

Some less-known plants parts as supplementary foods

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Abstract

Utilization of wild edible plants as a food source is an integral part of the culture of indigenous people that dwell in and nearby forests, who gather and consume wild edible plants as snacks, as a vegetable and at times of food scarcity. In India comparison of ethnobotanical knowledge between different regions and ethnic groups has been a major area of research done during last two decades. Present communication deals with the comparative ethnobotany of India and Africa. Over 750 species have been recorded as common to India and Africa. Of these, 14 plants which are reported as edible in African literature, but the part used in Africa seems to be less-known as edible in India, some examples of such plants and parts are *Adansonia digitata* (leaves and young roots), *Balanites aegyptiaca* (young leaves and shoots), *Cleome gynandra* (leaves and flower), *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* (roots) and *Grewia tenax* (roots).

Keywords: Less known, edible plants, India .

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, human societies all over the world have been using plant resources for fulfilling their basic needs like, food, medicine and shelter, etc. Studies on traditional knowledge about plants bring out data which has great potential for human welfare, and particularly comparative ethnobotanical studies are making very significant contributions to this aspect.

Exchange and analysis of information and research material through these studies, are further establishing their credibility.

In this context, the work on comparative studies we studied documented and compared ethnobotanical information from India with Africa. Over 750 species are already recorded as common to India and Africa. Of these about 100 species are reported to be used as traditional food plants in Africa. Various plant parts are consumed as food either raw or cooked or as spices, condiments, etc.

The following is a brief account of such 14 plants and parts which seem less-known as edible in India.

Enumeration

The enumeration of plants includes botanical names, followed by name of the family (in parenthesis), available common English name, local name in India, and a brief botanical account. The edible uses as known in Africa are then given. It is clarified that in uses only those are mentioned which are not found to be reported in major Indian literature, like Ambasta (1992), Arora & Pande (1996), Chandra (1997), Jain (1991) Roy *et. al.* (1988), Singh *et. al.* (1996).

The data for African uses are mainly based on Maunda *et. al.* (1999), and several research papers.

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***Adansonia digitata* L.** (*Bombacaceae*), BAOBAB, 'Gorak imli' A soft wooded tree scattered all over the country, particularly common along the west coast of India.

Uses:

- Fruit pulp added to porridge.
- Pulp coated seeds coloured, sugar coated and sold as sweets.
- Soft tuber-like root tips eaten in times of famines.

***Balanites aegyptiaca* L.** (*Balanitaceae*), DESERT DATE, 'Hingot' . A small, spiny, evergreen tree growing in drier parts of India.

Uses:

- Young leaves and tender shoots used as vegetables.
- Brown fruit pulp sucked.
- Seed cotyledons boiled for 2-3 hours and eaten. Seeds as a source of oil.
- Gum edible.

***Citrullus lanatus* (Thunb) Mansf.** (*Cucurbitaceae*), WATER MELON, 'Tarbooj'. A climbing or trailing, hispid annual, cultivated throughout India on sandy soils.

Use:

- Leaves used as vegetables.

***Cleome gynandra* L.** (*Capparidaceae*), SPRIDER HERB

An erect herb found along road sides and wastelands through out warm parts of country.

Uses:

- Leaves with flowers widely used as a vegetable.
- Leaves boiled, butter added and eaten with a recipe made from finger millet flour.
- Leaves cooked with other vegetables such as *Amaranthus* spp, and *Solanum nigrum*.

***Dactyloctenium aegyptium* (L.) Wild.** (Poaceae), CROW FOOT GRASS, 'Makra' An annual grass found throughout India.

Use:

- Roots chewed and eaten because of their sweet taste.

***Digera muricata* (L.) Mart.** (Amarantaceae), Latmahuria An erect herb, found throughout the plains of India as a weed of cultivation.

Use:

- Nectar at base of flower sucked by children.

***Grewia tenax* (Forssk.) Aschers & Schwf.** (Teliaceae), 'Gangerum'. A small much branched, straggling shrub, found throughout India.

Use:

- Roots boiled in milk and eaten.

***Kigelia pinnata* (Jacq.) DC.** (Bignoniaceae), SAUSAGE TREE, 'Jhar fanoos'. A spreading tree with woody, gourd like fruits, planted as roadside or ornamental tree.

Uses:

- Fruit, longitudinally split in half widely used for fermenting traditional beer.

***Lagenaria siceraria* (Molina) Standley** (*Cucurbitaceae*), BOTTLE GAURD, 'Lauki'. A climbing or trailing herb, cultivated throughout.

Use:

- Young shoots and roots are used as vegetables.

***Lippia javanica* (Burm.f.) Spreng.** (Verbenaceae). WILD TEA Much branched shrub, found throughout peninsular India.

Uses:

- Leaves used for making tea.
- Fruits and seeds eaten.

***Asystasia gangetica* (L.) T. Anders.** (Acanthaceae). Lavana-valli A scrambling herb, common in western peninsula.

Use:

- Leaves are used as leafy vegetable.

***Manihot esculanta* Crantz** (Euphorbiaceae). Tall herbs or shrubs, commonly cultivated.

Use:

- Leaves are used as leafy vegetables.

***Potulaca oleracea* L.** (Portulacaceae). Purslane, Khursa.

A prostrate herb distributed in Himalayas and also cultivated in other parts of country.

Use:

- Seeds are ground along with flour and porridge is made out of it.

***Sesamum orientale* L.** (Pedaliaceae). Til, Seshem. An erect, annual plant, cultivated in plains.

Use:

- Leaves eaten as vegetable.

CONCLUSION

Many species described are wild growing. The wild food plants have not received enough attention throughout the world. Instead of concentrating only on commercial crop, efforts should be made to popularize wild food plants. So that ever increasing demand for food can be met.

The species enumerated in the present paper, are consumed by folk in Africa directly or through various preparations. Absence of this information in major Indian literature made the authors to popularize it, so that people can utilize these resources also.

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