

## Wonder of the Forest Garcinia

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Garcinia is a large genus of flowering plants belonging to the family Clusiaceae, primarily found in tropical regions of Asia, Africa, and the Polynesian islands. The genus is known for its diversity, comprising over 200 species, many of which are economically important due to their fruit, medicinal properties, and use in traditional cuisines. Some important species are *Garcinia cambogia*, *Garcinia indica*, *Garcinia mangostana*, *Garcinia gummi-gutta*, *Garcinia livingstonei*, *Garcinia atroviridis* and *Garcinia prainiana* which are endemic to western ghats. *Garcinia* species such as *Garcinia indica*, *Garcinia gummi-gutta*, and *Garcinia cambogia* play essential roles in traditional recipes of people residing in western ghats of India. They are primarily used as souring agents, enhancing the flavour profiles of various dishes, including curries, soups, and beverages. These ingredients not only contribute to the distinctive taste of the region's cuisine but also offer health benefits, making them invaluable to the local culinary traditions.

*Garcinia cambogia* is popularly known as Malabar tamarind, brindle berry, Uppage and Kudam puli to name a few. The rind of the fruit is often used in cooking, particularly in Southeast Asian and South Indian cuisines. It is also popular as a weight loss supplement, although its efficacy is debated. The fruit is small, green or pale yellow, and pumpkin-shaped. *Garcinia cambogia* has been used in traditional medicine and recent studies have explored its potential health benefits, especially for weight management. It is said that the fruit's rind contains hydroxycitric acid (HCA), which has been studied for its ability to inhibit the enzyme citrate lyase, which is involved in fat production in the body. HCA is also believed to suppress appetite by increasing serotonin levels in the brain, leading to reduced food intake. These effects have made *Garcinia cambogia* a popular ingredient in weight loss supplements. *Garcinia cambogia* has traditionally been used to aid digestion and relieve digestive issues like constipation and indigestion. Anti-inflammatory and Antioxidant Properties: The fruit is rich in antioxidants, which help combat oxidative stress and inflammation in the body. Some studies suggest that *Garcinia cambogia* may



have potential benefits in reducing inflammation, protecting against chronic diseases, although more research is needed to confirm these effects.

*Garcinia indica* also known as Kokum is another popular fruit found in forests of western ghats. The fruit is dark purple to black, small, and round. The fruit is used in cooking, especially in Indian cuisine. The dried rind is used as a souring agent in curries and other dishes. Kokum is also used to make a popular refreshing drinks like soul khadi, sharbat and huli. Kokum has been used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine for centuries due to its various health benefits. Kokum is known to aid digestion and is often consumed after meals to relieve acidity and indigestion. The fruit is rich in garcinol, a compound with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, which may help reduce inflammation and protect



against oxidative stress. It is also believed to suppress appetite, although more research is needed to confirm this effect. It is known for its emollient properties, helping to moisturize and heal dry or damaged skin.

Kokum butter also known as Goa butter is an important ingredient in the recipes of Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. It is known for its emollient properties, helping to moisturize and heal dry or damaged skin and used as cream for topical application during winters. It is also used like ghee in many preparations for festivals. Few industries are using it as a substitute for cocoa butter in chocolates and confectionaries. The preparation of Kokam butter is a very tedious process Kokum seeds contain 33-44% edible oil. After drying the seeds for 15-20 days, the outer shell is removed. The inner seeds are roasted and ground into a fine paste. This paste is mixed with water (1 kg paste + 6 litres of water) and boiled in an open vessel for 1-2 hours. The mixture is then covered with a cloth and left for 24 hours. The thick butter that

floats on the surface is skimmed off. This process is repeated 2-3 times to extract the maximum oil from the seeds. Approximately ½ liter of butter can be obtained from 1 kg of seeds. The butter is shaped into egg-sized balls for storage. Kokum butter remains solid at room temperature and melts at 39°C.



The other lesser-known varieties are of *Garcinia* are Mangosteen, Imbe, Asam gelugur. *Garcinia mangostana* is popularly known as Mangosteen. The fruit is round, dark purple, and contains a soft, white, juicy interior. The fruit is prized for its sweet and tangy flavour and is a star of super markets. It is eaten fresh, made into juices, or used in desserts. Mangosteen is also reputed for its medicinal properties. Mangosteen a popular fruit of Supermarkets. It is used to make smoothies or eaten as fresh fruit. *Garcinia livingstonei* is commonly known as Imbe. The fruit is small, orange to red, and has a tangy taste. The fruit is eaten fresh and sometimes used in making jams. *Garcinia atroviridis* is popularly known as Assam gelugur. The fruit is green to yellow and looks like a small pumpkin. The dried slices of the fruit are used in Malaysian cuisine for their sour flavor. *Garcinia prainiana* is also known as Cherapu, button mangosteen. The fruit is small, orange-red, and similar to mangosteen but smaller. The fruit is consumed fresh and appreciated for its sweet taste.

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