

Cosmetic Ethnobotany Used by Tribal Women in Epe Communities of Lagos State, Nigeria



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Abstract

The women of the Epe Local communities, often referred to as the 'Tribal Women of Epe,' have been the custodians of this ancient knowledge, passed down through generations. They have harnessed the power of local plant resources to enhance their beauty, maintain skin health, and engage in grooming rituals. This practice is not merely about aesthetics but deeply rooted in the cultural and ecological context of the Epe communities, offering a holistic approach to well-being. Ethnobotanical surveys were conducted with 210 women from fifteen (15) communities in Epe area of Lagos State, Nigeria between November 2020, and January 2021. The study area included Etita/Ebode, Lagbade, Popo-oba, Oke-Balogun, Ajaganabe, Ise/Igbogun, Oriba/Ladaba, Poka, Odomola, Abomiti, Agbowa, Agbowa-ikosi, Ago-owu, Orugbo and Ilara to obtain information on plants used as cosmetics by women in the study areas. Ethno botanical and demographic information was gathered from the respondents by using oral interview in Yoruba Language. Fifty-two (52) plant species belonging to thirty-one (31) families were identified to be used as cosmetics in the study area. Family Fabaceae had the highest number of plant species used for cosmetics in the study area. This was followed by Meliaceae, Cucurbitaceae and Zingiberaceae. Trees (44%) constituted many of the plants used in the study area; this was followed by herbs (33%) while climbers were the least used plant habit. Leaves were the predominantly used plant part while the bulbs and cloves constituted the least used plant parts. The use of botanical resources for cosmetic purposes has been a particularly noteworthy tradition among the tribal women of Epe's communities. This practice has not only contributed to the preservation of indigenous knowledge but also provided insights into the unique botanical diversity of the region.

Keywords: Traditional cosmetics; Cosmetic ethnobotany; Anti-aging; Anti-aging remedies; Domestic medicines.

Introduction

Cosmetics are the substances applied to the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness, and altering appearance without affecting the body's structure or functions. The term "cosmetic" originates from the Greek word "kosmētikos," which signifies possessing the ability, artistry, or proficiency in adorning and beautifying. [1]. The origin of cosmetics was associated with hunting, fighting, religion and superstition and later associated with medicine. In traditional medicine practices, it has been discovered that plants possess utility in treating dermatological conditions. [2], enhancing the beauty and personality or hygiene of human beings [3,4] as well as anti-aging remedies or treatment [5]. Cosmetic ethnobotany, the study of traditional plant-based beauty practices and remedies, has played a pivotal role in the cultural heritage and daily lives of indigenous communities around the world. Phyto-cosmetics is a common practice in the domestic medicines of many cultures [6] with emphasis on skin, hair, and body. The majority of traditional

cosmetics are employed in enhancing beauty, eliminating body odors, cleansing, and treating certain skin disease conditions in both children and adults. However, various cultures have specific beauty recipes.

In Africa, plants, minerals, and fats serve as the main composition of the recipes for traditional cosmetics. In recent times, there is an increase of interest in the use of traditional cosmetics and anti-aging skin care products because they are considered less toxic, effective, and believed to contain antioxidants which are useful in treating skin problem, skin toning, smoothening, and increasing radiance and hydration [7].

In the diverse landscape of Lagos State, Nigeria, where a multitude of ethnic groups coexist, the Epe Local communities stand out for their rich cultural traditions and intimate relationship with nature. Among the various facets of ethnobotanical knowledge preserved by these communities, the use of botanical resources for

cosmetic purposes has been a particularly noteworthy tradition. This practice has not only contributed to the preservation of indigenous knowledge but also provided insights into the unique botanical diversity of the region. In this research, we explored the fascinating world of cosmetic ethnobotany practiced by the

tribal women of Epe Local communities in Lagos State. We delved into their traditional knowledge, the plant species used, and the methods employed, shedding light on the botanical treasures hidden in their immediate environment.

Table 1: The Demographic Information of the Respondents.

Age group	Individuals	%age	Literacy rate	Individuals	% age
20-30	40	19	Illiterate	112	53.4
30-50	70	33.3	High School	78	37.1
>50	100	47.7	College/ University	20	9.5

Table 2: Medicinal Plants Used by Tribal Women as Cosmetics in Epe Communities, Lagos, Nigeria.

Botanical Names	Family Names	Local Names	Common Names	Habits	Plant Parts	Cosmetical Uses
Allium cepa	Amarylidaceae	Alubosa	Onions	Herb	Bulbs	Onion oil is used to treat dandruff, hair breakage and darkening of white hair.
Allium sativum	Amarylidaceae	Ayuu	Garlic	Herb	Cloves	Garlic cloves are used to treat pimples. It is also used to strengthen the nails.
Azadirachta indica	Meliaceae	Dogoyaro	Neem	Tree	Leaves	Neem oil is used to treat dandruff and hair breakage.
Cucumis sativus	Cucurbitaceae	Cucumber	Cucumber	Herb	Fruit	Cucumber slices are used to remove dark eyes and eye bags.
Citrus limon	Rutaceae	Osan lemo	Lemon	Tree	Fruit	Lemon juice is applied on face to remove wrinkles.
Cucuma longa	Zingiberaceae	Ata-ile pupa	Turmeric	Herb	Rhizome	The paste is applied on the face to remove facial hair.
Lawsonia inermis	Lythraceae	Laali	Henna tree	Tree	Bark, Leaves	The extract is used to beautify the hands and the feet.
Bixa Orellana	Bixaceae	Osunbuke	Annato	Tree	Bark, Leaves	The leaves are used as natural colourant in makeup and skin care products.
Acalypha wike-siana	Euphorbiaceae	Jinwinini	Red acalypha	Herb	Leaves	Leaf juice is used to treat skin and scalp infections in children
Dabergia Sxatilis	Fabaceae	Paranpupa	Flat bean	Shrub	Root	The extract is used to treat smallpox, skin lesions and rashes.
Daucus carota	Apiaceae	Karoti	Carrots	Herb	Root	Carrot juice is used to brighten the skin.
Ficus exasperata.	Moraceae	Ipin	Sandpaper Tree	Tree	Leaves	The leaves are used to scrape ringworm.
Spigelia anthelmia	Loganiaceae	Paranfunfun	Worm weed	Shrub	Root	To treat ringworms and skin bacterial infections.
Cocos nucifera	Arecaceae	Agbon	Coconut	Tree	Seeds	Coconut oil is applied to the skin to make the skin glow. It is also used for hair care.
Lycopersicon esculentum	Solanaceae	Tomati	Tomato	Herb	Fruits	The fruit juice is used for skin lightening. Tomato slices are placed on the face to remove black heads.

<i>Mentha piperita</i>	Piperaceae	Ewe minti	Mint leaves	Herb	Leaves	The boiled leaves are used to treat blackheads, pimples, and mouth odour.
<i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Solanaceae	Efo-odu	Black Nightshade	Herb	Leaves	Leaf juice is applied on the skin to treat inflammation.
<i>Plumbago zeylanica</i>	Plumbaginaceae	Inabiri	Wild lead wort	Shrub	Root	The paste of the whole plant can be applied externally on the skin for treating skin diseases.
<i>Securidata longepedunculata</i>	Polygalaceae	Ipeta	Violet tree	Tree	Bark	Stem bark is used to treat skin diseases, inflammations, and oral candidiasis.
<i>Cissampe losperei</i>	Menispermaceae	Gbejedi	Bastard vervain	Shrub	Root	The roots are used in the treatment of skin infections.
<i>Euphorbia lateriflora</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Enuopire	Coral plant	Shrub	Leaves	To treat skin parasitic infections and as remedy for head lice and ring worm.
<i>Citrullus colocynthis</i>	Cucurbitaceae	Egusi-baara	Bitter cucumber	Climber	Fruit	Unripen seeds are used to treat acne.
<i>Kigelia Africana</i>	Bignoniaceae	Amuyon	Sausage tree	Tree	Bark	The dried fruits are used as emollients to soften the skin against eczema, psoriasis and for skin-tightening effects.
<i>Curculigo Pilosa</i>	Hypoxidaceae	Epan ikun	African crocus	Shrub	Fruit	To treat skin disorders and wounds.
<i>Mentha longifolia</i>	Lamiaceae	Ewe minti	Horsemint	Herb	Leaves	It is used as skin cleanser and to cure blackheads.
<i>Cassia alata</i>	Fabaceae	Asuwon	Candle bush	Herb	Leaves	To treat ringworms, tinea infections and eczema.
<i>Carica papaya</i>	Caricaceae	Ibepe	Pawpaw	Tree	Fruits	It possesses exfoliation, moisturization, and brightening effects.
<i>Nigella sativa</i>	Ranunculaceae	Asofeyeje	Blackseed	Tree	Seeds	Seeds are used daily with honey to cure freckle and eyes dark circles.
<i>Urena lobata</i>	Malvaceae	Oke	Caesarweed	Herb	Bark	The leaves are used to treat skin diseases due to its antimicrobial activity.
<i>Staudtia stipitata.</i>	Myristicaceae	Amuje	Abua	Tree	Bark	The fruit pulp is used as anti-aging.
<i>Cajanus cajan</i>	Fabaceae	Otili	Pigeon peas	Shrub	Leaves	It's used to treat skin inflammations.
<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Meliaceae	Dongoyaro	Neem tree	Tree	Leaves	The leave oil is used to treat acne, as well as mitigate other skin disorders related to inflammatory processes.
<i>Alstonia congensis</i>	Apocynaceae	Ahun	Cheese wood	Tree	Bark	The bark is used to cure skin diseases and rheumatism; the root juice is taken with milk to cure leprosy.
<i>Acacia nilotica</i>	Fabaceae	Eso booni	Sodom apple	Tree	Fruit	It helps to retain moisture in the skin and reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.
<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Anacardiaceae	Mangoro	Mango	Tree	Seed	Seed butter nourishes and hydrates the skin, helping to improve its elasticity and smoothness
<i>Lawsonia inermis</i>	Lythraceae	Ewe laali	Henna	Shrub	Leaves	The leaves are used to beautify and dye the hands and feet to express tints of dark red, and for the controlling of definite skin disorders.

Curcuma longa	Zingiberaceae	Ata ile pupa	Tumeric	Shrub	Fruit	It is used in the treatment of acne, blemishes, dark spots, and hyperpigmentation, and to address skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis.
Syzygium aromaticum	Myrtaceae	Kanafuru	Clove	Tree	Fruit	Clove oil is used to reduce skin sagging and the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.
Vernonia amygdalina	Asteraceae	Ewuro	Bitter leaf	Herbs	Leaves	The leaves have healing effects on certain skin conditions such as eczema, seborrhea, psoriasis, and sunburn.
Corchorus olitorius	Malvaceae	Ewedu	Jute	Shrub	Leaves	The leaf extract helps to maintain and increase skin elasticity and reduce the visibility of pores.
Khaya ivorensis	Meliaceae	Ogonwon	African mahogany	Tree	Leaves, barks	The leaves are used to treat fungal skin diseases such as ringworm.
Citrullus colocynthis	Cucurbitaceae	Egusi bara	Bitter apple	Climber	Leaves, Roots.	The extract from the leaves and roots are used to treat skin disorders.
Capsicum annum	Solanaceae	Atarodo	Chill pepper	Herb	Leaves, Fruits	It is used as an astringent in various skin, body, and hair preparations. It possesses great healing property.
Syzygium guineense	Myrtaceae	Atare	Water berry	Tree	Leaves, Fruits	To treat skin blisters and rashes.
Ficus capensis	Moraceae	Epo opoto	Cape fig	Tree	Leaves	The leaves are used to treat oedema, leprosy, and skin inflammations.
Aloe barbadensis	Asphodelaceae	Ewe eti erin	Aloe vera	Herb	Leaves	Aloe leaf gel is used to treat acne.
Diospyros ebanum	Ebenaceae	Igi-dudu	Persimmon	Tree	Leaves	The leaves are used to dye hair.
Elaeis guineensis	Arecaceae	Epo pupa	Oil palm	Tree	Fruit	The oil is applied to treat skin disorders including rashes and blisters. The oil is also used as body cream to brighten the skin.
Vitellaria paradoxa	Sapotaceae	Oori	Shea-butter	Tree	Fruit	Shea butter is applied to the skin for smooth and glowing skin. It is also applied to the hair for healthy and long hair.
Zanthoxylum zanthoxyloides	Rutaceae	Orin-ata	Artar root	Herbs	Roots	The roots are used as chewing sticks for oral care.
Zingiber officinale	Zingiberaceae	Ata-ile funfun	Ginger	Herbs	Rhizomes	Ginger juice is used to treat acne.

Table 3: Plants Distributions Within the Botanical Families.

S/N	Family	Number of plant species
1	Amarylidaceae	2
2	Anarcardiaceae	1
3	Apiaceae	1
4	Apocynaceae	2
5	Arecaceae	1
6	Asphodelaceae	1
7	Asteraceae	1
8	Bignoniaceae	1
9	Bixaceae	1

10	Caricaceae	1
11	Cucurbitaceae	3
12	Ebenaceae	1
13	Euphorbiaceae	2
14	Fabaceae	4
15	Hypoxiadaceae	1
16	Lamiaceae	1
17	Loganiaceae	1
18	Lythraceae	2
19	Malvaceae	2
20	Meliaceae	3
21	Menispermaceae	1
22	Moraceae	2
23	Myristicaceae	1
24	Myrtaceae	2
25	Piperaceae	1
26	Plumbaginaceae	1
27	Polygalaceae	1
28	Ranunculaceae	1
29	Rutaceae	1
30	Solanaceae	3
31	Zingiberaceae	3

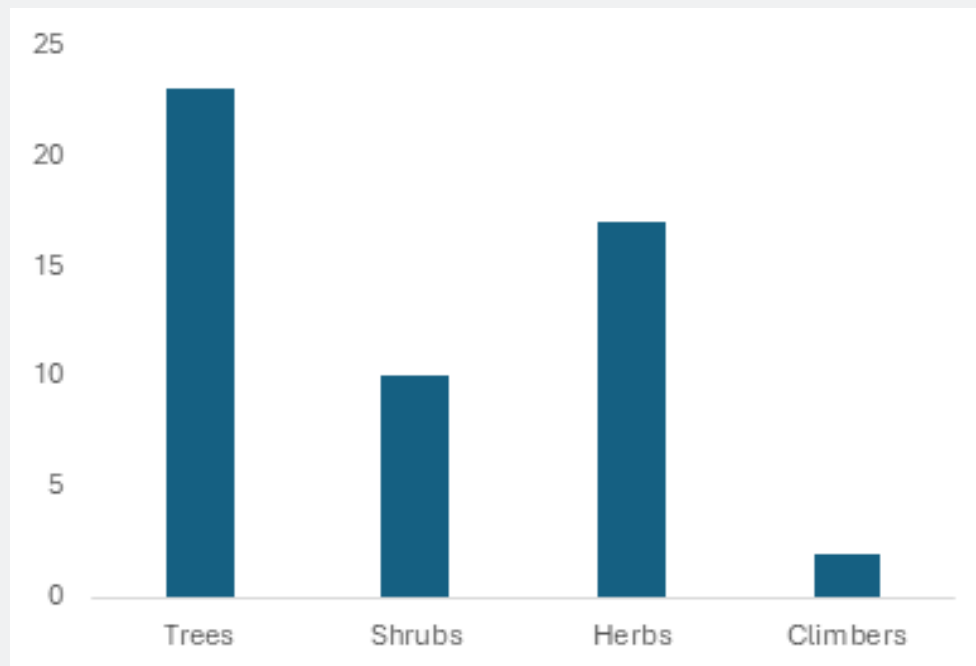


Figure 1: Plant Habits Distributions of the Plants Used as Cosmetics in the Study Area.

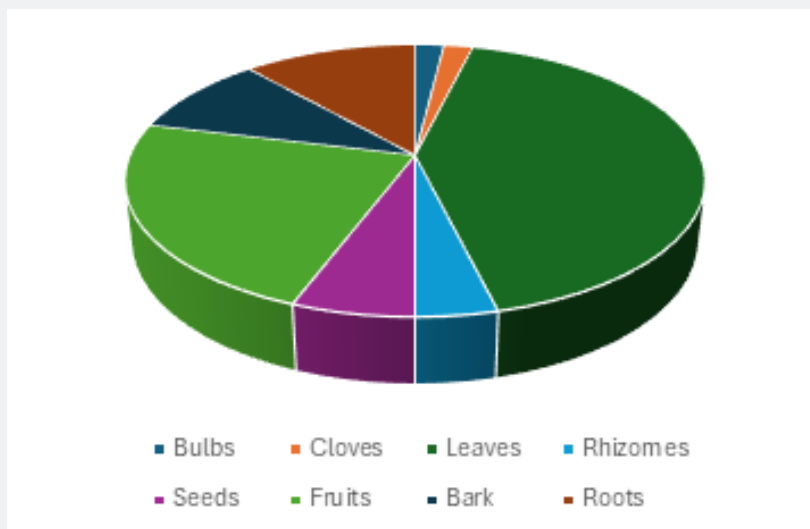


Figure 2: Distributions of the Plants Parts Used as Cosmetics in the Study Area.

Methodology

Study Area

Epe is an Ijebu-Yoruba town and Local Government Area (LGA) in Lagos State, Nigeria, located on the north side of the Lekki Lagoon. This location has always facilitated the development of the fishing industry, commerce, and agriculture. It occupies a total of 965 km² (373 sq mi) and lies at an elevation of 25m (82 ft). As at the 2006 National Population Census, the population was 181, 409. Epe's topography is marked by its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, which has a significant influence on the geography of the area. The region features a combination of coastal, riverine, upland terrains, mangrove swamps, forests and woodlands which are rich in biodiversity and provide valuable ecosystem services.

Collection of Ethnobotanical Data

Ethnobotanical surveys were conducted with 210 women from fifteen (15) communities in Epe area of Lagos State, Nigeria between November 2020, and January 2021. The study area included Etita/Ebode, Lagbade, Popo-oba, Oke-Balogun, Ajaganabe, Ise/Igbogun, Oriba/Ladaba, Poka, Odomola, Abomiti, Agbowwa, Agbowwa-ikosi, Ago-owu, Orugbo and Ilara to obtain information on plants used as cosmetics by women in the study areas. Ethno botanical and demographic information was gathered from the respondents by using oral interview in Yoruba Language. The interview focused on the informant's knowledge of cosmetic herbs, collection, uses and recipe preparation; major infections and disease treated. Local names, distribution of plants, dose preparation, medium of intake and application of cosmetic recipe were also asked from the informants. The data were arranged according to taxonomic identification of plants, their uses, and local names. The data were further analyzed for basic categorization of the respondents' age,

literacy, gender, use preferences, parts of medicinal plants used, recipes preparation and mode of administration.

Ethnobotanical Survey

Fifty-two (52) plant species belonging to thirty-one families were identified to be used as cosmetics in the study area.

Discussion

The utilization of plants for cosmetic purposes, known as cosmetic ethnobotany, is deeply embedded in the cultural practices of various indigenous communities worldwide. In the Epe communities of Lagos State, Nigeria, tribal women have been utilizing local flora for cosmetic applications for generations. This discussion aims to delve into the significance of cosmetic ethnobotany among these tribal women, exploring the plants used, their cultural importance, and potential implications for conservation and community well-being.

In Epe communities, the practice of cosmetic ethnobotany is not merely a beauty regimen but an integral part of cultural heritage. Tribal women inherit this knowledge from previous generations through oral traditions and practical demonstrations. The selection, preparation, and application of plant-based cosmetics are often accompanied by rituals and ceremonies, reinforcing the cultural significance of these practices. Moreover, cosmetic ethnobotany fosters a sense of community identity and solidarity, as women gather to share knowledge and exchange experiences.

The local flora of Epe communities offers a rich diversity of plants suitable for cosmetic purposes. Commonly utilized species include shea butter (*Vitellaria paradoxa*), African black soap (*Diospyros* spp.), palm oil (*Elaeis guineensis*), and various

aromatic herbs and flowers. These plants are employed to create a wide range of cosmetic products, including moisturizers, cleansers, hair treatments, and perfumes. Each plant is valued not only for its cosmetic properties but also for its medicinal and spiritual significance, reflecting the holistic approach to beauty and well-being in indigenous cultures. The practice of cosmetic ethnobotany plays a significant role in the socioeconomic dynamics of Epe communities. Tribal women often engage in small-scale production and trade of plant-based cosmetics, generating income for themselves and their families. Additionally, the cultivation and harvesting of cosmetic plants provide employment opportunities and contribute to local economic resilience. However, the commercialization of these practices also raises concerns about fair trade, intellectual property rights, and sustainable resource management, highlighting the need for ethical considerations and community-based initiatives. As the demand for natural cosmetics continues to rise globally, there is growing pressure on local ecosystems and traditional knowledge systems. In Epe communities, unsustainable harvesting practices and habitat degradation threaten the availability of cosmetic plants and jeopardize cultural continuity. Conservation efforts must, therefore, integrate indigenous perspectives and empower local communities to sustainably manage their natural resources. Initiatives such as community-led conservation projects, eco-tourism ventures, and biodiversity monitoring can help preserve both biological diversity and cultural heritage for future generations.

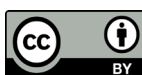
Conclusion

Cosmetic ethnobotany represents a convergence of cultural, ecological, and socioeconomic values among tribal women in

Epe communities of Lagos State, Nigeria. By recognizing the significance of traditional knowledge and promoting sustainable practices, we can foster holistic approaches to beauty, well-being, and community development. Through collaborative efforts involving indigenous communities, policymakers, and conservationists, we can ensure the preservation of both natural ecosystems and cultural traditions for the benefit of all.

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