

Malabar Tamarind: Introduced Relative of Native Cowphal

Souring agent or acidulants the technical term used for variety of plant products that are used to make our curries sour. Traditionally, acidulants have been a part of cuisines in almost all the regions of our country and species used for this purpose vary with the region. For example, amda or hogplum is popular in dishes of eastern India. Kokum is very popular constituent in foods prepared in coastal Maharashtra, Goa and parts of Karnataka. Nobody could ever forget the taste of sol kadhiserved after fish fries in Goa, which is also prepared from the sour kokum rinds. Mysore tamarind (locally known as rakatphal in the islands) and Malabar tamarind are unavoidable ingredients in most of the non-vegetarian and vegetarian curries in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Raw mango and tamarind are prime constituents of curries prepared in almost all the parts of our country. Our islands are the area of social confluence and hence, almost all these species are used by the islanders. Additionally, locally available cow phal species are also valued by some settlers as an important acidulant.

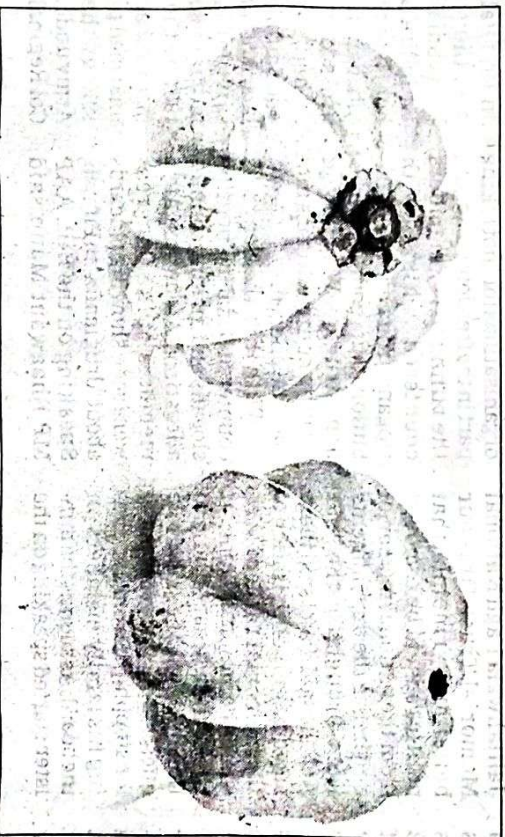
Malabar tamarind (popularly called as kodampulin Malayalam) is scientifically known as *Garcinia gummi-gutta*, which is a native species from India's Western Ghats. The species is botanically close to the locally available cow phal, rakatphal, takphal and Burma phal; all of which belong to the genus '*Garcinia*'. This simply means we have distant relatives of Malabar tamarind in our islands!

Generally, beginning of monsoon is the harvesting season of Malabar tamarind. Fruits are dark green in colour, which turn to yellow at ripening. But seeing the attractive ripe fruits, don't get tempted to consume them raw, as they retain sourness even at ripening! This sourness is the reason why fruit rind is separated and dried for use in curries. After

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drying, rind turns completely black and could be stored for long time in closed containers. Produce is very



popular in national markets and is also exported to other countries. Hydroxycitric acid is an active ingredient present in the rind which is known to possess anti-obesity properties. Owing to this compound, the medicines

prepared from this fruit are popular in western countries. The species was introduced in the islands by some settler families from Kerala for their home consumption. One can find one or two plants of Malabar tamarind in some of the households of these families. Subsequently, the species was planted at ICAR-Central Island Agricultural Research Institute, Port-Blair for testing its performance in the islands. Researchers at the institute could find that island conditions are well suited for cultivation of Malabar tamarind and prolific bearing has been noticed in island grown plants. Superior types have also been identified for use as mother plants. As per findings of the research carried out at CIARI, which got published recently in a German journal - *ErwerbsObstbau*, the species is a source of antioxidants as well.

The species can be grown in open condition or as an intercrop in coconut orchards. Being a perennial tree, wider spacing of about six to seven meter should be adopted. Or simply, one can plant a sapling at the centre of four coconut palms. Plants can be raised from seeds, but such seedlings take longer time to bear the fruits and they could turn male or female, due to their dioecious nature. Two to three seedlings could be planted in the garden to ensure at least one fruiting tree. Use of grafted plants can reduce this fruiting period and assure fruiting in all the plants. If a suitable mother plant is available, one can do grafting on one year old seedlings. Such grafts can produce fruits within 4-5 years of planting. Alternatively, planting material can also be purchased from the ICAR-CIARI, BhatuBasti. So, this rainy season, plant the Malabar tamarind in your backyards and make your curries more delicious.

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