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## Ethnobotany of Wartime: Wild Plants for Human Nutrition During the Conflict in Syria

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### Abstract

Wild edible plants have been an important source for human nutrition since ancient times, in particular when access to food is constrained in emergency situations such as natural disasters and conflicts. The war in Syria has now been going on for 10 years since it started in 2011. In addition to the many consequences of this conflict, 6.5 million people are unable to meet their food needs and a further 2.5 million people are at risk of food insecurity. Wild food plants are already culturally important in the region and may be supplementing local diets during this conflict. Our study aimed to uncover which wild plant species are used by local people, and what role they play in human nutrition during the current crisis. The fieldwork was carried out between March 2020 and March 2021 in the Tartus governorate located in the coastal region of Syria. We used semi-structured interviews with 50 participants in 26 villages about their use of wild plant species for food and drink. We recorded the vernacular names, uses, plant parts used, modes of preparation and consumption and frequency of use. We documented 75 wild food plant species used for food and drink. Asteraceae, Fabaceae and Lamiaceae were the most represented botanical families, whereas *Origanum syriacum*, *Rhus coriaria*, *Eryngium creticum*, and *Cichorium intybus* were among the species most quoted by informants. *Sleeq*, *Zaatar*, and *Louf* were the most popular wild plant-based dishes. The young aerial part was the most common plant part to be used. However, the nutritional composition of these wild food plants is not well documented. More research will be helpful in determining the role that these wild food plants play in supplementing local diets during the conflict.

**Keywords:** Eastern Mediterranean, emergency human behaviour, middle East, traditional food, wild vegetables