

Cola detectives test natural flavoring claims for pricey soft drinks

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Scientists are reporting development and successful testing of a new way to determine whether cola drinks -- advertised as being made with natural ingredients and sold at premium prices -- really do contain natural flavoring. The report appears in ACS' *Journal of Proteome Research*.

In the study, Pier Giorgio Righetti and colleagues explain that cola drinks purportedly made from natural cola nuts are becoming popular and are sold in many natural food stores. Genuine cola "nuts" are seeds from the fruit of the cola tree, which is native to African rainforests, and they are expensive to harvest and ship. In West African cultures, people include the nuts in ceremonies and offer them to guests. The nuts also have possible [health benefits](#) — they may help treat whooping cough, asthma, migraines and dysentery. Most soft drink manufacturers don't use cola nuts today, but a select few are starting to advertise cola as a natural ingredient in their products — and charge extra for it. To see whether consumers are getting what they pay for, the scientists set out to find a way to finger the drinks with real natural extracts.

The group found that testing for proteins was an accurate way to verify natural flavoring claims. They detected plant proteins in a drink claiming to have "organic agave syrup and cola nut extracts". On the other hand, Coca Cola products — which do not claim to include [cola](#) extract — have no protein. The scientists say, "The identifications here obtained represent the quality mark of this beverage and, in a way, give a certificate of authenticity."

More information: “Going nuts for nuts? The trace proteome of a Cola drink, as detected via combinatorial peptide ligand libraries”
Journal of Proteome Research.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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