

Herbalgram

NUMBER 6

Summer 1985

Published jointly by the HERB RESEARCH FOUNDATION and THE AMERICAN HERBAL PRODUCTS ASSOCIATION

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The illustrations of Marjoram (*Origanum majorana* L.) in this issue of Herbalgram are by Peggy-Ann Duke, from the book *Culinary Herbs: A Potpourri*, by James A. Duke, Ph.D. Tradco-Medic Books, New York, 1985.

DESERT PLANTS FOR FUTURE FOODS?

When most people look out over the vast desert landscape, they usually see barren terrain, devoid of plant life save a few scraggly cacti and sagebrush. But when Ethnobotanist Richard Felger walks through the open stretches of the Sonoran Desert in Northern Mexico, he sees a rich and varied ecosystem with the potential for the cultivation and harvesting of indigenous desert plants. Plants that require little water or maintenance. Plants as sources for food to feed a hungry planet. Unlike food crops that have been brought into the desert regions for large-scale cultivation, requiring the damming of rivers, massive irrigation projects, and use of pesticides, indigenous desert plants are already acclimated to the harsh, arid environment of the southwestern United States. Felger, a renowned botanist who serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Ethnobiology* and *Economic Botany*, spends some of his time at his home in Tucson, Ariz., as a researcher at the University of Arizona. But he prefers to live in the Sonoran Desert in Mexico, hunting for plants and interviewing the native Yaqui and Seri Indians about useful plant life. Much of the native lore of these tribes is not being passed down to the new generations, and Felger is racing against time to glean as much as possible from the older natives. He recently co-authored a book about the Seri Indians, titled *People of the Desert and Sea*. One item of interest to Felger is the cultivation of Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*). Eelgrass is the only grain-like plant useful as a human food that is harvested from the ocean. Eelgrass apparently compares favorably with other food grains in nutritional value, and grows abundantly in salt water along the coasts of Europe and North America.

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