
13 Phytochemistry of *Muntingia* *calabura* L. Fruits

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

The use of traditional medicine is widespread, and plants still present a large source of novel, active biological compounds with different activities, including anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, anti-viral, antibacterial and cardioprotective activities. Antioxidants may play a role in these health-promoting activities (Yan et al. 2002). Plants are potent biochemical factories and have been components of phytomedicine since time immemorial; from them, we are able to obtain from them a wondrous assortment of industrial chemicals. Plant-based natural constituents can be derived from any part of the plant, like the bark, leaves, flowers, roots, fruits, seeds or any part that may contain active components (Makari and Patil 2008).

13.2 BOTANICAL INFORMATION

Muntingia calabura, the sole species in the genus *Muntingia*, is a flowering plant native to southern Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and western South America, south of Peru and Bolivia. Common names include (English) Jamaican cherry, Panama berry, Singapore cherry and the Strawberry tree. It is a small tree (7–12 m tall) with tiered and slightly drooping branches. It has serrated leaves 2.5–15 cm long and 1–6.5 cm wide. The flowers are small, white and slightly malodorous. It gives rise to 1–1.5 cm light red fruit (Figure 13.1). The fruit is edible, sweet