

Ethnomedicinal, phytochemical and pharmacological profile of genus *Abelmoschus*

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Abstract

Abelmoschus is a genus of about fifteen species of flowering plants in the mallow family, Malvaceae, native to tropical Africa, Asia and northern Australia. It was formerly included within *Hibiscus*, but is now classified as a distinct genus. The genus comprises annual and perennial herbaceous plants, growing to 2 m tall. The leaves are 10-40 cm long and broad, palmately lobed with 3-7 lobes, the lobes are very variable in depth, from barely lobed, to cut almost to the base of the leaf. The flowers are 4-8 cm diameter, with five white to yellow petals, often with a red or purple spot at the base of each petal. The fruit is a capsule, 5-20 cm long, containing numerous seeds. Members of this genus have been reported to exhibit diverse medicinal properties ranging from antidiabetic, antimicrobial, anticancer, analgesic, antioxidant and antiplasmodial activities. Though there have been reports that some members of this genus exhibit toxic effect, extracts from the leaves, fruits and roots have shown no harmful effects on living cells. Reported compounds isolated from some species of the genus *Abelmoschus* contain primarane skeleton which could be responsible for their similar biologic activity as well as can be explored as a basis for their classification.

Keywords: *Abelmoschus*; Phytochemistry; Pharmacology

Introduction

Plants of the genus *Abelmoschus* belong to the family of flowering plants called *Malvaceae*; this genus, also known as *okra* is composed of numerous species of flowering plants in the mallow family and they are native to tropical and sub-tropical areas (Charrier, 1984). Two are widely cultivated: *A. esculentus*, found throughout the tropics, and *A. caillei*, which is cultivated extensively in Africa (Hamon, 1987; Hamon and Van Slotten, 1989). Interest in the crop is due principally to the high protein and mineral salt content of the pods, making