

Xylosma G. Forst. Genus

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Xylosma G. Forst. is a genus of plants belonging to the *Salicaceae* family with intertropical distribution in America, Asia, and Oceania. Of the 100 accepted species, 22 are under some level of conservation risk. Around 13 species of the genus used as medicinal plants were found, mainly in Central and South America, with a variety of uses, among which antimicrobial is the most common.

Keywords: *Xylosma* ; ethnopharmacology ; phytochemicals ; *Salicaceae*

1. Genus

The *Salicaceae* Mirb. family, to which the *Xylosma* genus belongs, is famously medicinal because of the *Salix* genus (willow), the pharmacological properties of which were already used in ancient Mesopotamia, and were extolled in the first century CE, in Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* ^{[1][2]}.

The *Xylosma* genus is one of the 55 that conform the *Salicaceae* family ^[3], and is composed of 100 accepted species ^[3], although others list 45 ^[4]. Until recently, it was included in the now-deprecated *Flacourtiaceae* family, but has now been assigned to *Salicaceae* ^[5]. The name stems from the Greek words for "wood" and "smell" in reference to odoriferous quality of the wood of some Pacific species of the genus ^[4], presumably *X. orbiculata* and *X. suaveolens* used to perfume coconut oil by early South Pacific inhabitants ^[6]. At first, the genus was named *Myroxylon* (myrrh-wood) but was changed to *Xylosma* to avoid confusion with South American balsam trees ^[7]. Not all species in the genus are sweet-smelling: *X. maidenii* timber, for example, is foul-smelling. *Xylosma* species are described in detail by Woodson et al. ^[8].

In shrubs or small trees, often with axillary spines, the branchlets commonly lenticellate. Leaves alternate, sometimes borne in fascicles, usually short-petiolate, estipulate, the blade is often ±coriaceous, usually glandular-dentate, penninerved, rarely entire-margined, without pellucid-glands. Inflorescences axillary, fasciculate or contracted-racemose, and are rarely racemose. Flowers are small, dioecious, or rarely polygamous; pedicels are articulated above the base, and the bracts are minute; sepals 4-5(-6), imbricate, usually scale-like, slightly connate at the base, often ciliolate along the margins, usually persistent; petals none; stamens ∞ (8–35 in Panamanian spp.), usually surrounded by an annular or glandular, fleshy disc, the filaments free, filiform, short- to usually long-exserted, the anthers minute, basifixed, extrose, longitudinally dehiscent; ovary sessile, inserted on an annular disc, 1-locular, with 2–3, rarely 4–6, parietal placentas, each placenta with 2, sometimes 4–6, ovules, the style entire or ±divided, sometimes very short, the stigmas scarcely dilated to dilated; rudimentary ovary wanting in male flowers. Fruits baccate, rather dry, indehiscent, surmounted by the persistent style, the pericarp rather thin-coriaceous, the seeds 2–8, +angular by mutual pressure, the testa thin; endosperm copious; embryo large, the cotyledons broad.

Species in the *Xylosma* genus have several uses and properties, from landscaping (*Xylosma congesta* (Lour.) Merr.), beekeeping (*Xylosma venosa* N. E. Br. ^[9]), timber, firewood, to food and medicine; notably *Xylosma longifolia* Clos. Due to the thorns that some species of the genus have, common names such as "do not touch me" (*Xylosma coriacea* (Poit.) Eichler) or "deer antlers" (*Xylosma spiculifera* (Tul.) Triana and Planch.) are used for them ^[10]. Eleven species of the genus, particularly *Xylosma vincentii* Guillaumin, are known to be nickel hyperaccumulators ^{[11][12]} which presents potential for phytoremediation and phytomining ^[13].

2. Distribution and Localization

Species belonging to the *Xylosma* genus are present in subtropical America, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. Of the 100 species listed in the genus ^[3], 61 are found in America, 8 in Asia, and 31 in Oceania. **Figure 1** shows examples of species of the genus. The map in **Figure 2** shows the intertropical, and to a lesser extent, temperate, distribution of *Xylosma* species, by country.



Figure 1. *Xylosma flexuosa* (Kunth) Hemsl. leaves and berries, left. *Xylosma congesta* (Lour.) Merr. inflorescence, right. Image sources: left, Public Domain (CC0); right, Miwasatosi, GDFL license.



Figure 2. Worldwide *Xylosma* distribution, by country, after [3].

Of the 100 species of the genus, 7 are listed as vulnerable, 9 as endangered, and 6 as critically endangered. In total, 22% of the species in the genus are considered as species of concern [14]. This should be considered when evaluating potential industrial uses for these species.

3. Ethnopharmacological and Ethnoveterinary Usage

Of the 100 species of the genus, few appear in the scientific literature, and even fewer are mentioned from an ethnopharmacological or ethnoveterinary perspective. Notwithstanding, *Xylosma* species are a part of the traditional Chinese medicinal system, with documented uses of *X. congesta* appearing as early as the XVI century CE [15].

Few of the *Xylosma* species are recognized as medicinal. **Table 1** summarizes the species with reported medicinal use along with their stated ethnopharmacological uses, when available. The Anatomical Therapeutic Chemical (ATC) Classification by the World Health Organization (WHO) is used to classify the uses for each species [16]. Not all species are identified in the literature, with general mentions as “*Xylosma* sp.” in some cases.

Table 1. Medicinal and veterinary use of *Xylosma* species, listed in alphabetical order.

No.	Species	Region	Plant Organs Used	Use	Form of Usage	ATC Category	Ref.
1	<i>Xylosma benthamii</i> (Tul.) Triana and Planch.	Brazil	NS	Medicinal (not specified)	NS	NS	[17]
2	<i>Xylosma characantha</i> Standl.	Nicaragua	Leaves	Placental retention in cattle	Decoction	Vet.	[18]
3	<i>Xylosma chlorantha</i> Donn. Sm.	Costa Rica	Bark	Medicinal (not specified)	NS	NS	[19]
4	<i>Xylosma ciliatifolia</i> (Clos) Eichler	Brazil	Root bark	Antibacterial	NS	V	[20]

No.	Species	Region	Plant Organs Used	Use	Form of Usage	ATC Category	Ref.
5	<i>Xylosma congesta</i> (Lour.) Merr.	China Japan Korea	Bark Leaves	NS Anti-inflammatory Disease prevention in suckling piglets Birthing aid	Bark ashes Poultice	NS D G Vet.	[21] [22] [23] [24]
6	<i>Xylosma controversa</i> Clos.	Guangxi, China	Roots Leaves	NS	NS	NS	[25]
7	<i>Xylosma flexuosa</i> (Kunth) Hemsl.	Mexico	NS	Antipyretic Anti-tuberculosis	NS	N R	[26] [27]
8	<i>Xylosma horrida</i> Rose.	Mexico Nicaragua Costa Rica	Bark	Kidneys	Decoction	G	[28]
9	<i>Xylosma intermedia</i> (Seem.) Triana and Planch.	Bolivia	Bark	Toothache	NS	N	[29]
10	<i>Xylosma longifolia</i> Clos	India China	Leaves Stem bark	Antifungal Antispasmodic Antidiarrheic Anti-tuberculosis Muscle sprains Narcotic	Paste Decoction Extract	D A A R M N	[30] [31] [32] [33] [34]
11	<i>Xylosma panamensis</i> (Turcz)	Panama Mexico	Bark Leaves	Cough Bronchitis	Dried	R	[35]
12	<i>Xylosma spiculifera</i> (Tul.) Triana and Planch	Colombia, Venezuela	Leaves	Ulcers, Dermatitis	Decoction	D	[36]
13	<i>Xylosma tessmanii</i> Sleumer	Ecuador	Leaves	Medicinal (NS)	NS	NS	[37]
14	<i>Xylosma</i> sp. (not specified)	Panama	Stem Root	Spider bites	Infusion	V	[38]
15	<i>Xylosma</i> sp. (not specified)	Perú	Bark	Bronchitis (with other plant species)	Decoction	R	[39]

NS: Not specified. ATC categories are as follows. A: Alimentary tract and metabolism, B: Blood and blood forming organs, C: Cardiovascular system, D: Dermatological, G: Genito urinary system and sex hormones, H: Systemic hormonal preparations, excluding sex hormones and insulins, J: Anti-infective for systemic use, L: Antineoplastic and immunomodulating agents, M: Musculo-skeletal system, N: nervous system, P: Antiparasitic products, insecticides, and repellents, R: Respiratory system, S: Sensory organs; V: Various [46]; STDs: Sexually transmitted diseases, Vet: veterinary.

Most *Xylosma* species in use are from Central and South America (38% and 31%), followed by China (23%) and India (8%). This is roughly in accordance with the local abundance of species. There are no reports of ethnomedicinal uses of *Xylosma* in Oceania. Uses by country are shown in **Figure 3**.



Figure 3. Ethnopharmacological and ethnoveterinary uses of *Xylosma* spp. Circle diameter proportional to use reports for the country.

According to the ATC classification, the most frequent uses of *Xylosma* spp. in ethnopharmacology are dermatological, nervous system, and respiratory system, with 17% of the uses each, alimentary tract and metabolism with 11%, and

genitourinary system and sex hormones with 6%. Additionally, 11% of the uses are veterinary.

As to the morphological structures used, the most common are leaves and barks with 33% each, and both stems and roots with 11% each.

4. Biological Activity

Biological activity tests of *Xylosma* have been carried out mostly in vitro, with no reported in vivo research, with plant extracts, be they leaf, root, bark, or the whole plant. Different solvents and solvent mixtures have been used for the extracts, mainly methanol and ethanol.

In Vitro Activity

In vitro research on biological activity of *Xylosma* species centers around 7 identified species and one unspecified one. The research figures are summarized in **Figure 4**, and the research is detailed in **Table 2**.

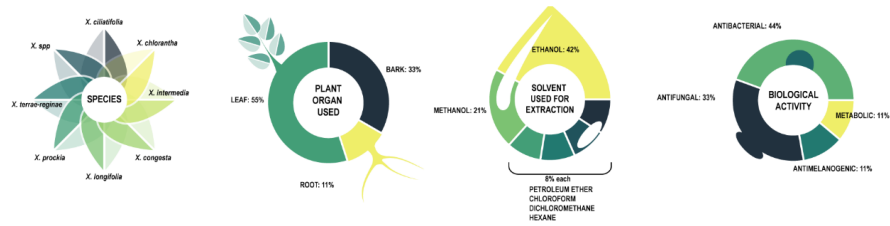


Figure 4. Summary of in vitro activity of *Xylosma* species.

Table 2. In vitro activity of *Xylosma* extracts. Species are in alphabetical order.

Species	Extract	Plant Organs Used	Biological Activity	Biological Model	Effect	Methodology	Ref.
<i>X. ciliatifolia</i>	Ethanol/Hexane partition	Root bark	Antibacterial	<i>S. aureus</i> <i>S. epidermis</i> <i>S. typhimurium</i> <i>E. coli</i>	Effective against <i>S. aureus</i> <i>S. epidermis</i> MIC (µg/mL) 250, 500	Disk diffusion assay	[20]
<i>X. chlorantha</i>	Ethanol	Leaves	Metabolic syndrome	HepG2 cells	LXR 2.14 ± 0.11: 100 µg/mL	LXR transcriptional activity	[40]
<i>X. congesta</i>	Ethanol	Leaves	Anti-melanogenic	B16F10 cells	Melanin synthesis inhibition: up to 57.9%	α-MSH	[22]
<i>X. intermedia</i>	DCM/Ethanol	Bark	Antibacterial	<i>Bacillus cereus</i> <i>S. aureus</i>	MIC (ppm) 156 512	Microbroth dilution	[41]
<i>X. longifolia</i>	Petroleum ether Chloroform Methanol	Leaves, Stem bark	Antifungal	<i>Microsporum boullardii</i> , <i>M. canis</i> , <i>M. gypseum</i> <i>Trichophyton ajelloi</i> <i>T. rubrum</i>	MIC (mg/mL) 0.141–9.0	Agar diffusion Micro wells diffusion	[30]
<i>X. prockia</i>	Ethanol	Leaves	Antifungal	<i>Cryptococcus</i> spp.	MIC (ppm) 8–64	Antifungal microdilution susceptibility standard test	[42]
<i>X. terrae reginae</i>	Methanol	Root	Antibacterial Antifungal	<i>S. aureus</i> <i>C. albicans</i>	MIC (mg/mL) 2.5 1.2	Dilution method	[43]
<i>X. sp II</i>	Methanol	Leaves	Antibacterial	<i>Flavobacterium columnae</i>	MIC 375 µg/mL	Agar diffusion assay	[44]

DCM: Dichloromethane; MIC: Minimum inhibitory concentration; α -MSH: melanocyte-stimulating hormone. LXR: LXR α Fold Activation.

In vitro biological activity tests devote the most attention to leaves (55%), with bark (33%) and root (11%) used to a lesser extent. Extraction solvents are ethanol (42%), methanol (21%), and to a lesser extent petroleum ether, chloroform, dichloromethane, and hexane, with 8% each. The solvent choices support the assumption that most active compounds are polar, and are thus extracted with polar solvents.

Testing centers on antibacterial (44%) and antifungal (44%) activity reflects the main ethnopharmacological use but appears to leave other traditional uses unexplored.

Cytotoxicity assays involving *Xylosma* extracts show no significant cytotoxicity for *Xylosma prockia* nor for *Xylosma congesta* leaf extracts [42][45]. Moderate cytotoxicity was reported for methanol *Xylosma terrae reginae* extracts [43]. 2,6-dimethoxybenzoquinone (**33**) isolated from *Xylosma velutina* is reported as cytotoxic [46].

Even though there is no in vivo research concerning *Xylosma* species in the literature, there are several patents that include *Xylosma* extracts for cosmetic, veterinary, and traditional medicinal uses, such as hangover cures [23].

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