

Beat the Heat

Posted on



The range of melons

Melons and cucumbers are super foods; the godsend for overall health. They are the aphrodisiac of Sri Lankan 'cooling' foods. These bounties of nature can be prepared to your liking; juice or curry, sweet or spicy.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena | **Photographs** Rasika Surasena

It's April. And the heat is on! Another summer month of perspiration. Water, is the ultimate hydrant when your body emanates heat and your mouth feels parched. But did you know there are certain fruits and vegetables that will 'cool' you from the inside and rejuvenate you?

Cucumbers and melons are always touted as 'cooling' foods because they are full of water and has essential nutrients that help to rejuvenate the body. Consuming these during the hot and humid month of April is a practice that goes so far back, that it is almost a custom. The concept of foods that would either cool the body or warm it was an important one for the ancients. It is an integral part of Ayurveda as well.

Whatever the choice, a glass of fresh watermelon juice or slices of the fruit or even a creamy curry, will certainly counteract the loss of fluid in the body and refresh the body.

Puhul (White Gourd Melon)

Very similar in texture to the cucumber, with a very hard exterior that is distinguished with a powdery substance on the surface, *Puhul* is classified as a fruit but also treated as a vegetable in Sri Lanka. It is, like the varieties of cucumbers that are light on the digestive system and cooling to the body, another food useful during hot weather. *Puhul* tastes best when cooked as a *Kalu Pol Maluwa*, again a traditional Sri Lankan dish. '*Kalu Pol*' refers to using roasted scraped coconut ground into a paste with chillies, condiments and a garlic, which is added to imbue the curry with its distinctive flavour.

Seeni Kekiri (Sweet Melon)

Seeni Kekiri, a sweet melon is bright yellow in colour with whitish flesh that can be consumed as a ripe fruit. In its raw form, it is cooked or used for salad preparation. This thirst quencher has a mild, almost watery flavour or a light melon taste. It is claimed by Ayurveda physicians that this fruit has many health benefits, including prevention of arthritis and cancer as well as providing a remedy for renal ailments and preventing dehydration. *Seeni Kekiri* is healthy, given that it is grown naturally in home gardens and predominantly in the Wet Zone.



Cucumber salad – ideal for weight-watchers

Pani Komadu (Watermelon)

Watermelon is a delicious fruit. Naturally, because it is sweet in taste. But they're much more than that fact. *Pani Komadu* in Sinhala, describes its lavish content of sweet juice, the sugar in the fruit keeps one fit. In addition to water and sugar, the fruit provides vitamins, minerals and also antioxidants. Low in calorie, this pinkish-red flesh is not just a thirst quencher; consuming this lowers body temperature. When preparing watermelon juice, in order to give it a sharp kick, a pinch of salt and lime extract is added. And of course, urban fruit bars prepare watermelon smoothies and also shakes that taste equally nourishing. A velvety scoop of vanilla

ice cream in a glass of watermelon juice would be purely irresistible.

Pipinya (Cucumber)

There is nothing that beats the unique taste of a cucumber curry made to a traditional recipe that includes a symphony of spices and condiments with a generous addition of coconut milk. This creamy curry is made spicier by the addition of pepper, often ground into a combined paste with coconut and mustard seed. It's definitely a creamy dish. Simply slicing a cucumber with an addition of chopped onions and chilli with the added oomph of salt and lime, is a regular dish for the figure conscious!

While the yellow-skinned cucumber is commonly used to prepare curry and salad, another variety known as *kekiri*, which is much harder and less sweet than cucumber distinguished by its orange skin with jagged whitish stripes, is cooked peeled as a white curry or unpeeled with additional chilli.

Because cucumber contains 96 per cent water, it is a natural hydrant. Given these truths, you may not just want to taste the Sri Lankan cucumber dish but actually consume it for its benefits. You will not regret it given the fact that the add-on benefits include the supply of skin and hair friendly minerals, weight loss and digestion, cures diabetes, reduces cholesterol, controls blood pressure and more.

