Review Article

Review on *Luffa acutangula* L.: Ethnobotany, Phytochemistry, Nutritional Value and Pharmacological Properties

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**ABSTRACT**

*Luffa acutangula* L. (Common name: Ridge gourd, Family: Cucurbitaceae) is a popular vegetable in India and other Asian countries. It is a healthy food and contains good amount of fiber, vitamins and minerals including Vitamin B2, Vitamin C, carotene, niacin, calcium, phosphorus, iron and small quantities of iodine and fluorine. It is reported to contain many phytochemicals such as flavonoids, saponins, luffangulin, sapogenin, oleanolic acid and Cucurbitacin B. *L. acutangula* has been used extensively in Indian traditional system of medicines as diuretic, expectorant, laxative, purgative, hypoglycemic agent and bitter tonic. The ethnobotanical survey revealed its use to protect jaundice, insect bites, swollen hemorrhoids, dysentery and headache. Various biological activities of this plant were reported including its use in weight loss, jaundice, blood purification, hypoglycemia, constipation, skin care, immune system booster, wound healing, eye problems, stomach worms and asthma. The present review work focused on its distribution, botanical characters, ethnobotanical uses, folklores claims, nutritional value, phytochemical constituents, medicinal properties and biological properties of *L. acutangula*.

**Keywords:** *L. acutangula*, ridge gourd, nutritional value, phytochemicals, medicinal value, biological activity

**INTRODUCTION**

*Luffa acutangula* L., belongs to the family Cucurbitaceae, is commonly known as ridge gourd and it is used as vegetable in Asian countries. It has different vernacular names in different languages like English (Ridge gourd, Angled luffa, Chinese okra, Dish-cloth gourd, Ribbed luffa), Silk gourd, Sinkwa towel sponge, Sinqua melon, Vegetable sponge), Hindi (Jhimani, Karvituri, Karviti, Sankirah, Rantorai), Sanskrit (Gantali, Kosataki, Ksweda, Mridangaphali, Sutikta), Urdu (Turai), Kannada (Kahire, Kahi Heere, Naaga daali balli), Malayalam (Athanga), Marathi (Divali, Kadudodaki, Kadushirali, Kaduturai, Ranturai, Kadudod-ka, Dadudodaka), Telugu (Adavibira, Chedubira, Sendubirai, Verribira, Adviveera, Verri beera, Chedu beera, Adavi beera, Chathi beera), Punjabi (Jhinga, Shirola), Tamil (Peerku, Itukari, Itukarikkothi, Kakappam, Kacapp, Kaippappirikku, Karniti).¹ The entire plant of *Luffa acutangula* L. is medicinally important and is used extensively in Indian traditional system of medicines. From Ayurvedic point of view, ridge gourd increases vata (the impulse principle necessary to mobilize the function of the nervous system) and kapha (the body fluid principle which relates to mucous, lubrication and the carrier of nutrients into the arterial system) and also it cools down and pacifies the dosha pitta (the energy principle which uses bile to direct digestion and hence metabolism into the venous system) in the body².

Habit and habitat

*L. acutangula* is a pan tropical climbing herb and cultivated throughout India and can grow in all types of soils and in naturalized tropics and sub tropics and can be grown in summer or in rainy season. It is propagated by seeds and can be sown either in February-March or June-July³. Botanical characters

Roots are yellowish-brown in colour, almost cylindrical in shape. They are rough because of the longitudinal wrinkles and also showed the presence of few adventitious roots. Stem is brownish-yellow in colour, 0.2-0.4 cm thick, 5 angled, glabrous, and consists of tendrils (3-fid tendril). Petiole is brownish yellow coloured, 3-8 cm in length; somewhat twisted, wrinkled, orbicular, and angular lamina is pale or light-green in colour, crumpled and broad. Flowers Gynoecious, petals yellow and showy, female flower solitary in long pedicel, occasionally in clusters, ovary long, slightly ribbed stigma. Male flower is light greenish-yellow coloured, occurs in small racemes having pubescent calyx and lanceolate lobes. Three stamens are present and corolla is yellow in colour whereas female flower is solitary, yellow coloured having a long pedicel. Ovary is strongly ribbed and stigma tri-fid. Fruits are obovate, cylindrical or club-shaped, pale yellowish-brown in colour, tapering towards the base and covered with 8-10 prominent longitudinal ribs on outer surface. There are three chambers, of which inner part is fibrous and easily detachable from outer one. Seeds are black coloured, bitter

*Author for Correspondence*
The ethnobotanical survey of the hilly areas in Maharashtra revealed that very fine powder of fruits of L. acutangula is used as a snuff to protect jaundice. It is also used traditionally in insect bites by tribes of Western Maharashtra. A powder of the fruit is used for rubbing on the swollen hemorrhoids. Kernel of the seeds is soft and an efficient remedy for dysentery while the juice of roasted young fruit is applied to cure headache.

**Folklore claims**
Ribbed gourd has diuretic properties; used as an expectorant, laxative and purgative; hypoglycemic agent, bitter tonic; used in the enlargement of spleen. The roots of ribbed gourd added to milk or water is helpful in the removal of kidney stones. The roots of ribbed gourd are added to cooled water, boiled and applied on skin in the swelling of the lymph glands. The leaves of the ribbed gourd are useful in the treatment of dysentery. The leaves or juice of the ribbed gourd are used as dressing in the diseases such as inflammation of spleen, ringworms, piles and even in leprosy. Pounded leaves mixed with garlic are applied locally for a relief in leprosy. Oil is extracted from the seeds of ribbed gourd and used in the treatment of skin diseases. Ridge gourd is also an effective home remedy for the prevention of premature greying of hair. Ridge gourd acts as an appetizer for the digestion of food and contains good amount of fiber, vitamins and minerals including Vitamin B2, Vitamin C, carotene, niacin, calcium, phosphorus, iron and small quantities of iodine and fluorine (Table 2). Ridge gourd has a sweet taste, cooling in nature and easy to digest. They form a low calorie diet, which is considered good for diabetics. Both the soft pulp and skin of ribbed gourd are used in making various recipes, especially in South Indian cuisine. Chutneys made from the pulp and the peel of ribbed gourd are consumed as food in almost every part of India. It is very nutritive plant and has a bitter taste in nature, shape ovoid-oblong.

**Ethnobotanical uses**

The most common use of the ribbed gourd fruit is cooked as a vegetable. It is very nutritive plant and has a bitter taste if taken raw. Ridge gourd acts as an appetizer and it is a healthy food and contains good amount of fiber, vitamins and minerals including Vitamin B2, Vitamin C, carotene, niacin, calcium, phosphorus, iron and small quantities of iodine and fluorine (Table 2). Ridge gourd has a sweet taste, cooling in nature and easy to digest. They form a low calorie diet, which is considered good for diabetics. Both the soft pulp and skin of ribbed gourd are used in making various recipes, especially in South Indian cuisine. Chutneys made from the pulp and the peel of ribbed gourd is known for their health benefits.

**Nutritional value**

The most common use of the ribbed gourd fruit is cooked as a vegetable. It is very nutritive plant and has a bitter taste if taken raw. Ridge gourd acts as an appetizer and it is a healthy food and contains good amount of fiber, vitamins and minerals including Vitamin B2, Vitamin C, carotene, niacin, calcium, phosphorus, iron and small quantities of iodine and fluorine (Table 2). Ridge gourd has a sweet taste, cooling in nature and easy to digest. They form a low calorie diet, which is considered good for diabetics. Both the soft pulp and skin of ribbed gourd are used in making various recipes, especially in South Indian cuisine. Chutneys made from the pulp and the peel of ribbed gourd is known for their health benefits.

**Medicinal uses**

Ayurvedic literature revealed that fruits of L. acutangula are used in the treatment of vata, kapha, anaeimia, leucoderma, tumors and also useful as diuretic and in splenic enlargement. Various biological activities reported on L. acutangula were shown in Table 3. In addition to its medicinal value, the fruit of L. acutangula are consumed as food in almost every part of India. Ayurveda has attributed ribbed gourd with a number of health benefits which current clinical research is also supporting as well. From Ayurveda point of view, ridge gourd increases vata and kapha, but it cools down and

**References**


**Table 1: Chemical constituents reported in L. acutangula**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Parts studied</th>
<th>Chemical constituents identified</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Luffeine, vitamins and minerals.</td>
<td>[13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lignin (58.7 mg/kg), Tannin (1.84 mg /kg), Phenol (0.62 mg/kg), Flavonoid (0.45 mg/kg) and Alkaloid (0.19 mg/kg)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Seed</td>
<td>Fixed oil, palmitic, stearic, and myristic acids.</td>
<td>[16]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lectin and chito-oligosaccharides.</td>
<td>[13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Luffangulin, cucurbitacin B, sapogenin and oleanolic acid.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Nutritional values of L. acutangula.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Parts studied</th>
<th>Food Materials</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Edible portion of fruit (100 g)</td>
<td>Carbohydrate (0.2 g), dietary fiber (3.3 g), organic acid (0.11-0.6 g), Ca (14 mg), K (160 mg), Mg (14 mg), Zn (0.2 mg), thiamine (0.05 mg), riboflavin (0.01 mg) and niacin(0.20 mg)</td>
<td>[7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Protein (9.6 mg/g), carbohydrates (5.5 mg/g), crude fiber (2.8 mg/g), total fat (2.5 mg/g), energy value (22.9 Kcal), vitamin E (0.01 mg/g), vitamin C (2.05 mg/g), free fatty acid (43.9 mg/g), P (4.86%), S (2.22%), Mo (0.07%), Mg (2.62%), Si (2.19%) and Fe (0.85%)</td>
<td>[15]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seed</td>
<td>Amino acids, phosphorous, iron and magnesium</td>
<td>[13]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in taste, shape ovoid-oblong. Luffa acutangula was reported that fruits of L. acutangula were used in the treatment of vata, kapha, anaeimia, leucoderma, tumors and also useful as diuretic and in splenic enlargement. Various biological activities reported on L. acutangula were shown in Table 3. In addition to its medicinal value, the fruit of L. acutangula are consumed as food in almost every part of India. Ayurveda has attributed ribbed gourd with a number of health benefits which current clinical research is also supporting as well. From Ayurveda point of view, ridge gourd increases vata and kapha, but it cools down and...
pacifies the dosha pitta in the body \[8\]. In spite of their bland taste, ridge gourds have many health benefits:

**Weight loss:** Since the ridge gourd is low in saturated fats and cholesterol, it is an ideal diet for those who are looking for weight loss. Ridge gourd has a high water content which makes it a food with very less calories.

**Jaundice:** The ridge gourd juice is a very good natural remedy for the treatment of jaundice. The juice which is prepared by pounding the ridge gourd or the seed powder is useful in controlling jaundice. The dried fruits are powdered and used as snuff in the treatment of jaundice.

**Blood purification:** Ridge gourd has blood purifying properties. It helps in the purification, restoration and nourishment of the liver and is also helpful in the liver detoxification resulting due to alcohol intoxication.

**Hypoglycemia:** Ridge gourd has certain peptides which are exactly like insulin, alkaloids and charantin chemicals which help in reducing the blood sugar and urine sugar levels.

**Constipation:** the cellulose fibers present in ridge gourd are used in the treatment of constipation and are also effective in the treatment of piles.

**Skin care:** Ridge gourd is allowed to dry and mature on the vine and it can be harvested as a sponge. This sponge has been used traditionally as an exfoliating product while bathing. They are considered to be useful in removing dead cells from the skin thus making the skin smooth and conditioned. The blood purifying properties of ridge gourd are helpful against pimples and acne problems. Luffa sponge is also effective in fighting off foot and body odor.

**Immune system booster:** Juice of ridge gourd mixed with other healthy vegetables taken daily helps in strengthening the immune system and helps the body in fighting against infections effectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Parts studied</th>
<th>Biological activity</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hydroalcoholic extract of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Hepatoprotective activity</td>
<td>[17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saponin fraction of <em>L. acutangula</em> seeds</td>
<td></td>
<td>[3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethanolic fruit extracts of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>[18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ether, chloroform, ethanol and aqueous extracts of fruits of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Anti-diabetic activity</td>
<td>[19]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juice of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>[13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methanolic and aqueous extracts of fruit of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>[20]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Methanolic and aqueous extracts of fruit of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Anti-ulcer activity</td>
<td>[21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Methanolic extract of fruit of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Anti-proliferative and anti-angiogenic effects</td>
<td>[22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ethanolic and aqueous extracts of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Anti-cancer</td>
<td>[5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Extracts were prepared by cold maceration using aerial parts of <em>Luffa acutangula</em></td>
<td>Antioxidant activity</td>
<td>[23, 24]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methanolic and aqueous extracts of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>[25]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethanolic seed extract of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>[26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ethanolic extract of <em>L. acutangula</em> fruits</td>
<td>CNS depressant activity</td>
<td>[27]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Seeds of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Fungistatic property</td>
<td>[28]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ethanolic extract of fruit of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Anti-cataleptic activity</td>
<td>[29, 30, 31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ethanolic extract of fruit of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Analgesic activity</td>
<td>[26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Fruit extract of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Antimicrobial activity</td>
<td>[7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><em>L. acutangula</em> fruits</td>
<td>Developmental toxicity</td>
<td>[33, 34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Aerial parts of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Larvicidal activity</td>
<td>[6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ethanolic extracts of Pericarp of <em>L. acutangula</em></td>
<td>Immuno-modulatory activity</td>
<td>[35]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eye problems: The high β-carotene content of ridge gourd fruit is considered good for the eyes. Fresh juice is also put in eyes to treat granular conjunctivitis and sties.

Wound healing: The pulp of the ridge gourd is ground and applied on the wound to stop the bleeding.

Stomach worms: Ridge gourd is boiled in two glasses of water and then added adequate salt. This mixture is taken twice daily, to kill stomach worms.

Asthma: The gourd is ground and ½ cup ridge gourd juice extracted mixed with sugar and taken twice a day to control asthma.

Other: Ridge gourd is also useful as an emetic, expectorant and demulcent.

CONCLUSION

Overview of L. acutangula revealed that the plant is the source of many nutrients and therapeutically important chemical constituents. Ethnobotanical and folklore claims indicated its traditional use in indigenous and traditional medicinal systems of India. Studies have exposed that it has hepatoprotective, antidiabetic, antiulcer, antiproliferative and antiangiogenic, anticancer, antioxidant, CNS depressant, fungistatic, anticaulotropic, analgesic, antimicrobial, larvicidal and immunomodulatory activity. Due to its high nutritional value and proven medicinal importance, some nutraceutical products could be developed from L. acutangula, since it is already being consumed as vegetable throughout India. Further, studies should also be focused on its bioactive principles of L. acutangula which are responsible for the health benefits offered by this plant, so that the bioactive compounds could give some leads for new drug discovery to various chronic diseases.

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