

# Phytochemical Screening and Determination of Antifungal Activities of *Emblica officinalis* (Amla)

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## Abstract

Since ancient times, India has been renowned throughout the world for its ayurvedic therapies. Itraconazole and fluconazole have been widely used as preventative measures and therapeutic agents for systemic fungal infections. These antifungal drugs have negative side effects and moreover numerous pathogenic microorganisms are continuously acquiring resistance to them. Therefore, there is resurgence to search for more effective and less toxic novel antifungal agents from plant sources. Hence, in the current study we aimed for phytochemical screening and determination of antifungal activities of leaf extract of *Emblica officinalis* (Amla). Leaves of *E. officinalis* was subjected to successive solvent extraction by continuous hot extraction (Soxhlet) with double distilled water. Results delineated the major phytochemical present in the aqueous

(Aq.) extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* were alkaloids, flavonoids, proteins & amino acids, saponins, phenolic compounds, tannins, carbohydrates, reducing sugars. Moreover, quantitative estimation of phytochemicals in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* revealed that total polyphenol quantity was found to be highest (24.43 GAE) when compared with total flavonoid quantities (6.83 GAE). Furthermore, Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) possess potential antifungal activity against *Aspergillus niger*, *Aspergillus fumigates*, *Candida tropicalis* and *Penicillium crysogenum*. In conclusion, this study results delineated that leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) could be used in herbal medicine for treatment of fungal diseases.

**Keywords:** *Embllica officinalis*, Amla, Leaves, Aq. Extracts, Antifungal

## Introduction

India is well known all over the world for its ayurvedic treatment since ancient time. A wide range of medicinal plant parts like root, stem, flower, fruit, and modified plant organs have been used for extraction of raw drugs.<sup>1,2</sup> The medicinal value of these plants lies in some chemical substances that produce a definite physiological action on the human body.<sup>3</sup> These chemicals are termed as phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are chemicals of plant origin, produced by plants through primary or secondary metabolism. They generally have biological activity in the plant host and play an important role in plant growth. They are naturally present in the plants to defend themselves against various pathogenic microbes by showing the antimicrobial activity by inhibiting or killing microbes. Medicinal plants are richest bio-resource of drugs in traditional system of medicine and it also responsible for different colors, flavors and smell of plant.<sup>4</sup>

*Embllica officinalis* known as Indian gooseberry or amla, belongs to family Euphorbiaceae, is a medium-sized deciduous tree with gray bark and reddish wood (Figure 1). It is native to tropical southern Asia and possesses very highly characteristic medicinal value. *E. officinalis* is

highly nutritious and is one of the richest sources of vitamin-C, amino acids and minerals.<sup>5</sup> It contains several chemical constituents like tannins, alkaloids and phenols.<sup>6</sup> Pharmacological research reports on amla reveals its analgesic,<sup>7</sup> cardio,<sup>8</sup> gastro,<sup>9</sup> nephron,<sup>10</sup> and anticancer properties.<sup>11</sup> *E. officinalis* plant extracts revealed antibacterial / antifungal,<sup>12</sup> antioxidant,<sup>13</sup> and cardioprotective properties.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 1:** Showing *E. officinalis* (Amla) plant

Phytochemicals have recently become great interest owing to their versatile application.<sup>15,16</sup> Phytochemicals play an important role in various preparations like food, cosmetics, pharmaceutical, flavours and agrochemical etc. as antimicrobial agents as well as antioxidants. Phytochemical screening is very important in identifying new sources of therapeutically and industrially important compounds like Alkaloids, Flavanoids, Phenolic Compounds, Saponins, Steroids, Tannins, Terpenoids etc.<sup>17</sup> They confer plants with odor (terpenoids), pigmentation (tannins and quinines), and flavor (capsacin).<sup>18</sup> They are a part of plant naturally defense system. These bioactive components are said to be responsible for the antimicrobial effects of plant extracts in-vitro.<sup>19</sup> With this background, present study was conducted with the objectives of phytochemical screening and determination of antifungal activities of leaf extract of *E. officinalis* (Amla).

## Materials and Methods

### Collection of plant material

The leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) were collected from Amla plant located around Chikkaballapura, Karnataka, India and washed with tap water for several times and then once with double distilled water. After washing, leaves were shade dried at room temperature and then grounded to fine powder. Powdered sample was stored for further use.

### Extraction

Approximately 50 g of dried and coarsely powdered leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) were subjected to successive solvent extraction by continuous hot extraction (Soxhlet) with 550 mL of double distilled water. All the extracts were concentrated by distilling the solvent in a rotary flash evaporator and dried at 40°C. The extracts were preserved in airtight containers and stored at room temperature until further use.

### Phytochemical Screening

Phytochemical screening was carried out on the aqueous (Aq.) extracts of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) by using standard procedure to detect phytoconstituents as described by Sofora,<sup>20</sup> Trease and Evans<sup>21</sup> and Harborne.<sup>22</sup>

### Test for Alkaloids

Approximately 0.2g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was warmed with 2% H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (2.0ml) for two minutes. The reaction mixture was filtered and few drops of Dragendrof's reagent was added to the filtrate. Orange red precipitation showed the presence of alkaloids moiety.

### Test for Tannins and Phenolic Compounds

The Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) in small quantity was mixed with water and heated on water bath and filtered. To the filtrate, few drops of ferric chloride ( $\text{FeCl}_3$ ) was added. A dark green colouration indicate the presence of tannins.

#### **Test for Glycosides**

About 0.6g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was hydrolyzed with HCl and neutralized with NaOH solution and few drops of Fehling's solution A and B were added. Formation of red precipitate indicates the presence of glycosides.

#### **Test for Reducing Sugars**

The Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was shaken with distilled water and filtered. Few drops of Fehling's solution A and B were added and boiled for few minutes. Formation of an orange red precipitate confirms the presence of reducing sugar.

#### **Test for Saponins**

About 0.2g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was shaken with 5 mL of distilled water and then heated to boil. Frothing (appearance of creamy mass of small bubbles) showed the presence of saponins.

#### **Test for Flavonoids**

0.2g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was dissolved in diluted 10% NaOH and few drops of 2M HCl was added. A yellow solution that turns into colorless indicate the presence of flavonoids.

#### **Test for Steroids**

2 mL of acetic anhydride was added to 0.5g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) and then added 2 mL of H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>. The change of color from violet to blue or green or red showed the presence of steroids.

### **Test for Terpenoids**

0.3g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was mixed with 2 mL of chloroform (CHCl<sub>3</sub>) and 3 mL of concentrated 6M H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> was carefully added to form a layer. Reddish brown coloration at the interface was formed which indicate positive results for the presence of terpenoids.

### **Test for Proteins and Amino acids**

To the 0.3g of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) few drops of 0.2% ninhydrin solution was added and heated for 5 minutes. Blue colouration indicate the presence of proteins.

### **Quantitative Estimation of Phytochemicals**

#### **Total phenolics**

The concentration of total phenolics in the Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was determined by the Folin-Ciocalteu assay that involves reduction of the reagent by phenolic compounds, with concomitant formation of a blue complex, its intensity at 725nm increases linearly with the concentration of phenolics in the reaction medium.<sup>23</sup> The phenolic content of the extract was determined from calibration curve and were expressed in mg gallic acid equivalent/g of extract powder.

#### **Total flavonoid**

Aluminum chloride colorimetric method was used for flavonoids determination in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla).<sup>24</sup> The content was determined from extrapolation of calibration

curve which was made by preparing gallic acid solution (0-0.8 mg/ml) in distilled water. The concentration of flavonoid was expressed in terms of mg gallic acid equivalent/g of extract powder.

## Evaluation of Antifungal Activity

### Fungal Strains

The pathogenic fungal strains viz. *Aspergillus niger*, *Aspergillus fumigates*, *Candida tropicalis*, *Candida albicans*, *Penicillium crysogenum* were isolated from clinical samples of local hospital in and around Chikkaballapura and confirmed by various microscopic evaluation like Gram's staining.<sup>25</sup> Motility, capsule and spore formation was confirmed as per the procedure prescribed by Collins and Lyne.<sup>26</sup> All the fungal pathogens were further confirmed by suitable biochemical tests,<sup>27</sup> and used for antifungal activity studies.

Stock cultures were maintained at 4°C on the slant of nutrient agar. Active Cultures for experiments were prepared by transferring a loopful of cell organisms from the stock cultures to test tubes of nutrient broth for fungi. Streaking was done on Yeast Extract Peptone Dextrose (YEPD) agar plates and incubated for 24-48 hours at 37°C in which the assay was performed by disc diffusion method.

### Determination of Antifungal Activities

Anti-fungal activity of the Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) was determined by disk diffusion method on Muller Hinton Agar (MHA) medium. Cultured colonies were picked from Yeast Extract Peptone Dextrose (YEPD) agar plates and were added in peptone water and was incubated for around 30 minutes. The MHA medium was poured in the petri plate. After the medium was solidified, the inoculums were spread on the solid plates with sterile swab moisture with the fungal suspension. The anti-fungal discs were placed on MHA plate with the help of sterile forceps and different concentration of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) were

loaded on discs. Fluconazole was used as positive control and double distilled water was used as negative control. Then all the plates were incubated in upright position at 37°C for 24-48 hours. The inhibition zones were measured on the underside of the plates.<sup>28</sup>

## Results

The major phytochemicals found in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) were found to be alkaloids, flavonoids, proteins & amino acids, saponins, phenolic compounds/tannins, carbohydrates, reducing sugars. Whereas, phytochemicals viz. glycosides, terpenoids and steroids were found to be absent (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Photochemical screening of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla)

Phytochemical Components	Aq. Extract of leaves of <i>E. officinalis</i> (Amla)
Alkaloids	+
Flavonoids	+
Glycosides	-
Proteins and Amino acids	+
Reducing sugar	+
Saponins	+
Steroids	-
Phenolic compounds	+
Tannins	+
Terpenoids	-
Carbohydrates	+



Quantitative estimation of phytochemicals in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* was represented in Table 2. Results revealed that total polyphenols quantity was found to be highest (24.43 GAE) phytochemicals found in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* when compared with total flavonoid quantities (6.83 GAE).

**Table 2:** Quantitative analysis of phytochemicals present in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis*

Chemical Components	Aq. extract of leaves of <i>E. officinalis</i>
Total phenolics	24.43 GAE
Total flavonoids	6.83 GAE

The highest zone of inhibition (17.5 mm) was observed against *A. fumigates* and lowest zone of inhibition (13.5 mm) was observed against *A. niger* at 100 mg/mL. At 50 mg/mL the highest zone of inhibition (15.5 mm) was observed against *A. fumigates* and lowest zone of inhibition (12.5 mm) was observed against *A. niger*. Whereas the highest zone of inhibition (12.5 mm) was seen against *A. fumigates* and lowest zone of inhibition (8.0 mm) against *C. tropicalis* at 25 mg/mL. At 12.5 mg/mL the highest zone of inhibition (10.5 mm) was observed against *A. fumigates* and lowest zone of inhibition (5.5 mm) was observed against *C. tropicalis*. The reference standard fluconazole showed highest zone of inhibition (25.5 mm) against *P. crysogenum* and the lowest zone of inhibition (18.5 mm) against at *A. niger*. These findings revealed that the tested Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) possess potential antifungal activity against *A. niger*, *A. fumigates*, *C. tropicalis* and *P. crysogenum* as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Antifungal activities of Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla)

Fungal strains	Zone of inhibition(mm)					
	Negative Control	Positive Control	Aq. extract of leaves of <i>E. officinalis</i> (Amla)			
			12.5 mg/mL	25 mg/mL	50 mg/mL	100 mg/mL
<i>A. niger</i>	-	18.5	8.5	10.5	12.5	13.5
<i>A. fumigates</i>	-	20.0	10.5	12.5	15.5	17.5
<i>C. tropicalis</i>	-	19.0	5.5	8.0	11.5	15.0
<i>P. crysogenum</i>	-	25.5	8.5	10.0	14.5	16.5

## Discussion

The frequency of life-threatening infections caused by pathogenic microorganisms is becoming an alarming factor of morbidity and mortality in immuno-compromised patients in developing countries. Many pathogenic microorganisms are constantly developing resistance to these agents. Since many of the existing antifungal drugs have undesirable side effects or are very toxic, show drug-drug interactions or develop resistance affecting treatment planning. Therefore, it is necessary to search for more effective and less toxic novel antifungal agents that would overcome these shortcomings. The herbal extracts are easily available and cheaper having added advantage of widespread availability, minimal side effects, cost effective and efficiency in long term usage. Considering the side effects and disadvantages of fluconazole, these herbal extracts mainly can be considered as a better alternative anti-fungal agent.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in the present study was conducted with the purpose of phytochemical analysis and determination of antifungal activities of leaf extract of *E. officinalis* (Amla).

Different phytochemicals have various protective and therapeutic effects which are essential to prevent diseases and maintain a state of well-being. Our study results on the qualitative analysis of the Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* revealed the presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, proteins & amino acids, saponins, phenolic compounds/tannins, carbohydrates, reducing sugars. Moreover, quantitative estimation of phytochemicals in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* revealed that that total polyphenol quantity was found to be highest (24.43 GAE) phytochemicals found in Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* when compared with total flavonoid quantities (6.83 GAE). Furthermore, Aq. extract of leaves of *E. officinalis* (Amla) possess potential antifungal activity against *A. niger*, *A. fumigates*, *C. tropicalis* and *P. crysogenum*.

Fluconazole and itraconazole have been used extensively as prophylactic and treatment for systemic fungal infections.<sup>30,31</sup> Fluconazole resistance has been increasing among patients.<sup>32</sup> Oropharyngeal candidiasis in patients with HIV has shown azole resistant.<sup>33</sup> Phytochemicals derived from plant products serve as a prototype to develop less toxic and more effective medicines in controlling the growth of microorganisms.<sup>34</sup> These compounds have significant therapeutic application against human pathogens including bacteria, fungi or virus. Numerous studies have been conducted with the extracts of various plants, screening antimicrobial activity as well as for the discovery of new antimicrobial compounds.<sup>35</sup>

The results obtained in the present study are encouraging as this study evidenced for the wide variety of secondary metabolites present in the Aq. extracts of leaves of *E. officinalis*. *E. officinalis* shown considerable antifungal properties. Hence this study supplies as evidence-based study for leaves of *E. officinalis* could be exploited in the management of various human ailments related to fungal infections.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this study results revealed the distribution of phytochemicals such as alkaloids, flavonoids, proteins & amino acids, saponins, phenolic compounds/tannins, carbohydrates, reducing sugars in leaves of *E. officinalis*. Biological activities such as antifungal properties of Aq. extracts of leaves of *E. Officinalis* depicted that leaves of *E. officinalis* could be used in herbal medicine for the treatment of fungal diseases. Further studies are recommended to be carried out to purify these bioactive compounds and could be effectively used in antimicrobial drugs.

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