



Isolation and Characterization of the Roots of *Rumex nervosus*

Gashaw Nigussie

¹ Applied Natural Science Department of Chemistry, Adama Science and Technology University, Adama, Ethiopia

² Armauer Hansen Research Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*E-mail: gashawnigussie20@gmail.com

Abstract

Rumex nervosus belongs to the family of *Polygonaceae*, which is traditionally used in Ethiopia to treat various diseases. This prompted us to isolate bioactive compounds from the root of this plant. Ground root parts of *Rumex nervosus* were subjected to exhaustive extraction successively with petroleum ether and methanol. The solvent from each extract was evaporated under reduced pressure using rotavapour to obtain petroleum ether and methanol extract. Chromatographic purification of the methanol extracts by Column chromatography followed by Preparative Thin layer Chromatography using CHCl_3 : MeOH (9: 1 to 1: 1) ratio gave a compound coded as RN-6. The structure of this compound 4-Ethylheptyl benzoate was characterized as by means of ^1H NMR, ^{13}C NMR, UV and IR spectral data.

Keywords: Medicinal Plant, *Polygonaceae*, *Rumex nervosus*, 4-Ethylheptyl benzoate

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■ Introduction

Plants have been used to treat a wide range of diseases throughout the history of human beings and this practice continues to date. This is mainly because most of these herbals are accessible, affordable and the extracted chemicals have little or no side effects as compared to drugs synthesized in the laboratory. Plants comprise the largest component of the diverse therapeutic elements of traditional health care practices both in humans and animals. The medicinal values of plants are due to

the chemical substances that produce a definite physiological action on human body and are called phytochemicals. They are chemicals extracted from plants and the term is often used to describe the large number of secondary metabolic compounds found in plants [1, 2]. Naturally occurring compounds may be divided into two broad categories. The first class of compounds is known as primary metabolites. They occur in all cells and play a central role in the metabolism and reproduction of those cells. Primary metabolites include the nucleic acids, the

common amino acids, sugars and the high molecular weight polymeric materials such as cellulose, lignins and proteins which form the cellular structures. Most primary metabolites exert their biological effect within the cell or organism that is responsible for their production. The second class of compounds is secondary metabolites. Such compounds are characteristic of a limited range of species and occur in plants in a high structural diversity. The major classes of secondary metabolites include tannins, glycosides, flavonoids, alkaloids, terpenoids, steroids, quinones and saponins are among others and play significant role in drug discovery. Secondary metabolites have often attracted interest of researchers because of their biological effect on other organisms [3, 4].

The biologically active constituents of medicinal, commercial and poisonous plants have been studied throughout the development of organic chemistry. Many of these compounds are secondary metabolites. Natural products often have an ecological role in regulating the interactions between plants, micro-organisms, insects and animals. They can be defensive substances, anti-feedants, and attractants. Natural products from plants remain vital in drug discovery where they can be used directly as drugs or serve as leads to new drugs by providing chemical entities [5]. The currently accepted modern medicines have gradually developed over the years by scientific and observational efforts of scientists. However, the basis of their development remains rooted in traditional medicine and therapies. The approach to new drugs through natural products has proved to be the single most successful strategy for the discovery of new drugs [6].

The *Rumex* species, belonging in the *Polygonaceae* family, comprise about 200 species widely distributed around the World. The name *Rumex* originated from the Latin word for dart, alluding to the shape of the leaves [7]. There have been numerous ethno botanical and ethno pharmacological literature reports dealing with the occurrence and traditional uses of *Rumex* species [8-10]. In some regions, the leaves of *Rumex* species (e.g. *R. acetosa*, *R. acetosella*, *R. abyssinicus*, *R. crispus*, *R. sanguineus*, *R. tuberosus* and *R. thyrsiflorus*, *R. vesicarius*) are utilized as foods, mainly in the forms of sour soups (usually in milk), sauces and salads [11, 12]. Traditional names for several species used as food reflect their

gustatory characteristics, taste and aroma, e.g. sour weed in the case of *Rumex*. The roots of many species belonging in the *Rumex* genus have been used in medicine from ancient times because of their gentle laxative effect. *R. acetosa* is officially listed in the Korean Food Code (Korea Food & Drug Administration) as one of the main food materials and has been used in folk medicine as a mild purgative and also for the treatment of cutaneous diseases [13]. Some of the species are cultivated, e.g. *R. acetosa* and *R. vesicarius* [14]. On the other hand, the members of this genus include many invasive weeds (e.g. *R. obtusifolius* and *R. crispus*) [15]. Plants belonging to the *Polygonaceae* are known to produce a large number of biologically important secondary metabolites, such as anthraquinones, naphthalenes, stilbenoids, steroids, flavonoid glycosides, leucoanthocyanidins and phenolic acids [16-20]. The aerial parts, leaves and roots of the plants are used in traditional medicine for the treatment of several health disorders such as infections, diarrhoea, constipation, mild diabetes, oedema, jaundice, and as an antihypertensive, diuretic and analgesic and in case of skin, liver and gallbladder disorders, and inflammation. The genus *Rumex* has attracted the attention of many researchers because of its phytoconstituents and medicinal properties. The extracts of these plants, and compounds isolated from them, have been demonstrated to possess various pharmacological activities, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antitumour, antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties in vitro and in vivo [13, 18, 21-26].

Rumex nervosus is commonly found near and around the terraces of high altitude areas (above 1000m.). Genus *Rumex* is a genus of about 200 species of annual, biennial and perennial herbs in the buckwheat family *Polygonaceae*. Members of this family are very common perennial herbs growing mainly in the northern hemisphere, but various species have been introduced almost everywhere. *Rumex nervosus* Vahl. is a perennial herb mainly distributed in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and Eritrea [27, 28]. *Rumex nervosus* locally called “Embuacho” in Amharic, “Huhot” in Tigrigna and “Dhangaggoo” in Afan Oromo in Ethiopia. The juice of *Rumex nervosus* is used in Ethiopia to seizure bleeding

during male circumcision [29]. *Rumex nervosus* leaves are an edible, consumed by some people in Saudi Arabia. *Rumex species* are used as food plants by the larvae of a number of Lepidoptera species [28]. The leaves of the plant are usually boiled with water, filtered and the water extract is consumed to reduce non-specific diarrhea. The roots and aerial parts of *Rumex nervosus* have been used traditionally for a variety of therapeutic uses, such as antioxidant, cytotoxic, antifertility, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antidiarrheal and antiviral activities [30]. Leaves of *Rumex nervosus* crushed and its paste applied on affected area can prevent Breast Cancer diseases [31]. The use of this plant as anti-dysentery, cure for stomach ache, and effective treatment of warts [32]. The roots of *Rumex nervosus* used as anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory activity [33].

R. nervosus is used as a cure for acne, a hypoglycemic agent, and an ophthalmic antiseptic [34]. It also shares the uses of *R. abyssinicus* for the treatment of wounds, eczema, typhus and rabies [35]. In Eritrea the leaves and stem of this herb is used for traditional medicine by the practitioners mostly on highland and on the villages it is used for purifying the body by women (traditionally known 'tish') as substituent of olive tree, to do this, the leaves are put on fire then they cover the patient body with that hot leaves and blanket so that the vapours and smoke surround all the body [28]. Leaf of *Rumex nervosus* used to treat skin disorders, leaves are crushed and mixed with butter, and then it is applied on the affected area [36]. Eat or chew and swallow the fluid of leaf and steam part of *R. nervosus* used to treat for Ascariasis, leaf of *R. nervosus* Soak it in water together with whole part of *Withania somnifera* and fruit of *Citrus aurantifolia* and wash body with it for the treatment of Michi and leaf of *R. nervosus* Crush and mixing with leaves of *Withania somnifera*, seeds of *Lepidium sativum* and bulbs of *Allium sativum*, soak it in water and wash body with it for the treatment of Itching /skin rash [37]. Traditionally in Eritrea, the leaves, stems and sometimes roots of *Rumex nervosus* are used as traditional medicines, for the eye disease, taeniocapitis, haemorrhoids, infected wounds, arthritis, eczema, abscess and gynecological disorders *Rumex species* contains anthracene derivatives like chrysophanol, physcion, emodin, aloe-emodin, rhein; which are the main biologically active compounds responsible for anti-

cancer, cytotoxic, genotoxic and mutagenicity properties [38]. Some reports in literature about the biological activities of *Rumex nervosus Vahl.*; Analgesic [39], anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial activity [33], urease enzyme inhibition [40], anthelmintic [41], anti-diarrheal activity [42], anti-bacterial activity [28], anti-oxidant activity [43], acute-toxicity and analgesic activity [44], anti-leishmanial, insecticidal and phytotoxic potential [45] and in vitro anticancer, antimicrobial and antioxidant activities [46]. The methanol, water and chloroform extracts of the leaf, bark, stem and root parts of *R. nervosus* and the root of *R. abyssinicus* were reported to possess antibacterial activity against several bacteria including *S. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa* [35].

Previously isolated classes of constituents of *R. nervosus* was flavonoids, steroids, tannins, tartaric and citric acids [47]. Recently the biologically active components of the plant reported and characterized 19 flavonoids for the first time in its flowers; namely (epi)catechin *O*-gallate, quercetin *O*-pentoside, luteolin 6-*C*-glucoside isomers (two), apigenin 8-*C*-glucoside, apigenin 6-*C*-glucoside, quercetin 3-*O*-glucoside, quercetin acetyl glycoside isomers (three), quercetin 3-*O*-rhamnoside, quercetin 3-*O*-rutinoside isomers (two), quercetin 3-acetylramnoside, hesperetin, naringenin, apigenin 6-*C*-glucoside 7-*O*-glucoside isomers (two), and liquiritin. These flavonoid components showed effective inhibition of pro-inflammatory mediators in mouse macrophage RAW 264.7 cells, such as inducible nitric oxide synthase, cyclooxygenase-2, inhibitor of kappa B, and interleukin-1 β [48]. Studies showed that four compounds, viz. chlorogenic acid, catechin, orientin, and apigenin-*O*-acetyl glycoside were characterized for the first time in *Rumex nervosus* leaves and stems by using liquid chromatography with electrospray ionization tandem mass spectrometry [43]. Studies although showed that essential oil obtained from ethyl acetate fraction of leaves of *R. nervosus* was subjected to GC-MS analysis and identified seven saturated and unsaturated fatty acid. All the compounds were identified as: palmitic acid, methyl ester, palmitoleic acid methyl ester, heptadecenoic acid, methyl ester, stearic acid, methyl ester, linoleic acid, methyl ester,

octadecadienoic acid, methyl ester, oleic acid, the methyl ester with retention times as: 16.364, 17.376, 19.440, 19.569, 19.826, 19.892 and 20.345 minutes respectively. The major fatty acids obtained as their methyl esters were palmitoleic acid (28.35%) followed by palmitic acid, (25.37%), stearic acid (20.25%), while linoleic acid, heptadecenoic acid, and oleic acid, were as (9.18%), (8.99%) and (7.24%) respectively. The lower fatty acid obtained was octadecadienoic acid, methyl ester with (0.62%) [46]. A recent review by Vasas et al. [49] showed that detail information on phytochemistry of *Rumex* species. However, to the best of our knowledge there is no published scientific report on the isolation and characterization of the roots extracts of this plant. So, since such medicinal herbs are widely distributed in different regions of Ethiopia and are traditionally used in the treatment of different varieties of diseases, the researcher took a big interest in conducting this research for chemical investigation of the roots extracts of the plant which could be important to generate adequate knowledge to the societies.

■ Experimental

Instruments and Chemicals

IR spectrum was obtained as pellets on Perkin-Elmer Bx infrared spectrometer in the range 4000-400cm⁻¹, ¹H NMR, ¹³C NMR spectra was recorded on a Bruker advance 400 MHz spectrometer with TMS as internal standard. The Ultra-Violet and Visible (UV-Vis) spectra was taken on GENESY'S 2PC UV-Vis scanning spectrometer (200-800nm). Silica gel with fluorescent indicator at 254 nm and aluminum cards with layer thickness 0.2 mm was used for TLC. Silica gel 60 (Merck), particle size 0.063-0.200 (70-230 mesh ASTM) was used for column chromatography. Compound on TLC was detected using eye protects by UV-Vis. PTLC (Preparative Thin Layer Chromatography) was used in the separation of analytes from small quantities of sample often it is used in conjunction with column chromatography as a final purification step of relatively less complex mixtures. Rotary evaporator was used to concentrate the samples. Petroleum ether, chloroform and methanol were used as solvent.



Figure 1. Flowers and Leaves of *Rumex nervosus* [50]

Sample Collection

The plant *Rumex nervosus* (Figure 1) was collected from Deber Berhan, Amhara Region in the local district of Debersina and identified by Prof. Sebsibie Demissew of the National herbarium, Department of Biology, Addis Ababa University.

Extraction and Isolation

After collection, plant material was dried to constant weight at room temperature (25 °C) in open air in the laboratory away from direct sunlight. The dried roots samples were coarse into powder by blender machine and the coarse powder samples (200 g) were sequentially extracted with solvents of increasing polarity: petroleum ether (PE) and methanol (MeOH). Multiple solvents can be used sequentially in order to limit the amount of analogous compounds in the desired yield. The polarity, from least polar to most polar, of a few common solvents is as follows: petroleum ether < Chloroform < Ethylacetate < Acetone < Methanol < Water [51]. Two hundred grams (200g) of root samples were extracted sequentially with one liter (1L) petroleum ether. The mixtures were shaken gently in a mechanical shaker for about one hour to increase extraction efficiency and left to stand at room temperature (25 °C) for 36 hours. The extract was onto pre-weighed flasks and organic solvents were removed through evaporation under a stream of air at room temperature in the fume hood. The dry extracts (2.36 g) of petroleum ether were not showed visible spots on Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC) using different solvents like n-Hexane, ethyl acetate and methanol. Therefore, the solvent free marc was then soaked with 1.5 liter methanol again for 72 hours. After 72 hours, the extract was onto pre-weighed flasks and organic solvents were removed evaporated under the reduced pressure using the Rota vapor and afforded 17g brown gummy extract. Dry extracts were kept in the refrigerator in tightly closed vials and used for the Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC)

and Column Chromatography (CC) analysis. The methanol extract (6.5 g) was applied on a column chromatography packed with 200g silica gel. Isolation was carried out using the solvents chloroform and methanol with increasing polarity. Plant materials include high amounts of complex phytochemicals, which make a good separation difficult [52]. Therefore, increasing polarity using multiple mobile phases is useful for highly valued separations. Thin-layer chromatography has always been used to analyze the fractions of compounds by column chromatography. Silica gel column chromatography (CC) and thin-layer chromatography (TLC) have been used for separation of active compounds with some analytical tools [52].

The Column was eluted using the solvent system in Table 1 and 54 fractions were collected.

Table 1 Methanol Extract Fraction

Solvent System	Ratio	Volume(mL)	Fractions
CHCl ₃	100%	100	1-12
CHCl ₃ - MeOH	9:1	100	13-20
CHCl ₃ - MeOH	8:2	100	21-30
CHCl ₃ - MeOH	7:3	100	31-40
CHCl ₃ - MeOH	6:4	100	41-49
CHCl ₃ - MeOH	1:1	100	50-54

Based on TLC analysis, fraction that showed the same characteristics of spots were combined. Fraction 1-6 (75.3mg) was combined and have four spots on TLC showed under UV. The series combined fraction was subjected to Preparative Thin Layer Chromatography (PTLC) developed in CHCl₃: MeOH (9:1 to 1:1) mixture which yielded one spot with a white fluorescence under UV. The extraction of the plant and isolation of the compound was described in detail in Figure 2.

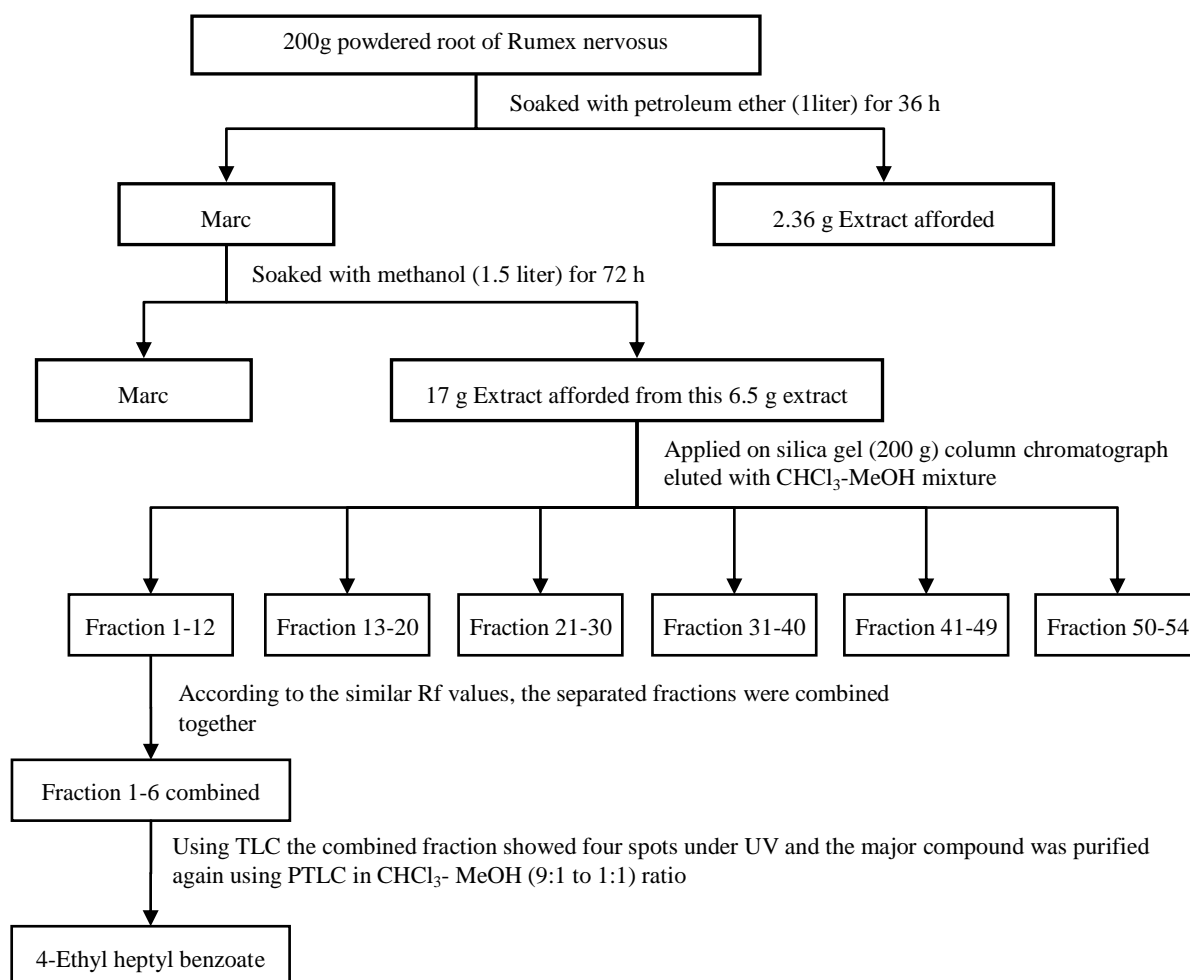


Figure 2. Method of extraction of the plant material

■ Results and Discussion

Extract Yield

Powdered roots of *Rumex nervosus* was extracted successively using solvents petroleum ether and methanol and yielded a colorless crude extract (2.36 g, 1.17% w/w) of petroleum ether, brown gummy crude extract (17 g, 7.83% w/w) of methanol. From these results one can deduce that more polar compounds are found in the plant than non-polar ones as the percentage yields increase with polarity. The structure of this compound has been elucidated on the basis of spectroscopic evidence as described in the following section.

Characterization of Fraction RN-6

The UV spectrum of **RN-6** (Figure 3) shows absorbance peaks at 276 nm which indicate the presence of a carbonyl substituted aromatic ring.

In the IR (KBr) spectrum of the compound (Figure 4) displayed the absorption band at $\delta 3439\text{cm}^{-1}$ may be due to moisture. The absorption band at $\delta 2925\text{cm}^{-1}$ indicates -C-H stretching. The absorption band at $\delta 1728\text{cm}^{-1}$ indicates the presence of conjugated carbonyl of ester attached to aromatic ring. The absorption Band at $\delta 1276\text{cm}^{-1}$ indicates C-O stretching. The absorption band at $\delta 1125\text{cm}^{-1}$ indicates -C-C- stretching of the compound.

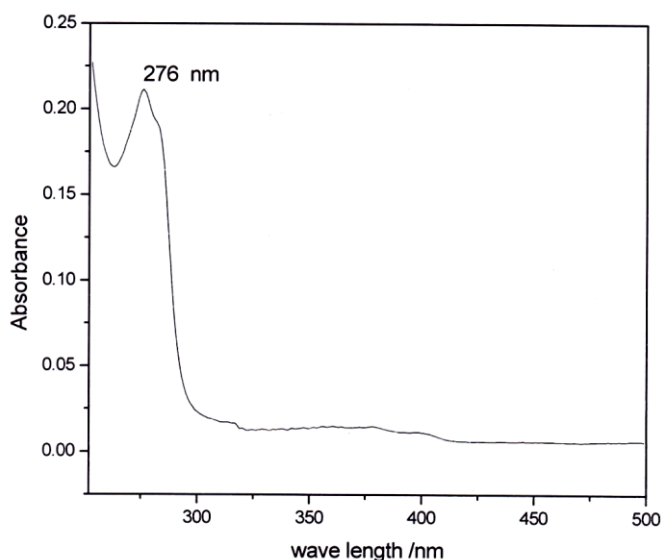


Figure 3. UV spectrum of RN-6

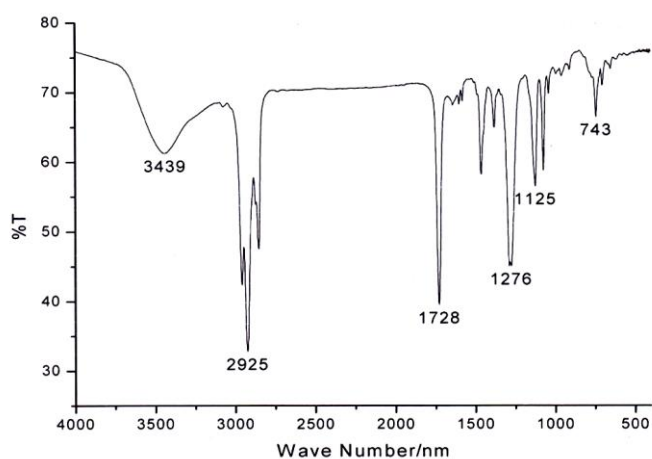


Figure 4. IR spectrum of RN-6

The $^1\text{H-NMR}$ Spectrum (Figure 5 and Table 2) of the compound showed Signals at δ 0.96 indicates the presence of two methyl group. The proton signal at δ 1.25, 1.29, 1.33, and 1.75 shows the presence of five methylene groups. The signal at δ 1.47 multiplet indicate methine group. The signal at δ 4.25 triplets was due to oxygenated methylene carbon protons. The signals at δ 7.73-7.79 indicate protons of aromatic carbon.

The $^{13}\text{C NMR}$ and DEPT-135 (Figure 6, Figure 7, and Table 3) indicate the compound RN-6 has 14 carbons. The spectra show two methyl

carbons at δ 10.97 and 14.7. Five methylene carbon at δ 23, 23.74, 28.93, 29.75 and 30.4. One methylene carbon that is attached with oxygen at δ 68.16. Two quaternary carbons at δ 167.79 and 132.45. Four methine carbons at δ 38.72, 130.9, 130.87, 128.81. Additionally the $^{13}\text{C NMR}$ spectrum of compound **RN-6**, indicate the presence of aromatic ring.

From comparison of phytochemistry of *Rumex species* with literature, compound **RN-6** (4-Ethyl heptyl benzoate) (Figure 8) closely resembles [46, 49].

Table 2. ¹H-NMR spectra data of compound RN-6

Hydrogen Number	δ (ppm)
1	4.25 (2H,t, J = 12 Hz)
2	1.75 (2H, t, J = 6.4 Hz)
3	1.25 (2H,m)
4	1.47 (1H,m)
5	1.25 (2H,m)
6	1.33 (2H,m)
7	0.96 (3H,d, J= 7.6Hz)
8	1.29 (2H,m)
9	0.96 (3H,d, J= 7.6Hz)
3',7'	7.97 (2H, m)
5'	7.47 (1H, m)
4',6'	7.37 (2H, m)

Table 3. ¹³C NMR and DEPT-135 spectra data of compound RN-6

Carbon Number	¹³ C	DEPT-135	Remark
1	68.16	down	CH ₂
2	23.75	down	CH ₂
3	29.71	down	CH ₂
4	38.74	up	CH ₂
5	30.37	down	CH ₂
6	23.00	down	CH ₂
7	14.07	up	CH ₃
8	28.93	down	CH ₂
9	10.97	up	CH ₃
1'	167.79	-	C
2'	132.45	-	C
5'	130.9	up	CH
3',7'	130.87	up	CH
4',6'	128.81	up	CH

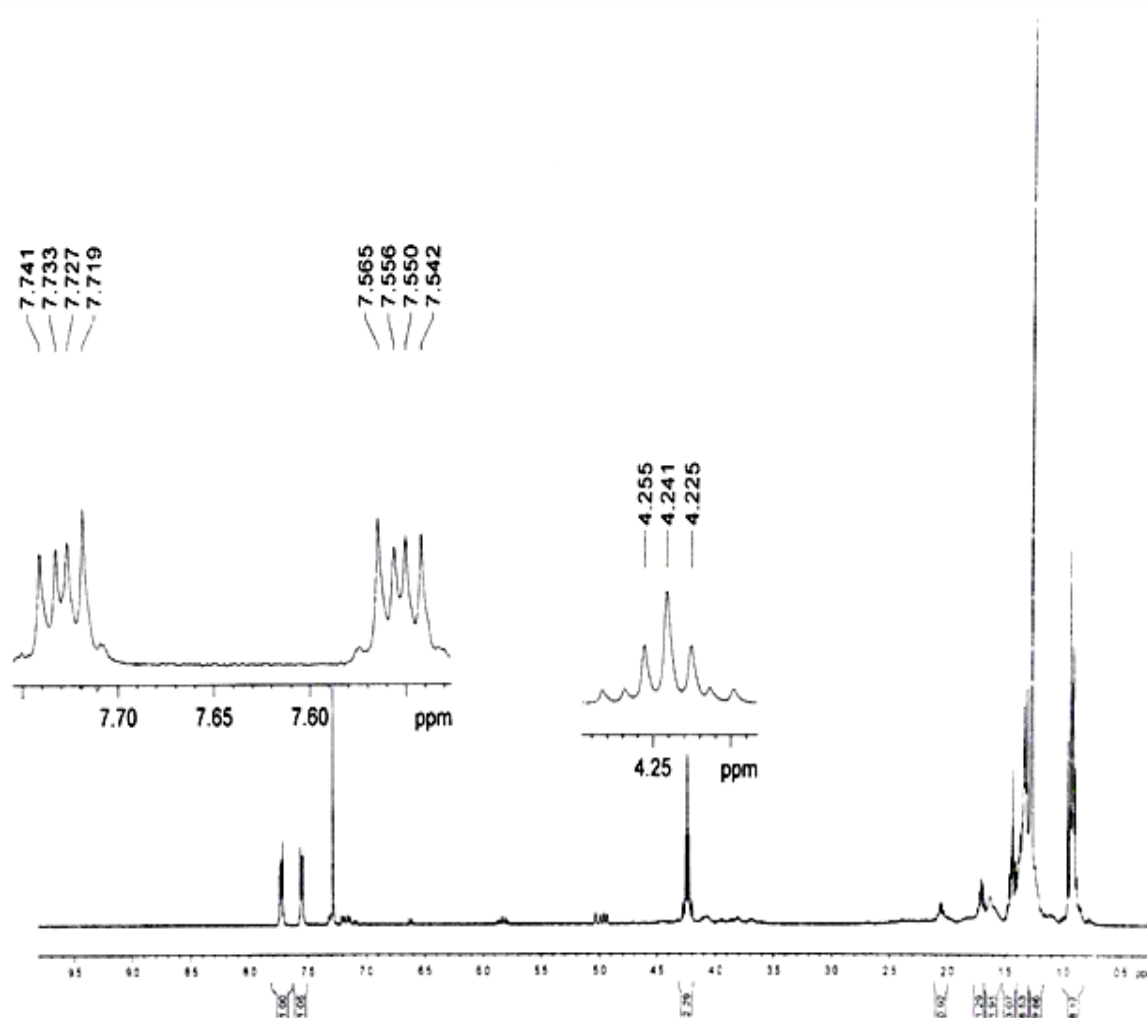


Figure 5. ¹H-NMR of RN-6

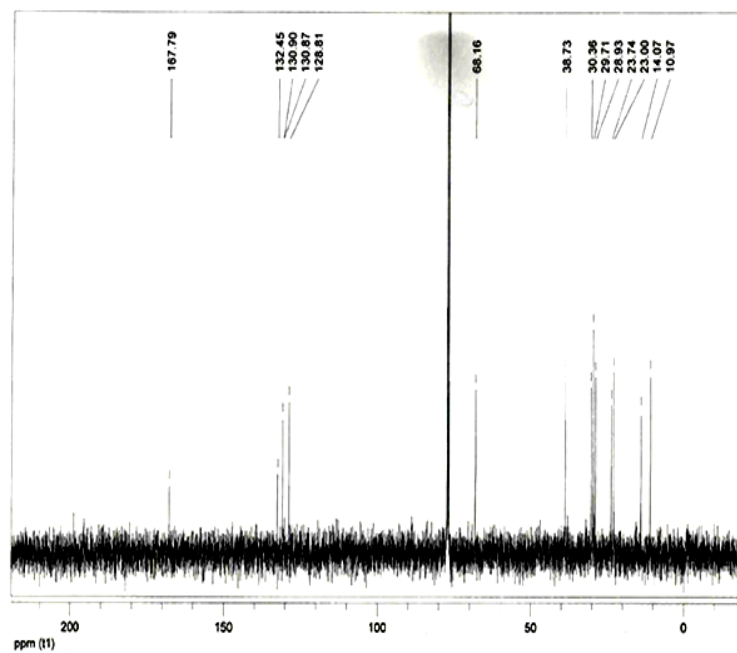


Figure 6. ^{13}C -NMR of RN-6

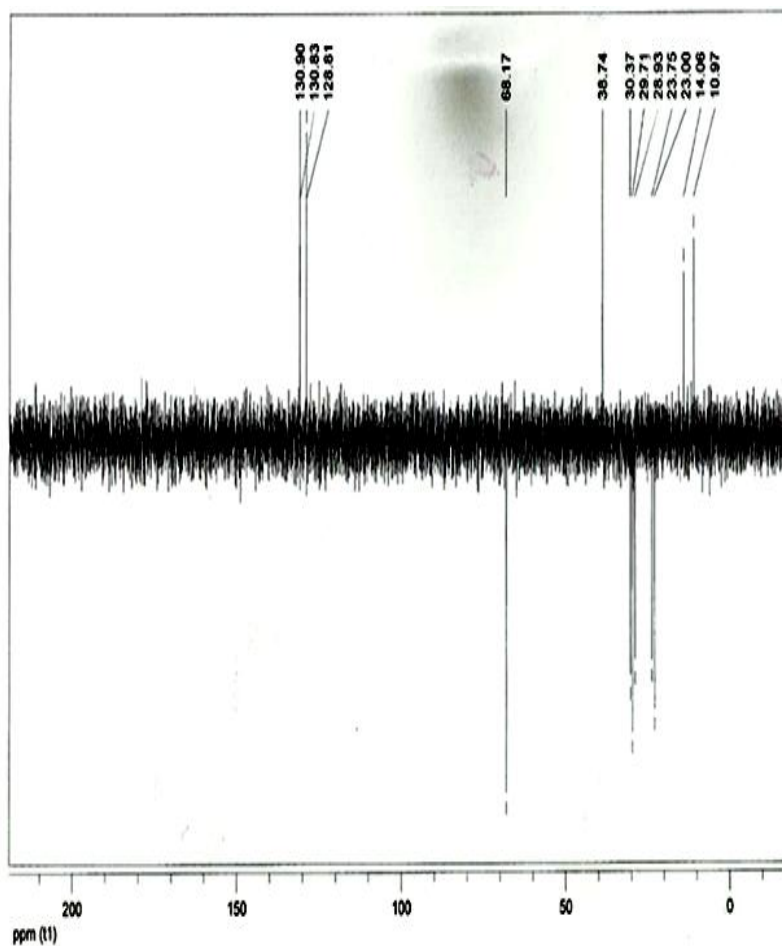


Figure 7. DEPT-135 Spectra of RN-6

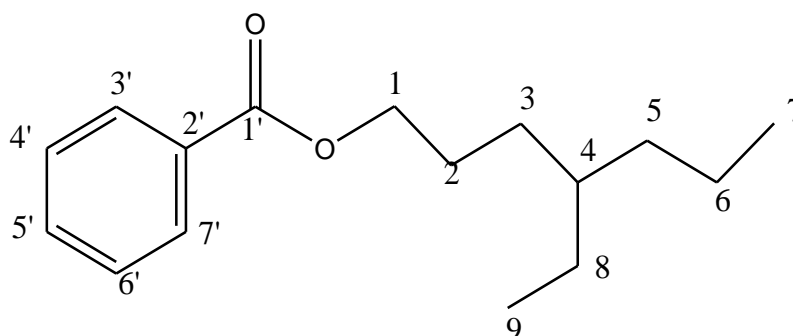


Figure 8. Proposed Structure of Compound RN-6 (4-Ethylheptyl benzoate)

■ Conclusion

The CHCl_3 -MeOH (9: 1 to 1:1) extract of *Rumex nervosus* affords 13 mg of compound **RN-6**. Compound **RN-6** (4-Ethylheptyl benzoate) was isolated and further purified by chromatographic methods such as Column Chromatography, Thin layer Chromatography, Preparative thin layer Chromatography and the structural elucidation of this compound was accomplished by means of a combination of spectroscopic methods. To the best of my Knowledge there was no report isolation and characterization of compounds from the root part of *Rumex nervosus*. Compound **RN-6** was reported here for the first time from this species on their root parts.

In this study the extraction, isolation and structure elucidation of compound **RN-6** (4-Ethylheptyl benzoate) was accomplished using chromatographic and spectroscopic method. The researcher recommended that advanced chromatographic techniques such as HPLC should be used to isolate more compounds from different extracts of the plants. 2D-NMR techniques are also required to elucidate structures of novel compounds isolated from the plant. Additionally bioassay tests should be conducted on crude extracts fractions and isolated compounds from the plant.

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■ Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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