

Diversity of Medicinal Plants in Selected home gardens in Thenmaradchi Region of Northern Province, Sri Lanka

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Home garden is an integrated system which comprises variety of plants that contribute towards food and nutritional security. The importance of diversity in home gardens is to provide pleasant environment, nutritious and balanced food includes vegetables, fruits, fodder, firewood, green leaf manure and other ecofriendly utilities. The composition needs to be evaluated to further incorporate the indigenous herbs that can be used for household medicine as well as other traditional medicinal purposes. Based on this a study was carried out to evaluate the existence of diversity of plant species in home gardens. Fifty home gardens were selected from the members of the Chavakachcheri Fruit Producers and sales cooperatives Society (CFPS) and assessed the different species of plants grown in those home gardens with the help of a structured questionnaire. In total, 111 types of plant species were found in those selected home gardens of which 20% were medicinal plants. Diversity comprised of vegetables, fruit crops, medicinal crops and ornamental plants of which vegetables and fruit crops were dominant in these home gardens. Among the medicinal plants, *Ocimum tenuiflorum* was found as high as 76% whereas *Eclipta prostrata*, *Crataeva religiosa*, *Vitex negundo*, *Justicia procumbens*, *Zingiber officinale*, *Rivea ornata* and *Artabotrys hexapetalus* were found not greater than 2%. Shrubs (39%) and herbs (48%) were found dominant among the medicinal plants counted. Trees with household medicinal value were recorded 5% of the plants species recorded. Of the medicinal plants listed, those frequently used in their daily meal were found dominant (20%) compared to those used for medicinal purpose only. The composition of plants species in the home gardens also exhibited greater importance to the ornamentals (leafy 40% and flowering 60%) and less attention was given towards household of utilization medicinal plants. Utility of the medicinal plants could be extended directly in preparation of meals and that could be feasible increasing the cultivation of such medicinal plants in the home gardens easily. Further intake of medicinal plants along the food will ensure improving the nutritive value and enhance resistance against common illnesses. Therefore creating awareness to cultivate diverse medicinal plants in the home gardens and their usage in providing household healthcare will create interest towards cultivation of common medicinal herbs in and around their home gardens. Further this will also support the households to generate income to improve their livelihood and such collective initiative will ensure and support providing the expected food and nutritional security through integrated household home gardening.

Keywords: home garden, biodiversity, medicinal plants, nutritive and food security