

Jack: the Largest Fruit in the World



Young Jackfruit or Polos growing on the trunk

The versatile green Jackfruit is a staple and delicious food item in Sri Lanka. Prepared in many ways, this can be consumed either as a meal or snack.

Words Manu Gunesena | **Photography** Rasika Surasena



Beginning of the Jackfruit and the mature Jackfruit

Called *Kos* in Sri Lanka, the Jackfruit tree was born in the Indian subcontinent and has taken strong root in the fertile soil of the country for centuries. It is a large tree, which can grow to heights of over 50 feet and its strong sturdy trunk and long branches sprout the largest tree fruit in the world. And the variety of ways in which the fruit is used has made the fruit of the jack, the jack of all fruits.

The Jackfruit grows out large, generally tipping the scales at over 10 pounds. It

has a thick spiky green hide which turns a dark brownish yellow when ripe and about to fall. It has hundreds of seeds which are tightly packed together and the flesh encasing the seed is what is generally consumed, though even the seeds are used and eaten roasted or boiled. At every stage of its development, when it is young, mature and fully ripened, Sri Lankans have found ingenious ways to make the best of it.

In the old days there used to be a wooden mesh hung over the kitchen fireplace or hearth called an *atuwa*. Its purpose was to preserve food. When Jackfruit was in plenty, the pericarp together with the seed was stored there. The smoke from the hearth acted as a drying agent and preserved it for later use. When prepared as a curry, the drying process gives the Jackfruit a touch of a smoky flavour.

POLOS

For those impatient and who cannot wait for time to slowly mature the Jackfruit and bring it to its prime of life, the fruit is plucked when tender. At this stage of teen life, it is referred to as *Polos*. It is when the fruit is between the ages of 4 to 6 weeks on the tree.

The tender flesh is cooked in many diverse ways. It is often cooked as a curry and is called a *Polos Ambula*, which resembles a meat curry.

POLOS AMBULA

First the tender flesh cut into cubes and is rubbed with a mixture of turmeric powder and goraka. The marinated *Polos* are then left for about an hour. Then tomato, green chilies, red onions, garlic and curry powder are placed in a pan and cooked in coconut milk with the *Polos* added until the mixture turns into thick gravy. *Polos*, once mashed, is used as filling for cutlets or is chopped to make a *mallum*.

KOS

For those who show a little more patience and wait for nature to bring the fruit to its peak, there is more to relish. This is when the fruit has reached the stage of being called *Kos*.

STEAMED KOS

The seed is removed and the jack is cut into thin strips and is boiled or steamed. It is then eaten with grated coconut and with a red or green chilli sambal for breakfast or for lunch.



The sweet, honey gold Waraka should be munched on sprinkled with salt and pepper

KIRI KOS CURRY

Kiri Kos is one of the all time favourites. A motley of finely chopped onions, pepper, turmeric, curry leaves, fenugreek, coconut milk and water are added along with the thinly cut Jackfruit to a pan and is cooked until well done. Ground mustard seeds and dry chillies are tempered and mixed in to the dish.

KOS BADALA

The seed is removed and the flesh is cut into small pieces and stir fried in oil together with small cut red chilli pieces, onions, curry leaves, rampe. It can even be deep fried, if preferred, cut into long pieces.

ATU KOS

Atu Kos is dehydrated jack seeds or strips of jack flesh. The process is to boil and then to dry them on the *atuwa*, to be preserved and used when the fruit is out of season.

KOS ATA

It's not only the flesh of the Jackfruit that is eaten. The seeds too have their culinary place. And here are a few ways of how the seed too plays its part to add to the value of the Jackfruit tree.

KOS ATA THAMBALA

Boiled jack seeds is of great taste and nutritious value. It is one of the easier preparations as the seeds are boiled in water with a pinch of salt. The husk of the seed is removed and it is relished as a snack.



The seeds, at the very core of the fruit, are a delicacy in its own right

KALU POL MALUWA

The *Kalu Pol Kosseta* is another tasty jack dish made with the seeds, which is a favourite, especially in the rural areas. It is made by first grating part of a coconut and roasting it in a pan without either oil or water. Then once it has turned into a dark brown it should be ground and made to a paste with a touch of water to help it mix and kept aside. The balance of the grated coconut can be used to extract milk. The first extract, which is the thickest should be kept aside. The third extract, which will be the thinnest is to be used to make the curry. Jack seeds should be cut and mixed with garlic, onions, roasted chili, pandan and curry leaves, should be made into a curry using the thin coconut milk. When the curry

has reached its optimum level, the coconut paste mixed with the thick extract of coconut milk should be added to the jack seed curry and must be stirred well on a slow fire until it is reduced to a darkish brown thick gravy, with the jack seeds tasting deliciously tender.

ROASTED KOS ATA

Jack seeds are also roasted on the BBQ grill to make a tasty snack. Once it is prepared, the husk is removed and the seed is relished. The heated coal gives it a smoky flavour that works well with a sprinkle of spices and salt.

KOS ATA BADUMA

The jack seeds make for a tasty snack. The seeds are first half boiled. And then they are added to a pan of heated oil and fried with a mixture of turmeric, curry powder, curry leaves, crushed chilies, raw chili powder until golden brown. With a dash of salt and a few drops of lime, it will provide a crispy accompaniment to a meal. The jack seeds can also be made into a curry.

WARAKA

Now, for the piece de-resistance. Everything comes to him to who waits. And for those who had the patience to wait for the fruit to ripen, the just dessert is a sweet delicacy beyond compare. It's the *Waraka*, as the fruit is known when it has ripened. The flesh has turned a bright yellow; the taste has turned from starchy blandness to a rich honey tinged sugary flavour. And the smell has turned a sugary and fruity aroma. It is eaten straight from the fruit, and for extra bite, a liberal dose of pepper is added.

The importance of the Jackfruit tree to the nation's people, specially to supplement their diet was first realised hundred years ago when a Sri Lankan philanthropist started a jack planting campaign throughout the Island in 1918. His campaign to educate the public of its importance earned him the sobriquet *kos mama* or Uncle Jack. Due to his efforts, the jack tree was declared a protected tree and even today a permit is required to cut the tree down, thus signifying the importance of this versatile tree.

