

**Food values in different  
morphotypes of *Centella asiatica* L.  
with special preference to Iron and Calcium content**

**By**

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The work describe in this thesis was carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. N. Salim and Dr. U.G. Chandrika and a report on this has not been submitted in whole or in part to any university or any other institution for another Degree/Diploma.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	vi
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	vii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b>	viii
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ix
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	5
<b>2.1 <i>Centella asiatica</i></b>	6
2.1.1 Introduction	6
2.1.2 Plant taxonomy	6
2.1.3 Vernacular names	7
2.1.4 Description	7
2.1.5 Distribution	8
2.1.6 General characters	8
2.1.7 Chemistry of plant	8
2.1.7.1 Chemical constituents of plant	8
2.1.7.2 Chemical composition	9
2.1.8 Cultivation	10
2.1.8.1 Area for cultivation	10
2.1.8.2 Planting season	10
2.1.8.3 Land preparation	10
2.1.8.4 Planting and space	10
2.1.8.5 Irrigation	10

2.1.8.6 Fertilizer	10
2.1.8.7 Harvesting	11
2.1.9 Uses of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	11
2.1.9.1 Culinary Uses	11
2.1.9.2 Medicinal Uses	11
2.1.10 Commercial preparations of Gotukola	12
2.1.10.1 Gotukola capsules	12
2.1.10.2 Thuja Gotukola compounds (Connective tissue tonic)	12
2.1.10.3 Gotukola-Ginkgo compounds (Brain & memory tonic)	13
2.1.10.4 Gotukola herbal tea	13
2.1.10.5 Gotukola kenda	13
2.1.11 Morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	14
2.1.11.1 Type 1: G <sub>1</sub>	14
2.1.11.2 Type 2: G <sub>2</sub>	15
2.1.11.3 Type 3: G <sub>3</sub>	16
2.1.11.4 Type 4: G <sub>7</sub>	17
2.1.11.5 Type 5: G <sub>8</sub>	18
2.1.11.6 Type 6: G <sub>12</sub>	19
<b>2.2 Minerals</b>	<b>20</b>
2.2.1 Calcium	21
2.2.1.1 Calcium sources	21
2.2.1.2 Physiological functions of calcium	22
2.2.1.3 Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA)	23

2.2.1.4 Deficiency	24
2.2.2 Sodium	24
2.2.2.1 Sources	25
2.2.2.2 Physiological functions of sodium	25
2.2.2.3 Recommended Dietary Allowance	26
2.2.2.4 Deficiency	26
2.2.3. Potassium	27
2.2.3.1 Sources	27
2.2.3.2 Physiological functions of potassium	27
2.2.3.3 Recommended Dietary Allowances	28
2.2.3.4 Deficiency	28
2.2.4 Magnesium	28
2.2.4.1 Sources	29
2.2.4.2 Physiological functions of magnesium	29
2.2.4.3 Recommended Dietary Allowances	29
2.2.4.4 Deficiency	30
2.2.5 Iron	30
2.2.5.1 Sources	31
2.2.5.2 Physiological functions of iron	32
2.2.5.3 Recommended Dietary Allowances	32
2.2.5.4 Deficiency	32
2.2.6 Zinc	33
2.2.6.1 Sources	33
2.2.6.2 Physiological functions of Zinc	34

2.2.6.3 Recommended Dietary Allowances	35
2.2.6.4 Deficiency	35
2.2.7 Copper	35
2.2.7.1 Sources	36
2.2.7.2 Physiological functions of copper	36
2.2.7.3 Recommended Dietary Allowances	36
2.2.7.4 Deficiency	37
<b>2.3 Green Leafy Vegetables in Sri Lanka</b>	<b>37</b>
2.3.1 Commonly growing leafy vegetables in Sri Lanka	37
2.3.2 Nutritional values of leafy vegetables	38
2.3.3 Preparation methods of leafy vegetables	40
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.1 Cultivation of <i>Centella asiatica</i></b>	<b>42</b>
3.1.1 Selection of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	42
3.1.2 Preparation of potting media	42
3.1.3 Growing of <i>C. asiatica</i> plants	42
<b>3.2 Harvesting</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3.3 Preparation of sample</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>3.4 Determination of moisture (Oven drying method)</b>	<b>43</b>
3.4.1 Procedure	43
3.4.2 Calculation	43
<b>3.5 Determination of ash</b>	<b>43</b>
3.5.1 Procedure	43
<b>3.6 Determination of Protein</b>	<b>44</b>



3.6.1 Procedure	44
3.6.2 Calculation	45
<b>3.7 Determination of Minerals (Atomic absorption spectroscopic method)</b>	<b>45</b>
3.7.1 Preparation of test sample	45
3.7.2 Analysis of minerals	45
3.7.3 Calculation	46
<b>3.8 Statistical analysis</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS &amp; DISCUSSION</b>	<b>47</b>
4.1 Moisture content	49
4.2 Ash Content	50
4.3 Mineral content	50
4.3.1 Calcium content	51
4.3.2 Potassium content	52
4.3.3 Sodium content	53
4.3.4 Magnesium content	54
4.3.5 Iron content	55
4.3.6 Zinc content	56
4.3.7 Copper content	57
4.4 Protein content	58
4.5 Summary of the results and general discussion	59
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>69</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

	Page No
Table 1: Chemical composition of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	9
Table 2: Major and Trace minerals	20
Table 3: Calcium content in some foods	21
Table 4: Approximate distribution of Iron in adult male and female	30
Table 5: Iron content in some common food items (mg/100g edible portion)	31
Table 6: Nutritional values of some common leafy vegetables in Sri Lanka	39
Table 7: Instrumental parameters in Atomic Absorption Spectrometer	46
Table 8: Calcium content of morphotypes of <i>C. asiatica</i>	51
Table 9: Potassium content of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	52
Table 10: Sodium content of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	54
Table 11: Magnesium content of different morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	54
Table 12: Iron content of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	56
Table 13: Protein content of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	58
Table 14: Proximate composition of different morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	59
Table 15: Mineral (major) content of different morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	59
Table 16: Mineral (trace) content of different morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	60
Table 17: Moisture content (%) of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	70
Table 18: Ash content (%) of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	70
Table 19: Zinc content of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	71
Table 20: Copper content of morphotypes of <i>Centella asiatica</i>	71

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page No
Figure 1. <i>Centella asiatica</i> , morphotypes G <sub>1</sub>	14
Figure 2. <i>Centella asiatica</i> , morphotypes G <sub>2</sub>	15
Figure 3. <i>Centella asiatica</i> , morphotypes G <sub>3</sub>	16
Figure 4. <i>Centella asiatica</i> , morphotypes G <sub>7</sub>	17
Figure 5. <i>Centella asiatica</i> , morphotypes G <sub>8</sub>	18
Figure 6. <i>Centella asiatica</i> , morphotypes G <sub>12</sub>	19
Figure 7: % Moisture contents of different morphotypes of <i>C.asiatica</i>	49
Figure 8: % ash content of different morphotypes of <i>C.asiatica</i>	50
Figure 9: Potassium content of different morphotypes of <i>C.asiatica</i>	52
Figure 10: Zinc content of different morphotypes of <i>C. asiatica</i>	57
Figure 11: Copper content of different morphotypes of <i>C.asiatica</i>	57
Figure 12: Calcium contents of different morphotypes of <i>C. asiatica</i>	72
Figure13: Sodium content of different morphotypes of <i>C. asiatica</i>	72
Figure 14: Magnesium contents of different morphotypes of <i>C. asiatica</i>	73
Figure 15: Iron content of different morphotypes of <i>C. asiaticai</i>	73
Figure 16: Protein content of different morphotypes of <i>C. asiatica</i>	74

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## ABSTRACT

Six morphotypes of *Centella asiatica*, a popular leafy vegetable in Sri Lanka were analyzed for proximate components and selected dietary minerals. Seven replicates from each morphotype were grown under homogeneous conditions in the green house for sixteen weeks. Proximate components including moisture, ash and protein and minerals calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, iron, zinc and copper were determined for five samples from each type and results were compared. Moisture content ranged between 85 and 86 % while ash content ranged between 15 and 17% (on dry weight basis). *Centella asiatica* contained considerable amounts of calcium, potassium, magnesium and iron. Potassium was the major element and present at an average of 3079.0 mg to 6295.0 mg per 100g. Sodium content ranged between 1114.2 and 2597.1 mg per 100g. Other minerals calcium, iron, magnesium, zinc and copper were contained in significant levels. Calcium ranged between 1150.9 and 2206.1 while iron content ranged between 18.5 and 74.3 mg per 100g. Mean content of magnesium, zinc and copper ranged from 240.7 to 841.2, 11.2 to 19.3 and 2.6 to 6.4 mg per 100g respectively. G<sub>3</sub> has highest contents of sodium, calcium, zinc and copper while G<sub>1</sub> has highest content of potassium and G<sub>7</sub> has highest content of iron. Highest content of magnesium was shown by G<sub>8</sub>. Significant difference in the contents of potassium, sodium, magnesium and iron could be seen among morphotypes of *Centella asiatica*.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**



## 1. Introduction

Gotukola is a slender-stemmed delicate perennial herbaceous creeper with kidney shaped leaves, belonging to the family Umbelliferae. Originally the plant was identified botanically as *Hydrocotyle asiatica* Linn, but subsequently it was named as *Centella asiatica*.

In the folklore of Sri Lanka, it is said that many years ago people wondered at the longevity of the elephant. They watched the animal's habits carefully, hoping to discover the secret to a long life, and found that Gotukola would keep old age at bay. A Sinhalese proverb states that two leaves of gotukola each day will keep old age from coming in. As an aid to deep meditation, gotukola can become part of a holistic attitude toward health and longevity, bringing a peace and relaxation that is a compliment to physical practices like yoga as well as the inner search for balance within the mind and body.

In the ancient art of Ayurveda, gotukola is regarded as one of the most spiritually pure herbs and particularly beneficial for the rejuvenation of the body. Gotukola's gifts include the ability to improve mental clarity while having a soothing effect on the circulatory and nervous systems and to heal wounds quickly and gently, particularly those caused by intense burns because it strengthens connective tissues to prevent scarring. A few leaves of the herb improve the blood flow throughout the body and stimulate the mind (called as 'food for the brain') both of which hasten healing in those who are confined to bed during an illness or in times of trauma, wherein clear and positive thoughts can be as beneficial as chemical pharmaceuticals. Gotukola is used as a leafy green vegetable in Sri Lankan cuisine. It is most often prepared as salad; a traditional accompaniment to rice and curry,

and goes especially well with vegetarian dishes. In addition, it is boiled and drunk as a beverage. Extract of whole plant is used for preparation of porridge (kola kenda). Gotukola is the one of the most common leafy vegetable consumed by Sri Lankans. According to the statistics given by Dynamic of Vegetable Production Distribution and consumption in Asia, per capita monthly consumption of Gotukola was averagely 73g. (Ali M., 2000)

The determination of minerals in leafy vegetables has considerable importance in recent years. Moreover, an increase awareness of the relationship between dietary minerals and the occurrence of chronic disease, such as hypertension, osteoporosis or cardiovascular disease, (Groff, 1994) has contributed the increased attention paid to mineral nutrient in food. Though Gotukola is the most popular leafy vegetable in Sri Lanka, very limited publications and literatures on nutritional value are available. Hence determination of the nutritional value in gotukola is considered as important.

Twelve morphotypes of gotukola including 'heen gotukola', 'salad gotukola' and 'yodha gotukola' have been identified according to their morphological and morphometric characters (Wijekoon, 2005). People believe that some of these morphotypes are more nutritious than others. So this research was mainly carried out to determine the nutritional value, especially dietary minerals in different morphotypes of gotukola.

According to the Food and Nutrition Policy of Sri Lanka 2004-2010, Sri Lanka has three micro nutrient deficiencies that have been identified as public health problems namely Iron, Vitamin A and Iodine. They are also known as 'hidden hunger'. Anemia is one of the major public health problem in Sri Lanka. It affects all segments of the population and