

Flourishing Plants, Flourishing People – article appendices

Appendix A. Maintaining health with everyday historically used edible plants



Examples commonly used in our educational settings include plants with both epidemiological and controlled clinical trial that support their traditional use:

- Apples ('An apple a day') associated with immunological, cardiovascular, metabolic and cancer preventative health
- Willow and meadowsweet for inflammation awareness
- Hawthorn for cardiovascular support
- Elderberry for immune resilience
- Garlic and onion for metabolic and antimicrobial support

- Cruciferous vegetables linked with reduced chronic disease risk
- Herbs such as sage, lemon balm and rosemary associated with cognitive support and long-term brain health
- Chamomile, valerian and lavender for anxiety and sleep support

These examples link botany, chemistry and biology with real-world health understanding.

Appendix B. Supporting evidence: wellbeing and flourishing

International wellbeing research increasingly shows that human flourishing depends on more than economic security or clinical healthcare. Key predictors include physical health, mental health, connection to nature, meaning and purpose, and a sense of personal agency. Education that integrates natural history with practical historical plant use knowledge supports these outcomes.

Preventive health

Public health organisations increasingly emphasise prevention, lifestyle and health literacy as essential strategies for reducing long-term disease burden. Education is recognised as a key foundation for improving population health.

Scientific evidence

More than half of modern medicines originate from natural compounds, many derived from plants. Teaching this history within education strengthens scientific literacy and encourages evidence-based thinking.

References

- World Health Organization (2019). Global Strategy on Health Promotion and Preventive Health.

- World Health Organization (2013–2023). WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy.
- Natural England (2020). Nature Connection Evidence Handbook.
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. State of the World's Plants and Fungi.
- Harvard University. Human Flourishing Program.

The ongoing extensive and robust scientific research conducted on our UK historically used plants provide context for their educational relevance as well as how they are valued in mainstream scientific (biomedicine, food industry, ecological) research, providing evidence that our natural historical use is not anecdotal. The following selection includes plants native or naturalised to the UK that are documented in scientific literature for pharmacological activity, health related research or traditional use (with approximate article numbers).

Scientific Name (Common Name)	Approx. Papers*	Research Focus Examples
Salix spp. (Willow species)	>1,000	Anti-inflammatory salicylates and pain pathways
Crataegus monogyna / laevigata (Hawthorn)	~700–900	Cardiovascular support, heart function
Urtica dioica (Nettle)	~300–500	Anti-inflammatory, metabolic health
Sambucus nigra (Elderberry)	~250–400	Immune support, influenza symptom
Vaccinium myrtillus (Bilberry)	~800–1,200	Vascular health, antioxidant mechanisms
Valeriana officinalis (Valerian)	~600–800	Sleep quality, anxiety modulation
Taraxacum spp. (Dandelion)	~300–400	Digestive/liver support, diuretic activity
Rosmarinus officinalis (Rosemary)	~800–1,200	Cognitive function, antioxidant effects
Mentha × piperita (Peppermint)	~1,000	GI disorders, IBS relief
Thymus vulgaris (Thyme)	~500–700	Antimicrobial, respiratory symptoms
Salvia officinalis (Sage)	~700–1,000	Cognitive and memory support, brain health, menopause symptoms, Alzheimer's pharmacology
Plantago major (Plantain)	~250–350	Wound healing, soothing GI effects
Galanthus nivalis (Snowdrop)	~250–350	Alzheimer's pharmacology (galantamine)

**Note: All of the plants above are naturally occurring in UK ecosystems; part of traditional British plant use; represented in peer reviewed scientific literature; suitable for educational study in botany, ecology, chemistry and human health.*

These examples help illustrate that native plants are more than ecologically necessary and historical references for use, but are vital subjects for modern scientific investigation for ecological and human health.