

1 **High Activity of Selective Essential Oils against Stationary Phase *Borrelia burgdorferi***

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14 **KEYWORDS:** *Borrelia burgdorferi*, persists, biofilm, essential oils, carvacrol

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16 **RUNNING TITLE:** High anti-persister activity of certain essential oils against *B.*

17 *burgdorferi*

18

19 **ABSTRACT**

20 Although the majority of patients with Lyme disease can be cured with the standard 2-4 week

21 antibiotic treatment, about 10-20% of patients continue to suffer from post-treatment Lyme

22 disease syndrome (PTLDS). While the cause for this is debated, one possibility is due to

23 persisters not killed by the current Lyme antibiotics. It has been reported that essential oils

24 have antimicrobial activities and some have been used by patients with persisting Lyme

25 disease symptoms. However, the activity of essential oils against the causative agent *Borrelia*  
26 *burgdorferi* (*B. burgdorferi*) has not been carefully studied. Here, we evaluated the activity of  
27 34 essential oils against *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture as a model for persisters. We  
28 found that many essential oils had varying degrees of activity against *B. burgdorferi*, with top  
29 5 essential oils (oregano, cinnamon bark, clove bud, citronella, and wintergreen) at a low  
30 concentration of 0.25% showing more activity than the persister drug daptomycin.  
31 Interestingly, some highly active essential oils were found to have excellent anti-biofilm  
32 ability as shown by their ability to dissolve the aggregated biofilm-like structures. The top 3  
33 hits, oregano, cinnamon bark and clove bud, completely eradicated all viable cells without  
34 regrowth in subculture. Carvacrol was found to be the most active ingredient of oregano oil  
35 showing excellent activity against *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase cells, while p-cymene and  
36  $\alpha$ -terpinene had no apparent activity. Future studies are needed to characterize and optimize  
37 the active essential oils in drug combinations in vitro and in vivo for improved treatment of  
38 persistent Lyme disease.

39

40 **IMPORTANCE** There is a huge need for effective treatment of patients with Lyme disease  
41 who suffer from PTLDS. Recent in vitro and in vivo studies suggest that *B. burgdorferi*  
42 develops persisters that are not killed by the current Lyme antibiotics as a possible contributor  
43 to this condition. Although essential oils are used by patients with Lyme disease with variable  
44 improvement in symptoms, their anti-borrelia activity has not been carefully studied. Here we  
45 found that not all essential oils have adequate anti-borrelia activity and identified some highly  
46 potent essential oils (oregano, cinnamon bark, clove bud) that have even higher anti-persister

47 and anti-biofilm activity than the persister drug daptomycin. Carvacrol was found to be the  
48 most active ingredient of oregano oil and have the potential to serve as a promising oral  
49 persister drug. Our findings may have implications for developing improved treatment of  
50 persisting Lyme disease.

51

## 52 **INTRODUCTION**

53

54 Lyme disease, which is caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi* (*B. burgdorferi*) sensu lato complex  
55 species, is the most common vector-borne disease in the United States with an estimated  
56 300,000 cases a year (1). The infection is transmitted to humans by tick vectors that feed  
57 upon rodents, reptiles, birds, and deer, etc. (2). In the early stage of Lyme disease, patients  
58 often have localized erythema migrans rash that expands as the bacteria disseminate from the  
59 cutaneous infection site via blood stream to other parts of the body. Late stage Lyme disease  
60 is a multi-system disorder which can cause arthritis and neurologic manifestations (1). While  
61 the majority of Lyme disease patients can be cured if treated early with the standard 2-4 week  
62 doxycycline, amoxicillin, or cefuroxime therapy (3), at least 10-20% of patients with Lyme  
63 disease have lingering symptoms such as fatigue, muscular and joint pain, and neurologic  
64 impairment even 6 months after the antibiotic treatment - a set of symptoms called Post-  
65 Treatment Lyme Disease Syndrome (PTLDS) (4). While the cause of PTLDS is unknown,  
66 several possibilities may be involved, including autoimmune response (5), immune response  
67 to continued presence of antigenic debris (6), tissue damage as a result of *Borrelia* infection  
68 and inflammation, co-infections (7), as well as persistent infection due to *B. burgdorferi*

69 persists that are not killed by the current antibiotics used to treat Lyme disease (8-10).  
70 Various studies have found evidence of *B. burgdorferi* persistence in dogs (11), mice (8, 9),  
71 monkeys (10), as well as humans (12) after antibiotic treatment, however, viable organisms  
72 are very difficult to be cultured from the host after antibiotic treatment.

73

74 In log phase cultures (3-5 day old), *B. burgdorferi* is primarily in motile spirochetal form  
75 which is highly susceptible to current Lyme antibiotics doxycycline and amoxicillin,  
76 however, in stationary phase cultures (7-15 day old), increased numbers of atypical variant  
77 forms such as round bodies and aggregated biofilm-like microcolonies develop (13, 14).  
78 These atypical forms have increased tolerance to doxycycline and amoxicillin when  
79 compared to the growing spirochetal forms (13-16). In addition, that the active hits from the  
80 round body persister screens (17) overlap with those from the screens on stationary phase  
81 cells (13) indicates the stationary phase culture contains overlapping persister population and  
82 can be used as a relevant persister model for drug screens to identify agents with anti-  
83 persister activity. Using these models, we identified a range of drugs such as daptomycin,  
84 clofazimine, anthracycline antibiotics, and sulfa drugs with high activity against stationary  
85 phase cells enriched in persisters through screens of FDA-approved drug library and NCI  
86 compound libraries (13, 18).

87

88 Essential oils are concentrated volatile liquid that are extracted from plants. It has been  
89 reported in the literature that essential oils have antimicrobial activities (19) and anecdotal  
90 reports from the internet suggest some essential oils may improve symptoms for patients with

91 persistent Lyme disease symptoms. However, the activity of essential oils against the  
92 causative agent *B. burgdorferi* has not been properly studied. Here, we evaluated a panel of  
93 essential oils for activities against *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase cells, and found that not all  
94 essential oils used by patients with Lyme disease have the same activity against *B.*  
95 *burgdorferi*, with oregano, cinnamon bark, and clove bud having among the highest anti-  
96 persister activity in vitro.

97

## 98 **RESULTS**

99

100 **Evaluation of essential oils for activity against stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*.** We  
101 evaluated a panel of 34 essential oils at four different concentrations (1%, 0.5%, 0.25% and  
102 0.125%) for activity against a 7-day old *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture in the 96-well  
103 plates with control drugs for 7 days. Consistent with our previous studies (13, 20),  
104 daptomycin control was shown to have high activity against the *B. burgdorferi* stationary  
105 phase culture, with a dose-dependent increase in killing activity resulting in a near total  
106 clearance of *B. burgdorferi* cells at the 40  $\mu$ M concentration (Figure 1). Five essential oils  
107 (bandit, oregano, clove bud, geranium bourbon and cinnamon bark) at 1% concentration  
108 showed more activity against the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* culture than 40  $\mu$ M  
109 daptomycin with the plate reader SYBR green I/PI assay (Table 1). We found some essential  
110 oils have autofluorescence which severely interfered with the SYBR Green I/PI plate reader  
111 assay, but we were able to identify and resolve this issue present in some samples by  
112 fluorescence microscopy. As we previously described (21), we directly calculated the green

113 (live) cell ratio of microscope images using Image Pro-Plus software, which could eliminate  
114 the background autofluorescence. Using SYBR Green I/PI assay and fluorescence  
115 microscopy, we additionally found 18 essential oils that showed more or similar activity  
116 against the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* at 1% concentration compared to the 40  $\mu$ M  
117 daptomycin, which could eradicate all live cells as shown by red (dead) aggregated cells  
118 (Table 1; Figure 1A). At 0.5% concentration, 7 essential oils (oregano, cinnamon bark, clove  
119 bud, citronella, wintergreen, geranium bourbon, and patchouli dark) were found to have  
120 higher or similar activity against the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* than 40  $\mu$ M daptomycin  
121 by fluorescence microscope counting after SYBR Green I/PI assay (Table 1; Figure 1B).  
122 However, bandit thieves oil, while having good activity at 1%, had significantly less activity  
123 at 0.5% and lower concentrations (Table 1). Among the effective hits, 5 essential oils  
124 (oregano, cinnamon bark, clove bud, citronella, and wintergreen) still showed better activity  
125 than 40  $\mu$ M daptomycin at 0.25% concentration (Table 1; Figure 1C). Eventually, oregano,  
126 cinnamon bark, and clove bud were identified as the most active essential oils because of  
127 their remarkable activity even at the lowest concentration of 0.125%, which showed similar  
128 or better activity than 40  $\mu$ M daptomycin (Table 1; Figure 1D).

129

130 To further compare the activity of these active essential oils and find whether they could  
131 eradicate stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* at lower concentrations, we evaluated 6 essential  
132 oils (oregano, cinnamon bark, clove bud, citronella, geranium bourbon, and wintergreen) at  
133 even lower concentrations at 0.1% and 0.05%. We noticed that oregano could not wipe out  
134 stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* at 0.05% concentration as shown by some residual green

135 aggregated cells (Table 2, Figure 2), despite oregano showed strong activity sterilizing all the  
136 stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* cells at above 0.1% concentration (Tables 1 and 2).

137

138 **Carvacrol as a highly potent active ingredient of oregano oil against stationary phase *B.***

139 *burgdorferi*. To identify active ingredients of the oregano essential oil, we tested three major

140 constituents (22), carvacrol, p-cymene and  $\alpha$ -terpinene on the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*.

141 Interestingly, carvacrol showed similar high activity against *B. burgdorferi* as oregano

142 essential oil either at 0.1% (6.5  $\mu$ M) or 0.05% (3.2  $\mu$ M) concentration (Table 2 and Figure

143 2h). Meanwhile we also found carvacrol was very active against replicating *B. burgdorferi*, as

144 shown with a very low MIC of 0.16-0.31  $\mu$ g/mL. By contrast, p-cymene and  $\alpha$ -terpinene did

145 not have activity against the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* (Table 2 and Figure 2i and j).

146 Thus, carvacrol could be one of the most active ingredients in oregano oil that kill stationary

147 phase *B. burgdorferi*.

148

149 **Subculture studies to evaluate the activity of essential oils against stationary phase *B.***

150 *burgdorferi*. To confirm the activity of the essential oils in killing stationary phase *B.*

151 *burgdorferi*, we performed subculture studies in BSK-H medium as described previously

152 (14). To validate the activity of these essential oils, samples of essential oil treated cultures

153 were subjected to subculture after removal of the drugs by washing followed by incubation in

154 fresh BSK medium for 21 days. According to the essential oil drug exposure experiments

155 (Table 2), we used subculture to further confirm whether the top 6 active essential oils

156 (oregano, cinnamon bark and clove bud, citronella, geranium bourbon, and wintergreen)

157 could eradicate the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* cells at 0.1% or 0.05% concentration. At  
158 0.1% concentration, the subculture results were consistent with the above drug exposure  
159 results. We did not find any regrowth in samples of three top hits, oregano, cinnamon bark  
160 and clove bud (Figure 3Ab-d). However, citronella, geranium bourbon and wintergreen could  
161 not completely kill the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* with many spirochetes being visible  
162 after 21-day subculture (Figure 3Ae-g). Subculture also confirmed the activity of carvacrol  
163 by showing no spirochete regrowth in the 0.1% carvacrol treated samples. In p-cymene and  
164  $\alpha$ -terpinene subculture samples, we observed growth even in 0.1% concentration samples. At  
165 0.05% concentration, we observed no spirochetal regrowth after 21-day subculture in the  
166 oregano and cinnamon bark treated samples (Figure 3Bb, c), despite some very tiny  
167 aggregated microcolonies were found after treatment (Figure 2Bb, c). Although the clove bud  
168 showed better activity than the cinnamon bark at 0.05% concentration (Table 2),  
169 interestingly, clove bud could not sterilize the *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture, as they  
170 all had visible spirochetes growing after 21-day subculture (Figure 3Bc, d). Additionally,  
171 0.05% citronella, geranium bourbon and wintergreen could not kill all *B. burgdorferi* since  
172 many viable spirochetes were observed in the 21-day subculture (Figure 3Be-g). Remarkably,  
173 0.05% carvacrol sterilized the *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture as shown by no  
174 regrowth after 21-day subculture (Figure 3Bh).

175

## 176 **DISCUSSION**

177

178 Previous *in vitro* studies showed that certain essential oils have bacteriostatic and/or



179 bactericidal activity against on multidrug resistant Gram-negative clinical isolates (23). In  
180 this study, we tested 34 essential oils from different plants on non-growing stationary phase  
181 *B. burgdorferi* as a model of persister drug screens. We were able to identify 23 essential oils  
182 that are more active than 40  $\mu$ M daptomycin at 1% concentration, 3 of which, i.e. oregano,  
183 clove bud and cinnamon bark, highlighted themselves as having a remarkable activity even at  
184 a very low concentration of 0.125% (Table 1). Among them oregano and cinnamon bark  
185 essential oil had the best activity as shown by completely eradicating *B. burgdorferi* even at  
186 0.05% concentration. In a previous study, oregano essential oil was found to have  
187 antibacterial activity against Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria (22). Here, for the  
188 first time, we identified oregano essential oil as having a highly potent activity against  
189 stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*. We tested three major ingredients of oregano essential oil  
190 (carvacrol, p-cymene and  $\alpha$ -terpinene) on *B. burgdorferi*, and found carvacrol is the major  
191 active component, which showed similar activity as the complete oregano essential oil  
192 (Figures 2 and 3). In addition, we noted that oregano essential oil can dramatically reduce the  
193 size of aggregated biofilm-like microcolonies compared to the antibiotic controls (Figure 1).  
194 After treatment with 0.25% oregano essential oil, only some dispersed tiny red aggregated  
195 cells were left in the culture (Figure 1C). Interestingly, we observed that amount and size of  
196 aggregated biofilm-like microcolonies of *B. burgdorferi* dramatically reduced with increasing  
197 concentrations of oregano oil, as aggregated biofilm-like structures vanished after treatment  
198 with 0.5% or 1% oregano essential oil. When we reduced the concentration of oregano  
199 essential oil to 0.05%, it could not eradicate stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* (residual viability  
200 56%, Figure 2Bb) but the size of aggregated microcolonies decreased significantly. By

201 contrast, daptomycin could kill the aggregated biofilm-like microcolonies of *B. burgdorferi*  
202 as shown by red aggregated microcolonies but could not break up the aggregated  
203 microcolonies even at the highest concentration of 40  $\mu$ M (Figure 1A). It has been shown that  
204 carvacrol and other active compositions of oregano essential oil could disrupt microbial cell  
205 membrane (19). Future studies are needed to determine whether oregano essential oil and  
206 other active essential oils have similar membrane disruption activity and could destroy the  
207 aggregated biofilm structures of *B. burgdorferi*.

208

209 We also noted that some essential oils such as oregano and cinnamon bark had relatively high  
210 residual viability percentage (Table 2) at low concentration of 0.05% but their treated *B.*  
211 *burgdorferi* cells did not grow in the subculture study (Table 2; Figure 3Bb, c). We speculate  
212 that these essential oils could dissolve the dead *B. burgdorferi* cells presumably due to their  
213 high lipophilicity. The reduction of number of dead red cells by the essential oil made the  
214 residual viability percentage increase, although the amount of live cells obviously decreased  
215 as well (Figure 2Ab-d, Bb-c). In addition, these essential oils may also permanently damage  
216 or inhibit the growth of *B. burgdorferi* during the treatment, such that even in the fresh  
217 medium, the residual *B. burgdorferi* cells still could not regrow.

218

219 Meanwhile, we found that at a high concentration (above 1%) lemongrass or oregano  
220 essential oil showed apparent high residual viability percentage by the SYBR Green I/PI plate  
221 assay, compared with the microscopy counting data (Table 1, Figure 1A). This may be caused  
222 by strong autofluorescence of these essential oils that severely interfere with the SYBR Green

223 I/PI assay. We studied the emission spectral of lemongrass essential oil using Synergy H1  
224 multi-mode reader and found lemongrass essential oil emits the strongest autofluorescence.  
225 The peak fluorescence of lemongrass essential oil is at 520 nm that overlaps with the green  
226 fluorescence of SYBR Green I dye (peak is at 535 nm). The strong autofluorescence caused  
227 the abnormal residual viability percentage (above 100% in Table 1) using SYBR Green I/PI  
228 plate assay. We also found oregano essential oil emits autofluorescence at 535 nm, which  
229 pushed the green/red fluorescence ratio higher than their true values (Table 1). However, we  
230 were able to solve this problem by using fluorescence microscopy as a more reliable measure  
231 to confirm the results of SYBR Green I/PI plate reader assay (13, 21).

232

233 Additionally, we found cinnamon bark and clove bud essential oils showed excellent activity  
234 against *B. burgdorferi*. Cinnamon bark essential oil eradicated the stationary phase *B.*  
235 *burgdorferi* even at 0.05% concentration (Table 2) while clove bud essential oil showed  
236 sterilization at 0.1% or above concentration. Extractions of cinnamon bark and clove bud  
237 have been used as flavors for food processing. Based on this discovery, effective oral  
238 regimens with low side effect may be developed to fight against Lyme disease in future  
239 studies.

240

241 In a previous study, it has been found that volatile oil from *Cistus creticus* showed growth  
242 inhibiting activity against *B. burgdorferi in vitro* (24) but its activity against stationary phase  
243 bacteria enriched in persisters was not evaluated. In this study, we tested six *Citrus* plants  
244 (*Citrus bergamia*, *Citrus sinensis*, *Citrus limonum*, *Citrus aurantifolia*, *Citrus racemosa*,

245 *Citrus reticulata*) on the stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* culture and found bergamot (*Citrus*  
246 *bergamia*) had high activity (residual viability 12%) at 1% concentration but the other *Citrus*  
247 essential oils did not show good activity against *B. burgdorferi* compared with clinically used  
248 doxycycline, cefuroxime or ciprofloxacin (Table 1).

249

250 Although we found several essential oils (oregano, cinnamon bark, clove bud) that have  
251 excellent sterilizing activity against *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase cells in vitro (Table 1),  
252 the effective dose that will show equivalent activity in vivo is unknown at this time largely  
253 because the active ingredients in the active essential oils and the pharmacokinetic profile of  
254 the active ingredients are not all known. Future studies are needed to identify the active  
255 ingredients of the active essential oils and determine their effective dosage in vivo.  
256 Identification of active components or active component combinations from essential oils  
257 may help to eliminate the quality difference of natural products. However, we were able to  
258 identify carvacrol as the most active ingredient in oregano essential oil, and its  
259 pharmacokinetics has been studied as a feed addition in pigs (25) and topical oil in cattle  
260 (26). In the rat model, the calculated LD50 of carvacrol is 471.2 mg/kg (27). We noticed that  
261 the 0.05% of carvacrol used here, which is equivalent to 0.48 µg/mL or 3.2 µM and  
262 completely eradicated *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase cells in subculture (Figure 3), is lower  
263 than the peak plasma concentration (3.65 µg/mL) in the swine study (25). These findings  
264 favor the application of carvacrol in future treatment studies. Importantly, carvacrol seems to  
265 be more active than daptomycin, the most active persister drugs against *B. burgdorferi* (13,  
266 14). In this study, 0.1% carvacrol (6.4 µM) showed much higher activity (2% residual

267 viability) than 5  $\mu$ M daptomycin (45% residual viability) (Table 1 and 2). In addition, 0.05%  
268 carvacrol (3.2  $\mu$ M) could eradicate *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase cells with no regrowth in  
269 subculture, but 10  $\mu$ g/mL daptomycin (6.2  $\mu$ M), by contrast, could not completely kill *B.*  
270 *burgdorferi* stationary phase cells as shown by regrowth in subculture (14). Furthermore,  
271 carvacrol showed remarkable activity against not only stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* but  
272 also log phase replicating cells with very low MIC (0.16-0.31  $\mu$ g/mL). However, there is  
273 limited safety information on carvacrol in humans. In mice, carvacrol has been given at 40  
274 mg/kg daily for 20 days with no apparent toxicity (28). However, carvacrol and other active  
275 components of essential oil showed certain cytotoxicity (IC<sub>50</sub> of carvacrol was 200-425  $\mu$ M)  
276 (29, 30) on mammalian cells and genotoxic activity *in vivo* (even the lowest dose of 10  
277 mg/kg) (31). In addition, it is well known that some effective drugs identified *in vitro* may  
278 fail when tested *in vivo*. Thus, adequate animal studies are needed to confirm the safety and  
279 efficacy of the active essential oils in *in vivo* setting before human studies.

280

281 In summary, we found that many essential oils had varying degrees of activity against  
282 stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*. The most active essential oils are oregano, cinnamon bark,  
283 and clove bud, which seem to have even higher activity than the persister drug daptomycin. A  
284 particularly interesting observation is that these highly active essential oils had remarkable  
285 biofilm-dissolving capability and completely eradicated all stationary phase cells with no  
286 regrowth. In addition, carvacrol was found to be the most active ingredient of oregano with  
287 high activity against *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase cells. Future studies are needed to test  
288 whether carvacrol could replace the persister drug daptomycin in drug combinations against

289 more resistant biofilm-like structures and for treating persistent borrelia infections in animal  
290 models and in patients.

291

## 292 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

293

294 **Strain, media and culture techniques.** Low passaged (less than 8 passages) *B. burgdorferi*  
295 strain B31 5A19 was kindly provided by Dr. Monica Embers (15). The *B. burgdorferi* B31  
296 strain was grown in BSK-H medium (HiMedia Laboratories Pvt. Ltd.) and supplemented  
297 with 6% rabbit serum (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA). All culture medium was filter-  
298 sterilized by 0.2 µm filter. Cultures were incubated in sterile 50 ml conical tubes (BD  
299 Biosciences, California, USA) in microaerophilic incubator (33°C, 5% CO<sub>2</sub>) without  
300 antibiotics. After incubation for 7 days, 1 ml stationary-phase *B. burgdorferi* culture (~10<sup>7</sup>  
301 spirochetes/mL) was transferred into a 96-well plate for evaluation of potential anti-persister  
302 activity of essential oils (see below).

303

304 **Essential oils and drugs.** A panel of essential oils was purchased from Plant Therapy (ID,  
305 USA), Natural Acres (MO, USA), or Plant Guru (NJ, USA). Carvacrol, p-cymene, and α-  
306 terpinene were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (USA). Essential oils were added to *B.*  
307 *burgdorferi* cultures to form aqueous suspension by vortex. Immediately the essential oil  
308 aqueous suspension was serially diluted to desired concentrations followed by addition to *B.*  
309 *burgdorferi* cultures. Doxycycline (Dox), cefuroxime (CefU), (Sigma-Aldrich, USA) and  
310 daptomycin (Dap) (AK Scientific, Inc, USA) were dissolved in suitable solvents (32, 33) to

311 form 5 mg/ml stock solutions. The antibiotic stocks were filter-sterilized by 0.2  $\mu$ m filter and  
312 stored at -20°C.

313

314 **Microscopy.** The *B. burgdorferi* cultures were examined using BZ-X710 All-in-One  
315 fluorescence microscope (KEYENCE, Inc.). The SYBR Green I/PI viability assay was  
316 performed to assess the bacterial viability using the ratio of green/red fluorescence to  
317 determine the live:dead cell ratio, respectively, as described previously (13, 34). This residual  
318 cell viability reading was confirmed by analyzing three representative images of the bacterial  
319 culture using epifluorescence microscopy. BZ-X Analyzer and Image Pro-Plus software were  
320 used to quantitatively determine the fluorescence intensity.

321

322 **Evaluation of essential oils for their activities against *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase**  
323 **cultures.** To evaluate the essential oils for possible activity against stationary phase *B.*  
324 *burgdorferi*, aliquots of the essential oils or drugs were added to 96-well plate containing 100  
325  $\mu$ L of the 7-day old stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* culture to obtain the desired  
326 concentrations. In the primary essential oil screen, each essential oil was assayed in four  
327 concentrations, 1%, 0.5%, 0.25% and 0.125% (v/v) in 96-well plate. The active hits were  
328 further confirmed with lower 0.1% and 0.05% concentration; all tests were run in triplicate.  
329 All the plates were incubated at 33°C and 5% CO<sub>2</sub> without shaking for 7 days when the  
330 residual viable cells remaining were measured using the SYBR Green I/PI viability assay and  
331 epifluorescence microscopy as described (13, 34).

332

333 **Antibiotic susceptibility testing.** To qualitatively determine the effect of essential oils in a  
334 high-throughput manner, 10  $\mu$ l of each essential oil from the pre-diluted stock was added to  
335 7-day old stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* culture in the 96-well plate. Plates were sealed and  
336 placed in 33°C incubator for 7 days when the SYBR Green I/ PI viability assay was used to  
337 assess the live and dead cells as described (13). Briefly, 10  $\mu$ l of SYBR Green I (10,000  $\times$   
338 stock, Invitrogen) was mixed with 30  $\mu$ l propidium iodide (PI, 20 mM, Sigma) into 1.0 ml of  
339 sterile dH<sub>2</sub>O. Then 10  $\mu$ l staining mixture was added to each well and mixed thoroughly. The  
340 plates were incubated at room temperature in the dark for 15 minutes followed by plate  
341 reading at excitation wavelength at 485 nm and the fluorescence intensity at 535 nm (green  
342 emission) and 635 nm (red emission) in microplate reader (HTS 7000 plus Bio Assay Reader,  
343 PerkinElmer Inc., USA). With least-square fitting analysis, the regression equation and  
344 regression curve of the relationship between percentage of live and dead bacteria as shown in  
345 green/red fluorescence ratios was obtained. The regression equation was used to calculate the  
346 percentage of live cells in each well of the 96-well plate.

347

348 The standard microdilution method was used to determine the MIC of carvacrol, based on  
349 inhibition of visible growth of *B. burgdorferi* by microscopy. Carvacrol was added to *B.*  
350 *burgdorferi* cultures ( $1 \times 10^4$  spirochetes/mL) to form aqueous suspension by vortex. The  
351 carvacrol suspension was two-fold diluted from 0.5% (4.88  $\mu$ g/mL) to 0.008% (0.08  $\mu$ g/mL).  
352 All experiments were run in triplicate. *B. burgdorferi* culture was incubated in 96-well  
353 microplate at 33 °C for 7 days. Cell proliferation was assessed using the SYBR Green I/PI  
354 assay and BZ-X710 All-in-One fluorescence microscope (KEYENCE, Inc.).



355

356 **Subculture studies to assess viability of the of essential oil-treated *B. burgdorferi***  
357 **organisms.** A 7-day old *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture (500  $\mu$ l) was treated with  
358 essential oils or control drugs for 7 days in 1.5 ml Eppendorf tubes as described previously  
359 (14). After incubation at 33 °C for 7 days without shaking, the cells were collected by  
360 centrifugation and rinsed with 1 ml fresh BSK-H medium followed by resuspension in 500  $\mu$ l  
361 fresh BSK-H medium without antibiotics. Then 50  $\mu$ l of cell suspension was transferred to 1  
362 ml fresh BSK-H medium for subculture at 33 °C for 20 days. Cell proliferation was assessed  
363 using SYBR Green I/PI assay and epifluorescence microscopy as described above.

364

#### 365 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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369 Table 1. Effect of essential oils on a 7-day old stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*<sup>a</sup>.

| Essential oils and control drugs | Plant                         | Residual viability (%) <sup>b</sup> |                   |                   |                  |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
|                                  |                               | 1%                                  | 0.5%              | 0.25%             | 0.125%           |
| Daptomycin                       |                               | 22% <sup>c</sup>                    | 37% <sup>d</sup>  | 44% <sup>e</sup>  | 45% <sup>f</sup> |
| Cefuroxime                       |                               | 55% <sup>c</sup>                    | 63% <sup>d</sup>  | 71% <sup>e</sup>  | 77% <sup>f</sup> |
| Doxycycline                      |                               | 70% <sup>c</sup>                    | 69% <sup>d</sup>  | 77% <sup>e</sup>  | 88% <sup>f</sup> |
| Oregano                          | <i>Origanum vulgare</i>       | <b>6% (0%)</b>                      | <b>64% (0%)</b>   | <b>67% (0%)</b>   | <b>65% (0%)</b>  |
| Clove Bud                        | <i>Syzygium aromaticum</i> L  | <b>6% (0%)</b>                      | <b>24% (0%)</b>   | <b>22% (0%)</b>   | <b>39% (20%)</b> |
| Cinnamon Bark                    | <i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum</i>  | <b>16% (ND<sup>g</sup>)</b>         | <b>18% (ND)</b>   | <b>21% (0%)</b>   | <b>36% (24%)</b> |
| Citronella                       | <i>Cymbopogon winterianus</i> | <b>26% (0%)</b>                     | <b>27% (0%)</b>   | <b>35% (25%)</b>  | 79% (66%)        |
| Wintergreen                      | <i>Gaultheria procumbens</i>  | <b>103% (5%)</b>                    | <b>114% (10%)</b> | <b>104% (20%)</b> | 104% (70%)       |
| Geranium Bourbon                 | <i>Pelargonium graveolens</i> | <b>9% (0%)</b>                      | <b>28% (0%)</b>   | 41% (66%)         | 77% (72%)        |
| Patchouli Dark                   | <i>Pogostemon cablin</i>      | <b>26% (0%)</b>                     | <b>55% (0%)</b>   | 68% (66%)         | 76%              |
| Basil                            | <i>Ocimum basilicum</i>       | <b>60% (5%)</b>                     | 70% (30%)         | 71% (70%)         | 76%              |
| Lavender                         | <i>Lavendula officianalis</i> | <b>27% (0%)</b>                     | 65% (40%)         | 70%               | 78%              |
| Clary Sage                       | <i>Salvia sclarea</i>         | <b>26% (0%)</b>                     | 70% (45%)         | 77%               | 79%              |
| Cedarwood Atlas                  | <i>Cedrus atlantica</i>       | <b>23% (0%)</b>                     | 69% (47%)         | 76%               | 79%              |
| Lemongrass                       | <i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>    | <b>93% (ND<sup>g</sup>)</b>         | 77% (48%)         | 73%               | 72%              |
| Bandit "Thieves"                 | Synergy blend                 | <b>0<sup>h</sup> (0%)</b>           | 40% (50%)         | 72%               | 76%              |
| Lemongrass                       | <i>Cymbopogon flexuosus</i>   | <b>67% (ND<sup>g</sup>)</b>         | 74% (50%)         | 72%               | 82%              |
| Spearmint                        | <i>Mentha spicata</i>         | <b>33% (0%)</b>                     | 84% (50%)         | 82%               | 84%              |
| Tea Tree                         | <i>Melaleuca alternifolia</i> | <b>31% (0%)</b>                     | 78% (55%)         | 81%               | 76%              |
| Ginger                           | <i>Azingiber officinalis</i>  | <b>65% (0%)</b>                     | 71% (55%)         | 71%               | 77%              |
| Marjoram (Sweet)                 | <i>Origanum marjorana</i>     | <b>22% (0%)</b>                     | 71% (60%)         | 74%               | 76%              |
| Peppermint                       | <i>Mentha piperita</i>        | <b>28% (0%)</b>                     | 78% (60%)         | 77%               | 81%              |
| Bergamot                         | <i>Citrus bergamia</i>        | <b>62% (12%)</b>                    | 74% (63%)         | 74%               | 83%              |

|                 |                        |                  |           |     |     |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----|-----|
| Breathe         | Synergy blend          | <b>32% (18%)</b> | 74% (66%) | 74% | 74% |
| Cajeput         | Melaleuca cajeputi     | <b>36% (0%)</b>  | 77% (66%) | 75% | 76% |
| Ylang Ylang     | Cananga odorata        | <b>56% (5%)</b>  | 77% (70%) | 76% | 79% |
| Anise Star      | Illicium verum hook    | 34% (33%)        | 73%       | 76% | 78% |
| Stress Relief   | Synergy blend          | 36% (55%)        | 77%       | 77% | 77% |
| Cypress         | Cupressus sempervirens | 66%              | 72%       | 74% | 74% |
| Orange (Sweet)  | Citrus sinensis        | 70%              | 70%       | 72% | 75% |
| Eucalyptus      | Eucalyptus globus      | 59%              | 72%       | 72% | 75% |
| Lemon           | Citrus limonum         | 72%              | 76%       | 75% | 77% |
| Lime            | Citrus aurantifolia    | 73%              | 76%       | 75% | 77% |
| Rosemary        | Rosmarinus officinalis | 64%              | 75%       | 75% | 80% |
| Pink Grapefruit | Citrus racemosa        | 75%              | 79%       | 78% | 81% |
| Tangerine       | Citrus reticulata      | 73%              | 81%       | 79% | 85% |
| Frankincense    | Boswellia serrata      | 81%              | 85%       | 94% | 94% |

370 <sup>a</sup> A 7-day old *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture was treated with essential oils or

371 control drugs for 7 days.

372 <sup>b</sup>Residual viable *B. burgdorferi* was calculated according to the regression equation

373 and ratios of Green/Red fluorescence obtained by SYBR Green I/PI assay (34).

374 Residual viability calculated by fluorescence microscope is shown in brackets. Bold

375 type indicates the essential oils that had better or similar activity compared with 40

376  $\mu$ M daptomycin used as the active persister-drug control.

377 <sup>c</sup>Activity was tested with 40  $\mu$ M control antibiotics.

378 <sup>d</sup>Activity was tested with 20  $\mu$ M control antibiotics.

379 <sup>e</sup>Activity was tested with 10  $\mu$ M control antibiotics.

380 <sup>f</sup>Activity was tested with 5  $\mu$ M control antibiotics.

381 <sup>g</sup>Autofluorescence of essential oil is too strong to be observed under fluorescence

382 microscope.

383 <sup>h</sup>Values are below the 70% isopropanol killed all-dead control.

384

385 Table 2. Comparison of essential oil activity against stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*  
 386 with 0.1% and 0.05% (v/v) treatment and subculture<sup>a</sup>.

|  | 0.1% Essential oil     |                         | 0.05% Essential oil |                         |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
|  | Treatment <sup>b</sup> | Subculture <sup>c</sup> | Treatment           | Subculture <sup>c</sup> |
| Drug free control                                  | 95%                    | +                       | 95%                 | +                       |
| Daptomycin+Doxycyc<br>line+Cefuroxime <sup>d</sup> | 18% <sup>d</sup>       | - <sup>d</sup>          | N/A                 | N/A                     |
| Oregano  | 60% (8%)               | -                       | 68% (56%)           | -                       |
| Cinnamon Bark                                      | 62% (55%)              | -                       | 66% (66%)           | -                       |
| Clove Bud  | 57% (33%)              | -                       | 68% (77%)           | +                       |
| Citronella   | 78% (70%)              | +                       | 77% (82%)           | +                       |
| Geranium Bourbon                                   | 74% (70%)              | +                       | 85% (80%)           | +                       |
| Wintergreen  | 90% (77%)              | +                       | 94% (85%)           | +                       |
| Carvacrol  | 55% (2%)               | -                       | 60% (55%)           | -                       |
| p-cymene   | 66% (72%)              | +                       | 73% (83%)           | +                       |
| $\alpha$ -terpinene                                | 70% (77%)              | +                       | 77% (85%)           | +                       |

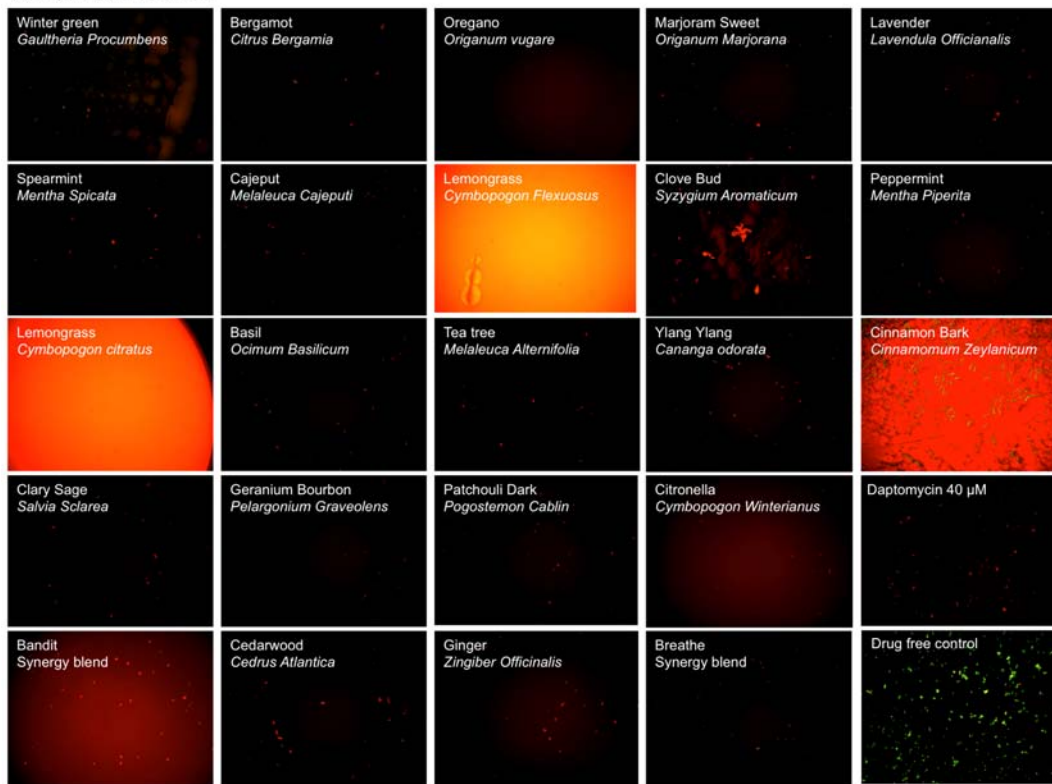
387 <sup>a</sup> A 7-day old stationary phase *B. burgdorferi* was treated with 0.05% or 0.1 %  
 388 essential oils or their ingredients for 7 days when the viability of the residual  
 389 organisms was assessed by subculture.

390 <sup>b</sup>Residual viable percentage of *B. burgdorferi* was calculated according to the  
 391 regression equation and ratio of Green/Red fluorescence obtained by SYBR Green  
 392 I/PI assay as described (13). Direct microscopy counting was employed to rectify the  
 393 results of the SYBR Green I/PI assay. Residual viability calculated by fluorescence  
 394 microscopy is shown in brackets. Viabilities are the average of three replicates.

395 <sup>c</sup>“+” indicates growth in subculture; “-” indicates no growth in subculture.

396 <sup>d</sup>Activity was tested with 5 µg/mL antibiotic combination.

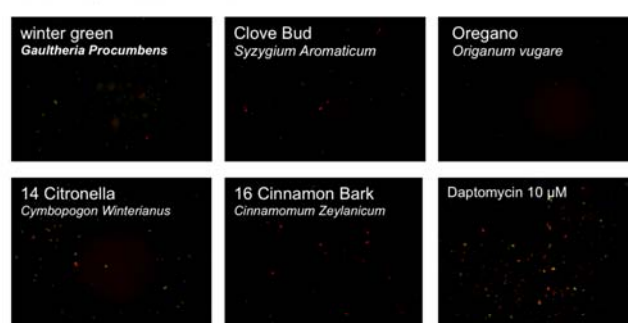
### A. 1% Essential oil



### B. 0.5% Essential oil



### C. 0.25% Essential oil



### D. 0.125% Essential oil



397

398 **FIG 1. Effect of essential oils on the viability of stationary phase *B. burgdorferi*.** A

399 7- day old *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture was treated with essential oils at

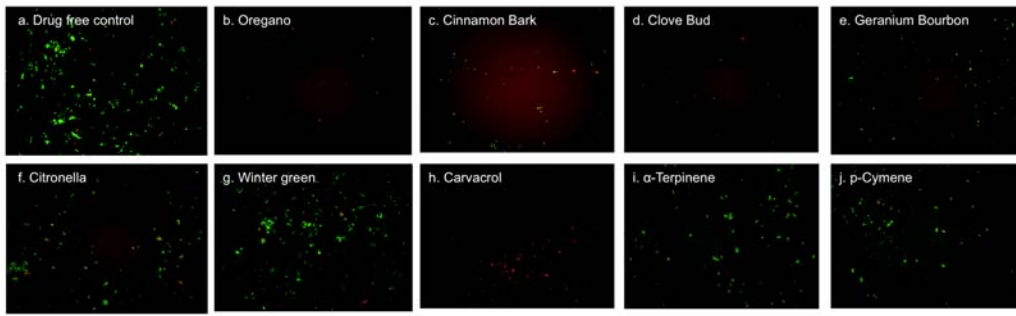
400 different concentrations (v/v), 1% (A), 0.5% (B), 0.25% (C), and 0.125% (D) for 7

401 days followed by staining with SYBR Green I/PI viability assay and fluorescence

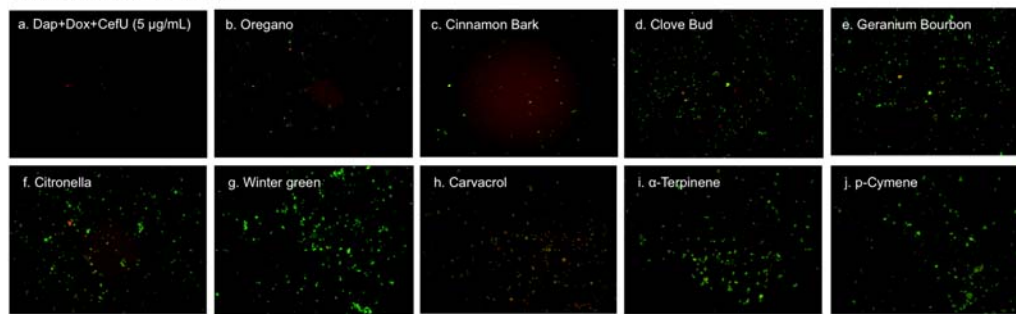
402 microscopy.



**A. 0.1% Essential oil**



**B. 0.05% Essential oil**



403

404 **FIG 2. Effect of active essential oils or their ingredients on stationary phase *B.***

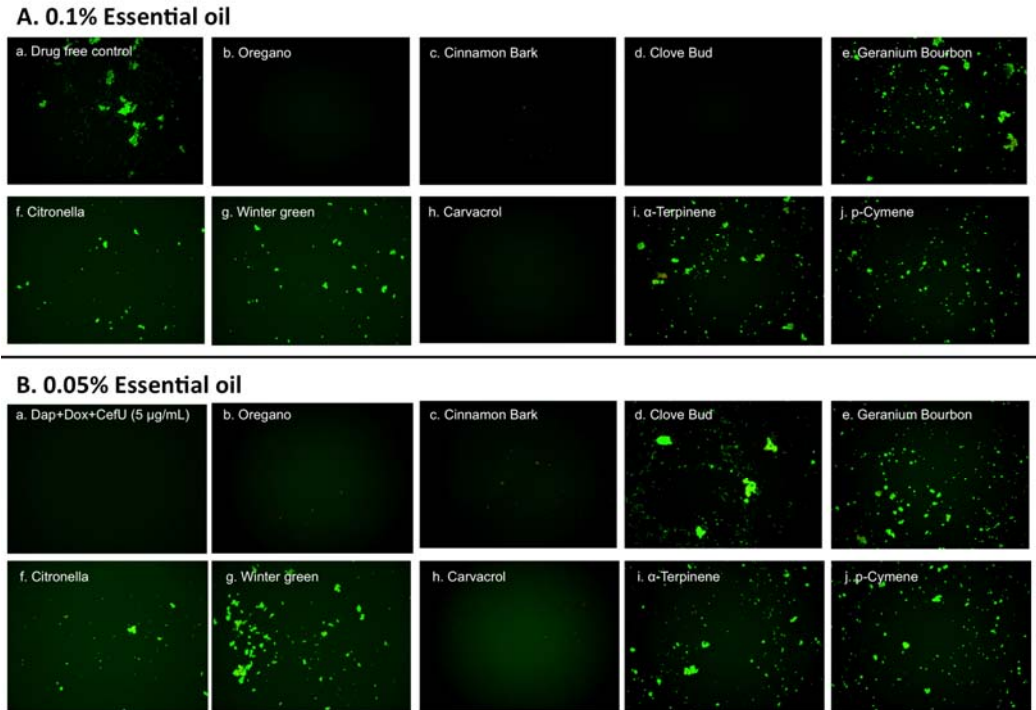
405 *burgdorferi*. A *B. burgdorferi* stationary phase culture (7-day old) was treated with

406 0.1% (A) or 0.05% (B) essential oils (labeled on the image) or the ingredients

407 (carvacrol,  $\alpha$ -terpinene or p-cymene) of oregano for 7 days followed by staining with

408 SYBR Green I/PI viability assay and fluorescence microscopy.

409



410

411 **FIG 3. Subculture of *B. burgdorferi* after treatment with essential oils.** A *B.*  
412 *burgdorferi* stationary phase culture (7-day old) was treated with the indicated  
413 essential oils at 0.1% (A) or 0.05% (B) for 7 days followed by washing and  
414 resuspension in fresh BSK-H medium and subculture for 21 days. The viability of the  
415 subculture was examined by SYBR Green I/PI stain and fluorescence microscopy.

416

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