

Loquat, the wonder kidney and diabetic fruit

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

Those believing in evolutionary processes claim, the original man settled in Africa, and particularly around the rift valley. I grew up on the slopes of the Aberdares and there, fruits were plenty. We would move from one fruit season to another and relish these nature's delicacies as young boys in reckless abandon. The markets especially – *Kabuta* – the present day *Kiriaini* used to be full of extra fruits from the farms. Christmas was plums month, January and February the green plums, March – April was apple and pears. May – June was *Mbera* or *Ngagati* – Loquat. July – August was wild berries (*Ndare*) and cherimoya (*Matomoko*), September and October was passion fruit and soon Christmas was with us again. Sweet potatoes were regular and sometimes during planting season, would be an only dish in the whole village. Bananas seemed to grow throughout the year.

We can bring the village to towns by buying plenty of fruit. My village now has only tea bushes. Fruits are disappearing fast and the village glory will soon be lost forever.

Loquat – otherwise called *Mbera* or *Ngagati* in Kikuyu – originated from Southern China. Dismissed in my village as children's fruit, since the big seeds were used by boys as marbles, the volume of this fruit occupied by seeds is discouraging. But, such disappointment quickly changes when the taste and succulent fruit is eaten. It grows in springtime and its place is assured in future for its nutrients and ingredients.

Sugars in loquat are fructose. They have negligible protein and fats contents. Small amounts of Vitamin C, B, and E occur but it has copious amounts of Vitamin A. Its mineral content includes iron, calcium and magnesium and abundant quantities of potassium. They supply calories and water which increases its diuretic (urine producing) action.

In 1992, it was reported in the *Journal of Natural Products*, a study done by De Tommasi et al on the antiviral properties of the fruit that, one of the types of substances contained in the fruit have antiviral effects against rhinoviruses that cause common cold. Eating this fruit during the cold season cures common cold. The plant is rich in tannins as well as other aromatic substances which gave them their anti-diabetic properties. In 1991, investigations conducted at the Federico II University in Naples Italy, had found that loquat extracts reduce the level of sugar in urine of diabetic rats. Some non-nutritive substances have been identified as responsible for this anti-diabetic action. This action has been demonstrated in humans according to studies at the Autonomous University of Mexico in 1991. It makes sense then, to recommend liberal use of loquats in case of diabetes. As is the case with other fruit, the fact that it contains sugars does not affect its appropriateness in this disease condition. In liver disorders, loquat treatments are useful for hepatitis, cirrhosis and liver disease. This treatment may be repeated every two or three weeks. It consists of eating

from one to two kilos of loquats a day as the primary food for two to three days. They may be accompanied by small amounts of toasted whole grain bread.

In infectious diarrhoea, loquats have mild astringent and normalising effects. They also provide water and restore mineral salts. During fasting, they are recommended as a first solid food. One may eat up to a kilo a day bearing in mind they appear only seasonally.

They increase urine production and facilitate elimination of uric sediments and are therefore recommended in gout, kidney stones, as well as kidney failure due to their low protein content and significant mineral content.

Loquats are best eaten fresh when ripe. If they are not ripe, they are very acidic.

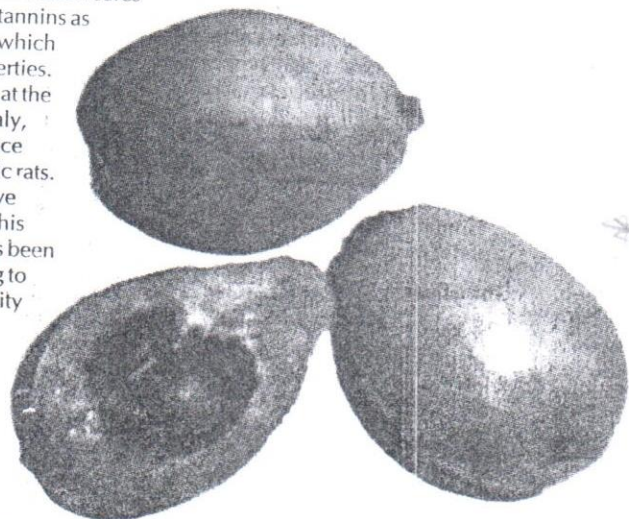
The sweet potato grew in my village and was roasted over charcoal fire whole with the peel. With minimal protein and fats and high in sugars and starch, it is not recommended for diabetics. They are rich in Pro-vitamin A especially the yellow variety. It is easily digestible and has soothing effects on the intestinal walls.

It can relieve feeling of hunger for a long time. It is known that one of the causes of obesity is that individuals do not feel satisfied after eating a normal amount of food. The sweet potato aids the obese in reducing calorie intake by producing a full sensation in the stomach and reducing appetite. The Beta-carotene in sweet potatoes makes them appropriate in cases of arteriosclerosis. This provitamin protects the inner lining of the arteries whose degeneration, produces by cholesterol deposits, results in arteriosclerosis. Regular sweet potato consumption is recommended in cases of lack of adequate blood, hypertension and arteriosclerosis.

Next time I go to the village, I look and marvel at the rate of disappearance of vital food items like sweet potatoes. I long for the season of loquats and sweet potatoes.

Mothers can learn all over again to discipline their children with sweet potato vines as our mothers did.

And *Kabuta* should be investigated as a possible cradle of mankind for its fruit marvel.



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