Ethnographic sources in both countries were compared in order to find traditionally used wild growing spices. In Poland 14 species were found, in Slovakia around 11. In both countries few and similar species were used (e.g. Armoracia rusticana, Carum carvi, Mentha). Some species had already ceased to be added to dishes at the beginning of the twentieth century, e.g. Glechoma hederacea. The scarce use of spices in Poland and Slovakia may be attributed to the general avoidance of wild green leaves (apart from in famine times) and aromatic plants in the cuisine of both countries; a phenomenon, which can be classified as herbophobia.

Key words: ethnobotany, spices, Glechoma hederacea, herbophobia

Material and methods

Ethnographic data concerning the use of wild plants in the 19th and 20th century were searched in Poland and Slovakia. The data on Poland were extracted from summaries of wild food plants of Poland published by the author of the article (Łuczaj and Szymański, 2007; Łuczaj, 2008a; 2008b; 2010a; 2010b). Spices were defined as plants added to foods in small quantities in order to give them flavour. Herbal teas were not included. Only information on the actual use of species were included.

Results and discussion

Polish sources list a similar number of wild growing spice species (14) to the Slovakian ones (between 10 and 12, depending on the interpretation). In Poland Armoracia rusticana was used as a spice for meat or beetroot, also used as a side dish mixed with boiled eggs. The roots are still commonly dug out from the wild state. Another once important spice was Carum carvi. Its seeds have been used to give flavour to soups and bread. The next important spice are pseudo-fruits of Juniperus communis, used as spice for meat and vodka. Glechoma hederacea leaves were added to flavour the soups. The use of this spice stopped at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mentha longifolia and M. arvensis leaves were used as flavourings for potato and cheese dumplings in many villages of SE and E Poland, and sometimes also added to soups. Thymus pulegioides and T. serpyllum flowering tops were added to various dishes in scattered localities around the country, though this custom was very rare. In the Podhale region (Tatra Mts), Achillea millefolium leaves were sometimes used as a spice.

It is more difficult to estimate the frequency of use in Slovakia, due to the smaller number of ethnographic publications. Some species were the same as in Poland: Armoracia rusticana, Glechoma hederacea, Mentha spp. Some species from the publications of Markuš may not be identified correctly. The uncertainty concerns a spice called madra, once reported as Anthriscus cerefolium – wild and cultivated (although the species is only cultivated in Slovakia) and another time reported as Nepeta sp. Another uncertain identification is lebitka, reported by him as Melissa, in fact this name was often used in the Carpathians for Origanum vulgare.

The use of Glechoma hederacea must be brought to attention in both countries. This was once an important spice for soups in both countries and its use has disappeared, mainly due to the popularization of parsley (Łuczaj, 2010a). A special article was devoted to the use of this species in Poland (Łuczaj, 2008a). Efforts could be made to restore the use of this indigenous and healthy spice.

The comparison of the spices used in both countries shows many similarities, which result from the similarity of the folk cultures of the two countries. The larger number of spices listed for Poland is the result of its larger area and a larger number of ethnobotanical publications. Additionally in Poland the detailed ethnobotanical surveys of Rostański and the Polish Ethnographic Atlas, brought incredibly detailed material which has no comparison in any other country in the world in terms of its historic and geographical scope.

In both countries a limited number of spices was used, as both cultures can be classified as herbophobous as defined by Łuczaj, 2008b, in contrast to herbophilous cultures such as those of Italy and Eastern Asia. This avoidance of greens was well reflected by the Slovak botanist Holuby (1872): “Nemcom zelina, Maďarom slanina, a Slovákom kaša s mliekom”.

Appendix 1. Wild spice plants used in Poland in the XIX and XX century according to ethnographic sources summarized by Łuczaj & Szymański (2007); Łuczaj (2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b).
1. Carum carvi L. – kminek, kmin, anyžek, soups, bread, widely used, collected from the wild, now mainly cultivated.
Conclusions

Similar plants were used as spices in Poland and Slovakia. In both countries a very limited number of species was used. Some species ceased to be utilised, particularly *Glehoma hederacea*, which used to be an important ingredient of soups in both countries.

Słowa kluczowe: etnobotanika, koreniny, *Glehoma hederacea*, herbofobia

References


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