

Chapter 62

The Nutritional and Health Potential of Blackjack (Bidens pilosa L.): A Review – Promoting the Use of Blackjack for Food

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ABSTRACT

Blackjack (bidens pilosa L.) grows naturally as a perennial herb across the world, especially in tropical regions, and it is used in many parts of the world for treating illnesses such as diarrhea, indigestion, wounds, and respiratory infections. Blackjack's agricultural and pharmaceutical benefits have been well studied by scientists, following which several suggestions for using it as a source of supplements and alternative antibiotics have been made. Moreover, blackjack is edible but very much underutilized for food purposes. In this article, the author reviews the advantages and disadvantages of blackjack and argues for the deliberation of promoting its use for food.

INTRODUCTION

Blackjack (*Bidens pilosa* L.) is a widespread plant said to have its origin in tropical America. It is currently recognized as an invasive weed and a threat to natural vegetation in many countries (Arthur, Naidoo & Coopooosamy 2012), requiring serious preventative measures. It is therefore mostly destroyed and wasted. However, blackjack is well recognized for its curative characteristics in many parts of the world, thus used to treat illnesses such as respiratory infections, wounds, dysentery, diarrhoea and indigestion (Arthur et al., 2012). It is also consumed in some parts of the world, especially when other vegetables are scarce (Lusweti, Wabuyele, Ssegawa & Mauremootoo, 2011). In general, blackjack is greatly underutilized as a food source. It's occurrence as a weed or wild plant would naturally create negative perceptions with

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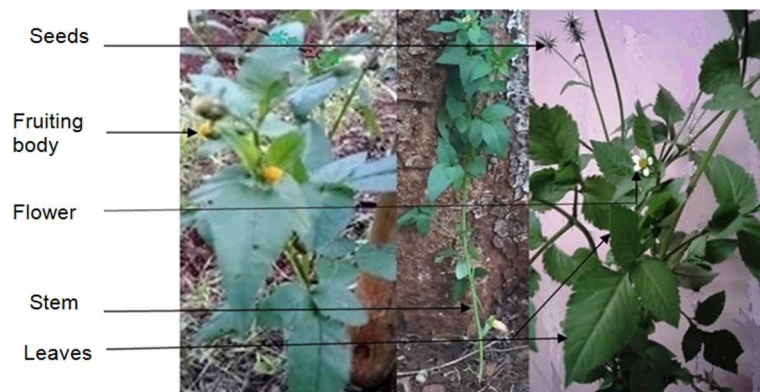
regard to its consumption regardless of its benefits. The fact that it is consumed in some communities only when other vegetables are scarce implies that blackjack is not a preferred food.

Although its nutritional benefits have been studied, they have not been reported as much as its pharmaceutical and agricultural benefits. Considering the minimal labour required to grow blackjack together with its potentially significant nutritional benefits, in this paper, the author argues for the domestication of the blackjack plant and the deliberation of its use for food. The main objective for this paper was to review the advantages and disadvantages of blackjack and argue for its promotion for use as food based on its nutritional benefits and its potential for combating micronutrient deficiencies and chronic diseases.

BACKGROUND

Blackjack (Figure 1) falls under the following taxonomic tree (Bartolome, Villaseñor & Yang, 2013):

Figure 1. Blackjack (Bidens pilosa L.)



Taxonomic Tree

Kingdom: *Plantae*
Subkingdom: *Tracheobionta*
Phylum: *Spermatophyta*
Subphylum: *Angiospermae*
Class: *Magnoliopsida*
Order: *Asterales*
Family: *Asteraceae*
Genus: *Bidens*
Species: *Bidens pilosa*

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