxy flavones. In particular, compound **5** demonstrated promising antioxidant properties presumably due to its ability for transferring hydrogen(s) efficiently. The polymethoxy flavones are unusually rare amongst plants, occurring only in a few genera

including *Polygonum* and *Murraya*, suggesting a unique biosynthetic pathway. Thus, the observation that *N. plumbaginifolia* leaves are rich in polymethoxyflavones warrants further investigations for their potential chemotaxonomic relationships with *Polygonum* and *Murraya*. Because these compounds have the potential to scavenge radicals, further research can be directed towards comprehensive Structure-Activity Relationship (SAR) studies aimed at developing polymethoxyflavone-based antioxidants. While we primarily focused on identifying antioxidant flavonoids, the *N. plumbaginifolia* leaves may also serve as a potential source of cytotoxic compounds that will likely find ways forward to anticancer drug development.

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