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Journal of Ethnopharmacology

Volume 145, Issue 2, 30 January 2013, Pages 517-529

Traditional knowledge on medicinal and food plants used in Val San Giacomo (Sondrio, Italy) – An alpine ethnobotanical study

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2012.11.024>

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Abstract

Ethnopharmacological relevance

This work increases the ethnobotanical data from Northern Italy and, in particular, the Lombardy region, till now poorly documented, safeguarding the local folk knowledge, and provides information on new or scarcely reported properties of medicinal plants, whose traditional use needs to be validated experimentally.

Aim of the study

The present study aimed to gather, analyse and evaluate the ethnobotanical information on the species used for medicinal and food purposes by the native people of Val San Giacomo.

Materials and methods

The plant use was documented by speaking with more than 100 people, mainly over 60 years old, born and resident in Val San Giacomo. Information was collected using semi-structured interviews and then analysed by indices such as Ethnophytonomic Index (EPI), Ethnobotanicity Index (EI), relative frequency of citation (RFC), use value (UV), relative importance (RI) and factor informant consensus (FIC).

Results

Information on 66 plants belonging to 35 families (Asteraceae, Rosaceae and Lamiaceae, mainly) was gathered. The preference ranking placed *Achillea moschata* Wulfen at first place, both for the citation number and for RFC and UV. *Arnica montana* L., *Thymus pulegioides* L. and *Artemisia genipi* Stechm. were also in relevant use. Sixty species were wild and six were cultivated. Leaves, flowers, complete aerial parts and fruits were the plant parts most commonly used for remedy preparation (infusion, especially). The interviewees collected local flora for medicinal purposes, specifically. About 51.5% of the plant species were used to treat gastrointestinal tract of humans as digestive, depurative, appetiser, laxative, astringent and carminative remedies. About 56% of the plants were used in cookery, 24.2% in veterinary field, and 3% as cosmetics. The calculated indices demonstrated that in the studied area there is a small retention of plant knowledge. Only 6.2% of the autochthonous plants proved useful in folk tradition. Despite this, the uses of *Sempervivum montanum* L., *Rhododendron ferrugineum* L. and *Panicum miliaceum* L. were never documented by other ethnobotanical investigations conducted in the alpine area.

Conclusions

This survey was an extension of the ethnobotanical investigations performed in the Italian Alps. A study like this, though performed in a small area with a reduced traditional knowledge, could be the basis for subsequent research on the species that are interesting from a phytochemical point of view and on the potential use of their active metabolites.

Graphical abstract





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Keywords

Ethnobotany; Officinal plants; North Italy; Alpine area; Quantitative indexes

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