

Medicinal Edible Plants Used in the Himalayas and Their Cultures

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Summary

Wild plants were important sources of food for mankind before the dawn of civilization. People have been using roots, tubers, rhizomes, leaves, barks and fruits of wild plants since then as food.

The improved varieties of different agricultural and horticultural crops of today are derived from wild plants. The vegetation of Nepal exhibits a remarkable plant diversity. Within a few Sq. km area (about 150-200 km in breadth and 800 km in length) some 6500 species of flowering plants, among which 700 species have been recognized as medicinal and aromatic plants are known to occur. Flora of east Nepal shows the affinity towards Sino-Japanese flora, where that of west Nepal to Mediterranean flora and flora of northern part to Indo-Gangetic flora. So Nepal can be considered as a transitional zone for these floral elements. In Nepal 133 species of wild edible plants have been reported in "Wild Edible Plants of Nepal" bulletin No.9, published in 1982 by the Department of Medicinal Plants.

We have traveled different parts of Nepal and Pakistan during the different time and seasons. This survey focuses on the growth of some wild edible plant, the distribution of those in their natural habitat of the Himalayas, and also investigates the cultural relationship between the Himalayan people and utilization of natural resources. We researched the Namche area from Lukla to Gokyo (from 2,840m - 4,500m altitude) the Sagarmatha National Park and Islamabad in Pakistan. The information on the wild edible plants was gathered by interview with local people during the summer of 1999. Thirty six plants were found to be edible, in which 8 species had not been reported before.