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Healthy cup of tea

Sashi Kiran

Sunday, October 22, 2017

FRESH citrus aroma fills the air as you walk into a village at tea time. Lemon grass or coboi, with its lemon flavour, is served hot refreshing a tired body within minutes. A traditional drink we grew up with without knowing all the health benefits but scientific research has made known its antioxidant, detoxifying, antibacterial and other healing properties. It's a daily intake in many rural households in Fiji while chefs in Fiji and Asia use the well-known herb in their culinary delights.

Lemon grass grows easily and can readily be planted in a pot to be placed in or near the kitchen for its refreshing aroma cleansing the whole environment. Not only is lemon grass a key ingredient in sauces and soups, it tenderises meat and adds a natural lemon flavour to barbecue, lovo and charcoal fish (ika tavu).

Lemon grass is now available in tea bags and easily accessible as a refreshing health drink or as a packet that could be added to marinades and flavouring of food. Chef Lance Seeto uses lemon grass tea bag in his marinades for meats.

To try and bring health to every home and income stream to rural farmers, Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND), a homegrown NGO working towards poverty alleviation packs various antioxidant rich herbal teas for distribution to retail outlets through its partner Motibhai & Company Ltd. Lemon grass as well as other herbs now available in tea bags are grown organically by farmers, picked fresh to be dried and blended for packing.

Basil or tulsi, with its sweet earthy smell is a common herb used extensively in Indian homes for herbal remedies for example in steam baths for fever or to simply detox for stomach ailments. Known for its anti-inflammatory and cleansing properties, tulsi is found in most households as a natural insect repellent and cleanser for environment. Tulsi is also used in beauty products and face masks for its health effect on skin.

Tulsi is another versatile culinary delight now available in tea bags.

Those struggling with their sugar and stress levels after Diwali festivities and eating spree could well benefit from both tulsi and lemon grass tea; both known for their detoxification properties and contribution to cardiovascular health.

Strongly aromatic local cinnamon also known for its stress and sugar management properties are now available in tea bags and can be used as a great herbal remedy or added to flavours to give that sweet spicy taste to any sweet or salty dish.

Cinnamon tea with honey and lemon juice provides a great start to the day and helps with weight loss. The bark of cinnamon packed in tea bags is used extensively by rural women in curries, palau and flavouring sweets. Cinnamon leaves work as a great potpourri and natural insect repellent.

Khatta bhaji flowers or rosella is better known in Fiji as a great ingredient for jams and chutneys. The tangy nutritious leaves are used to make chutneys, curries and added to soups to add a sour flavor. Once the dry season begins the leaves thin out to give way to heavy flowering.

This famous deep red flower is also known as hibiscus tea and is another colourful flavor much in demand. Its tart cranberry like taste and deep red colour makes for a refreshing tea. Rosella is also the base for cordials and it can be served as iced teas.

At Tukuni restaurant we sometimes use the bright red and tangy flavours as a base for colourful fruit punch. Rich in vitamin C, either served as tea or juice rosella is instantly refreshing.

For health fanatics, rosella tea can be used as a supplement for people with hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis and is a great healthy drink preventing infection.

Among chefs in Fiji, rosella is a high-demand ingredient used for fish marinade, giving the taste and colour to soups and sauces for a range of dishes. Rosella is also used in deserts, ice creams and of course simply as a decoration.

Yaqona or kava is a well-known relaxant! Kava also has strong antibacterial and antifungal properties and remains can be mixed in water, left to stay and sprayed on farms to control pests naturally.

When mixed in cold water in a tanoa, it turns brown. We have placed kava in tea bags for it to be readily accessible to those who need a relaxant for their anxiety or need help just to sleep. Once a bag is mixed in boiling water strong yaqonin extracts come out, keeping the water clear yet one drink is enough to relax anyone who needs a good night's sleep !

It is a real wonder how our ancestors knew the health benefits of colourful aromatic tastes we have grown up with. Passed down from generations, many of these ingredients were grown, preserved and used for daily intake to prevent infections and maintain health.

Today, the findings of scientific research tell us lemon grass, rosella and basil are all rich in antioxidants, have anti-inflammatory properties, are good for the heart and diabetes management. They also help fight infections and viruses.

To sustain health, we encourage growing of these plants at home. If you can't start a garden then these tea bags are readily available in your nearest supermarket.

? Sashi Kiran is a director of FRIEND.

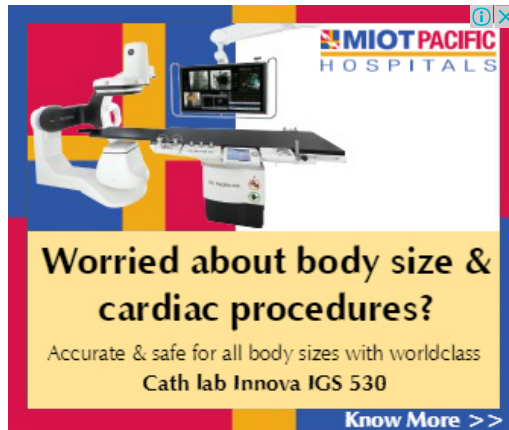


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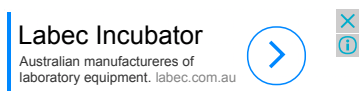
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