

Comparative Botanical and Phytochemical Review of *Coscinium fenestratum* and *Berberis aristata*: Clarifying Tree Turmeric-Associated Medicinal Plant Identity in India

Najeem M Illyas

Research Scholar

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Abstract

The common name Tree Turmeric is used in Indian medicinal plant discourse for more than one taxon, most notably *Coscinium fenestratum* (Gaertn.) Colebr. and *Berberis aristata* DC. This creates ambiguity in taxonomy, pharmacognosy, conservation planning, cultivation, medicinal plant trade, and research communication. This review compares the two species from botanical, ecological, phytochemical, and conservation perspectives. *Coscinium fenestratum* is a woody climber belonging to Menispermaceae and is associated with moist tropical forest systems and the South Indian name Maramanjil. *Berberis aristata* is a thorny shrub belonging to Berberidaceae and is widely associated with Daruharidra or Indian barberry in temperate and sub-Himalayan contexts. Although both plants are connected with yellow-coloured medicinal tissues and berberine-related phytochemistry, they differ strongly in growth habit, ecology, plant part usage, conservation requirements, propagation strategy, and research priority. This review concludes that Tree Turmeric should not be used as a standalone research identifier. Scientific name, regional common name, voucher-based authentication, plant part, and source location must be documented to avoid misidentification and to support reproducible medicinal plant research.

Keywords: Tree turmeric; *Coscinium fenestratum*; *Berberis aristata*; Maramanjil; Daruharidra; berberine; medicinal plants; plant taxonomy; phytochemistry; conservation; pharmacognosy

1. Introduction

Medicinal plant research in India often depends on vernacular names, classical names, regional trade names, and scientific names. Vernacular names are culturally important, but they can become scientifically ambiguous when one common name is used for multiple species. Tree Turmeric is one such name. It can refer to *Coscinium fenestratum*, a woody climber known in Kerala and South India as Maramanjil, and it can also refer to *Berberis aristata*, a thorny shrub widely known as Daruharidra or Indian barberry.

This ambiguity is not a minor naming issue. It affects sample authentication, phytochemical comparison, cultivation planning, conservation strategy, pharmacognostic standardisation, and interpretation of published research. When a study reports Tree Turmeric without a scientific name, the reader may not know whether the material belongs to Menispermaceae or Berberidaceae, whether the plant was collected from a wet tropical forest system or a temperate Himalayan habitat, or whether the tested plant part came from a climber stem, root, bark, or shrub root.

The purpose of this review is to present an independent, research-oriented comparison of *Coscinium fenestratum* and *Berberis aristata*. The article does not treat the two plants as substitutes. It treats them as distinct medicinal plant taxa that share certain vernacular and phytochemical associations but require separate botanical, conservation, and experimental handling.

2. Review Methodology

This article follows a narrative review approach. Authoritative taxonomic databases, medicinal plant board information, flora resources, and selected peer-reviewed pharmacological and phytochemical studies were reviewed. Priority was given to sources that clearly state the scientific name, family, habit, geographic distribution, plant part used, and phytochemical relevance.

The comparison is organised around five research dimensions: botanical identity, ecological distribution, morphological diagnosis, phytochemical relevance, and conservation or propagation implications. The review is intended as a foundation for future experimental work rather than as a clinical efficacy claim. No therapeutic recommendation is made in this article.

3. Comparative Botanical Identity

Parameter	<i>Coscinium fenestratum</i>	<i>Berberis aristata</i>
Accepted scientific name	<i>Coscinium fenestratum</i> (Gaertn.) Colebr.	<i>Berberis aristata</i> DC.
Family	Menispermaceae	Berberidaceae
Habit	Large woody climber or liana	Erect thorny shrub
Common research-associated names	Tree Turmeric, Maramanjil, False Calumba, Yellow Vine	Tree Turmeric, Daruharidra, Daruhaldi, Indian Barberry
Primary ecological association	Wet tropical biome, moist deciduous to evergreen forest systems	Temperate/sub-Himalayan biome and hill habitats
Research concern	High risk of misidentification where common names are used alone	Confusion with Daruharidra and other <i>Berberis</i> species in classical and trade literature
Major phytochemical marker	Berberine and related alkaloids reported in stem/root tissues	Berberine and other protoberberine alkaloids reported mainly in root, stem, and bark tissues

4. Morphological and Ecological Distinction

The most important field-level difference is plant habit. *Coscinium fenestratum* is a woody climber. Its research handling must consider support trees or climbing structures, forest-edge ecology, slow woody biomass accumulation, and the difficulty of destructive harvesting. *Berberis aristata*, by contrast, is a spiny shrub. Its research handling is closer to shrub ecology, hill-habitat conservation, and root or stem-bark pharmacognosy.

The second distinction is habitat. *Coscinium fenestratum* is associated with humid tropical environments and forest systems of South India and parts of South and Southeast Asia. *Berberis aristata* is associated mainly with Himalayan, sub-Himalayan, and hill habitats. These ecological differences mean that cultivation experiments, survival studies, and conservation nurseries cannot use the same protocol for both plants.

The third distinction is identification risk. Yellow colour inside woody tissue is not sufficient for species identification. Both plants can be connected to yellow medicinal tissues and berberine-containing chemistry. Therefore, voucher specimens, herbarium confirmation, macroscopic and microscopic pharmacognosy, DNA barcoding where possible, and documented collection locality are important for research-grade authentication.

5. Phytochemical and Pharmacological Research Relevance

Both species are relevant to berberine-related research. Berberine is an isoquinoline alkaloid reported from several medicinal plant genera and has been reviewed for diverse biological and pharmacological contexts. However, the presence of berberine does not make the two species botanically interchangeable. Differences in plant matrix, associated alkaloids, extraction behaviour, concentration, plant part used, maturity, ecology, and post-harvest processing can all affect experimental results.

Coscinium fenestratum has been studied for biological activities using stem extracts, including experimental antidiabetic and antioxidant-related work in animal models. *Berberis aristata* has a broader classical association with *Daruharidra* and Indian barberry literature and has been reviewed for phytochemistry, pharmacology, nanoformulation possibilities, and berberine-rich extracts. A future research design should compare authenticated samples of both species under the same extraction and analytical protocol rather than relying on literature values compiled from different locations and methods.

For analytical work, a practical research pathway would include authenticated plant material, moisture content determination, solvent-wise extraction, HPTLC or HPLC fingerprinting, berberine quantification, profiling of related alkaloids such as palmatine or jatrorrhizine where relevant, and comparison of extract yield across plant parts. Such a design would support reproducibility and reduce taxonomic ambiguity.

6. Conservation and Propagation Research Relevance

Conservation questions differ between the two species. *Coscinium fenestratum* is repeatedly discussed in conservation-oriented literature because destructive harvesting of woody stem and root material can reduce wild populations. Its climber habit and slow biomass formation make sustainable harvest protocols especially important. Propagation research, nursery establishment, seed biology, vegetative multiplication, tissue culture, and field survival studies are central research needs.

Berberis aristata also deserves conservation and cultivation attention because demand for *Daruharidra* and berberine-containing raw material can pressure natural populations. However, the shrub habit changes the cultivation model. Research can focus on seed germination, cutting success,

altitude and climate adaptation, root biomass development, harvest rotation, and quality variation across Himalayan and non-Himalayan accessions.

Both species require ex-situ conservation and cultivation models, but their protocols should be species-specific. A shared conservation theme is the need to reduce destructive pressure on wild medicinal plant populations while maintaining traceable, quality-controlled raw material for research and traditional medicine industries.

7. Research Gaps

- **Standardised identity protocol:** A practical field-to-laboratory identification protocol is needed to separate *Coscinium fenestratum*, *Berberis aristata*, and other *Daruharidra*-associated taxa.
- **Comparative phytochemical fingerprinting:** Authenticated samples of both species should be analysed using the same extraction method and chromatographic platform.
- **Plant part comparison:** Stem, root, bark, and fruit materials should not be pooled without clear documentation, because plant part strongly affects phytochemical interpretation.
- **Cultivation and survival trials:** Species-specific propagation trials are required, especially for *Coscinium fenestratum* under humid tropical conditions and *Berberis aristata* under suitable hill or controlled environments.
- **Sustainable harvest models:** Non-destructive or rotation-based harvest studies are needed to reduce wild extraction pressure.
- **Nomenclature audit:** Published and trade literature using Tree Turmeric, Maramanjil, *Daruharidra*, *Daruhaldi*, and Indian barberry should be audited to identify where species names are missing or inconsistent.
- **AI-assisted medicinal plant documentation:** Computer vision, structured databases, and natural-language processing could be explored for reducing vernacular-name ambiguity in medicinal plant records.

8. Proposed Future Research Framework

Stage	Activity	Expected output	Research value
1	Collect authenticated samples with voucher records	Verified identity dataset	Prevents common-name confusion
2	Record morphology, habitat, plant part, maturity, and source location	Structured field dataset	Supports reproducibility
3	Perform solvent extraction and chromatographic profiling	Phytochemical fingerprints	Enables objective comparison
4	Quantify berberine and related markers	Comparative marker data	Separates chemistry from naming ambiguity
5	Study propagation and cultivation response	Species-specific cultivation protocol	Supports conservation planning
6	Develop a digital documentation template	Research-grade plant record format	Improves traceability and future data reuse

9. Conclusion

Coscinium fenestratum and *Berberis aristata* are distinct medicinal plant species that can both be connected with the common name Tree Turmeric. Their overlap in common-name usage and berberine-related chemistry should not lead to botanical substitution. *Coscinium fenestratum* is a woody climber associated with wet tropical systems and Maramanjil identity. *Berberis aristata* is a thorny shrub associated with Daruharidra and Indian barberry identity.

From a research point of view, the most important conclusion is that Tree Turmeric must always be accompanied by the scientific name. Future studies should use authenticated plant material, voucher-based documentation, and standardised phytochemical methods. Such care will support better medicinal plant research, conservation planning, and digital knowledge dissemination.

Declarations

Clinical or therapeutic claim: This article is a botanical and phytochemical review. It does not make clinical treatment recommendations.

Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest is declared for the preparation of this review article.

Research context: The review was prepared as an independent research documentation article under Towncraft Agrico Pvt Ltd.

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