

Endemic wild Vegetables and Fruits- great companions- from North-Western Ghats – Sahyadri



Western Ghats Of Maharashtra – Sanhyadri Mountains

Welcome !! to my blog on Endemic Plants and Vegetables. I am working on compiling and publish various aspects about endemic fruits and vegetables from the Western Ghats (*Sahyadri Mountains*). This I am planning to do, out of my passion for understanding the nature around us. also, will be writing about the various endemic plants and vegetables along with interesting recipes.

These endemic plants grow in the wild and are sometimes difficult to bring the wild into your garden or paddy fields. This is owing to many reasons, one of which is the living togetherness of various plants, trees and there closely connect with the local climate, environment, and geomorphological conditions. Famously can be termed as Biodiversity. So, it may be worth it to conserve, develop or even protect the biodiversity of the area to bring the ecological values. One of such ecological values is endemic fruits and vegetables.

We are also aware of the fact that Western Ghat itself is a biodiversity hot spot and the majority of the part is ecologically sensitive as well. Some parts of the mountain are already having World Heritage Conservation Status.

Endemism is one of the important parameters in ecology which indicates the availability of plants, trees within a very confined area of the earth. These plants will not grow in the wild anywhere like that. True you may find these plants germinating else away from their native wild, but may not bear flowers, fruits and on a time scale will die away. Hence protecting endemism is a critical factor.

Few of the vegetables growing in wild are spread over the larger land area and geographical presence for example *Carissa carandas*. And efforts are also made to bring them into cultivation fields. But still, there are many unexplored vegetables and fruits. We may not be able to mark all of them as Endemic variety but definitely, they are growing in the wild and many of them are endemic so for the purpose of this blog, we will term them as Wild Vegetables..

So, with this basic introduction about biodiversity and endemism, let's start our blog on endemic vegetables and fruits of Western Ghat.

The wild vegetables are seasonal in nature and are already part of the food of tribes, locals. These are normally collected from the wild by individual or self-help group people, generally without damaging the plants and used for individual use and as well brought to nearby towns for selling in the open market.

When the importance of these vegetables is known to all, the jungles will be conserved by locals, tribes as by then it will be realized by them the economical value of ecology. So, in fact, the publicity and use of endemic wild vegetables will protect the local forests. And the deforestation pressure on the forests of western ghats will definitely get reduced and conservation, restoration efforts will begin.

Brief Information:

During the monsoon season in the Western Ghats (Sahyadri), we see only shades of green all along. The Sahyadri is a house of seasonal endemic plants including abundant, vulnerable, endangered species which are mainly annual, either herbs or climbers. All this growth is contributed by rains and humus layers growing every year, post-monsoon deciduous times. This vegetative growth is in its natural environment with fragile bio diversity-supporting. This helps to offer a beautiful landscape which has tourist attractions.

The beauty of nature does not stop here. The locals and tribes treat this beauty as one of the sources of income. They engage themselves in collecting the edible herbs as the whole body, leaves, flowers, fruits of edible plants. These naturally grown vegetables are available in the market during a specific period of the years at nearest peri, semi, or urban areas. These vegetables are accepted in the local market as seasonal, healthy, true organic vegetables. Customers do prefer to buy and consume on a larger scale. There is definitely a class of consumers who wait for naturally grown vegetables to arrive in the market, on the onset of monsoon, and like to enjoy pure natural and organic highly nutritional vegetables grown in nature. This collection also helps tribes to earn their daily life.

Though we are basically focusing now on monsoon-grown vegetables since the quantum and variety is more. Sahyadri in reality blesses us throughout the year, throughout the various seasons with varieties of naturally grown vegetables.



Wild/ Sickle Senna



Fully Ripped Jamun Fruit



Fully Ripped Karonda Fruit



Unripped Jamun Fruit

Picture Credit: <https://www.naturesbunch.com/media>

This is the list of such famous naturally grown vegetables, this list is endless, but let's read about a few of them as a sample.

Above are few samples, we have as many famous plants as, Asparagus, Chlorophytum, Nevala, Phodshi, Dinda, Mayalu, Tilvan, and so on and on....

We find a few competitions are held at local levels to develop various recipes for seasonal naturally grown and collected vegetables.

It's a challenge to grow these naturally grown vegetables on farms due to a lack of biodiversity support and fewer efforts to do so. However, few naturally grown plants have medicinal values, these are tried on the farm.

These plans and products are available only for a limited period hence we need to adapt to some techniques to preserve these vegetables and fruits and make them available throughout the year.

Why Processing:

- The nutritional values are available naturally.
- To extend the availability of True Organic.
- To increase the popularity of such vegetables.

Major advantages of processing:

- Will help generate employment and organizing the way naturally grown vegetable market.
- To create a new value chain in food processing.
- To help to conserve the biodiversity and unleashing the ecological social value of Sahyadri.
- To create research ideas.
- To tap the export market.

Food processing techniques suggested:

We can use basically 3 types of processing techniques. The selection of processing techniques is solely depending upon the physical and chemical properties of vegetables and the form of the product we are trying to offer to customers i.e. unprocessed raw vegetables or processed ready-to-cook and serve products.

- Aseptic processing: By using thermal methods and packings can be in bulk glass jars, tin cans, aluminum cans, or sachets.
- Dehydration: This is the traditional method, can be considered as solar drying, tray drying, and followed by flex packaging.
- Special techniques: costlier ways like cold storage, fridge drying in bulk, suitable for bulk ordering, and high-value naturally grown vegetable collection.

We may like to understand in which form we have to present these vegetables to prospective customers i.e. raw, in shape as collected, powder, dry half-cooked, full cooked, and dried. These will decide the process and cost of processing.

All above processing will result in a shelf life of 6 Months to 18 Months depending upon, vegetable's physicochemical properties and format of the end product we are offering to customers.

Way forward:

We all are aware of tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli, etc but have less knowledge about the vegetables and fruits growing in our back yard. This may be due to a lack of awareness and availability in quantity and time, as well. But it is researched by various experts that these wild varieties offer some medicinal and health values to the user. Therefore, bringing wild vegetables into everyone's food dish may be an interesting and exciting experience.

With this some basic information, we will start reading about each type of fruit and vegetable in some detail starting from the upcoming blog on the same subject. I will also try to write about the efforts taken up by individuals to bring these wild vegetables to the mainstream of the vegetables-fruit market.

So, happy reading my blog- on endemic and wild fruits and vegetables of North Western Ghats-Sahyadri.

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