

African leafy vegetables in South Africa

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Abstract

In this article the term ‘African leafy vegetables’ was adopted to refer to the collective of plant species which are used as leafy vegetables and which are referred to as *morogo* or *imifino* by African people in South Africa. Function is central in this indigenous concept, which is subject to spatial and temporal variability in terms of plant species that are included as a result of diversity in ecology, culinary repertoire and change over time. As a result, the concept embraces indigenous, indigenised and recently introduced leafy vegetable species but this article is concerned mainly with the indigenous and indigenised species. In South Africa, the collection of these two types of leafy vegetables from the wild, or from cultivated fields where some of them grow as weeds, has a long history that has been intimately linked to women and their traditional livelihood tasks. Among poor people in remote rural areas the use of these types of leafy vegetables is still common but nationwide there is evidence of decline, particularly in urban areas. Cultivation of indigenous or indigenised leafy vegetables is restricted to a narrow group of primarily indigenised species in South Africa. Seven groups of indigenous or indigenised African leafy vegetables that are important in South Africa were given special attention and their local nomenclature, ecology, use and cultivation are discussed.

Keywords: African leafy vegetables, *morogo*, *imifino*, history, ecology, gender, collection, cultivation, use, processing, storage