

Medicinal Plants as A Natural Immunity Booster Against Covid 19: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Medicinal plants have long been valued for their therapeutic properties, especially in boosting immune function. This review explores the role of medicinal plants in enhancing immunity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with an emphasis on plants known for their bioactive compounds and health benefits. A thorough search of online databases resulted in the identification of 115 published articles from 2020 to 2024, which led to the selection of 50 plants commonly used for immune support. Plants include Garlic, Ashwagandha, Neem, Turmeric, Guduchi, Holy Basil, Amla, Aloe Vera, Black Cardamom, Cinnamon, Pomegranate, Guava, Moringa, Black Cumin, Lemon, Lemongrass, Papaya, Green Tea and others. These plants contain bioactive compounds such as flavonoids, alkaloids, and terpenoids, which are believed to possess immune-boosting, anti-inflammatory, and antiviral properties. Garlic, Turmeric, and Ashwagandha are particularly noted for combating oxidative stress and supporting immune function, while Gurjo, Neem, and Amla are valued for their detoxifying and anti-inflammatory effects. These plants, traditionally used during viral infections like the flu and COVID-19, represent a fusion of ancient cultural wisdom and modern scientific research. Future research should focus on clinical validation and pharmacological studies to better understand the efficacy of these plants in immune modulation.

Keywords: *Alkaloids, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, flavonoids, terpenoids.*

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INTRODUCTION

Global health has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic, which has presented serious difficulties for healthcare systems, particularly in rural areas. The virus spread quickly, putting a strain on the healthcare system and highlighting the urgent need for efficient preventative and treatment plans. In this situation, the community's response to the epidemic relied heavily on traditional medical practices, especially the usage of medicinal herbs. During this health crisis, Nepal a country renowned for its rich biodiversity and long history of employing herbal medicine saw a rise in the use of these natural medicines (Chaudhary et al., 2024; Ghimire et al., 2021). Since ancient times, medicinal plants have played a crucial role in Nepal's healthcare system. Numerous of these plants have antiviral, anti-inflammatory, and immune-stimulating qualities that make them effective tools in the fight against respiratory infections, such as COVID-19. For example, Tulsi, often known as holy basil (*Ocimum sanctum*), is well known for its immunomodulatory properties and has been used traditionally to improve respiratory health (Bhadra & Sethi, 2020). Similar to this, Gurjo (*Tinospora cordifolia*), a well-known adaptogen, was favored by Nepalese communities during the pandemic since it has been shown to boost the immune system and lower fever (Subedi et al., 2022; Joshi et al., 2021).

In the initial phases of the pandemic, when medical facilities were finding it difficult to handle the growing number of COVID-19 cases, many Nepalese people found that using medicinal herbs was an affordable and culturally appropriate alternative. Realizing the potential advantages of combining traditional and modern medical treatments, the Nepalese government and a number of health organizations encouraged the use of traditional remedies (WHO, 2020; Pham et al., 2021). By utilizing local knowledge of therapeutic plants, this all-encompassing strategy attempted to empower communities in addition to mitigating COVID-19 symptoms.

The pharmacological characteristics of the many medicinal plants utilized in Nepal have been the subject of numerous investigations. For instance, studies have demonstrated the antiviral and anti-inflammatory qualities of chemicals contained in turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), which may be helpful in the treatment of COVID-19 symptoms (Das, 2022). Furthermore, it has been reported that the widely used plant neem (*Azadirachta indica*) possesses immune modulatory properties and the ability to prevent the growth of viruses (Oli & Gautam, 2022). Notwithstanding the extensive application of these botanicals, a notable lacuna exists in the clinical research endorsing their effectiveness and safety in managing COVID-19. The purpose of this review article is to give a general summary of the medicinal plants that the Nepalese

people used during the COVID-19 epidemic, looking at their pharmacological characteristics, traditional applications, and roles.

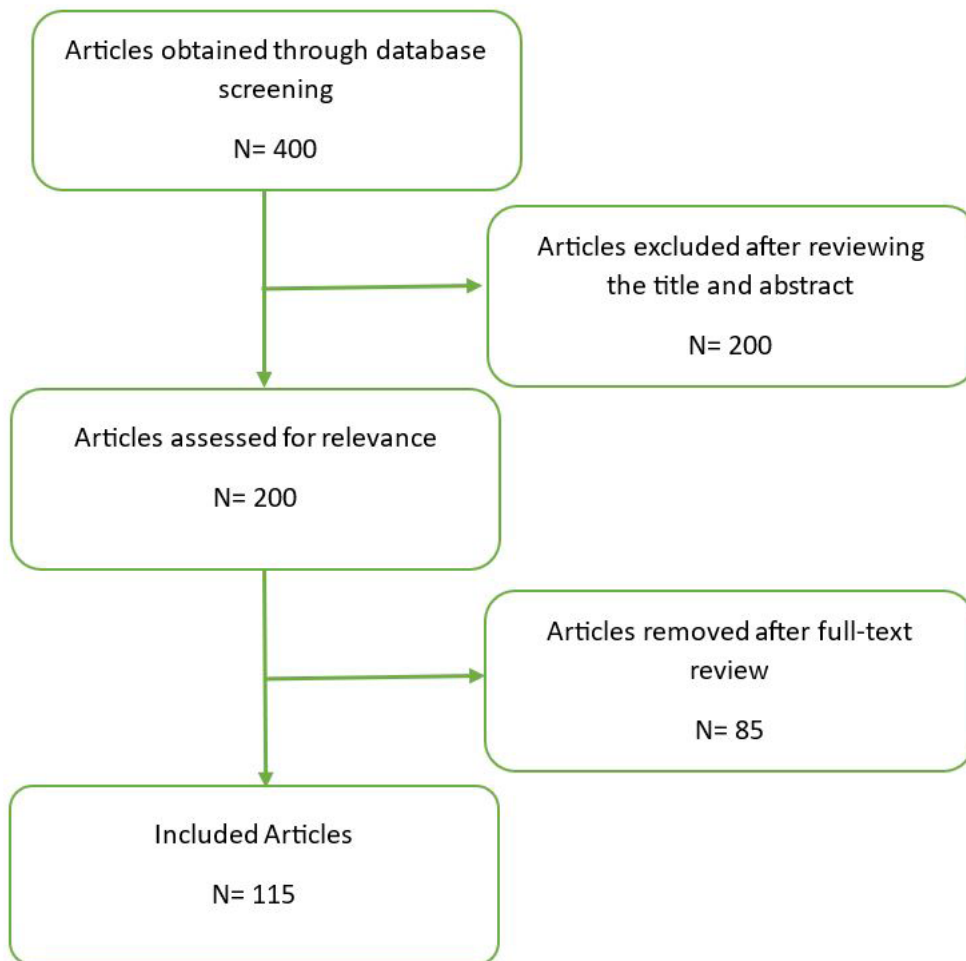
DATA AND METHODS

This study utilized a structured literature review to investigate the role of medicinal plants as natural immune enhancers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected from primary databases, including Google Scholar, Science Direct, and PubMed, using search terms like “Immunomodulatory properties of medicinal plants,” “Immune-boosting medicinal plants,” and “Use of medicinal plants to prevent COVID-19.” Articles published from 2020 to 2024 were selected to ensure the inclusion of the most recent and relevant findings. A total of 500 articles were initially downloaded, and each was screened based on specific inclusion criteria, prioritizing studies that focused on antiviral, immunomodulatory, and anti-inflammatory properties of plants used in Nepalese communities.

The review systematically categorized studies based on the efficacy of these plants in enhancing immunity and combating viral infections. Key bioactive compounds and their associated health benefits were identified, linking them to the plants’ potential role in preventing COVID-19. The analysis resulted in the final selection of 115 articles, which included 50 medicinal plants known for their immune-supporting effects. The entire process, including article selection and analysis, is depicted in Figure 1, following the PRISMA flowchart. This method provided a comprehensive and culturally relevant understanding of the contribution of medicinal plants to public health during the pandemic, particularly in the context of Nepal.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow chat for the study of medicinal plants as a natural immunity booster against COVID 19



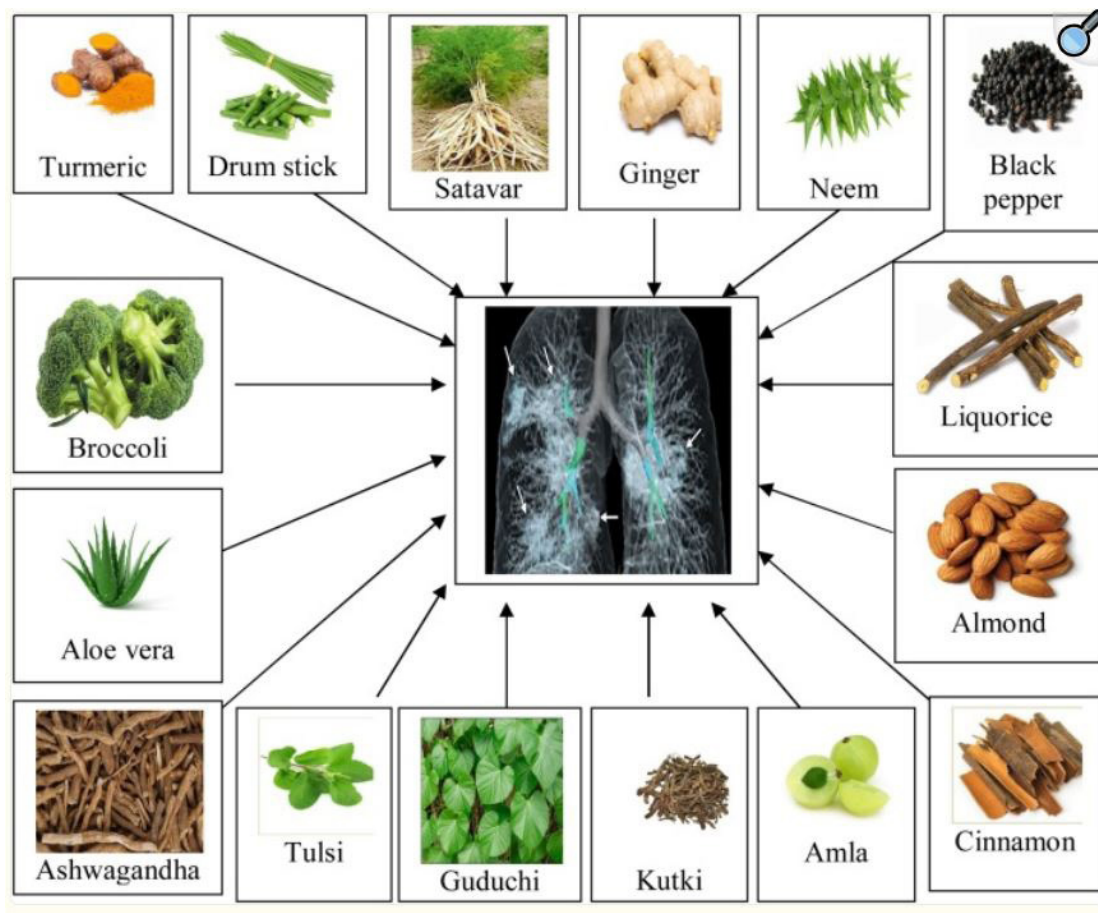
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nepal is rich in medicinal plants. During the COVID-19 epidemic in Nepal, medicinal herbs greatly aided public health by increasing immunity and relieving respiratory problems. Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) was widely utilized for its antiviral and immune modulatory properties, while Gurjo (*Tinospora cordifolia*) was used as an adaptogen to improve immunity and lower fever (Bhadra & Sethi, 2020; Subedi et al., 2022; Joshi et al., 2021). Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

and ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) were popular due to their anti-inflammatory characteristics, which help with inflammation and immunological function (Zhou et al.,2022; Memarzia et al., 2021; Munekata et al., 2021). Selvaraj et al. (2019) also used Aloe Vera for its anti-oxidant and therapeutic properties. As like in Nepal, in India also many people used herbal medicinal plants such as Tulsi, Alovevera, Turmic, Neem, Ginger etc. to combat COVID-19. Indian ayurvedic doctors suggest a few essential herbs (Figure 2) that give the body a strong immune system (Das, 2022). The list of the common plants consumed by Nepalese community during the COVID-19 Pandemic is listed in Table 1. However, there is a significant dearth of clinical studies showing their efficacy against COVID-19, emphasizing the need for additional research to validate these traditional therapies.

Figure 2

Medicinal plants as immunomodulator against COVID-19 infection (Source: Das, 2022)



Medicinal plants like Garlic, Ashwagandha, Neem, Turmeric, Guduchi, Holy Basil, Amla, Aloe Vera, and others contain bioactive compounds such as flavonoids, alkaloids, and terpenoids with immune-boosting, anti-inflammatory, and antiviral properties. Garlic, Turmeric, and Ashwagandha are especially noted for combating oxidative stress and supporting immune function. Guduchi, Neem, and Amla are valued for their detoxifying and anti-inflammatory effects. The details are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Lists of the major Medicinal Plants Consumed by the Nepalese Community During the COVID-19 Pandemic

<i>Scientific Name</i>	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Achyranthes aspera L.</i>	Amaranthaceae	Prickly Chaff Flower	Datiun	Whole plant, Roots	Alkaloids, Saponins, Tannins, Flavonoids	Anti-inflammatory, Antioxidant, Anti-microbial, Immunomodulatory, Pain relief	(Abhang, 2024; Ha et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2024; Jain et al., 2024)
<i>Aconitum heterophyllum Wall. ex Royle</i>	Ranunculaceae	Indian Aconite	Atis	Roots	Alkaloids (Aconitine), Saponins	Immunomodulatory, Anti-inflammatory, Analgesic, Antioxidant	(Chauhan et al., 2024; Gururani et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2021)
<i>Allium sativum L.</i>	Amaryllidaceae	Garlic	Lasun	Bulbs	Allicin, Sulfur compounds	Antiviral, Immunomodulatory, Antibacterial	(Enejiyon et al., 2020; El-Saber Batiha et al., 2020)
<i>Allium cepa L.</i>	Amaryllidaceae	Onion	Pyaj	Bulbs	Quercetin, Sulfur compounds	Immune-boosting, Antioxidant	(Boru et al., 2024; Marefati et al., 2021)
<i>Amomum subulatum Roxb.</i>	Zingiberaceae	Black Cardamom	Alaichi	Seeds, Pods	Cineole, Limonene, Terpinol, Quercetin, Flavonoids, Phenolic Compounds	Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Antimicrobial, Respiratory health, Immune-boosting	(Drishya et al., 2023; Drishya et al., 2022)

Scientific Name	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Aloe vera (L.) Burm. f.</i>	Asphodelaceae	Aloe vera	Ghiu kumari	Gel, Leaves	Vitamins, Anthraquinones	Immunomodulatory, Antiviral	(Miah et al., 2024; Kaur & Bains 2023)
<i>Artemisia indica Willd</i>	Asteraceae	Sweet worm-wood	Titepati	Leaves	Artemisinin	Immunomodulatory, Antiviral	(Cui et al., 2024; Dogra et al., 2023)
<i>Artocarpus heterophyllus Lam.</i>	Moraceae	Jackfruit	Rukh Katahar	Fruit, Seeds, Wood	Flavonoids, Tannins, Carotenoids, Polysaccharides	Antioxidant, Immune-boosting, Anticancer, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid	(Li et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2023)
<i>Azadirachta indica A. Juss.</i>	Meliaceae	Neem	Neem	Leaves, Bark	Azadirachtin, Nimbin	Immunomodulatory, Antibacterial, Antiviral	(Oli & Gautam, 2022; Islas et al., 2020)
<i>Asparagus racemosus Willd.</i>	Asparagaceae	Shatavari	Kurilo	Roots	Steroids, flavonoids,	Immunomodulatory, antidiabetic, antioxidant	(Akhter et al., 2024; Paniagua-Zambrana et al., 2024)
<i>Berberis asiatica Roxb. ex DC.</i>	Berberidaceae	Indian barberry	Chutro	Bark, Roots	Berberine	Antimicrobial, Immunomodulatory	(Rawat et al., 2024; Yazdanpanah et al., 2024)
<i>Bergenia ciliata (Haw.) Sternb.</i>	Saxifragaceae	Winter begonia	Paakhanbhed	Rhizome, Leaves	Bergenin, Tannins, Flavonoids, Glycosides	Anti-inflammatory, Diuretic, Immunomodulatory, Antioxidant, Kidney health	(Kushwaha, & Singh, 2024; Sapkota et al., 2022)
<i>Camellia sinensis (L.) Kuntze</i>	Theaceae	Green tea	Chiya	Leaves	Catechins, Polyphenols	Antioxidant, Immune-boosting	(Chandra et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024; Malabadi et al., 2024))
<i>Carica papaya L.</i>	Caricaceae	Papaya	Mewa	Fruit, Leaves, Seeds	Papain, Flavonoids, Carotenoids, Vitamin C	Immune-boosting, Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid	(Babalola et al., 2024; Maryam et al., 2024)

Scientific Name	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Cinnamomum verum</i> J.Presl	Lauraceae	Cinnamon	Dalchini	Bark	Cinnamaldehyde, Eugenol	Antiviral, Antioxidant, Immune-supportive	Elachouri et al., 2024; Pagliari et al., 2023
Citrus limon (L.) Burm. f.	Rutaceae	Lemon	Kagati	Fruit, Peel, Juice	Vitamin C, Flavonoids, Citric acid, Limonoids	Immune-boosting, Antioxidant, Antibacterial, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid	Abdo et al., 2024; Nassarawa et al., 2024)
<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i> (DC.) Stapf	Gramineae	Lemon grass	Kagate ghass	Leaves	flavonoids, essential oils, phenolic compounds and other phytochemical constituents	anti-obesity, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-nociceptive, anti-oxidants anti-diarrheal, and anti-inflammatory properties	(Fouelefack et al., 2024; Hasan-Al-Sharif et al., 2023)
<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> L.	Apiaceae	Coriander	Dhaniya	Seeds, Leaves	Linalool, Polyphenols, Flavonoids	Antioxidant, Immunomodulatory, Antimicrobial	Meradi et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2020;
<i>Cordyceps sinensis</i> (Berk.) Sacc.	Ophiocordycipitaceae	Cordyceps	Yar-shagumba	Fruit body, Mycelium	Polysaccharides, Cordycepin (3'-deoxyadenosine), Adenosine, Ergosterol	Immune booster, anti-fatigue, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, enhances athletic performance	(Chen et al., 2024; Krishna et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024)
<i>Cuminum cyminum</i> L.	Apiaceae	Cumin	Jeera	Seeds	Cuminaldehyde, Limonene, Thymol, Terpenes	Antioxidant, Antimicrobial, Anti-inflammatory, Immune-boosting, Digestive aid	Meena et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2021
<i>Curcuma longa</i> L.	Zingiberaceae	Turmeric	Besar	Rhizome	Curcumin	Anti-inflammatory, Immunomodulatory	(Kim et al., 2024; Munekata et al., 2021
<i>Curcuma caesia</i> Roxb.	Zingiberaceae	Black Turmeric	Kaalo haledo	Rhizomes	Curcumin, Essential oils, Starch, Tannins	Anti-inflammatory, Antioxidant, Anti-cancer, Analgesic, Immune-boosting	Darina et al., 2024; Juariah et al., 2024

Scientific Name	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Dactylorhiza hatagirea</i> (D. Don) Soo	Orchidaceae	Marsh orchid	Pan-chaule	Tuber, roots	Alkaloids, terpenoids, flavonoids, phenolics, and saponins	Anti-inflammatory, Antioxidant, Immunomodulatory, Analgesic, Anti-fatigue	(Kiziltas et al., 2024; Shrivastava et al., 2023)
<i>Datura stramonium</i> L	Solanaceae	Jimson weed	Dhaturo	Leaves, Seeds	Atropine, Scopolamine	Respiratory health, Immune-supportive	Chouhan et al, 2024;Njoya et al., 2024
<i>Dioscorea deltoidea</i> Wall. ex Griseb.	Dioscoreaceae	Chinese Yam	Tarul	Root	Diosgenin, Steroids, Alkaloids, Saponins	Anti-inflammatory, Antioxidant, Immunomodulatory, Anticancer	Naseem et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023;
<i>Elettaria cardamomum</i> (L.) Maton	Zingiberaceae	Green Cardamom	Sukmel	Seeds, Pods	Essential oils, Terpenes, Flavonoids, Cardamomol	Digestive aid, Anti-inflammatory, Antioxidant, Antimicrobial, Immune-boosting	Mekky et al., 2023; Pavarino et al., 2023;
<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i> L.	Fabaceae	Licorice	Jethimadhu	Roots	Glycyrrhizin	Immunomodulatory, Antiviral, Anti-inflammatory	(Michel & Olszewska, 2024; Olszewska et al., 2021)
<i>Justicia adhatoda</i> L.	Acanthaceae	Malabar nut	Asuro	Leaves, Roots	Vasicine	Respiratory health, Immunomodulatory	(Andleeb et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2024)
<i>Mentha piperita</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Mint	Pudina	Leaves	Menthol, Flavonoids	Digestive aid, Immune-supportive	(Jahan et al., 2024; Sharma & Gautam, 2022)
<i>Morus alba</i> L	Moraceae	White Mulberry	Kimbu	Leaves, Fruit, Bark	Flavonoids, Alkaloids, Anthocyanins, Resveratrol	Antioxidant, Antidiabetic, Anti-inflammatory, Cholesterol-lowering, Immune-boosting	(Chang et al., 2021; Umeyama et al., 2021)
<i>Moringa oleifera</i> Lam.	Moringaceae	Moringa	Sitalchini	Leaves, Seeds	Vitamins A, C, Polyphenols	Antioxidant, Immune-boosting, Nutrient-dense	(Xi et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2020)

Scientific Name	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Nardostachys grandiflora</i> Wall. ex DC	Valerianaceae	Spikenard	Jatamansi	Rhizomes, Roots	Nardosin, Sesquiterpene, Flavonoids, Alkaloids	Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Stress-reliever, Immunomodulatory	(Krishnan et al., 2024; Panara et al., 2020)
<i>Nigella sativa</i> L.	Ranunculaceae	Black cumin	Kaalo Jeera	Seeds	Thymoquinone	Immunomodulatory, Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory	(Kulyar et al., 2021; Salem et al., 2021)
<i>Ocimum sanctum</i> L.	Lamiaceae	Holy basil	Tulasi	Leaves	Eugenol, Rosmarinic acid	Antioxidant, Immunomodulatory, Anti-inflammatory	(Savita et al., 2021; Bhadra et al., 2020)
<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> L.	Phyllanthaceae	Indian gooseberry	Amala	Fruit	Vitamin C, Flavonoids	Antioxidant, Immune-boosting	Hu, et al., 2024; Van Doan et al., 2022;
<i>Picrorhiza kurroa</i> Royle ex Benth.	Scrophulariaceae	Kutki	Kutki	Rhizomes, Roots	Picroside, Kutkoside, Iridoid glycosides	Liver protection, Immunomodulatory, Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Antimicrobial	(Kaur et al., 2023; Almeleebia et al., 2022)
<i>Piper longum</i> L.	Piperaceae	Long Pepper	Pipla	Fruit, Root	Piperine, Alkaloids, Essential oils	Anti-inflammatory, Antioxidant, Antimicrobial, Immune-boosting, Digestive aid	Phan et al., 2024; Subramaniam et al., 2021)
<i>Piper nigrum</i> L.	Piperaceae	Black Pepper	Marich	Fruits (Peppercorns)	Piperine, Essential oils, Alkaloids, Terpenes	Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Antimicrobial, Digestive aid, Immune-boosting	Lasso et al., 2024; Phan et al., 2024
<i>Punica granatum</i> L.	Lythraceae	Pomegranate	Anaar	Fruit, Seeds, Peel	Punicalagins, Tannins, Flavonoids, Vitamin C	Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Cardiovascular health, Anticancer, Immune-boosting	(Cordiano et al., 2024; de O. Trovão et al., 2023)
<i>Psidium guajava</i> L.	Myrtaceae	Guava	Ambaa	Fruit, Leaves	Vitamin C, Flavonoids, Carotenoids, Tannins	Antioxidant, Immune-boosting, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid, Anti-diabetic	(Kalyani, 2024; Heppy et al., 2023)

Scientific Name	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Syzygium cumini</i> (L.) Skeels	Myrtaceae	Jamun	Jamun	Fruit, Seeds	Anthocyanins, Flavonoids, Tannins, Glycosides	Antioxidant, Immunomodulatory, Antidiabetic, Antimicrobial, Antibacterial	Ali et al., 2024; Fara-dilla et al., 2024)
<i>Trachyspermum ammi</i> (L.) Sprague	Apiaceae	Ajwain	Jwano	Seeds	Thymol, Carvacrol, Flavonoids, Terpenes	Antimicrobial, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid, Immune-boosting, Antioxidant	Siddiquie et al., 2024; Jabeen et al., 2023;
<i>Terminalia chebula</i> Retz.	Combretaceae	Chebolic myrobalan	Harro	Fruit	Tannins, Polyphenols	Immune-boosting, Digestive aid	(Gahatraj et al., 2020; Nigam et al., 2020)
<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i> (Willd.) Miers.	Menispermaceae	Guduchi/Giloy	Gurjo	Stem, Leaves	Alkaloids, Tannins	Immunomodulatory, Antipyretic, Antioxidant	Subedi et al., 2022; Arunachalam et al., 2022)
<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i> L.	Fabaceae	Fenugreek	Methi	Seeds, Leaves	Saponins, Flavonoids, Alkaloids, Fiber	Antidiabetic, Antioxidant, Immune-boosting, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid	Shaheen et al., 2024; Fatima et al., 2022)
<i>Urtica dioica</i> L.	Urticaceae	Stinging nettle	Sisnu	Leaves, Roots	Flavonoids, Vitamins	Anti-inflammatory, Immune-supportive	Alimoddin et al., 2024; Dhakal et al., 2024)
<i>Valeriana jatamansi</i> Jones ex Roxb.	Valerianaceae	Indian Valerian	Samayo	Rhizomes, Roots	Valerenic acid, Alkaloids, Flavonoids	Anti-anxiety, Sedative, Antioxidant, Immunomodulatory, Anti-inflammatory	(Tamang et al., 2024; Maurya & Agnihotri, 2024)
<i>Withania somnifera</i> (L.) Dunal	Solanaceae	Ashwagandha	Ashwagandha	Roots	Withanolides	Anti-stress, Immunomodulatory, Adaptogenic	(Gaurav et al., 2023; Verma et al., 2024)

Scientific Name	Family	English Name	Nepali Name	Parts Used	Key Chemical Constituents	Immune-supportive Benefits	Citations
<i>Zingiber officinale</i> Rosc.	Zingiberaceae	Ginger	Aduwa	Rhizome	Gingerols, Shogaols, Zingerone	Antiviral, Anti-inflammatory, Digestive aid	(Adhikari et al., 2023; Van et al., 2021)
<i>Ziziphus jujuba</i> Mill.	Rhamnaceae	Jujube	Baer	Fruit, Seeds, Leaves	Saponins, Flavonoids, Alkaloids, Triterpenes	Immunomodulatory, Antioxidant, Anti-inflammatory, Sedative, Antidiabetic	Batovska et al., 2024; Popstoyanova et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, medicinal plants have demonstrated significant therapeutic potential, particularly in enhancing immune function and combating infections. Their bioactive compounds, including Saponins, Flavonoids, Alkaloids, Triterpenes, allicin, curcumin, and withanolides, contribute to their antiviral, anti-inflammatory, and immunomodulatory effects. These plants have been an integral part of traditional medicine in Nepal, and their widespread use during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights their relevance in supporting public health. While the traditional knowledge surrounding these plants is promising, further clinical research is essential to confirm their efficacy, safety, and optimal applications. Integrating these plants into modern healthcare strategies could provide a valuable complementary approach to disease prevention and treatment. Promoting sustainable cultivation and responsible harvesting will also be crucial in ensuring their availability for future generations, ultimately contributing to global health and well-being.

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