

## **Indigenous Vegetables of India with a Potential for Improving Livelihoods**

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### **Abstract**

The Indian subcontinent represents one of the richest diverse genetic resources. Of the estimated 250,000 species of flowering plants at global level, about 3000 are regarded as food source; out of which only 200 species have been domesticated. More than 15,000 species of flowering plants are indigenous to this region including over 160 domestic species of economic importance, 320 species of wild ancestral forms and approximately 800 species of ethnobotanical origin. Global diversity in vegetable crops is estimated to be about 400 species of which about 80 species of major and minor vegetables are reported to have originated in India. However, with the advent of cut and burn agriculture, green revolution/commercialized agriculture, the area development projects and the related activities of these diverse resources are declining at a fast pace. Overgrazing, deforestation and over exploitation of native resources under range situations have eroded the biodiversity from this unique ecosystem. Moreover, our traditional knowledge about these important indigenous plant species has also decreased in the younger generation influenced with urbanization. Indigenous plant species provide a variety of products like food, medicines, raw materials and are also an important source of renewable energy. Around 119 pure chemical substances extracted from some 90 species of higher plants are used in medicines throughout the world. Indian medicine system is largely dependent on such drug plants. The Indian subcontinent had been one of the rich emporia of 2500 plant species used in indigenous treatment and food sources. This paper highlights important annual and perennial indigenous herbs, shrubs and tree vegetables and their use in alleviating hunger, malnutrition and improving health and thereby making a difference in livelihoods.