

The tale of Guava



A guava field

Pear shaped, oval or round - I did not know which one to choose from the gazillion number of Kilo Gram Guavas or Kilo Pera that surrounded me. Green tinged and emitting a sweet aroma, they seemed to beckon me to savour the scrumptiousness of this delicious fruit...

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Indika De Silva

Cruising through the sun bathed Eththala in Kalpitivitya, we passed by countless guava sellers. Curious stirred, we stopped to inquire at one stall filled with nothing but Kilo Gram Guava. We were told that Eththala is a well known village for guava cultivation and if we take a trek inwards through one of the many roads leading towards the sea, we may come across countless fields of guava. Heeding these words, we set on a journey in search of Kilo Gram Guava...

The Fruit...

Kilo Gram Guava, so named as it is known to weigh one kilogram, is the most popular among all varieties. Nowadays it is hard to find a Kilo Gram Guava that would weigh one kilogram, but it is still well-loved by Sri Lankans due to its size and unique taste.

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Considered to have originated from Central and South America, guava is now grown in tropical as well as subtropical regions. The term guava is believed to have been derived from the Spanish term guayaba while pera is presumed to be a derivation of pear, influenced by either Portuguese or Spanish.

The nutritional and healthful benefits of guava have been a constant subject of study for many decades. For many centuries before that, the plant has been used in ayurvedic rituals. Rich in vitamins such as A and C, dietary fibre and minerals and more, guava is famed in several Asian countries as a healthy source or traditional treatment against diabetes.

Growth...

Lush fields encircled as far as the eye could see and spotting a field of guava trees we at once set out to unearth the secrets of its growth. On our way we met Duintin Dasa, the owner of this flourishing field, and he took time from his busy schedule to explain how they go about planting Kilo Gram Guava.

Though guavas are propagated through seeds, cutting and grafting are used for commercial purposes. Trees obtained thus, are planted every 16-20 feet and are trimmed to ensure that the trees do not touch each other to facilitate better growth. As we surveyed the field before us, the neat rows of trees planted meticulously attested to this while further adding a natural charm to the abundant field.

Looking at the ground, the contrast between the soft white sand between rows of trees and the darkened soil surrounding each tree showcased the rich sustenance that is provided. Fertilizer, which brings in the darkened hue of the soil around the tree is composed of compost and other nutrients and is renewed every 20 days. After planting a guava tree, fruits can be harvested within one and a half to two years and will continue to provide fruits for about eight to ten years.

After two years, fruits are harvested each week and under room temperature they can be kept for about one week. Once the fruits are harvested they are packed into trucks to be delivered to Colombo and beyond. Delivered thus, they are used to produce various products such as candy, shampoo, jellies, jams, sauces and

juice to name a few.

Through the fields...

Traversing through the three to four acre guava field we observed as a worker watered each tree armed with a huge hose. Water gushed out from the hose soaking the trees and the parched earth seemed to eagerly absorb the cooling moisture. Trees that have been already watered carried drops of water that shone like small jewels in the blazing sun light. A few trees bore small fruits while many others bore white flowers indicating that more fruits are to be harvested in the near future.

Emerging from this verdant field and keen to try the taste of Kilo Gram Guava, our steps next carried us towards a guava stall teeming with what seemed to be freshly picked fruits. The seller hand picked three guavas and known for its sizable volume, each guava fit into the palm of our hands quite snugly.

Delicious, was the first thought that ran through my mind. Sourness and sweetness combined with a mild spiciness gave an extra zest to the natural savouriness of the fruit.

The seller cut the guavas into pieces and put them into a bowl. To this he added some chilli powder and salt, after which he mixed the ingredients together. Putting the flavoured guava pieces into a bag he passed it onto us and we eagerly bit into a piece.

Delicious, was the first thought that ran through my mind. Sourness and sweetness combined with a mild spiciness gave an extra zest to the natural savouriness of the fruit. Succulent and soothing, it cooled our bodies while quenching the incessant thirst.

Enjoying this feast we bade the seller goodbye as we set off, munching happily, having discovered the delectable taste of Kilo Gram Guava.

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