The Tropical Wonders of the Wood Apple

Posted on

Wood apples, known as ‘Divul’ in Sinhala and ‘Vilampalam’ in Tamil, are exotic fruits available in abundant mainly during the season from March to November on the isle. Quite unusual in appearance, with a hard woody coat, one might gaze at what this fruit could be called.



Wood apples, or Divul (Limonia acidissima of the family Rutaceae), are commonly cultivated in the country’s dry zones. You can spot these fruits in abundance during the season, from roadside stalls to supermarkets, grabbing your attention if you have never tried them before!

It is pretty fascinating to know that the fruit has several exciting names, such as Elephant Apple, Monkey Fruit, curd fruit, and that it is commonly known as bael in India. It is often grown in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and Southeast Asia.

The trees grow to a maximum of seven to nine feet, yielding bunches of these hard coated fruits. The round, pale brown fruit has a distinctive taste and a musky aroma. From the bark to the roots, the entire plant carries medicinal properties. It has a hard, woody outer appearance; the fruit is cracked open to reveal a sticky brown pulp with tiny white seeds inside. The fruit has captured the hearts of the Lankans for centuries, and it is used to make delicious sweet jams, pickles, and juice. Sri Lankans enjoy it as Divul Kiri or Divul Sherbet, where the pulp is blended with jaggery and milk, usually coconut milk. The creamy smoothie drink is sure to beat the heat during the summer months. It is also loved as a sweet delicacy by mixing the creamy pulp with sugar or honey and eating it right away. A twist for the sweet tooth is to try the pulp with a scoop of ice cream that is sure to melt in your mouth. Also, one can indulge in sweet wood apple-flavored ice cream. A Sri Lankan style of enjoying is preparing the Divul Sambol, where the divul is split into two and grated similarly to a coconut. The grated divul is soaked in vinegar and water to remove the tanginess. The flakes are squeezed, sprinkled with chili flakes, salt, and mixed to make a delicious sambol. Ripe divul can also be combined with chili, salt, cumin, and jaggery and savored. It tastes great when spread on a slice of bread or roti. For even a stronger piquant flavor, try adding sliced chilies, curry leaves, and coriander and enjoy it.



Refreshing Divul Kiri.





Spicy Divul Sambol is a fine island delicacy.

The divul can be tried out in various sweet, sour, or savory combinations. Culinary styles have experimented with it using salads, and their juicy texture makes them fabulous for preparing jams and chutneys. The more pungent the smell of the fruit is a sign that the fruit is ripe and ready to eat. The fruit is rich in anti-microbial properties, carbohydrates, calcium, Vitamin C, iron, phosphorus, and other minerals. It is an excellent source of energy too. This highly nutritious fruit can cure digestive disorders, sore throats, and gum ailments.

> Divul is loaded with a perfect balance of tanginess, delightful taste, and plenty of nutrients and continues to capture the hearts of those who savor it every time.

The powdered shell and pulp can heal poisonous insect bites. Ayurvedic treatments also use various parts of the fruit. The leaves of wood apple trees are crushed and given to stop vomiting and hiccups. The leaves contain an oil known to have

astringent properties and treat itchy skin and insect bites. At the same time, the sap from the branches and trunk is an excellent substitute for gum arabic, commonly used in artists' paints, inks, and varnishes. Similarly, the sticky layer around the unripe seeds is a household glue used in making jewelry. It is also one of the most loved fruits among the majestic giants. They would gladly take in two or three fruits and enjoy them. That might be why Hindus consider it a sacred fruit and offer it to the Hindu deity God Ganesh during Vinayaga Chathurthi (the birthday of God Ganesh). Divul is loaded with a perfect balance of tanginess, delightful taste, and plenty of nutrients and continues to capture the hearts of those who savor it every time.



Sweet wood apple jam



Ripe wood apples have a strong, pungent smell.



Wood apple shooter with coconut foam and oyster tempura.