SMALL FARMERS GAIN PROFIT FROM ALUGBATI

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Green leafy vegetables have become abundant in our markets as more and more people are appreciating the health benefits of such table fare and their relatively low price. The leafy green with the most dominant, year round presence is undoubtedly kangkong.

Pechay too, is plentiful in months when farmers traditionally harvest it. Camote, Malunggay, Ampalaya, Alugbati, Kulitis, Saluyot, and Sili leaves also abound when there are no typhoons.

For farmers these leafy greens have the potential for semi-commercial or even commercial scale production to boosts their incomes. This is especially true of alugbati, which one of the easiest and most economical vegetable to grow throughout the country.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) promotes the production of alugbati and other indigenous leafy vegetables in the farms and gardens to contributed to the nutritional intake of Filipinos, especially the youth at its stations in the National Capital Region and in the provinces. The Bureau maintains demonstration gardens that also serve as reliable sources of seeds and planting materials. In the past, the DA’s National Agriculture and Fisheries Council actively promoted the production and consumption of indigenous vegetable to help attain food security and provide good nutrition. The council promotes vegetables like alugbati for its nutrient content, health benefits and ease of preparation as food.

The “Spinach” which is not a spinach. The English names of Alugbati are myriad; Malabar Nightshade; Malabar Red Vine, creeping and climbing spinach; and Indian,
Ceylon, Vietnamese, Philippine, and Asian spinach. It also has names in Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Thai, Indonesian and Vietnamese, as well as several Philippine dialects. But the term “Spinach” in its English names is inappropriate. Alugbati is not of the spinach family but of the Basellaceae family and of the genus Basella.

There are four known species. Basella Alba and B. rubra are main ones, with B. Lucida and B. Cordefolia as a minor species. B. alba and B. rubra both have thick stems, but these are of different colors; those of the former are green-red. Both species bear thick, fleshy, ovate or heart-shaped leaves five to 12 centimeters (cm) long and with pointed tips.

In the Philippines aside from the two main species there is a third which is possibly either B. lucida or B. cordefolia. It’s the indigenous species with thin stems and small curly leaves, all light-green in color, growing wild and climbing fences, hedges and shrubs in hilly areas. In terms of vegetable biomass, its inferior to B. alba and B. rubra, but it also sells fairly well in Northern Luzon markets.

Alugbati is a popular perennial vine found in the tropics and sub-tropics where it is widely used as a leafy vegetable, as it has a mild flavour and mucilaginous (moist and sticky) texture. Its succulent, branching, herbaceous vines reach a length of several meters in tropical lowlands. This highly heat tolerant crop is native to tropical Asia, probably originating in India or Indonesia. It grows throughout the tropics as a perennial plant and as an annual in warm, temperature areas, where it grown in slower B. alba loves full sunlight; B. rubra tolerates shade well. The vegetable is widely used in the cuisines in China, India, Korea, Vietnam, where it always available in grocery stores and farmers markets. Basella’s mucilaginous cooked schools are also common in Africa.

As with most leafy greens, alugbati is low in calories by volume and in cholesterol but high in protein per calorie. Research has shown it to contain certain phytochemicals and antioxidant properties. It’s also a good source of protein, niacin, B6 and phosphorus, and
a very good source of dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, thiamine, riboflavin, folate, calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium, copper, and manganese. The succulent mucilage is a particular rich source of soluble fiber. It may be used to thicken soups and stews or stir-fries with garlic and chilli peppers.

Alugbati plants are very easy to grow, are fast growing tolerate high rainfall rates, and are highly resistant to pest and diseases. Some farmers in Central and Southern Luzon broadcast the seeds in prepared plots with organic fertilizer and thoroughly water the seedlings that emerge. When the young plants are at least 30 cm. tall and the supply of the vegetable is low, the farmers uproot their plants then wash the bundles these and all for market. Other farmers prefer to provide trellis or dried branches that the vines vigorously clib so these can provide harvests for a longer period without the need for immediate replanting.

Home gardeners can begin harvesting individual leaves and the tips of tender shoots 30 to 45 days after seeding; they can do this earlier if they planted cuttings. Continue harvesting the vines more tender now leaves and shoots at weekly intervals throughout the season. Harvest by cutting the young leaves 15 to 20 cm. long tips, but let two to three leaves remain on the lower branches so that subsequent new shoots will grow from the nodes. Harvest in the late afternoon to minimize moisture loss in the picked stems. Wrap the bundles in banana leaves and store these in a shaded, cool place.

Regular alugbati eaters say that its leaves and tender stems cook well with corned beef, pork giniling, or even sardines sautéed in garlic and onions.

References:

www.ehow.com
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9OkC17o2JM