

King Coconut

"Thambili", (King Coconut) short in stature and indigenous to that country and the nuts of which its inhabitants regard as "a living pharmacy." And so do sell and consume thousands of them on a daily basis.

A Sight of a king coconut palm in most of Sri Lankan home gardens is a common thing. And bunches of king coconuts can be seen many wayside kiosks throughout the country.

These nuts come in several varieties, the most commonly found being the 'Red Dwarf (kaha Thambili, more commonly called 'Gon Thambili'.) Other varieties are the 'Ran Thambili' a smaller and containing about 40 nuts a bunch.



But it is the king coconut that is really known as 'king of coconuts'. In the villages the more easily available, cheap and popular drink is that of the green coloured young coconut, the 'kurumba'. The king coconut is also a hot favourite among visitors to Sri Lanka.

It's soft, spongy, tangy, nutritious and tasty kernel called the 'londha'. The kernel can also be eaten straight off the split nut by scooping it either with a piece shaved off from the nut shell which most villages do, or by scooping it with a spoon.

The sweetness of the king coconut water is said to vary among palms (the 'Gon Thambili' is less sweet) and its quantity in each fruit to be dependent on the correct timing of its harvesting which is best when the nut is between its seventh to eighth months of maturity.

The king coconut is also highly nutritious. It is a good source of carbohydrates, has a high dietary soluble fibre and appreciable amounts of protein, fat, Vitamin E, iron, calcium, and phosphorus. And apart from this, its pharmaceutical benefits are legion.

And so king coconut water has been used in folk medicine from time immemorial - particularly as a 'brew' made by the addition of a proportionate quantity of powdered 'Aralu' (myrobalan) nuts to its water and used as a laxative. And that long before modern day medicines like blood purifiers and other chemical and herbal cures came into the picture.

King coconut water comes naturally sterile and is, therefore, a good substitute for life saving saline. It is said that during World War II, both the Americans and the Japanese military doctors found that in an emergency they could dip coconut water instead of sterile glucose solutions straight into a person's veins.

Lanka's ayurveda physicians talk of this 'Aralu brew' as having the properties for "expelling heat from the body" thus resulting in a feeling of freshness - a freshness which is due to the concoction's ability to balance the body's electrolytes. King coconut oil promotes hair growth and the 'ran thambili water' is used as an eyewash.

Moreover, King coconut water is considered a good antidote to some of the powerful drugs that are now being administered to some patients.

Scientists believe that king coconut water is far superior to injectable potassium salts.

Other countries like India, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have also put this product into good use by processing, sweetening, drying or dehydrating its tender kernel and popularising those products around the world.