

Comprehensive Review on Badam (*Prunus dulcis*): Phytochemistry, Pharmacology, Traditional Uses, and Modern Applications in Unani and Contemporary Medicine

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Abstract

Badam, scientifically known as *Prunus dulcis* (Mill.) D.A. Webb (syn. *Prunus amygdalus* Batsch.) is a nutrient-dense drupe from the Rosaceae family, revered in Unani medicine as a Ghiza-e-Dawaae (nutraceutical) for its revitalizing health benefits. Native to Central and Western Asia, it has been cultivated globally for millennia. This review synthesizes data from classical Unani texts and modern scientific studies, highlighting its morphology, phytochemistry, pharmacological actions (e.g., neuroprotective, immunostimulant, hypolipidemic), therapeutic uses (e.g., for amnesia, sexual debility, constipation), and safety profile. Key constituents include monounsaturated fats (e.g., oleic acid 62%), proteins (21.2g/100g), vitamin E (25.6mg/100g), and phenolics like quercetin and kaempferol. Preclinical and clinical evidence supports its antioxidant, antidiabetic, antifungal, and anti-inflammatory properties. While sweet almonds (var. *dulcis*) are safe and nutritious, bitter almonds (var. *amara*) pose cyanide toxicity risks. This comprehensive analysis underscores Badam's potential in integrative medicine for promoting health and managing chronic conditions.

Keywords: *Prunus dulcis*, Unani medicine, Phytochemistry, Nutraceutical, Pharmacological actions.

Introduction

Nature offers a plethora of food products rich in bioactive compounds that provide diverse health benefits, often surpassing synthetic alternatives [1]. Among these, Badam (almond) stands out as a valuable nutraceutical from the Rosaceae family, long recognized for its essential nutrients and therapeutic potential [2]. Originating from regions extending from India to Persia, the almond tree spread eastward and westward thousands of years before Christ [3]. Classified into sweet (*Prunus dulcis* var. *dulcis*) and bitter (var. *amara*) varieties, the sweet type is primarily edible and medicinal, while the bitter type is used cautiously due to toxicity [4].

In Unani medicine, Badam is prescribed for ailments like brain weakness (*Du'f al-Dimagh*), sexual debility (*Du'f al-Bah*), and constipation (*Qabz*), acting as a brain tonic (*Muqawwi-i-Dimagh*), aphrodisiac (*Muqawwi-i-Bah*), and laxative (*Mulayyin*) [5]. Modern research corroborates these uses, linking almond consumption to reduced risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and oxidative stress [6]. This review integrates Unani perspectives with contemporary data, covering botany, phytochemistry, pharmacology, and applications.

Botanical Description and Morphology



Figure 1. (a) Plant, (b) Kernels and (c) oil of *Prunus dulcis*.

Macroscopic Features

Prunus dulcis is a small deciduous tree, 4-10m tall, with a trunk diameter up to 30cm [7]. Young twigs are green, turning purplish then grey. Leaves are lanceolate, 8-13cm long, with serrated margins and petioles 2.5cm long [8]. Flowers, pale pink to white (3-5cm diameter), bloom singly or in pairs in early spring before leaves [9]. The fruit is a drupe (3.5-6cm long), with a velvety hull splitting at maturity to reveal a pitted shell enclosing the seed (kernel) [10]. Kernels are ovoid, flattened (2-3cm long), with a thin brown seed coat removable after soaking [11]. Sweet kernels are nutritious; bitter ones are toxic due to amygdalin [12]. Varieties include cultivated (*Bustani*), wild forest (*Jangali*), and hilly (*Pahadi*), with *Kagzi* (paper-shelled) considered superior for softness and oil content [13]. Fruits mature 7-8 months post-flowering, bearing economically from the third year [14].

Microscopic Features

Transverse sections show a thin seed coat with papilliform epidermal cells (pitted base), crushed middle layers, and tubular inner cells [15]. Endosperm is single-layered parenchymatous. Cotyledons contain aleurone grains, oil globules, and fixed oils [16]. Powder is creamy white, oily, sweet-tasting (sweet variety), odorless [17].

Taxonomy

- Kingdom: *Plantae*
- Division: Tracheophyta
- Class: Magnoliopsida
- Order: Rosales
- Family: Rosaceae
- Subfamily: Amygdaloideae
- Genus: *Prunus*
- Subgenus: *Amygdalus*
- Species: *dulcis*
- Binomial: *Prunus dulcis* (Mill.) D.A. Webb
- Synonyms: *Amygdalus communis* L., *Amygdalus dulcis* Mill., *Prunus amygdalus* Batsch, *Amygdalus sativa* Mill. [18]

Vernacular Names

- Arabic: Lauz-ul-Hulu, Louz
- Persian: Badam-e-Shireen
- Urdu: Badam Shireen
- Hindi: Badam
- English: Sweet Almond
- Bengali: Bilaiti Badam, Kaath Badam
- Gujrati: Badam
- Malayalam: Badam, Vatam-kotta
- Marathi: Badam
- Kannada: Badami
- Tamil: Vadumai, Vadamkottai
- Telugu: Badamu
- Punjabi: Badam
- Sanskrit: Badama, Madhurya badamitte
- Greek: Amygdalia [19]

Habitat and Distribution

Native to Southwest Asia (Iran, Turkey), cultivated in Mediterranean regions, California (largest producer), Australia, South Africa [20]. In India, grown in Kashmir, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh; limited in Uttar Pradesh due to rainfall [21]. Requires temperate climate with cold winters and warm ripening periods [22].

Parts Used

Seeds (kernels), seed oil; occasionally shells, fruits, roots [23].

Temperament (Mizaj)

Hot 1° Moist 1° (most sources); variations include Hot and Moist, Hot 2° Moist 2°, Cold 1° Dry 2° [24].

Taste

Sweet and oily (sweet variety); bitter (bitter variety) [25].

Therapeutic Dose (Miqdar-e-Khuraq)

7-11 kernels; oil 18-60ml [26].

Bitter: 0.5-1g externally [27].

Adverse Effects (MuzirAsraat)

Increases bile, stomach heaviness, delayed digestion (sweet); cyanide toxicity in bitter (lethal at 50 kernels adults, 5-10 children) [28].

Corrective (Musleh)

Sugar, honey, Mastagi [29].

Substitute (Badal)

Maghz Chilgoza, Akhrot, Pista, Filfildaraz [30].

Compound Formulations (Murakkabat)

Laoq-e-Badam, Laoq-e-Sapistan, Luboob Kabir/Sagheer, MajoonAarad Khurma, MajoonMughalliz, Roghan-e-Badam Shireen, Banadiq-ul-Buzoor, Habb-e-Jadwar, Qurs-e-Kaknaj [31].

Actions (Af'al)

Muqawwi-i-Dimagh (brain tonic), Mulattif/Murattib (demulcent), Mulayyin (laxative), Muqawwi-i-Bah (aphrodisiac), Mughazzi (nutritive), Muwallid-i-Mani (spermatogenic), Musammin-i-Badan (fattening), Muqawwi-i-Basr (eye tonic), Jali (detergent), Mudirr-i-Baul (diuretic), Kasir-i-Riyah (carminative), Mufattih (deobstruent), Muqawwi-i-Qalb (cardiotonic), Taqwiat-i-Hifz (memory enhancer), Musakkin (analgesic), Dafi-i-Qulanaj (antispasmodic), Muhammira (rubefacient), Hazim (digestive), Mufattit-i-Hasah (lithotriptic), Mudirr-i-Hayd (emmenagogue) [32].

Table 1: Pharmacological Actions (Af'al) of Badam (Prunus dulcis)

Action (Af'al)	English Equivalent	References
Mulattif	Demulcent	[12, 7, 11, 28, 14, 29, 22, 23]
Muharrak	Stimulant	[12, 7, 11]
Mughazzi	Nutritive	[12, 7, 4, 5, 28, 27, 15, 29]
Muqawwi-i-A'sab	Nervine tonic	[12, 11, 17]
Murakkhi	Emollient	[12, 27, 29, 22, 87]
Mulayyin-i-Am'a'	Laxative	[12, 6, 5, 8, 27, 10, 24, 13, 9, 19, 87]
Muqawwi-i-Dimagh	Brain tonic	[6, 8, 24, 13, 15, 16]
Muqawwi-i-Bah	Aphrodisiac	[6, 8, 10, 24, 13, 15, 16]
Muwallid-i-Mani	Spermatogenic	[5, 17]
Kasir-i-Riyah	Carminative	[5]
Mufattih	Deobstruent	[5, 15, 16, 14]
Jali	Detergent	[5, 24, 13, 21]
Musakkin	Calorific	[5, 24]
Muqawwi-i-ama	Intestinal tonic	[10]

Therapeutic Uses (Iste'malat)

Du'f al-Dimagh (brain weakness), Khafqan (palpitation), Nisyan (amnesia), Du'f al-Bah (sexual debility), Qabz (constipation), Du'f al-Basar (weak eyesight), Su'al (cough), Zeeq-un-Nafas (asthma), Zat-ul-Janb (pleurisy), Nafth al-Dam (haemoptysis), Khushunat-i-Halaq (sore throat), Qarh-i-Meda (peptic ulcer), Ishaal/Zahir (diarrhoea/dysentery), Bawasir (piles), Yarqaan (jaundice), Istisqa (ascites), Waja-i-Asab (neuralgia), Ushr-i-Tamth (dysmenorrhoea), Suzak (gonorrhoea), Hurqat al-Baul (burning micturition), Waram al-Mathana (cystitis), Hasat al-Kulya (renal stones) [33].

Table 2: Therapeutic Uses (Iste'malat) of Badam (Prunus dulcis)

Therapeutic Use (Iste'malat)	English Equivalent	References
Su'al	Cough	[12, 5, 8, 27, 10, 24, 13, 15, 16, 17, 14, 20, 22, 19]
Zahir	Dysentery	[12, 4, 19]
Qurūh al-Am'a'	Peptic/Intestinal ulcer	[7]
Khushunat al-Halaq	Sore throat	[4, 5, 10, 15, 16, 14, 19]
Rabw/Rabū'	Asthma	[4, 5]
Dhāt al-Janb	Pleurisy	[4, 5, 17, 19]
'Ushr al-Bawl	Dysuria/Burning micturition	[4, 5, 16, 19]
Sūzāk	Gonorrhoea	[4, 17]
Ḥuṣṭ/Qabz	Constipation	[4, 24, 13]
Qurūh al-Am'a'	Intestinal ulcer	[4, 5, 17]
Za'f al-Bāh	Loss of libido/Sexual debility	[6, 8, 13]
Za'f al-Dimāgh	Cerebrasthenia/Brain weakness	[6]
Ṣudā'	Headache	[5, 10]
Sahr	Insomnia	[5]
Ziyābetus (Diabetes Mellitus)	Diabetes mellitus	[27, 14]
Juzām	Leprosy	[10]

Chemical Constituents

Table 3: Nutritional Composition of Almonds (Per 100g)[34]

Nutrient	Value	% DV
Energy	579 kcal	-
Carbohydrates	21.6g	-
Dietary Fiber	12.5g	50%
Fat	49.9g	-
Protein	21.2g	42%
Vitamin E	25.6mg	171%
Calcium	264mg	26%
Magnesium	268mg	75%
Iron	3.72mg	29%

Phytochemical Constituents

Almonds, derived from *Prunus dulcis* (sweet variety) and *Prunus dulcis* var. *amara* (bitter variety), are nutrient-dense kernels renowned for their rich composition of fixed oils, proteins, and bioactive compounds. Both varieties typically contain 40–55% fixed oil, approximately 20% proteins, mucilage, and the enzyme emulsin (synaptase). The fixed oil is predominantly composed of unsaturated fatty acids, with oleic acid constituting about 77% and linoleic acid 17%, alongside saturated fatty acids such as palmitic (5%) and stearic (1–2%), contributing to a high calorific value of around 655 kcal/100 g. This oil primarily consists of glycerides like myristo-diolein (3%), palmito-diolein (14%), linoleo-diolein (52%), and triolein (31%) [61, 62, 63]. The protein fraction includes two major albuminous substances: amandin (a globulin with 19% nitrogen content) and albumin. Amandin is characterized by its essential amino acid profile, including arginine (11.9%), histidine (1.6%), lysine (0.7%), phenylalanine (2.5%), leucine (4.5%), valine (0.2%), tryptophan (1.4%), methionine (0.7%), and cystine (0.8%), with notably high arginine levels [35, 64, 65, 66].

Carbohydrates in almonds comprise sucrose (4.4–4.7%), pentosans, hemicelluloses, and trace monosaccharides and sugar alcohols, but starch is absent. The kernels are also a source of minerals, with potassium (856 mg/100 g), calcium (247 mg/100 g), magnesium (257 mg/100 g), phosphorus (442 mg/100 g), sodium (5.8 mg/100 g), iron (4.23 mg/100 g), copper (0.14 mg/100 g), sulfur (145 mg/100 g), and chlorine (1.7 mg/100 g), alongside trace elements like iodine (2 µg/100 g), manganese, and zinc. The ash content ranges from 3–5%, primarily consisting of potassium, calcium, and magnesium phosphates [67, 68, 69]. Vitamins present include folic acid (0.45 ppm), α-tocopherol (15 mg/100 g), and γ-tocopherol (0.5 mg/100 g), while ascorbic acid (vitamin C) and vitamin A are absent; however, the oil also contains vitamins A, B, and C in minor amounts [70, 71, 72]. A key distinction lies in the bitter almonds, which additionally contain 2.5–4.0% of the colorless, crystalline cyanogenic glycoside amygdalin, absent in sweet almonds. Amygdalin, upon enzymatic hydrolysis by emulsin, yields hydrocyanic acid (HCN), benzaldehyde, and glucose, rendering bitter almonds unfit for direct consumption due to toxicity. Bitter kernels also feature prunacin (a cyanogenic monoglucoside) and higher levels of phenolic compounds such as caffeic acid, ferulic acid, hydroxycinnamic acid, naringenin, and kaempferol.

The protein content in bitter almond kernels is about 10% higher, while fat is 10% lower compared to sweet almonds [73, 74, 75]. Both varieties are rich in sterols, with β -sitosterol and Δ -5-avenasterol predominating in the unsaponifiable fraction, alongside polyphenols, phytosterols, and lipid-soluble vitamins that contribute to antioxidant properties [76, 77, 78]. The moisture content is approximately 5.2%, with fiber at 10.5% and ether-extractable fat at 58.9% in sweet almonds, emphasizing their role as a source of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats [79, 80, 81].

These constituents underscore almonds' nutritional and therapeutic potential, with sweet almonds serving as edible nuts and bitter ones used cautiously for medicinal extracts. The absence of amygdalin in sweet varieties ensures safety, while its presence in bitter almonds necessitates detoxification processes for pharmacological applications [82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87].

Pharmacological Studies

Antihyperlipidemic Activity

Almonds exhibit consistent LDL-lowering effects. Berryman et al. (2015) demonstrated 1.5 oz/day for 6 weeks reduced LDL by 6-10% in healthy and hypercholesterolemic individuals [36]. Nishi et al. showed altered serum fatty acids, reducing CHD risk by 10 years [37]. Epidemiological data from Nurses' Health Study link nuts to reduced CHD via lipid modulation [38].

Immunostimulant Activity

Arena et al. reported increased cytokines (INF- α , IL-12, TNF- α), enhancing antiviral surveillance against HSV-2 [39]. Mandalari et al. (2010) found almond skins modulated responses as antivirals [40]. Dikariyanto et al. (2021) linked almond consumption to higher nutrient intakes for immune health [41].

Anti-inflammatory and Antioxidant Activity

Methanolic extracts scavenge radicals, with hulls showing higher activity due to phenolics [42]. Almond diets reduced CRP and E-selectin [43]. In smokers, supplementation decreased DNA damage, 8-OH-dG, MDA [44]. Barreca et al. (2020) reviewed inflammation modulation via MUFA and phenolics [45].

Hypoglycemic Activity

Jenkins et al. (2006) showed reduced glycemia and insulinaemia [46]. Gulati et al. (2017) improved HbA1c, waist circumference, triglycerides in T2D [47]. Cohen and Johnston (2011) reported 30% postprandial glycemia reduction [48]. Meta-analyses confirm glucose/insulin reductions [49].

Hepatoprotective Activity

Almond oil pretreatment reduced enzymes (ALT, AST, ALP, LDH) and lipids (TC, TG, MDA), increased antioxidants (GPx, SOD, catalase) in CCl₄ toxicity [50].

Nootropic Activity

Kulkarni et al. (2010) enhanced spatial memory in scopolamine-amnesia, elevating acetylcholine, reducing cholesterol [51]. 28-day administration improved learning in maze assays [52].

Prebiotic Activity

Mandalari et al. (2008) increased Bifidobacteria, Eubacterium, elevating butyrate for microbiome regulation [53].

Anticancer Activity

Daily consumption lowered aberrant crypt foci, colonic turnover in rats [54]. High intake reduces breast cancer risk 2-3 times via antioxidants [55].

Cardioprotective and Weight Management

Dreher (2021) reviewed reduced uric acid, glucose, lipids [56]. Li et al. (2018) meta-analysis: lowered body mass (-0.56kg), BMI (-0.49kg/m²), waist (-2.4cm) [57]. Foster et al. (2012) reported greater weight loss with almond diets [58].

Antifungal Activity

Geng et al. (2016) identified 21 components in bitter almond oil (benzaldehyde 62.52%), showing in vitro/in vivo efficacy against fungi like *Alternaria brassicae*, *Gloeosporium orbiculare* [59].

Toxicity

Sweet almonds are safe; bitter contain amygdalin yielding cyanide (1062mg/kg vs. 25mg/kg sweet). Lethal: 50 bitter kernels adults, 5-10 children [60].

Discussion

The comprehensive review of Badam (*Prunus dulcis*) underscores its enduring significance as a nutraceutical bridging classical Unani traditions and contemporary biomedical science. In Unani medicine, Badam is classified as a *ghiza-e-dawaae* (food-medicine), valued for its *muqawwi-i-dimagh* (brain tonic), *muqawwi-i-bah* (aphrodisiac), *mulayyin* (laxative), and *muqawwi-i-qalb* (cardiotonic) properties, attributed to its hot and moist temperament (*mizaj*). Classical scholars like Ibn Sina and Ghani described its role in enhancing cognitive function, alleviating sexual debility, and promoting digestive health, often incorporating it into formulations like *Laoq-e-Badam* for respiratory issues or *Majoon Mughalliz* for vitality [4, 5, 13, 15, 24]. These empirical observations align remarkably with modern pharmacological validations, highlighting Badam's polyphenol-rich profile, monounsaturated fats, and bioactive compounds as drivers of its therapeutic efficacy. Phytochemically, Badam's kernel is a powerhouse of monounsaturated fatty acids (oleic acid ~62%), proteins (~21g/100g), and antioxidants like vitamin E (25.6mg/100g) and phenolics (quercetin, kaempferol), which confer anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and hypolipidemic effects [34, 35, 61-87].

The sweet variety's absence of amygdalin ensures safety for dietary use, while the bitter variety's cyanogenic glycosides necessitate caution, as enzymatic hydrolysis yields hydrocyanic acid, posing toxicity risks (lethal doses: 50 kernels for adults) [28, 60]. This dichotomy is critical in Unani practice, where sweet Badam is preferred for internal use, and bitter for external applications post-detoxification [12, 27]. Pharmacological studies corroborate these uses: antihyperlipidemic trials show 6–10% LDL reduction with daily consumption, reducing CHD risk through altered serum fatty acids [36–38, 43]. Immunostimulant effects, via cytokine modulation (e.g., INF- α , IL-12), suggest antiviral potential against HSV-2, resonating with Unani's *daf'ita'affun* (antiseptic) action [39–41]. Antioxidant assays reveal radical scavenging superior in hulls, mitigating oxidative stress in conditions like diabetes and neurodegeneration [42–45, 51–52].

Hypoglycemic activity, evidenced by 30% postprandial glucose reduction and improved HbA1c in T2D patients, supports Unani indications for *ziyabetus* (diabetes) management [46–49]. Hepatoprotective studies demonstrate reduced liver enzymes and enhanced antioxidants in toxicity models, aligning with traditional uses for *yarqaan* (jaundice) [50]. Nootropic effects in amnesia models improve memory via acetylcholine elevation, validating *taqwiyyat-i-hifz* (memory enhancement) [51–52]. Prebiotic benefits foster gut microbiota (e.g., increased Bifidobacteria), aiding *qabz* (constipation) relief [53]. Anticancer potential, reducing crypt foci and breast cancer risk, hints at chemopreventive roles [54–55]. Cardioprotective and weight management meta-analyses confirm reductions in body mass, BMI, and uric acid, echoing Unani's *musammin-i-badan* (fattening yet balancing) without obesity risks [56–58]. Antifungal activity of bitter almond oil against pathogens like *Alternaria brassicae* supports external uses for skin infections [59].

Integrating Unani and modern perspectives reveals synergies: Badam's MUFA and phenolic content mechanistically explains its humoral balancing (*mulattif, mufattih*). However, limitations include reliance on preclinical data; clinical trials are sparse for Unani-specific indications like *du'f al-bah*. Bitter almond toxicity demands standardization, as seen in pharmacopeial guidelines [6, 60]. Geographical variations in cultivation affect phytochemical profiles, influencing efficacy [20–22]. Future research should prioritize RCTs validating compound formulations (*murakkabat*) and exploring synergies with pharmaceuticals for chronic diseases. Bioavailability studies on key constituents (e.g., amygdalin derivatives) could mitigate risks, while sustainable sourcing addresses environmental concerns in major producers like California [3, 7]. In essence, Badam exemplifies integrative medicine's potential, offering evidence-based solutions for modern ailments while preserving traditional wisdom. Its versatility—from daily nutrition to targeted therapy—positions it as a cornerstone for preventive healthcare, warranting further interdisciplinary exploration.

Conclusion

Badam (*Prunus dulcis*) emerges as a multifaceted nutraceutical with profound therapeutic value, seamlessly integrating Unani principles with contemporary evidence. Its rich phytochemistry encompassing oleic-rich oils, high-quality proteins, vitamin E, and phenolics underpins diverse pharmacological actions, including antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, hypolipidemic, hypoglycemic, immunostimulant, nootropic, prebiotic, hepatoprotective, anticancer, cardioprotective, and antifungal effects. Traditional Unani applications for brain weakness, sexual debility, constipation, and respiratory issues are substantiated by preclinical and clinical data, highlighting its role in managing chronic conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and oxidative stress. While sweet almonds offer safe, nutrient-dense benefits, bitter varieties require cautious use due to cyanide risks. This review affirms Badam's status as a *ghiza-e-dawaa*, advocating for its incorporation in integrative medicine. Future directions include standardized RCTs, bioavailability enhancements, and sustainable cultivation to maximize its global health impact.

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