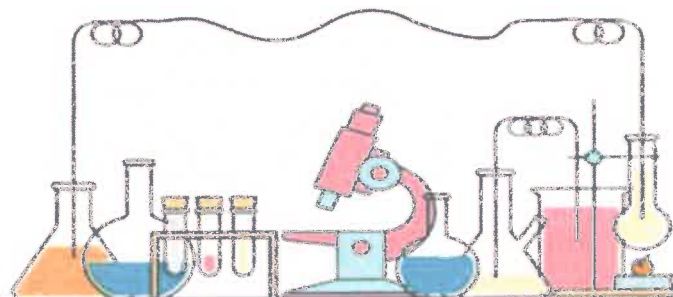




School of Science
University of Minho



3rd Symposium on Medicinal Chemistry of University of Minho

May 26th, 2017

School of Science, Chemistry Department

University of Minho, Campus of Gualtar

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Posters

- P01 Phenolic Profile, Tocopherols and Antioxidant Activity of Watercress** (41)
José Pinela
- P02 Serine HydroxyMethylTransferase: Inhibit it or Improve it?** (42)
H. S. Fernandes
- P03 Organic acids, tocopherols and antioxidant activity of white and black garlic samples** (43)
Joana Botas
- P04 From the raw material to your headache** (44)
Iva Costa
- P05 Are you confident about your Chromatographic Result?** (45)
Katalin Kováts
- P06 Improving the bioactivity of medicinal plants using gamma radiation: Thymus vulgaris L. infusions as a case-study.** (46)
Eliana Pereira
- P07 The role of chamomile phenolic compounds in the development of dairy functional foods** (47)
C. Caleja
- P08 Rosa canina L. as new food ingredient an source of bioactive compounds** (48)
T.C. S. P. Pires
- P09 Synthesis of *N*-catechoyl phenylalanine and dehydrophenylalanine derivatives** (49)
I. Machado
- P10 Synthesis of the methyl esters of *N*-phenoyl and *N*-catechoyl dehydroalanine and dehydrophenylalanine** (50)
S. Oliveira
- P11 Synthesis of phenolic and catecholic amino acids by the modified multicomponent Ugi reaction** (51)
L.S. Monteiro
- P12 Synthesis of phenolic and catecholic amino acids by Michael addition to a dehydroalanine derivative** (52)
J. Parente
- P13 Theoretical and computational studies addressed to the stereo and regio- selective synthesis of polyhydroxylated sugar-like compounds** (53)
J. F. Rocha
- P14 *Pseudofistulina radicata* (Schwein) Burds: the first study focused on its antioxidant activity and bioactive compounds** (54)
Blanca N. Castaneda
- P15 Synthesis of a low molecular weight peptide hydrogelator based on dehydroamino acids** (55)
Rita L. Araújo
- P16 An efficient method for dehydration of 6-carbamoylpurines** (56)
Mónica C. S. Fernandes

Phenolic Profile, Tocopherols and Antioxidant Activity of Watercress

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Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale* R. Br.) is a cruciferous vegetable of the Brassicaceae family frequently classed as superfood. Several epidemiological studies have established a positive correlation between its consumption and a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer [1,2]. These health-promoting effects can be attributed to antioxidant nutrients (such as tocopherols) and non-nutrients (such as phenolic compounds), which may act synergistically and offer protection against oxidative stress and degenerative diseases. This study was carried out aiming to characterize the watercress profile in phenolic compounds and tocopherols and evaluate its antioxidant properties. Wild specimens of watercress were collected in a stream located in the municipality of Bragança, Portugal, and promptly analyzed. Phenolic compounds were analyzed by HPLC-DAD-ESI/MS and tocopherols by HPLC with a fluorescence detector [3,4]. Hydroalcoholic extracts were prepared by solid-liquid extraction and four *in vitro* assays were performed to evaluate the antioxidant capacity, which was assessed via DPPH free-radical scavenging activity, reducing power (ferricyanide/Prussian blue assay), β -carotene bleaching inhibition (β -carotene-linoleate model system), and thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) formation inhibition in brain homogenates [3,4]. Watercress was particularly rich in flavonoids, mainly quercetin and isorhamnetin derivatives. Interesting amounts of hydroxycinnamic acids were also detected. α -Tocopherol was identified as the predominant isoform, followed by γ - and β -tocopherols. The low EC₅₀ values for the TBARS formation and β -carotene bleaching inhibition revealed that the hydroalcoholic extracts have a high lipid peroxidation inhibition capacity. These results support the consumption of watercress as source of phytochemicals potentially capable of inhibiting free radical-mediated reactions and its classification as a superfood.

Acknowledgments:

The authors are grateful to the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT, Portugal) and FEDER under Programme PT2020 for financial support to CIMO (UID/AGR/00690/2013); to FCT/MEC for financial support to REQUIMTE/LAQV (UID/QUI/50006/2013 - POCI/01/0145/FERDER/007265); and to FCT for the grant (SFRH/BD/92994/2013, funded by the European Social Fund and MEC through POCH) attributed to J. Pinela.

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