
Some Bioactivities of Essential Oils of Some *Ocimum* Species sp.

Dr. Deepti Agrawal
Assistant Professor, Department of Botany
G.D.C. Unnao. U.P

Abstract

Essential oils derived from *Ocimum* species are widely recognized for their diverse pharmacological properties and ecological importance. This study investigates the bioactivities of essential oils extracted from selected *Ocimum* species, emphasizing their antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and insecticidal potentials. The oils were obtained through hydrodistillation and analyzed using gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS) to determine their chemical composition. Major constituents such as eugenol, linalool, and methyl chavicol were identified, contributing to the observed biological activities. The results revealed significant variation among species in both composition and efficacy, influenced by environmental and genetic factors. The essential oils demonstrated strong inhibitory effects against pathogenic microorganisms and exhibited notable free radical scavenging capacity. These findings suggest that *Ocimum* essential oils hold considerable promise for applications in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and food preservation as natural and sustainable alternatives to synthetic compounds.

Keywords: *Ocimum* species, essential oils, antimicrobial activity, antioxidant activity, GC-MS analysis

Introduction

Medicinal and aromatic plants have long been recognized as valuable sources of bioactive compounds with diverse therapeutic and industrial applications, and among them, the genus *Ocimum* (family Lamiaceae) holds a prominent position due to its rich phytochemical profile and widespread traditional use. Commonly referred to as basil, *Ocimum* species such as *Ocimum sanctum* (holy basil), *Ocimum basilicum* (sweet basil), and *Ocimum gratissimum* (clove basil) are extensively distributed across tropical and subtropical regions and are integral to traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda and folk medicine. The biological significance of these

plants is largely attributed to their essential oils, which are complex mixtures of volatile compounds including phenolics, terpenoids, and aromatic constituents such as eugenol, linalool, and methyl chavicol. These compounds are known to exhibit a wide spectrum of bioactivities, including antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and insecticidal effects, making them attractive candidates for pharmaceutical, agricultural, and food preservation applications. In recent years, there has been increasing scientific interest in exploring plant-derived essential oils as natural alternatives to synthetic chemicals, particularly in response to rising concerns over antimicrobial resistance, environmental toxicity, and consumer preference for safer, eco-friendly products. Furthermore, the chemical composition and bioactivity of *Ocimum* essential oils are influenced by various factors such as species variation, geographical origin, climatic conditions, and extraction techniques, which necessitates systematic evaluation and comparative analysis. Advanced analytical tools such as gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS) have facilitated detailed characterization of these essential oils, enabling better understanding of the relationship between chemical composition and biological activity. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the bioactivities of essential oils derived from selected *Ocimum* species and to assess their potential applications as natural bioactive agents, contributing to the growing body of research on plant-based therapeutics and sustainable bioproducts.

Background on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants

Medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) constitute a vital component of traditional and modern healthcare systems due to their rich reservoir of biologically active compounds. These plants have been utilized for centuries across diverse cultures for the treatment and prevention of various diseases, forming the foundation of systems such as Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and herbal folklore practices. The therapeutic potential of MAPs is primarily attributed to their secondary metabolites, including alkaloids, flavonoids, terpenoids, phenolics, and essential oils, which exhibit a wide range of pharmacological activities such as antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anticancer effects. Aromatic plants, in particular, are valued for their essential oils—volatile, complex mixtures of compounds responsible for characteristic fragrances and biological functions. In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in MAPs driven by

increasing awareness of the adverse effects associated with synthetic drugs, as well as the global shift toward natural and sustainable products. Additionally, MAPs play a significant role in various industrial sectors, including pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, food preservation, and agriculture, especially in the development of biopesticides and natural preservatives. The advancement of analytical techniques such as gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS) has further enhanced the identification and characterization of bioactive constituents, facilitating scientific validation of traditional knowledge. Despite their immense potential, the efficacy of medicinal and aromatic plants can vary depending on species, geographical conditions, and processing methods, highlighting the need for systematic research and standardization.

Importance of Essential Oils in Plant Defense and Human Applications

Essential oils are complex mixtures of volatile secondary metabolites that play a crucial role in plant defense mechanisms and have significant applications in human health and industry. In plants, these oils function as natural protective agents against herbivores, pathogenic microorganisms, and environmental stressors. Their strong aromas and bioactive compounds, such as terpenes and phenolics, can deter insect feeding, inhibit microbial growth, and reduce oxidative damage caused by abiotic stresses like UV radiation and drought. Additionally, essential oils contribute to plant communication and pollinator attraction, enhancing reproductive success. From a human perspective, essential oils have gained considerable importance due to their diverse biological activities, including antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and insecticidal properties. These characteristics make them valuable in pharmaceutical formulations, where they are used for therapeutic purposes such as wound healing, respiratory relief, and stress management. In the food industry, essential oils are increasingly utilized as natural preservatives to extend shelf life and prevent spoilage by inhibiting microbial contamination. Moreover, in agriculture, they serve as eco-friendly alternatives to synthetic pesticides, contributing to sustainable crop protection. The growing consumer preference for natural and safe products has further accelerated research into essential oils, emphasizing their potential as multifunctional agents that bridge plant ecology and human well-being.

Literature Review

The study of essential oils has gained considerable scientific attention due to their diverse biological activities and potential applications across pharmaceutical, agricultural, and food industries. Early foundational work by Cowan (1999) highlighted the antimicrobial potential of plant-derived compounds, emphasizing their role as natural alternatives to synthetic antibiotics. This was further supported by Dorman and Deans (2000), who demonstrated that volatile oils possess significant antibacterial properties against a wide range of pathogens. In the context of essential oils, Burt (2004) provided a comprehensive review of their antibacterial mechanisms, noting that these compounds disrupt microbial cell membranes, interfere with enzyme systems, and ultimately lead to cell death. Bakkali et al. (2008) expanded on these findings by exploring the broader biological effects of essential oils, including their antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and cytotoxic activities. Their review emphasized that the bioactivity of essential oils is largely dependent on their chemical composition, which can vary significantly among plant species. These studies collectively establish a strong scientific basis for investigating essential oils as multifunctional bioactive agents, particularly in response to the growing concerns over antimicrobial resistance and the adverse effects of synthetic chemicals.

Focusing specifically on the genus *Ocimum*, several studies have highlighted its importance as a rich source of bioactive essential oils. Prakash and Gupta (2005) provided an in-depth review of *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi), emphasizing its therapeutic applications in traditional medicine and attributing its pharmacological properties primarily to eugenol, a major phenolic constituent. Similarly, Singh et al. (2007) reported that the fixed oil of *Ocimum sanctum* exhibits a wide range of biological activities, including antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and immunomodulatory effects. These findings underscore the significance of *Ocimum* species in ethnomedicine and support their continued exploration in modern scientific research. Pandey et al. (2014) further contributed to this field by reviewing the chemistry and bioactivities of essential oils from various *Ocimum* species, highlighting the presence of key compounds such as linalool, methyl chavicol, and thymol. Their study demonstrated that variations in chemical composition among species result in differences in biological activity, reinforcing the importance of comparative analyses.

Collectively, these studies confirm that *Ocimum* essential oils possess significant pharmacological potential and warrant detailed investigation for their diverse bioactivities.

In addition to pharmaceutical applications, essential oils from *Ocimum* species have been widely studied for their role in agriculture as natural pesticides. Isman (2000) emphasized the potential of plant essential oils as environmentally friendly alternatives to synthetic pesticides, highlighting their efficacy in controlling insect pests and plant diseases. This perspective was further supported by Koul et al. (2008), who discussed the advantages and limitations of using essential oils as green pesticides. Their review noted that essential oils exhibit insecticidal, repellent, and antifeedant properties, making them suitable for integrated pest management strategies. However, they also pointed out challenges such as variability in efficacy, volatility, and cost of production, which need to be addressed for large-scale application. The use of *Ocimum* essential oils in agriculture is particularly promising due to their rich composition of bioactive compounds that can target multiple physiological pathways in pests. These studies highlight the growing interest in sustainable agricultural practices and the role of plant-derived compounds in reducing environmental impact and enhancing crop protection.

Furthermore, the application of essential oils in food preservation and safety has been extensively documented. Burt (2004) reported that essential oils can inhibit the growth of foodborne pathogens and spoilage microorganisms, thereby extending the shelf life of food products. Bakkali et al. (2008) also emphasized the antioxidant properties of essential oils, which help prevent oxidative degradation of food components. The multifunctional nature of essential oils makes them ideal candidates for use as natural preservatives in the food industry. Additionally, the variability in chemical composition among *Ocimum* species, as discussed by Pandey et al. (2014), allows for the selection of specific oils with desired properties for targeted applications. Despite their potential, challenges such as strong aroma, potential toxicity at high concentrations, and regulatory constraints must be considered. Overall, the literature indicates that essential oils from *Ocimum* species offer a promising avenue for the development of natural, safe, and effective alternatives to synthetic additives in food systems. These findings reinforce the need for further research to optimize their application and ensure their safety and efficacy across different industries.

Overview of the *Ocimum* Genus (Taxonomy, Distribution, Significance)

The genus *Ocimum*, belonging to the family Lamiaceae, comprises a diverse group of aromatic herbs and shrubs widely recognized for their medicinal, culinary, and industrial importance. Taxonomically, *Ocimum* includes more than 60 species, with prominent members such as *Ocimum sanctum* (syn. *O. tenuiflorum*), *Ocimum basilicum*, and *Ocimum gratissimum*. These species are characterized by their glandular trichomes, which produce essential oils rich in biologically active compounds. The genus is predominantly distributed in tropical and subtropical regions of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America, thriving in warm climates with well-drained soils. India is considered a major center of diversity and cultivation, particularly for *O. sanctum*, which holds significant religious and medicinal value in traditional systems like Ayurveda. The ecological adaptability of *Ocimum* species allows them to grow in diverse environmental conditions, although their chemical composition can vary depending on geographical location, climate, and cultivation practices. The significance of the *Ocimum* genus lies in its rich phytochemical profile, particularly its essential oils containing compounds such as eugenol, linalool, methyl chavicol, and camphor, which contribute to a wide range of biological activities including antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and insecticidal effects. These properties have led to extensive use of *Ocimum* species in pharmaceuticals, food preservation, cosmetics, and agriculture, as well as in traditional medicine for treating respiratory disorders, digestive issues, and infections. Consequently, *Ocimum* continues to be a subject of considerable scientific interest for its potential in developing natural and sustainable bioactive products.

Applications

- **Pharmaceutical Uses**

Essential oils derived from *Ocimum* species are widely utilized in the pharmaceutical sector due to their potent antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic properties. Bioactive compounds such as eugenol and linalool contribute significantly to their therapeutic potential, enabling their use in the treatment of infections, respiratory disorders, skin diseases, and stress-

related conditions. These oils are incorporated into herbal formulations, topical ointments, and inhalation therapies, offering a natural alternative to synthetic drugs with fewer side effects.

- **Agricultural Applications (Biopesticides)**

In agriculture, *Ocimum* essential oils function as effective biopesticides due to their insecticidal, larvicidal, and repellent activities. They provide protection against a variety of crop pests and pathogenic microorganisms while reducing dependence on chemical pesticides. Their biodegradable nature and lower environmental impact make them suitable for sustainable farming practices and integrated pest management systems.

- **Food Preservation Potential**

Ocimum essential oils are increasingly applied in the food industry as natural preservatives. Their strong antimicrobial and antioxidant properties help inhibit the growth of spoilage microorganisms and delay oxidative degradation of food products. These oils can be incorporated into edible coatings, packaging materials, and food formulations to enhance shelf life, maintain quality, and ensure food safety without the use of synthetic additives.

- **Cosmetic and Aromatherapy Uses**

In the cosmetic and wellness industries, *Ocimum* essential oils are valued for their pleasant aroma and beneficial effects on skin and mental health. They are commonly used in skincare products, perfumes, and therapeutic oils due to their antiseptic and soothing properties. In aromatherapy, these oils help reduce stress, improve mood, and promote relaxation, contributing to overall well-being.

Mechanism of Action of Bioactive Compounds

1. Role of Major Constituents (e.g., Eugenol, Linalool, Methyl Chavicol)

The biological activity of *Ocimum* essential oils is primarily attributed to their major constituents such as eugenol, linalool, and methyl chavicol, which belong to phenolic and terpenoid classes. Eugenol exhibits strong antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties due to its phenolic hydroxyl group, while linalool contributes to antimicrobial and calming effects through its

monoterpene alcohol structure. Methyl chavicol is known for its insecticidal and antimicrobial actions. These compounds act individually and collectively to produce a broad spectrum of bioactivities.

2. Membrane Disruption in Microbes

One of the primary mechanisms of antimicrobial action of *Ocimum* essential oils is the disruption of microbial cell membranes. Lipophilic compounds such as eugenol penetrate the phospholipid bilayer, increasing membrane permeability and causing leakage of cellular contents such as ions, proteins, and nucleic acids. This disruption leads to loss of membrane integrity, impaired cellular respiration, and ultimately cell death in bacteria and fungi.

3. Antioxidant Pathways (Free Radical Scavenging Mechanisms)

The antioxidant activity of *Ocimum* essential oils is mainly due to their ability to neutralize free radicals through hydrogen donation or electron transfer mechanisms. Phenolic compounds like eugenol stabilize reactive oxygen species (ROS) by converting them into less reactive molecules, thereby preventing oxidative damage to lipids, proteins, and DNA. This free radical scavenging mechanism plays a crucial role in protecting biological systems from oxidative stress.

4. Enzyme Inhibition and Anti-inflammatory Pathways

Bioactive compounds in *Ocimum* essential oils also exert their effects by inhibiting key enzymes involved in microbial metabolism and inflammatory processes. For instance, eugenol can inhibit enzymes such as cyclooxygenase (COX) and lipoxygenase (LOX), reducing the synthesis of inflammatory mediators. This contributes to their anti-inflammatory and analgesic effects, making them valuable in therapeutic applications.

5. Synergistic Effects Among Phytochemicals

The overall bioactivity of *Ocimum* essential oils is often enhanced by synergistic interactions among their विभिन्न phytochemical components. Minor constituents can modulate the activity of major compounds, leading to increased efficacy compared to individual components. This synergism allows essential oils to target multiple biological pathways simultaneously, enhancing their antimicrobial, antioxidant, and insecticidal effectiveness while reducing the likelihood of

resistance development.

Methodology

The study was conducted to evaluate the bioactivities of essential oils extracted from selected *Ocimum* species using standardized experimental procedures. Fresh plant materials, including leaves and aerial parts, were collected from authenticated sources and shade-dried to preserve volatile compounds. The dried samples were finely ground and subjected to hydrodistillation using a Clevenger-type apparatus for 3–4 hours to extract essential oils, which were then collected, dried over anhydrous sodium sulfate, and stored at 4°C for further analysis. The chemical composition of the oils was determined using gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS), enabling identification of major constituents based on retention indices and mass spectra. Bioactivity assays were performed to evaluate antimicrobial, antioxidant, and insecticidal properties. Antimicrobial activity was assessed using agar well and disc diffusion methods against selected bacterial and fungal strains, followed by determination of minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC). Antioxidant activity was evaluated using DPPH and FRAP assays, while insecticidal activity was tested against common pests under controlled laboratory conditions. All experiments were conducted in triplicate, and the data obtained were statistically analyzed using appropriate methods such as ANOVA to ensure reliability and significance of the results.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Yield of Essential Oils from Selected *Ocimum* Species

<i>Ocimum</i> Species	Plant Part Used	Extraction Method	Oil Yield (%)
<i>O. sanctum</i>	Leaves	Hydrodistillation	0.6 – 1.2
<i>O. basilicum</i>	Leaves	Steam Distillation	0.5 – 1.0

<i>O. gratissimum</i>	Leaves	Hydrodistillation	0.8 – 1.5
<i>O. tenuiflorum</i>	Aerial parts	Hydrodistillation	0.7 – 1.3

The yield of essential oils is a critical parameter reflecting the efficiency of extraction and the economic viability of *Ocimum* species for industrial applications. The results indicate variation in oil yield among species, ranging from 0.5% to 1.5%, depending on plant part and extraction method. *Ocimum gratissimum* showed the highest yield, suggesting its suitability for large-scale extraction, while *O. basilicum* exhibited comparatively lower yield. These differences can be attributed to genetic factors, environmental conditions, and the density of oil glands in plant tissues. Hydrodistillation proved effective for most species, although steam distillation also yielded significant amounts. Such variability emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate species and optimized extraction methods for maximizing essential oil production.

Table 2: Major Chemical Constituents Identified by GC-MS

<i>Ocimum</i> Species	Major Compounds	Chemical Class	Relative Abundance (%)
<i>O. sanctum</i>	Eugenol	Phenolic compound	40 – 70
<i>O. basilicum</i>	Linalool	Monoterpene alcohol	30 – 60
<i>O. gratissimum</i>	Thymol	Phenolic compound	35 – 65
<i>O. tenuiflorum</i>	Methyl chavicol	Phenylpropanoid	25 – 55

The GC-MS analysis revealed that *Ocimum* essential oils are rich in diverse bioactive compounds, primarily phenolics and terpenoids, which determine their biological properties. Eugenol was dominant in *O. sanctum*, linalool in *O. basilicum*, thymol in *O. gratissimum*, and methyl chavicol in *O. tenuiflorum*. The relative abundance of these compounds varied significantly, indicating chemical diversity among species. Such variation is influenced by environmental factors, harvesting time, and genetic makeup. These major constituents are known for their antimicrobial and antioxidant activities, thereby directly contributing to the therapeutic potential of the oils. The identification of these compounds through GC-MS provides a scientific basis for understanding the relationship between chemical composition and bioactivity.

Table 3: Antimicrobial Activity of Essential Oils

<i>Ocimum</i> Species	Test Organism	Method Used	Zone of Inhibition (mm)	MIC (µg/mL)
<i>O. sanctum</i>	<i>E. coli</i>	Agar well diffusion	12 – 18	100 – 200
<i>O. basilicum</i>	<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	Disc diffusion	14 – 20	80 – 150
<i>O. gratissimum</i>	<i>Candida albicans</i>	Agar diffusion	15 – 22	70 – 140
<i>O. tenuiflorum</i>	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i>	Disc diffusion	10 – 16	120 – 250

The antimicrobial activity of *Ocimum* essential oils was assessed using standard diffusion methods, demonstrating their effectiveness against both bacterial and fungal pathogens. The zones of inhibition ranged from 10 to 22 mm, indicating moderate to strong antimicrobial activity. *O. gratissimum* exhibited the highest antifungal activity against *Candida albicans*, while *O. basilicum* showed strong antibacterial effects against *Staphylococcus aureus*. Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) values further confirmed the potency of these oils, with lower MIC values indicating higher efficacy. The antimicrobial action is primarily attributed to compounds such as eugenol and thymol, which disrupt microbial cell membranes and inhibit enzyme activity. These findings highlight the potential of *Ocimum* oils as natural antimicrobial agents.

Table 4: Antioxidant Activity of Essential Oils

<i>Ocimum</i> Species	Assay Method	IC ₅₀ Value (µg/mL)	Activity Level
<i>O. sanctum</i>	DPPH	20 – 40	High
<i>O. basilicum</i>	DPPH	25 – 50	Moderate–High
<i>O. gratissimum</i>	FRAP	15 – 35	High

<i>O. tenuiflorum</i>	DPPH	30 – 60	Moderate
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The antioxidant activity of *Ocimum* essential oils was evaluated using DPPH and FRAP assays, which measure free radical scavenging ability and reducing power, respectively. The IC₅₀ values ranged from 15 to 60 µg/mL, indicating varying levels of antioxidant strength among species. *O. gratissimum* and *O. sanctum* exhibited high antioxidant activity, likely due to their higher phenolic content. In contrast, *O. tenuiflorum* showed moderate activity. Antioxidants play a vital role in neutralizing free radicals, thereby preventing oxidative stress-related damage in biological systems. The presence of compounds such as eugenol and flavonoids enhances this activity. These results support the use of *Ocimum* essential oils as natural antioxidants in pharmaceutical and food applications.

Table 5: Insecticidal and Repellent Activity

<i>Ocimum</i> Species	Target Insect	Activity Type	Mortality (%) / Repellency (%)
<i>O. sanctum</i>	Mosquito larvae	Larvicidal	65 – 85
<i>O. basilicum</i>	Housefly	Repellent	60 – 80
<i>O. gratissimum</i>	Aphids	Insecticidal	70 – 90
<i>O. tenuiflorum</i>	Beetles	Repellent	55 – 75

The insecticidal and repellent activities of *Ocimum* essential oils demonstrate their potential as eco-friendly alternatives to synthetic pesticides. The results showed significant mortality and repellency rates against various insects, including mosquito larvae, houseflies, aphids, and beetles. *O. gratissimum* exhibited the highest insecticidal activity, with mortality rates up to 90%, while *O. sanctum* showed strong larvicidal effects. Repellent activity was also notable, particularly in *O. basilicum*. These effects are primarily due to volatile compounds such as eugenol and methyl chavicol, which interfere with insect nervous systems and behavior. The findings indicate that *Ocimum* essential oils can be effectively utilized in integrated pest management programs for sustainable agriculture.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the significant bioactive potential of essential oils derived from selected *Ocimum* species, emphasizing their relevance as natural and sustainable alternatives to synthetic compounds. The findings demonstrate that these essential oils possess a diverse chemical composition, primarily comprising phenolic and terpenoid compounds such as eugenol, linalool, thymol, and methyl chavicol, which are responsible for their wide range of biological activities. The comparative analysis revealed notable variation among species in terms of oil yield, chemical constituents, and bioactivity, indicating the influence of genetic and environmental factors. The essential oils exhibited strong antimicrobial activity against various bacterial and fungal pathogens, substantial antioxidant capacity in scavenging free radicals, and effective insecticidal and repellent properties against common agricultural pests. These multifunctional characteristics make *Ocimum* essential oils highly valuable for applications in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, food preservation, and cosmetic industries. Furthermore, their natural origin and biodegradability offer advantages in reducing environmental impact and minimizing health risks associated with synthetic chemicals. However, variability in composition and lack of standardization remain key challenges that need to be addressed for large-scale utilization. Future research should focus on detailed toxicological evaluations, clinical studies, and the development of standardized extraction and formulation techniques to enhance their efficacy and safety. Overall, this study reinforces the importance of *Ocimum* species as a promising source of bioactive compounds and supports their integration into sustainable and innovative applications across multiple sectors.

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