

WILD EDIBLE PLANTS OF KASHMIR—SOME LESS KNOWN VEGETABLE SUBSTITUTES AND BEVERAGES

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ABSTRACT

Twenty wild plants : *Coronopus didymus* L., *Dipsacus mitis* D. Don, *Eremurus persicus* Boiss., *Gagea stipitata* Merkl., *G. dshungarica* Rgl., *G. elegans* Wall., *G. kashmiriensis* Turril, *Lactuca serriola* L., *Lamium amplexicaule* L., *Melilotus albus* Medikus, *M. indica* All., *Ranunculus arvensis* L., *R. muricatus* L., *Scandix pecten-venaris* L., *Silene conoidea* L., *Silene cucubalis* Wibel., *Sisymbrium loesolii* L., *Tulipa clusiana* DC., *Bergenia ligulata* (Wall.) Engl. and *Indigofera gerardiana* Wall. ex. Baker have been reported to be used as vegetable substitutes or as beverages. Various portions of these plants are consumed by people of hilly areas of Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

The present communication puts on record usefulness of a few plants growing wild at high altitude regions of Jammu and Kashmir state. Information about the potentiality of these plants was gathered through first hand enquiry about food habits of the inhabitants of these areas. These plants are either used as vegetables or as source of beverages.

VEGETABLE SUBSTITUTES

***Coronopus didymus* L.** (Brassicaceae)

Local name: "Jangli - Alian" (IAH 301).

Prostrate herbs growing extensively in subtropical regions during winters and in temperate areas during spring months. Tender shoots and basal leaves of the plant are cooked as vegetable.

***Dipsacus mitis* D. Don** (Dipsacaceae)

Local name: "Wopal - Hakh" (IAH 302).

Erect stiffly hairy, 1.2 - 1.5 m tall herbs growing throughout the temperate regions of Jammu and Kashmir state. Leaves of

young plants are used by local people. Before cooking, leaves are thoroughly boiled and squeezed. Sun-dried leaves are consumed during winter months when fresh vegetables are scarce. "Wopal-Hakh" is specially fed to women during their post-pregnancy convalescence period. In Kashmir valley, "Wopal-Hakh" is cooked by Hindus specially on occasions of death anniversaries of kiths.

***Eremurus persicus* Boiss.** (Liliaceae)

Local name: "Hoal-saag" (IAH 303).

20-35 cm tall rhizomatous herb, restricted to hill slopes of Udhampur district. Leaves and young scapes of plants are cooked as vegetable. During March - April, when plants are in abundance, "Hoal-saag" is sold even in Jammu city. Long, soft and keeled leaves are squeezed in boiling water, before cooking. In urban areas, "Hoal-saag" is considered a delicacy. Another wild species of the genus, *E. himalicus* is consumed in Kashmir and several other places (Annonymous, 1952) in a similar way.

Gagea Salisb. (Liliaceae)

Local name: "Dudal" (IAH 304, 305, 306 & 307).

A group of small bulbous plants with soft, somewhat fleshy, grass-like leaves inhabiting moist places in temperate regions of the state. Four species namely, *G. stipitata* Merkl., *G. dshungarica* Rgl., *G. elegans* Wall. and *G. kashmiriensis* Turrit. are collectively called "Dudal" in Kishtwar. Leaves of these species are cooked into a vegetable. In some villages of Kashmir valley as well, plants of *Gagea* are eaten as delicacy. Leaves are made into a curry or are cooked with egg.

Lactuca serriola L. (Asteraceae)

Local name: "Dudej" (IAH 308).

60-120 cm tall herbs abounding lower altitudes of the state. In Bhadarwah and about, it is called "Dudej" (meaning milk yielding) obviously because of its latex. Young leaves and shoots of the plant are consumed as vegetable after washing them thoroughly in boiling water. Boiling dissolves latex.

Lamium amplexicaule L. (Lamiaceae)

Local name: "Neul-Hakh" (IAH 309).

Erect-decumbent herbs, 15-30 cm tall growing in all temperate areas of the state between April and July. In Kishtwar, young plants are consumed as vegetable under the name "Neul-Hakh". Before cooking, plants are boiled in water for 15-20 minutes.

L. amplexicaule has been reported to cause poisoning of cattle in Queensland and New South Wales (Anonymous, 1962). The poisonous principle is either absent from these plants here or is destroyed by cooking, making it possible to eat by people of Kishtwar.

Melilotus albus Medikus (Fabaceae)

Local name: "Senji" (IAH 310).

Pubescent herbs up to 50 cm tall; leaves trifoliate; flowers white. Young shoots and leaves of the species are consumed as

vegetable, by poorer sections in Jammu city and its environs. Plants are cooked directly after thorough washing.

M. indica All. (Fabaceae)

Local name: "Senji" (IAH 311).

The species resembles *M. albus* in most features except its yellow flowers. This species is commonly found in Jammu and Doda districts where young shoots, inflorescences and leaves are cooked for consumption as vegetable.

Ranunculus arvensis L. (Ranunculaceae)

Local name: "Gager-Kande" (IAH 312).

Erect, pale-green herbs, 15-30 cm tall, growing during spring months as a weed from subtropical to temperate regions of Jammu and Kashmir state. In Kishtwar, young leaves are consumed as vegetable. Before cooking, they are thoroughly squeezed in boiling water.

R. muricatus L. (Ranunculaceae)

Local name: "Chingir" (IAH 313).

Rosette herbs about 25 cm tall, widely growing in temperate areas of the state. The palmately lobed radical leaves form a delicious vegetable. Leaves are boiled and then fried after discarding the water.

Buttercups in general are notorious for containing hydrocyanic acid. Both *R. arvensis* and *R. muricatus* are known to cause poisoning (Kirtikar and Basu, 1935; Jacobs and Burlage, 1958). Their use in human dietry is obviously therefore, perplexing. It seems that boiling leeches out the toxic principle from tender shoots, thus rendering them safe for human consumption.

Scandix pecten-venaris L. (Apiaceae)

Local name: "Kachi-Dane" (IAH 314).

Fern like, 15-20 cm tall herbs, known as shepherd's needle is widely distributed in subtropical and temperate regions of the state. In Kishtwar, it is called "Kachi-Dane" on account of its close resemblance with *Coriandrum sativum*, known as "Dania". Leaves and young shoots of the plant

are either consumed raw or cooked into a vegetable.

Silene conoidea L. (Caryophyllaceae)

Local name: "Chotta - Takla" (IAH 315).

15-30 cm tall herbs growing widely as a weed in wheat fields, from subtropical-temperate regions of the state. In Jammu and about, green, oval capsules are cooked as vegetable. Immature seeds are sweet and are consumed raw.

S. cucubalis Wibel. (Caryophyllaceae)

Local name: "Wat - Kram" (IAH 316).

60-90 cm tall, glaucous herbs, widely growing at high altitudes from June to August. Plants of the species are common around Bhadarwah and Kishtwar. Soft and crisp leaves of the plant make a delicious vegetable.

Sisymbrium loeselii L. (Brassicaceae)

Local name: "Dand - Hakh" (IAH 317).

Erect, hispid annual herbs, widely growing in temperate regions of the state. In Kishtwar, basal leaves of the young plants are consumed as vegetable during spring season. Before cooking, leaves are washed with boiling water which leeches out the bitter constituent commonly present in crucifers.

Tulipa clusiana DC. (Liliaceae)

Local name: "Keinshur" (IAH 318).

Bulbous herbs, growing profusely in temperate regions of Jammu and Kashmir state. In Kishtwar and Poonch, the tuni-

cated bulbs of the species are either eaten raw or after frying. Salt is sprayed to taste.

BEVERAGES

Bergenia ligulata (Wall.) Engl. (Saxifragaceae)

Local name: "Pathan - Beg" (IAH 319).

Perennial herbs, growing in rock crevices in temperate regions of Jammu and Kashmir state. Root stocks of the plant are used as a substitute for tea leaves in Kishtwar. Carmine coloured decoction obtained by boiling sun-dried root-stocks in water, yield a tasteful beverage. Milk and sugar are added to taste.

Indigofera gerardiana Wall. ex Baker (Fabaceae)

Local name: "Kesh - Dooph" (IAH 320).

50-70 cm tall shrubs, distributed widely in hilly areas of the state. In Poonch and Doda districts of the State, flowers of the species are used in making a decoction. For human consumption, flowers are boiled in milk for 4-5 minutes and sugar added to taste. The decoction serves as a tonic and restorative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors are grateful to Prof. Y. R. Malhotra for providing necessary facilities. Financial assistance received from INSA and ICAR, New Delhi, is gratefully acknowledged.