

The Myriad miracles of Moringa

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CHENNAI: We are told that if there is one plant that can heal the planet and its dwellers, it is the moringa. Carrying a pungent fragrance and an earthy bitterness, the moringa is a no-frills backyard plant with soft, fern-like leaves, droopy branches and white blossoms.

“It’s a tropical tree that requires little water to grow and can help restore degraded soil. It’s good for the planet in plenty of ways. It purifies water, reverses deforestation, improves soil fertility, fights malnutrition, acts as an income for rural communities and improves their food security,” says botanist and gardening enthusiast, Kasturi Venkat.

The green power

While it's beginning to gain popularity in many kitchens of the West, what is lesser-known is its health benefits for animals. "Consuming moringa prevents cancer, treats digestive problems, reduces obesity, fights seizure, boosts immunity and overall health of animals," notes Kasturi. Native medicine practitioners have been using the leaves, flowers, seeds, and the roots of this plant for centuries to treat health ailments.

While it's the leaf that contains the maximum benefits, Kasturi breaks down the properties of the other parts, sharing why it's referred to as 'The Tree of Life' in many cultures. "The white flowers contain vitamin E, calcium, anti-cancer, anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial and neuroprotective properties. The stem contains vitamin C, iron, calcium, antiobesity and cardioprotective properties. The root contains iron, zinc, anti-ageing, anti-microbial, anti-inflammatory and anti-viral properties. The seed contains vitamins C and E, anti-diabetic, anti-cholesterol and anti-microbial properties," she details.

Gourmet makeover

Four years back, moringa gave kale a stiff competition as a must-have superfood, across the world. While it may not be a great palate-pleaser, players in the gourmet market have found quirky ways to incorporate a mild boost of its greenness into everyday meals. Deepika Ravi, founder of The Good Leaf, explains how. "Moringa caught the attention of the millennials soon after it penetrated the gourmet market. The awareness has only spiralled over the years and during the lockdown.

People prefer anything that's given to them in a palatable format. We offer valueadded products with moringa such as powder, tea, honey, pods powder, rice mix and chutney. A healthy mix and pickle are down the line," says Deepika. Besides this, their skincare range with moringa includes face and hair serum, hair oil, packs, soaps and scrubs. "We will be introducing a moringa face cream with blue light protection," she adds. The Good Leaf's moringa farm in Karur employs over 100 farmers through organic farming for the last six years.



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“We’ve been into farming and cultivating moringa for almost three generations. The leaves form a significant part of the plant. They are dried and ground into a fine, velvety powder. The laborious process involves harvesting, drying and milling. For the modern crowd, it’s available in capsules in a consumable quantity. So far, there aren’t many side effects unless there’s no overconsumption. We’ve been receiving only positive feedback on how it has solved many back-related problems for people working from home,” shares Deepika.

Nutritional life-saver

With its increasing popularity in the market, during the pandemic, SI Dhivyaa Svarna, nutritionist and dietician, Fortis Hospital, Vadapalani, decodes the nutrient-dense food. “It’s a versatile plant. Earlier, people used to boil the leaves and consume them as soup. You can make chutney, spinach and poriyal out of it. Moringa tea is said to alleviate stress and fatigue. But these days, the powdered format has garnered a liking, and that can be added to anything — idli/dosa batter, pasta, smoothie, energy bars and brownies, too.”

MORINGA CHUTNEY

INGREDIENTS

Oil: 1 tsp

Tender moringa leaves: ½ cup

Green chillies: 3

Grated coconut: 1/2 cup

Small piece of tamarind: 1

Salt to taste

To temper:

Oil: 1 tsp

Mustard seeds: 1/2 tsp

Cumin (jeera) seeds: 1/2 tsp

Curry leaves: 1 sprig

METHOD

Add a teaspoon of oil to a pan, add the green chillies and moringa leaves and saute for a minute until the leaves wilt. Don't overcook. Keep aside.

In a blender, take grated coconut, roasted green chillies-moringa leaves mixture, tamarind and salt. Blend into a smooth paste by adding ½ cup of water.

Transfer it into the serving bowl. Can be served with dosa, idli or chapati.

MORINGA SMOOTHIE

INGREDIENTS

Moringa leaves (remove stalk): 1/3 cup

Any spinach variety: ¼ cup

Milk: 1 cup

Banana: 1

Chia seeds: a handful

Lemon: a few drops

Honey: 1 tbsp

METHOD

Blend all the ingredients in a mixer.

Add crushed ice if you like it cold.

Add some cream topping for kids.

— **Kasturi Venkat**

NUTRIENT KNOW-HOW(per 100 g)

Carbohydrate: 12.5 g

Protein: 9.5 g

Iron: .85 mg

Potassium: 259 mg

Vitamin A: 6.9 mg

Vitamin C: 220 mg

Calcium: 440 mg

Fat: 1.7 g

Fibre: .9 g

Magnesium: 42 mg

Vitamin B1: 81 mg

Vitamin B2: .05 g

Source: SI Dhivyaa Svarna, nutritionist & dietician, Fortis Hospital, Vadapalani

World-renowned

Scientifically called *Moringa oleifera*, it's a fastgrowing, drought-resistant tree of the family Moringaceae. Popularly called drumstick tree, horseradish tree, ben oil tree or even benzolive tree,

moringa is remarkably durable to farming in any kind of soil. That's perhaps why one might find it growing in South Asia, West and East Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, some parts of South America.

ANTI-INFLAMMATORY PROPERTIES

Good for rheumatoid arthritis. Moringa leaf extract may lower fluid swelling, redness and pain.

Strengthens bones

Moringa also contains calcium and phosphorus, which help keep bones healthy and strong.

Reduces cholesterol

Antioxidants can also lower blood pressure and reduce fat in the blood and body. It improves heart function.

Treats asthma

Helps reduce the severity of asthma attacks and protects against bronchial constrictions. It has also been shown to assist with better lung function and breathing overall.

Controls diabetes

Studies show that insulin-like proteins found in moringa may help lower blood sugar.

Helps digestion

Moringa extracts might help treat stomach disorders, such as constipation, gastritis, and ulcerative colitis.

Anti-cancerous properties

Leaf extracts slow the growth of pancreatic cancer cells and help chemotherapy work better.

A well-balanced diet

The leaves have seven times more vitamin C than oranges and 15 times more potassium than bananas. It also has calcium, protein, iron, and amino acids, which help your body heal and build muscle.

Nourishes hair

Moringa seed oil is beneficial for protecting hair against free radicals. The essential amino acids and antioxidant content is responsible for fighting oxidative stress, promoting hair growth, keeping hair follicles healthy.

Skincare

Moringa also contains protein that helps in protecting skin cells from damage. It fights acne, blackheads and dark spots. It also contains hydrating and detoxifying elements, which boost the skin and hair texture. It can be successful in curing skin infections and sores. It contains anti-ageing properties which help remove wrinkles and sagging of skin.

Boosts immunity

It's also packed with antioxidants, substance that can protect cells from damage and may boost your immune system. It's also best effective when consumed with turmeric and amla.

Treats anaemia

Moringa helps the body absorb more iron, therefore increasing the red blood cells count. It is believed that the plant extract helps treat and prevent anaemia and sickle cell disease.

GLOBAL GOODNESS

Founded by a Peace Corps Volunteer, Kuli Kuli is an Oaklandbased food business. Its mission is to use climate-smart, nutrientrich plants like moringa as a tool to improve nutrition and livelihoods worldwide. It partners directly with small family farmers and women's cooperatives around the world to help them scale up their businesses. Over two crore moringa trees have been planted by them in a decade.

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