Sri Lanka’s Gram Awards

Posted on
Serve the chick pea masala on plate

One thing’s for sure, Sri Lankans are nutty over peas. And see a world of good in a grain of gram. As committed pea poppers of the Munch Bunch, they go batty over giving the daily gram workout for the jaws and a pep up pea for the heart. For, if there is one virtue in this addiction, it is that it does wonders for the heart and gives a boost to general health.

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Coming on top of the peas in Sri Lanka’s Gram Awards, is the best selling King of Gram, the Garbanzo chick pea or better known as bola kadala or jumbo kadala. In the sidewalk gram kiosks, found at almost every street corner in cities and towns, it is the fastest moving gram among pea heads, say vendors. It is available either roasted or roasted and laced with chillies or just plain boiled.

The cool thing about it, as it is with all peas, is that it’s so simple to make. Just take some *bola kadala* and soak it in water for over six hours. Then boil it with a dash of salt. Deep fry the *kadala* and thereafter spice it up with some chilli powder and salt. If you prefer a bit more panache, and wish to concoct it with a fiery flamboyance, then pour some oil into a pan, add some diced coconut, *karapincha* or curry leaves, some pieces of red dry chilli and some mustard seeds and sauté it. As the eye tearing aroma wafts, add the boiled *kadala* to the mixture together with a dash of salt. Stir it and serve it in a bowl and Hey Peasto! You have the Garbanzo Masala: the ideal accompaniment to an evening round of sundowners or simply as a tasty TV snack.

Earning high points in the health column in the pea stakes is the black eyed cowpea, a small oval shaped, soft textured, creamy white bean with a black eye. It belongs to the pea genus and comes from a family that includes the sow-pea, the yardlong bean, the asparagus bean and the Chinese long bean. There is also the red cowpea.

The black eye cowpea is strong in fibre and iron and comes packed with a flavour that virtually negates the need for spices to add taste. It is rich in potassium and

has a good amount of calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus. It contains essential minerals and vitamins A, B6 and C and is low in fat and calories. It is also known to reduce the plasma cholesterol in your body and, along with the red, black, brown and light cowpeas, is rich in anti-oxidants. There is also good news for weight watchers and those presently following diets to beat the flab. This is because it provides a high level of protein and thus acts as a vital supplement to any diet. And for those who count the calories, every 100 grams equals 44 calories.

Here’s how to cook them. First clean the cowpeas well and soak it overnight in water. Then boil it with salt to taste. Add some scraped coconut if you wish or even sugar if you prefer and eat. It’s an ideal starter for the day, since it contains high levels of amino acids similar to cereals.

It can also be made into a curry. Take the boiled cowpea. Mix with curry powder, turmeric, chilli powder. Keep aside. Then sauté a few curry leaves, *rampe* leaves with onions and tomato. Add the cowpea. Cover and cook for about fifteen minutes. Add salt, coconut milk and simmer for a further ten minutes and serve.

Moving on to another kind of pea, it is one not only munched but eaten mashed. Meet the *kadala parrippu*, or the chick pea dhal and its close cousin the *Bataan*. Both can be roasted and eaten spiced with chilli powder or they can be made into a curry in the same manner as the cowpeas. But their value is far more than being a mere tasty pea crunch. They constitute one of the prime ingredients in a South Indian snack which has won Sri Lanka’s taste buds—the dhal *vadai*.

This round shaped cutlet is made by first soaking the yellow dhal chick peas or *Bataan* for six hours. Divide the peas into two piles. Grind one part into a smooth paste and the other into a chunky paste. Add a few whole peas to the chunky mixture. Crush some curry leaves and place it in a bowl along with the peas, chillies, shallots, ginger and salt. Add the chickpea flour and work it into a dough with your hands. Take a golf ball size amount of the paste and shape it into a half or one inch thick patty and deep fry it till golden brown.

Another similar South Indian snack, which has curried favour in Sri Lanka and complements the dhal *vadai* is the doughnut *Ulundu vadai*. It is made from *ulundu* dhal, or Orid Dhal. After the usual process of soaking, these tiny white peas are pounded or processed in a food processor and made into a paste. Shape parts of the paste into round shapes leaving a hole in the middle. Add cut pieces of green chilli, together with cut shallots, curry leaves and salt and mix well with the paste.

Then stir fry it until the required brown colour is achieved. And there you have it: the *vadai* with a hole in it.

> Mung beans come packed with dietary fibre, Vitamin C, Vitamin K, riboflavin, folate and copper

At the ever popular South Indian restaurants, *Ulundu* is extensively used as the base for a wide variety of dishes. *Dosa* and *idli* are two very popular dishes that are generally eaten with a vegetable curry.

Now let the curtain lift to unveil the mainstay gram that provides a hearty breakfast to millions of Sri Lankan homes. It’s the great green gram, better known as Mung. Green in colour and minute in size, its appearance beguiles the important role it plays in the food stakes. Easy on the pocket, tasty on the palette and simple to make, these little green peas are first soaked in water overnight and boiled in the morning. It is then served without any further fuss with a lump of grated coconut and a hot mixture of chillies and onions known as *Lunu Miris*. The combination is perfect and no extra frills are needed to enhance the taste.

It is also extremely nutritious. These little beans come packed with dietary fibre, Vitamin C, Vitamin K, riboflavin, folate and copper. It is also extremely low in saturated fat and sodium and also low in cholesterol. Mung sprouts can also be used to make a light consommé while its stock, obtained through soaking, is consumed for its medicinal value.

All these peas, strutting on the centre stage like peacocks—and there are many waiting in the wings, green peas, kollu, kidney beans, to name a few—play their roles in their own inimitable style. Some bag the star role, some hug dual roles and some make do with cameos, but all take their bows on an equal footing and await your verdict with equal anticipation in Sri Lanka’s own Gram Awards. So why tarry? Pick now. And may peas be with you

