VALUABLE WEEDS

Daniel Moerman of the University of Michigan, author of Native American Ethnobotany [see AHA 15:1] and John Stepp of the University of Georgia studied wildcrafting habits of Indians in six Mayan communities in the Chiapas, Mexico highlands of southern Mexico. They found that 208 people collected 103 medicinal plant species from disturbed areas near their community in a seven-month period. About 35 herbs were non-native. They theorize the Mayans became familiar with using such "weeds" for medicine because they have lived close to disturbed ground for so long and they may prefer harvesting fresh plants, which often contain more active ingredients. Biochemical evidence also suggests that plants growing in disturbed areas have evolved stronger chemical defenses to fight disease and pests, and so may produce stronger medicine. A quarter of the non-native plants were also used by North American Indians, suggesting the potential medicinal value of exotic species needs to be reconsidered. A database search identified 9000 native and introduced plants growing in the region.


MONGOLIAN HERBS

Mongolian herbs used as traditional medicines were tested at the University of the Ryukyus in Okinawa, Japan. A water extract of fireweed (Chamaenerion angustifolium), geranium (Geranium pratense), nonea (Nonea pouilla), long duk or stelleria root (Stelleria chamaejasme), and Lomatogonium carinithiacum, Phodococcus vitis-idae, and Sphaerocarpus gracilis were potent antioxidants and free radical scavengers, while horsetail (Equisetum arvense) had little activity. Gentian (Gentiana decumbens) displayed scavenging but not anti-oxidant ability.


AYURVEDIC EYE TREATMENT

The symptoms of a variety of eye disorders that include conjunctivitis, dry eye, dacryocystitis, degenerative conditions, and postoperative cataract were alleviated in astudy using an Ayurvedic herbal eye drop called Ophthacare. It contains (Terminalia belerica), caraway (Carum coticum), Emblica officinalis, turmeric (Curcuma longa), holy basil (Ocimum sanctum), camphor (Cinnamomum camphora), and rose (Rosa damascena), with melopsipumum. In most cases, the herbs reduced infection and inflammation without side effects.


Yarrow

A Middle Eastern yarrow (Achillea wilhelmsii) found growing throughout Iran effectively lowered blood triglyceride levels and high blood pressure in people who took 15-20 drops twice a day for two months. They were even lower after four months and, after six months, good HDL-cholesterol also increased. This double-blind trial by the Isfahan Cardiovascular Research Center at the Isfahan University of Medical Sciences was with 120 people aged 40-60 years. Yarrow's flavonoids and sesquiterpene lactone compounds are considered responsible for the cholesterol-lowering action.


HEPATITIS HERBS

An herbal liver formula from Japan's Kampo medicine tested at the University of Tokyo proved as effective as interferon therapy to treat chronic hepatitis C. Named Ninjin-yoei-to, it contains ginseng (Panax gingseng), unshiu peel (Citrus unshiu), yan zhi root (Polygon sibirica) and schisandra (Schisandra chinensis). Of these herbs, schisandra inhibited hepatitis best, thanks to a lignan compound it contains called Comisin A.


Anti-viral Chinese herbs tested at Capital University of Medical Sciences in Beijing suppressed hepatitis B virus similarly to IFN-alpha treatment. The main ingredients were phyllanthus (Phyllanthus anamur, P. niruri, P. urnaria), and oxymatrine from yellow pagoda tree root (Sophora flavescensis, S. subprostratae). The Japanese anti-inflammatory formula "Stronger NeoMinophagen C," of glycyrrhizin from licorice (Glycyrrhiza glabra) shows a 65-73% reduction in hepatitis severity.