

The series: This brochure is the 3rd in a series of 10 linking wild foods in Lao PDR to nutrients essential for public health. Each issue focuses on a single nutrient, highlighting wild species that contribute to its dietary intake:

Macronutrients	Vitamins	Minerals
1. Energy	3. Vitamin A	7. Iron
2. Protein	4. Vitamin B1	8. Zinc
	5. Vitamin B9	9. Potassium
	6. Vitamin C	10. Calcium

Objective: To provide health professionals, extension officers, and nutrition educators with practical information on the role and potential of wild foods in addressing nutrient deficiencies in local diets in rural communities.

Structure: Each brochure contains the following parts: (a) Overview of the nutrient’s importance for general health or specific groups, such as children or pregnant women. (b) Brief description of selected wild food species that contribute to the intake of the nutrient. (c) One or two cooking recipes per species to encourage dietary integration.

Additional resources: QR codes link to the Pha Khao Lao Platform (www.phakhaolao.la) for detailed species profiles and recipes.

Data sources: Species were selected using AI-aided literature analysis (cross-validated with ChatGPT & DeepSeek). Species categorisation (high – medium – low) was done using Mistral LLM. This data is preliminary. All nutritional data will be reassessed through laboratory analyses in the AFN II project. Species and recipe information were sourced from Pha Khao Lao.

Authors: Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, Switzerland and National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), Ministry of Agriculture and Environment of the Lao PDR.

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Wild Foods and Nutrition

Vitamin A

Why your body needs Vitamin A



Good eyesight: It helps see well, especially at night. Without, you might have trouble seeing in the dark.



Strong immune system: It helps your body fight off infections and stay healthy.



Healthy skin: It keeps your skin soft and helps wounds heal faster.



Growth and development: It is especially important for children to grow strong and healthy.

Vitamin A in Wild Foods in Lao PDR

Wild food species also provide vitamin A. Wild plants like yanang, climbing wattle, balsam apples, spiny amaranth, and Asiatic pennywort are rich in beta carotene, which the body can convert to Vitamin A. Eating these traditional foods helps families stay healthy. In the next pages, you will find a selection of wild food species and a few recipes showing how you can prepare them.

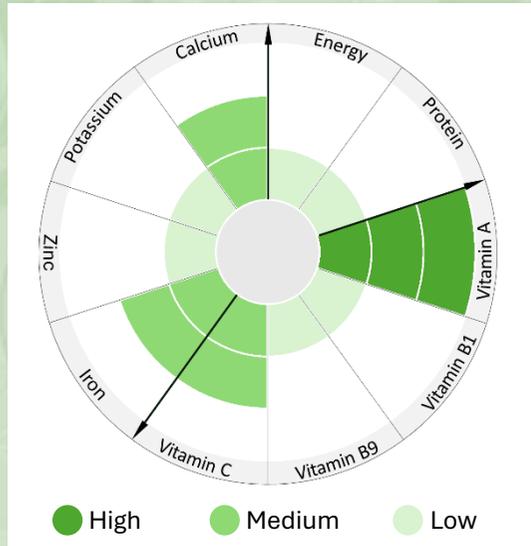


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Yanang

Tiliacora triandra (Colebr.) Diels

Yanang is a climbing plant. It is popular as ingredient in soups and Juice. It is known for its refreshing taste. The young leaves and shoots contain **beta-carotene**, which your body can convert into **vitamin A**. Including yanang in meals, whether raw in Juice s or cooked in soups, can help boost your vitamin A intake. This makes yanang a useful local food for supporting good eyesight, a strong immune system, and healthy skin.



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Mushroom Soup with Yanang Leaves Extract

Ingredients

- 1 plate of mushrooms
- 1 small bowl of young sponge gourd (cut in pieces)
- 1 small bowl of pumpkin (cut in pieces)
- **1 big bowl Yanang leaves extract**
- ½ bunch of finger grass
- 3 tablespoons of pounded chilies
- 3 tablespoons pounded sticky rice
- 3-4 tablespoons of padek



Method

- Heat the pot with Yanang leave extract,
- Add mushrooms, pumpkin and sponge gourd
- Add pounded sticky rice, chilies and Padek
- After 10 minutes add finger grass and young sponge gourd. Cover
- Wait until the pot is hot, then transfer to bowl for serving



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Yanang Juice



Ingredients

- **1 bunch of Yanang leaves**
- 1 litre of boiled water

Method

- Clean the leaves with water
- Put the leaves in a blender and add the boiled water
- Sieve the mixture and serve the juice

Variation:

- Use hand bruise Yanang leaves (substitute).
- If you are drinking Yanang juice for the first time, add more water to reduce the concentration.
- Divide the ingredients into two parts before shaking.

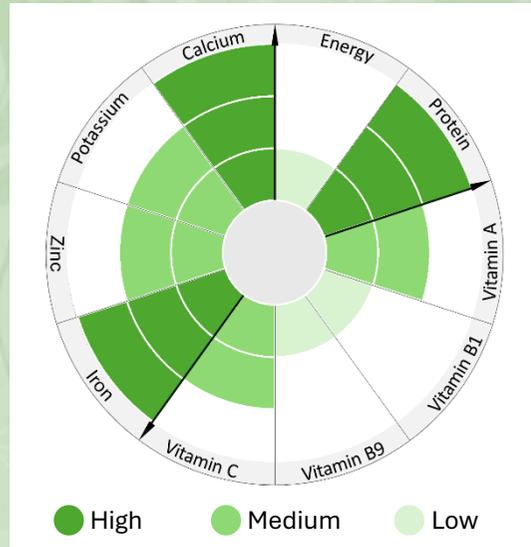


ຜັກຂະ

Climbing wattle

Senegalia pennata (L.) Maslin

Climbing wattle is a wild plant often used in traditional cooking. Its young shoots and leaves are not tasty and packed with nutrients, including **beta-carotene**, which your body turns into **vitamin A**. People in Laos often add climbing wattle to soups, omelets, or stir-fries. Because it grows easily in the wild and in home gardens, climbing wattle is a convenient and natural way to get important vitamins, especially for families who rely on local and wild foods.



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Bamboo Shoot Soup with Climbing Wattle Buds and Leaves

Ingredients

- 8 Buds and Young Leaves of Climbing Wattle
- ½ Small Bowl Short tailed Crickets
- 3 Tablespoons of Soaked Sticky Rice
- 1 Small Bunch of Finger Grass
- 500 g Boiled Bamboo Shoots
- 1 bunch Yanang Leaves
- ½ Small Bowl of Padeak
- 1 Teaspoon of Salt
- 4 Chilies

Method

- Slice bamboo shoots into small pieces
- Gently crush the Yanang leaves mixed with water (1/3 bowl)
- Boil water and Yanang leaf extract, then add bamboo shoots, mushrooms, pieces of sponge gourd, and pumpkin
- Pound the soaked sticky rice and add it to the pot
- Add short tailed crickets and Padaek
- Put fresh finger grass and climbing wattle bud
- Cover, then serve



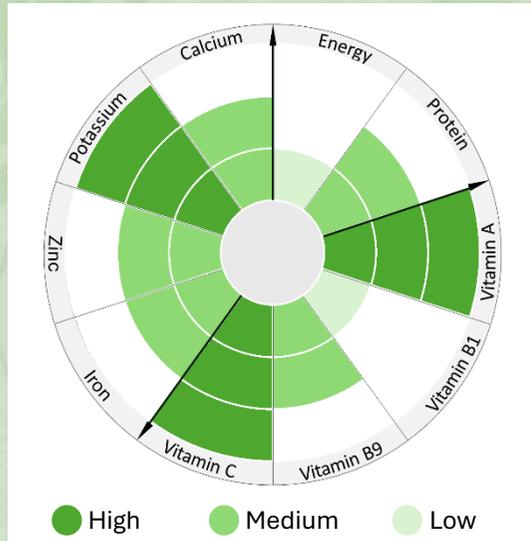


ຜັກໄຊ່

Balsam apple

Momordica charantia L.

Balsam apple is a green, bumpy vegetable known for its strong, bitter taste. While it is famous for its health benefits like helping with blood sugar, it also contains **beta-carotene**, which your body can turn into **Vitamin A**. People in Laos often cook bitter melon in soups, stir-fries, or curries. Eating balsam apples regularly can help you get more vit-amin A, which is important for keeping your eyes, skin, and immune system healthy.



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Termite Mushroom Soup with Balsam Apple Leaves

Ingredients

- 1-2 kilogram termite mushrooms
- **2 bundles of balsam apple leaves**
- 1 teaspoon of chicken stock powder
- 3 tablespoons of thin soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon pickled fish
- 1 stem of lemongrass
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- 1 liter of water
- 1-2 chillies

Method

- Clean the mushrooms, chillies, balsam apple leaves, and lemongrass
- Soak these ingredients for 2-3 minutes in water
- Pour the water in a pot and add lemongrass and chillies
- Boil for 10-15 minutes, then add the termite mushrooms
- Season with pickled fish, thin soy sauce, chicken stock powder and salt
- Boil for another 10-15 minutes
- When the termite mushrooms are cooked, add the balsam apple leaves and cook for another 2-3 minutes
- Serve the soup in bowls



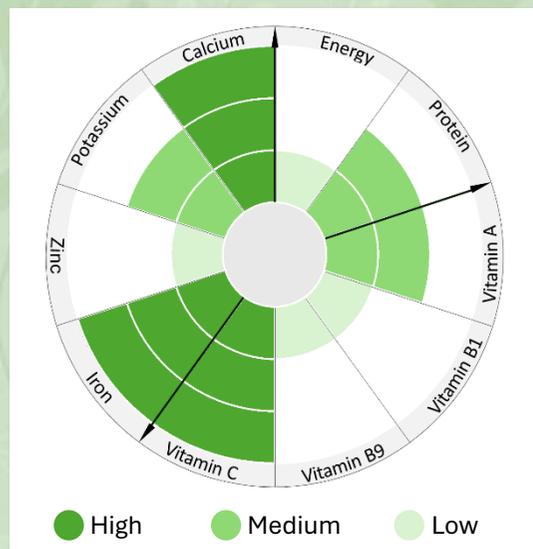


ຜັກໝອກ

Asiatic pennywort

Centella asiatica (L.) Urb.

Asiatic pennywort is a small, green leafy plant often found in gardens and wild areas. While it is **famous for its healing properties** and use in salads or soups, it also contains beta-carotene, which your body can turn into vitamin A. Adding Asiatic pennywort to meals helps support healthy eyes, skin, and immunity. Because it **grows easily and is commonly used in traditional dishes**, it is a simple and natural way to get important vitamins, especially in rural communities



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Pennywort juice

Ingredients

- 3 cups of Asiatic Pennywort
- 0.5 liters of boiled water
- Syrup (optional)

Method

- Wash the Asiatic Pennywort and cut it into small pieces
- Put the Asiatic Pennywort in a blender and add the boiled water
- Crush the mixture in the blender and then sieve it
- Serve the juice with ice and syrup (optional)
- You can use Pandanus as a substitute for water.



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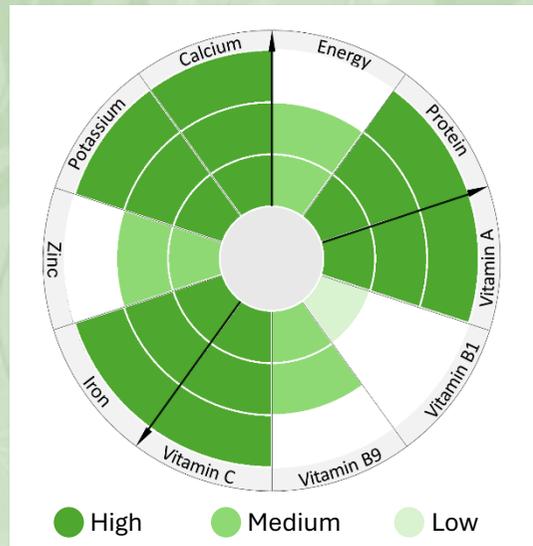


ຜັກຫົມໝາມ

Spiny Amaranth

Amaranthus spinosus L.

Spiny amaranth is a common wild or cultivated leafy green. Its **tender leaves and stems are rich in beta-carotene**, which your body converts into vitamin A. This plant is often stir-fried, boiled, or added to soups, making it an easy and tasty way to boost vitamin A intake. Eating spiny amaranth helps support good eyesight, a strong immune system, and healthy skin. Since it **grows quickly and is widely available**, it is a valuable food for families looking to improve their nutrition naturally.



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Spiny Amaranth Soup

Ingredients

- 2 small bunches of Spiny Amaranth
- 300 g to 500 g of lean pork meat with little fat
- 1 teaspoon of seasoning powder (MSG)
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 0.5 litre of clean water

Method

- Boil the water
- Add the pork and cook until fully done
- Wash the Spiny Amaranth thoroughly and cut it to your liking
- Add the Spiny Amaranth and continue boiling the water for about 2 to 3 minutes, until the Spiny Amaranth is cooked and the broth absorbs its flavour.
- Serve this tasty and nutritious soup hot in a bowl

