

# *Effects of domestic processing methods on the phytochemical content of watercress (Nasturtium officinale)*

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**Title**

Effects of domestic processing methods on the phytochemical content of watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*).

**Authors** Natasa Giallourou<sup>1</sup>, Maria Jose Oruna-Concha<sup>1</sup>, Niamh Harbourne <sup>2</sup>

**Affiliations**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy, University of Reading, Whiteknights campus, Reading, United Kingdom,

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Food and Health, School of Agriculture and Food Science, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

**Corresponding author**

Natasa Giallourou

Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 6AP, United Kingdom.

E-mail: [n.giallourou@pgr.reading.ac.uk](mailto:n.giallourou@pgr.reading.ac.uk)

Telephone: +44 (0) 7761402005

## 21 **Abstract**

22 The impact of conventional cooking and processing methods on total phenols,  
23 antioxidant activity, carotenoids and glucosinolates of watercress was evaluated.  
24 Boiling significantly decreases phenolic content, antioxidant activity and  
25 recoverable glucosinolates, however it increases the carotenoid concentrations of  
26 watercress as compared to the raw vegetable. Cooking by microwaving and  
27 steaming maintains the majority of phytochemicals in comparison to the fresh  
28 material, suggesting that they should be used as the preferred methods of  
29 watercress preparation. Boiling of watercress should be avoided to ensure  
30 maximum ingestion of watercress-derived beneficial phytochemicals.

## 31 **Keywords**

32 Watercress; Brassica; Processing; Phytochemicals; Phenolics; Carotenoids;  
33 Glucosinolates; Flavonols

## 34 **1.0 Introduction**

35 Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) belongs to the family of *Brassicaceae*  
36 together with broccoli, cabbage, mustard and Brussels sprouts. Epidemiological  
37 studies associate a higher intake of Brassica vegetables, such as watercress, with  
38 a reduced risk of various types of cancers (Verhoeven, Goldbohm, vanPoppel,  
39 Verhagen & vandenBrandt, 1996). Watercress is an exceptional source of natural,  
40 bioactive compounds for which research has highlighted a favourable role in anti-  
41 genotoxic and anti-cancer processes both *in vivo* and *in vitro* (Boyd, McCann,  
42 Hashim, Bennett, Gill & Rowland, 2006; Gill, Haldar, Boyd, Bennett, Whiteford,  
43 Butler, et al., 2007; Rose, Faulkner, Williamson & Mithen, 2000). The health

benefits of watercress have been attributed to phytochemicals including glucosinolates, carotenoids and flavonoid compounds.

Watercress, and essentially all members of the *Brassicaceae* family, have been identified as a rich source of glucosinolates (Bell & Wagstaff, 2014). Glucosinolates are hydrolysed to isothiocyanates by the action of the enzyme myrosinase ( $\beta$ -thioglucoside glucohydrolase; EC 3.2.3.1), upon cell tissue damage such as mastication, chopping or cooking. This group of plant bioactive compounds is responsible for the characteristic pungent taste that Brassica vegetables possess. Gluconasturtiin (2-phelylethyl glucosinolate) is the most prominent glucosinolate in watercress (Boyd, et al., 2006; Gill, et al., 2007) with a range of aliphatic and indole glucosinolates adding to its glucosinolate profile.

High concentrations of carotenoids and flavonol compounds are also contained in watercress. Carotenoids with well established health benefits such as  $\beta$ -carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin are abundant in watercresss (Hart & Scott, 1995). Flavonols like quercetin, kaempferol and isorhamnetin, make up the polyphenolic core of watercress (Martinez-Sanchez, Gil-Izquierdo, Gil & Ferreres, 2008). Polyphenols have attracted great importance due to their many health benefits related to cardiovascular function, antioxidant and anticancer activity (Morel, Lescoat, Cillard, & Cillard, 1994 Doostdar, Burke, & Mayer, 2000; Galati, Teng, Moridani, Chan, & O'Brien, 2000).

While watercress is widely consumed raw in salads, it is becoming increasingly popular in cooked foods such as soups, smoothies and also wilted in pasta and meat dishes. Annual retail sales of watercress in the United Kingdom amounted to 40 million pounds in 2015. Sales of food products with cooked or processed watercress as the main ingredient have taken off the last few years,

representing approximately 50% of total watercress sales (S. Rothwell, Vitacress salads LTD, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Culinary processing is the source of several complex biochemical and physical alterations, modifying the phytochemical constituents of vegetables, ultimately resulting in nutritional changes (Palermo, Pellegrini & Fogliano, 2014).

To our knowledge, phytochemical characterisation of watercress subjected to different culinary treatments has not been explored to date. The present research was undertaken to elucidate the effects of five common cooking methods on the phytochemical profile of watercress and formulate suggestions for the most appropriate method for consuming watercress for maximum nutrient ingestion.

## **2.0 Materials and methods**

### ***2.1 Plant Material***

Fresh watercress samples were provided from VITACRESS LTD (Andover, Hampshire, UK), transferred to the laboratory and stored at 4 °C for up to 24 hours until all watercress processing analyses were performed. Only samples free from mechanical damage were used in the experiments. All analyses were performed in triplicate using the same batch of plant material to minimise variation in our results.

### ***2.2 Reagents & Chemicals***

All chemicals were obtained from Sigma Aldrich (Poole, UK), unless otherwise stated.

## 2.3 Domestic Processing

The effect of domestic processing on the phytochemical content and antioxidant activity of watercress was examined by cooking of the plant material by boiling, microwaving, steaming, chopping and blending with water to make a watercress smoothie. Processing treatments and cooking times used were decided upon general consumer preferences and after online search of watercress recipes as well as using past research papers looking at the effects of domestic processing in other types of Brassica vegetables. 100 g portions of watercress were used for each replicate ( $n=3$ ). Temperature data for boiling and steaming treatments were recorded throughout cooking, using a temperature logger (Squirrel OQ610-S, Grant instruments, UK) and a type T thermocouple.

**2.3.1 Boiling ( $n=3$ ):** 500 ml of tap water was brought to boil (90 °C) in a stainless steel pot and watercress was boiled for 2, 5 and 10 min. Watercress was removed from the boiling water and water used for cooking was kept at -20 °C for analysis.

**2.3.2 Microwaving ( $n=3$ ):** Fresh watercress was placed in plastic trays, then transferred to a domestic microwave oven (Panasonic, UK) and cooked at full power (1400 W) for 1, 2 and 3 min.

**2.3.3 Steaming ( $n=3$ ):** A domestic steamer (Russel Hobbs, UK) was pre-heated at 100 °C with 500 ml water at its base. Watercress was placed in the steamer and cooked for 5, 10 and 15 min.

**2.3.4 Chopping ( $n=3$ ):** 100 g of watercress was transferred to a food processor (Waring Commercial, New York, USA) and chopped for 30 secs at full speed. To study the effect of storage time on the phytochemical content, the chopped watercress was left on the bench at room temperature (21 °C) for 0, 10, 30, 60

and 120 min to replicate how watercress can be treated at home when chopped in salads or other dishes and not consumed immediately after preparation.

**2.3.5 Watercress smoothie ( $n=3$ ):** 100 g of the plant material was transferred to a juice maker (Vitamix, Total Nutrition Centre, UK), 200 ml of water was added and the watercress was blended for 30 secs at full power. The effect of storage time was also examined by leaving the smoothie on the bench at room temperature (21 °C) for 0, 10, 30, 60 and 120 min.

After processing, all samples were immediately frozen in liquid nitrogen then freeze-dried (Christ A 2-4 LD, Christ, Germany); ground to fine powder using a coffee bean grinder (De'Longhi, Italy), vacuum packed and stored at -20 °C.

## **2.4 Preparation of watercress extracts**

**2.4.1 Crude methanol (MeOH) extracts:** The method used for the preparation of the extracts was adapted from Bell *et al.* (Bell, Oruna-Concha & Wagstaff, 2015). Briefly, 40 mg of ground watercress powder was heated in a dry-block at 75 °C for 2 min to inactivate myrosinase enzyme. Preheated (70 °C) 70% (v/v) MeOH (1 ml) was then added to each sample and placed in a water bath for 20 min at 70 °C. Samples were then centrifuged for 5 min at 6,000 rpm and the supernatant was transferred to fresh tubes. The final volume was adjusted to 1 ml with 70% (v/v) MeOH and stored at -20 °C until the day of analysis. MeOH extracts were used for the FRAP assay, total phenols as well as flavonols and glucosinolates identification and quantification.

**2.4.2 Acetone extracts:** Total and specific carotenoids were determined in acetone watercress extracts. Watercress powder (25 mg) was weighed out in Falcon tubes (12 ml) previously wrapped in aluminium foil to minimise the degradation of carotenoids by ultra-violet light. Acetone (4 ml) was added to the powder and the



samples were shaken for 15 min at 8000 rpm. Following centrifugation at 4000 rpm for 5 min, the supernatant was transferred to a clean tube and the process was repeated (4 ml acetone for the second time and 2 ml the third time) until a colourless supernatant was obtained. The combined supernatants were transferred in fresh tubes and the final volume was adjusted to 10 ml with 100% acetone.

## *2.5 Determination of total phenolics*

Total phenols were measured using the method developed by Singleton and Rossi (Singleton & Rossi, 1965) with slight modifications. Briefly, 0.2 ml of the MeOH watercress extract (Section 2.4) or blank was added to 6.0 ml of distilled water in volumetric flasks and mixed with 0.5 ml of Folin - Ciocalteu reagent. A sodium carbonate solution 20% (v/v) (1.5 ml) was added to the mixture and the volume was adjusted to 10 ml. Absorbance was read after incubation of the samples for two hours at room temperature, at 760 nm using a UV-Vis Spectrophotometer (UV-VIS, Perkin Elmers, UK). A standard curve was made using gallic acid in the following concentrations: 0, 50, 100, 150, 250, 500, 750 & 1000 mg/L and total phenols were measured as gallic acid equivalents ( $R^2 > 0.99$ ).

## *2.6 FRAP (Ferric Reducing Antioxidant Power) assay*

Antioxidant activity of the samples was determined using the FRAP assay based on an adapted version of the method developed by Benzie and Strain (Benzie & Strain, 1996). The FRAP reagent was made by mixing 25 ml of 300 mM acetate buffer (pH 3.6), 2.5 ml 10 mM 2,4,6-tripyridyl-s-triazine solution (TPTZ) and 2.5 ml of freshly prepared ferric chloride hexahydrate ( $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ). A standard curve

was made using L-Ascorbic acid in the following concentrations: 0, 10, 50, 100, 250, 500, 750, 1000  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  ( $R^2 > 0.99$ ). Each MeOH extract (Section 2.4) or standard (10  $\mu\text{l}$ ) was combined with 300  $\mu\text{l}$  of the FRAP reagent and 100  $\mu\text{l}$  of the mixture was transferred in duplicate in a 96-well plate. Absorbance was measured immediately using a plate reader (Tecan GENios, Geneva, Switzerland) at 595 nm.

## 2.7 Total carotenoids

An aliquot of the acetone extracts prepared as previously described (Section 2.4) was used to quantify the total carotenoid content of the samples spectrophotometrically. Absorbance was measured at 470, 645 and 662 nm in a spectrophotometer (UV-VIS, Perkin Elmers, UK). The total amount of carotenoids was calculated according to the following equations by Lichtenthaler (Lichtenthaler & Buschmann, 2001).

$$C_a = 11.24 A_{662} - 2.04 A_{645}$$

$$C_b = 20.13 A_{645} - 4.19 A_{662}$$

$$C_{a+b} = 7.05 A_{662} + 18.09 A_{645}$$

$$C_{x+c} = \frac{1000 A_{470} - 190 C_a - 63.14 C_b}{214}$$

\*Chlorophyll a ( $C_a$ ), Chlorophyll b ( $C_b$ ), Total Chlorophylls ( $C_{a+b}$ ), Total Carotenoids ( $C_{x+c}$ ). Equations are based on specific absorption coefficients for 100% acetone. The pigment concentrations obtained by inserting the measures absorbance values are  $\mu\text{g/ml}$  plant extract solution.

## 2.8 Quantification of carotenoids via HPLC

To determine the amount of lutein, zeaxanthin and  $\beta$ -carotene present, the acetone extracts were used (Section 2.4). Carotenoids were quantified using the method developed by Guiffrida *et al.* (Guiffrida, Dugo, Torre, Bignardi, Cavazza, Corradini, et al., 2013) with modifications. 10 ml of the extract was mixed with 10 ml of diethyl ether, 10 ml of water and 5ml of 10% (v/v) NaCl. Two layers were formed and the lower - acetone phase was discarded. The upper layer containing the ether was collected in a glass vial and anhydrous  $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4$  was added to it to remove any moisture from the solution. The ether phase was transferred to a clean glass vial, the volume was adjusted to 10ml with diethyl ether and the solution was condensed under nitrogen gas. The dry residue was then reconstituted in 1 ml of methyl tert- butyl ether (MTBE):MeOH (1:1, v/v), filtered using 0.22  $\mu\text{m}$  syringe driven filter unit and analysed by HPLC. The analyses were performed using an YMC30 column (5  $\mu\text{m}$  250 x 4.6 mm) on a HP Agilent 1050 series HPLC system. The mobile phases used were as follows: Eluent A, consisting of MeOH:MTBE:H<sub>2</sub>O (82:16:2 v/v/v) and Eluent B, consisting of MeOH:MTBE:H<sub>2</sub>O (23:75:2 v/v/v). The analyses followed a gradient program for the mobile phases, 0 min 0% B, 20 min 0% B, 80 min 70% B, 90 min 70% B. The protocol used a 1 mL/min flow rate and a 100  $\mu\text{L}$  injection volume. UV-vis spectra were gathered in the range of 190-600 nm and the chromatograms were analysed at 450 nm. Identification was based on retention times by comparison with HPLC grade standards of lutein, zeaxanthin and  $\beta$ -carotene (Extrasynthese, France).

## 2.9 Identification and quantification of glucosinolates and flavonols via LC-MS/MS

Methanol extracts, prepared as described above, were used for the quantification

210 of glucosinolates and flavonols in the samples (Section 2.4.1). 1ml of each extract  
211 was filtered using a 0.22  $\mu\text{m}$  syringe driven filter unit (Millex; EMD Millipore,  
212 Billerica, MA, USA) and then diluted using 9ml LC-MS grade water. For the  
213 quantification of glucosinolates and flavonols, external calibration curves of 12 mM  
214 sinigrin hydrate and isorhamnetin standards were prepared using the following  
215 concentrations (56  $\text{ng}\cdot\mu\text{l}^{-1}$ , 42  $\text{ng}\cdot\mu\text{l}^{-1}$ , 28  $\text{ng}\cdot\mu\text{l}^{-1}$ , 14  $\text{ng}\cdot\mu\text{l}^{-1}$ , 5.6  $\text{ng}\cdot\mu\text{l}^{-1}$ ,  $R^2 > 0.99$ ).  
216 Glucosinolates and flavonols were analysed by LC-MS/MS using an Agilent 1200  
217 LC system coupled to an Agilent 1100 series LC/MSD mass trap spectrometer.  
218 Separation conditions of samples and MS analysis settings used are identical to  
219 those described by Bell, et al. (2015) . Glucosinolates were quantified at 229 nm  
220 and flavonols at 330 nm. The identification was performed using the compounds  
221 nominal mass and the analysis of their fragmentation patterns, and also by the  
222 comparison with previously published data. All data were analysed using Agilent  
223 ChemStation.

## 224 *2.10 Statistical Analysis*

225 The results are presented as the mean of three biological replicates ( $n = 3$ ) for  
226 each sample. One-way ANOVA and Dunnett's multiple comparisons test were  
227 used for comparison of all treatments related to the raw watercress. These  
228 analyses were carried out using GraphPad Prism version 5.0a for Mac OS  
229 X, GraphPad software (Version 5.0a La Jolla, California, USA). Principal  
230 component analysis (PCA) and correlation analysis were performed using XL Stat  
231 (Version 2016 Addinsoft, New York City, New York, USA).

## 3.0 Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Total phenols content

Fresh watercress had the highest amount of total phenols ( $14.86 \pm 2.02$  mg GAE  $\text{g}^{-1}$  DW) compared to the processed samples (Figure 1A). Our results are in agreement with that of Aires, Carvalho, Rosa and Saavedra (2013) who found the phenolic content of watercress to be  $14.00 \pm 0.03$  mg GAE  $\text{g}^{-1}$  DW. In comparison to other vegetables in the Brassica family, watercress is a rich source of phenolic compounds. It has a similar amount to kale ( $16.67 \pm 0.67$  mg GAE  $\text{g}^{-1}$  DW) (Hagen, Borge, Solhaug & Bengtsson, 2009) and it is much higher than broccoli and cabbage which have a lower phenolic content that being 8.86 mg and 5.6 mg GAE  $\text{g}^{-1}$  DW respectively (Gliszczynska-Swiglo, Ciska, Pawlak-Lemanska, Chmielewski, Borkowski & Tyrakowska, 2006; Puupponen-Pimiä, Häkkinen, Aarni, Suortti, Lampi, Euroola, et al., 2003).

Boiling of watercress resulted in a significant decrease ( $P < 0.05$ ) in the total phenolic content in comparison with the fresh samples. Total phenolic losses ranged from 49% to 71% in the samples boiled for 2 and 10 minutes respectively. Microwaving and steaming for up to 5 minutes did not significantly affect the phenolic content of watercress ( $P > 0.05$ ). Likewise, blending with water to make a watercress smoothie and chopping did not have a significant effect on the total phenolic content in the watercress. However, storage of the smoothies and the chopped watercress samples for 120 minutes at room temperature resulted in a significant reduction of the phenolics from  $13.65 \pm 1.56$  to  $10.76 \pm 1.15$  mg GAE  $\text{g}^{-1}$  DW and from  $10.55 \pm 1.48$  to  $8.65 \pm 2.29$  mg GAE  $\text{g}^{-1}$  DW respectively (Figure 1A).

Our results are corroborated by previous studies showing that boiling of Brassica vegetables can lead to significant time dependant losses of phenolics whereas microwaving and steaming led to only minor decreases in the phenolic content of broccoli (Turkmen, Sari & Velioglu, 2005; Zhang & Hamauzu, 2004), red cabbage (Podsedeck, Sosnowska, Redzynia & Koziolkiewicz, 2008) and cauliflower (Natella, Belelli, Ramberti & Scaccini, 2010). During the process of cooking, phenolic compounds appear to be highly reactive undergoing several changes including their release from bound forms, oxidation, degradation and polymerisation (Gliszczynska-Swiglo, et al., 2006).

The losses during boiling can be attributed to water-soluble compounds leaching into the water used for boiling or due to breakdown of these compounds during thermal processing. Indeed, analysis of the water used in the boiling experiments ( $9.35 \pm 0.12$  mg GAE g<sup>-1</sup> DW) for total phenolics revealed that phenols had leached into the boiling water. The total amount of phenols in the water used in boiling and the remaining phenol content of watercress was no different from the total phenols in raw watercress. The minimal effect of microwaving and steaming on the phenolic compounds is potentially a result of limited or no contact of the samples with water and also the inactivation of oxidative enzymes preventing the disruption of phenolic biosynthesis and degradation (Vallejo, Tomás-Barberán & García-Viguera, 2003).

### *3.2 Flavonols identification and quantification*

Flavonol profiling of watercress revealed three main derivatives namely kaempferol, quercetin and isorhamnetin as well as feruloyl, ceffeoyl, p-coumaroyl and sinapoyl glucosides attached to kaempferol and quercetin. Kampferol-3-diglucoside-7-glucoside was the most abundant flavonol detected ( $3.76 \pm 0.09$  mg

g<sup>-1</sup> DW). The flavonols identified in the fresh watercress leaves are similar to those defined by Martinez-Sanchez, et al. (2008).

Domestic processing of watercress resulted in a significant decrease in the levels of all quantified flavonols (Table 1). The only exception was Q 3,4'diGlc-3'-(p.coum-Glc) + K 3,4'-diGlc which appeared to be the most stable of all flavonols and were only significantly affected by boiling ( $P < 0.05$ ). Total flavonol losses suggest that these compounds are particularly sensitive to all cooking regimes used. Boiling for 10 minutes nearly depleted all watercress samples of flavonols in a time dependent manner. The unstable nature of flavonols was also apparent in chopped watercress and watercress smoothie with the levels going down to  $3.42 \pm 0.32$  and  $4.11 \pm 0.36$  mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW respectively as compared to the total amount of flavonols in the fresh samples ( $10.70 \pm 1.07$  mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW,  $P < 0.001$ ). Similarly to total phenols, the highest retention of flavonols was observed in the microwaved watercress followed by steamed.

### 3.3 Carotenoid content

In contrast to the previous assays, boiling of watercress resulted in an increased concentration of total measurable carotenoids, from  $2.35 \pm 0.22$  mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW in the fresh samples to  $3.13 \pm 0.20$  mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW after 2 minutes of cooking and up to  $3.28 \pm 0.30$  mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW after 5 minutes of boiling (Table 1). Microwaving and steaming did not have a significant impact on the level of total carotenoids ( $P > 0.05$ ). On the other hand, the watercress smoothie had significantly lower total carotenoid content, with the levels decreasing from  $1.54 \pm 0.21$  to  $1.11 \pm 0.08$  mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW after 60 minutes of storage at ambient temperature. A similar decreasing trend was observed in the chopped watercress samples.

305 The individual carotenoids identified and quantified in our watercress samples  
306 were  $\beta$ -carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin and they all resulted in distinct responses  
307 upon domestic processing.  $\beta$ -carotene was the most abundant of the three  
308 quantified carotenoids ( $0.95 \pm 0.08 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$ ) and its levels significantly  
309 increased after thermal treatment of the watercress samples. Boiling for 5 minutes  
310 resulted in  $\beta$ -carotene being significantly increased up to  $1.75 \pm 0.09 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$   
311 as compared to the raw samples ( $P < 0.001$ ). In the microwaved watercress  
312 samples  $\beta$ -carotene was increased up to  $1.48 \pm 0.26 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$  ( $P < 0.01$ ) and in  
313 the samples steamed for 15 minutes levels went up to  $1.54 \pm 0.07 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$   
314 ( $P < 0.001$ ).  $\beta$ -carotene was decreased in the watercress smoothie only after  
315 storage for 30 and 60 and 120 minutes ( $P < 0.01$ ) therefore, immediate  
316 consumption of a watercress smoothie ensures sufficient intake of  $\beta$ -carotene. No  
317 significant differences were found in the chopped samples.

318 Lutein content of fresh watercress samples was  $0.24 \pm 0.02 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$  and it  
319 exhibited the highest degree of stability after watercress processing. It was  
320 significantly increased only after 5 minutes of boiling going up to  $0.36 \pm 0.02 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$   
321 ( $P < 0.05$ ). Significant decreases in lutein were only observed in the smoothie  
322 after 120 minutes of storage ( $P < 0.05$ ). Zeaxanthin concentration in fresh  
323 watercress was notably lower than  $\beta$ -carotene and lutein ( $0.02 \pm 0.00 \text{ mg g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$ ).  
324 It was dramatically affected by boiling with increases higher than 6 and 3 times, as  
325 compared to fresh watercress, after boiling for 5 minutes and steaming for 10  
326 minutes respectively.

327 Increases in the carotenoid contents of other Brassica vegetables such as  
328 broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower upon boiling and steaming  
329 have been reported by a number of research groups (Bernhardt & Schlich, 2006;



330 Gliszczynska-Swiglo, et al., 2006; Hart, et al., 1995). Elevations in the measurable  
331 carotenoid concentrations after thermal treatments can be explained by changes  
332 in the plant cell wall due to the breakdown of cellulose as well as improved  
333 extractability of carotenoids from the plant as a result of the denaturation of  
334 carotenoid-protein complexes due to thermal processing (Khachik, Beecher, Goli  
335 & Lusby, 1991).

### 336 *3.4 Glucosinolate identification and quantification*

337 Gluconasturtiin was the most abundant glucosinolate in fresh and cooked  
338 watercress samples followed by the indole glucosinolates: glucobrassicin, 4-  
339 methoxyglucobrassicin, 4-hydroxyglucobrassicin and the aliphatic glucosinolate  
340 glucoibarin (Table 3). The profile characterised here is similar to that previously  
341 defined by Boyd, et al. (2006); Gill, et al. (2007).

342 Glucosinolate quantification revealed a major impact of cooking on the levels of  
343 these phytochemicals. Boiling reduced the levels of total glucosinolates by up to  
344 63% and led to significant losses of all the individual glucosinolates identified in this  
345 study ( $P < 0.001$ ). Considerable glucosinolate losses after boiling of Brassica  
346 vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts, have also been  
347 observed in other studies performed by a number of research groups (Song &  
348 Thornalley, 2007; Vallejo, Tomás-Barberán & Garcia-Viguera, 2002). Heat  
349 application combined with cooking in water can result in depletion of  
350 glucosinolates in Brassica as a result of enzyme activity modification and  
351 thermally induced breakdown processes (Jones, 2007; Palermo, et al., 2014).  
352 Boiling of watercress in water caused significant loss of glucosinolates that most  
353 likely have leached into the cooking water. Similar conclusions were drawn by  
354 Song, et al. (2007) who showed that boiling of Brassica vegetables leads to

355 significant leaching of glucosinolates in the boiling water. Jones (2007) have  
356 shown that the glucosinolate losses in Brassica vegetables are positively  
357 correlated with the cooking time.

358 Microwaving and steaming had a subtle effect on glucosinolate concentrations  
359 with minor losses at the longest cooking duration, as compared to the other  
360 treatments. Microwaving and steaming for 2 or 5 minutes did not result in major  
361 losses of total glucosinolates suggesting that these cooking methods will ensure a  
362 higher retention rate of these phytochemicals. Our results are in agreement with  
363 that of Song, et al. (2007) who examined the impact of different cooking methods  
364 on broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and green cabbage. This observation is  
365 likely due to denaturation and subsequent deactivation of the myrosinase enzyme,  
366 which depletes glucosinolates in favour of their hydrolysis to isothiocyanates, after  
367 application of high temperatures during cooking (Verkerk, vanderGaag, Dekker &  
368 Jongen, 1997). We found that cooking by steaming resulted in a slight increase in  
369 gluconasturtiin concentrations from 1.76 to 2.04 mg g<sup>-1</sup> DW (P<0.05) and it can  
370 therefore be considered as the preferred method of watercress consumption to  
371 maximise gluconasturtiin levels. Elevated gluconasturtiin concentrations upon  
372 steaming are also reported by Gliszczynska-Swiglo, et al. (2006) in broccoli.  
373 Increases in other glucosinolates in Brassica vegetables subjected to steaming  
374 have been also been noted in a number of studies (Pellegrini, Chiavaro, Gardana,  
375 Mazzeo, Contino, Gallo, et al., 2010; Vallejo, et al., 2002). The inactivation of  
376 myrosinase at the high temperatures such as the ones reached during steaming,  
377 can temporarily cease the conversion of glucosinolates to isothiocyanates  
378 (Vallejo, et al., 2002) a process which can be undertaken post ingestion, *in vivo*,  
379 by the action of the endogenous bacterial myrosinase in the gut (Rouzaud, Rabot,

380 Ratcliffe & Duncan, 2003). Furthermore, heat application leads to plant cell  
381 structure disintegration allowing glucosinolates to be released from their bound  
382 forms on the plant cell wall making these compounds more recoverable during  
383 extraction (Gliszczynska-Swiglo, et al., 2006). Steaming is performed without  
384 direct contact of the plant material and water, preventing the leaching of  
385 glucosinolates into it.

386 Homogenisation by blending watercress with water to create a smoothie resulted  
387 in dramatic reductions in glucosinolates stemming mainly from the complete loss  
388 of gluconasturtiin ( $P < 0.001$ ). Upon chopping losses ranged from 35% to 46% after  
389 120 minutes of storage at room temperature. Chopping of vegetables before  
390 consumption is a regular practise and this can lead to decreased glucosinolate  
391 content since they are exposed to myrosinase for conversion to isothiocyanates.  
392 This was reflected in our results and those of others (Smith, Mithen & Johnson,  
393 2003; Song, et al., 2007), and it was particularly apparent in the gluconasturtiin  
394 quantification. When watercress was homogenised to create a smoothie,  
395 gluconasturtiin was completely lost and the levels of other glucosinolates were  
396 significantly diminished. Our results are comparable with results from a study  
397 performed by Smith, et al. (2003) where homogenisation for juice extraction from  
398 Brussels sprouts led to loss of glucosinolates which were converted to  
399 isothiocyanates and other breakdown products due to the exposure of  
400 glucosinolates to myrosinase enzyme. Song, et al. (2007) observed that shredding  
401 of Brassica vegetables and subsequent storage at ambient temperature results in  
402 major losses of glucosinolates with concurrent formation of isothiocyanates.  
403 Isothiocyanates such as PEITC are highly volatile compounds therefore they are  
404 prone to evaporation as observed by Rose, et al. (2000) who did not detect PEITC

405 in watercress aqueous extracts. However, Ji, Kuo and Morris (2005) noted that  
406 PEITC remains stable in aqueous buffers with a half-life of 56 h at ambient  
407 temperature. This suggests that smoothies or juices made from watercress, which  
408 is rich in PEITC, should be freshly consumed after preparation to ensure adequate  
409 ingestion.

### 410 *3.5 Antioxidant activity*

411 The antioxidant activity of all watercress samples was determined using the FRAP  
412 assay (Figure 1B). Fresh watercress had an antioxidant activity of  $74.54 \pm 10.81$   
413  $\mu\text{mol AAE g}^{-1} \text{DW}$ . Watercress was found to have the highest antioxidant activity  
414 when compared to spinach, rocket and mizuna (Martinez-Sanchez, et al., 2008;  
415 Payne, Mazzer, Clarkson & Taylor, 2013).

416 Boiling dramatically decreased the antioxidant capacity of watercress over time as  
417 compared to raw watercress, with losses reaching 67% of total antioxidant activity  
418 for samples cooked for 10 minutes (Figure 1B). Antioxidant activity analysis of the  
419 cooking water showed that the losses observed during boiling are due to leaching  
420 of antioxidant compounds in the water ( $46.03 \pm 9.42 \mu\text{mol AAE g}^{-1} \text{DW}$ ). In  
421 contrast, microwaving and steaming of watercress did not result in any significant  
422 losses. Chopping and blending to smoothie had no significant impact on the  
423 antioxidant activity of the samples, however storage of these samples at room  
424 temperature for 30 or 120 minutes resulted in a significant decrease in antioxidant  
425 activity. Chopping and blending to smoothie reduced the antioxidant activity to  
426  $42.84 \pm 8.00$  and  $48.47 \pm 9.63 \mu\text{mol AAE g}^{-1} \text{DW}$  at 120 minutes of storage  
427 respectively. The antioxidant activity of raw and cooked samples followed a similar  
428 trend to that found for total phenols with a significant correlation between these  
429 measures ( $R^2 = 0.759$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

430 In a study carried out by Ismail, Marjan and Foong (2004) it was found that boiling  
431 for 1 minute significantly decreased the antioxidant activity of kale, but not that of  
432 cabbage. Zhang and Hamauzu Zhang, et al. (2004) showed that after boiling and  
433 microwaving, broccoli lost 65% and 65.3% of its total antioxidant activity  
434 respectively.

435 Since the antioxidant activity of plants may be defined by the concentration of  
436 phenols and ascorbic acid in combination with other phytochemicals, leaching of  
437 these compounds into the boiling water, or oxidation and degradation of them  
438 during cooking, can lead to lower antioxidant activity of watercress (Gliszczyńska-  
439 Swigło, et al., 2006; Vallejo, et al., 2003).

### 440 *3.6 Watercress phytochemical profile modifications upon cooking*

441 PCA revealed distinct phytochemical profiles for watercress cooked using different  
442 regimes (Figure 2). The profiles obtained from microwaved and steamed  
443 watercress closely resembled that of fresh watercress with these cooking  
444 methodologies positively correlating with the phenolics, carotenoids and  
445 glucosinolate concentrations. In stark contrast, boiled watercress has a  
446 phytochemical profile very different from that of fresh watercress characterised by  
447 elevated carotenoid amounts ( $R^2 = 0.668$ ) and significant losses in glucosinolates  
448 and flavonols, which essentially result in compromised antioxidant activity ( $R^2 =$   
449  $-0.596$ ). Chopped watercress and watercress smoothie samples have similar  
450 phytochemical profiles and separate from the fresh samples on the first principal  
451 component characterised by losses of all the phytochemicals quantified in our  
452 study. Cooking time appears to be negatively correlated with microwaving, boiling  
453 and steaming but exposure of chopped samples and watercress smoothie to  
454 ambient temperature for extended time periods does not appear to have a

particular impact on the measureable phytochemicals in these samples, expect in the total phenolic content of stored chopped watercress. Antioxidant activity as measured by the FRAP assay, exhibits a significant positive correlation with microwaving ( $R^2= 0.452$ ) driven by higher concentrations of glucosinolates and flavonols suggesting that it should be the preferred method of watercress preparation when it is not consumed raw.

#### **4.0 Conclusions**

This study clearly demonstrates that health-promoting compounds in watercress are significantly influenced by domestic processing methods. Cooking by microwaving and steaming preserves the levels of most phytochemicals in watercress. Domestic processing can have a detrimental effect on the bioactives which may be responsible for the health promoting properties of watercress. Satisfactory retention of beneficial phytochemicals in watercress may be achieved by avoiding boiling which results in a compromised phytochemical profile.

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**Figure 1 (A)** Total phenols content in raw and processed samples expressed as gallic acid equivalents (GAE) in mg g<sup>-1</sup> of dry weight (DW). **(B)** FRAP-assay results for the measurement of the antioxidant activity in raw and cooked watercress samples. Results are presented as ascorbic acid equivalents (AAE) in mg g<sup>-1</sup> of DW. Data is mean of three biological replicates + SD. Significance: \*, P < 0.05; \*\*, P < 0.01; \*\*\* P < 0.001 as compared to carotenoid content of raw watercress. (BD: Boiled, MW: Microwaved, ST: Steamed, SM: Smoothie, CH: Chopped).

**Figure 2** PCA scores of all cooked samples (□) and loadings plot for all quantified phytochemicals (●). Abbreviations: 4-MGB, 4-methoxyglucobrassicin; 4-HGB, 4-hydroxyglucobrassicin; KSG, K 3-(sinp-Glc)-4'Glc; KSTG, K 3-(sinp-triGlc)-7-Glc; QDGCG, QCSG, Q 3-(caf-Glc)-3'-(sinp-Glc)-4'-Glc; KDG, K 3-diGlc-7-Glc; IG, I 3-Glc; KFTG, K 3-(fer-triGlc)-7 Glc; QCG+KDG Q 3,4'diGlc-3'-(p.coum-Glc) + K 3,4'-diGlc.

**Table 1** Concentration of individual and average total flavonols in raw and processed watercress samples. Data is presented in mg g<sup>-1</sup> of DW (mean ± SD). Experiment was performed with three biological replicates per group. Significance: \*, P < 0.05; \*\*, P < 0.01; \*\*\* P < 0.001 as compared to flavonoid content of raw watercress. Abbreviations: K, kaempferol; I, isorhamnetin; Q, quercetin; Glc;

611 glucoside, fer, feroloyl; sinp, sinapoyl; p.coum, p-coumaroyl; caf, caffeoyl.  
612 <sup>a</sup>Flavonols co-elute.

613  
614 **Table 2.** Quantification of total and specific carotenoids, in raw and processed  
615 watercress samples. Data is presented as absolute carotenoid concentration in  
616 mg g<sup>-1</sup> of DW (mean ± SD). Experiment was performed with three biological  
617 replicates per group. Significance: \*, P < 0.05; \*\*, P < 0.01; \*\*\*P < 0.001 as  
618 compared to carotenoid content of raw watercress. <sup>a</sup> Total amount of carotenoids  
619 measured spectrophotometrically.

620 **Table 3** Concentration of individual and average total glucosinolates in raw and  
621 processed watercress samples. Data is presented in mg g<sup>-1</sup> of DW (mean ± SD).  
622 Experiment was performed with three biological replicates per group. Significance:  
623 \*, P < 0.05; \*\*, P < 0.01; \*\*\*, P < 0.001 as compared to carotenoid content of raw  
624 watercress.

625  
626