

THE GOOD FOOD GUIDE FOOLS' PARADISE

*There's nothing better to beat the summer heat than a long, cold glass of mango fool, says **Gitanjali Prasad.***

Yesterday, I made the first mango fool of the season. The mercury was close to 40°C. And instead of a cooling breeze, a fierce, hot wind made me realise that the dog days of summer were unassailably upon us. And so, when the children walked in after the evening's cricket, bathed in sweat and looking distinctly weather-beaten (to use the term in its most literal sense!), I greeted them with a long, cold glass of mango fool. The effect was magical. Weary expressions and tired smiles were wiped off instantly by exclamations of delight.

Mango fools were part and parcel of growing up for me. I remember that during my school days, all through the long bus ride home, I dreamed and mentally drooled over the tart sweetness of the welcoming mango fool. Mango fool was supposed to provide protection against heat stroke. And it makes me wonder how, over the years, both mango fools and heat strokes went into oblivion. It is, I suppose, one more sign of the obsolescence we read about everywhere.

Traditionally, all drinks made with raw mangoes are supposed to have a cooling effect on the system. Since scorching weather and raw mangoes generally happen at the same time, it's a wonderful example of nature's grand design where the problem and the solution are so harmoniously interlinked.

In an Indian summer, as the season progresses, even as one hot day stretches into yet another hot day, there's no denying that one summer fruit after another makes its appearance to provide a medley of absolutely irresistible delights. Raw mangoes have a long innings because of the vast variety of mangoes that are so lovingly and loyally grown in different parts of the country. Thus while the southern favourite, the baiganpalli, makes its appearance in April, the North Indian langda is not ready till July. Each variety has its distinctive taste and flavour, but all adapt well to most uses. So aam ki sherbet, the drink made by roasting raw mangoes on charcoal or the tawa before peeling and using the liquidised pulp to make a sensational thirst quencher, is popular in almost every part of the country. The British brought in the mango fool, which is a variant of this traditional dessert of fruit puree served with cream and this, as a drink, seems to have exited with the British! Most summer drinks metamorphose beautifully into long, cold drinks. Watermelon, a luscious cut slice of which is virtually a symbol for Hawaii or Florida, or all kinds of sunny holiday destinations, purees into a wonderfully refreshing summer drink, diluted with just as many ice-cubes as you fancy. Other drinks such as bananas, mangoes, chikus and litchis combine wonderfully with chilled milk to become a drink at once so cooling, soothing and substantial that it can really become a meal in itself.

A fruit shake is a tremendous way to revive drooping spirits and flagging appetites. Just the sight of a long, tall glass with a temptingly alluring garnish of fruit, or a mint leaf deliciously frosted over, clinking happily with ice cubes unjangles frazzled nerves and is a sight for sore eyes.

Grapes and pomegranates and oranges make wonderful drinks just liquidised or combined with water, as does that pick-me-up par excellence, the humble lime juice, which makes a terrific drink with a dash of ginger juice. Jamun is another fruit which is not normally used to make drinks but is traditionally considered to be a real tonic for the liver. Another winner, from the

health point of view, is the drink made from the fruit of the bel tree. According to folklore, this drink is excellent for digestion while far more popular litchis and mango shakes are, let's face it, just excellent for putting on weight! There's no question that bel can't match the other drinks for flavour or taste, but its do-good properties have won it its band of aficionados.

Thandais are becoming increasingly popular these days. I now see thandais in many colours of the rainbow adorning shelves in the supermarket. But I think it's a really pity that more people don't attempt to make them on their own. Almonds are really easy to work with. You just soak them overnight, peel and grind to a fine paste before combining with water or milk and adding sugar and one's favoured flavouring. Royalty used crushed pearls and such-like, but cardamom and kesar pista will do fine for you and me. Try it this summer!

And if you really want to be exotic, make a drink with flowers. This is not really as far out as it sounds. Rose water and rose syrups are an integral part of our inheritance, but not many people are aware that many other flowers lend themselves to very good sherbets. I remember the tangy flavour of the squash my mother made from rhododendron flowers when I was a child. The jewel-red colour and the inimitable taste made it a real favourite. Friends tell me that their mothers used to make sherbets from nilourfer (the blue lily) and gulhad (hibiscus). Apart from being extraordinarily pretty as a flower, I'd heard that rubbing black leather shoes with hibiscus was one way of getting a superior shine; this latest nugget of information really makes it a flower for all reasons!

According to all the lifestyle ads one sees in the glossies or on TV, long cold drinks are shown on cruises or other very jet-set locations. If one is lucky enough to be able to afford such getaways, there's no doubt that this is a fabulous way to enjoy a fruit (or flower!) drink. But considering fruit drinks are as packed with vitamins, minerals and other natural goodness, I'd love, once in a while, to see summer drinks shown in a more natural setting - a mango grove, shady and cool and full of the smell of the earth, where children have filched raw mangoes earlier in the afternoon when adults are lost in siesta, and hidden them from prying eyes. I wish that older folk, with lovely, lined faces and beautiful silver hair, were shown enjoying their fruit drinks on the lawns of bungalows where the paint is just a little sun-bleached and where one can almost smell the bela or chameli fragrance from the shrubbery never very far away.

If you're an out and out urbanite with nary a potted plant in your home, before you sip your elixir, spare a moment conjuring up the orchard or garden it originated in. You'll get a whiff of the wonderful outdoors right inside your concrete jungle. That's a promise.

Mango Fool (to serve four)

- 4 raw mangoes
- 4 cups chilled milk
- 8 tbsps sugar
- ice-cubes

Roast raw mangoes in their skin on charcoal or a hot tawa. Or, if you prefer, boil them (unpeeled) in half a saucepan of water. When they are soft, peel and liquidise pulp either in a mixer or by hand. Place about 2 tablespoons of liquidised pulp in a tall tumbler. Add sugar and blend well. Then, add the cup of cold milk slowly, mixing all the while. Serve with ice-cubes. Lick your lips, slurp and express appreciation in a suitably effusive manner - for this is a truly delectable fool!

Watermelon Juice (to serve four)

- 4 chunks of watermelon
- Ice-cubes

Take four large chunks of fresh, red watermelon (make sure it's really fresh, because otherwise the juice has an unpleasant 'off' taste). Remove seeds and cut away pith. Cut watermelon into large pieces and liquidise in a mixer or manually.

Strain if you prefer a liquid taste or serve unstrained, if you like a less fine texture. Delicious chilled and served with ice!

Hibiscus Squash (Gulhad ka sherbet) to serve eight)

- 250 gms hibiscus or china roses
- 1 kg sugar
- 1 litre water Ice-cubes

Take the hibiscus flowers (only the petals) and boil in water till they are well-cooked. Strain the juice and discard the pulp. Add the sugar to the juice and cook till it thickens and becomes syrupy. Cool and bottle. Serve chilled, diluted to taste by ice-cubes. If you're in the mood for a bit of whimsy, you can serve the drink with a hibiscus tucked behind your ear. This is an exotic cock tail!

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