

Roselle (*Hibiscus Sabdariffa*): A Functional Food



Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) is popular for its edible leaves and fleshy red fruit calyces that are used for making fresh salads, tea, juices, jellies, jams, ice cream, and spices for cooking. Since 2005, scientists at the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center have been testing Roselle varieties collected from different countries to evaluate their growth performance, yield, and nutritional values in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.



Roselle is also famous for its high nutritional and medicinal values. It is a source of antioxidants.

Functional Uses

Many parts of Roselle including seeds, leaves, fruits and roots are used in various foods. Among them, the fleshy red calyces are the most popular. They are used fresh for making wine, juice, jam, jelly, syrup, gelatin, pudding, cakes, ice cream and flavors and also dried and brewed into tea, among other things. The red calyces contain antioxidants including flavonoids, gossypetine, hibiscetine and sabdaretine.



healthy flavonoids as one serving of fruits and vegetables.

Each year, the U.S. imports more than 5,000 metric tons of dried Roselle fruit calyces valued at \$22 million for use in making herbal teas.

There is great market potential for Roselle as a cash crop for U.S. farmers located in warmer climates where it grows well.

Health Benefits

Hibiscus tea contains high levels of antioxidants, such as flavonoids, which are good for our hearts and bodies. Flavonoids comprise a group of compounds that give the color to red wine, watermelon, and grapefruits. These antioxidants help our bodies fight the harmful molecules known as free radicals, which can cause cell damage leaving the body in a diseased state. By taming free radicals, antioxidants help maintain the body's good health. Research shows that drinking two cups of black tea a day provides as many heart-

The Southern University Ag Center researchers have so far identified a Roselle variety originating from Nigeria suitable for cultivation in the U.S. warmer climates. This Roselle is a highly shade intolerant plant and the best way to grow it is under full sunlight in an open space.

The variety has been grown successfully by farmers in Opelousas, Louisiana.

Currently, the researchers at Southern University are collecting other Roselle varieties from all over the world to cultivate them in the U.S., and investigate levels of antioxidants and yields.





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