

One Bagful Of Kadju Please!



Kadju, the various shades of the apple denote how ripe it is

We were passing through Puthukudiyiruppu, Batticaloa, when makeshift stalls with bags full of succulent fruits caught our attention. It was time for a Kadju break!

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Juicy and soft, the kadju (also known as cashew) apple has a unique sweetness when ripe. While the apple itself is popular, it is the kadju nut that is the favourite among the masses. In Puthukudiyiruppu, Batticaloa you see many cashew trees around and that is because all households grow this tree in their gardens. Usually the extent of the land grown can vary from an acre to about two acres.

We met Kanagasabai Lingarasa and his little daughter selling their harvest of ripen kadju apple on the side of the road. Friendly and helpful, they offered to show us their homestead. Nearing the property, we were amazed to see that Lingarasa's neighbours too had many cashew trees. On Lingarasa's property alone he had 50 trees. Their home was simple and small, where the main house was separate from the kitchen. It seemed like the family stayed more outdoors than inside because the property was spacious. Since it was the kadju season the entire family would engage in picking, sorting and removing the shell of the kadju nuts.

The kadju tree is borne from seeds. Firstly, seeds are planted within coconut husks and placed in the ground and covered with soil. This is then watered regularly. Once the sapling has appeared, it can be uprooted and planted where one wishes the tree to be. Till about one year, the plant has to be watered until it can survive only from rainwater. A fully grown tree will start to bear fruit after about two years. The flowers will appear in February, and from April to June the kadju fruit will ripen. We had come at the right time because the trees were full of kadju, with the apple ranging from shades of green, yellow, pink and finally a shade of red. The aroma of the ripen fruits was apparent as we got closer to the trees. And, Lingarasa plucked whatever ripen fruits that he could find and offered them to us amidst our protests that we could not eat this many.

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The kadju fruit is quite curious in the sense that its seed or nut is encased in a shell outside the apple. Usually the nuts are separated from the apple and placed out to dry. Then, it is roasted in a stove of fire and cracked open to reveal the flavoursome flesh. This is a favourite delicacy among many where it is used as a snack roasted with chilli, it can be cooked in a curry and also added to make sweets. The kadju apple is actually not the fruit but the fleshy stalk that connects the cashew nut to the tree. The nut is the actual kadju fruit.

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Lingarasa's mother-in-law quickly lit a fire and threw in a few kadju nuts to roast. Once it was ready they took out the somewhat blackened nuts from the fire. She powdered her hand with some ash, as the milk from the kadju nut once it is cracked open causes burns on the skin. She deftly held an iron rod and cracked some of the kadju nuts to reveal the creamy interior. Definitely the kadju in Batticaloa were a tasty bunch. The kadju apple should be washed with salt water before consuming raw as it may cause some itchiness in the throat. But I must say we did not feel any itchiness as we bit into the succulent fruit apple. This is also used to make jam and kadju juice.

The evening breeze was soothing as it rustled the leaves of the kadju trees. We had enjoyed an evening learning about this crunchy fruit and as we left Lingarasa and his family and were back on the main road, we came across a few more makeshift stalls selling packets of peeled kadju nuts. Knowing what we knew now—the best kadju is from Batticaloa—we promised ourselves that we would visit again.

