

'Dung of the devil' plant roots point to new swine flu drugs

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These commercial products contain extracts from the roots of the "dung of the devil" plant. New research says it shows promise for fighting the H1N1 swine flu virus. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Scientists in China have discovered that roots of a plant used a century ago during the great Spanish influenza pandemic contains substances with powerful effects in laboratory experiments in killing the H1N1 swine flu virus that now threatens the world. The plant has a pleasant onion-like taste when cooked, but when raw it has sap so foul-smelling that some call it the "Dung of the Devil" plant. Their report is scheduled for the Sept. 25 issue of ACS' *Journal of Natural Products*.

In the study, Fang-Rong Chang and Yang-Chang Wu and colleagues note

that the plant, *Ferula assa-foetida*, grows mainly in Iran, Afghanistan and mainland China. People used it as a possible remedy during the 1918 [Spanish flu pandemic](#) that killed between 20 to 100 million people. Until now, however, nobody had determined whether the plant does produce natural antiviral compounds.

Chang and Wu identified a group of chemical compounds in extracts of the plant that showed greater potency against influenza A (H1N1) than a prescription [antiviral drug](#) available for the flu. "Overall, the present study has determined that sesquiterpene coumarins from *F. assa-foetida* may serve as promising lead components for new drug development against influenza A (H1N1) viral infection," the authors write.

More information: "[Influenza](#) A (H1N1) Antiviral and Cytotoxic Agents from *Ferula assa-foetida*", *Journal of Natural Products*.

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