

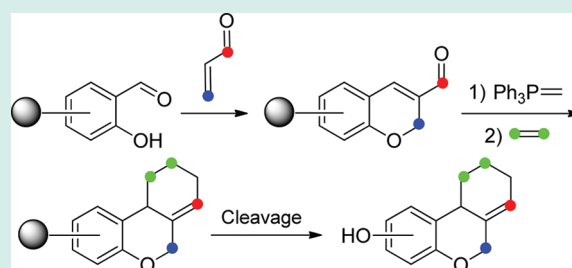
Versatile Solid-Phase Synthesis of Chromenes Resembling Classical Cannabinoids

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Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: A novel solid-phase approach toward classical cannabinoids is described. The desired tricyclic natural product analogues are assembled in only four atom economic steps: domino oxa-Michael-aldol condensation, Wittig reaction/enol-ether formation, Diels–Alder cycloaddition and cleavage. The synthesis is designed to allow combinatorial chemistry at several stages of the sequence. The variation of commercially available reagents at three of the reactions (enals/enones, Wittig salts, and dienophiles) allows the introduction of various diversity points. As proof of concept, a small library of 20 members has been synthesized with overall yields ranging from 10% to 60%.

KEYWORDS: cannabinoids, combinatorial chemistry, domino reactions, heterocycles, natural products, solid phase synthesis



INTRODUCTION

Classical cannabinoids are a group of approximately 70 terpenophenolic secondary metabolites produced by Indian hemp (*Cannabis sativa* var. *indica*). The most prominent of these psychotropic compounds is (–)- Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (Δ^9 -THC, Dronabinol, **1**, Figure 1), which was isolated by Gaoni and Mechoulam in 1964¹ and bears a tricyclic 6a,7,8,10a-tetrahydro-6H-benzo[*c*]chromene core structure.

Δ^9 -THC and other cannabinoids have been used in medicine since the 1980s to treat symptoms of cancer, pain relief, and spasticity in multiple sclerosis, or as appetite stimulants for AIDS patients.² Furthermore, they alleviate nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy and are commercially available under the trademark names of Sativex, Marinol, or Cesamet.

The physiological activities of THC and other cannabinoids are based on their interaction with certain membrane bound G-protein coupled cannabinoid receptors. So far two of these, CB₁ and CB₂, have been confirmed.³ CB₁-receptors are primarily found in the brain with the highest concentrations in the basal ganglia, cerebellum, and the limbic system, including the hippocampus. Interaction of THC with the CB₁ receptor causes the euphoric and anticonvulsive effects of cannabis. CB₂-receptors are almost exclusively located in the immune system, with the greatest density in the spleen. They are responsible for anti-inflammatory and other therapeutic activities.

The aim of this work is to generate a library of novel THC-analogous structures, which will subsequently be tested for their biological activity (e.g., interaction with CB-receptors). The identification of receptor-selective compounds will serve to minimize the adverse effects of existing drugs, such as their

addictive or psychotropic properties. Furthermore, the synthesis of diversely modified THC-like molecules will allow to explore the full therapeutic potential of cannabinoids, which ranges from Parkinson's disease and Huntington disease up to obesity and drug dependence treatment.^{2e,4}

THC and several analogous cannabinoid compounds have already been prepared synthetically.⁵ But the methods employed are usually quite rigid concerning modifications of the side chains, limiting the availability of a broad range of derivatives. To circumvent this problem, a new strategy toward the generation of cannabinoids is proposed here: combinatorial chemistry on solid supports. It is not only compatible with various substitution patterns, but also avoids extensive purification and will allow automation later on.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our approach is designed to yield diverse THC-analogues in a straightforward, four-step reaction sequence. It starts by reacting salicylaldehyde (SA) motif bearing molecules attached to a polystyrene backbone with various Michael acceptors in a domino oxa-Michael-aldol (DOMA) condensation (Figure 2).⁶

The formed 2H-chromene-3-carbaldehydes are then treated with Wittig salts or are converted into enol-ethers, yielding in both cases dienes of a different reactivity pattern. The diene moieties are later on subjected to a Diels–Alder cycloaddition

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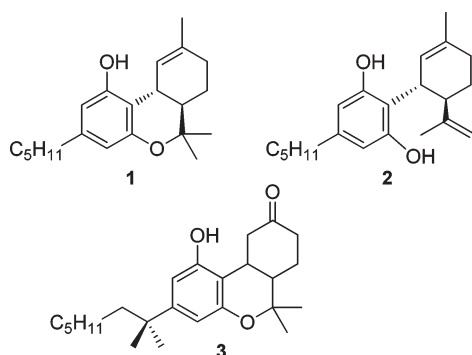


Figure 1. Cannabinoids in clinical use: Dronabinol (1), Cannabidiol (2), Nabilone (3).

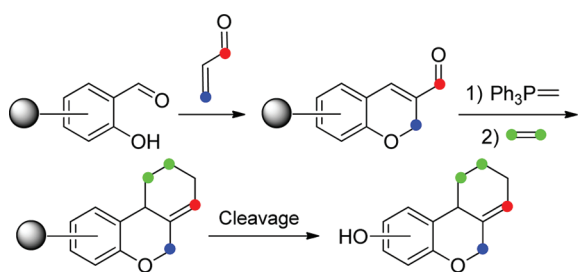


Figure 2. General approach to THC-like structures; introduction of diversity points.

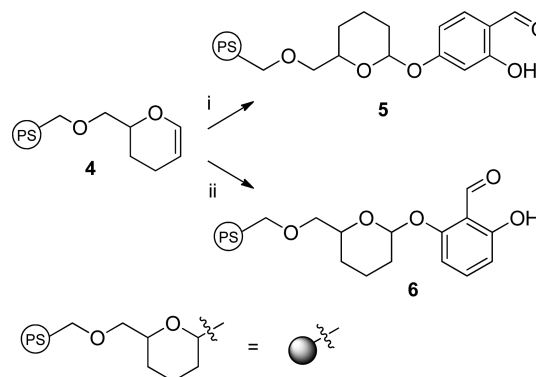
with dienophiles, concluding the route to the tricyclic structures typical for classical cannabinoids.

Our first approach was to immobilize the commercially available 4-hydroxysalicylaldehyde (4-HSA) directly on Merrifield resin.⁷ Neither treatment in 10% nor 50% TFA in CH_2Cl_2 released any of the attached material. Harsher conditions were not employed, as they would limit the number of possible functionalities to be introduced later on. The same result was found for Wang resin.⁸ Attachment and cleavage with Ellman's acid-labile DHP-linker (4) was finally successful (Scheme 1).⁹

Compared to other linkers, such as the triazene one for coupling of aniline-precursors,¹⁰ it did not require protection of the HSAs used as starting material and could be easily prepared by etherification of Merrifield resin⁷ (0.99 mmol/g).¹¹ At first, polymer 4 was treated with 4-HSA/PPTS (pyridinium *p*-toluenesulfonate) to give resin 5 in a yield of up to 48% (0.43 mmol/g) under optimized conditions (determined via cleavage from solid supports). In addition, 6-HSA¹¹ was immobilized in 52% yield (0.46 mmol/g, 6, Scheme 1).

To generate the chromene core structure the conditions for the DOMA condensation⁶ were optimized for resin 5 and acrolein as Michael acceptor. Although there is literature precedence for solid phase syntheses of chromenes,¹² the method reported herein is to the best of our knowledge the first domino reaction with SAs on solid supports.^{6a,13} Mixtures of 1,4-dioxane or tetrahydrofuran (THF) with water for better solubility of the base (DABCO, Na_2CO_3 or K_2CO_3) were explored. Nevertheless only traces of product were formed under conventional heating or ultrasound. The same was found for other basic conditions displaying good results in solution phase (*N*-methylimidazole, tetramethylguanidine,^{14a} or pyrrolidine/benzoic acid^{14b}). Finally, by employing K_2CO_3 in 1,4-dioxane with agitation at 80 °C for

Scheme 1. Immobilization of SAs on Resin 4^a



^a Reaction conditions: (i) 4-HSA, PPTS, DCE/toluene, 55 °C, 16 h. (ii) 6-HSA, PPTS, DCE/toluene, 55 °C, 16 h.

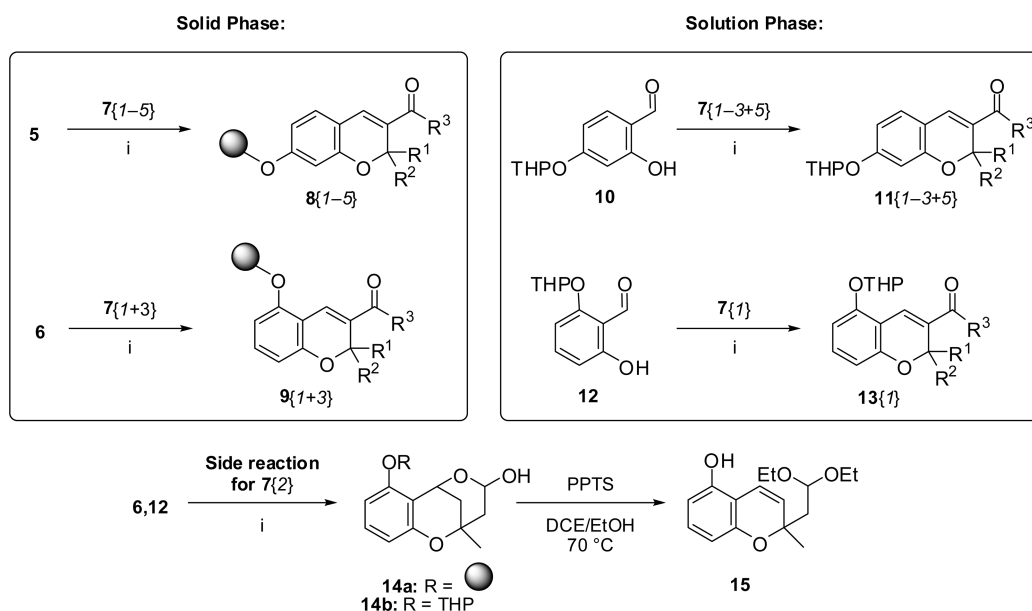
4 days, chromene 8{1} was obtained in 65% yield (Scheme 2; Table 1, Entry 1; data from [ref 6a] are included).¹⁵

Degassing of the solvent turned out to be crucial for the reproducibility of the experiments. According to these conditions, resin 5 was reacted with four other Michael acceptors (Figure 3), resulting in chromenes 8 in yields between 38–90% (Table 1, Entries 2–5). In all cases, except for entry 4, the purity of the products after cleavage was above 90%, as determined by ¹H NMR of the reactions after workup. The lower yields are probably due to prior cleavage from the resin during the DOMA condensation.

When switching to resin 6 and acrolein as Michael acceptor, the reaction would not proceed to completion. After repeating the DOMA condensation twice with the same batch of resin, the ratio of product to starting material remained at 4:1, explaining the yield of only 32% (Table 1, Entry 6). A similar result was found for crotonaldehyde (7{3}) (Entry 7). When switching to senecialdehyde (7{2}), no product could be found after cleavage, only 30% of side-product 15 formed by a vinylogous aldol condensation were isolated.^{6c,16} Apparently, the DOMA condensation is dependent on the substitution pattern of the aromatic ring and does not tolerate immobilization on position 6 very well.

To compare the results above with an analogous solution phase approach,¹⁷ THP-protected HSAs 10+12 and reagents 7{1–3+5} were also subjected to the DOMA condensation.¹⁸ With the exceptions of acrolein and methyl vinyl ketone 7{1+5}, lower yields were observed for compound 10 substituted in position 4 (Table 1, Entries 9–12). Furthermore, the resulting chromenes 11 were contaminated with many side-products that were difficult to separate. In case of substrate 12, the same trend as in solid phase could be observed: lower yields for substitution in position 6 and formation of side-product 14b with senecialdehyde (Entries 13 + 14). In conclusion, the solid phase approach was found to be more effective, especially for sterically demanding Michael acceptors. This is probably due to the high actual excess of reagents,¹⁷ a feature predestined for solid phase chemistry because of their ease of separation by filtration.

Because of the suboptimal results for the DOMA condensation with resin 6 and the consecutive low loading of 9, the sequence was only continued with resins 8 immobilized in position 4. The next step was either Wittig reaction with $\text{CH}_3\text{PPh}_3\text{Br}$ ¹⁹ to 16{1+2} or TBS-enol ether formation yielding 18{5} (Scheme 3, left).

Scheme 2. DOMA: Solid and Solution Phase^{a,b}

^a Reaction conditions: (i) K₂CO₃, 1,4-dioxane, 80 °C, 4 d. ^b For R¹, R², R³ see Table 1.

Table 1. Yields for the DOMA Condensation: Solid and Solution Phase

entry	substrate	product	R ¹	R ²	R ³	yield (%)
1 ^{6a}	5	8{1}	H	H	H	65 ^a
2 ^{6a}	5	8{2}	Me	Me	H	85 ^{a,b}
3 ^{6a}	5	8{3}	Me	H	H	90 ^a
4	5	8{4}	Ph	H	H	38 ^{a,c}
5	5	8{5}	H	H	Me	50 ^a
6 ^{6a}	6	9{1}	H	H	H	32 ^a
7 ^{6a}	6	9{3}	Me	H	H	27 ^a
8 ^{6a}	6	15				25 ^a
9 ^{6a}	10	11{1}	H	H	H	89 ^d
10 ^{6a}	10	11{2}	Me	Me	H	44 ^d
11 ^{6a}	10	11{3}	Me	H	H	75 ^d
12	10	11{5}	H	H	Me	67 ^d
13 ^{6a}	12	13{1}	H	H	H	43 ^d
14 ^{6a}	12	14b				69 ^d

^a Average isolated yield after cleavage (reproducible within a 10% yield range). ^b Formation of 5–10% of the vinylogous aldol condensation product, not isolated. ^c Additionally, 27% of starting material were recovered. ^d Isolated yield.

Again, analogous solution phase syntheses were performed,¹⁷ giving 17{1+2} and 19{5} in 80, 87, and 73% yield, respectively. In all three cases the resulting products were not stable in pure form and dimerized within days in the refrigerator. Accordingly, the yields of the solid phase approach were not determined by cleavage reaction, but by Raman spectroscopy (Scheme 3, right-hand side). Complete disappearance of the carbonyl bands from the starting materials (blue) compared to the products (red) allowed an assignment of quantitative conversion. Furthermore, resins 16{1+2} were unable to dimerize because of being immobilized, resulting in far greater stability (>1 month at room

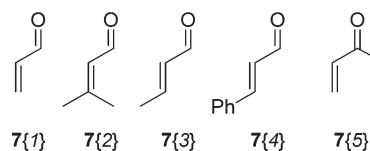


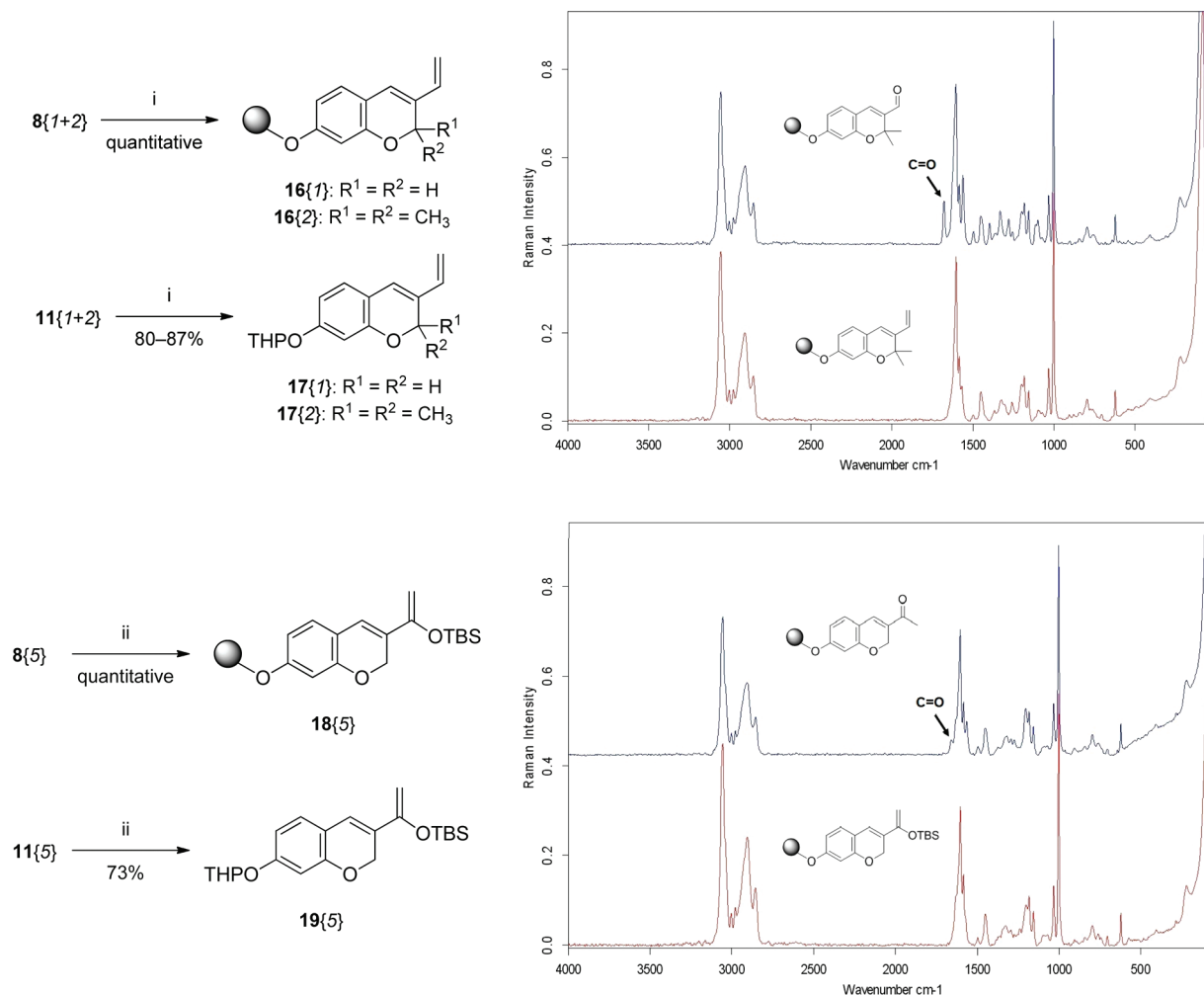
Figure 3. Diversity reagents for the DOMA condensation 7{1–5}.

temperature (r.t.)), a further reason for choosing the solid phase approach over the solution one.

For the Diels–Alder reaction, thermal conditions (80 °C) were chosen, as Lewis or Brønsted acid catalysis would lead to concomitant cleavage from the resin (Scheme 4).

Initially, the reaction of 16{1} with methyl vinyl ketone (20{1}) as dienophile was screened in different solvents (toluene, DMF, DCE). This resulted in comparable, almost quantitative yields, but the best *endo/exo* ratios were observed with toluene, making it the solvent of choice (Table 2, Entry 1).

Resin 16{1} was reacted with two further dienophiles (Entries 2 + 3). But more emphasis was paid to resin 16{2} (R¹ = R² = Me) because of its higher loading and greater similarity to THC. It was converted to 12 different products 21{2,1–12} with all diversity reagents 20 shown in Figure 4. For both dienes no general trend concerning the selectivity of the Diels–Alder reaction could be observed. It ranged from exclusively *endo* (maleimides 20{7 + 8}, Entries 10 + 11, 19) to mainly *exo* in case of acrylonitrile (20{3}, Entry 6). Usually, diastereomeric mixtures favoring the *endo*-product were formed, which could be separated by column chromatography in almost all cases. This was more of an advantage, as a higher number of compounds for later testing could be generated. In case of methyl vinyl ketone as dienophile (Entry 4), the lower yield and increased *exo*-ratio was caused by the *endo*-diastereomer being labile (starting decomposition after a few hours in the NMR tube). Generally, the *endo*-products were more prone to decomposition compared to the thermodynamically more stable *exo* ones.

Scheme 3. Wittig Reaction and Enol-Ether Formation, Including Raman Spectra^a

^a Reaction conditions: (i) $\text{CH}_3\text{PPh}_3\text{Br}$, $n\text{-BuLi}$, THF, $-35\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ to r.t., 2 h. (ii) Et_3N , TBSOTf, CH_2Cl_2 , $-30\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ to r.t., 16 h.

Worth mentioning are compounds **21**{2,11 + 12} formed from diazocarboxylates, as such heterocyclic dihydrochromenopyridazines have not been investigated concerning the CB receptors so far (entries 14 + 15).²⁰

Next, enol ether **18**{5} was subjected to the Diels–Alder reaction (Scheme 5, Entries 16–20).

The resulting tricycles **22** were at first cleaved with PPTS in DCE/EtOH giving ketones **24** directly under concomitant loss of the TBS-group (Entries 16–17). Unfortunately, the yield was reduced because of diethyl acetal **25** being formed as a side-product. When switching the solvent to THF/water, the formation of **25** was avoided, but now the TBS group was only partially cleaved-off, mainly giving enol-ethers **23**. Further treatment with TBAF in acetonitrile finally liberated tricycles **24** in all cases except for **23**{5,11}, where side-product **26**{5,11} was formed exclusively. The latter also occurred for other dienophiles (see footnotes f, g, i in Table 2) in 7–15% yield independent of the cleavage conditions. In all cases, the stereochemistry of the hydrogen atoms on the carbons of the former double bond was *anti* after isomerization from enol-ethers to the ketones.

In conclusion, a combinatorial approach toward THC-like molecules has been developed, proven by the synthesis of a library

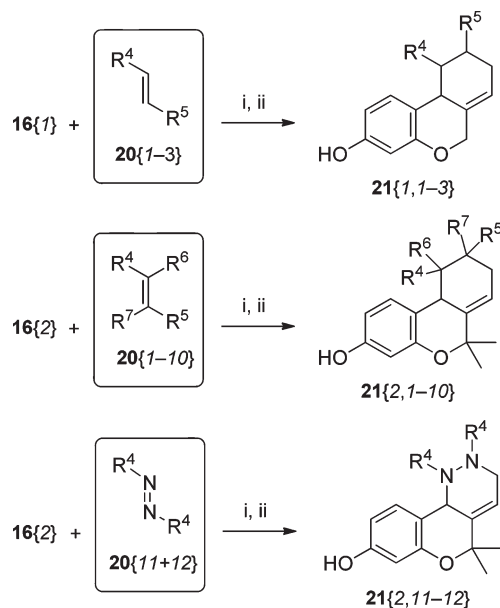
with 20 structurally different members. Almost twice this amount is available for testing, when including diastereomers and tricyclic side-products. The chromene cannabinoids are formed in up to 60% yield employing a four step solid phase synthesis. The best suited starting material is 4-HSA immobilized on Merrifield resin via a THP-linker. The route itself is open to various substitution patterns, which can simply be introduced by variation of the starting material or reagents. The latter are cheap and commercially available (Michael acceptors, Wittig salts, dienophiles).

Our solid phase approach has several advantages compared to one in solution: higher yields because of excess of reagents, increased stability of the intermediates (no decomposition by dimerization possible), plus the possibility for automation.

In the future, the latter will be exploited to explore the full potential of structural diversity. The generated library of substrates will then be tested toward affinity for the cannabinoid receptors.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

General Procedure for Immobilization. DHP-resin **4** (6 g, 0.99 mmol/g) was dried overnight at $100\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, then suspended in a

Scheme 4. Diels–Alder Cycloaddition and Cleavage^a

^a Reaction conditions: (i) Toluene, 80 °C, 2 d. (ii) PPTS, DCE/EtOH, 65 °C, 16 h.

mixture of DCE/toluene (42/18 mL) under nitrogen. 4- or 6-HSA (4.15 g, 30.0 mmol) and PPTS (2.26 g, 9.00 mmol) were added, and the mixture agitated at 55 °C overnight. Afterward, the resin was filtered, washed (CH₂Cl₂, 2 × H₂O and DMF, 2 × H₂O and THF, 3 × MeOH and CH₂Cl₂, 4 × CH₂Cl₂, with 20 mL/g resin each), and dried under vacuum.

General Procedure for Cleavage. A 200 mg portion of the resin was suspended in a 1:1 mixture of EtOH/DCE (4 mL) or a

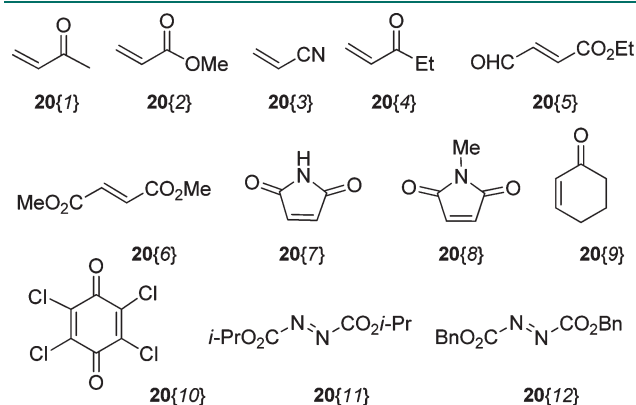


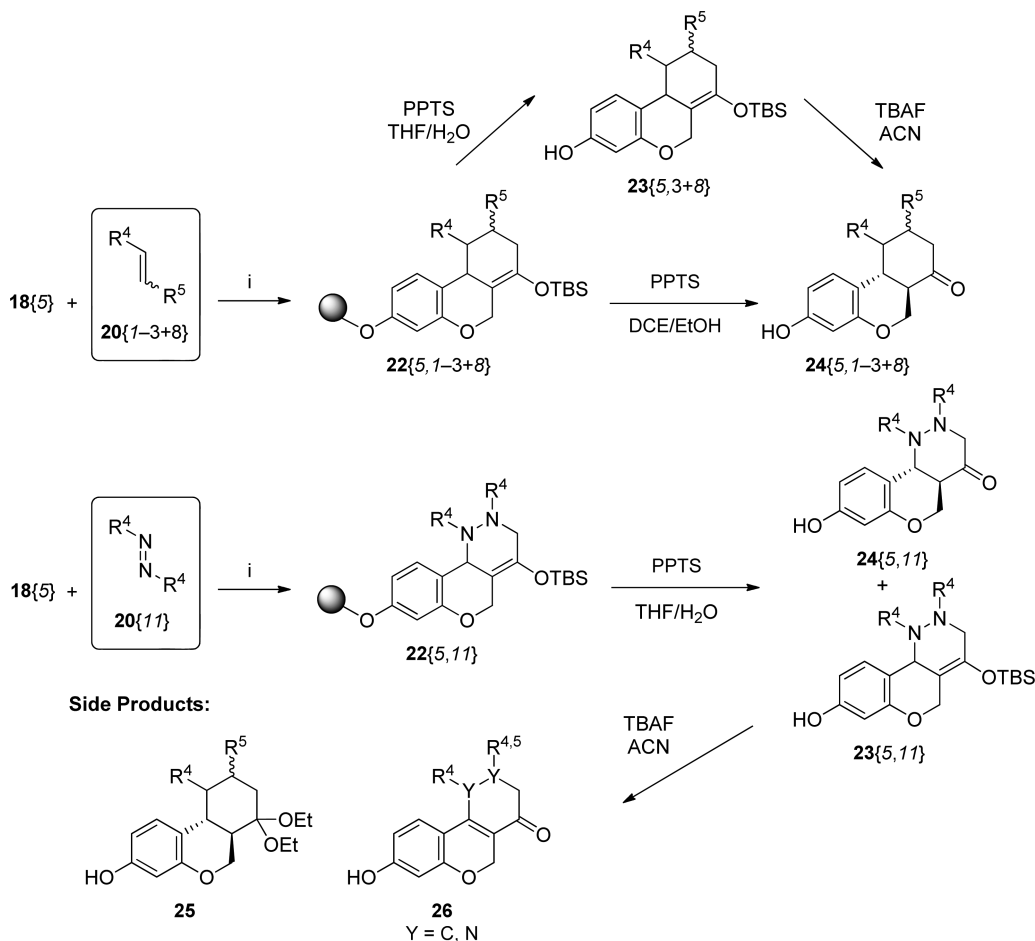
Figure 4. Diversity reagents for the Diels–Alder cycloaddition 20{1–12}.

Table 2. Yields for the Diels–Alder Cycloaddition

entry	substrate	dienophile	product	R ¹ = R ²	R ⁴	R ⁵ , R ⁶	R ⁷	endo/exo ^a	yield ^b (%)
1 ^{6a}	16{1}	20{1}	21{1,1}	H	C(O)Me	H, H	H	4/1	95
2 ^{6a}	16{1}	20{2}	21{1,2}	H	CO ₂ Me	H, H	H	2/1	90
3 ^{6a}	16{1}	20{3}	21{1,3}	H	CN	H, H	H	4/5	50,
4	16{2}	20{1}	21{2,1}	CH ₃	C(O)Me	H, H	H	7/10	50
5	16{2}	20{2}	21{2,2}	CH ₃	CO ₂ Me	H, H	H	1/1	35
6 ^{6a}	16{2}	20{3}	21{2,3}	CH ₃	CN	H, H	H	1/10	50
7 ^{6a}	16{2}	20{4}	21{2,4}	CH ₃	C(O)Et	H, H	H	8/5	70
8 ^{6a}	16{2}	20{5}	21{2,5}	CH ₃	CO ₂ Me	CO ₂ Me, H	H	1/1	32
9	16{2}	20{6}	21{2,6}	CH ₃	CHO	CO ₂ Et, H	H	5/4	29 ^c
10	16{2}	20{7}	21{2,7}	CH ₃	H	C(O)N(H)C(O)	H	1/0	23
11	16{2}	20{8}	21{2,8}	CH ₃	H	C(O)N(Me)C(O)	H	1/0	27
12	16{2}	20{9}	21{2,9}	CH ₃	H	C(O)CH ₂ CH ₂ CH ₂	H		Traces ^d
13	16{2}	20{10}	21{2,10}	CH ₃	Cl	C(O)(CCl ₂)C(O)	Cl	1/1	11 ^e
14 ^{6a}	16{2}	20{11}	21{2,11}	CH ₃	CO ₂ ⁱ -Pr	CO ₂ ⁱ -Pr			30
15	16{2}	20{12}	21{2,12}	CH ₃	CO ₂ Bn	CO ₂ Bn			48
16	18{5}	20{1}	24{5,1}	H	C(O)Me	H, H	H	1/2	35 ^f
17	18{5}	20{2}	24{5,2}	H	CO ₂ Me	H, H	H	2/1	51 ^g
18	18{5}	20{3}	23{5,3}	H	CN	H, H	H		15 ^h
			24{5,3}					0/1	10 ^h
19	18{5}	20{8}	23{5,8}	H	H	C(O)NMeC(O)	H	1/0	20 ⁱ
			24{5,8}					4/5	12 ^j
20	18{5}	20{11}	23{5,11}	H	CO ₂ ⁱ -Pr	CO ₂ ⁱ -Pr			20 ^j
			24{5,11}						8 ^j

^a Determined by ¹H NMR of the crude product. All diastereomers apart from 21{2,5} and 21{2,10} were separable by column chromatography.

^b Average isolated yield of *endo*- and *exo*-diastereomers after cleavage if not otherwise mentioned. ^c Cleavage in DCE/ethanol resulted in acetal formation of the aldehyde, which was removed by the addition of *p*-TsOH. The isolated yield was 16% of the *endo*-isomer, but according to NMR of the crude product 13% of the *exo*-isomer were formed as well, which were lost upon chromatography. ^d Complex mixture after slow conversion, the main component being the dimer of the Wittig product. ^e Formation of 10% of a side product with an aromatized C-ring. ^f Cleavage in DCE/ethanol gives additionally 15% of 26{5,1} and 20% of starting material (DOMA-product). ^g Cleavage in DCE/ethanol gives additionally 22% of 25{5,1}, 7% of 26{5,1} and 20% of the DOMA-product. ^h Cleavage in THF/water gives additionally 8% of the DOMA-product. ⁱ Cleavage in THF/water gives additionally 10% of 26{5,8}. ^j Cleavage in THF/water gives additionally 13% of the DOMA-product.

Scheme 5. Diels–Alder Cycloaddition of TBS-Enol Ether 18{5}^a

^a Reaction conditions: (i) Toluene, 80 °C, 2 d.

6:1 mixture of THF/water (4 mL) in case of the enol-ether path to avoid acetal formation of the resulting ketone. Then PPTS (100 mg, 0.400 mmol) was added, and the mixture was agitated at 65 °C overnight. The resin was separated by filtration, washed with 25 mL of EtOAc, and the filtrate concentrated. The crude product was diluted with EtOAc (15 mL) and water (10 mL). The organic layer was separated, and the aqueous one extracted twice with EtOAc (15 mL). The combined organic phases were dried (MgSO₄) and concentrated under reduced pressure. After Diels–Alder reactions the crude products were additionally purified by flash chromatography to separate *endo*- and *exo*-diastereomers.

General Procedure for DOMA Condensation. A 1.00 g portion of the resin (5 or 6) was suspended in 1,4-dioxane (10 mL) in a 20 mL vial. Nitrogen was bubbled through for a few minutes, before adding K₂CO₃ (552 mg, 4.00 mmol) and the Michael acceptor (6.0 mmol). The vial was closed and agitated at 80 °C for 4 d. After the second day another portion of the Michael acceptor (1.00 mmol) was added. At the end of the reaction, the resin was filtered, washed (as described above) and dried under vacuum. The procedure was repeated a second time if remaining starting material was detected after cleavage.

General Procedure for Enol-Ether Formation. A 2.50 g portion of resin 8 was dissolved in CH₂Cl₂ (25 mL) and flushed with nitrogen for 5 min. Et₃N (2.08 mL, 1.52 g, 15.0 mmol) was added, followed by TBSOTf (1.70 mL, 1.98 g, 7.50 mmol) at

–30 °C. Afterwards, the reaction was agitated for 16 h, in which the temperature was allowed to rise to r.t. The resin was separated by filtration, washed (as described above), and dried under vacuum.

General Procedure for Wittig Reaction. Methyl triphenylphosphonium bromide (1.79 g, 5.00 mmol) was suspended in dry THF (14 mL) under nitrogen and cooled to –25 °C. *n*-BuLi (3.1 mL, 5.0 mmol, 1.6 M solution in hexanes) was added (yellow color), and the mixture stirred for 2 h (–25 °C up to r.t.). Afterward, it was cooled to –35 °C and added to resin 8 (1.65 g), which was previously suspended in 12 mL of dry THF, also cooled to –35 °C. The reaction was allowed to warm up to r.t. over the next 2 h. It was then quenched with water (2 mL), washed (as described above), and dried under vacuum.

General Procedure for Diels–Alder Reaction. Resins 16 and 18 (500 mg) were dried overnight at 90 °C. They were suspended in toluene (5 mL) in separate vials and nitrogen was bubbled through for 10 min. The dienophile (5.0 mmol) was added in each vial, the vials closed, and the reaction agitated at 80 °C for 2 days. The resins were filtered, washed (as described above), and dried under vacuum before being cleaved.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information. Experimental procedures are given, including the preparation of starting materials (6-HSA, 10, 12),

analogous solution phase syntheses, characterization of all compounds, as well as selected gel-¹³C NMR spectra (4, 5, 6, 8- $\{1-3\}$, 16 $\{1-2\}$), Raman spectra (8 $\{1-2\}$, 16 $\{1-2\}$, 18 $\{5\}$), and ¹H/¹³C NMR spectra of representative library members (21 $\{1,3\}$, 21 $\{2,2\}$, 21 $\{2,3\}$, 21 $\{2,7\}$, 21 $\{2,10\}$, 21 $\{5,3\}$). This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

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Author Contributions

D.C.K. and S.B. conceived and designed the project, as well as wrote the manuscript. D.C.K. performed the experimental work.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DABCO, 1,4-diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane; DCE, 1,2-dichloroethane; DOMA, domino oxo-Michael-aldol; HSA, hydroxyl-salicylic acid; PPTS, pyridinium *p*-toluenesulfonate; SA, salicylaldehyde; TBAF, tetrabutylammonium fluoride; TBSOTf, *t*-butyldimethylsilyl trifluoromethanesulfonate; THC, tetrahydrocannabinol; *p*-TsOH, *p*-toluenesulfonic acid

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