

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Seaweed



Seaweed species such as kelps provide essential nursery habitat for fisheries and other marine species and protect food sources. Other species, such as planktonic algae, play a vital role in capturing carbon, producing up to 90% of the Earth's oxygen. Understanding these roles offers principles for conservation and sustainable use.

Seaweed has been with us for billions of years but many of us who do not live within a reasonable distance of a shoreline do not realise that seaweed as a food source.

Seaweed is consumed across the world. For example, the Welsh are famous for Lava Bread, a delicacy from seaweed. Whilst seaweed is more of a novelty in the typical Western diet, save for an occasional sushi dinner or bowl of miso soup, it has been a staple food in Japan, Korea and China since ancient times.

In Japan, seaweed may account for more than 10% of the diet and twenty-one different types are used in everyday cooking. Seaweed is highly nutritious and provides a rich source of micronutrients. It also has powerful antiviral properties and researchers are looking into seaweed extracts as potential treatments.

Lead researcher, Jonathan Dordick, said in a news release that "We're learning how to block viral infection and that is knowledge we are going to need if we want to rapidly confront pandemics. The reality is that we don't have great antivirals. To protect ourselves against future pandemics, we are going to need an arsenal of approaches that we can quickly adapt to emerging viruses."

Seaweed compounds can be consumed orally and they may also be beneficial for addressing gastrointestinal infections. Seaweeds are actively being studied in the hope of finding new compounds to treat viral diseases. There are many reasons to add seaweed to your diet, aside from its antiviral potential. It is an excellent source of iodine which in itself is a strong weapon against viral infections.

Seaweed also has properties that are useful for lowering blood pressure. In an observational study in children, seaweed consumption was shown to lower diastolic blood pressure in boys and systolic blood pressure in girls.

But, choosing seaweed from unpolluted waters is crucial as these plants absorb the contents of the water in which they are grown. Whilst this is part of what makes them so nutritious, it can also be their downfall if sourced from contaminated waters.

We must all make the most of what we have. Gardeners were originally gatherers, turning to gardening for a more prolific food source.