PLANTS & HERBS

Seaweed Seems to Be the Key to Our Sustainable Future

By bestfolkmedicine · 03/03/2022 · 3 min read



The use of seaweed both for food and as medicine is old as time itself, especially among people who live in coastal cities.

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Asian cuisines in countries like China, Korea, and Japan have a long and rich history of seaweed use.

Though its medicinal and culinary uses are well-established, the innovations today prove that this sea veggie can do so much more for our well-being and that of our planet.

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From helping reduce the negative effects of the climate crisis to being a sustainable source of energy, seaweed has a huge potential in relieving one of the most concerning environmental problems in the world.

Seaweed: The Sea's Vegetable

There are more than 10,000 species of seaweed, but they're divided into three major groups, i.e. brown, red, and green algae.

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The most common types are wakame, kelp, kombui, and nori. It's rich in minerals, vitamins, protein, fiber, and antioxidants. It's also very sustainable and a carbon sink.

In a study from 2016 from the *Nature Geoscience* journal, seaweed was found able to absorb 175 million tons of CO2 in the world, every year.

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Seaweed doesn't need any freshwater or fertilizer to be grown since it grows in the ocean, and it does it pretty fast. Oceana, an ocean conservation group note that the giant kelp is one of the fastest-growing plants in the world.

It grows at a rate of 11 inches daily and when the conditions are perfect, it can actually grow 24 inches per day. Considering its benefits, many sustainability companies are using it and referring to it as the food of the future.

Seaweed: The Food of the Future?

Trophic is a startup from California which uses red seaweed to produce plant-based bacon whereas the NovaMeat startup from Spain uses it for their 3D printed steak.

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Other sustainable food brands such as Akua make burgers from ocean-farmed kelp, mushrooms, and other superfoods. Tech innovations have also shown that the uses of seaweed go beyond the food plate.

Namely, in the not-so-distant future, the cars we drive may be powered by seaweed biofuel. It can be transformed into energy forms such as ethanol.

Though they release greenhouse gases when burned, giant kelp is a more sustainable and low emission option than fossil fuels.

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Packaging may also be produced with the help of seaweed. Namely, plants from the sea have polymers with similar characteristics as plastic. Unlike plastic though, sea plants are sustainable.

The UK startups Notpla and Lucozade made edible vegan seaweed pods to fight off the plastic waste. Oohos are small drink pouches that are biodegradable and they're a sustainable alternative to plastic bottles.

Seaweed may also be used for building materials. The seaweed bungalows of the Shandong Province in China are made of kelp. Using plants as house covers has been done since ancient times.

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Seaweed is a potent, long-lasting, and non-flammable material that's also resistant to insects and mildew. Clothing may also be another area where we'll see more seaweed. Brands already use it in their wares.

For example, the tech startup from Israel, Algaeing, makes clothes from algae. Pangaea's T-shirts are a combo of GOTS-certified organic cotton and seaweed. The Yeezy Foam Runners by Ye have algae partially included in their making.

Energy is an important area and seaweed may also become more common in this sector.

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Back in 2013, the first algae-powered building in the world opened in Hamburg, Germany. During photosynthesis, the algae make energy from sunlight. The heat that's produced is caught and used for power.

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