

MINI REVIEW



Phytochemical profile, pharmacological activities, and toxicological concerns of mandragora species: A mini review

Alexander S. Taylor

Department of Ecology and Conservation Biology, Institute of Plant Sciences, University of Regensburg, Germany

ABSTRACT

The convergence of nanotechnology and plant science has led to a transformative shift in precision agriculture and real-time plant health monitoring. This comprehensive review explores the forefront of plant nanosensors and smart materials, which hold significant potential for early disease detection, environmental stress assessment, and overall plant welfare. Researchers have enabled unprecedented insights into plant physiology, pathogen interactions, and environmental responses, by leveraging highly sensitive, selective, and non-invasive nanosensor platforms. Key advances in sensor miniaturization, biocompatibility, and data accuracy are driving the implementation of these technologies within the agricultural sector. This review synthesizes current technological breakthroughs and research applications, thoroughly examining various nanosensor types including optical, electrochemical, and magnetic sensors—and their integration with smart materials.

KEYWORDS

Mandragora species;
Tropane alkaloids;
Phytochemical analysis;
Pharmacological activities;
Toxicological evaluation

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 March 2024;
Revised 27 March 2024;
Accepted 03 April 2024;

Introduction

The genus *Mandragora* (Solanaceae), comprising species such as *Mandragora officinarum* and *Mandragora autumnalis*, is indigenous to the Mediterranean region and western Asia. These perennial herbaceous plants have a long history of use in folklore and medicine, particularly among ancient Greek, Roman, and medieval European cultures. Historically associated with anesthesia, fertility enhancement, and spiritual rituals, the mandrake root remains a subject of fascination due to its anthropomorphic shape and psychoactive effects [1]. Contemporary research has shifted focus from traditional applications to systematic scientific evaluation of its phytoconstituents and therapeutic potential. The increasing interest in ethnopharmacology and drug discovery from plant sources has propelled the scientific community to re-evaluate ancient medicinal plants like *Mandragora*. With the development of modern analytical tools, it is now possible to isolate, identify, and characterize novel bioactive compounds more accurately [2]. Additionally, the convergence of traditional knowledge and modern biomedical research offers new pathways for investigating the pharmacodynamics, therapeutic roles, and potential risks of such plants. In this context, *Mandragora* serves as a promising yet challenging candidate due to its dual profile of medicinal efficacy and potent toxicity. This review synthesizes current knowledge on the phytochemistry, biological activity, and safety profile of *Mandragora* species [3].

Phytochemical Composition of Mandragora Species

The pharmacological activity of *Mandragora* species is largely attributed to its diverse and complex phytochemical makeup. Modern analytical approaches, including gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS), have allowed for the precise identification of numerous secondary metabolites.

These compounds include tropane alkaloids, flavonoids, phenolic acids, terpenoids, sterols, and essential oils. Each class of compounds contributes uniquely to the medicinal and toxicological characteristics of the plant [4].

Tropane alkaloids

Tropane alkaloids are the most well-characterized constituents of *Mandragora*. Atropine, scopolamine, and hyoscyamine exhibit strong anticholinergic activity, acting primarily as muscarinic acetylcholine receptor antagonists. These compounds influence cognition, induce mydriasis, and produce analgesic and sedative effects. Other alkaloids such as apoatropine and cuscohygrine have also been detected but require further pharmacological investigation [5]. Studies utilizing chromatographic and spectrometric methods, including LC-MS and GC-MS, have enabled detailed metabolic profiling of these alkaloids, revealing interspecies and organ-specific variations in concentration [6].

Flavonoids and phenolic acids

Flavonoids and phenolic compounds in *Mandragora* contribute to its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory actions. Identified flavonoids include quercetin, kaempferol, and rutin, which are known for their free radical scavenging properties and modulation of inflammatory pathways [7]. Phenolic acids, such as ferulic acid and chlorogenic acid, further enhance these effects. These polyphenols are primarily concentrated in the leaves and roots and play a role in protecting cells from oxidative damage, thereby offering neuroprotective and cardiovascular benefits [8].

Terpenoids, sterols and essential oils

Secondary metabolites such as terpenoids and sterols exhibit antimicrobial, cytotoxic, and lipid-regulating effects.

*Correspondence: Dr. Alexander S. Taylor, Department of Ecology and Conservation Biology, Institute of Plant Sciences, University of Regensburg, Germany. email: stayloralexander8@gmail.com

β -Sitosterol, a plant sterol found in *Mandragora*, is implicated in cholesterol modulation and prostate health [9]. Essential oils comprising monoterpenes and sesquiterpenes contribute to the plant's characteristic aroma and may possess additional antimicrobial and anxiolytic properties. Despite limited studies, the diverse phytochemical spectrum supports the multifaceted pharmacological profile of *Mandragora* species [10].

Pharmacological Potential

Mandragora spp. have attracted significant pharmacological interest due to the wide range of physiological effects produced by their diverse secondary metabolites. These compounds interact with various biochemical pathways, resulting in neuropharmacological, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic effects [11]. The presence of tropane alkaloids allows modulation of the central and peripheral nervous systems, while polyphenols and terpenoids contribute to immunomodulatory and cytoprotective effects. The plant's potential to act on multiple targets makes it a valuable source of pharmacologically active compounds that could be explored for treating complex diseases [12].

Neuropharmacological effects

Tropane alkaloids from *Mandragora* demonstrate potential in neurological therapeutics. Scopolamine, in particular, has been studied for its effects on memory and cognition, serving as both a model for inducing cognitive deficits and a candidate for treating motion sickness and Parkinsonian tremors. Preclinical data suggest these alkaloids may ameliorate symptoms of neurodegenerative diseases, though neurotoxicity remains a critical challenge [13]. The anticholinergic properties of tropane alkaloids allow them to modulate central nervous system activity, offering potential benefits in conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and epilepsy. Experimental studies have shown that low doses may enhance neurotransmitter balance and reduce neural inflammation. However, due to their narrow therapeutic margin, precise dosing and delivery systems are essential to minimize adverse effects [14].

Antimicrobial properties

Extracts of *Mandragora* have exhibited activity against Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria, as well as fungi such as *Candida albicans*. The antimicrobial effect is attributed to the synergistic action of alkaloids, flavonoids, and essential oils disrupting microbial membranes and inhibiting quorum-sensing mechanisms. These findings indicate potential for the development of new phytotherapeutic agents targeting drug-resistant pathogens [15]. Studies have demonstrated that *Mandragora* extracts possess antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which may enhance their overall therapeutic efficacy. The presence of bioactive compounds such as scopolamine, atropine, and hyoscyamine contributes to their broad-spectrum antimicrobial potential. These characteristics make *Mandragora* a promising candidate for the development of novel, plant-based formulations aimed at combating multidrug-resistant infections [16].

Anti-inflammatory and analgesic activity

Phenolic compounds in *Mandragora* inhibit key pro-inflammatory mediators such as TNF- α and IL-6, while

modulating NF- κ B signaling pathways. Alkaloids also contribute to analgesia by interacting with cholinergic and dopaminergic receptors. Animal studies have demonstrated reduced inflammation and pain following administration of standardized extracts. These properties support the therapeutic application of *Mandragora* in managing chronic inflammatory and pain disorders [17]. The flavonoids in *Mandragora* demonstrate significant antioxidant activity, which helps reduce oxidative stress and contributes to the attenuation of inflammatory processes. The synergistic effects of phenolic compounds, alkaloids, and flavonoids enhance the plant's ability to regulate immune responses and reduce tissue damage [18]. Initial toxicological studies in animal models indicate that standardized extracts are generally safe and well tolerated at therapeutic doses. These findings highlight the potential of *Mandragora* as a supportive agent in the management of chronic inflammatory conditions and pain syndromes, particularly in the context of integrative and phytotherapeutic approaches [19].

Toxicological Considerations and Safety Profile

Despite its medicinal benefits, *Mandragora* is classified as a toxic plant due to the high concentration of tropane alkaloids. Accidental ingestion can result in anticholinergic syndrome, characterized by dry mouth, hallucinations, tachycardia, and, in severe cases, respiratory failure or death [20]. Documented cases of poisoning highlight the need for controlled dosages and medical supervision. Toxicological studies suggest that the LD₅₀ of atropine in rodents ranges from 453 to 620 mg/kg, indicating a narrow therapeutic index. The development of standardized extracts with defined alkaloid content is essential to mitigate risks and improve safety. Regulatory frameworks must be established to guide the therapeutic use of *Mandragora*-based products [21]. In addition to toxicity concerns, the therapeutic potential of *Mandragora* remains underexplored due to limited clinical data and variability in phytochemical profiles. Ethnobotanical evidence indicates its historical use in pain relief, sedation, and treatment of gastrointestinal disorders [22]. However, inconsistent dosages and preparation methods across traditional systems pose challenges for modern pharmacological standardization. Advanced techniques such as HPLC and mass spectrometry are essential for ensuring batch-to-batch consistency in pharmaceutical formulations [23]. Furthermore, biotechnological interventions like tissue culture and metabolic engineering could help in producing safer, standardized alkaloid profiles. Collaborative research and international guidelines are crucial for integrating *Mandragora* safely into evidence-based medicine [24].

Conclusions

Mandragora species possess a complex phytochemical architecture enriched with alkaloids, flavonoids, terpenoids, and sterols that collectively offer neuroprotective, antimicrobial, and anti-inflammatory effects. However, the inherent toxicity associated with tropane alkaloids limits their therapeutic application without rigorous safety evaluations. Future research should focus on isolating individual bioactive compounds, elucidating their mechanisms of action, and developing safe, standardized formulations. To realize its therapeutic potential, it is essential to bridge the gap between

traditional use and clinical validation. Interdisciplinary research involving pharmacology, toxicology, and ethnobotany could unlock novel uses while ensuring patient safety. Establishing guidelines for proper dosage, administration, and quality control will be crucial steps toward integrating Mandragora into evidence-based medicinal practice. With the right safeguards, Mandragora could serve as a valuable resource in the search for new therapeutic agents.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

1. Monadi T, Azadbakht M, Ahmadi A, Chabira A. A comprehensive review on the ethnopharmacology, phytochemistry, pharmacology, and toxicology of the mandragora genus; from folk medicine to modern medicine. *Curr Pharm Des.* 2021;27(34):3609-3637. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1381612827666210203143445>
2. Najmi A, Javed SA, Al Bratty M, Alhazmi HA. Modern approaches in the discovery and development of plant-based natural products and their analogues as potential therapeutic agents. *Molecules.* 2022;27(2):349. <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules27020349>
3. Islam T, Ara I, Islam T, Sah PK, de Almeida RS, Matias EF, et al. Ethnobotanical uses and phytochemical, biological, and toxicological profiles of *Datura metel* L.: A review. *Curr Res Toxicol.* 2023;4:100106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crttox.2023.100106>
4. Zhu MZ, Chen GL, Wu JL, Li N, Liu ZH, Guo MQ. Recent development in mass spectrometry and its hyphenated techniques for the analysis of medicinal plants. *Phytochem Anal.* 2018;29(4):365-374. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pca.2763>
5. Shim KH, Kang MJ, Sharma N, An SS. Beauty of the beast: anticholinergic tropane alkaloids in therapeutics. *Nat Products Bioprospect.* 2022;12(1):33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13659-022-00357-w>
6. Vanderplanck M, Glauser G. Integration of non-targeted metabolomics and automated determination of elemental compositions for comprehensive alkaloid profiling in plants. *Phytochem.* 2018;154:1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.phytochem.2018.06.011>
7. Al-Maharik N, Jaradat N, Bassalat N, Hawash M, Zaid H. Isolation, identification and pharmacological effects of *Mandragora autumnalis* fruit flavonoids fraction. *Molecules.* 2022;27(3):1046. <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules27031046>
8. Lu H, Tian Z, Cui Y, Liu Z, Ma X. Chlorogenic acid: A comprehensive review of the dietary sources, processing effects, bioavailability, beneficial properties, mechanisms of action, and future directions. *Compr Rev Food Sci Food Saf.* 2020;19(6):3130-3158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1541-4337.12620>
9. Bao X, Zhang Y, Zhang H, Xia L. Molecular mechanism of β -sitosterol and its derivatives in tumor progression. *Front Oncol.* 2022;12:926975. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fonc.2022.926975>
10. Arbia F, Ayari-Gribaa O, Souilem F, Chiboub W, Zardi-Berguoui A, Jannet HB, et al. Profiles of the essential oils and headspace analysis of volatiles from *Mandragora autumnalis* growing wild in Tunisia. *Chem Biodivers.* 2019;16(10):e1900345. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbdv.201900345>
11. Plazas E, Muñoz DR. Natural isoquinoline alkaloids: Pharmacological features and multi-target potential for complex diseases. *Pharmacol Res.* 2022;177:106126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.phrs.2022.106126>
12. Ulriksen ES, Butt HS, Ohrvik A, Blakeney RA, Kool A, Wangenstein H, Inngjerdigen M, Inngjerdigen KT. The discovery of novel immunomodulatory medicinal plants by combination of historical text reviews and immunological screening assays. *J Ethnopharmacol.* 2022;296:115402. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4081232>
13. Srinivasan P, Smolke CD. Biosynthesis of medicinal tropane alkaloids in yeast. *Nature.* 2020;585(7826):614-619. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2650-9>
14. KM Chaves S, M. Feitosa C, da S. Araújo L. Alkaloids pharmacological activities-prospects for the development of phytopharmaceuticals for neurodegenerative diseases. *Curr Pharm Biotechnol.* 2016;17(7): 629-635. <https://doi.org/10.2174/138920101707160503201541>
15. Álvarez-Martínez FJ, Barrajón-Catalán E, Herranz-López M, Micol V. Antibacterial plant compounds, extracts and essential oils: An updated review on their effects and putative mechanisms of action. *Phytomedicine.* 2021;90:153626. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.phymed.2021.153626>
16. KM Chaves S, M. Feitosa C, da S. Araújo L. Alkaloids pharmacological activities-prospects for the development of phytopharmaceuticals for neurodegenerative diseases. *Curr Pharm Biotechnol.* 2016;17(7): 629-635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.micpath.2018.01.043>
17. Olędzka AJ, Czerwińska ME. Role of plant-derived compounds in the molecular pathways related to inflammation. *Int J Mol Sci.* 2023;24(5):4666. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms24054666>
18. Zeinali M, Rezaee SA, Hosseinzadeh H. An overview on immunoregulatory and anti-inflammatory properties of chrysin and flavonoids substances. *Biomed Pharmacother.* 2017;92:998-1009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopha.2017.06.003>
19. Khumalo GP, Van Wyk BE, Feng Y, Cock IE. Toxicity and phytochemical properties of southern African medicinal plants used traditionally to treat pain and inflammatory ailments. *S Afr J Bot.* 2023;160:102-122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sajb.2023.07.005>
20. Serrano R. Toxic plants: Knowledge, medicinal uses and potential human health risks. *Environ Ecol Res.* 2018;6(5):487-492. <https://doi.org/10.13189/EER.2018.060509>
21. Benítez G, Leonti M, Böck B, Vulfsons S, Dafni A. The rise and fall of mandrake in medicine. *J Ethnopharmacol.* 2023;303:115874. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2022.115874>
22. Soulaïdopoulos S, Sinakos E, Dimopoulou D, Vettas C, Cholongitas E, Garyfallos A. Anticholinergic syndrome induced by toxic plants. *World J of Emerg Med.* 2017;8(4):297. <https://doi.org/10.5847/wjem.j.1920-8642.2017.04.009>
23. Almubayedh H, Albannay R, Alelq K, Ahmad R, Ahmad N, Naqvi AA. Clinical uses and toxicity of *Atropa belladonna*; an evidence based comprehensive retrospective review. *Biosci Biotech Res Comm.* 2018;11:41-48. <https://doi.org/10.21786/bbrc/11.1/6>
24. Punia A, Joshi R, Kumar R. Identification and quantification of eight alkaloids in *Aconitum heterophyllum* using UHPLC-DAD-QTOF-IMS: A valuable tool for quality control. *Phytochem Anal.* 2022;33(7): 1121-1134. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pca.3164>