Grams: Tiny and Packed with Energy

Posted on

In most Sri Lankan homes, grams are a popular breakfast. They are freely available in a packet or lose form. Grams are a healthy option and prepared in various forms, and enjoyed any time of the day, whether from the roadside kiosks or at home.

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Photographs Sujith Heenatigala and Dinesh Fernando.



Kadala (Chickpea), Mung eta (Green gram), and Cowpea (Black-eyed peas) are among the wide varieties that are loaded with plenty of essential proteins, vitamins, soluble fiber, and nutrients.

Kadala (Chickpea)

Chickpeas (Cicer arietinum) or Garbanzo beans, also known as Kadala are the ‘King

of Grams’ on the island. The commonly seen larger cream-colored Kadala are nutritious legumes, low in fat, and rich in fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals. These legumes are widespread across Sri Lanka, the Middle East, India, Africa, and Central and South America.

Usually, Kadala is boiled and enjoyed with a dash of grated coconut. Preparing boiled Kadala requires soaking the chickpeas overnight. It is one of the most common preparation methods. Once boiled, it is tempered with cumin, mustard, onion, dried chili, and curry leaves. The most popular Sri Lankan Kadala thel dala (stir-fried kadala) style is a favorite among many and quite often prepared at homes and street food stalls. Streetfood vendors along the beachside or roadsides pull out their carts as the aroma of the boiled kadala drifts in the air. While leisurely enjoying a walk, passers-by stop to get a cone full of these nutritious and mouthwatering snacks. It is so tempting that one would never resist continuing to ask for more. A cup of kadala/chickpea is filled with plenty of proteins and nutrients equivalent to meat, making it one of the ideal choices for those dieting or looking for vegetarian options. It is also interesting to note that kadala is a powerhouse of proteins, which is why it is offered as prasadam for gods at Hindu temples and consumed by devotees.

Though tiny, these grams are packed with a creamy taste and rich in energy to kickstart the day.



Boiled Kadala as a healthy breakfast.



Boiled konda kadala is packed with plenty of nutrients.

On Middle Eastern platters, chickpeas are relished as a delicious spread called hummus, a combination of mashed chickpeas with lemon juice, olive oil, and tahini (sesame paste). Chickpeas are prepared in a variety of exciting salads, soups, and stews in Southern Europe and Latin America. At the same time, there is no one fixed way to enjoy it; there are plenty of ways with innovative twists that can be tried out to indulge in this nutritious little legume. Indulge in the currying flavors of Kadala as Chana Masala, prepared according to the North Indian style, makes it the best combo with naan, paratta, and bread varieties. The Chettinad Kadala curry, prepared according to the South Indian style, is a savory platter that tastes best with rice and poori. Kadala prepared in whichever culinary style combines the eclectic flavors and spices that play a magical role in enriching its creamy taste.

The smaller, brown chickpeas known as ‘Konda Kadala’ are a healthier choice because they can be boiled and tempered with onions, mustard seeds, and grated

coconut and enjoyed as a delicious snack (Sundal in Tamil).

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Mung eta (Green gram)

The small oval-shaped green gram (Vigna radiata), also called mung beans or mung eta, is the island's wholesome food. It is commonly called mung eta (in Sinhala) and pachai payaru (in Tamil). The love for the green gram has lured over the years, adding to the breakfast choice of the islanders. It can be combined to make sweet or savory dishes. The various forms of green gram, such as split green moong dal, are powdered to make sweets. The yellow moong dal is cooked like lentils and is best enjoyed with rice. Mung bean sprouts are high in nutrients and antioxidants. They are popular in Eastern and Southeastern Asian cuisines. Culinary styles differ, but it tastes delicious when prepared as a savory dish.

Green gram must be soaked for a couple of hours before cooking. Boiled green gram sprinkled with grated coconut and sugar or jaggery is a favorite for the sweet tooth, while the fiery option combines boiled green gram with lunu miris and grated coconut. Another choice is mung eta kiribath, where the legumes are cooked with white raw rice and coconut milk – a filling breakfast.

Green gram is grown and found widely in Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and East Asia. It carries incredible benefits when added to the daily food routine. This gram is packed with proteins, fiber, and iron that help boost immunity, help reduce weight, lower blood pressure, and control cholesterol and heart disease risk.

Cowpea (Black eyed peas)

Cowpea (Vigna unguiculata) is known to have originated in Africa and is widely grown in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the southern United States. The creamy cowpea, with distinctive black eyes, is one of the main grain legumes of the

island. A good yield of cowpea is sufficient to support the island economically and nutritionally. Enriched with natural dietary fibers



A favorite – boiled mung eta with lunu miris.



Boiled cowpea with grated coconut and lunu miris gives a creamy taste.

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The island is home to abundant varieties of gram cultivation that can be prepared

and indulged in plenty of healthy and delightful options. Though tiny, these grams are packed with a creamy taste and rich in energy to kickstart the day.



Black eyed peas or cowpea and mung eta/green gram.



Brown chickpea and Kadala.