

News Briefs

Sorrel as a Nutraceutical – Health Benefits

Throughout the world many individuals consume sorrel unaware of its health benefits. In Jamaica, this refreshing and nutritious drink is consumed as part of its Christmas tradition.

Recent advances in medicine and a greater understanding of human nutrition have led researchers to recognize the existence of a number of substances normally occurring in plants, known as nutraceuticals, which can enhance human health. There is now acceptance of the link between diet and health and this has evolved into the concept of nutraceuticals and functional foods.

Dr. Stephen Defelice defines nutraceuticals as “any substance that may be considered a food or part of a food which in addition to its normal nutritive value provides health benefits including prevention of disease.”

Nutraceuticals have been associated with the prevention and or treatment of at least four life-threaten-

ing diseases – cancer, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. Examples of nutraceuticals are food supplements that contain substances called phytochemicals. They include vitamins, antioxidants, dietary fibre and free fatty acids. Sorrel contains a wide range of vitamins and minerals including vitamin C, calcium, niacin, riboflavin and a group of compounds called **FLAVONOIDS** which not only give its deep red colour but are now being recognized as a powerful antioxidant which scavenges the body of free radicals than can cause deadly diseases if they are not removed from the body.

It is also believed that the **FLAVONOIDS** present in sorrel may be a useful deterrent against certain types of cancer and help to enhance the body’s immune system in general. Recent studies conducted by the Northern Caribbean University, Jamaica, revealed that sorrel could kill certain types of cancer cells. Sorrel tea is consumed in many countries such as Sudan, Senegal and Egypt on a daily basis and researchers in Mexico have reported a significant reduction in the triglyceride levels of persons who consume sorrel. Elevated levels of triglycerides are associated with heart disease.

newsbriefs continued

Scientists from the Mexican Institute of Social Security (MISS) proved that 'sorrel water' significantly decreases cholesterol and triglyceride levels in the blood and contributes to protection against heart diseases. As a preventative measure in heart diseases it is a good habit to consume sorrel water daily to decrease the risk of heart disease. It helps to prevent the clogging of arteries resulting from excessive levels of cholesterol and triglycerides in the blood. Sorrel has also been recognized for its diuretic properties and as an aid to weight loss. Abigail Aguilar Contreras, a Mexican professor in Sciences recommends the daily drinking of a litre of sorrel water, prepared from 10 grams of sorrel, engaging in physical exercise under doctor's supervision and taking other measures such as avoiding cigarettes, stress, excess calories and saturated fat.

The Hope Gardens Jamaica, Sorrel Chutney and Sorrel Squashes, and several other new exotic sorrel products are delicious, nutritious and convenient ways of enjoying the many benefits of sorrel. These products, rich in vitamin C, are currently available at leading supermarkets and gift shops. This suite of sorrel products produced by the Scientific Research Council (SRC) and marketed by Marketech Ltd. (its subsidiary), under the Hope Gardens Jamaica label, are available for divestment.

The SRC is assisting with the sustainable development of a local sorrel industry, cognizant of the associated health benefits and the potential to create employment and earn foreign exchange.

[Source: Public Education Unit, Scientific Research Council, April 30, 2002.]

CAJANAQUOTE

....Use only good quality raw materials – that is, sound fruits and vegetables.

“Food & Nutrition Resource Manual for the Small-scale Food Processor in the Caribbean”