

From the wild into the pharmacy: 200 Years of Norwegian Medicinal Plant Knowledge

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Background – Much ethnobotanical knowledge is documented through history in books of various kinds, allowing diachronic studies of plant use and investigations of plant knowledge transmission.

Aim – To evaluate the change in medicinal plant knowledge in Norway between the 18th and the 20th centuries.

Methods – We compared:

- *Flora Norvegica* (J. E. Gunnerus 1766–1776), the first Norwegian Flora and a major Enlightenment natural history work in Norway
- *Planter og Tradisjon* ("Plants and Tradition," O. A. Høeg 1974), Norway's most important ethnobotanical compilation.

We systematized information from these two sources in Use Reports per medicinal category, based on the International Classification of Primary Care.

JO. ERN. GUNNERI,
Theologie & philosophiæ Doctoris, nec non diocesisis iudicis,
in Norvegia, Episcopi,

FLORA NORVEGICA,

Observationibus præsertim œconomicis
Panosque norvegici locupletata.

PARS PRIOR
cum iconibus.

Bachel. de M. D. D. 96.

Si peregrinari libere, in ista hæc patria felicitæ eræ inspireremus
herbas ingulmas & numero plures & virtutes præstantes, et pællim de ju-
gulis incolumem observationem conquiremus, a quibus dicere medicum pateri
dubet.

NIDROSIE, A. O. R. MDCCCLXVI
typis Vindingianis.
Probe Hafslæ apud bibliopolum Pelt & Nidrosie apud
typographum Vindingium.

planter
og tradisjon
OVE ARBO HØEG



Results

- **793 medicinal Use Reports for 292 medicinal taxa** were collected in total, including vascular plants, ferns, mosses, algae, lichens, and fungi.
- **Few unchanged medicinal plant traditions** (single plant-use combinations): only 70 taxa and 42 Use Reports are present in both sources.

Potentilla erecta to
treat diarrhoea

Juniperus communis
to treat whooping
cough



Interpretation & Relevance

- Plant knowledge may have changed, been lost or newly developed in Norway, but it is also possible that it has largely been under-documented.
- Differences are explained to a great extent by the differing aims and socio-economic contexts of the two texts.
- Unchanged medicinal plant traditions include easily available species and perhaps also most attractive remedies.
- Perceptions of what nature is and what it is for determine what ethnobotanical knowledge is documented in historical sources.