

A little well of delight

✘ There is a popular riddle that anyone schooled in this tropical island would have encountered. “Punchi lindey wathura rasai” - a little well filled with sweet tasting water. School children still ask this from one another regardless of it being hackneyed through generations. True to the riddle however, the King Coconut or Thambili is indeed like a little well containing sweet and slightly cloudy liquid within, that famously vanquishes thirst, bringing relish to the drinker with every sip.


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It is a known fact that water is the best remedy for thirst, but those who have enjoyed the effects of “Thambili wathura” may beg to differ had they the choice at hand. Better yet, iced King Coconut water takes refreshment to a whole new level. This yellow-orange nut offers much more than a thirst-quenching beverage. The water inside the young nut, devoid of impurities, has a rich mineral content particularly potassium making it an effective electrolyte and can be consumed to relieve illnesses such as, cholera and diarrhoea and even as a sports drink.

The purity of the tender coconut water has made it useful as a natural saline and it is said that the Japanese administered it intravenously during World War I, in emergency situations. Seemingly possessing a cure for nearly all ailments it’s also known for its uses as a diuretic, an oral rehydrant, eye wash and is often sought for its “cooling effect”. These and many other health benefits have led to its long history in ayurvedic treatments. With almost the same electrolyte balance as our own blood it certainly seems to have earned the title, “fluid of life”.

The natural sugars in the immature stages of the nut confer its characteristic sweet taste. This sweetness gradually recedes with time, which is why the variations in tastes result at different stages of its maturation. To prepare it for drinking, the broader end of the nut is sliced with a knife to expose a white meat inside and this is gradually shaved till the liquid filled core of the nut is just beneath the surface. A small piercing at the centre releases a spurt of the liquid catching bystanders off guard with a sudden spray. The fruity sweet liquid can then be easily consumed through a straw or for the more experimental, drunk directly out of the nut. This can prove to be challenging, leaving many dribbles

down your front.

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Available in abundance during the dry seasons, holidaymakers, and those afflicted with the travel bug, would gladly make pit stops if they come across a wayside Thambili stall on their long journeys, to seek relief from the sultry weather. These restful nooks, are makeshift stalls, with bunches of King Coconut. An individual nut is wrenched from the bunch, expertly cut and prepared for drinking by the sellers. The empty shell can then be cut open to two halves and the tender white jelly lining can be peeled off with a piece of the husk and eaten right out of the shell. Referred to as “londa” this jelly makes for a sumptuous and cooling dessert-like dish and can even be had with sugar.

If that’s not enough the Thambili water can even be converted to oil - Thambili thel - used among locals to promote hair growth and has the added benefit of exuding a pleasant aroma. Furthermore, the husk can be shredded and parts used as an effective scrub for surfaces. The husks are also gathered and used in the coir industry where its fibrous interior is extracted. Much like the coconut tree, which is renowned as the “tree of life,” it seems the nut hasn’t fallen too far from the tree!

