

Letter to the Editor

Wild Edible Plants: From the Past to the Future

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Many wild edible plants are rich in nutrients and vitamins, which render them particularly valuable in terms of a balanced diet in communities that are resource poor. The food that is sourced from the wild is still significant for the poor and becomes vital during conflicts or famines. Since wild plants contain vitamins, minerals and trace elements, they complement staple foods towards a balanced diet even under normal living conditions [1].

Human diet has featured food plants gathered from the wild since ancient times. It is argued that societies in the past resorted to the wild flora in times of hunger more than today. Agricultural societies depend on crop plants in the modern world; however the tradition of consuming wild plants is still strong [2].

The importance of health, though never completely cast aside, was somewhat ignored in fast urban living settings of the modern era. However, it came to the fore with the advent of various illnesses, such as obesity, cancer and cardiovascular conditions. Now human beings seek ways to live healthier and longer lives without giving up their fast and hectic life styles. People in the developed world are rediscovering that a healthy diet and exercise is paramount. The interest in organic and natural foodstuff is ever increasing, though no one can claim to be consuming hundred percent organic foods. In many parts of the world, people consume natural foods due either to tradition or to underdevelopment.

People living in our geography are starting to embrace classical diet of the region, which is the Mediterranean diet. In this type of diet, vegetable consumption is high and meat consumption is lower. The Mediterranean Diet mainly includes vegetables, salads, fruits and spices, whole-grain cereals, pasta, nuts, legumes, olive oil, seafood, a moderate consumption of wine with meals, poultry consumed in low-to-moderate amounts, and a relatively low consumption of red meat [3-5]. However, in modern interpretation of the diet, vegetable consumption rather means the consumption of natural plants collected from the wild. People prefer fresh wild plants where possible. If they are not present due to the seasonal availability, then cultured plants will do. It seems that people are rediscovering green wild plants as they did medicinal wild plants. While people in various parts of the world, especially the poor, choose this type of diet out of necessity, those living in modern cities prefer it willingly and consciously.

Studies show that Mediterranean Diet contains some components with antioxidant potential that may help explain its

health benefits. Some authors attribute the relatively long lifespan of the Mediterranean people to the type of diet they consume [6]. The Mediterranean Diet is an example of sustainable food production. It is a dietary pattern that can combine taste and health, environmental protection, biodiversity protection, and consumption of local and seasonal products [7].

Increasing interest in the wild edible foods of the Mediterranean region has led to ethno botanical studies centred on edible plants. For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina [8,9], Bulgaria [10], Turkey [11-14], Croatia [15,16], Italy [17-21], Spain [22-25], Greece [26,27], Cyprus [28] and Mediterranean Europe and Balkan [4,29-31].

The fact that there are many more studies being carried out on the field of ethnobotany is encouraging in terms of preserving traditional knowledge and passing it on to the next generations. Ethnobotany used to only mean use of medicinal plants by the locals. However recently, it has come to mean all manners of use by human beings. It seems that the field of wild edible plants will be the one to benefit the most from this change.

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