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Date-Plum (*Diospyros lotus*): An Underutilized Species with Multifaceted Ecological and Economic Potential

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Abstract— *Diospyros lotus, commonly known as the Date-Plum, is a deciduous tree species belonging to the Ebenaceae family, native to a vast expanse of subtropical and temperate Eurasia. Historically revered for its edible fruit and diverse medicinal properties, it possesses remarkable resilience to a wide array of environmental stressors, including cold, drought, and varying soil conditions. Despite its proven utility as a robust rootstock for the commercially dominant persimmon (Diospyros kaki) and its inherent ecological value, D. lotus remains significantly underutilized in contemporary agricultural systems and global markets. This comprehensive review systematically examines the botanical characteristics, diverse phytochemical composition, profound ecological significance, and substantial economic potential of D. lotus. Furthermore, it explores the species' pivotal role in fostering sustainable agroforestry practices and highlights its promising pharmacological prospects. By synthesizing current knowledge, this paper advocates for the strategic integration of D. lotus into mainstream horticultural value chains and its recognition as a vital component of future climate-resilient food systems.*

Keywords— Diospyros lotus, Date-Plum, underutilized species, phytochemistry, rootstock, agroforestry, climate resilience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The genus *Diospyros*, a prominent member of the Ebenaceae family, encompasses an impressive diversity of over 700 species, many of which are globally recognized for their valuable timber (e.g., ebony) or their highly prized, succulent fruits. Within this extensive genus, *Diospyros lotus* L., commonly known as the Date-Plum or Caucasian Persimmon, holds a unique historical and biological significance. Its very name, derived from Greek, translates to "fruit of the gods," underscoring its ancient reverence and long history of human interaction (Mallavadhani et al., 2001; Rauf et al., 2017). Archaeological evidence suggests its cultivation dates back millennia, making it one of the oldest cultivated fruit trees in human history (Grygorieva et al., 2018).

While the global commercial market for persimmons is overwhelmingly dominated by the Japanese or Asian persimmon (*Diospyros kaki* Thunb.), *D. lotus* possesses a distinct suite of genetic traits that position it as an invaluable, yet often overlooked, resource. Its exceptional cold hardiness, remarkable drought tolerance, and adaptability to marginal soils provide a significant advantage in the face of escalating climate change and increasing pressure on agricultural land (Rauf et al., 2017; Ayaz et al., 2010). These characteristics make it an ideal candidate for cultivation in regions where *D. kaki* struggles, or as a resilient rootstock to impart these desirable traits to commercial cultivars.

Despite its historical importance, nutritional richness, and ecological resilience, *D. lotus* has largely been relegated to the status of an underutilized or minor fruit crop in modern intensive agriculture. This review aims to bridge this knowledge gap by providing a comprehensive synthesis of current research on *D. lotus*. We will meticulously examine its botanical features,

delve into its complex phytochemical profile and associated nutritional benefits, elucidate its critical ecological roles, and assess its multifaceted economic potential. By exploring its applications in sustainable agroforestry and its promising pharmacological properties, this paper seeks to highlight the untapped value of *D. lotus* and advocate for its greater recognition and strategic integration into global horticultural and medicinal landscapes.

II. BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION AND DISTRIBUTION

2.1 Morphological Characteristics

FIGURE 1: Seedlings of *Diospyros lotus* growing in the nursery at Experimental Farm, SKUAST-Chatha

Diospyros lotus is a medium-sized, deciduous tree, typically reaching heights of 15 to 30 meters, though some specimens can exceed this (Grygorieva et al., 2018). Its growth habit is often upright, forming a rounded crown with age. The bark is dark grey to black, deeply furrowed and fissured, providing a distinctive texture. The leaves are alternate, simple, and ovate to elliptical-oblong, measuring approximately 5-15 cm in length and 3-6 cm in width. They are characterized by their glossy, dark green upper surface and a paler, sometimes slightly pubescent, underside. In autumn, the foliage transforms into attractive shades of yellow, orange, and red, adding ornamental value (Ayaz et al., 2010).

D. lotus is predominantly dioecious, meaning individual trees bear either male or female flowers, though monoecious forms (bearing both sexes) and hermaphroditic flowers can occasionally occur (Karaman et al., 2014). The flowers are small, inconspicuous, and yellowish-green. Male flowers are typically borne in clusters of 2-3 in the leaf axils, while female flowers are solitary. Flowering generally occurs in late spring to early summer, depending on the geographical location and climatic conditions (Grygorieva et al., 2018).

The fruit is a small, globose berry, resembling a cherry or a small plum, typically 1-2 cm in diameter. It undergoes a significant color change during maturation, transitioning from green to yellow, and finally to a characteristic bluish-black or dark purple when fully ripe. The fruit contains several flattened, dark brown seeds, though seedless varieties or fruits with aborted seeds are also observed (Rauf et al., 2017). The taste of the unripe fruit is intensely astringent due to high tannin content, but upon full ripening or after a period of bletting (softening), it becomes sweet and palatable, with a flavour profile reminiscent of dates and plums (Loizzo et al., 2009).

2.2 Geographical Distribution and Habitat

Diospyros lotus boasts an extensive natural range, stretching across a vast belt of Eurasia. Its native habitat extends from Southeast Europe, through the Caucasus region, Turkey, and Central Asia, reaching into the Himalayas, China, Korea, and

Japan (Ayaz et al., 2010). This wide distribution underscores its remarkable adaptability to diverse climatic zones, from temperate to subtropical.

Within its native range, *D. lotus* is typically found in mixed deciduous forests, often thriving in mountain valleys, along riverbanks, and on slopes at altitudes ranging from 500 to 2,500 meters above sea level (Xun et al., 2020). It prefers well-drained, deep soils, but its resilience allows it to tolerate a variety of soil types, including sandy, loamy, and clayey soils, and it can withstand both slightly acidic and alkaline conditions (Rauf et al., 2017). Its ability to tolerate drought and cold temperatures (down to -25°C or lower in some provenances) makes it a valuable species for cultivation in challenging environments where other fruit trees might fail (Karaman et al., 2014). This broad ecological niche highlights its potential for cultivation in a wider range of agricultural landscapes globally.

III. PHYTOCHEMICAL PROFILE AND NUTRITIONAL VALUE

FIGURE 2: Dried fruits and seeds of *Diospyros lotus* in the Lab at Division of Silviculture & Agroforestry, SKUAST-Chatha

The nutritional and therapeutic potential of *D. lotus* is intrinsically linked to its rich and diverse array of primary and secondary metabolites. These compounds contribute to its characteristic flavor, color, and its documented health benefits.

3.1 Macronutrients and Micronutrients

The fruit of *D. lotus* is a valuable source of readily available energy, primarily in the form of sugars. Fructose and glucose are the predominant monosaccharides, contributing to its sweet taste upon ripening. The total sugar content can vary significantly depending on the ripeness stage and cultivar, but generally ranges from 15% to 25% of fresh weight (Grygorieva et al., 2018).

In terms of vitamins, *D. lotus* is particularly rich in Vitamin C (ascorbic acid), an essential antioxidant vital for immune function and collagen synthesis. Studies have shown that its Vitamin C content can be comparable to, or even surpass, that of many common citrus fruits, making it a significant dietary source (Loizzo et al., 2009). It also contains appreciable amounts of Vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene, a precursor), which is crucial for vision, immune health, and skin integrity. B vitamins, including thiamine (B1), riboflavin (B2), and niacin (B3), are also present, contributing to metabolic processes (Ayaz et al., 2010).

The mineral profile of *D. lotus* fruit is equally impressive. Potassium is found in high concentrations, playing a critical role in maintaining fluid balance, nerve signals, and muscle contractions. Other essential minerals include magnesium, important for bone health and enzyme function, and calcium, vital for skeletal structure and cellular signalling. Trace elements such as iron, zinc, and manganese are also present, contributing to various physiological processes (Ayaz et al., 2010). The seeds and leaves also contain a spectrum of minerals, though in different proportions, suggesting their potential for other applications.

3.2 Bioactive Compounds and Phytochemicals

Beyond basic nutrition, *D. lotus* is a treasure trove of bioactive phytochemicals, which are largely responsible for its medicinal properties and antioxidant capacity.

3.2.1 Phenolic Compounds and Flavonoids

These are among the most abundant and well-studied secondary metabolites in *D. lotus*. Phenolic compounds, including phenolic acids (e.g., gallic acid, caffeic acid, ferulic acid) and flavonoids (e.g., quercetin, kaempferol, catechins), are powerful antioxidants. They scavenge free radicals, reduce oxidative stress, and have been linked to a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and neurodegenerative disorders (Loizzo et al., 2009). The total phenolic content (TPC) and total flavonoid content (TFC) are often used as indicators of the antioxidant potential of plant extracts, and *D. lotus* consistently shows high values in these assays, particularly in the fruit peel and leaves (Grygorieva et al., 2018).

3.2.2 Tannins

Tannins are a class of astringent, bitter polyphenolic compounds that bind to and precipitate proteins. They are particularly abundant in the unripe fruit of *D. lotus*, contributing to its characteristic astringency (Mallavadhani et al., 2001). As the fruit ripens, or undergoes specific post-harvest treatments like bletting, the soluble tannins polymerize into insoluble forms, reducing astringency and making the fruit palatable. While high concentrations can be unpalatable, tannins also possess beneficial properties, including antioxidant, antimicrobial, and anti-inflammatory effects (Rauf et al., 2015). They also play a role in plant defense against herbivores and pathogens.

3.2.3 Triterpenoids and Steroids

Various triterpenoids and steroidal compounds have been isolated from different parts of *D. lotus*, particularly from the bark and leaves. Examples include lupeol, betulinic acid, and ursolic acid. These compounds are known for their diverse pharmacological activities, including anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, hepatoprotective, and antimicrobial properties (Rauf et al., 2015). Their presence suggests a broader therapeutic potential for extracts beyond just the fruit.

3.2.4 Carotenoids

The yellow and orange hues observed in the ripening fruit and autumn leaves are primarily due to the presence of carotenoids, such as beta-carotene and lycopene. These pigments are not only responsible for colour but also act as powerful antioxidants and precursors to Vitamin A, further enhancing the nutritional value of the fruit (Ayaz et al., 2010).

3.2.5 Other Volatile Compounds

The characteristic aroma of ripe *D. lotus* fruit is attributed to a complex mixture of volatile organic compounds, including esters, aldehydes, and ketones. While less studied than the non-volatile compounds, these contribute to the fruit's sensory appeal and may also possess subtle biological activities (Grygorieva et al., 2018).

The comprehensive phytochemical profile of *D. lotus* underscores its potential as a functional food and a source of natural therapeutic agents. Further research into the synergistic effects of these compounds and their bioavailability is warranted to fully unlock its health-promoting capabilities.

IV. ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Diospyros lotus plays a crucial and often underestimated role in maintaining the ecological balance and biodiversity of its native habitats. Its resilience and adaptability contribute significantly to ecosystem health.

4.1 Biodiversity and Habitat Support

As a native species across vast regions of Eurasia, *D. lotus* is an integral component of forest ecosystems, contributing to local biodiversity. Its presence supports a wide array of fauna, particularly during critical periods. The late-ripening fruits, which often persist on the tree into late autumn and early winter, provide a vital food source for numerous bird species (e.g., thrushes, jays) and small mammals (e.g., squirrels, martens) when other food resources become scarce (Xun et al., 2020). This extended availability of fruit is crucial for the survival of these animals, especially in temperate zones where winter foraging can be challenging. The tree's foliage also provides shelter and nesting sites for various avian species, further enhancing its role as a keystone resource in its ecosystem. The flowers, though small, attract pollinators, contributing to the overall health of insect populations.

4.2 Soil Conservation and Reforestation

The robust and extensive root system of *D. lotus* makes it an exceptional species for soil stabilization and erosion control, particularly in vulnerable landscapes such as hilly terrains, riverbanks, and degraded slopes (Xun et al., 2020). Its deep-reaching roots bind soil particles, preventing surface runoff and minimizing soil loss due to wind and water erosion. This characteristic makes it an invaluable species for ecological restoration projects, especially in areas prone to landslides or desertification.

Furthermore, its ability to thrive in nutrient-poor, marginal, or disturbed soils positions *D. lotus* as an excellent pioneer species in reforestation and afforestation efforts. It can colonize barren lands, gradually improving soil structure and fertility through leaf litter decomposition, thereby creating more favourable conditions for the establishment of other, more demanding plant species (Rauf et al., 2017). This makes it a strategic choice for rehabilitating degraded forest lands and enhancing ecological resilience in vulnerable regions.

4.3 Climate Change Resilience

The inherent resilience of *D. lotus* to a range of environmental stressors, including extreme cold, prolonged drought, and varying soil pH, makes it a highly relevant species in the context of global climate change (Karaman et al., 2014). As climatic patterns become more unpredictable, with increased frequency of extreme weather events, species like *D. lotus* that can withstand such fluctuations will be crucial for maintaining forest cover and agricultural productivity. Its genetic diversity across its wide native range likely harbours valuable traits for adaptation to future environmental challenges, making it a critical genetic resource for breeding programs aimed at developing climate-resilient crops and forest trees.

V. ECONOMIC POTENTIAL AND UTILIZATION

The economic potential of *Diospyros lotus* is diverse, extending beyond its direct fruit consumption to its applications in horticulture, food processing, and traditional medicine.

5.1 Horticultural Value as Rootstock

One of the most significant and well-established economic uses of *D. lotus* is its role as a rootstock for the commercially important Japanese persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*). This application is driven by several key advantages:

- **Disease Resistance:** *D. lotus* rootstock exhibits strong resistance to various soil-borne diseases and nematodes that can severely impact *D. kaki* trees, thereby enhancing the longevity and productivity of grafted orchards (Karaman et al., 2014).
- **Stress Tolerance:** It imparts superior cold hardiness and drought tolerance to the grafted scion, allowing *D. kaki* to be cultivated in regions with harsher climates than its own natural range would permit (Rauf et al., 2017). This expands the geographical scope of commercial persimmon production.
- **Vigor Control:** *D. lotus* rootstock can induce a dwarfing or semi-dwarfing effect on the scion, leading to smaller, more manageable trees. This facilitates high-density planting, improves light penetration, and simplifies orchard management practices such as pruning, harvesting, and pest control, ultimately increasing yield efficiency per unit area (Karaman et al., 2014).
- **Adaptability to Soil Conditions:** Its tolerance to a wider range of soil types, including heavier clays and slightly alkaline soils, makes it a more versatile rootstock compared to other *Diospyros* species.

5.2 Food Industry Applications

The fruit of *D. lotus*, once ripened and its astringency removed, offers a unique flavor profile that can be utilized in various food products.

- **Fresh Consumption:** While smaller than *D. kaki*, the ripe fruit is sweet and flavourful, suitable for direct consumption. Its distinctive taste, often described as a blend of dates, plums, and figs, could appeal to niche markets (Grygorieva et al., 2018).
- **Dried Fruit:** In many parts of its native range, particularly in the Himalayas and Central Asia, *D. lotus* fruits are traditionally dried. This process not only preserves the fruit for extended periods but also concentrates its sugars and

flavors, creating a highly nutritious and energy-dense snack (Ayaz et al., 2010). Dried Date-Plums could find a market as a natural, healthy alternative to other dried fruits.

- **Processed Products:** The fruit can be processed into a variety of value-added products:
    - Jams, Jellies, and Preserves: The high pectin content in the fruit makes it suitable for gelling, producing flavorful preserves.
    - Syrups and Nectars: The sweet pulp can be extracted to create natural sweeteners or fruit nectars.
    - Traditional Beverages: In some cultures, the fruit is used to make traditional fermented beverages or fruit wines, leveraging its sugar content (Mallavadhani et al., 2001).
    - Baked Goods: The pulp can be incorporated into cakes, muffins, and other baked goods, similar to how other dried fruits are used.
- **Animal Feed:** Unmarketable or surplus fruits, as well as leaves, can serve as a nutritious feed supplement for livestock, particularly in rural areas where fodder resources may be limited.

5.3 Medicinal and Pharmacological Applications

The traditional medicinal uses of *D. lotus* are extensive, and modern pharmacological research is beginning to validate many of these claims, highlighting its potential as a source of novel therapeutic agents.

- **Traditional Medicine:** In traditional Persian, Chinese, and Ayurvedic medicine, various parts of *D. lotus* (fruit, leaves, bark) have been employed for centuries to treat a wide range of ailments. These include:
    - Hypertension: Used as a hypotensive agent to lower blood pressure.
    - Diabetes: Employed to manage blood sugar levels.
    - Gastrointestinal Disorders: Used for digestive issues, diarrhea, and dysentery, likely due to its astringent properties (Rauf et al., 2014).
    - Anti-inflammatory: Applied topically or consumed internally to reduce inflammation.
    - Sedative and Anxiolytic: Extracts have been traditionally used to calm nerves and induce sleep.
- **Modern Pharmacological Research:** Contemporary studies have begun to elucidate the mechanisms behind these traditional uses:
    - Antioxidant Activity: High levels of phenolic compounds and flavonoids confer significant antioxidant capacity, protecting cells from oxidative damage (Loizzo et al., 2009). This is crucial in preventing chronic diseases.
    - Anti-inflammatory and Analgesic Effects: Extracts from leaves and bark have demonstrated potent anti-inflammatory and anti-nociceptive (pain-relieving) activities in animal models, supporting its traditional use for pain and inflammation (Rauf et al., 2015).
    - Antidiabetic Potential: Research suggests that *D. lotus* extracts can help regulate blood glucose levels, potentially by inhibiting carbohydrate-digesting enzymes or improving insulin sensitivity (Mallavadhani et al., 2001).
    - Antimicrobial Activity: Certain extracts have shown inhibitory effects against various bacteria and fungi, indicating potential as natural antimicrobial agents.
    - Anticancer Properties: Preliminary in vitro studies have suggested that some phytochemicals from *D. lotus* may possess antiproliferative effects against certain cancer cell lines, warranting further investigation (Loizzo et al., 2009).
    - Hepatoprotective Effects: Some studies indicate that *D. lotus* extracts may protect the liver from damage induced by toxins.

The rich ethnobotanical history coupled with emerging scientific evidence positions *D. lotus* as a promising candidate for the development of novel pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, and functional food ingredients.

VI. CHALLENGES TO COMMERCIALIZATION

Despite its numerous advantages and potential, *Diospyros lotus* faces several significant hurdles that have prevented its widespread commercialization and integration into global markets.

6.1 Astringency Management

The most prominent challenge is the intense astringency of the unripe fruit, primarily due to high concentrations of soluble tannins (Mallavadhani et al., 2001). While this astringency diminishes upon full ripening or bletting, the process can be inconsistent and difficult to manage on a large scale. Consumers accustomed to non-astringent fruits may find the taste unpleasant, limiting its fresh market appeal. Developing reliable and efficient post-harvest methods for de-astringency that maintain fruit quality and shelf-life is crucial for wider acceptance.

6.2 Fruit Size and Market Appeal

Compared to the large, often seedless, and visually appealing fruits of commercial *Diospyros kaki* cultivars, the fruit of *D. lotus* is relatively small (1-2 cm in diameter) and typically contains several seeds (Grygorieva et al., 2018). This smaller size and seed presence reduce its attractiveness as a standalone fresh table fruit in markets where larger, seedless varieties are preferred. Overcoming this requires either targeting niche markets that appreciate its unique flavor and nutritional profile, or focusing on processing applications where size is less critical.

6.3 Lack of Standardized Cultivars and Breeding Programs

A major impediment to commercial development is the lack of standardized, high-yielding, and quality-controlled cultivars. Most existing *D. lotus* trees are wild or semi-domesticated, exhibiting significant variability in fruit size, yield, ripening time, and astringency levels (Karaman et al., 2014). Unlike *D. kaki*, which has benefited from extensive breeding programs, *D. lotus* has received limited attention in this regard. The absence of well-characterized cultivars makes it difficult to ensure consistent product quality and supply, which are essential for large-scale commercial operations. Establishing dedicated breeding programs focused on improving fruit characteristics, reducing astringency, and enhancing yield is a prerequisite for its commercial viability.

6.4 Limited Awareness and Market Demand

Globally, there is a general lack of awareness about *D. lotus* among consumers and even many horticulturalists outside its native range. This limited recognition translates into low market demand, making it challenging for growers to invest in its cultivation. Educational campaigns highlighting its nutritional benefits, unique flavor, and ecological advantages are necessary to build consumer interest and create a market for its products.

6.5 Post-Harvest Handling and Shelf-Life

While the fruit can be dried, the fresh fruit, once ripe and de-astringent, can be delicate and have a relatively short shelf-life, posing challenges for transportation and distribution to distant markets. Research into optimal harvesting techniques, storage conditions, and packaging methods is needed to extend its market window and reduce post-harvest losses.

VII. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION

To fully unlock the potential of *Diospyros lotus* and transition it from an underutilized species to a valuable commercial and ecological asset, a concerted, multidisciplinary approach is required.

7.1 Genetic Improvement and Cultivar Development

Intensive breeding and selection programs are paramount. These programs should focus on:

- **Improving Fruit Characteristics:** Developing cultivars with larger fruit size, reduced seed count (or seedlessness), and naturally lower or more easily manageable astringency.
- **Enhanced Yield and Quality:** Selecting for trees with consistent high yields and superior nutritional and sensory qualities.

- **Disease and Pest Resistance:** Further enhancing its natural resistance to common diseases and pests, reducing the need for chemical interventions.
- **Molecular Breeding:** Utilizing modern molecular tools, such as marker-assisted selection and genomic sequencing, to accelerate breeding cycles and identify genes responsible for desirable traits (Xun et al., 2020).

7.2 Agroforestry and Sustainable Land Use Models

Integrating *D. lotus* into multi-strata agroforestry systems offers a sustainable pathway for its cultivation, providing both ecological benefits and diversified income streams for farmers.

- **Shelterbelts and Windbreaks:** Its robust growth and deep root system make it ideal for creating shelterbelts, protecting other crops from wind erosion and harsh weather.
- **Riparian Buffers:** Planting *D. lotus* along riverbanks can help stabilize soil, filter pollutants, and enhance aquatic biodiversity.
- **Silvopastoral Systems:** Integrating *D. lotus* with livestock grazing can provide shade for animals, additional fodder (leaves and fallen fruit), and potentially enhance soil fertility.
- **Intercropping:** Exploring compatible intercropping systems where *D. lotus* can provide shade or other benefits to understory crops. These systems enhance biodiversity, improve soil health, and increase overall farm resilience (Rauf et al., 2017).

7.3 Post-Harvest Technology and Value-Added Processing

Developing and optimizing post-harvest technologies is crucial for overcoming the astringency challenge and extending the market reach of *D. lotus* products.

- **De-astringency Methods:** Research into controlled atmosphere storage, CO2 treatment, and other non-chemical methods to remove astringency efficiently and consistently.
- **Drying and Preservation:** Optimizing traditional and modern drying techniques (e.g., solar drying, freeze-drying) to produce high-quality dried fruit with extended shelf-life and preserved nutritional content.
- **Novel Food Product Development:** Innovating new food products such as fruit leathers, purees, concentrates, functional beverages, and extracts for use in confectionery or dairy products.
- **Nutraceuticals and Pharmaceuticals:** Further research into isolating and characterizing specific bioactive compounds for the development of nutraceuticals (e.g., antioxidant supplements) and pharmaceuticals (e.g., anti-inflammatory drugs). This requires rigorous clinical trials to validate efficacy and safety (Loizzo et al., 2009).

7.4 Market Development and Awareness Campaigns

Strategic marketing and educational initiatives are essential to create demand and foster appreciation for *D. lotus*.

- **Consumer Education:** Highlighting the unique flavor, nutritional benefits, and ecological advantages of *D. lotus* through various media channels.
- **Niche Market Development:** Targeting health-conscious consumers, gourmet food markets, and ethnic food markets where its traditional uses are already known.
- **Certification and Branding:** Establishing quality standards and branding for *D. lotus* products to ensure consumer trust and differentiate them in the market.
- **Policy Support:** Government policies and incentives can encourage farmers to cultivate *D. lotus*, particularly in marginal lands, and support research and development efforts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Diospyros lotus, the Date-Plum, stands as a testament to nature's resilience and bounty, embodying a unique combination of ecological robustness and multifaceted economic potential. Despite its historical significance and inherent advantages, it remains an underutilized species, overshadowed by its commercially dominant relatives. This review has underscored its

remarkable adaptability to diverse and often challenging environmental conditions, its rich phytochemical profile contributing to significant nutritional and medicinal value, and its critical ecological roles in biodiversity support and soil conservation.

The challenges to its widespread commercialization, primarily related to fruit astringency, size, and the lack of standardized cultivars, are surmountable with targeted research and strategic development. By investing in genetic improvement programs, promoting its integration into sustainable agroforestry systems, developing innovative post-harvest technologies, and fostering market awareness, *D. lotus* can be strategically positioned as a valuable asset for future food security and sustainable rural development. Its potential as a resilient rootstock, a source of functional foods, and a reservoir of novel therapeutic compounds makes it an indispensable genetic resource for a changing world. Recognizing and harnessing the full spectrum of benefits offered by *Diospyros lotus* is not merely an academic exercise but a crucial step towards building more resilient, diverse, and sustainable agricultural landscapes globally.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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