

GOOD EARTH

## Once in a blue (ja)moon

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On a hot summer's day it is indeed a pleasing sight to see a fruit laden jamun tree. It is a sign of hope for greener, happier days ahead.



**SWEET-SOUR: Nothing to beat the taste of a jamun. Photo: SHIV KUMAR**

Have you ever had a blue tongue? Let me tell you how you could get one.

When I moved from Bangalore to Delhi to take up my first job, my worst experience was the unbelievably cruel summer that exploded on me without warning. Cursing the weather gods at India Gate one day, I looked upward for reprieve. I was under a tree, which even in that parched heat had skilfully put forth a flush of green leaves. It distracted me with its deep purple fruit. Even while I was wondering how to get at them, a street vendor came by selling the very fruit that had caught my fancy — the jamun. Their sweet-sour taste was more than I dreamed of in the 42 heat.

### Versatile jamun

That was 16 years ago. Today, I live on a farm in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. The summers are relatively mild compared here. Many trees are leafless during this season. One of the few with fresh foliage, bringing a sign of hope for greener, happier days ahead is the *jamun* tree. Our forests have a small, wild variety of the fruit whose sweetness I have become addicted to. I sometimes come across bear droppings containing seeds of these. There is a secret delight I feel being connected to this wild creature by a shared passion for this forest fruit. Bees buzz around in swarms collecting nectar from the small white flowers.

My ayurvedic doctor tells me that jamun is highly medicinal. The seeds are used to treat diabetes, which has now become a killer disease in India. The bark is also used to treat

dysentery. A friend of mine makes delicious wine from *jamun* fruit. It is quite a process since the pulp has to be patiently removed from the small fruit.

I often recommend jamun as a good species for afforestation work since it is a hardy native species.

Each summer, children in our village eat the fruit with wild abandon. Listening to their laughter has indeed become one of the highlights of the hot season for me. This is also a time when people are waiting for the mango mania to start, but really, the *jamun* has quite a unique place in our lives!

### **What can I do?**

- Eat jamun, and experiment with it — like making juice, in baking or any other creative cooking trick!
- Make a list of unusual fruits in your area that people generally ignore or are ignorant about. Eat those!

*In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group*