



**WORLD
WILDLIFE DAY
3 MARCH**

Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY 3 MARCH 2026

MNRE INFORMATION FALE VAILIMA BOTANICAL GARDEN AND ONLINE
MARTIN HITZIGER, SPREP (AND IUCN MEDICINAL PLANTS SPECIALIST GROUP)



Digitalis purpurea



Why do medicinal plants keep you healthy?

Humanity uses up to 60,000 medicinal plant species worldwide.

Biodiversity is the basis for most patented pharmaceutical drugs, and the resource base for traditional health services to 80% of the global population, mainly in Africa, Asia and Pacific SIDS.

Nine Oceania governments engaged in the development of WHO's traditional medicines strategy 2025-2034.

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SPREP
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional
Environment Programme

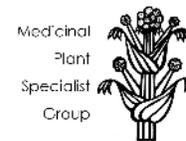
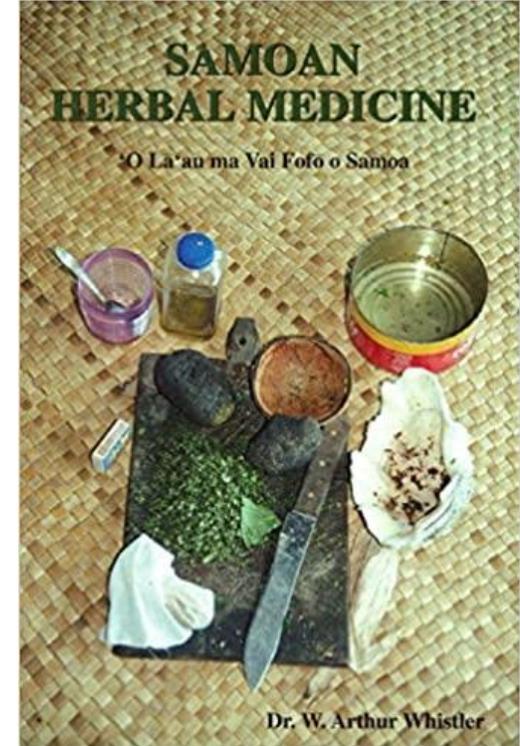
Which medicinal plants does Oceania have?

Samoa boasts ~ 800 species of plants, of which local healers use at least 84 for medical purposes!

In Oceania, available (incomplete) databases reference more than 780 medicinal plant species!

The bark of Mamala trees (*Homolanthus nutans*) is used by traditional healers in Savai'i in concoctions to treat hepatitis. After agreements between the village of Falealupo, the government of Samoa, and international actors, it is tested as potential drug against HIV.

Ifilele (*Intsia bijuga*) is a highly valuable timber used in polynesian voyaging canoes, but also for dyes, insect repellents, and traditional medical decoctions. Its populations are already threatened in many of Oceania's island states due to overharvesting.



Why are medicinal plants part of every culture's heritage?



Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a celebrated ritual drink, a light psychoactive, and a medicinal plant – recognized by 28 medical compilations, World Health Organization and European Union.

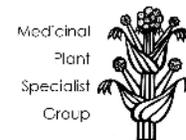


Boswellia spp. (Frankincense) and *Commiphora* spp. (Myrrh) are used in incense, are considered sacred in most world religions, and are widely used in health and well-being products.

Koka, Ayahuasca, Silphium,



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Why are medicinal plants important for livelihoods?

Annual output of Chinese *materia medica* (2012):
USD 83 billion

European market for herbal supplements (2018):
EUR 7.4 billion

Global value of the industry based on Agar /
Eaglewood oils from Asia and Papua New Guinea
(2018): USD 30 billion.

Market price of 1 l of Agar oils: up to USD 100,000.



Royal Sumatra

3 grams \$1295

ADD TO CART

How important are medicinal plants in trade?

Global trade in medicinal plant products (HS1211, 2014): USD 33 billion

~ 3 000 medicinal plant species are traded internationally

~ 1600 medicinal plant species are listed under the CITES Convention, 368 of which are formally regulated as health products by medical or food regulators

CITES trade database contains evidence of a total of 95 million kg, 618,000 liters and 52 million specimens of 78 CITES-listed MAPs exported for commercial purposes between 2010 and 2022

Scale of illicit online trade unknown – a one-off scoping survey for only 15 selected medicinal plant species on 10 selected e-commerce platforms found 68 million hits. Ca. 11% of these are sales ads.



Government of Samoa
Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment



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Medicinal plants are part of national biodiversity resources!

PACIFIC / SAMOA

Healing properties of Samoan plants verified

8:19 am on 18 August 2020



The healing properties of some plants used in traditional Samoan medicine have been scientifically proven in a new study.



Homalanthus nutans, or Mamala. Photo: [Mark Marathon / CC BY-SA (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0) Mark Marathon]

Published on Friday in the Journal of Ethnopharmacology it looked at 14 Samoan plants.



PACIFIC / SAMOA

Researcher working on Samoan medicinal knowledge and virology

10:59 am on 13 February 2026



RNZ Pacific
@RNZPacific pacificnews@rnz.co.nz



Dr Natalie Netzler has been awarded funds to research indigenous medicinal knowledge to find new treatments for viral diseases. Photo: Supplied / Auckland University



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PREMIUM

Aloi-Gray advances study of traditional medicinal plants

SAMOA



Samoan Scientist Sekotilani Aloi- Gray (Photo: Supplied)

By Maneralokina Amituanai
21 February 2026, 6:30PM



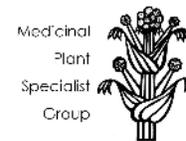
Are medicinal plants threatened biodiversity resources?

- at least two-thirds of medicinal plants continue to be harvested from the wild
- many species grow and accumulate essential compounds slowly
- demand for wild plant ingredients is growing rapidly (+ 75 percent in value in 20 years)
- IUCN red list classifies 9 % of assessed medicinal plant species as threatened, mainly from habitat loss, overexploitation, invasive pests and diseases, climate change
- Pacific examples:
 - Ifilele (*Intsia bijuga*) rare or threatened in many parts of Oceania due to overharvesting, last major stands in PNG
 - *Gyrinops* / Eaglewoods in PNG are subject to CITES compliance procedures due to unsustainable harvest
 - *Metroxylon amicarum* – a medicinal Sago variety native to Micronesia – assessed as near threatened due to land use change and climate change
 - *Dendrobium tokai* – an orchid used as oral contraceptive or abortifacient in Fiji, Tonga, and French Polynesia - classified as near threatened due to land use change and climate change



Overview of the world wildlife day celebrations – Vailima

09.00	MC/Prayer Opening words	Seiuli Ioane Etuale (SFS/SCS) Easter Chu Shing (SPREP Deputy Director General) Saveatama Benjamin Salele (Acting CEO MNRE)
09.20	Medicinal plants – Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods	Martin Hitziger (SPREP)
09.40	Research on Samoan medicinal plants	Annie Tuisuga, Fiaigoa Malolo (SROS)
10.00	Group photo, coffee, refreshments	All
10.40	Conservation of rare plants in Samoa	James Atherton (SFS/SCS)
11.00	Q&A and general discussion	All
11.15	Guided walk through Vailima botanical garden	MNRE, SFS/SCS
12.00	Closing words, invitation to afternoon webinar	Saveatama Benjamin Salele (Acting CEO MNRE) Easter Chu Shing (SPREP Deputy Director General)
12.15	Light lunch	All



Overview of the world wildlife day celebrations – webinar

15.00	Opening words	Amenatave Yauvoli (SPREP Director BC) Danna Leaman (IUCN MPSG)
15.10	Medicinal plants – Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods	Martin Hitziger (SPREP)
15.30	Country highlights: Ethnomedical & Ethnobotanical Studies in Vanuatu	Gregory M. Plunkett, Michael J. Balick (Center for Plants, People, and Culture, New York Botanical Garden)
15.50	Country highlights: Medicinal plants in agroforests in Fiji	Ashley McGuigan (University of Hawai'i)
16.10	Q&A and general discussion	All
16.30	Closing words	Danna Leaman (IUCN MPSG) Amenatave Yauvoli (SPREP Director BC)



Join us on zoom, 3 March, from 3pm (Samoa time):

<https://sprep.zoom.us/j/91472125596?pwd=nkggj80jr0lz1aEHHzVtdT1JT1eBe4.1>

Meeting ID: 914 7212 5596, Passcode: !mzwLD51