Antifungal Effects of Essential Oils of Zataria multiflora, Mentha pulegium, and Mentha piperita

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HIGHLIGHTS
- All Essential Oils (EOs) of Zataria multiflora, Mentha pulegium, and Mentha piperita showed antifungal activities.
- Among three studied plant EOs, Z. multiflora EO showed the strongest antifungal activity.
- Inhibition zone of Z. multiflora EO for Aspergillus spp., Penicillium spp., and Geotrichum candidum were 11.6, 5.7, and 7.1 mm, respectively.

ABSTRACT
Background: Among important fungi associated with foods are Aspergillus spp., Penicillium spp., and Geotrichum spp. In this study, we evaluated antifungal effects of Essential Oils (EOs) of Zataria multiflora, Mentha pulegium, and Mentha piperita.

Methods: Antifungal properties of EOs of M. piperita, M. pulegium, and Z. multiflora against Aspergillus spp., Penicillium spp., and Geotrichum candidum were determined by agar well diffusion and broth macrodilution method. Data were analyzed by SPSS 20.

Results: Among three studied plant EOs, Z. multiflora EO had the strongest antifungal activity (p<0.05) on tested fungi; so that the Minimum Inhibitory Concentration (MIC) and Minimum Fungicidal Concentration (MFC) were 0.01 and 0.3% for G. candidum, 0.005 and 0.3% for Penicillium spp., and 0.1 and 0.3% for Aspergillus spp.

Conclusion: All three studied plant EOs showed antifungal activities. However, as Z. multiflora EO showed the most antifungal effect, it could be specially suggested as natural powerful antifungal preservatives in the food industry.

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Introduction

Some fungi associated with foods, such as Aspergillus spp., Penicillium spp., and Geotrichum spp., may cause food spoilage and diseases (Derek and Gary, 2014). Control of fungi in foods is usually done using synthetic chemical additives, but some synthetic preservatives may have mutagenic, carcinogenic, and allergic effects. Thus, in recent years, researchers have focused on using natural compounds, especially Essential Oils (EOs) of the plants have been focused to prevent fungal growth and spoilage in foods (Khatibi et al., 2015). EOs are natural plant compounds obtained from the plants by different methods such as steam distillation (Burt, 2004; Moradi et al., 2014).

Mentha piperita (peppermint) and Mentha pulegium (pennyroyal) are the members of Lamiaceae family, produce high quality plant EOs (Singh and Pandey, 2018). Zataria multiflora Bios (Shirazi thyme) belongs to the Lamiaceae family and grows mainly in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Zarei Mahmoudabadi et al., 2007). In this...
in vitro study, we evaluated antifungal effects of EOs of *Z. multiflora*, *M. pulegium*, and *M. piperita*.

**Materials and methods**

**EOs**

EOs of *M. piperita*, *M. pulegium*, and *Z. multiflora* used in this study were obtained from Barij® Essence Pharmaceutical Company (Kashan, Iran). The dilutions of EOs and itraconazole were prepared using dimethyl sulfoxide (Sigma-Aldrich Chemie GmbH, Steinheim, Germany).

**Organisms**

The tested fungi included *Aspergillus* spp., *Penicillium* spp., *Geotrichum candidum* that were isolated from cheese culture. Ten g of each cheese sample was homogenized using a stomacher 400 with 90 ml of sterile physiological saline for at least 2 min. Decimal dilutions of the homogenized samples were prepared in sterile physiological saline and were plated in duplicates onto Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA; Sigma-Aldrich Chemie GmbH, Steinheim, Germany) plates and were incubated at 30 °C for 3-7 days. After that, the plates were observed for the presence of mold colonies. The fungal isolates were identified and purified using a combination of macroscopic observation and microscopic Tease mount test (Reiss et al., 2012). Isolated strains were cultured on plates and incubated at 30 °C for 7 days. The 7 day old culture slants were flooded with 5 ml of 0.01% tween 80® (Sigma-Aldrich Chemie GmbH, Steinheim, Germany) with a sterile Pasteur pipette and shaken vigorously to give inoculums; then, the conidia was counted with a haemocytometer and diluted in sterilized distilled water to correspond to a final inoculums concentration of 2.4×10⁶ spores/ml.

**Determination of antifungal effects**

- **Agar well diffusion method**

After mixing a solution of fungi, 0.1 ml of fungal suspension at a concentration of 2.4×10⁶ Colony Forming Unit (CFU/ml) was transferred to PDA plates and was spread using a sterile bent glass rod. At the center of plates, 6 mm wells by sterile cork bo of each well. 50 μl of different concentrations of EOs were poured into wells instead of EOs.

To determine the MIC and MFC and, one way ANOVA was considered as a significant differences among groups.

**Results and discussion**

Among three studied plant EOs, *Z. multiflora* EO showed the strongest antifungal activity (p<0.05) on tested fungi by macrodilution method (Table 1); so that the MIC and MFC were 0.01 and 0.3% for *G. candidum*, 0.005 and 0.3% for *Penicillium* spp., and 0.1 and 0.3% for *Aspergillus* spp.

By increasing the concentration of EOs, the diameter of the inhibitory zone was also increased in agar well diffusion method (Tables 2-4). *Z. multiflora* EOs had the most antifungal activity (p<0.05) against tested fungi; and the inhibition zone for *Aspergillus* spp., *Penicillium* spp., and *G. candidum* were 11.6, 5.7, and 7.1 mm, respectively.

Fungi are of the important agents of food spoilage due to the production of different enzymes and break down the nutrients (Ledenbach and Marshall, 2009). In this study, the antifungal effect of *M. piperita*, *M. pulegium*, and *Z. multiflora* on the growth of *Aspergillus* spp., *Penicillium* spp., and *G. candidum* were determined. The results of the present study showed that all the tested plants EOs had the acceptable antifungal activities on tested fungi. However, the most antifungal activity was recorded for *Z. multiflora* EOs.

The findings of this study are close to that of Gandomi et al. (2009) who found inhibitory effect of *Z. multiflora* EOs against *A. flavus* in culture media and white cheese. In their study, the value of MIC and MFC were reported 400 and 1000 ppm, respectively on PDA.
Table 1: Minimum Inhibitory Concentration (MIC) and Minimum Fungicidal Concentration (MFC) levels of three studied plant essential oils against Aspergillus spp., Penicillium spp., and Geotrichum candidum

| Plant essential oils | Geotrichum candidum | Penicillium spp. | Aspergillus spp. |
|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                      | MIC (%)             | MFC (%)         | MIC (%)         | MFC (%)         |
| Mentha piperita      | 0.3                 | 1               | 0.05            | 1               |
| Mentha pulegium      | 0.1                 | 0.5             | 0.01            | 0.5             |
| Zataria multiflora   | 0.01                | 0.3             | 0.005           | 0.3             |

Table 2: Mean inhibition zone (mm) of mycelial growth in media treated by Mentha pulegium essential oil

| Concentrations (%) | Aspergillus spp. | Penicillium spp. | Geotrichum candidum |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1                  | 0.5              | 2.00             | 0.25                |
| 2                  | 3.0              | 3.14             | 2.14                |
| 3                  | 3.5              | 4.42             | 2.28                |
| 5                  | 5.0              | 5.36             | 7.55                |
| 7                  | 6.5              | 5.42             | 7.66                |

The different letters in each column indicate the significant difference (p<0.05).

Table 3: Mean inhibition zone (mm) of mycelial growth in media treated by Mentha piperita essential oil

| Concentrations (%) | Aspergillus spp. | Penicillium spp. | Geotrichum candidum |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1                  | 0.5              | 1.16             | 0.8                |
| 2                  | 2.5              | 3.37             | 4.4                |
| 3                  | 3.5              | 4.28             | 4.5                |
| 7                  | 5.5              | 4.62             | 5.87               |

The different letters in each column indicate the significant difference (p<0.05).

Table 4: Mean inhibition zone (mm) of mycelial growth in media treated by Zataria multiflora essential oil

| Concentrations (%) | Aspergillus spp. | Penicillium spp. | Geotrichum candidum |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1                  | 0.5              | 0.83             | 0.66               |
| 2                  | 3.5              | 2.12             | 1.66               |
| 3                  | 4.0              | 4.42             | 3.28               |
| 7                  | 11.6             | 5.66             | 7.1                |

The different letters in each column indicate the significant difference (p<0.05).

et al. (2011) stated that the MIC and MFC ranges of Z. multiflora EOs against Candida sp. were 0.003-0.6 and 0.007-4 μl/ml, respectively. In another study, Effatpanah et al. (2010) examined the antifungal effects of the Z. multiflora EO on five different saprophytes and dermatophytes. These researchers showed that a >10 mg/ml concentration of Z. multiflora EO prevented the growth of Aspergillus fumigatus and Aspergillus flavus. The variation between the results may be related to the geographical condition and the time of harvesting the plants.

The differences in antifungal activities of EOs relate mainly to their chemical components. The main components of Z. multiflora, M. pulegium, and M. piperita EOs are thymol, pulegone, and menthol, respectively which may show different antimicrobial properties (Khosravi...
et al., 2009; Saharkhiz et al. 2012; Sokovic et al. 2009; Verma et al. 2011). Hammer et al. (1999) reported that the antifungal activity of thyme (Thymus vulgaris) EO was stronger than the peppermint oil which is in agreement with the results of the present study. Similar findings were also reported by Ameziane et al. (2007) who showed perfect antifungal activity of M. pulegium against three fungal species, including Penicillium digitatum, Penicillium italicum, and G. candidum.

Conclusion

All EOs of Z. multiflora, M. pulegium, and M. piperita showed antifungal activities. However, as Z. multiflora EO showed the most antifungal effect, it could be specially suggested as natural powerful antifungal preservatives in food industry.

Author contributions

M.B. and H.M. designed the study; Z.Z.C. and A.E. conducted the experimental work; M.B. and A.E. analyzed the data; Z.Z.C. and M.B. wrote the manuscript. All authors revised and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest in the study.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the deputy of research of Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran for their financial support. This study is extracted from the DVM thesis at Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran.

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