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AYURVEDIC MEDICINAL PLANTS OF SRI LANKA

The use of plants as medicines pre-dates written human history. Ethnobotany, the study of traditional human uses of plants, is recognized as an effective way to discover future medicines. Medicinal plants have been identified and used throughout human history. Plants contain many chemical compounds that are responsible for biological functions, including defense against insects, fungi and herbivorous mammals. Chemical compounds in plants mediate their effect on the human body through processes identical to those already well understood for the chemical compounds in conventional drugs; thus herbal medicines do not differ greatly from conventional drugs in terms of how they work. This enables herbal medicines to have beneficial pharmacological effects, but also gives them the same potential as conventional pharmaceutical drugs to cause harmful side effects. Moreover plant material comes with a variety of compounds which may have undesired effects, though these can be reduced by processing. The use of herbs to treat disease is almost universal among non-industrialized societies and is often more affordable than purchasing modern pharmaceuticals.

The main ayurvedic medicinal plants of Sri Lanka are following: *Aerva Lanata*, *Achyranthesaspera*, *Alternantherasessilis*, *Acalyphaindica*, *Alpinia Galanga*, *Amaranthusviridis*, *Biophytumreinwardtii*, *Boerhaviadiffusa*, *Cardiospermum Halicacabum*, *Cassia tora*, *Centellaasiatica*, *Costusspeciosus*, *Curcuma longa*, *Cymbophogoncitratrus*, *Ecliptaprostrata*, *Hygrophiliaspinosa*, *Hemidesmusindicus*, *Ipomeaaquatica*, *Justiciaadhatoda*, *Kaempferiagalanga*, *Lawsoniainermis*, *Moringaoleifera*, *Murrayakoengi*, *Ocimumbasilicum*, *Ocimum sanctum*, *Piper nigrum*, *Pandanaslatifolia*, *Synsepalumdulcificum*.

The growth of the pharmaceutical industry and the unceasing development of new and more effective synthetic and biological medicinal products has not diminished the importance of medicinal plants in many societies. On the contrary, population growth in the developing world and increasing interest in the industrialized nations have greatly expanded the demand for medicinal plants themselves and the products derived from them.

Regulations in countries for the assessment of the quality, safety and efficacy of medicinal plants, and the work of WHO in supporting the preparation of model guidelines in this field, have been helpful in strengthening recognition of their role in health care. It is hoped that assessment of these traditional remedies could become the basis for a future classification of herbal medicines, as well as for evaluative studies on their efficacy and safety, and their potential use in national health care systems in different parts of the world.