



**Grow & Use**  
**Medicinal Plants**  
**for primary health care**

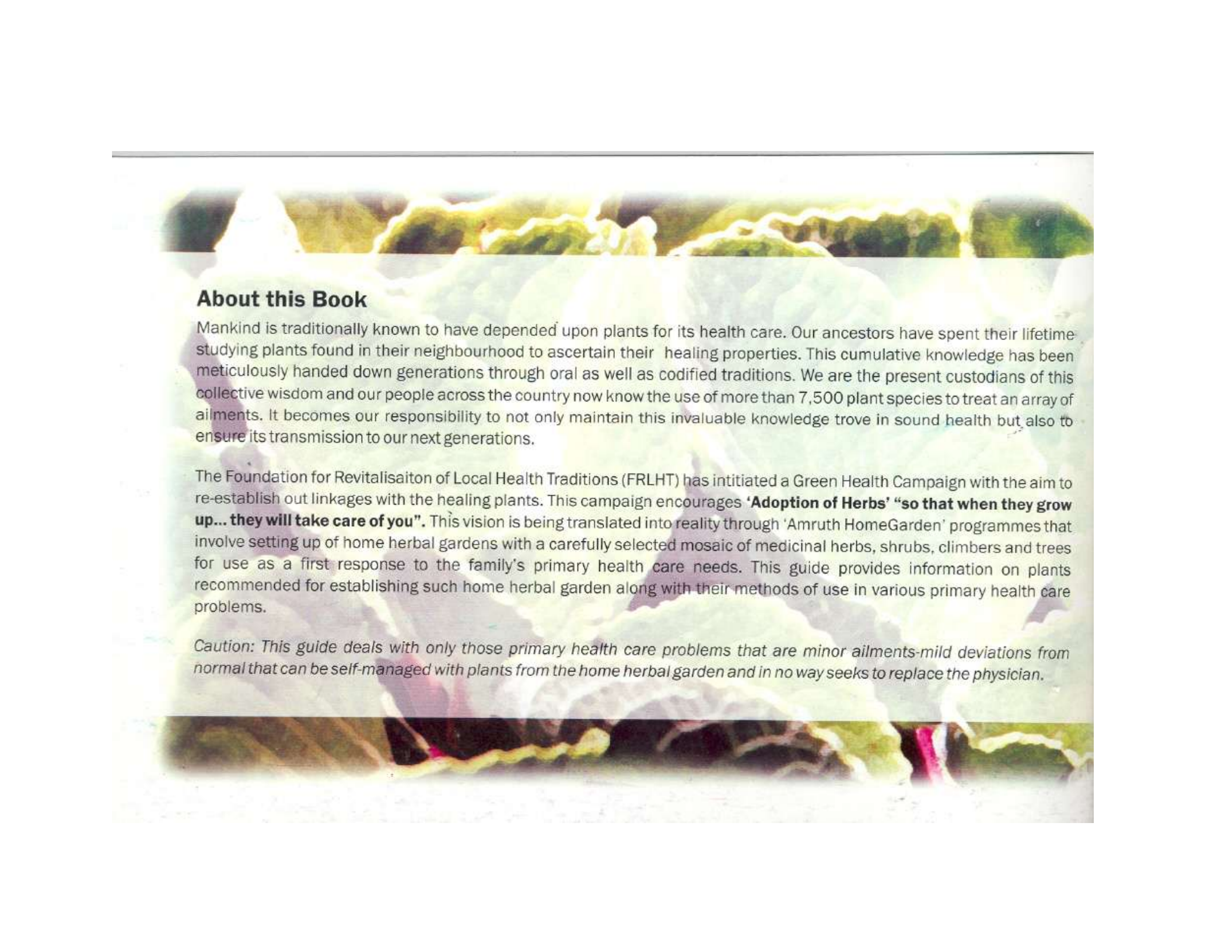
- A Guide



Developed and Published by  
**Medican Conservatory Society, Bangalore**  
C/o FRLHT-Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions  
No.74/2, Jarakoande Kaval, Post Attur, Via Yelahanka,  
Bangalore - 560 106  
Website - [www.frlht.org](http://www.frlht.org)



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**National Medicinal Plants Board**  
Department of AYUSH  
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India  
Chandralok Building, 36, Janpath, New Delhi - 110001  
Website - [www.nmpb.nic.in](http://www.nmpb.nic.in)



## About this Book

Mankind is traditionally known to have depended upon plants for its health care. Our ancestors have spent their lifetime studying plants found in their neighbourhood to ascertain their healing properties. This cumulative knowledge has been meticulously handed down generations through oral as well as codified traditions. We are the present custodians of this collective wisdom and our people across the country now know the use of more than 7,500 plant species to treat an array of ailments. It becomes our responsibility to not only maintain this invaluable knowledge trove in sound health but also to ensure its transmission to our next generations.

The Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) has initiated a Green Health Campaign with the aim to re-establish our linkages with the healing plants. This campaign encourages **'Adoption of Herbs' "so that when they grow up... they will take care of you"**. This vision is being translated into reality through 'Amruth HomeGarden' programmes that involve setting up of home herbal gardens with a carefully selected mosaic of medicinal herbs, shrubs, climbers and trees for use as a first response to the family's primary health care needs. This guide provides information on plants recommended for establishing such home herbal garden along with their methods of use in various primary health care problems.

*Caution: This guide deals with only those primary health care problems that are minor ailments-mild deviations from normal that can be self-managed with plants from the home herbal garden and in no way seeks to replace the physician.*



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# Grow & Use Medicinal Plants for Primary Health Care: A Guide

(Revised Edition)

Dr. G.S. Goraya & B.S. Somashekhar

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1<sup>st</sup> Edition: April 2005

2<sup>nd</sup> Reprint: 2008

Revised Edition: August, 2009

Published by:

Medplan Conservatory Society (MCS), 74/2, Jarakabande Kaval, Post Attur, Via Yelahanka,  
Bangalore – 560 106 for and on behalf of the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions ,  
(FRLHT), Bangalore, Tel-080-28568000, 28565890, email: [medplan@frlht.org](mailto:medplan@frlht.org)

Printing of this Edition Sponsored by: National Medicinal Plants Board, Government of India, New Delhi.

Printed & copies Produced at M/s Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh, 23 -A, New Connaught Place, Dehradun.

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**Grow & Use Medicinal Plants for Primary Health Care - A Guide**  
(National Edition)

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**Acknowledgements**

<p><b>Conceptualization</b> Shri. Darshan Shankar Advisor, FRLHT</p> <p><b>Administrative Guidance</b> Mr. B.S. Sajwan CEO, NMPB</p> <p>Mr. D.K. Ved Director, FRLHT</p> <p>Dr. K. Haridasan Joint Director, FRLHT</p>	<p><b>Authentication of Sanskrit and Vernacular Names of Plants</b> Vd. S.N. Venugopal Senior Program Officer, FRLHT</p> <p>Mrs. Suma T.S. Program Officer, FRLHT</p> <p>Mrs. Kavitha.M Research Fellow, FRLHT</p> <p>Dr. Noorunnisa Begum Research Officer, FRLHT</p> <p>Dr. K. Ravikumar Assistant Director, FRLHT</p>	<p><b>Medicinal Uses of Plants</b> Vd. P.M. Unnikrishnan Vd. G.G. Gangadharan Joint Director, FRLHT</p> <p><b>Photo Courtesy</b> Dr. G.S. Goraya Chief Conservator of Forests, Himachal Pradesh Forest Department</p> <p>Dr. K. Ravikumar</p> <p><b>Page design</b> Mrs. Sugandhi Rani Program Assistant, FRLHT</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

The traditional primary health care system in India is embodied in a 'people's health culture'. This culture is based on very effective and sound, region-specific health practices involving about 8,000 species of plants across the country. Whereas most of the medicinal plants used in these local health cultures were freely available in the vicinity of the households, some of these were also raised and maintained in the home gardens. This 'people's health culture' provided an easy and cost effective succour to day- to- day primary health care problems of the local communities over centuries on one hand and also continued to develop and evolve alongside the codified Indian Systems of Medicine like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Gso-rigpa on the other hand.

However the last century saw a temporary setback to these time-tested practices due to lack of recognition and necessary societal support. The danger of permanently losing our extremely rich knowledge base related to herbal traditions and driving many of the associated plants to extinction started haunting the humanity. However, this dismal scenario is in for a change due to a global resurgence of interest in the natural and organically grown products. The relative safety of whole plant based drugs, in contrast to the synthetic ones, is being increasingly appreciated. It is in this context that home grown medicinal plants offer a high quality, low-cost, easily accessible and safe primary health care option. To make this easy and cost effective health care option a reality, our linkages with plant based health traditions would need to be re-established.

The Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) has been contributing in a big way to the revitalisation process of our rich medical heritage and conservation of the associated resource and knowledge base. It has, in association with State Forest Departments, Research Institutions, NGOs and local communities successfully spearheaded a "Green Health Campaign" in southern India under which medicinal plant packages for primary health care have been developed and thus far more than 1.5 lac home herbal gardens promoted.



This guide has been specifically prepared for establishing home herbal gardens across different eco-regions in the country. It provides a list of plants/ plant material used for alleviation of various primary ailments along with easy and reliable methods of use of the plants/ plant material. The ailments covered in this guide are limited to minor problems, mild deviations from normal health and those that can be easily diagnosed and self-managed. References to complex and chronic ailments that do need professional medical advice have been deliberately avoided. The primary health care problems listed in the guide have been categorized as follows:

1. Common Problems (acidity, burning feet, constipation, cough, cuts and wounds, diarrhoea, fever, headache, hoarse throat, indigestion, sore eyes, stomach ache, urinary problems, vomiting, worms, etc.)
2. Women Health – Pregnancy and Gynaecological Problems (pregnancy care, breast milk purification and production, menstrual disorders)
3. Health Promotion (general immunity, mental and liver tonics, hair care)

The plants/ plant material short-listed for this guide have been selected on the following criteria:

- **Confirmed clinical efficacy of the plants** i.e., the recommended uses of the plants have been drawn from the practices actually prevalent and tested by authorities in the field. Even as these plants are also known to be used in many serious ailments, reference to their use in this guide has been limited to Primary Health Care conditions only.
- **Confirmed identity of the plant** i.e., plants having ambiguous identity in view of multiple names for one species and one name for many species have been avoided.
- **Safety factor** i.e., only those plants have been included having no known toxic effects.
- **Ease of use of plants/ plant parts** i.e., the recommended plants have simple methods of use.

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- Multiple uses i.e. the recommended plants can be used in more than one condition.
  - Ease of maintaining plants in home herbal garden i.e. recommended plants are easy to maintain and are amenable to harvest in a short period of time.
  - Aesthetic appeal i.e. the recommended species also have excellent ornamental appeal.
  - Easy availability of planting material i.e. the planting material is easily available across the country.

Whereas a total of 21 plant species have been recommended for planting in the home herbal gardens, use of some common kitchen spices, fresh fruits and common wild plants has also been included in the guide. The names of the plants used in the Guide as lead names are those commonly used in trade

This guide along with the suggested plant species forms essential component of the 'green health packages' for home herbal gardens. Since the healing plants in home gardens will provide health security to us, the programme has been named "Amruth HomeGarden" programme. 'Amruth' means 'elixir of life'. The name of the programme also reflects one of the key plants - 'Amrithaballi' also known as Guduchi or Giloe - forming part of the 'green health package'.

The species included in the 'green health package' have a fairly vast range of natural occurrence, and, therefore, can be used to establish 'Amruth HomeGardens' at places different eco-regions of the country also. To make this guide more useful in such areas, species as per local traditions may be added and those unsuitable for those areas may be deleted.

It is hoped that this Guide would provide much needed information on use of plants for primary health care and help in re-establishing linkages to our rich medical heritage.