

GOOD EARTH

Bidding adieu to the king

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Summer brings with it some joys, one of them being the mango.

Photo: AFP



Absolutely delectable: Sweet and juicy.

With the onset of the monsoon, it's time to bid adieu to the king of tropical fruits — the mango (*Mangifera indica*). Well, not just the mango, it's time-up for jamuns, lichees, the green and yellow melons, the many different kinds of berries, and a host of other fruits. But, I think, it's the mango which is missed the most. Largely because the mango still remains a fruit which is strictly seasonal and makes its appearance only in the summer and reigns over the fruit kingdom till early monsoon.

Country cousins

A tropical fruit of immense commercial importance; so much so that the best of the cultivated mangoes are all exported. We know of the mango varieties that are made available in the local markets in packed boxes. Most famous and desired of all is the Alphonso mangoes, also know as the Hapus or Aapus. Then there is the less coveted Dusssheri, Kesar, Totapuri, Rajapuri, Begumpuri, Badam, Langra, and so on. But the fact is, in India, at least 500 to 600 named varieties of mangoes have been described. Definitely not all reach the commercial market. So, where are they?

Definitely in the different tropical and riverine regions of our country! And I am sure; many of them are in Kerala. Some in our home garden itself! Unlike the popular varieties, which are

cultivated to yield a rich crop every season, these ‘country cousins’ do not fruit every year. Research says that trees need to rest, to replenish the huge carbohydrate reserves needed to produce fruit. And these trees of the native varieties in home gardens or land surrounding people’s homes and estates, and plantations grow naturally without nutrient supplements and human care. But when they do, the fruit is delicious! There are large and small varieties, but what is common to them is the fibrous stringy flesh and the divine experience of eating them standing under the tree! And they have such quaint and funny names which translate like – the hairy one, the sugar baby, the sour nut and so on.

Whether these native varieties reach the commercial markets or not, these mangoes are used extensively by the locals for pickles, curry paste, and even dried and preserved for use when fresh mangoes are no longer available.

What can you do?

When visiting the countryside or a new geographical region, explore and learn more about local vegetables, trees, fruits and flowers. Taste the various local food preparations.

While in the city, check out the local market yourself. Don’t just stop at the Alphonso mangoes. Try other varieties, and of course, the host of other less popular, but wonderful fruits likes the jamun, ber, raina, amrud and so on.

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group