

Description**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

5 The present invention relates to a method of producing in a high yield cells of a microorganism of the species Rhodococcus rhodochrous having a high nitrile hydratase activity.

In recent years, there have been increasing attempts to utilize microorganisms and enzymes as they are or in immobilized state as catalysts for various single or complex chemical reactions.

10 Nitrile hydratase has been found by Hideaki Yamada, one of the present inventors, et al. as an enzyme capable of hydrating nitriles to produce the corresponding amides. (Reference: Agric. Biol. Chem. 46 1165 (1982)) As one example of the utilization of this enzyme, a method for preparation of amides from nitriles in the presence of bacteria having nitrile hydratase has been proposed. (References: Japanese Patent Pub. No. 37951/1984 and U.S. Patent No. 4,637,982)

15 Further, we have proposed a method for preparation of amides, especially suitable for preparation of amides from aromatic nitriles. (References: Japanese Patent Appln. No. 231744/1988 and U.S. Patent Appln. Ser. No. 243,986) Under this situation, a method that can ensure the production of cells of Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria having a high nitrile hydratase activity in a high yield would be remarkably beneficial.

20 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to solve the above problem by adding specific substances, i.e., urea or its specific derivative and cobalt ion, to a culture medium in the cultivation of the bacteria.

25 Thus, the method for cultivation of bacteria of the species Rhodococcus rhodochrous having a high nitrile hydratase activity according to this invention comprises adding to a culture medium at least one of urea and urea derivatives of the following formulae [I] to [III]:



30 wherein R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 each are -H, -CH₃ or -C₂H₅, all the substituents not being -H;



wherein R_5 and R_6 each are -H, -CH₃ or -C₂H₅; and



and cobalt ion in the preparation of cells of bacteria having nitrile hydratase activity by cultivating Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria capable of producing nitrile hydratase.

40 The addition of at least one of urea and specific urea derivatives of formulae [I] to [III] and cobalt ion to the culture medium during the cultivation of Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria remarkably increases the nitrile hydratase activity per unit culture fluid.

This increase in nitrile hydratase activity per unit culture fluid is presumably traceable to the increase in cell concentration (i.e., yield) and/or cell activity (i.e., quantity of the nitrile hydratase in the cells).

45 In the present invention, the addition of urea or a derivative thereof and cobalt ion is especially effective in increasing the cell activity.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**50 I. Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria**

The bacteria used in the present invention are Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria having nitrile hydratase activity and the capability of hydrating nitriles, particularly, even aromatic nitriles, to produce the corresponding amides. A specific example of such bacteria is Rhodococcus rhodochrous, strain J-1 (FERM BP-1478), disclosed in Japanese Patent Appln. No. 231744/1988 and U.S. Patent Appln. Ser. No. 243,986
55 mentioned earlier. The details of the strain J-1 are given in these patent applications as follows.

1. Origin and Deposition

The strain J-1 was isolated by us from the soil in Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, Japan, and deposited on September 18, 1987 with the Fermentation Research Institute, Agency of Industrial Science and Technology, Ministry of International Trade and Industry of Japan, where it was assigned the accession number FERM BP-1478 under the Budapest Treaty.

2. Bacteriological Characteristics

10 (a) Morphological Characteristics

- (1) Shape and size of cell: $0.9-1.0\ \mu \times 3-10\ \mu$
- (2) Polymorphism: An elongated rod-shaped cell in the initial stage of cultivation grows to form a straight stick with snapping, and then is divided into short bacillus form.
- 15 (3) Motility: Immotile
- (4) Formation of spores: None
- (5) Grain staining: Positive
- (6) Acid-fast property: Negative
- (7) Heterophile granulocyte: Observed

20 (b) Cultural Characteristics on Various Culture Media (30 ° C)

- (1) Bouillon-agar plate culture: Circle with 1-mm diameter (48 hours), irregular, smooth, rather dry on the surface, flat, opaque, and pale orange-pink.
- 25 (2) Bouillon-agar slant culture: Filament with a smooth surface and a slightly convex, rather dry cross section, and pale orange-pink.
- (3) Bouillon liquid culture: Abundant growth with formation of membrane. The culture fluid becomes fairly turbid and a precipitate is formed as the cell grows.
- (4) Bouillon-gelatin stab culture: Good growth on the surface in the shape of a funnel along the stabbed area, but scant growth in the undersurface. Gelatin is not liquefied.
- 30 (5) Litmus-milk: No change.

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(c) Physiological properties

5	(1) Reduction of nitrate:	Positive
	(2) Denitrification:	Negative
	(3) MR Test:	Negative
	(4) VP Test:	Negative
10	(5) Formation of indole:	Positive
	(6) Formation of hydrogen sulfide:	Positive
	(7) Hydrolysis of starch:	Negative
15	(8) Utilization of citric acid:	
	Kocur's culture medium:	Negative
	Christensen's culture medium:	Positive
20	(9) Utilization of inorganic nitrogen source:	
	Nitrate:	Positive
	Ammonium salt:	Positive
	(10) Formation of pigments:	Negative
25	(11) Urease:	Positive
	(12) Oxidase:	Negative
	(13) Catalase:	Positive
30	(14) Hydrolysis of cellulose:	Negative
	(15) Growth range:	pH: 5-10 Temp.: 10-41°C
35	(16) Behavior toward oxygen:	Aerobic
	(17) Decomposition of tyrosine:	Positive
	(18) Decomposition of adenine:	Positive
	(19) Phosphatase:	Positive
40	(20) Hydrolysis of Tween 80:	Positive
	(21) O-F Test:	0 (weak)
45	(22) Heat resistance (in 10% skim milk at 72°C for 15 min.):	None

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(23) Formation of acid & gas from saccharide:

	<u>Acid</u>	<u>Gas</u>
5	L-Arabinose	-
	D-Xylose	-
	D-Glucose	+
10	D-Mannose	-
	D-Fructose	+
	Maltose	+
	Sucrose	+
15	Lactose	-
	Trehalose	-
	D-Sorbitol	+
20	D-Mannitol	+
	Glycerol	+

(24) Growth in a single carbon source:

	Inositol	-
25	Maltose	+
	D-Mannitol	+
	Rhamnose	-
	D-Sorbitol	+
30	m-Hydroxybenzoic acid	+
	Sodium adipate	+
	Sodium benzoate	+
35	Sodium citrate	+
	Sodium lactate	+
	Testotetrone	+
	L-Tyrosine	+
40	Glycerol (1%)(w/v)	(+)
	Trehalose	(+)
	p-Hydroxybenzoic acid (1%)(w/v)	+
45	(+) : slightly positive	

(25) Analysis of fatty acid & cell wall: The cell contains unsaturated and saturated straight-chain fatty acids and tuberculostearic acid. TLC of mycolic acid gives a single spot.

55 According to the characterization of the above listed bacteriological properties in the light of Bergy's Manual of Systematic Bacteriology (1986), the strain J-1 is an aerobic, Gram-positive, weakly acid-fast, catalase-positive and non-endospore forming bacillus with no flagellum. This strain is in the shape of an elongated bacillus and a mycelium in the initial stage of growth, grows with branching and then is divided

into short bacillus form. In view of these features, the strain J-1 is considered to fall under Nocardia type bacteria.

The analysis of the fatty acid composition has revealed that the bacterium contains unsaturated and saturated straight-chain fatty acids including tuberculostearic acid. Since the TLC of mycolic acid gives a single spot having the same Rf value as the standard bacterium Rhodococcus rhodochrous (IFO 3338), the bacterium is distinguished from those of the genus Mycobacterium. This bacterium is also distinguished from Nocardia bacteria in view of the composition (number of carbon atoms) of the mycolic acid.

As a result of investigation of other biochemical properties, this bacterium has been identified as Rhodococcus rhodochrous.

II. Urea and its derivatives

In the present invention, urea and urea derivatives of the formulae [I] to [III] shown hereinbefore function as enzyme inducers, but, from what we have heretofore known, i.e., typical enzyme inducers are nitriles or amides, inter alia, crotonamide, it is wholly unexpected that urea and its derivatives can effectively induce nitrile hydratase. Surprisingly, urea and its derivatives, when used singly and not in combination with other enzyme inducers, exhibit far higher efficacy than conventional enzyme inducers. Furthermore, since urea is less expensive than other enzyme inducers, the method of the present invention can be advantageously applied to industry from economy viewpoint.

Examples of the compounds of the formula [I] among the urea derivatives used in the present invention are methylurea, ethylurea, 1,1-dimethylurea, and 1,3-dimethylurea.

Exemplary compounds of the formula [II] are urethane and methylurethane.

The compound of the formula [III] is thiourea.

Urea or its derivatives are added to the culture medium in one batch at one time or sequentially. The term "sequentially" as used herein is intended to mean both "continuously" and "incrementally".

III. Cobalt ion

Nitrile hydratase cannot be obtained simply by adding urea or its derivatives to the culture medium, and it is essential in the present invention that cobalt ion be added to the culture medium. (The presence of cobalt ion is essential for the production of nitrile hydratase by the bacterium of the present invention as has been set forth in Japanese Patent Appln. No. 231744/1988 and U.S. Patent No. 243,986 mentioned earlier.)

Ordinarily, cobalt ion is formed by adding a water-soluble cobalt compound to the culture medium which is aqueous. The water-soluble cobalt compounds are as defined in chemical encyclopedias, so that it may be easy for those skilled in the art to suitably select and use one of such compounds.

Typical examples of the cobalt compounds are those which afford Co^{++} or Co^{+++} , particularly Co^{++} , such as cobalt chloride, cobalt sulfate, cobalt acetate, cobalt bromide and cobalt borate.

Additionally, vitamin B_{12} and metallic cobalt can also be used as cobalt sources. Vitamin B_{12} contains cobalt in the form of a complex which is ionized by autoclave treatment, while metallic cobalt is ionized by the oxidizing function of microorganisms during cultivation.

IV. Cultivation/Production of nitrile hydratase

The Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria of the present invention can be cultivated under any conditions suitable for the purpose except that urea or its derivatives and cobalt ion are added to the culture medium.

For example, predetermined amounts of urea or its derivatives and cobalt ion are added to basal media listed below, and cultivation may be carried out at a temperature of about 15 to 50 °C, preferably about 20 to 45 °C, and more preferably about 30 °C at a pH of 7 to 9 for about 30 hours or longer, preferably for 40 hours or longer (up to, for example, 120 hours).

The overall concentration of the urea or its derivatives in the culture medium is about 1 to 30 g/l, preferably about 2 to 20 g/l, and more preferably about 5 to 15 g/l, while the concentration of the cobalt ion is about 5 to 15 mg/l as calculated in terms of CoCl_2 .

Basal medium:

Culture medium A

<u>Component</u>	<u>Amount (in 1ℓ of the medium)</u>
K_2HPO_4	13.4 g
KH_2PO_4	6.5 g
NaCl	1.0 g
$MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$	0.2 g
Vitamin mixture*	0.1 ml
Distilled water	Balance (pH 7.0)
*Composition (in 1ℓ of the solution):	
Biotin	2.0 µg
Calcium pantothenate	0.4 mg
Inositol	2.0 mg
Nicotinic acid	0.4 mg
Thiamin hydrochloride	0.4 mg
Pyridoxine hydrochloride	0.4 mg
p-Aminobenzoic acid	0.2 ng
Riboflavin	0.2 mg
Folic acid	0.01 ng
Distilled water	Balance

Culture medium B

K_2HPO_4	0.5 g
KH_2PO_4	0.5 g
$MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$	0.5 g
Yeast extract	3.0 g
Distilled water	Balance (pH 7.2)

Culture medium C

Glucose	10 g
K_2HPO_4	0.5 g
KH_2PO_4	0.5 g
$MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$	0.5 g
Yeast extract	1.0 g
Peptone	7.5 g
Distilled water	Balance (pH 7.2)

V. Experimental Examples

Measurement and Definition of Enzyme Activity

5 (1) Method for Measuring Nitrile Hydratase Activity

The nitrile hydratase activity was determined as follows.

2 ml of a reaction solution comprising 1.0 ml of benzonitrile (20 mM), 1.0 ml of 3-cyanopyridine (1 M) or 1.0 ml of acrylonitrile (1 M) as a substrate; 0.5 ml of potassium phosphate buffer (0.1 M, pH 7.0); and a
10 predetermined amount of bacterium cells (isolated from a culture fluid) was caused to react at 20 °C for a predetermined time period, and the reaction was then terminated with the addition of 0.2 ml of 1N HCl.

(2) Definition of Nitrile Hydratase Activity

15 The activity was determined for the specific activity (S.A.) and the total activity (T.A.) as defined below.

S.A.: $\mu\text{mole product amide/mg-cells/min.}$

T.A.: $\mu\text{mole product amide/ml-culture medium/min.}$

Example 1

20 Predetermined amounts of urea were each added to the above basal medium C containing 10 mg/l of CoCl_2 . To 60 ml each of the resulting culture medium was added 4 ml of a preculture fluid of Rhodococcus rhodochrous, strain J-1 (FERM BP-1478) (obtained using the basal medium C), and shake culture was carried out at 28 °C for 96 hours.

25 For comparison purposes, culture was conducted similarly in a medium containing either urea or CoCl_2 alone.

The results obtained are summarized in TABLE 1.

From the TABLE, it will be noted that the addition of both urea and CoCl_2 is essential for increased production of nitrile hydratase.

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Example 2

Strain J-1 was subjected to culture similarly as in Example 1 at 28 °C for 48 to 120 hours in the basal medium C mentioned above in the presence of 10 mg/l of CoCl_2 , while adding or not adding predeter-
35 mined amounts of enzyme inducers (urea and crotonamide) as set forth in TABLE 2.

Presented in TABLE 2 are T.A. and S.A. values obtained when the maximum T.A. values were marked during the measurements of the activity.

As is apparent from the TABLE, the use of urea alone as an enzyme inducer contributes effectively toward increasing production of nitrile hydratase.

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TABLE 1

CoCl ₂ (mg/ℓ)	Urea (g/ℓ)	Cell Concen- tration (mg/ml)	Benzonitrile		3-Cyanopyridine		Acrylonitrile	
			T.A.	S.A.	T.A.	S.A.	T.A.	S.A.
0	0	4.61	0.11	0.02	0.75	0.16	3.59	0.70
0	7.5	5.53	0.11	0.02	1.00	0.18	4.31	0.78
10	0	5.28	1.09	0.21	3.70	0.70	17.7	3.35
10	2.0	5.17	25.2	4.87	39.6	7.66	189	36.5
10	5.0	5.03	65.6	13.0	162	32.2	774	154
10	7.5	4.99	210	42.1	519	104	2480	497
10	10	4.72	186	39.4	471	99.7	2250	477
10	15	4.26	191	44.9	515	121	2460	578
10	20	3.96	162	40.9	363	91.7	1740	438

TABLE 2

Culture Medium	CoCl ₂ (mg/l)	Urea (g/l)	Crotonamide (g/l)	Benzonitrile	
				T.A.	S.A.
C	10	-	2.0	23.2	6.0
C	10	-	4.0	24.6	6.1
C	10	-	7.5	16.8	5.8
C	10	5.0	2.0	32.6	6.5
C	10	7.5	-	213	42.2

Example 3

Predetermined amounts of urea derivatives were each added to the above basal medium C containing 10 mg/l of CoCl₂. To 60 ml each of the resulting culture medium was added 4 ml of a preculture fluid of *Rhodococcus rhodochrous*, strain J-1 (FERM BP-1478) (obtained using the basal medium C), and shake culture was carried out at 28°C for 96 hours.

For comparison purposes, culture was conducted similarly in a medium containing methylurea alone or CoCl₂ alone.

The results are shown in TABLE 3 in which are presented T.A. and S.A. values obtained when the maximum T.A. values were marked during the measurements of the activity. In this TABLE are added for reference the results obtained for 7.5 g/l of urea.

As is apparent from the TABLE, the use of both a urea derivative and CoCl₂ is essential for increased production of nitrile hydratase.

TABLE 3

CoCl ₂ (mg/ℓ)	Enzyme Inducer	Amount of Enzyme Inducer (g/ℓ)	Cell Concentration (mg/ml)	3-Cyanopyridine	
				T.A.	S.A.
0	Methylurea	7.5	4.78	0	0
10	--	0	4.94	3.20	0.65
10	Methylurea	7.5	5.72	230	40.2
10	Ethylurea	7.5	5.76	245	42.5
10	1,1-Dimethylurea	7.5	6.44	150	23.3
10	1,3-Dimethylurea	7.5	4.16	104	25.0
10	Methylurethane	7.5	6.19	166	26.8
10	Thiourea	7.5	1.99	40.2	20.2
10	Urea	7.5	4.99	519	104

Claims

1. A method for cultivating bacteria of the species *Rhodococcus rhodochrous* which comprises adding to a culture medium free of crotonamide at least one of urea or urea derivatives of the following formulae [I] to [III]:



TABLE 3

CoCl ₂ (mg/ℓ)	Enzyme Inducer	Amount of Enzyme Inducer (g/ℓ)	Cell Concentration (mg/ml)	3-Cyanopyridine	
				T.A.	S.A.
0	Methylurea	7.5	4.78	0	0
10	--	0	4.94	3.20	0.65
10	Methylurea	7.5	5.72	230	40.2
10	Ethylurea	7.5	5.76	245	42.5
10	1,1-Dimethylurea	7.5	6.44	150	23.3
10	1,3-Dimethylurea	7.5	4.16	104	25.0
10	Methylurethane	7.5	6.19	166	26.8
10	Thiourea	7.5	1.99	40.2	20.2
10	Urea	7.5	4.99	519	104

Claims

1. A method for cultivating bacteria of the species *Rhodococcus rhodochrous* which comprises adding to a culture medium free of crotonamide at least one of urea or urea derivatives of the following formulae [I] to [III]:



wherein R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 each are -H, -CH₃ or -C₂H₅, all the substituents not being -H;



wherein R_5 and R_6 each are -H, -CH₃ or -C₂H₅; and



and cobalt ion for preparing cells of Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacteria having nitrile hydratase activity.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the Rhodococcus rhodochrous bacterium having nitrile hydratase activity is Rhodococcus rhodochrous, strain J-1 (FERM BP-1478).

3. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein urea is added to the culture medium.

4. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the overall concentration of the urea or its derivatives in the culture is 1 to 30 g/l.

5. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the concentration of the cobalt ion is 5 to 15 mg/l as calculated in terms of CoCl₂.

Patentansprüche

1. Verfahren zum Züchten von Bakterien der Spezies Rhodococcus rhodochrous, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß zu einem Kulturmedium ohne Crotonamid mindestens ein Harnstoff oder Harnstoffderivat der folgenden Formeln [I] bis [III]:



worin R_1 , R_2 , R_3 und R_4 je -H, -CH₃ oder -C₂H₅ bedeuten und alle Substituenten nicht -H bedeuten;



worin R_5 und R_6 je -H, -CH₃ oder -C₂H₅ bedeuten; und



und Kobaltionen zur Herstellung von Zellen von Rhodococcus-rhodochrous-Bakterien mit Nitrilhydratase-Aktivität zugegeben werden.

2. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, worin das Rhodococcus-rhodochrous-Bakterium mit Nitrilhydratase-Aktivität Rhodococcus rhodochrous, Stamm J-1 (FERM BP-1478) ist.

3. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, worin Harnstoff zu dem Kulturmedium zugegeben wird.

4. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, worin die Gesamtkonzentration des Harnstoffs oder seiner Derivate in der Kultur 1 bis 30 g/l beträgt.

5. Verfahren nach Anspruch 1, worin die Konzentration der Kobaltionen 5 bis 15 mg/l, berechnet als CoCl₂, beträgt.

Revendications

1. Méthode pour la culture de bactéries de l'espèce Rhodococcus rhodochrous qui comprend l'addition à un milieu de culture exempt de crotonamide au moins de l'urée ou d'un dérivé d'urée de formules suivantes [I] à [III] :



dans laquelle R_1 , R_2 , R_3 et R_4 chacun sont -H, -CH₃ ou -C₂H₅, tous les substituants n'étant pas -H ;



dans laquelle R_5 et R_6 chacun sont -H, -CH₃ ou -C₂H₅, et



et l'ion cobalt pour préparer des cellules de la bactérie *Rhodococcus rhodochrous* ayant une activité de nitrile hydratase.

2. Méthode selon la revendication 1, où la bactérie *Rhodococcus rhodochrous* ayant l'activité de nitrile hydratase et *Rhodococcus rhodochrous*, souche J-1 (FERM BP-1478).
3. Méthode selon la revendication 1, où on ajoute de l'urée au milieu de culture.
4. Méthode selon la revendication 1, où la concentration totale en urée ou ses dérivés dans le milieu de culture est de 1 à 30 g/l.
5. Méthode selon la revendication 1, où la concentration en ions cobalt est de 5 à 15 mg/l calculée sous forme de CoCl₂.