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EDIBLE, HERBAL PLANTS OF SRI LANKA WITH MEDICINAL PROPERTIES

'Heen bowitiya'

OSBECKIA OCTANDRA (L.) DC.: A GIFTED ENDEMIC

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The plant *Osbeckia octandra* (L.)DC. (family Melastomataceae), which is locally known as 'Heen bowitiya' is one of the endemic plant species in Sri Lanka renowned for its medicinal importance. Also it had been referred to as 'Kuruwina' in the past. This plant has been extensively used in traditional medicinal system in Sri Lanka for treating several liver disorders such as cirrhosis, hepatitis, hyperlipidemia and diabetes mellitus, jaundice, hemorrhoids and ascites. Most importantly, chronic liver injury has become a major health concern world-wide and at severe condition, only remedy remains the organ transplantation which again is hampered by many factors. Complementary and alternative medicines included with herbal therapies are drawing more attention recently in decelerating progressive liver damage.

Heen bowitiya Recipes and Effects

- From the traditional medicine perspective, herbal porridge ('kola kenda') prepared with the juice of tender 'Heen bowitiya' leaves, coconut milk, heenati rice without adding salt given as the very first meal of the day is effective for alleviating aforementioned liver disorders.
- 'Heen bowitiya' leaves can be combined with Mussenda, Monarakudumbiya, Udahalu, Yakinaran leaves and green gram in preparation of 'kola kenda'. Though 'Heen bowitiya' preparations are proven with minimal side effects, frequent consumption may cause adverse effects. If 'Heen bowitiya' 'kola kenda' is consumed in excessive amounts too frequently, it can eliminate even the essential fatty acids from the body as this plant material has the ability to reduce cholesterol level.
- 'Heen bowitiya' leaves and tender stems can be used in other dietary preparations as well.

A delicious curry is prepared from tender 'Heen bowitiya' leaves by combining with other ingredients like coconut milk, spices, red onion, few cloves of garlic, green chilies, tamarind, curry leaves and maldive fish. This curry is effective for patients suffering from hepatitis and indigestion.

- 'Mallung' can be prepared by adding scraped coconut, red onion and a pinch of salt to freshly cut 'Heen bowitiya' leaves. This fresh 'Mallung' is beneficial particularly in lowering high blood sugar levels. This plant material helps in strengthening the immune system as it is rich in antioxidants. 'Heen bowitiya' is known to purify blood and regulate blood temperature. This eradicates urinary disorders too. Whole plant is boiled and consumed to alleviate burning sensation in micturition.
- The 'Heen bowitiya' fruit is consumed raw.
- Dried and powdered 'Heen bowitiya' leaves are used as a herbal drink or a herbal tea preparation. For medicinal preparations, 'Heen bowitiya' roots, leaves, and barks are also used.

Heen bowitiya treatments

Medicinal properties associated with *Osbeckia Octandra* have also been investigated at a depth in a more scientific context. Several biochemical and histopathological studies have been able to prove the potential of *Osbeckia Octandra* for treating liver cirrhosis induced by different factors as the plant extract in different forms exhibited strong hepatic anti-fibrotic effects.

Moreover, *Osbeckia Octandra* has demonstrated anti-cancer potential during cell culture investigations with oral carcinoma cells. Anti-angiogenic properties associated with above plant material were also proven in recent experiments which could be useful in developing integrated cancer therapies.

Osbeckia Octandra has demonstrated its potential in oral hypoglycemic activity as well. Ethnomedicinal knowledge coupled with evidence-based medicine could pave way to deliver more effective hepatoprotective, anti-diabetic and anti-cancer drugs and therapies in future harnessing this invaluable medicinal plant.