

Cichorium spinosum

Stamnagathi



For hundreds of years, the Cretan people have been eating the wild greens abundant from their even wilder mountains.

Many of the greens are often simply called horta. Many wild greens including stamnagathi exist around the Mediterranean basin, in countries such as Italy, Malta and Turkey.

Although, like many plants, there is a stamnagathi that is endemic and unique to Crete. This is a sweet and bitter wild green. This sweet-bitter component is what contains its magical properties. This herb is mainly found on or near the Omalos Plateau, in the White Mountains in the west of Crete.

Our forefathers used to gather mountain greens for salad or side plate. Not surprisingly, we now consider their food poor and humble. However, it is proven that

they lived proportionally longer and also had better health. Can we assume the same of our modern westernized nutrition?

One of the more sought after Greek edible potherbs is *Cichorium spinosum*, commonly named “stamnagathi”. It was named after its thorns, which we ‘ve used for creating a cap for water crocks. In time, the edible part of *Cichorium spinosum* ended up being called crock-thorn (stamna–agathi, in Greek).



Cichorium spinosum germinates mainly in Crete Island and it is consumed either raw or cooked. Recently, we have started cultivating it so as to meet the increasing demand, throughout the year.

“Stamnagathi” is a nutritious green leafy vegetable with high water content (88.7-93.7%); it is also poor in fat (0.2-0.4g/100g) and calories (23.8-36.3 kcal/100g) . Its

nutritional value depends on cultivation conditions and surrounding ecosystem; thus it appears with high heterogeneity among different species . However, cultivated Cichorium doesn't have fluctuations in nutritional content due to similar cultivation methods .

The plant contains free sugars, mainly glucose (0.14-0.69 g/100 g), and sucrose (0.18-0.6 g/100 g) (3). The edible parts of the plant are considered good sources of vitamins alpha-tocopherol, C, K1, and beta-carotene, as well as contain potassium, calcium, magnesium, iron, and sodium .



It is also rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids (more than 76% of total fat content), whereas polyunsaturated/saturated fatty acids ratio, and n-6/n-3 fatty acids ratio is higher than 0.45 and lower than 4, respectively . Cichorium leaves have plenty of bioactive

compounds, such as phenols and glutathione, having intense antioxidant action .

It will make you feel refreshed and revived.

As a result of its high antioxidant content, Cichorium is considered to benefit cardiovascular health, blood lipid levels, and immune system health; it may also exert protective effect against certain types of cancer . In addition, it has diuretic and mild laxative effect, whereas it was used in ancient years to treat liver and gallbladder issues. However, the latter is not scientifically proven yet.

