



Total synthesis and dual PPAR α / γ agonist effects of Amorphastilbol and its synthetic derivatives

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ABSTRACT

Amorphastilbol (APH-1), isolated from a *Robinia pseudoacacia* var. *umbraculifer* seed extract, is a biologically interesting natural *trans*-stilbene compound with dual peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR) α / γ agonist activity. After total synthesis of APH-1 and its derivatives by Pd-catalyzed Suzuki–Miyaura cross-coupling of a common (*E*)-styryl bromide intermediate and various aromatic trifluoroborate compounds, we biologically evaluated APH-2–APH-12 for PPAR agonist activity. APH-4 and APH-11 were effective PPAR α / γ transcriptional activators, compared with APH-1. Therefore, we suggest that APH-4 and APH-11 are novel dual PPAR α / γ agonists and are potentially useful for treating type 2 diabetes by enhancing glucose and lipid metabolism.

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Type 2 diabetes (T2DM) is characterized by hyperglycemia, insulin resistance, and relative insulin deficiency and is usually associated with dyslipidemia, hypertension, atherosclerosis, and obesity.¹ Although its pathophysiology remains incompletely understood, metabolic defects in the liver, pancreatic β -cells, adipose tissue, and skeletal muscle contribute to the development of T2DM. Recently, the members of the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor (PPAR) subfamily of nuclear receptors have emerged as key pharmacological targets in the management of T2DM, because their activation can normalize metabolic dysfunctions and reduce some cardiovascular risk factors associated with this disease.

PPARs occur as 3 isoforms: PPAR α , PPAR γ , and PPAR δ .² PPAR α is expressed predominantly in the liver and regulates genes involved in fatty acid uptake and oxidation. PPAR α agonists such as fibrates have been used for treating hyperlipidemia and ameliorating cardiovascular disease. PPAR γ is expressed mainly in adipose tissue and regulates genes involved in fatty acid uptake and storage and in glucose homeostasis. PPAR γ agonists such as thiazolidinediones or glitazones have been used for treating insulin resistance and hyperglycemia. PPAR δ is expressed in most tissues and regulates genes involved in fatty acid catabolism and macrophage lipid homeostasis. PPAR δ agonists such as GW501516 may have a beneficial effect on lipid and lipoprotein metabolism.³

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PPAR agonists are effective drugs for improving the metabolic abnormalities linking hyperlipidemia to diabetes, hyperglycemia, insulin resistance, and atherosclerosis. Especially, dual PPAR α / γ agonists, such as muraglitazar⁴ and tesaglitazar,⁵ combine the plasma triglyceride- and very low-density lipoprotein-lowering and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol-raising effects of a PPAR α activator with the insulin resistance- and blood glucose level-reducing and insulin-sensitizing properties of a PPAR γ activator. Therefore, dual PPAR α / γ agonists are expected to be effective hypoglycemic and hypolipidemic agents.⁶

There is growing interest in the therapeutic use of natural products for metabolic syndrome, because such products are considered to be less toxic and cause fewer side effects. In the field of drug discovery, natural products and their analogs can be developed into useful lead compounds by highly efficient bioactivity-guided fractionation, followed by synthesis of natural product-based libraries.⁷ Among the dual PPAR α / γ activators, however, natural ligands are generally less potent than biochemically optimized synthetic ligands.⁸

We previously discovered amorphastilbol (APH-1), having a C-geranylated 4'-dehydroxyresveratrol structure (Fig. 1), as the most active compound of the *Robinia pseudoacacia* var. *umbraculifer* (RPU) extract, and explored its effects on the transcriptional activities of PPAR α and PPAR γ , adipogenesis in 3T3-L1 cells, insulin resistance-associated disorders in *db/db* mice (mouse model of T2DM), and hypolipidemia in a high-fat diet model.⁹ Especially, APH-1 stimulates PPAR α / γ transcriptional activity at the lower

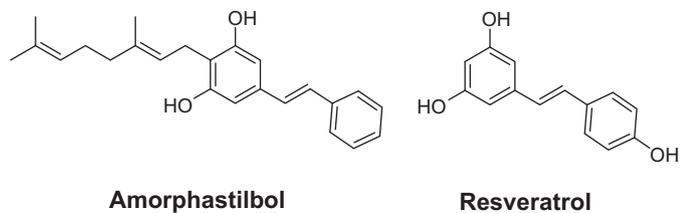
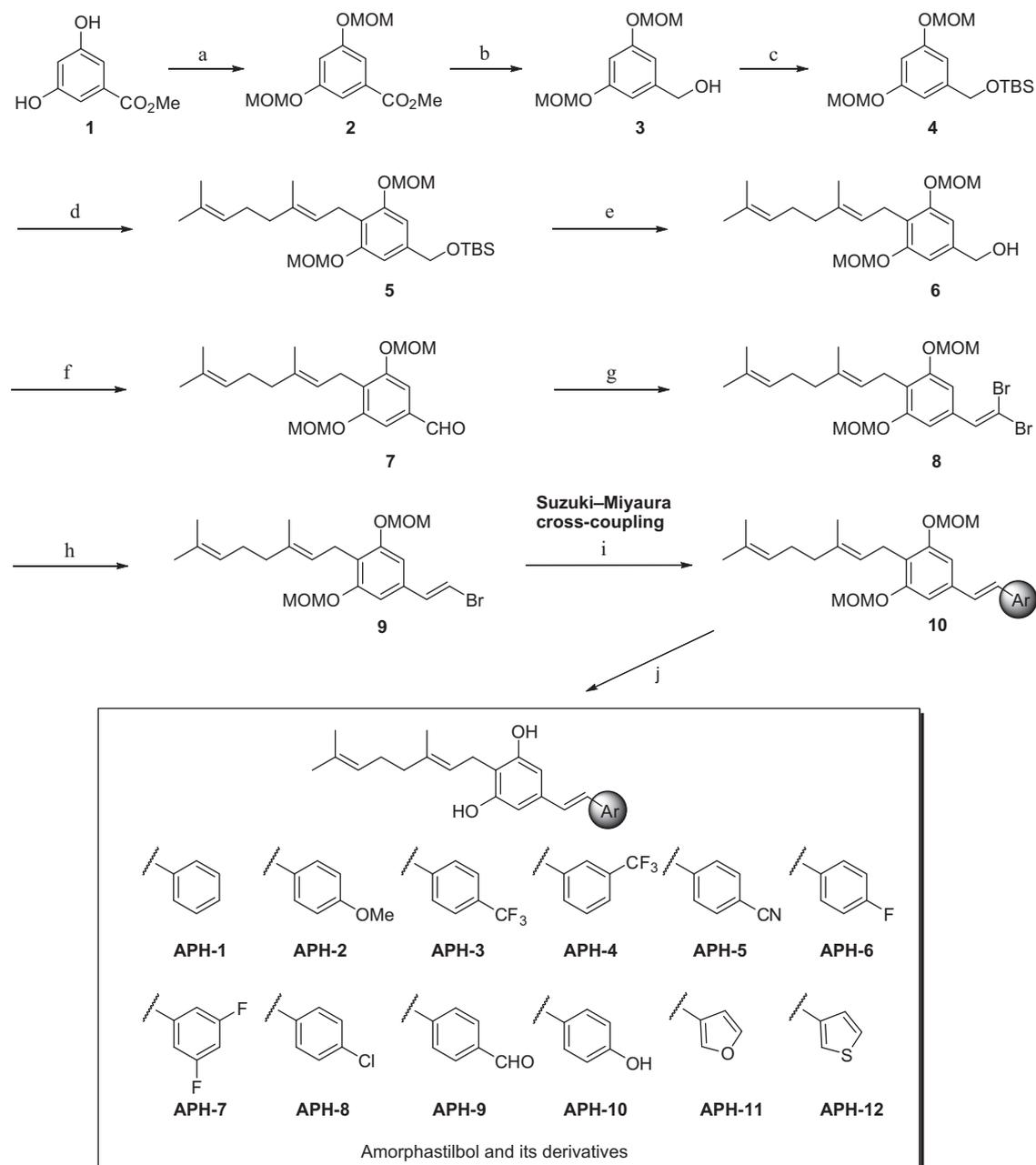


Figure 1. Structure of amorphastilbol and resveratrol

concentration than previously reported natural PPARs ligands.⁸ Therefore, we focused on the total synthesis of APH-1 from RPU seed extract (0.04% yield). Here, we describe the total synthesis of APH-1 and its derivatives and their biological evaluation as PPAR transcriptional activators.

The synthesis of APH-1 and its derivatives (APH-2–APH-12) is described in Scheme 1. Initially, conversion to the known benzyl alcohol (**6**) was readily accomplished starting from methyl 3,5-dihydroxybenzoate (**1**) using the literature methods.^{10a,b} After protection of phenolic alcohols by using MOMCl, general reduction of the MOM-protected ester (**2**) produced benzyl alcohol (**3**). TBS-mediated protection of benzyl alcohol completed the silyl ether synthesis. Geranylation of the silyl ether (**4**) was investigated under several well-known conditions in the presence of copper catalysts such as CuI, CuCN, and CuBr-DMS. However, the best result was obtained only by using geranyl bromide and *n*-BuLi, without a copper catalyst.¹⁰ TBAF-mediated deprotection of the TBS ether yielded the corresponding alcohol (**6**) in 2 steps (83% yield). To construct the *trans*-stilbene skeleton, (*E*)-styryl bromide (**9**), a common precursor of APH derivatives, was also obtained from



Scheme 1. Reagents and conditions: (a) MOMCl, NaH, DMF, rt, 12 h, 97%; (b) LAH, THF, rt, 2 h, 94%; (c) TBSCl, imidazole, DMAP, rt, 5 h, 99%; (d) *n*-BuLi, THF, 0 °C, 0.5 h, then geranyl bromide, rt, 6 h, 83%; (e) TBAF, THF, rt, 1 h, 99%; (f) PCC, MS 4 Å, CH₂Cl₂, rt, 3 h, 98%; (g) CBr₄, PPh₃, Zn dust, CH₂Cl₂, rt, 1.5 h, 78%; (h) diethyl phosphite, Et₃N, DMF, rt, 2 h, 98%; (i) potassium aryltrifluoroborate, 5 mol % of Pd(PPh₃)₄, K₂CO₃, EtOH, 60 °C, 6 h; (j) CSA, MeOH, rt, 10 h, 45–75% (2 steps).

Table 1
In vitro PPAR binding and transactivation activity of APH derivatives

Entry	Compound	TA EC ₅₀ ^a (μM)				Binding IC ₅₀ ^b (μM)			
		h-PPARα ^c (%max)		h-PPARγ ^c (%max)		h-PPARα	h-PPARγ		
1	Amorphastilbol (APH 1)	12	(66)	5	(83)	NA	(21)	1.52	0.85
2	APH 2	19	(63)	14	(66)	NA	(20)	2.50	0.63
3	APH 3	ND	(ND)	ND	(ND)	NA	(ND)	3.33	8.10
4	APH 4	4	(ND)	5	(ND)	NA	(ND)	1.21	0.53
5	APH 5	20	(54)	ND	(41)	NA	(15)	3.47	1.20
6	APH 6	6	(88)	11	(68)	NA	(17)	2.48	2.32
7	APH 7	ND	(ND)	7	(ND)	NA	(ND)	2.08	0.90
8	APH 8	ND	(ND)	ND	(ND)	NA	(ND)	7.47	0.54
9	APH 9	ND	(35)	ND	(27)	NA	(7)	2.82	0.89
10	APH 10	8	(ND)	8	(ND)	NA	(ND)	1.21	0.11
11	APH 11	6	(87)	5	(98)	NA	(34)	2.03	0.65
12	APH 12	14	(56)	6	(68)	NA	(24)	5.41	1.01
Wy14643		0.13	(100)					10.11	ND
Troglitazone				0.40	(100)			ND	0.30
GW501516						0.0012	(100)	ND	ND

^a TA (PPARα/γ/δ transactivation assay) measuring the ligand-mediated luminescence resulting from PPARα/γ/δ-induced transcription of a luciferase reporter. PPARα/γ/δ and the luciferase reporter genes are transfected into CV-1 cells, then treated with test compound. The EC₅₀ values are the mean of two independent experiments in triplicate. NA denotes inactive where compounds did not show any fold induction above the basal level shown by vehicle and ND denotes not determined.

^b Binding affinity for PPARα and PPARγ using TR-FRET (time-resolved fluorescence resonance energy transfer).

^c The maximum percent efficacy (%max) of all compound 30 μM compared to reference compounds (Wy14643 for PPARα, Troglitazone for PPARγ and GW501516 for PPARδ) normalized to 100%.

the alcohol (**6**). After oxidation with a PCC suspension and by using molecular sieves (4 Å), geranylated benzaldehyde (**7**) was converted to dibromoolefine (78% yield) by the Ramirez olefination reaction. Subsequent treatment with diethyl phosphite followed by quenching with water produced (*E*)-styryl bromide (**9**) with excellent yield (98%).

Finally, (*E*)-styryl bromide (**9**) was cross-coupled with potassium phenyltrifluoroborate under the standard Suzuki–Miyaura reaction conditions to produce a *trans*-stilbene. Deprotection of the MOM ether by treatment with 10-camphorsulfonic acid (CSA) yielded APH-1. The derivatives, i.e., APH-2 to APH-12, were similarly synthesized. Their synthesis required only 2 steps from the common (*E*)-styryl bromide (**9**) intermediate: Pd-catalyzed

Suzuki–Miyaura cross-coupling reaction with various aromatic trifluoroborate compounds for fixation of the *trans*-stilbene moiety and removal of the MOM-protected groups.

The PPAR agonist activity of the APH derivatives was evaluated by both cell-based and cell-free assays. Wy14643 (a potent PPARα ligand), troglitazone (a PPARγ ligand), and GW501516 (a PPARδ ligand) were used as positive controls, strongly and dose-dependently activated reporter gene. However, these synthetic ligands are generally more potent than natural product-derived ligands.⁸ We therefore attempted the PPAR-agonist activity test of APH derivatives compared with APH-1 which has reported natural product-derived dual PPAR α/γ agonists.⁹ The results are summarized in Table 1. All the compounds seemed to have little effect on

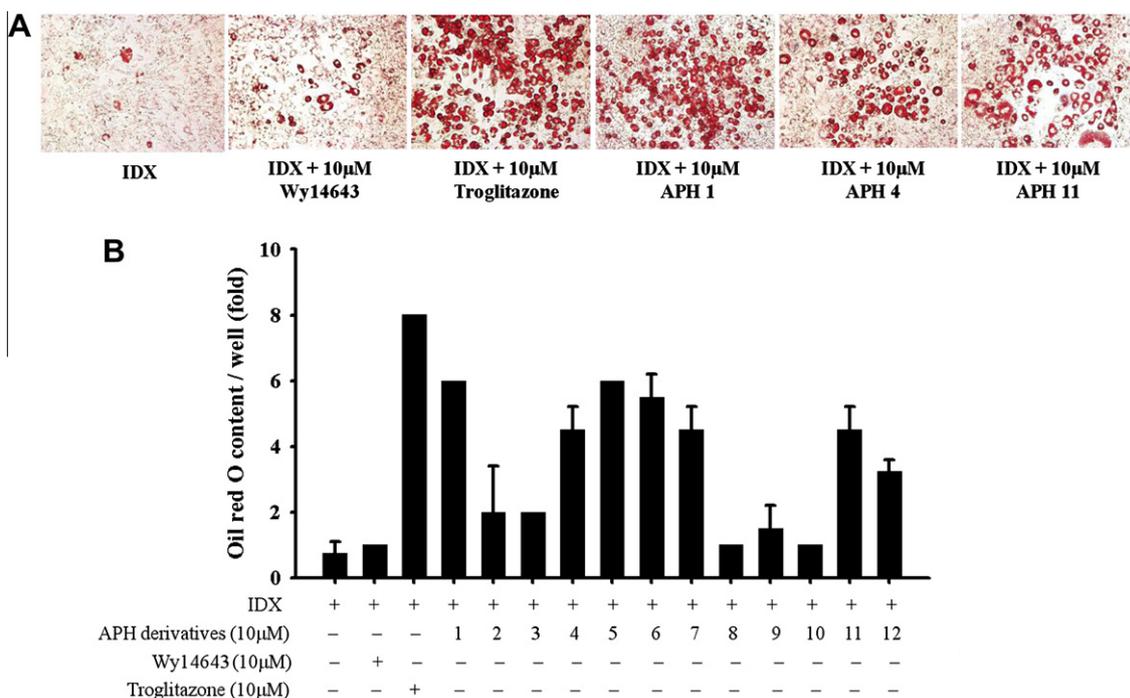
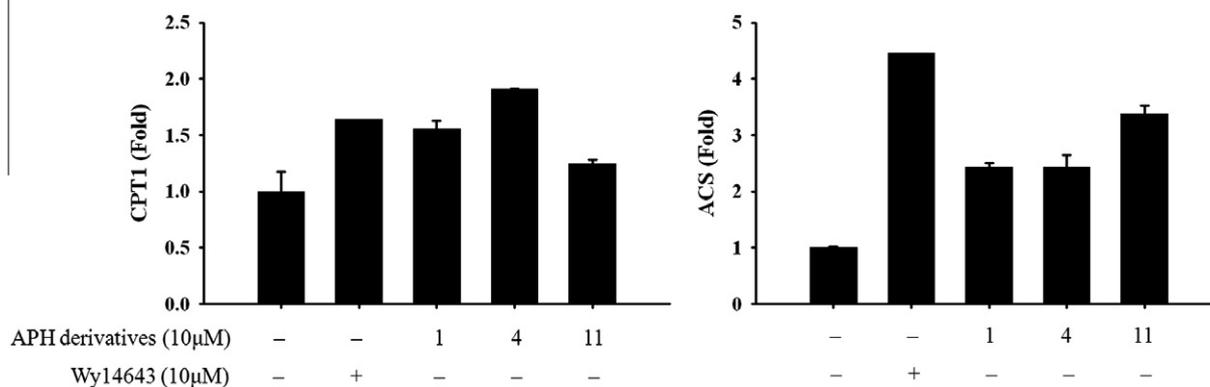


Figure 2. The effects of APH derivatives on adipocyte differentiation. 3T3-L1 cells were grown in the IDX condition and treated with Wy14643 (10 μM), troglitazone (10 μM) and APH derivatives (10 μM). (A) Morphological changes associated with adipogenesis were assessed by staining the cellular triglyceride deposition with Oil Red O. (B) The stained oil droplets were dissolved in isopropanol and were quantified by measuring the absorbance 520 nm. Relative Oil red O levels were expressed as the fold increase relative to the control. Data were expressed as mean ± SD.

Human HepG2 hepatocytes



PPAR δ . However, APH-4 (PPAR α , EC₅₀ = 4 μ M; PPAR γ , EC₅₀ = 5 μ M) and APH-11 (PPAR α , EC₅₀ = 6 μ M; PPAR γ , EC₅₀ = 5 μ M) were effective transcriptional activators of both PPAR α and PPAR γ ; they exhibited similar PPAR γ agonist activity to but better PPAR α agonist activity than APH-1 (PPAR α , EC₅₀ = 4 μ M; PPAR γ , EC₅₀ = 5 μ M). At 30 μ M, APH-11 had higher agonist efficacy (PPAR α , 87%; PPAR γ , 98%) than APH-1 (PPAR α , 66%; PPAR γ , 83%), but APH-4 induced cytotoxicity. We then examined whether the APH derivatives could directly bind to PPAR α or PPAR γ by using LanthaScreen™ technology (Invitrogen) in a TR-FRET PPAR α / γ competitive binding assay (Invitrogen).¹¹ APH-4 exhibited increased binding affinity (IC₅₀ = 1.21 μ M and 0.53 μ M, respectively) for PPAR α and PPAR γ compared with APH-1 (IC₅₀ = 1.52 μ M and 0.85 μ M, respectively); APH-11 exhibited increased binding affinity only for PPAR γ (IC₅₀ = 0.65 μ M).

To explore the potential effects of the APH derivatives on adipogenesis, 3T3-L1 preadipocytes were differentiated with the derivatives for 8 days in combination with the adipogenic IDX cocktail (insulin, dexamethasone, and IBMX).¹² When preadipocytes differentiated into adipocytes, morphological changes were observed because of the cytoplasmic accumulation of lipid droplets. Adipocyte differentiation was confirmed by Oil Red O staining to observe lipid droplet accumulation. Lipid droplet accumulation in adipocytes was significantly greater with the APH-1 treatment than without the APH-1 treatment (Fig. 2). However, the APH-4 and APH-11 treatments decreased lipid droplet accumulation to a greater extent than the APH-1 treatment. APH-4 and APH-11 had better PPAR α agonist activity but not PPAR γ agonist activity than APH-1, leading to the relative reduction in lipid droplet accumulation in 3T3-L1 cells.¹³

In conclusion, we synthesized APH-1 and its derivatives by Pd-catalyzed Suzuki–Miyaura cross-coupling of a common (*E*)-styryl bromide intermediate and various aromatic trifluoroborate compounds. Synthetic APH-1 stimulated PPAR α / γ transcriptional activity at a lower concentration than natural APH-1. Further, the APH-1 derivatives APH-4 and APH-11 were effective PPAR α / γ transcriptional activators.^{14,15} Therefore, we suggest that APH-4 and APH-11 are novel dual PPAR α / γ agonists and are potentially useful for treating T2DM and obesity by enhancing glucose and lipid metabolism.

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- PPAR α target genes have been mainly concentrated on hepatocytes and PPAR α activation upregulates CPT1 (carnitine palmitoyltransferase 1) and ACS (acyl-CoA synthetase) gene expression involved in mitochondrial fatty acid uptake and oxidation. APH-4 treatment strongly increased CPT1 mRNA expression and APH-11 treatment strongly increased ACS mRNA expression involved in fatty acid β -oxidation in HepG2 cells than APH-1. Therefore we suggested that APH-4 and APH-11 had better PPAR α agonist activity than APH-1.

14. Luciferase reporter gene assay description: CV-1 cells were seeded into 24-well plates and cultured for twenty four hour before transfection. CV-1 cells were grown in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) containing 10% charcoal dextran treated fetal bovine serum (CDT-FBS) and 1% antibiotics. 24 h later, a DNA mixture containing PPRE-luciferase reporter plasmid (0.3 μ g), pcDNA3-hPPAR- γ / α / δ (30 ng) and internal control plasmid pRL-SV-40 (5 ng) was transfected using TransFast™ transfection reagent (Promega, Madison, WI). After 24 h of transfection, the cells were incubated for an additional 24 h following treatment with positive control or the indicated concentrations of APHs. The luciferase activity of the cell lysates was measured using Dual-Luciferase® Reporter Assay System (Promega, Madison, WI), according to the manufacturer's instruction. Relative luciferase activity was normalized for transfection efficiency using the corresponding Renilla luciferase activity.
15. Spectroscopic data of representative compounds. **Amorphastilbol (APH 1)**: ^1H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl_3) δ 7.48 (d, 2H, $J = 7.1$ Hz), 7.34 (t, 2H, $J = 7.4$ Hz), 7.25 (m, 1H), 7.01 (d, 1H, $J = 16.5$ Hz), 6.94 (d, 1H, $J = 16.5$ Hz), 6.59 (s, 2H), 5.28 (td, 1H, $J = 7.5, 1.5$ Hz), 5.08 (s, 2H), 5.05 (m, 1H), 3.44 (d, 2H, $J = 7.1$ Hz), 2.10 (m, 4H), 1.82 (s, 3H), 1.68 (s, 3H), 1.59 (s, 3H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl_3) δ 155.2, 139.4, 137.2, 136.9, 132.1, 128.7, 128.1, 127.6, 126.5, 123.7, 121.3, 113.3, 106.6, 39.7, 26.4, 25.7, 22.5, 17.7, 16.3. ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, Acetone- d_6) δ 156.2, 156.1, 137.6, 135.9, 133.8, 130.7, 129.0, 128.6, 127.3, 126.3, 124.3, 123.2, 105.2, 105.1, 39.7, 26.6, 24.9, 22.2, 16.8, 15.4. FT-IR (ATR): 3376, 2907, 2850, 1612, 1577, 1448, 1425, 1261, 1156, 1039, 960, 827, 748, 688 cm^{-1} . ESI-MS: m/z calcd for $\text{C}_{24}\text{H}_{28}\text{O}_2$ $[\text{M}+\text{H}]^+$ 348.21, found 348.00. **APH 4**: ^1H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl_3) δ 7.70 (s, 1H), 7.62 (d, 1H, $J = 7.5$ Hz), 7.47 (m, 2H), 7.01 (d, 1H, $J = 16.0$ Hz), 6.98 (d, 1H, $J = 16.0$ Hz), 6.59 (s, 2H), 5.27 (m, 3H), 5.05 (t, 1H, $J = 7.0$ Hz), 3.44 (d, 2H, $J = 7.0$ Hz), 2.09 (m, 4H), 1.82 (s, 3H), 1.68 (s, 3H), 1.59 (s, 3H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl_3) δ 155.3, 139.6, 138.0, 136.2, 132.2, 129.9, 129.5, 129.1, 127.1, 124.1, 124.0, 123.7, 123.1, 123.0, 121.1, 113.9, 106.7, 39.7, 26.4, 25.7, 22.6, 17.7, 16.2. FT-IR (ATR): 3338, 2917, 1850, 1622, 1574, 1441, 1324, 1163, 1115, 1068, 1039, 1011, 944, 817, 691, 653 cm^{-1} . ESI-MS: m/z calcd for $\text{C}_{25}\text{H}_{27}\text{F}_3\text{O}_2$ $[\text{M}+\text{H}]^+$ 416.20, found 416.00. **APH 11**: ^1H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl_3) δ 7.50 (s, 1H), 7.39 (s, 1H), 6.97 (d, 1H, $J = 20.0$ Hz), 6.85 (d, 2H, $J = 20.0$ Hz), 6.62 (s, 1H), 6.51 (s, 2H), 5.27 (t, 1H, $J = 5.5$ Hz), 5.20 (s, 2H), 5.05 (m, 1H), 3.42 (d, 2H, $J = 8.5$ Hz), 2.08 (m, 4H), 1.81 (s, 3H), 1.68 (s, 3H), 1.59 (s, 3H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl_3) δ 155.2, 143.7, 141.0, 139.4, 136.9, 132.1, 127.8, 124.4, 123.7, 121.3, 118.4, 113.0, 107.4, 106.2, 39.7, 26.4, 25.7, 22.5, 17.7, 16.2. FT-IR (ATR): 3392, 2913, 1584, 1422, 1267, 1153, 1017, 960, 868, 824, 779, 650, 586 cm^{-1} . ESI-MS: m/z calcd for $\text{C}_{22}\text{H}_{26}\text{O}_3$ $[\text{M}+\text{H}]^+$ 338.19, found 337.75.