

1. Medicinal plants in the Mediterranean area: Synthesis of the results of the project Rubia

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Abstract

Aim of study: Within the scope of the European project RUBIA (ICA3-2002-10023), research has been performed on the traditional use and handling of plant species in several Mediterranean countries, Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Morocco, and Spain. This paper synthesises the chief results related to the medicinal utilization of those plants. Material and methods: The information has been gathered by means of semi-structured interviews (1256) and techniques of participant observation with 803 informants. In each of the participating countries the study areas were selected by means of uniform criteria defined at the beginning of the study. Results and conclusions: A total of 985 species have been catalogued, of which 406 have medicinal use. This work constitutes the first comparative study performed with ethnobotanical data gathered by a coordinated methodology in the Mediterranean area. An exhaustive list is provided for the species catalogued, indicating the regions where each plant was mentioned. Ethnopharmacological relevance: This information underlines the ethnobotanical richness of the region and the need to broaden this study to other areas of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, this constitutes a base for future phytochemical and pharmacological studies which could lead to new therapeutic

products.

Keywords: ethnobotany; Mediterranean; medicinal plants

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2. Wild and semi-domesticated food plant consumption in seven circum-Mediterranean areas

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Abstract

The use of local Mediterranean food plants is at the brink of disappearance. Even though there is relatively abundant information on inventories of wild edible taxa, there is also a crucial need to understand how these plants are consumed and when and how these consumption phenomena change over time and place around the Mediterranean. Additionally, it is important to study such knowledge systems and find innovative ways of infusing them to the future Mediterranean generations. During the years 2003-2006 a circum-Mediterranean ethnobotanical field survey for wild food plants was conducted in selected study sites in seven Mediterranean areas (European Union-funded RUBIA Project). Structured and semi-structured questionnaires have been administered to indigenous people and 294 wild food plant taxa were documented in the survey. A comparative analysis of the data was undertaken showing that the quantity and quality of traditional knowledge varies among the several study areas and is closely related to the traditions, environment and cultural heritage of each country. More similarities of wild edible popular use were

revealed between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Mediterranean.

Keywords: Ethnobotany; Mediterranean diet; ethnobiology; wild food plants; food medicine

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3. NaCl ENHANCES GROWTH AND MORPHOGENESIS POTENTIAL OF *ALHAGI GRAECORUM*

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Abstract

The contamination of soils with excess salts is one of the greatest challenges to plant survival, but some unique species have evolved to thrive in highly saline environments. One such species, *Alhagi graecorum* Boiss., has been previously shown to accumulate high levels of sodium while growing in salt marshes. The aim of this research was to investigate the effects of saline conditions on the growth and the regeneration capacity of this species. Plantlets and explants of *A. graecorum* were cultured on a medium supplemented with various concentrations of NaCl, where *A. graecorum* tissues accumulated up to 8% Na. The capacity for regeneration was enhanced by the excess sodium, indicating a requirement of salt for optimal growth and development in this species. Further study of this species may provide new concepts and understanding of the metabolism of sodium in higher plants.

Keywords: *Alhagi graecorum*; light; morphogenesis; salt tolerance; TDZ.

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4. *Artemisia judaica* L.: micropropagation and antioxidant activity

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Abstract

Artemisia judaica L., an Egyptian medicinal plant used in the treatment of gastrointestinal disorders, was mass-propagated and grown using solid, paper-bridge-support liquid, liquid-flask and bioreactor cultures. The liquid-flask culture using 50 ml MS liquid medium in 250 ml flask yielded significantly greater shoot proliferation than either solid cultures or paper-bridge-support liquid cultures. Increasing flask capacity from 100 to 500 ml improved shoot proliferation and growth. Mass-propagation efficiencies of various bioreactor systems, viz. temporary immersion reactors and bubble column reactors, were also compared. The temporary immersion bioreactor was found to have significant advantages for *A. judaica* shoot proliferation. The shoot cultures from the temporary immersion reactor formed complete plantlets when subcultured onto a medium containing 1 $\mu\text{mol l}^{-1}$ indole-3-butyric acid (IBA), and mature plants were established, acclimatized and thrived in standard greenhouse conditions. Assays of antioxidant activity and total flavonoid content of in vitro and in vivo grown tissues were evaluated as gross parameters of medicinal efficacy. Significantly higher antioxidant activity and flavonoid contents were observed in the tissues of mature greenhouse-grown plants. The efficient in vitro production systems developed in this study provided sterile, consistent tissues for investigation of bioactivity and germplasm conservation of *A. judaica*. (C) 2004 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: *Artemisia judaica* L.; Egyptian medicinal plant; shoot culture; bioreactor; flavonoids; antioxidant activity

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5. Circum-Mediterranean cultural heritage and medicinal plant uses in traditional animal healthcare: a field survey in eight selected areas within the RUBIA project.

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Abstract

During the years 2003-2005, a comparative ethnobotanical field survey was conducted on remedies used in traditional animal healthcare in eight Mediterranean areas. The study sites were selected within the EU-funded RUBIA project, and were as follows: the upper Kelmend Province of Albania; the Capannori area in Eastern Tuscany and the Bagnocavallo area of Romagna, Italy; Cercle de Ouezanne, Morocco; Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Natural Park in the province of Huelva, Spain; the St. Catherine area of the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt; Eastern and

Western Crete, Greece; the Paphos and Larnaca areas of Cyprus; and the Mitidja area of Algeria. One hundred and thirty-six veterinary preparations and 110 plant taxa were recorded in the survey, with Asteraceae and Lamiaceae being the most quoted botanical families. For certain plant species the survey uncovered veterinary phytotherapeutical indications that were very uncommon, and to our knowledge never recorded before. These include *Anabasis articulata* (Chenopodiaceae), *Cardopatum corymbosum* (Asteraceae), *Lilium martagon* (Liliaceae), *Dorycnium rectum* (Fabaceae), *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* (Apiaceae), *Origanum floribundum* (Lamiaceae), *Tuberaria lignosa* (Cistaceae), and *Dittrichia graveolens* (Asteraceae). These phytotherapeutical indications are briefly discussed in this report, taking into account modern phytopharmacology and phytochemistry. The percentage of overall botanical veterinary taxa recorded in all the study areas was extremely low (8%), however when all taxa belonging to the same botanical genus are considered, this portion increases to 17%. Nevertheless, very few plant uses were found to be part of a presumed "Mediterranean" cultural heritage in veterinary practices, which raises critical questions about the concept of Mediterraneanism in ethnobotany and suggests that further discussion is required. Nearly the half of the recorded veterinary plant uses for mammals uncovered in this survey have also been recorded in the same areas in human folk medicine, suggesting a strong link between human and veterinary medical practices, and perhaps also suggesting the adaptive origins of a few medical practices. Since most of the recorded data concern remedies for treating cattle, sheep, goats, and camels, it would be interesting to test a few of the recorded phytotherapeuticals in the future, to see if they are indeed able to improve animal healthcare in breeding environments, or to raise the quality of dairy and meat products in the absence of classical, industrial, veterinary pharmaceuticals.

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