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The World of Medicinal Plants

From household remedies to natural healing, the spectrum of medicine in the 21st century has never been wider – with research and practice ranging from the traditional to the innovative. We go round the world to explore regional traditions and uncover a few pharmaceutical secrets along the way.

01 The Traditional Medicine of Bhutan – Healing in the Himalayas

With its fertile soil, the kingdom of Bhutan in the eastern Himalayas is known as the land of medicinal plants. Traditional medicine still serves as the basis for much of its health care. The Golden Needle and herbs are used to relieve pain. Other medicinal plants are used to boost energy levels and potency.

02 Red Bush to the Rescue – The Cure-All Tea

Rooibos is indigenous to the Cedarberg region of the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. ‘Rooibos’ means ‘red bush’ in Afrikaans. In the early 20th Century, locals found that the needle-like leaves of the wild *Aspalathus linearis* plant produced a tasty, aromatic tea. These days, red bush tea is sold all over the world. Much of its popularity stems from its alleged healing properties: It has been argued that rooibos can help protect against some forms of cancer.

03 King of the Herbs – Ginseng, the Miracle Cure

Ginseng is one of the most widely studied medicinal plants in history, staple of traditional Chinese medicine and a cornerstone of the Yin-Yang concept. We report on ginseng farmers and traders, researchers, restaurants, kings and cooks – and of course the rare wild mountain ginseng, which has become as sought-after as gold.

04 Of Weeds and Wonders – Herbs with Healing Properties

You see them growing wild by the sides of roads and in meadows – dandelions, plantains and masterwort. Everyone knows what they look like, but few know that they have healing properties. We explore the medicinal uses of common weeds that grow around the world – from Bavaria to tropical forests.

05 Prescriptions for Indonesia – The Wondrous Herb Garden of Djakarta

In the hills near the Indonesian capital, herb expert Endah Lasmadivati has fulfilled a dream by creating her own herb garden. Together with her husband, she treats poor sick people who cannot afford standard modern medical treatment. In Indonesia only one person in ten has health insurance. As a result, plant-based medicine, knowledge of which was at one time passed on only within certain families of healers, has now become the everyday medicine for an entire nation.