

# Traditional Indian Ayurvedic Medicinal Plants and Herbal Medicines

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## Abstract

Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine developed in ancient India, is based on the holistic integration of body, mind, and spirit through natural healing methods. Central to this practice are medicinal plants and herbal formulations, which have been used for thousands of years to prevent and treat a wide range of diseases. This paper explores the significance, pharmacological properties, and contemporary relevance of Ayurvedic medicinal plants such as *Withania somnifera* (Ashwagandha), *Curcuma longa* (Turmeric), *Phyllanthus emblica* (Amla), and *Azadirachta indica* (Neem). It also examines the growing body of scientific research supporting their therapeutic efficacy, as well as the challenges posed by issues such as lack of standardization, drug-herb interactions, and safety concerns.

The paper emphasizes the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern pharmacological validation to ensure the responsible use of herbal medicines in both clinical and community settings. Regulatory frameworks, quality assurance protocols, and public education are identified as key strategies for maximizing the benefits of these natural therapies while minimizing risks. Overall, the study underscores the enduring value of Ayurvedic herbal medicine as a sustainable, accessible, and culturally relevant component of global health care.

**Keywords:** Medicinal plants, Rasayana, Ayurvedic herbal medicines, Drug-herb.

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## Introduction

Health care in India has been dependent on the use of plants as a source of medicine since ages. Plants are primarily used for the preparation of drugs because they are a rich source of secondary metabolites/bioactive compounds that have medicinal properties. There are various Indian Systems of Medicines (ISM) established in the course of many centuries such as Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha [1]. Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word, which means "the scripture for longevity". It represents an ancient system of traditional medicine prevalent in India and in several other south Asian countries. It is based on a holistic view of treatment which is believed to cure human diseases through establishment of equilibrium in the different elements of human life, the body, the mind, the intellect and the soul. Ayurveda dates back to the period of the Indus Valley civilization (about 3000 B.C) and has been passed on through generations of oral tradition, like the other four sacred texts (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvanaveda) which were composed between 12th and 7th century B.C. References to the herbal medicines of Ayurveda are found in all of the other four Vedas, suggesting that Ayurveda predates the other Vedas by at least several centuries [2]. It was already in full practice at the time of Buddha (6th century B.C) and had produced two of the greatest physicians of ancient India, Charaka and Shushruta, who composed the basic texts of their trade, the Samhitas. By this time, Ayurveda had already developed eight different subspecialties of medical treatment, named Ashtanga, which included surgery, internal medicine, ENT, pediatrics, toxicology, health and longevity, and spiritual healing [3,4].

More than 70% of India's population still uses nonallopathic systems of medicines for treating common as well as severe health conditions since these are easily available and affordable [4]. Another reason for people's dependence on herbal medicines may be due to weak healthcare system in the rural areas [5]. Recently, the urban population in India and across the globe has revived interest in herbal medicines owing to lesser side effects and lesser risk of contraindications [6]. The use of plants as a source of medicine varies from region to region depending upon their culture and traditions [7]. Ethnobotanical approaches are significant in highlighting locally important medicinal plant species that can be helpful to ecologists, pharmacologists and taxonomists [8].

Despite their historical and emerging significance, there remain challenges regarding standardization, safety evaluation, quality control, and global integration of Ayurvedic herbal medicines. Addressing these gaps through rigorous scientific inquiry is essential for promoting the responsible and evidence-based use of traditional Indian medicinal plants in global health systems.

### Some Important Traditional Medicinal Plants

The cultivation of medicinal plants is a great way to enhance the greenery quotient while ensuring better health prospects. There are endless varieties of medicinal plants online, so picking the most suitable ones for your garden can sometimes be a task. But don't worry, down below is a list of the best medicinal plants and their uses for you to select accordingly [9,10].

#### *Holy Basil*

Locally called Tulsi, this plant has to be on top of this list. It is known globally for its medicinal powers and across the nation for its religious value (Fig.1). While we Indians worship it with diyas and incense sticks, the plant returns generously with its healing properties.

So, the Holy Basil is often seen in the kitchens, brewing with the Chai leaves or in a healthier concoction. One of its most common variants, the Rama Tulsi, is known for its grace in removing severe coughs & colds. You can grow it in spiritual-looking terracotta pots with rich soil.

Several herbal toiletries are manufactured with Karpura Tulsi as their primary healing agent. Overall, this plant can cure malaria, headache, insomnia, respiratory diseases, etc. Some people also prefer wearing Tulsi beads, enhancing their physical and mental health.



Fig. 1: Holy Basil

#### *Calendula*

A flowering variety that comes in decorative plant seeds packages, it is typically known as the Marigold (Fig. 2). It stays low-maintenance in the preference for soil, accepting the worst of them as long as they are filled with moisture. However, that should not deter you from propagating the Calendula in a nutritious potting mix.



Fig. 2: Calendula

Apart from producing gorgeous orange-hued flowers, the plant imposes an extreme value in the derma industry. It readily cures sprains, sore eyes, wounds, stings, etc., when applied externally, and the healing tea will benefit fevers, blood circulation, and chronic infections. Propagate it in rectangular plastic pots to see the flourishing with more flowers.

#### *Aloe Vera*

Being a succulent, this green buddy is a hero in the hardy plants' category. Aloe vera grows with thick leaves, carrying the Superman of the saps that are incredibly beneficial for our health (Fig. 3). Pick a thick leaf and open it up

to remove the jelly-like white substance; you can use it in health drinks to cure inflammations from the inside, and it will turn out superb in face packs to lead you to a filter-free tone.



Fig. 3: Aloe Vera

Not only that, you can use the sap to treat wounds and cuts as well. When ingested as a healthy beverage, it will prepare your digestive system for a less irritated lifestyle and can even cure chronic constipation, making way for a better appetite. It lends a rugged vibe to the garden when grown in aesthetic floor planters. Plus, its flexibility allows one to grow it indoors on the balconies and the peeking windowsills.

### *Sage*

We are unsure if the Sage word came from this plant or if the Sages gave it the same name as themselves to point out its pure qualities. Whatever it is, the Latin term 'Salvia' literally means 'healing,' and that's where the English word Sage comes from (Fig. 4). A favourite in the medicinal greenery, it picks feminine ailments like menopausal issues, unending lactation, and sterility. Besides this, it also acts as a mood booster for anxiety and depression.

The Sage plant also reduces liver issues, excessive salivation & perspiration, but if you are dealing with skin issues like inflammations and insect bites, use it externally. From mouth inflammations to vaginal problems, it will give you more comfortable health. It can also promote better heating power in the digestion system, enhancing gut health.



Fig. 4: Sage

This green buddy is also revered for its pure vibrations in the spiritual world, as people burn its leaves to spread a positive aura with its aromatic fragrance and serene vibrations with its incense-like smoke. Burn it in the evening and enjoy the peaceful aura without negative vibrations.

### *Fenugreek*

Chefs worldwide call it Fenugreek, while Indians know it by the Hindi name called Methi (Fig. 5). This plant's seeds, locally known as Methi seeds, aid us in several ways. From treating inflammations in the ulcers to keeping the liver safe to enhancing digestion to making weight gain easy, this plant is a boon to Ayurvedic science.



Fig. 5: Fenugreek

It is also a boon for females, as it eases the cramps caused by menstruation and labor. Also, if one is having a bad breath issue, then these seeds will work miracles in altering the mouth odor. In fact, these are often used when someone

has lost their mouth's taste buds, perhaps after vomiting. Some people also use them in hair masks, as they promote strong hair growth with a glossy shine.

### *Ashwagandha*

An oldy in the medicine world, this plant is as ancient as we can trace back; since then, it has been used in Ayurvedic science for its varied benefits (Fig 6). Its ingestion in measured doses leads to a more robust immune system, which is its more commonly known use after the pandemic struck.



Fig. 6: Ashwagandha

Apart from boosting immunity, it helps in bettering cholesterol levels, reducing anxiety and stress, promoting vision, regenerating brain cells, and keeping the heart young. It is pretty normal to see healthy tonics infused with this herb, as it vouches for better health and well-being. Moreover, these days people even make ashwagandha-infused hot chocolate to satiate their taste buds and keep their bodies warm.

### *Stevia*

Living in today's diet-conscious world is impossible without hearing the term 'Stevia' (Fig 7). The advertisements are enough to make us aware of this product's magical sweetness, which is three hundred percent more potent than the primary sugar and much healthier.

This plant is super beneficial for people with diabetes, as they can fulfil their sugar cravings in a controlled manner using this herb instead! Also, due to its low-calorie content and low carbohydrate profile, it is pretty famous among health fanatics who wish to keep a check on their calories. One may enjoy the taste of sugar without hampering their blood glucose levels.



Fig. 7: Stevia

### *Lavender*

A herb that blossoms with bright-coloured flowers, lavender is one such gorgeous beauty that enhances the beauty around while proving beneficial for physical and mental health (Fig. 8). You may grow them in grow bags, too, and once propagated, wait for them to burst with pretty blooms, and they are ready for harvesting.



Fig. 8: Lavender

One may sprinkle these flowers over a salad, infuse them in the lemonade, or experiment with some other way to include them in one's diet. This plant, however, is more famously known for its brilliant fragrance, which feels as sweet as a sugar cookie. Lavender-infused candles, incense sticks, and perfumes are appreciated for their stress-releasing effects.

### Importance of Medicinal Plants

Medicinal plants have been integral to human health care for centuries, serving as a primary source of treatment long before the advent of modern pharmaceuticals. Globally, more than 80% of the population in developing countries depends on traditional plant-based medicines for their primary health care needs, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) [11]. These plants provide a rich source of bioactive compounds that contribute to the development of modern drugs and therapies.

In India, medicinal plants hold a particularly significant place within traditional systems of medicine such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani. They are not only used to treat diseases but also to maintain health, boost immunity, and prevent illness through natural means [12]. Plants like Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) have been scientifically shown to exhibit anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, while Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) has demonstrated broad-spectrum antimicrobial effects [5,13].

Beyond their therapeutic applications, medicinal plants play a crucial economic and ecological role. The global herbal medicine market is projected to grow significantly, driven by increased consumer preference for natural and organic products [14]. In India alone, the trade in medicinal plants contributes significantly to rural livelihoods and the national economy, especially in biodiversity-rich regions [15].

Moreover, medicinal plants serve as essential raw materials for the pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and nutraceutical industries. Many conventional drugs have their origins in phytochemicals first discovered in traditional medicine for example, aspirin from *Salix alba* (willow bark) and quinine from *Cinchona officinalis* (*Cinchona* tree) [16]. The continued study and conservation of medicinal plant species are therefore crucial for both modern drug discovery and the sustainability of traditional medicine systems.

In the context of rising antibiotic resistance, chronic disease burden, and increasing interest in integrative health, the value of medicinal plants is more pronounced than ever. They offer a holistic, culturally relevant, and often cost-effective approach to health care, particularly in underserved communities.

Medicinal plants play a very important role in our life. Some important uses are: Medicinal plants are beneficial to the environment as well, as more greenery indicates a healthier ambiance that stays cool and *promotes better airflow* around. These plants are pretty easy to grow, so if you are looking for some *low-maintenance green buddies*, these herbs are ready to shake hands with you.

There is an endless list of diseases that come under these plants' jurisdiction. From something as ordinary as a cough to something as terrible as labor pain, these plants are the closest to the superheroes.

Catching a common cold and dealing with chronic conditions is something that most of us have experienced at least once. It's always better to use *natural remedies* over chemical ones. Just a friendly reminder: we are not discouraging the use of pharmaceuticals.

Some of these plants are also beneficial to use without any diseases, just to protect your body from potential diseases. Their usage in moderate doses will be *advantageous for your long-term health*, be it physical or mental.

### Herbal Medicines

Herbal medicines are therapeutic products derived from plants or plant extracts, used in the prevention and treatment of diseases. They are a core component of many traditional medicine systems, including Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and Unani, and continue to play a significant role in global health care [14]. These medicines are formulated using parts of medicinal plants such as leaves, roots, bark, flowers, and seeds, and may be administered in various forms including decoctions, powders, tinctures, capsules, and ointments [11] (Shown in Fig. 9).

In the Ayurvedic tradition, herbal formulations are often polyherbal—combining multiple plant ingredients to enhance efficacy and reduce toxicity. This holistic and synergistic approach aims to restore balance among the body's biological energies (*doshas*) rather than simply alleviate symptoms [9]. For example, the formulation *Triphala*, which contains three fruits *Embolica officinalis* (*Amla*), *Terminalia chebula* (*Haritaki*), and *Terminalia bellirica* (*Bibhitaki*) is used for digestive health, detoxification, and rejuvenation [17].

Modern pharmacological studies have demonstrated the efficacy of many herbal medicines. Curcumin, the active compound in *Curcuma longa* (Turmeric), has shown anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and anticancer properties in both *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies [18]. Similarly, Withaferin A, an active constituent of *Withania somnifera* (*Ashwagandha*), exhibits adaptogenic and neuroprotective effects [19]. Such findings have helped bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern biomedical science.



Herbal medicines are increasingly integrated into primary healthcare and wellness regimes across the world, often marketed as dietary supplements or natural remedies. However, concerns regarding quality control, adulteration, contamination, and lack of standardized dosing remain prevalent [20]. Therefore, ensuring scientific validation, good manufacturing practices (GMP), and regulatory oversight is essential for their safe and effective use.



Fig. 9: Herbal medicines in liquid form.

The global herbal medicine market is rapidly expanding, driven by consumer demand for natural and holistic alternatives to synthetic drugs. In this context, traditional herbal medicine systems, particularly Ayurveda, offer a rich, time-tested pharmacopeia that continues to inform modern research and innovation.

### Precautions of Herbal Medicines

While herbal medicines are widely perceived as safe due to their natural origin, this assumption can be misleading. Like synthetic drugs, herbal products contain bioactive compounds that may produce adverse effects, especially when used improperly or in combination with other medications. Therefore, the use of herbal medicines should be approached with caution and supported by proper knowledge, regulation, and clinical supervision.

#### 1. Lack of Standardization and Quality Control

One of the major concerns surrounding herbal medicines is the lack of standardization in terms of active ingredient concentration, dosage, and formulation. Variations in plant species, growing conditions, harvesting methods, and preparation techniques can result in inconsistent potency and efficacy. Furthermore, the presence of adulterants, heavy metals, pesticides, and microbial contaminants poses serious health risks [20].

#### 2. Potential for Drug-Herb Interactions

Herbal medicines can interact with prescription drugs, sometimes enhancing or inhibiting their effects. For instance, St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), though not an Ayurvedic herb, is known to reduce the effectiveness of oral contraceptives and anticoagulants by inducing liver enzymes [21]. In the Ayurvedic context, herbs like Ashwagandha or Guggul may interact with sedatives, thyroid medications, or statins. These interactions may lead to reduced therapeutic efficacy or increased toxicity.

#### 3. Inaccurate Dosage and Self-Medication

Self-medication and incorrect dosing are common with herbal products, especially those sold over-the-counter or online without proper guidance. Unlike conventional pharmaceuticals, many herbal formulations lack clear dosage instructions based on age, body weight, or health status, leading to under- or overdosing [22]. Overuse of certain herbs, such as *Aristolochia* spp., has been associated with nephrotoxicity and carcinogenicity [23].

#### 4. Vulnerable Populations

Pregnant or breastfeeding women, children, the elderly, and patients with chronic illnesses should exercise extra caution when using herbal medicines. For example, some herbs like Senna (used as a laxative) can stimulate uterine contractions, posing risks during pregnancy [24]. Similarly, immunocompromised individuals may be more susceptible to adverse effects from contaminated or improperly prepared herbal remedies.

#### 5. Need for Professional Consultation and Regulation

Due to the potential risks mentioned above, it is crucial that herbal medicines are used under the guidance of qualified practitioners. Regulatory frameworks must also be strengthened to ensure quality assurance, accurate labeling, post-marketing surveillance, and the prevention of misleading health claims [11]. Public education is essential to dispel the myth that "natural" always means "safe."

## Conclusions

Traditional Indian medicinal plants and herbal medicines, rooted in the ancient science of Ayurveda, continue to play a significant role in global health care systems. These botanicals offer a natural, holistic approach to disease prevention and treatment, drawing on centuries of empirical knowledge. With herbs such as Ashwagandha, Turmeric, Neem, and Amla, Ayurvedic medicine presents therapeutic options that address the root causes of illness while promoting overall balance and well-being.

Scientific research has increasingly validated the pharmacological potential of many of these plants, revealing their antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, adaptogenic, and antimicrobial properties. This growing evidence base has fueled international interest in herbal medicine as a complement or alternative to conventional pharmaceuticals. However, the rising popularity of herbal remedies also underscores the need for caution. Issues such as lack of standardization, contamination, drug-herb interactions, and self-medication highlight the importance of regulatory oversight and professional guidance.

To fully harness the benefits of herbal medicines, future efforts must focus on standardizing formulations, conducting rigorous clinical trials, and integrating traditional knowledge with modern science. Public awareness, practitioner training, and policy support are also crucial for ensuring safe and effective use.

In conclusion, Ayurvedic medicinal plants represent a valuable intersection of tradition and innovation. When used responsibly and supported by scientific validation, they have the potential to contribute meaningfully to sustainable and inclusive global health care.

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