

# Characterization and potentiation phytoestrogen of pigeon pea (*Cajanus cajan* L. mill sp.) on rat ovary

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# Characterization and potential of Pigeon Pea; *Cajanus cajan* L. Mill sp. Phytoestrogen on rat ovary

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The objective of this study was to analyze the estrogenic compounds in pigeon pea seeds and the effect of the plant seeds to rat ovaries development. **Materials and Methods:** The *Cajanus cajan* seeds were extracted, and to elucidate its content, liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS), and gas chromatography (GC)-MS analysis were employed. 24 Sprague-Dawley female rats were divided into three experimental groups and feed with *C. cajan* solution. The experimental groups were: P<sub>0</sub> (control/without *C. cajan* solution), P<sub>1</sub> (24 g:24 ml), and P<sub>2</sub> (8 g:24 ml). The experimental treatment by *C. cajan* was for 36 days. On the 37<sup>th</sup> day, rats were dissected to examine the ovary and liver organs. **Results:** Based on LC-MS analysis, it was obtained that *C. cajan* seeds contain several phytoestrogens. GC-MS analysis showed that *C. cajan* seeds contain up to 7.91945 µg/kg of 17β-estradiol. The observations showed a normal liver tissue structure, and there is no necrosis identified in the lobules of the hepatic sinusoids. The ovarian tissue structure of rats in the P<sub>0</sub> treatment group appeared normal. Some germinal follicular developments were detected in ovarian tissue of P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> treatment groups. **Conclusion:** *C. cajan* shows potential as a natural estrogenic substance that is effective and safe for further application in human hormone replacement therapy.

**Keywords:** *Cajanus cajan*, follicle ovarium, phytoestrogen

## INTRODUCTION

Hormone use carries many therapeutic health benefits. For instance, estrogen can be used for cardiovascular treatment, menopause postponement, osteoporosis prevention, and cancer treatment.<sup>[1-4]</sup> Estrogen hormone therapy (hormone replacement therapy or HRT) typically uses synthetic hormones because they are considered to be effective and efficient. In this instance, however, the long-term risks associated with their use have not been extensively considered.<sup>[5,6]</sup>

Phytoestrogens or plant-derived estrogens may be a safer alternative to synthetic hormones. Several plants have been studied to be used as a natural source of ingredients for HRT. Among them, phytoestrogen-rich *Pueraria mirifica* can be used to prevent bone loss.<sup>[7]</sup> Pollens of *Pinus yunnanensis* (Franch.) are proven to decrease the risk of premature ovarian failure. Phytoestrogens can be used to alleviate the lack of estrogen in body.<sup>[8]</sup> Yam tubers (*Pachyrhizus erosus*) (400 and 800 mg/kg) are affirmed to prevent bone loss in ovariectomized rats, as a model for osteoporosis prevention.<sup>[9]</sup> Furthermore, *P. erosus* (0.9 g/kg) leads to a proliferation of uterine endometrial

glands, and proliferation and maturation of ovarian follicles in premenopausal rats.<sup>[10]</sup> In addition, yam tuber juice is clinically proven to cause a proliferation of myometrium tissue, increasing the thickness of rat myometrium.<sup>[11]</sup>

In general, phytoestrogens, under certain circumstances, show some of the same activities as human female estrogen, although they have a weaker effect. However, phytoestrogens are more effective than their synthetic counterparts and thus, may be a suitable alternative for use in human HRT. Furthermore, exposure to phytoestrogens has a longer effect and considered safer than the synthetic as the side effects from the synthetic are not observed in phytoestrogen treatment.<sup>[12-16]</sup> One potential source of the natural phytoestrogen hormone, estrogen, is pigeon pea (*Cajanus cajan*). *C. cajan* (Indonesian local name kacang gude) belongs to the Fabaceae or Leguminosae family and cultivated in many developing countries in the semi-arid tropics and subtropics. The roots contain genistein and genistin.<sup>[17]</sup> *C. cajan* also contains chemical properties, such as daidzein and the lignan, secoisolariciresinol diglucoside.<sup>[18]</sup> *C. cajan* leaves are rich in flavonoids and stilbenes. They also contain saponins, tannins, and moderate amounts of resins, reducing sugars, and terpenes. *C. cajan* leaf extract is shown

1 to decrease uterine contractions in rats<sup>[19]</sup> and increase the  
2 childbirths rate.<sup>[20]</sup>

3 The application of *C. cajan* as a natural replacement for  
4 synthetic estrogen has not been widely investigated. In this  
5 context, the current study aimed to identify and quantitate the  
6 phytoestrogens present in pigeon pea (*C. cajan*) seeds and the  
7 influence of the seeds on the development of germinal ovarian  
8 follicles in rats.  
9

## 10 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 11 Materials

12 Dried *C. cajan* seeds were obtained from several pigeon pea  
13 plantations in Ponorogo and Madiun, Indonesia.

### 14 Sample Preparation

15 First, the dried *C. cajan* seeds were washed and dried to  
16 remove any unwanted debris. Next, they were mashed with  
17 a blender and initial total weight of the seeds between 100  
18 and 250 g. The pre-weighed, finely-ground seeds were then  
19 placed in 95% methanol at a 1:5 ratio (sample: methanol).  
20 The mixture was homogenized, put into sealed bottles, and  
21 allowed to stand for 24 h at low temperature. Then, the  
22 solution was filtered using an Erlenmeyer vacuum filter. This  
23 treatment was repeated 3 times.  
24

25 The combined filtrates were evaporated using a rotary  
26 evaporator, to remove the methanol until a semi-viscous  
27 extract was obtained (the solution obtained was half the  
28 volume of the original filtrate). After that, the extract was  
29 diluted with methanol to obtain 100 ppm concentration  
30 and homogenized. The extract was centrifuged in  
31 8000 rpm for 10 min to separate the solid matter. The  
32 supernatant was taken for protein precipitation by adding  
33 3 ml acetonitrile, which acidified by 0.2% formic acid, to  
34 2 ml of supernatant. The solution was then centrifuged in  
35 8000 rpm for 30 s. Finally, the supernatant was taken for  
36 the next step analysis.  
37

### 38 Extract Purification

39 The extract was then purified using solid phase extraction  
40 using C18 Sep-pak. The cartridge for the C18 column was  
41 conditioned by pouring 95% methanol (up to 2 column  
42 volumes) into the column to obtain an eluate. Then, a solution  
43 of acidified distilled water (3 column volumes) was poured  
44 in to obtain eluate as the remaining methanol was removed.  
45 Next, the liquid extract was poured into the cartridge until  
46 color development in the cartridge was apparent. Usually, the  
47 poured sample volume was between 5- and 10 ml, which was  
48 later put into the C18 column containing 360 mg of sorbent.  
49 Next, the extract was eluted with 95% methanol and then  
50 rotary evaporated at 40°C under reduced pressure to remove  
51 the methanol. The eluate was re-dissolved using acidified  
52 distilled water or an aliquot of the liquid chromatography-  
53 mass spectrometry (LC-MS) mobile phase. The purified extract  
54 was stored at 4°C for no >24 h. For longer storage, it was kept  
55 at -15°C or lower (-70°C recommended) in a frost resistance  
56 bottle.  
57

### 1 LC-MS Analysis

2 The method of LC-MS was used by Konar *et al.*,<sup>[21]</sup> Konar  
3 *et al.*,<sup>[22]</sup> and Hanganu *et al.*<sup>[23]</sup> The samples were injected into  
4 the LC-MS system and then analyzed with LC-MS manufacturer  
5 based on the manufacturer procedure (Shimadzu, Japan).  
6

### 7 17 $\beta$ -Estradiol Analysis

8 The 17 $\beta$ -estradiol analysis on *C. cajan* seeds using gas  
9 chromatography (GC)-MS based on the manual procedure.<sup>[24]</sup>  
10 The specification for the GC-MS is as follow: (1) FID Detector;  
11 (2) Shimadzu stainless steel column 30 m  $\times$  0.25 mm; (3)  
12 250°C inlet temperature; (4) 300°C detector temperature; (5)  
13 carrier gas nitrogen; (6) 2 ml/min flow rate; (7) 2  $\mu$ l injection  
14 volume; and (8) 25 min runtime analysis based on Janeczko  
15 and Skoczowski.<sup>[25]</sup>  
16

### 17 Experimental Animals

18 A total of 24 female Sprague-Dawley rats aged between 6  
19 and 7 months and weighing 150–180 g were obtained from  
20 laboratory animal farms in Blitar, Indonesia. The animals were  
21 placed in a group cage located in the Bioscience laboratory at  
22 Brawijaya University, Indonesia.  
23

24 The room temperature ( $\pm 27^\circ\text{C}$ ) was carefully maintained  
25 with 50-60% relative humidity and 12-h lighting cycle. The  
26 rats were fed with milk pellet, which contained 12% water,  
27 16% crude protein, 3-7% crude lipid, 8% crude fiber, 10%  
28 ash, 0.9-1.2% calcium, and 0.6-1% phosphorus, with yellow  
29 corn as the main source. It also contained wheat bran,  
30 soybean meal SBM, palm oil, essential amino acids, essential  
31 minerals, premix, and vitamins. The laboratory animals were  
32 maintained according to the experimental animal guide of the  
33 Institute of Biosciences, Brawijaya University. The procedures  
34 were approved by Brawijaya University Ethics Committee,  
35 with ethical clearance no. KEP-168-UB.  
36

### 37 Treatment Groups

38 The rats were grouped into three treatment groups: (1) The  
39 first group was control ( $P_0$ ) group, fed by food pellets; (2)  
40 the second group was fed with *C. cajan* solution extract at  
41 a ratio of 24 g *C. cajan* powder: 24 ml distilled water ( $P_1$ );  
42 and (3) the third group was fed with *C. cajan* solution 8 g  
43 *C. cajan* powder: 24 ml distilled water ( $P_2$ ). The dose extract  
44 was based on our previous study, which observed significant  
45 growth in ovarian follicle after 20,188 mg/100g daidzein  
46 administration for 36 days.<sup>[26]</sup> The *C. cajan* solution was  
47 administered by gavage into the rat stomach using a gastric  
48 tube every morning for 36 days. Based on high-performance LC  
49 analysis, the  $P_1$  solution contained 29.77580  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  daidzein  
50 and 40.45506  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  genistein compounds, while  $P_2$  contained  
51 daidzein and genistein compounds, at 12.19308  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  and  
52 18.71281  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ , respectively.  
53

### 54 Histopathological Analysis

55 On the 37<sup>th</sup> day, all the rats were dissected to collect the ovary  
56 and liver organs for examination. Histological sections were  
57 prepared according to standard paraffin slide procedures.<sup>[24]</sup>  
58 The samples were fixated in Bouin solution; dehydrated in  
59  
60  
61

1 alcohol series (50%, 70%, 85%, and 96%, and absolute);  
 2 cleaned in alcohol: xylol solution; infiltrated and embedded  
 3 in paraffin; and finally sliced in 12  $\mu\text{m}$  thickness. The  
 4 sliced paraffin-tissues were stained by Hematoxylin-Eosin.  
 5 The histopathological changes in structure were observed  
 6 using optical microscopy Obtilab twice for each organ. The  
 7 observation results were then confirmed by experts.  
 8

## 9 Data Analysis

10 The analysis of pigeon pea compounds containment was based  
 11 on the chromatogram. The data analysis of ovarian and liver  
 12 tissue structure was drawn on the observation using optical  
 13 microscopy. The obtained data were not statistically analyzed  
 14 as the data were chromatography and histological data.  
 15

## 17 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 19 *C. cajan* Compounds

20 From the LC-MS spectrum results [Figure 1] of the *C. cajan*  
 21 seeds, 35 chemical properties were identified [Table 1].  
 22 Some of the isoflavones identified were daidzein, genistein,  
 23 glycitein, daidzein, genistin, glycitin, malonyl daidzein,  
 24 malonyl genistin, and malonyl glycitin. This group of  
 25

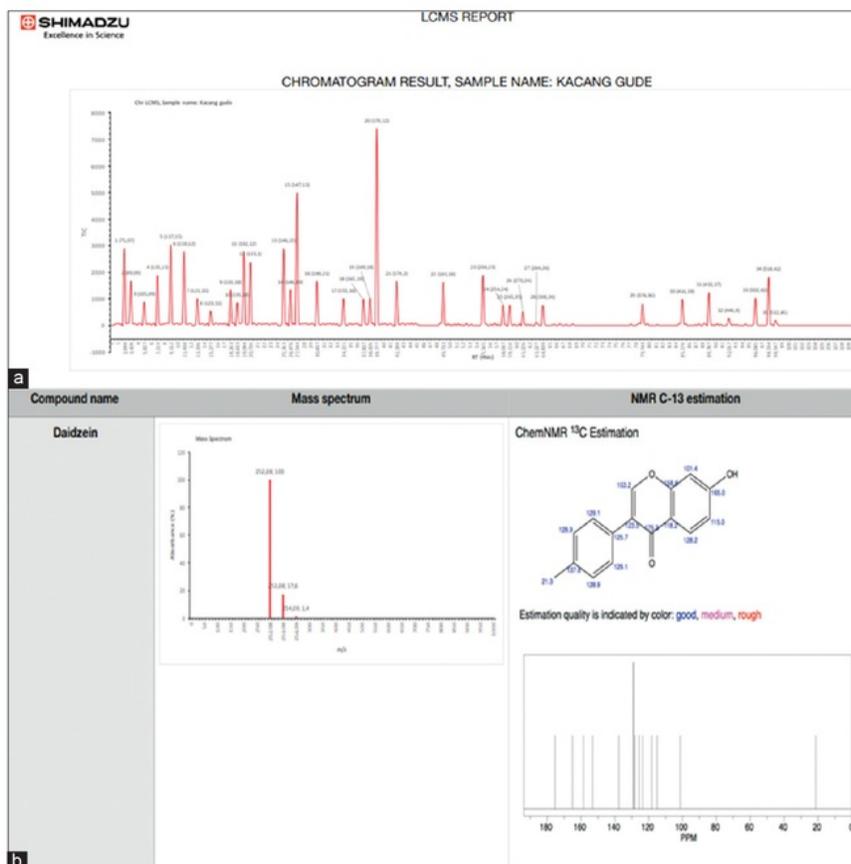
26 phytoestrogens is structurally similar to estrogen. The  
 27 phytoestrogens are structurally similar to 17 $\beta$ -estradiol. Hence,  
 28 they are commonly referred to as estrogen-like-molecules.  
 29 Some estrogen-like compounds are the isoflavonoids  
 30 (genistein, daidzein, biochanin A, and formononetin),  
 31 flavonoids (chrysin, apigenin, naringenin, kaempferol, and  
 32 quercetin), coumestans (coumestrol, 4-methoxycoumestrol),  
 33 and lignans (enterolactone, enterodiol, matairesinol, and  
 34 secoisolariciresinol diglucoside).<sup>[27,28]</sup>  
 35

### 36 $\beta$ -Estradiol in *C. cajan* Seeds

37 The GC-MS results of the *C. cajan* seeds [Table 2] showed that  
 38 the hormone, 17 $\beta$ -estradiol, was present up to 7.91945 mg/kg.  
 39 The 17 $\beta$ -estradiol hormone is a steroid hormone in mammals.  
 40 In this regard, it supports the theory that 17 $\beta$ -estradiol,  
 41 androsterone, progesterone, and testosterone are present in  
 42 60-80% of 128 plant species investigated.<sup>[25]</sup>  
 43

### 44 Histopathological Observation of Rat 45 Ovaries and Liver

46 The ovarian tissue structure of rats in the P<sub>0</sub> treatment group  
 47 appeared normal. In the cortex, epithelium, tunica albuginea,  
 48 and follicles were observed [Figure 2a]. In the ovarian tissue  
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**Figure 1:** Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS) spectra result from *Cajanus cajan* seed. (a) The chromatogram spectrum from LC-MS. (b) One example of the spectrum analysis by nuclear magnetic resonance, confirming that one of the spectra is the phytoestrogen Daidzein

**Table 1:** LC-MS results of *Cajanus cajan* seeds analysis

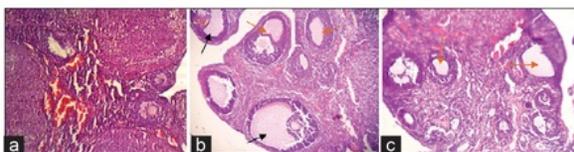
No.	Composition	Molecular weight (g/mol)	Name compound	No.	Composition	Molecular weight (g/mol)	Name compound
1.	5,002	75.07	Glycine	19.	1,772	169.18	Pyridoxine
2.	2,892	89.09	Alanine	20.	12,816	170.12	Gallic acid
3.	1,523	105.05	Serine	21.	2,879	174.20	Arginine
4.	3,255	115.13	Proline	22.	2,813	181.19	Tyrosine
5.	5,247	117.15	Valine	23.	3,269	204.23	Tryptophan
6.	4,809	119.12	Threonine	24.	1,339	254.24	Daidzein*
7.	1,738	121.15	Cysteine	25.	1,330	265.35	Thiamine
8.	0,932	123.11	Niacin	26.	0,906	270.24	Genistein*
9.	2,316	131.18	Isoleucine	27.	0,224	284.26	Glycitein*
10.	1,476	131.18	Leucine	28.	1,322	300.26	Cajanin
11.	4,804	132.12	Asparagine	29.	1,405	376.36	Riboflavin
12.	4,116	133.10	Aspartic acid	30.	1,702	416.38	Daidzein*
13.	4,987	146.15	Glutamine	31.	2,127	432.37	Genistin*
14.	2,316	146.19	Lysine	32.	0,471	446.40	Glycitin*
15.	8,641	147.13	Glutamic acid	33.	1,764	502.42	Malonyl daidzein*
16.	2,879	149.21	Methionine	34.	3,137	518.42	Malonyl genistin*
17.	1,736	155.16	Histidine	35.	0,327	532.45	Malonyl glycitin*
18.	1,712	165.19	Phenylalanine				

\*Member of phytoestrogens. LC-MC: Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry

**Table 2:** Results of GCMS 17 $\beta$  estradiol analysis on *Cajanus cajan*

Sample name	Sample weight (g)	RT (min)	Sample curve area	Result ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ )	compound
Pigeon pea	2,008	12,469	1,429,255	7,91945	17 $\beta$ -estradiol

GCMS: Gas chromatography-mass spectrometry



**Figure 2:** The rats ovarian tissue structure, H and E staining,  $\times 100$ . (a) Control, (b) *Cajanus cajan* seeds solution treatment at 24 g: 24 ml ( $P_1$ ), (c) *C. cajan* seeds solution treatment at 8 g: 24 ml ( $P_2$ ). (a) The germinal follicle germ has not undergone any maturation process, (b) The germinal follicle experienced growth and maturation, follicle de Graaf (black arrowhead) showed some follicular fluid, (c) the germinal follicle experienced growth although not extensive, some primary and secondary follicles (orange arrowhead) were shown

of the  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  rat treatment groups, some germinal follicular developments were noticed. Secondary follicle and follicle de Graaf were mainly found in the  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  ovarian tissue compared to control. Meanwhile, numerous germinal follicle was observed in control but not follicle de Graaf [Figure 2b and c]. Primary follicles of the  $P_1$  rats were not highly visible because they had already developed and matured into secondary follicles and Graafian follicles. Graafian follicles (or vesicular ovarian follicles) are fluid-filled cavities that surround and protect the developing oocyte in mammalian ovaries.<sup>[29-31]</sup> Moreover, the cortex layer structure of the  $P_1$  rats

had undergone some proliferation [Figure 2b]. The primary follicles of the  $P_2$  rats seemed to have spread. Any considerable growth or maturation was not detected in the follicles. Several secondary follicles were identified, but Graafian follicles were not present yet.

The ovary has estrogen receptors (ERs).<sup>[32,33]</sup> Estrogenic compounds, such as those identified in *C. cajan* (genistein, daidzein, glycitein, genistin, daidzein, glycitin, malonyl genistin, malonyl daidzein, and malonyl glycitein) have a similar structure to estrogen that binds to the ERs in the ovaries. Isoflavones, namely, daidzein, genistein, and glycitein, are structurally similar to 17 $\beta$ -estradiol<sup>[34-36]</sup> and can be found in the Fabaceae plant family.

The chemical structure of phytoestrogens found in *C. cajan* has a potentially similar structure to the estrogen hormone. Phytoestrogens that bind to ERs *in vivo* result in an increased level of the estrogen hormone in the blood.<sup>[37-40]</sup> The level of estrogenic compounds in the blood is increased by the presence of 17 $\beta$ -estradiol hormone, resulting in growth and maturation of ovarian germinal follicles.<sup>[41,42]</sup> The *C. cajan* seed estrogenic compounds may change the structure of ovarian tissue, based on our observation. Phytoestrogens have a strong binding affinity with the ERs, although it is much weaker than that of estradiol. Isoflavones exert estrogenic effects on a number of target organs that possess ER $\alpha$  and/or ER $\beta$ , although the

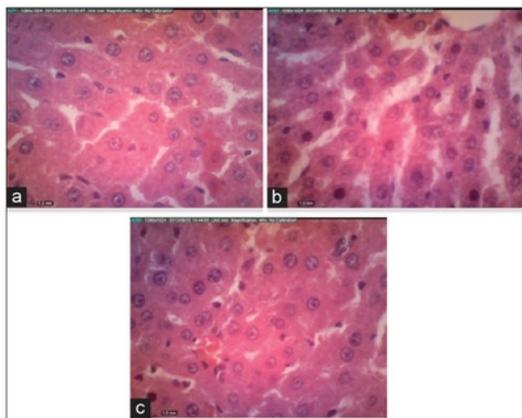
binding affinities of isoflavones with these receptors are much lower than those of 17 $\beta$ -estradiol.<sup>[43]</sup> Phytoestrogen compounds *Cajanus cajan* has an activity similar estrogen, can be absorbed in the blood with low levels, and can be excreted through the urine.<sup>[44-46]</sup>

The observations showed a normal liver tissue structure, and the lobules of the hepatic sinusoids appeared clean; there were no changes identified. Cylindrical liver lobule surrounds the central vein that flows into the hepatic venous and then flows into the vena cava. No necrosis was identified in the liver tissue structure. The microscopic observations of the paraffin section revealed that normal hepatic sinusoid and hepatic lobules could be clearly identified in the liver tissue [Figure 3]. The liver is a multifunctional organ which has a pivotal role in human metabolism, especially in detoxification. One of the signs of toxicity is the damage in the hepatocytes.<sup>[47-49]</sup> As observed in the histological slide, the *C. Cajan* extract was not induce any toxicity in the given concentration; thus, it will not harm the body in overall.

Phytoestrogens compounds are multi-component and multi-targeted since they have multiple ERs.<sup>[50]</sup> Multi-compounds phytoestrogens ingested soy protein are biotransformed by intestinal microflora, are absorbed, undergo enterohepatic recycling.<sup>[51]</sup> *C. cajan* has a multi-compound, could get into circulation and then be metabolized.<sup>[52]</sup> Moreover, these compounds may have metabolic interaction, stabilize the interaction within the body. The complexity of *C. Cajan* pea compounds may interact with each other and then to the body system. The complex interaction has better potential than a single active compound. The *C. cajan* seeds solution did not promote any structural changes in the liver tissue. Multi-compound *C. cajan* is able to have synergy with body system. Consequently, *C. cajan* can be applied as a natural estrogen, providing its safety in humans is investigated.<sup>[53-55]</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Based on LCMS analysis, *C. cajan* seeds contain compounds, such as daidzein, genistein, glycitein, daidzein, genistin, glycitin, malonyl daidzein, malonyl genistin, and malonyl



**Figure 3:** Hepatocytes structure of rats, H and E staining,  $\times 400$ . (a) Control ( $P_0$ ), (b) *Cajanus cajan* seeds solution treatment at 24 g:24 ml ( $P_1$ ), (c) *C. cajan* seeds solution treatment at 8 g:24 ml ( $P_2$ )

glycitin. According to GCMS analysis, *C. cajan* seeds contain 7.91945 mg/kg of 17 $\beta$ -estradiol. In summary, *C. cajan* shows potential as a natural estrogenic substance that is effective and safe.

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