



ISSN (E): 2320-3862
ISSN (P): 2394-0530
Impact Factor (RJIF): 5.94
www.plantsjournal.com
JMPS 2025; 13(4): 333-336
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Received: 09-07-2025
Accepted: 14-08-2025

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Ethnomedicinal relevance and health benefits of Karonda (*Carissa carandas*): Bridging folk knowledge with scientific evidence

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Abstract

Carissa carandas, commonly known as Karonda, is a small, thorny shrub native to tropical and subtropical regions. Widely utilized in traditional medicine across different cultures, Karonda has been acclaimed for its broad spectrum of medicinal properties. This research explores the ethnomedicinal significance and scientifically backed health benefits of Karonda, with a focus on its usage in Kenya. The paper examines folk knowledge surrounding its therapeutic properties and correlates it with the findings from modern scientific studies. Ethnobotanical surveys indicate that Karonda is used for a variety of ailments, including digestive disorders, skin conditions, and infections. Phytochemical analysis reveals that Karonda contains bioactive compounds such as alkaloids, flavonoids, and tannins, which contribute to its medicinal efficacy. This paper emphasizes the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern scientific evidence to unlock the full potential of Karonda in therapeutic applications.

Keywords: *Carissa carandas*, ethnomedicine, folk knowledge, health benefits, Kenya, pharmacological properties

1. Introduction

Carissa carandas, or Karonda, is a small deciduous shrub belonging to the Apocynaceae family. It is native to the Indian subcontinent but has become widely distributed in various tropical and subtropical regions, including parts of Africa. In Kenya, Karonda is commonly found in rural and peri-urban areas, where it is used extensively in local medicine. Traditionally, the fruit, leaves, and roots of Karonda are used for a variety of ailments, including digestive issues, infections, and inflammatory conditions.

Ethnomedicinal knowledge, passed down through generations, has recognized the plant as a valuable resource for natural remedies. In Kenya, the use of Karonda in traditional medicine aligns with practices in various African communities where the plant is regarded as a therapeutic agent for common health problems. Despite its traditional usage, the scientific validation of these claims has been limited. Recent studies have explored the phytochemical composition of Karonda and its pharmacological activities, confirming its anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant, and antidiabetic properties.

This paper aims to bridge the gap between folk knowledge and modern scientific findings by providing an ethnomedicinal overview of Karonda's health benefits. The study integrates traditional uses of the plant with contemporary research to highlight its therapeutic potential.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Location

The study was conducted in Nakuru County, Kenya, where Karonda is commonly cultivated in both rural and urban agricultural settings. Nakuru is located in the Rift Valley region and is known for its rich biodiversity, making it an ideal location for studying indigenous plants used in local health practices. The research involved ethnobotanical surveys and laboratory-based phytochemical analyses.

2.2 Ethnobotanical Survey

An ethnobotanical survey was conducted to gather information from local herbal practitioners, farmers, and community members in Nakuru. Semi-structured interviews were used to document the traditional uses of Karonda, its preparation methods, and the ailments for which

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it is used. The survey also aimed to understand the cultural significance of the plant and its place in local health practices.

2.3 Plant Collection and Preparation

Fresh samples of *Carissa carandas*, including leaves, fruits, and roots, were collected from local farms in Nakuru County. The collected plant material was identified and authenticated by a local botanist. The plant parts were washed, dried under shade, and powdered for further analysis.

2.4 Phytochemical Analysis

Phytochemical screening was carried out to identify the major bioactive compounds in Karonda. Standard methods were used for the detection of alkaloids, flavonoids, saponins, tannins, and terpenoids:

- **Alkaloids:** Dragendorff’s reagent was used to detect alkaloids.
- **Flavonoids:** Aluminum chloride colorimetric method was used to quantify flavonoids.
- **Saponins:** Foam test was employed to detect saponins.
- **Tannins:** Ferric chloride test was used to confirm the presence of tannins.
- **Terpenoids:** Liebermann-Burchard test was used to

identify terpenoids.

2.5 Pharmacological Testing

Pharmacological tests were conducted to evaluate the biological activity of Karonda extracts:

- **Anti-inflammatory Activity:** The carrageenan-induced paw edema method was used to assess the anti-inflammatory effect of Karonda extracts in rats.
- **Antioxidant Activity:** The DPPH free radical scavenging assay was used to measure the antioxidant capacity of the plant.
- **Antimicrobial Activity:** The antimicrobial activity was tested using the agar well diffusion method against *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Candida albicans*.

2.6 Statistical Analysis

Data from the pharmacological tests were analyzed using SPSS version 23.0. Results were presented as means ± standard deviation (SD), and differences were evaluated using one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey’s post-hoc test. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

Table 1: Ethnomedicinal Uses of Karonda in Nakuru County

Ailment	Traditional Use	Plant Part Used
Digestive Disorders	Used to treat indigestion and constipation	Fruit, leaves, root
Skin Infections	Applied as a poultice for wounds, boils	Fruit, leaves
Fever	Used to reduce fever and inflammation	Root, fruit
Antidiabetic	Used for regulating blood sugar levels	Fruit, leaves
Antimicrobial	Used as an antimicrobial agent for infections	Fruit, leaves, root

The survey indicated that Karonda is primarily used to treat digestive issues, skin infections, fever, and as a remedy for

diabetes. The fruits, leaves, and roots are the most commonly used parts of the plant.

Table 2: Phytochemical Constituents of Karonda

Alkaloids	Carissine	0.9
Flavonoids	Quercetin, Kaempferol	2.5
Tannins	Gallic Acid	1.8
Saponins	Carissaponin	1.2
Terpenoids	Carindone	0.7

The phytochemical analysis revealed that Karonda is rich in alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, and saponins, which are

responsible for its therapeutic properties.

Table 3: Pharmacological Activities of Karonda

Anti-inflammatory	Carrageenan-induced paw edema (rat model)	42% reduction in inflammation
Antioxidant	DPPH free radical scavenging	75% scavenging activity
Antimicrobial	Agar well diffusion	Effective against <i>E. coli</i> , <i>S. aureus</i> , and <i>C. albicans</i>
Antidiabetic	Oral glucose tolerance test	29% reduction in blood glucose levels

- **Anti-inflammatory:** The anti-inflammatory effect of Karonda was significant, with a 42% reduction in paw edema in rats.
- **Antioxidant:** The DPPH assay demonstrated that Karonda extract scavenged 75% of free radicals, indicating strong antioxidant activity.
- **Antimicrobial:** Karonda was found to be effective against *Escherichia coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Candida albicans*, confirming its traditional use as an antimicrobial agent.
- **Antidiabetic:** The plant extract showed a 29% reduction in blood glucose levels in the oral glucose tolerance test,

supporting its role in managing diabetes.

4. Discussion

The results of this study support the ethnomedicinal significance of *Carissa carandas* (Karonda) in Kenya, validating its traditional uses with modern scientific evidence. Karonda has been an integral part of folk medicine in various cultures across Asia and Africa, where it is widely utilized to treat conditions such as digestive disorders, skin infections, fever, and more. This study, conducted in Nakuru County, Kenya, highlights the therapeutic potential of Karonda, corroborating its wide range of health benefits as described in traditional health practices.

In Nakuru County, Karonda is predominantly used for treating digestive issues, such as indigestion and constipation, and for managing skin infections like boils and wounds. These uses are consistent with the ethnomedicinal knowledge found in other regions. In India, for example, *Carissa carandas* is often employed to treat diarrhea and improve digestion (Saeed *et al.*, 2024) [6]. The high vitamin C content in Karonda, alongside its antimicrobial and astringent properties, supports its use in skin care and wound healing. The fruit's astringency is thought to aid in tightening tissues and reducing inflammation, which is a feature also observed in other tropical medicinal plants used for similar purposes (Saher *et al.*, 2020) [7].

The results of this ethnobotanical survey indicate that Kenyans use Karonda for fever—a typical use found in Indian traditional medicine as well. Fever, often associated with underlying inflammatory responses or infections, can benefit from the anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties of Karonda, as confirmed by the pharmacological tests conducted in this study.

Phytochemical analysis revealed that Karonda is rich in bioactive compounds such as alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, saponins, and terpenoids. These compounds contribute to the plant's medicinal properties. The presence of flavonoids like quercetin and kaempferol, known for their potent antioxidant effects, aligns with findings from other studies. Flavonoids in plants have been shown to scavenge free radicals, reducing oxidative stress, which is a key factor in chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer (Singh, 2020) [8]. Similarly, the antioxidant activity observed in our DPPH assay, where Karonda exhibited 75% scavenging activity, is consistent with the high antioxidant capacities reported in other plants containing similar flavonoid compounds (Saeed *et al.*, 2024) [6].

The alkaloid, carissine, found in Karonda is responsible for its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory effects, similar to alkaloids found in other plants used in traditional medicine (Mishra *et al.*, 2015) [9]. Alkaloids like carissine are known for their ability to interfere with microbial growth and reduce inflammation, making Karonda valuable in treating infections and inflammatory conditions (Mishra *et al.*, 2015) [9]. This compound's antimicrobial activity against *Escherichia coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus* was evident in our tests, further validating the traditional use of Karonda in treating infections. Moreover, the saponins and terpenoids identified in Karonda have shown significant anti-inflammatory properties. Saponins, widely recognized for their ability to inhibit microbial growth, and terpenoids, which provide anti-inflammatory effects, contribute to the plant's role in traditional health practices for treating fevers, infections, and inflammation (Mishra, 2024) [10].

The anti-inflammatory activity of Karonda, as observed in the carrageenan-induced paw edema model, with a 42% reduction in inflammation, is consistent with data from other studies on medicinal plants rich in flavonoids and alkaloids. In the study by Singh (2020) [8], the anti-inflammatory activity of plants like *Zingiber officinale* (ginger) and *Curcuma longa* (turmeric) was attributed to their flavonoid content, which functions through the inhibition of inflammatory mediators like COX-2 and prostaglandins. Similarly, Karonda's anti-inflammatory action, attributed to flavonoids such as quercetin, supports its use in reducing fever and inflammation, a common application in Kenyan folk medicine.

Additionally, the antioxidant activity of Karonda, with a

scavenging rate of 75% in the DPPH assay, is comparable to other plant extracts known for their antioxidant properties, such as those from *Moringa oleifera* and *Cissus quadrangularis* (Nyang'oro *et al.*, 2023) [2]. The strong antioxidant effect of Karonda, driven by its phenolic and flavonoid content, further substantiates its role in reducing oxidative stress, which is linked to the pathogenesis of various chronic diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and neurodegenerative disorders.

The antimicrobial efficacy of Karonda against both bacterial pathogens (*E. coli* and *S. aureus*) and the fungal pathogen *C. albicans* is also noteworthy. Previous studies on *Carissa carandas* have demonstrated similar antimicrobial activity, validating its traditional use for treating wounds, boils, and infections (Mishra, 2024) [10]. This antimicrobial activity is likely due to the combined effect of alkaloids, flavonoids, and tannins, which disrupt microbial cell membranes and inhibit microbial growth.

Antidiabetic effects of Karonda were also observed, with a 29% reduction in blood glucose levels in an oral glucose tolerance test. This finding is in line with ethnomedicinal reports from India, where Karonda has been used to treat diabetes (Saeed *et al.*, 2024) [6]. The plant's antidiabetic effects could be attributed to its bioactive compounds that enhance insulin sensitivity and improve glucose metabolism, making it a valuable asset in managing type 2 diabetes.

Our findings align with other studies that have highlighted the therapeutic potential of *Carissa carandas* in various pharmacological areas. In a study conducted by Saeed *et al.* (2024) [6], Karonda was shown to possess antimicrobial properties against *S. aureus* and *E. coli*, confirming the results from this study. Similarly, the anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties observed in our study are consistent with previous research, which has demonstrated that plants rich in flavonoids and alkaloids offer potent therapeutic effects (Mishra *et al.*, 2015) [9].

The comparative analysis of our findings with existing literature underscores the consistent medicinal properties of Karonda. However, this study expands the scope by combining ethnobotanical insights with modern pharmacological evidence, thus bridging the gap between folk knowledge and scientific validation. The integration of traditional health knowledge with scientific research enhances the credibility and acceptance of Karonda as a natural therapeutic agent.

5. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence of the ethnomedicinal relevance and health benefits of Karonda (*Carissa carandas*) in Kenya. The integration of folk knowledge with scientific validation highlights the therapeutic potential of this plant. Karonda's anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and antidiabetic activities, along with its rich phytochemical profile, make it a valuable resource for modern medicine. Continued research and the development of standardized formulations could lead to the widespread use of Karonda in treating various diseases and promoting overall health.

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