

Safed Musli: a Potent Traditional Medicine & a Cornucopia

D. P. Agrawal
Lok Vigyan Kendra
Almora 263601
Email: dpagrawal@sancharnet.in

Safed Musli grows wild in thick forests and is a traditional medicinal plant. Mainly its tuberous roots are used in Ayurvedic medicines. Roots are used for the preparation of a nutritive tonic used in general sexual weakness. *Safed Musli* has been named in the *Atharva Veda* as one of the divine herbs, offering cure for many ailments and health related problems. The origin of Safed Musli, a wild herb, can be traced back to the Aravallis, the oldest mountain ranges of the continent, from where it spread to the nearby areas, presently known as the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh. It is a herb with sub-erect lanceolate leaves. Nowadays, there is a vast demand all over the world, especially in the Gulf countries and the West. Due to its vast demand it is very costly.

Safed musli's botanical classification is as follows:

Nomenclature and Taxonomy

Class : Monocotyledons
Series : Coronarieae
Family : Liliaceae
Genus : Chlorophytum
Species: borivilianum/ tuberosum

Varieties

Because of its significant medicinal properties, *Chlorophytum borivilianum*, a variety of Safed Musli has got today maximum demand and commercial value. There are around 256 varieties of Chlorophytum in the world; in India, we have around 17 of them, of which, *borivilianum* has got a good market demand.

USES

It would not be an exaggeration to call Safed Musli a unique, potent and versatile medicine discovered by the genius of ancient India. It is a rich source of over 25 alkaloids, vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, steroids, saponins, potassium, calcium, magnesium, phenol, resins, polysaccharides etc.

Safed Musli is an important ingredient of more than a hundred Ayurvedic, Allopathic, Homeopathic and Unani medicinal preparations. As a (protein rich) food supplement, there is a tremendously growing International demand for processed Safed Musli.

Safed Musli is used as an:

- * Aphrodisiac agent and revitalizer.
- * As a general sex tonic.
- * Remedy for Diabetes.
- * As a cure for Arthritis.
- * As a curative for Natal and Post-Natal problems.
- * For Rheumatism and Joint Pains.
- * Increases lactation in feeding mothers and lactating cows.
- * Increasingly used in Ayurvedic and Pharmaceutical Industries.
- * Used in Diarrhea, Dysentery
- * Used for Gonorrhoea
- * Used for Leucorrhoea
- * Used as a diuretic

CULTIVATION & INCOME

If we keep exploiting the natural sources of musli, within no time it will reach extinction. It is therefore imperative that we try to grow it ex-situ. During the last decade, some systematic efforts have been made to popularise the cultivation of musli, as its cultivation is far more profitable than any of the traditional crops. As musli grows naturally in most parts of Central region of India, the normal climate of the central region suits the crop most. Sandy loam soil with proper drainage is ideal for its growth. It has now been found that it can grow successfully within a wide range of temperature and rainfall.

On an average a crop gives an yield of 20-30 quintals of wet musli per acre. After peeling and drying up to nearly 20 percent (4-4.5 quintals) dry musli is finally obtained. In the indigenous market, the present rate of dry Musli ranges between Rs 800 to Rs 1,800 per kg, but it is more than Rs 3,000 per kg in the international market. Thus even if its sold raw, it can be a rich source of rural income. But if it is processed in the form of Ayurvedic and other drugs, it can generate tremendous income.

Because of it's use in many Ayurvedic, Allopathic and Unani medicines, this wonder-herb has a total estimated annual market demand of approx. 35, 000 tons. Presently, production is not even 5% of the estimated demand. There is a huge demand for Safed Musli in the Middle East, Europe, Japan and the USA.

Safed Musli is a cash crop with low risk and assured tax-free high returns in a period as short as less than one year. Scientific mode of cultivation and careful selection of planting material will yield repeated benefits year after year. As musli farming is agricultural income, its tax free. For an acre of land it generates about Rs. 4-5 lakh (More than \$100,000) net income per acre. As the huge demand for this herb is driving it to extinction, it should be grown ex-situ which will not only preserve the biodiversity but also generate vast incomes in an equitable and eco-friendly manner. The Lok Vigyan Kendra is also putting in some efforts in this direction.

