



Received on 23 June 2026; received in revised form, 20 July 2026; accepted, 23 July 2026; published 01 August 2026

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE BOTANICAL, PHYTOCHEMICAL, AND PHARMACOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF *ADENIUM OBESUM* (APOCYNACEAE)

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Keywords:

Adenium obesum, Phytochemistry, Antioxidant activity, Antimicrobial activity, Antidiabetic activity

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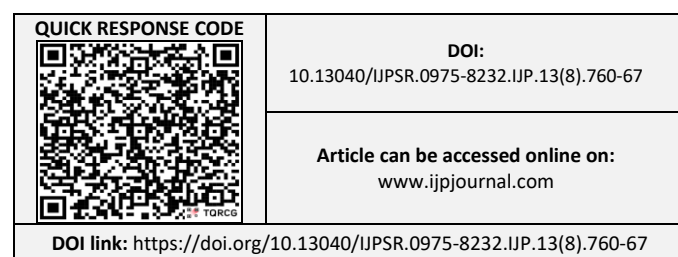
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ABSTRACT: *Adenium obesum*, commonly known as Desert Rose, belongs to the family Apocynaceae and is widely distributed in Africa and tropical regions. Traditionally valued as an ornamental and medicinal plant, it possesses diverse pharmacological properties attributed to its rich phytochemical composition, including alkaloids, flavonoids, glycosides, terpenoids, tannins, and phenolic compounds. Various studies have demonstrated its antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-arthritis, antidiabetic, anti-obesity, wound healing, anticancer, and trypanocidal activities. Different plant parts such as flowers, leaves, roots, stems, and bark have shown significant biological activities through *in-vitro* and *in-vivo* investigations. The pharmacological effects are strongly influenced by extraction methods and solvent polarity. This review summarizes the taxonomy, ethnomedicinal uses, phytochemistry, and major pharmacological activities of *Adenium obesum*, highlighting its therapeutic potential and future prospects in phytopharmaceutical research.

INTRODUCTION: According to the World Health Organization, a large proportion of the world's population relies on traditional herbal remedies for primary healthcare. Herbal medicine continues to gain popularity due to its perceived natural origin, cultural acceptance, and potential therapeutic benefits¹. The Apocynaceae family is also known as the dogbane family because some taxa are used to poison dogs. Several taxa in this family are widespread in the subtropics and tropics². It is divided into five subfamilies, i.e., Rauvolfioideae, Apocynoideae, Periplocoideae, Secamonoideae, and Asclepiadoideae. Apocynaceae contain 424 genera with more than 4600 species³.

Several genera in Apocynaceae are *Acokanthera*, *Adenium*, *Allamanda*, *Amsonia*, *Apocynum*, *Brachystelma*, *Carissa*, *Ceropegia*, *Cryptostegia*, *Cynanchum*, *Duvalia*, *Plumeria*, and *Vinca*⁴. Apocynaceae consist of herbs, shrubs, lianas, or trees. The unique characteristic is that tissues contain latex². Several species are generally cultivated as ornamental plants. Nevertheless, most species in Apocynaceae are rich in alkaloids and cardiac glycosides^{4, 5}. Therefore, Apocynaceae have enormous medicinal benefits. Some traditional medical practices, such as Chinese, Thai, and Indian medicine, use this family. However, some taxa can be used as poisons⁴. An example species that belongs to Apocynaceae is *Adenium obesum*.

Adenium obesum, commonly known as the 'desert rose,' is widely recognized as an ornamental plant. Native to the African continent, it is found in countries such as Senegal, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, and Sudan^{6, 7}. Beyond its native range, *Adenium obesum* is also cultivated in



tropical regions, including Indonesia, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, India, the Philippines, and Malaysia^{8, 9, 10}. In addition to its ornamental value, *Adenium obesum* possesses significant medicinal potential. Paul et al.¹¹ reported its biological activities, including antibacterial, antiviral, antioxidant, and anticancer properties. This is further corroborated by Shafiq et al.¹², who summarized the phytochemical constituents of *Adenium obesum*. Despite these findings, there is a notable lack of comprehensive information regarding the ethnobotanical uses of *Adenium obesum*. Therefore, the present review aims to provide an updated overview of the ethnobotanical applications of *Adenium obesum*.

Taxonomy:

Kingdom: Plantae

Division: Magnoliophyta

Class: Magnoliopsida

Order: Gentianales

Family: Apocynaceae

Genus: *Adenium*

Species: *Adenium obesum*

Vernacular Names:

English: Desert Rose

Arabic: Sabi Star

Hindi: *Adenium*

African regions: Kudu Lily

Thai: Chuan Chom¹²

Habitat and Geographical Distribution: *Adenium obesum* is a drought-tolerant succulent plant adapted to arid and semi-arid climatic conditions. It commonly grows in sandy, well-drained soils, dry savannahs, rocky habitats, and warm tropical to subtropical regions receiving abundant sunlight. The plant possesses a thick succulent stem (caudex) that stores water, enabling it to survive prolonged drought conditions. *Adenium obesum* is native to the eastern and northeastern regions of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Owing to its ornamental value and adaptability, the plant is now cultivated widely

in tropical and subtropical countries worldwide, including India^{13, 14}.

Botanical Description: The morphological characteristic of *Adenium obesum* is that it has roots that can enlarge, like tubers, which store water from the upper roots or base of the stem. The shape of the roots, which can expand, twists to the left and right and coincides with each other so it looks artistic Fig. 1¹⁵. The enlarged roots are covered with root hairs or a large number of tiny roots, especially at the bottom, sides and top together with the enlarged roots. The enlargement of the base of the stem is due to old age. The older it is, the bigger the roots. *Adenium obesum* has an upright stem accompanied by fine branches, grayish green to brown with irregular branch spacing, making it unique and attractive for making bonsai. The leaves are simple and spirally arranged at the ends of the branches. Leaves are around 3-12 x 0.5-5 cm. The flowers are white or pink to dark red, shaped like trumpets^{16, 17}. They also have wavy petals. *Adenium obesum* is a group of terminal flowers formed throughout the year. The plant may die almost entirely during the summer, but the flowers are covered. When ripe, the fruit follicle will split on one side and release the seed with a hairy pappus attached to it, which is spread by the wind. *Adenium obesum* is unique because it can secrete white latex when injured. The tall between 0.4 – 5 m¹⁸.



FIG. 1: LEAVES AND FLOWERS OF ADENIUM OBESUM

Ethnomedicinal Uses: Traditionally, different parts of the plant have been used for medicinal and cultural purposes.

Traditional Uses:

- Treatment of skin infections and wounds

- Management of lice and parasitic infestations
- Treatment of rheumatic pain
- Use as an antimicrobial remedy
- Latex used as fish poison and arrow poison in some African communities
- Treatment of venereal diseases in folk medicine

Veterinary Uses:

- Used for treating animal skin diseases
- Applied externally for parasitic infections

Phytochemistry: A complete AO plant growing locally was found to contain a variety of chemicals, the amount of which rising with age ¹⁹. The selected plant contained, among other chemical compounds, carbohydrates, flavonoids, cardiac glycoside, flavonoid, terpenoids, and pregnanes, according to the phytochemical study. The most of the isolated chemical components of the chosen plant were physiologically active ²⁰. 53 compounds in all were isolated and identified in earlier studies of the selected plant by different authors. While certain have biological properties like antiviral, anticancer, and cytotoxic impact, others are toxic ²¹. Few studies have been done in Gulf countries on the chosen local medicinal plant. The chemical components of the bark and stem were betulin and rosmarinic acid. While leaves confirmed for several chemical components, such as Honghelin, Obeside-B & C, the stem exhibited 3,5,7,3,4,5-Hexahydroxy flavone and 5,7,3,4-Tetrahydroxy flavone ^{22, 23}.

Pharmacological Activity:

Antimicrobial and Antioxidant Activity:

Adenium obesum has gained considerable scientific attention due to its rich phytochemical composition and diverse pharmacological activities, particularly its antimicrobial and antioxidant potential. Various studies have investigated different parts of the plant including flowers, leaves, stems, roots, and stem bark using multiple extraction methods and analytical techniques to identify bioactive compounds and evaluate their biological efficacy. Early studies demonstrated the antimicrobial significance of the plant ²³. Tijjani A et al. (2011) evaluated methanolic and petroleum ether extracts of the stem bark against several Gram-negative bacterial strains including *Escherichia coli*,

Pseudomonas aeruginosa, *Salmonella typhi*, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, and *Klebsiella pneumoniae*. The extracts exhibited broad-spectrum antibacterial activity with significant zones of inhibition. Phytochemical analysis confirmed the presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, steroids, glycosides, anthraquinones, and saponins, which were considered responsible for the observed antimicrobial effects ²⁴. Similarly, Atawodi SE (2005) reported strong trypanocidal activity of stem-bark extracts of *Adenium obesum* against *Trypanosoma brucei*, indicating its potential application as a source of antiprotozoal agents ²⁵.

Bungihan ME and Matias CA (2013) investigated the phytochemical profile, antioxidant potential, and antibacterial activity of ornamental flowers including *Adenium obesum*. Thin layer chromatography revealed the presence of phenolics, alkaloids, terpenes, and essential oils. Although some ornamental flowers exhibited comparatively higher antioxidant activity, *Adenium obesum* demonstrated considerable antibacterial activity against *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli* ²⁶. In the same year, Alseini AII (2014) assessed the antioxidant capacity of ten Arabian medicinal plants and found that *Adenium obesum* possessed high total phenolic and flavonoid contents along with significant Trolox equivalent antioxidant capacity (TEAC), suggesting strong free radical scavenging properties and possible protective effects against oxidative stress-related diseases ²⁷.

Hossain MA et al. (2014) further evaluated the antimicrobial potency of stem extracts obtained through Soxhlet and maceration methods. Different solvent fractions exhibited moderate to significant antibacterial activity against food-borne pathogenic bacteria. The study concluded that extraction methods influence the antimicrobial efficacy of plant extracts ²⁸. In another investigation, AL-Ghudani MKN and Hossain MA (2015) analyzed the total phenolic content, flavonoid content, and antioxidant activity of root extracts prepared using Soxhlet and maceration techniques. The study demonstrated that different extraction procedures and solvents significantly affected the recovery of antioxidant phytochemicals.

Soxhlet extraction yielded higher phenolic contents in ethyl acetate fractions, while methanol extracts from maceration showed greater flavonoid concentration and antioxidant activity²⁹.

Sharma Y et al. (2015) investigated antibacterial activity of aqueous and methanolic leaf extracts against Gram-positive bacteria (*Bacillus amyloliquefaciens* and *Staphylococcus aureus*) and Gram-negative bacteria (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Escherichia coli*). Methanolic extracts exhibited stronger antibacterial activity, especially against Gram-positive bacteria. Phytochemical screening confirmed the presence of bioactive constituents such as flavonoids, alkaloids, tannins, and glycosides, supporting the therapeutic potential of the plant as an antimicrobial agent³⁰.

Akhtar MS et al. (2016) isolated and characterized bioactive compounds from the chloroform extract of *Adenium obesum*. Traditional medicinal applications of the plant in Oman for treating wounds, skin diseases, headaches, and joint pain motivated the investigation. The isolated compounds were characterized using chromatographic and spectroscopic methods including TLC, column chromatography, IR, MS, and NMR techniques. The study confirmed significant antioxidant and antimicrobial activities of the isolated constituents and represented the first successful characterization of compounds from chloroform extracts of the plant³¹.

Further investigations by Tijjani A et al. (2019) demonstrated synergistic antibacterial activity when methanolic stem-bark extracts were combined with oxytetracycline. The extract exhibited potent inhibitory effects against both Gram-positive and Gram-negative clinical bacterial isolates, especially *Streptococcus pyogenes*. The minimum inhibitory concentration ranged between 62.5 µg/ml and 1250 µg/ml. Phytochemical analysis again confirmed the presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, steroids, tannins, anthraquinones, glycosides, and saponins³².

Kalva S (2019) evaluated methanolic flower extracts of *Adenium obesum* for antimicrobial activity against *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, and *Candida albicans*. The study reported significant antibacterial and antifungal

activities comparable to standard drugs such as ciprofloxacin and fluconazole. Phytochemical screening identified alkaloids, flavonoids, phenols, tannins, cardiac glycosides, proteins, amino acids, and steroids as major constituents responsible for the observed bioactivity. Recent studies have focused more extensively on antioxidant properties and phytochemical characterization³³.

Menachery SJ et al. (2025) performed a comprehensive phytochemical investigation of methanolic cold extracts of *Adenium obesum* flowers using GC-MS, LC-MS, FT-IR, and NMR techniques. The extract exhibited remarkable antioxidant and antibacterial activities against both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria. Ethyl iso-allocholate was identified as the predominant compound and was proposed as a major contributor to the plant's pharmacological effects. The study emphasized the therapeutic potential of *Adenium obesum* flower extracts as natural antioxidant and antibacterial agents for future pharmaceutical applications³⁴. Overall, the literature strongly supports that *Adenium obesum* is a rich source of bioactive phytochemicals including alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, phenolics, glycosides, steroids, terpenoids, and saponins. These compounds contribute significantly to its antimicrobial, antioxidant, trypanocidal, and therapeutic activities. Variations in extraction methods, solvent polarity, and plant parts greatly influence phytochemical yield and biological activity. The cumulative findings validate the traditional medicinal use of the plant and highlight its potential for the development of novel phytopharmaceuticals, antimicrobial formulations, and natural antioxidant agents.

Anti-obesity and Wound Healing Activity:

Recent studies have highlighted the diverse pharmacological potential of plants belonging to the genus *Adenium obesum* and *Adenium socotranum*. Al-Hakami IA et al. (2025) investigated the phytochemical composition, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and wound healing activities of the methanolic leaf extract of *Adenium socotranum*. Phytochemical characterization using GC-MS identified methyl palmitate, methyl stearate, β-sitosterol, and α-amyrin as major constituents.

The extract demonstrated significant antioxidant activity in the DPPH assay and potent antibacterial activity, particularly against *Enterococcus faecalis*. *In-vivo* wound healing studies in rats revealed accelerated wound contraction, increased hydroxyproline content, enhanced collagen deposition, improved angiogenesis, and reduced inflammatory cell infiltration following topical application of the extract. Molecular docking analysis further suggested that compounds such as α -tocospiro B, α -amyrin, and 1,2-benzenedicarboxylic acid may contribute to wound healing by interacting with TNF- α and TGF- β R1 pathways. The findings established the therapeutic potential of *Adenium socotranum* as a promising natural source for wound healing and antimicrobial applications³⁵.

Similarly, Hussain S et al. (2024) evaluated the phytochemical constituents and anti-obesity potential of aqueous leaf extracts of *Adenium obesum* in Wistar rats. The extract was prepared by macerating powdered leaves in distilled water followed by filtration and concentration using a rotary evaporator. Preliminary phytochemical screening confirmed the presence of bioactive compounds. Obesity was induced in rats using progesterone, and the animals were treated with different doses of the plant extract for thirty days³⁶. The study demonstrated significant reductions in body weight, liver, spleen, and kidney weights, as well as decreased cholesterol, triglyceride, and blood glucose levels in treated groups compared to disease controls. These findings indicate that *Adenium obesum* possesses notable anti-obesity and hypolipidemic activities, supporting its potential role as a natural therapeutic agent for obesity management and metabolic disorders. Together, these studies emphasize the broad pharmacological significance of *Adenium* species and their potential for future phytopharmaceutical development.

Anti-inflammatory Activity: Recent scientific investigations have highlighted the therapeutic potential of *Adenium obesum*, particularly its ethanolic leaf extracts, in addressing inflammation-related disorders. Patel A et al. (2025) studied the phytochemical composition and evaluated the anti-arthritis and anti-inflammatory activities of ethanolic extracts and column fractions of the plant.

The extract was prepared using Soxhlet extraction followed by fractionation through TLC-guided column chromatography. GC-MS analysis revealed the presence of multiple bioactive constituents. The anti-arthritis activity was assessed using the human red blood cell (HRBC) membrane stabilization method, while anti-inflammatory potential was evaluated through COX-2 inhibition assays. The results demonstrated significant membrane stabilization and enzyme inhibition, indicating strong anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritis potential of the plant extracts³⁷.

Further supporting its pharmacological relevance, Deepak S et al. (2024) investigated the antioxidant and antibacterial properties of ethanolic leaf extracts of *Adenium obesum*. GC-MS analysis identified around 45 phytochemical constituents, including benzofuran, phenolic compounds, and other secondary metabolites. The extract exhibited strong free radical scavenging activity using the DPPH assay in a dose-dependent manner, comparable to ascorbic acid. Additionally, significant antibacterial activity was observed against both *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli*, with notable zones of inhibition, suggesting that the bioactivity of the plant is strongly associated with its diverse phytochemical profile³⁸.

Similarly, Alshehri A et al. (2022) evaluated the ethanolic leaf extract of *Adenium obesum* for antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anticancer activities. The study employed multiple antioxidant assays, including DPPH, ABTS, superoxide, hydroxyl radical scavenging, and lipid peroxidation inhibition tests. The extract demonstrated strong antioxidant potential compared to standard ascorbic acid. *In-vitro* anti-inflammatory activity showed significant reduction of pro-inflammatory mediators such as TNF- α in murine macrophage cell lines. Furthermore, cytotoxic effects were observed against A549 lung cancer cells, indicating the broad therapeutic potential of the plant³⁹.

Supporting evidence from other medicinal plants reinforces the relevance of these findings. Farooq S et al. (2022) evaluated the anti-arthritis and anti-inflammatory activities of several medicinal plants using HRBC membrane stabilization and protein denaturation assays. The study reported significant

inhibition of inflammatory responses in tested extracts, confirming the role of phytochemicals such as flavonoids, alkaloids, phenols, and terpenoids in anti-inflammatory mechanisms. These findings align with the observed biological effects of *Adenium obesum*, suggesting that similar phytoconstituents may contribute to its pharmacological activity⁴⁰. Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that *Adenium obesum* contains a wide range of bioactive compounds responsible for its antioxidant, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and anti-arthritic properties. These activities are strongly linked to its rich phytochemical profile, including flavonoids, phenolics, alkaloids, and terpenoids. The evidence supports its traditional medicinal use and highlights its potential as a promising candidate for the development of natural therapeutic agents for inflammatory and oxidative stress-related diseases.

Antidiabetic Activity: Journal IJPR et al., 2019 Several recent studies have demonstrated the promising antidiabetic potential of *Adenium obesum* through both *in-vitro* and *in-vivo* experimental models. In one study, the methanolic (MEAO) and ethyl acetate (EAEAO) flower extracts of *Adenium obesum* were evaluated for antidiabetic activity in streptozotocin-induced diabetic rats. Diabetes was induced by intraperitoneal administration of streptozotocin (35–50 mg/kg), and the extracts were administered orally at doses of 100, 200, and 300 mg/kg. The *in vitro* α -amylase inhibitory assay demonstrated strong dose-dependent enzyme inhibition by both extracts when compared with the standard drug acarbose. *In-vivo* studies further revealed significant reductions in blood glucose levels ($p < 0.0001$) along with marked increases in serum insulin levels in treated diabetic rats. Metformin (50 mg/kg) was used as the standard antidiabetic drug. The findings suggested that flower extracts of *Adenium obesum* possess potent antihyperglycemic activity and may help in the management of diabetes mellitus through inhibition of carbohydrate digestion and enhancement of insulin secretion⁴¹.

Similarly, Sharma R et al. (2025) investigated the antioxidant and antidiabetic activities of ethanolic leaf extracts of *Adenium obesum* in alloxan-induced diabetic Wistar rats. Diabetes was induced by

administering alloxan monohydrate (150 mg/kg, s.c.), and the animals were treated with ethanolic leaf extract at doses of 200 mg/kg and 400 mg/kg for 21 days. The study evaluated antioxidant activity using the DPPH free radical scavenging assay along with parameters such as body weight, blood glucose levels, and oral glucose tolerance tests. Both extract-treated groups exhibited significant reductions in blood glucose levels compared to diabetic controls, with values decreasing to 109.23 ± 0.46 mg/dl and 98.46 ± 0.24 mg/dl at doses of 200 mg/kg and 400 mg/kg, respectively. The study concluded that *Adenium obesum* possesses significant antioxidant and antidiabetic activities and may serve as a potential herbal therapeutic agent for diabetes management, although further studies are needed to elucidate its exact mechanism of action and optimal therapeutic dosage⁴².

CONCLUSION: *Adenium obesum* is an important medicinal plant possessing significant ethnopharmacological and therapeutic value. The plant contains a wide variety of bioactive phytoconstituents such as flavonoids, alkaloids, glycosides, phenolics, terpenoids, and steroids that contribute to its diverse pharmacological properties. Scientific studies have validated its antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-arthritic, wound healing, anti-obesity, anticancer, and antidiabetic activities through various experimental models. Different extraction techniques and solvent systems have been shown to influence the yield and biological efficacy of phytochemicals. The cumulative evidence supports the traditional medicinal use of *Adenium obesum* and highlights its potential as a promising source for the development of novel phytopharmaceuticals and natural therapeutic agents. However, further detailed toxicological, mechanistic, and clinical studies are required to establish its safety, efficacy, and therapeutic applications in modern medicine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Nil

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Nil

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How to cite this article:

Agrawal H, Rajvanshi S and Kumar A: Comprehensive review of the botanical, phytochemical, and pharmacological aspects of *Adenium obesum* (Apocynaceae). Int J Pharmacognosy 2026; 13(8): 760-67. doi link: [http://dx.doi.org/10.13040/IJPSR.0975-8232.IJP.13\(8\).760-67](http://dx.doi.org/10.13040/IJPSR.0975-8232.IJP.13(8).760-67).

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