The indispensable pawpaw

GOOD LIVING

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In their 1980 book, *Tropical and Subtropical Fruits*, S. Nagy and P.E Shaw say that sophisticated methods of chemical analysis identify 106 volatile substances in the pulp of pawpaw, which are responsible for its aroma. This gives an idea as to just how complex the composition of fruit really is.

There are so many substances in plant-based foods whose function is not yet known and so many yet to be discovered, that one can only marvel at the Great Designer's plan for his creation.

The pawpaw, usually weighing 0.5 to 2kg, although some reach 6kg, grows wild in Mexico but is so popular in Kenya, it would be difficult to imagine that it is exotic. It is sold along major highways and in all towns in the country.

The pawpaw is best eaten fresh and makes an excellent breakfast or dessert and blends well in lettuce salad with lemon juice. It tends itself well to soft drinks, shakes and ice cream, and makes jam. It is a popular dessert in the American tropics. Pawpaw contains small amounts of an enzyme that is capable of digesting 200 times its own weight of proteins.

J. A Osato (and others) in a 1993 article in Life Sciences showed that the pawpaw, particularly when it is slightly green, has bacterio-static properties that impede the development of many enteropathogens that cause intestinal infections.

Pawpaw is highly recommended for infectious diarrhoea, both as an emollient and antiseptic.

In 1994, it was reported in the Journal of Helminthology that pawpaw sap or latex and the pulp has anti-helminthic and vermifuge properties against intestinal parasites, particularly taenia.

The pawpaw is 88.8 per cent water and its content of energy producing nutrients has 8 per cent carbohydrates, 0.61 per cent proteins and O.14 per cent fats. One hundred grammes of pulp provide 103 per cent of the recommended vitamin C and 18 per cent of vitamin A for an adult. High in folates and B vitamins, the pawpaw is rich in potassium and has significant amounts of calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and iron. Its pectin, at 1.8 per cent, makes it a good source of soluble vegetable fibre.

Pawpaw is easy to digest and contributes to the digestion of other foods, making the fruit ideal in treating stomach disorders, especially in difficult digestion, gastritis and in cases of inflammation of gastric mucosa (lining).

Pawpaw helps to neutralise excess gastric acid and is beneficial in case of heartburn. Blending fruit shakes with pawpaw adds to the flavour of the juices and improves their texture. Bromelin is a protein-digesting enzyme found in pineapples, which is capable of breaking down proteins and releasing amino- acids that form them. It has long been used in the food industry as a meat tenderiser.

In the intestines, it breaks down proteins and facilitates digestion in much the same way as the stomach's pepsin.

It is advisable to take pineapple as an aperitif- eating before meals, especially when the stomach is weakened. When one has a sense of stomach heaviness and slowed digestion or the stomach cannot empty itself (gastric atonia), pineapple eaten fresh and ripe before or after a meal helps a great deal.

M.A Helser, in a 1972 article, showed that pineapple is a powerful inhibitor of the formation of nitrosamines. These substances, which form in the stomach as a chemical reaction between nitrites and certain proteins contained in foods, are known as being among the leading causes of stomach cancer.

Pineapple juice is prepared by placing chunks of pineapple in a blender and the resultant juice drank immediately to prevent the loss of nutrients.

So many papers have been written on pineapple and some claim it can break up blood clots and could therefore be useful in managing heart diseases. It is known to accelerate tissue repair and has many applications for sports injuries, such as

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