

Economic botany of Ethiopia: An illustrated review of ethnobotanical treasures

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Introduction

Plants are an important part of everyday life in Ethiopia and an essential component of the ancient history as well as the contemporary culture. This can be witnessed in humble roadside coffee stalls as well as sophisticated Ethiopian restaurants that have become fashionable all over the world. A richly illustrated review of the useful plants of Ethiopia is in preparation, arranged in the following chapters: 1. Staple foods; 2. Pulses; 3. Vegetables; 4. Fruits; 5. Oilseeds; 6. Spices; 7. Culinary herbs; 8. Beverages, sugar and stimulants; 9. Aromatic plants; 10. Frankincense and myrrh; 11. Gums; 12. Toothbrush sticks; 13. Fumigants and cleaning agents; 14. Medicinal plants; 15. Timber and construction materials.

Some of the most interesting and unique plants and products are illustrated here.



Traditional Ethiopian dinner with red and white injera, flat enset bread (far right, wrapped in enset leaf) and various savoury dishes in the centre, including shiro and berbere.

Staple foods

Eragrostis tef tef, teff • teff



Harvesting teff



Landscape with teff haystacks



Teff plant

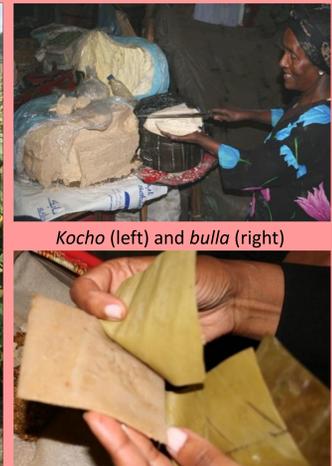


White and red teff grains

Ensete ventricosum enset, wild banana • enset



Enset plants



Kocho (left) and bulla (right)

Enset bread made from kocho and bulla

Oilseeds

Guizotia abyssinica niger seed, nug • nug



Camel-driven sesame oil press made from wild olive wood (Sheraro, NW Ethiopia)



Flower head of nug



Fruits ("seeds") of nug



Ethiopian seed oils



Cultivars of castor oil

Spices

Aframomum corrorima Ethiopian cardamom • korerima



Berber (the popular Ethiopian spice powder) and its main ingredients: chilli pepper, korerima, sesame, ajowan, cloves, long pepper, cinnamon, coriander, fenugreek



Korerima plant



Fruits and seeds of korerima

Beverages and stimulants

Coffea arabica coffee tree • buna zaf



Coffee (buna): the coffee ceremony is an important part of Ethiopian social life



Coffee plant: flowers, fruits, unroasted and roasted seeds

Catha edulis khat • chat



Khat (chat) is a popular and widely used stimulant in Ethiopia.



Khat: fresh leaves of *Catha edulis*



Coffee ceremony

Frankincense and myrrh

Boswellia papyrifera Tigrae-type frankincense

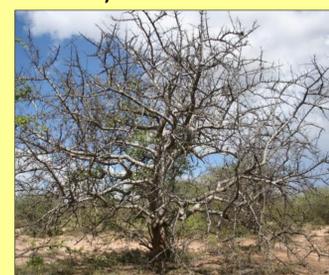


Frankincense tree (Shiraro district)



Church frankincense (Tigrae-type)

Commiphora myrrha myrrh tree • kerbe



Myrrh tree (Melka Guba, S Ethiopia)



Myrrh leaves, fruits

Myrrh

Conclusions

- This overview highlights a selection of some of the most unique and characteristic useful plants of Ethiopia and the many interesting ways in which they are used in everyday life.
- Ethiopia has remained poorly known despite it being one of the oldest and most interesting civilizations of the world. It is a country with fascinating cultural and biological diversity that in many ways are representative of the African continent. It is the birthplace of coffee, second only to petroleum as the most valuable natural product commodity in the world.
- Many plant species that are commonly used in Ethiopia are underutilized from a global perspective and represent valuable potential starting points for the development of new commercial crops and products. However, measures should be taken to ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits to be derived from the development of this tremendous botanical and cultural wealth.

Acknowledgements

