

Delphinium in Herbal Folklore Myths, Cures and Mysteries

¹Ekashwaran TSK and ²Manikandan R

¹PG Scholar, Department of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture, SRM College of agricultural Sciences, Chengalpattu.

²PG Scholar, Department of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture SRM College of agricultural Sciences, Chengalpattu.

Corresponding Author: ekashwarantsk@gmail.com

Abstract

The genus *Delphinium*, commonly referred to as larkspur, comprises approximately 300 species of flowering plants belonging to the Ranunculaceae family, celebrated for their striking, frequently blue or purple, spiked blooms. Apart from their visual allure, various *Delphinium* species harbor a range of chemical compounds, predominantly diterpenoid alkaloids such as delphinine and methyllycaconitine. These alkaloids contribute to the plant's significant toxicity, posing risks to both humans and animals that can lead to neuromuscular paralysis, irregular heart rhythms, and potentially fatal outcomes.

Their poisonous nature, certain *Delphinium* species, like *Delphinium denudatum* (Jadwar), have been utilized in multiple traditional medicine practices, especially in areas of the Indian subcontinent. Their traditional uses include addressing neurological and mental health disorders (like epilepsy and mania), providing pain relief, reducing fever, and acting as anthelmintics and antipyretics. Emerging scientific research has begun to explore these traditional applications, uncovering hepatoprotective, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antimicrobial effects in specific.

Introduction

The term "Delphinium" is derived from the Ancient Greek word "delphis," which translates to "dolphin," a reference to the way their closed flower buds resemble a dolphin's snout. Although many popular cultivated varieties are hybrids, this genus includes about 300 species of both annual and perennial plants, distributed throughout the Northern Hemisphere and in the elevated regions of tropical Africa.

These graceful plants are mainly celebrated for their beautiful hues of blue and purple, although there are cultivars that come in pink, white, and even red or yellow. Each flower, referred to as a floret, can be single, semi-double, or double, and is usually positioned along a central upright stem that can vary considerably in height, from smaller varieties reaching just one foot to impressive forms that exceed six feet.

Alongside their visual attractiveness, delphiniums also carry symbolic meanings often linked to joy, kindness, dignity, elegance, and an eagerness to embrace new

experiences. They are often chosen for floral arrangements, serving as a classic vertical line element, and are frequently found in cottage gardens and perennial borders.

Source: [Gyula Pinke et,al]



DIFFERENT SPECIES THAT YIELDING MEDICINAL PROPERTIES

Here are a few prominent Delphinium species acknowledged for their medicinal advantages

1. *Delphinium denudatum* Wall

This species is well-regarded for its extensive traditional medicinal use, particularly in Unani and Ayurvedic medicine in India, as well as in traditional Persian medicine.

Traditional Uses

It acts as an antidote to various toxins (such as aconite and snake venom), serves as a nerve tonic, acts as a cardiogenic, works as an anti-pyretic (fever reducer), provides anti-inflammatory effects, and serves as an analgesic (pain reliever) for headaches and toothaches.

2. *Delphinium grandiflorum* L. (Siberian Larkspur)

This species is commonly encountered and has received significant recognition for its medicinal properties, especially within traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

Traditional Uses

It has been used for traumatic injuries, enteritis, rheumatism, headaches, toothaches, neuralgia, asthma, and various forms of pain.

3. *Delphinium staphisagria* (Stavesacre)

Traditional Uses

Historically, its seeds have been used as an insecticide, particularly for treating lice (hence the name "lice-bane"), and as a remedy for parasites. It has also been traditionally used for itchy skin, toothaches, and as an emetic or purgative (though typically not taken internally due to toxicity). There are also traditional accounts of its effectiveness for hair loss.

4. *Delphinium barbeyi* (Barber's Larkspur)

Traditional Uses

Despite its high toxicity, traditional practices may have explored its alkaloids for neurological effects.

MEDICINAL PROPERTIES OF DELPHINIUM

Although Delphinium is an attractive and popular ornamental plant, it is crucial to begin any conversation about its medicinal properties with a significant warning regarding its toxicity. The entire Delphinium genus contains potent diterpenoid alkaloids that can be extremely harmful if consumed, leading to severe and potentially fatal consequences for both heart health and the nervous system.

Despite its toxic nature, certain species of Delphinium, especially *Delphinium denudatum* (known as Jadwar or Nirvisha in traditional Indian and Unani medicine), have been utilized for centuries to address various health issues.

Neuroprotective and Neurological Uses

Delphinium is frequently used in Unani and Ayurvedic practices for neurological and psychological disorders, including epilepsy, convulsions in infants, hemiplegia, facial paralysis, migraines, mania, hysteria, numbness, tremors, and schizophrenia. It is regarded as a nerve tonic, which is crucial in neurodegenerative conditions such as Parkinson's disease. Its anticonvulsant properties have also been observed in animal studies.

Anti-inflammatory and Analgesic (Pain-Relieving)

Employed for various pains, including headaches, toothaches, neuralgia, rheumatism, and pain resulting from injuries. It has indicated that diterpenoid alkaloids (such as grandifolines) from *Delphinium grandiflorum* show in vitro anti-inflammatory effects by inhibiting nitric oxide (NO) production. Extracts from *D. denudatum* have also demonstrated significant pain-relieving effects in studies.

Antimicrobial Properties

It Used to treat intestinal parasites, fluid retention, and several infections. Ethanol extracts from the roots of *D.*

denudatum have shown antibacterial and antifungal activity against various human pathogenic bacteria and fungi (such as *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli*). Furthermore, silver nanoparticles derived from *D. denudatum* root extract have proven effective against bacteria and mosquitoes.

Hepatoprotective (Liver Protecting)

Some traditional applications pertain to its benefits for liver ailments like jaundice. Ethanolic extracts of *D. denudatum* root have significantly reduced alcohol-induced liver damage in animal studies, preventing lipid peroxidation and restoring liver function indicators.

Antioxidant Properties

Implicit in its overall "purifying" or "detoxifying" effects in traditional therapies. Extracts from Delphinium, including those from *D. denudatum*, contain compounds such as β -Sitosterol and phenolic acids that demonstrate strong antioxidant capabilities by scavenging free radicals.

Antidotal/Antitoxic Properties:

Delphinium is recognized as an antidote for various poisons, including snake venom, scorpion stings, and particularly aconite poisoning (from *Aconitum ferox*). The term "Nirvisha" means "that which counteracts the effects of poison." While this traditional application is remarkable, direct scientific evidence supporting its antitoxic effects against various poisons is intricate. Its function as an antidote, especially for severe toxins, would likely involve alleviating symptoms rather than directly neutralizing the toxic agents themselves.

CONCLUSION

In summary, *Delphinium* is a genus of considerable botanical significance due to its horticultural appeal, intricate chemistry marked by powerful alkaloids, its historical role in traditional medicine, and its increasing relevance as a scientific reference for the evolutionary biology of flowers. Continued research is vital to fully comprehend the therapeutic potential of certain species while also addressing and managing the toxicity associated with the genus.

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