

HEALTHY SRI LANKAN HERBAL INFUSIONS



The array of herbal remedies these days must include these natural ingredients.

Indigenous medicinal infusions are slowly but steadily gaining recognition for their risk-free nontoxic healing properties for good health

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena.

Drink your koththamalli' as a preventive intervention against is a familiar refrain among Sri Lankans, almost a niggling litany from mothers and elders who will swear by the good-ness of a liquid brewed from roasted coriander seeds to beat the cold and the flu. Today, the buzz word in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic is koththamalli, although for years this beverage has remained in the conventional narrative of rudimentary medicines. For Sri Lankans, the drink made from coriander seeds is an essential accompaniment in treating the flu and a cold. And for this purpose, coriander seeds are a must in every home; the slightest throat irritation and a few sneezes are enough for a cup of the medicinal drink to be thrust into one's hand. All along, native Ayurveda physicians have held this herb's curative value in high esteem. Coriander has been more than a spice, an essential ingredient in medicines, which is prominently featured in ancient books of medicine, such as the Sarartha Sangraha, the Sanskrit medical discourse written by King Buddhadasa (341-370 AD).

Today, with the onset of COVID-19 the debate has turned towards an exploration and exposition of the health benefits in Ayurveda and traditional systems and the age-old koththamalli drink has been strongly recommended

contracting the disease, because coriander contains vitamin C as well as antibacterial and antiviral properties, its consumption builds immunity. This drink has been consumed for centuries to combat ailments such as high fever, headache, body pain, rhinitis, painful menstruation and menstrual disorders, skin diseases and urinary disorders. This was, while the seeds and the plant parts

were used in cooking.

Of the six distinct tastes identified in Ayurveda – namely madura (sweet), amla (sour), lawana (salty), katu (pungent/spicy), thikta (bitter) and kashaya (astringent), coriander contains four – sweet, pungent, bitter and astringent tastes. Hence it is dynamic, that is, it has multiple benefits, such as being a coolant owing to its sweet taste, making it ideal for the skin and hair, importantly to boost immunity. Its pungency stimulates digestion and blood circulation and helps with sinusitis and diseases of the throat, bitter or thikta rasa renders its detoxifying quality; and the astringent kashaya rasa helps purify blood.

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Crushing the seeds partially allows its aroma to infuse into the water while it cooks. To treat a 'cold' disease, coriander seeds are roasted prior to boiling. This process can be skipped when the drink is prepared to treat urinary tract infections.

While koththmalli stands out as the most popular herb used these days, the Government is encouraging the use of several other medicinal plants frequently used in traditional medical systems, such as the drink prepared from the dried root bark of weniwelgeta (Ceylon calumba wood) to fight infections. This bitter medicinal root has antioxidant and antibacterial qualities. The root is used to treat, among a plethora of ailments, fever and cough, and a decoction of the bark for intermittent fevers. In Sri Lanka, it has long been a practice to bathe infants and children in water boiled with pieces of weniwelgeta, and among adults for relief from body pain. To ensure overall wellbeing in the midst of COVID-19, a drink made from the root boiled in water and drunk on an empty stomach in the morning is recommended.

The health benefits of the leaves, roots and the whole plant that trails along the ground are immense; the vishnukranthi (dwarf morning glory) herb in its entirety can be used to treat children suffering from fever and cough. This herb is also used to treat patients' suffering from continuous high fever. Vishnukranthi contains antiviral as well as immunomodulatory ingredients and when consumed during fever, it induces the outflow of urine, enabling the infection to be flushed out as blood circulation improves.

Pathpadagam possesses antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and fever-reducing qualities. A decoction prepared in traditional medicine from the aerial part of Pathpadagam (diamond flower) and vishnukranthi is used to treat viral and bacterial infections, cough and bronchitis and fever resulting from communicable diseases such as chickenpox. This medicinal herb is also used to treat skin ailments, eye disease, venomous bites and even appendicitis.

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The root of heenaraththa (snap ginger) contains antiviral and antibacterial properties and its drink is used to treat colds and cough. It is most efficacious when boiled together with coriander seeds to treat viral and bacterial infections. It is also used to treat catarrh and hoarseness. Inhalation of steam from fresh root boiled in water helps cure cough and cold. The herb alone can be boiled and taken for pain in the body and the joints, including rheumatism.

Ginger has many health benefits. Apart from its frequent use in food for flavor and aroma, traditional medicine recommends fresh ginger and honey prepared as a tea to relieve colds, cough and breathing difficulties. Some of these medicinal plants, roots and seeds are included as 'major' herbs in a traditional medicinal formula - the 'paspanguwa' which, as the name suggests, includes five portions, and is boiled in water and taken to treat colds, coughs, fever and body pain.

The five major ingredients that make up the paspanguwa are - coriander, weniwelgeta, pathpadagam, Katuwelbatu (wild eggplant) and ginger. Additional

herbs like thippili (long pepper), Thai eggplant, black pepper, pawatta (Malabar nut) and vish- nukranthi may also be used in the preparation. Complementary herb Katuwelbatu is used to treat fever, asthma, bronchitis, urinary infections, heart related ailments and body pain. Thippili has antiviral properties; it's used to treat among other ailments, cough, bronchitis, tuberculosis, asthma, menstrual pain and arthritis and its rejuvenating properties can aid in the healing process.

According to Ayurveda practitioners, although the Thai eggplant is a minor ingredient, it's used as a boosting agent as it contains vitamins, including vitamin C, proteins and minerals. Traditional medicine also uses pawatta as a subsidiary ingredient in this concoction for its ability to treat fever, cough, cold, catarrh, pneumonia, whooping cough, asthma and tuberculosis. In addition to aiding in the circulation of blood, black pepper, an antioxidant, a common household ingredient added to food, is used in traditional medicine to treat fever. Small portions of weniwelgeta and heen araththa and ginger and garlic together with kiratha (swertia chirata) and rasakinda (heart- leaved moonseed) are added to the coriander concoction, which can be taken either hot or cold, plain or with sugar, depending on the condition being treated. Obviously someone with a cold and a cough and phlegm has to drink it either hot or warm. To cool the body in the case of itchy skin and urinary infection, koththamalli is consumed cold. Individuals with diabetes must drink it plain. Excess coriander drink can be kept overnight in a refrigerator. Once taken out of the refrigerator and heated, it should be consumed then and there. Do not rerefrigerate.

The goodness of this drink defies age, hence a baby of three months and above can be given, although the amount varies according to the weight and age of the baby. However, native physicians would advise against giving it daily to very young children, twice a week would suffice. In administering coriander drink to the elderly, it's important to be conscious of the quantity, large amounts are not recommended. The liquid extracted from the plant is recommended for healthy skin. A salad made from coriander leaves is very similar to the way other green salads are prepared by natives; grated coconut, onions, green chilies, tomatoes, pepper and salt and lime juice combined and consumed regularly will help reduce the harmful LDL cholesterol, while increasing HDL. This combination also helps against hypertension and stomach puffiness. Antioxidants contained in the plant also prevents the growth of cancers.



The immune boosting coriander seed drink.

A herbal coriander drink is prepared by first roasting the washed seeds in a pan; as the seeds blacken water is added. It's boiled on medium heat until the water decreases to less than half its original quantity.

In instances of swelling, crushed coriander seeds roasted on low fire, until slightly dark in color can be made into a 'pottani' or a pouch by wrapping the seeds in a cloth and placing the warm bag on the affected area. The pouch can be reheated and reused on the affected area. In addition, the same method can be applied to the forehead for a headache and phlegm.

If there's one thing that's safe these days to be around, it's definitely with a glass of fresh herbal drink.

Information provided by:

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Coriander seeds.



The medicinal brews are boiled for a stipulated time.



Garlic, ginger and curry leaves have healing properties.



Bitter but highly efficacious Wenivelgeta.



Wenivelgeta, pathpadagam and coriander seeds are highly sought after by natives who vouch for their goodness.



Be smart and keep a stock of coriander seed, ginger, garlic and other condiments at all times