

Sorrel is good for you!

Sorrel is one of the most popular drinks in Jamaica, not only during the Christmas season. In fact, gone are the days when sorrel could only be found at Christmas time.

Now, all year round, this delicious, highly nutritious beverage is available anywhere you go. And for good reasons. Researchers have uncovered numerous health benefits of this amazing plant, which has led to increased, widescale production.

Sorrel (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) is used in many parts of the world to treat a number of ailments, including as a diuretic, a sedative, a tonic, a laxative, to lower blood pressure, to stimulate the production of bile by the liver, to relieve coughs; while the leaves are made into a poultice to relieve boils and abscesses. Research suggests that sorrel may be used as a deterrent against certain kinds of cancer due to the presence of a group of compounds called flavonoids, now thought to be powerful antioxidants which scavenge the body of disease-causing free radicals. Flavonoids are healthy chemical substances found in plants such as sorrel and are also responsible for its deep-red colour. The red sorrel calyx has also been found to have a wide range of vitamins and minerals, including: vitamin C, calcium, thiamin (B1), niacin, and riboflavin (B2). Sorrel provides fibre - if pulp and seeds are used to make drink, stuffing or whatever dish or side item. Calcium helps to build and maintain strong bones. It also helps the heart, muscles and nerves to function properly. Niacin is a B vitamin and has long been used to increase HDL - 'the good cholesterol'. Local researcher Dr Paul Gyles, professor at Northern Caribbean University, found that sorrel has substances that can rid the body of certain types of cancer cells, but these substances are found in the seeds and calyx (flower) of the sorrel. Sorrel has been proven to reduce the risk of heart disease by significantly reducing elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels, as it helps to prevent the clogging of arteries. It also has benefits as a diuretic and a weight-loss aid when taken daily. Ongoing research in Britain is investigating its use in the reduction of high blood pressure, with positive results thus far, suggesting that daily consumption of sorrel tea/drink may help to prevent or reduce high cholesterol, high blood pressure and some cancers.

The Vitamin C in sorrel: Helps to build the immune system and reduce the chances of getting certain illness such as the flu, especially at this time of the year. **Helps with the absorption of iron** found in dried peas, dried beans and dark-green leafy vegetables (non-haem iron). **Helps with the healing of cuts and bruises.**

The Vitamin B1 in sorrel: Helps the body to get more energy for the brain and nerve cells from the starchy foods that are eaten. **The Vitamin B2 in sorrel:** Helps the body to get energy from the fat that is stored on the body during exercise. **Prevents damage to cells.**

Flavonoids in sorrel: Help to reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease. **The Fibre in sorrel:** Helps to lower blood-sugar levels. **Helps to lower the 'bad cholesterol' or low density lipoproteins (LDL) cholesterol and increase the 'good cholesterol' or high density lipoproteins (HDL) cholesterol.** The fibre content of sorrel is dependent on how the sorrel is prepared. When the whole sorrel flower (seeds and calyx) is used in making drink or other products, more fibre will be consumed and will be of greater health benefit. Based on results of Gyles' research, the anti-cancer properties of sorrel are found in the entire sorrel (flower and seeds), and if consumed, may reduce the risk of laryngeal and lung cancers.

Making a healthier sorrel drink Use whole sorrel - calyx (flower) and seeds. This will result in less waste and getting more value for money. Blend, grind or puree sorrel, then steep overnight to retain vitamins. Using hot water destroys vitamin C, and straining removes the fiber and some of the flavonoids. Use less sugar or sweetening agents in order to reduce total calories consumed. Add ginger and cloves for flavour. Do not use ginger or brown sugar for persons on a low-potassium diet, such as persons with kidney disease. Ginger and brown sugar are high in potassium and may cause the heart to beat faster and result in a heart attack. Instead, use cloves and sweeten with white sugar. For persons with diabetes or those trying to lose or maintain weight, sweeten drink with less sugar or with low-calorie sweeteners. Add soda or carbonated water to sorrel drink before serving, for the fizz and 'sparkling' effect. Use less alcohol (white rum) and more cloves for flavour. Try white sorrel to make drink or combine both types of sorrel.

Other ways to use sorrel this Christmas Make or buy locally made sorrel chutney to serve with poultry instead of cranberry sauce. Make a sorrel sauce with the waste (what was strained off from making drink) and some sorrel liquid. Serve with meats and fish. Use chopped or pureed sorrel to make a stuffing for fish or meat. Use whole sorrel to make a 'red smoothie' for breakfast or healthy snack. Try locally made sorrel wines at dinner instead of imported wines. Use sorrel jam on bread and crackers. Source: Jamaica Gleaner