

The Nutritious Cashewnut

By
P. Abraham

NO one ever disputes the exclusive fine taste of the cashew kernel. The great demand for this nut and high prices it obtains are proof, if proof were needed, of the high popularity it enjoys in India and abroad.

Scientists have unravelled another aspect of the cashewnut—its nutritive value. Analysis has shown that it contains about 21 per cent protein, 47 per cent fat and 22 per cent carbohydrates. The protein content of the cashewnut has been found to be of a very rich and readily digestible kind. In addition, the kernel contains other substances of nutritive value like calcium, phosphorus, iron, vitamins A and B, nicotinic acid and riboflavin. With these traits, the cashew kernel easily is of high nutritional value and a perfect food for man.

About five per cent of our total crop of nuts is dried in the sun and then shelled without roasting for internal trade. It is this kind of raw kernel that you can obtain in the retail shop. But foreign buyers demand only kernels from roasted and oil-free shells. The demand for roasted kernels for internal consumption also has been increasing in recent years.

The kernel is eaten raw or fried, salted or sugared. A busy trade in salted kernels has recently sprung up in restaurants, coffee, tea and picture houses, and even on the pavements of towns and cities and railway stations.

AS FLAVOURING

A major portion of the kernels, however, is used for flavouring

sweetmeats and also for many kinds of meat and vegetable dishes. The superior flavour gives it a preference over almonds and groundnuts. In the United States and other countries, cashew kernels are mainly used as a dessert, in the manufacture of nut chocolates as well as for flavouring sweetmeats and cakes in confectioneries.

Storage is an important problem in the cashew trade. Well-dried cashewnuts can be stored for a pretty long time without fear of spoilage. The kernels keep better with their reddish brown skin on than without.

Shelling without roasting has advantages. Such kernels, they say, retain the flavour and the vitamins. A larger percentage of whole kernels is obtained. Raw kernels keep the longest, even for more than a year.

The fat in the kernel is responsible for the spoilage in prolonged storage. It is this fat that develops rancidity after a time. When the kernels are roasted in oil, the oil forms a film over them, developing rancidity. The keeping quality is also reduced when the kernels are roasted and salted. Kernels meant for export to foreign countries are packed in vacuum or in carbon dioxide. Under these conditions, the storage life of the kernels goes up, even more than a year.

ROASTING

Investigations on the method of roasting of cashew kernels have shown that roasted and salted kernels can be stored without deterioration for six months if *vanaspali* or

refined groundnut oil is used as the roasting medium and if it is added at the beginning of the roasting operation.

Cashew kernels taste well salted or sugared, but those who prefer pungency should try them with chilli powder along with salt. For pungency nothing can beat pepper. The kernels should be roasted in ghee and a pinch of pepper powder added. To prepare the kernels this style, put a tea-cup full of raw or roasted kernels in a frying pan and add sufficient ghee or butter required for roasting the nuts. Add also two or three pinches of pepper powder and a pinch of salt to add to the taste. Stir the nuts until they turn brownish.

CASHEW ‘APPLE’

Some people use the cashew apple for preparing fermented beverages and vinegar. The apple is juicy, sweet and edible. After the nuts are removed, most people usually throw away the apples as they do not know what to do with them.

The cashew apple is also a nutritious food. It is rich in vitamin C. Investigations at the Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore, have shown that a number of edible products can be made from it. These include jam, candy, juice, syrup and even chutney. By preparing such products, the astringent taste of the fresh fruit can be got rid of.

Of the total outturn of 26,000 tons of kernels, only 3,000 tons are consumed within the country.

The main source of supply are the East and West Coast regions. The kernels distributed in North India, particularly Delhi, the Punjab, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh come from the West Coast countries through Bombay. Those distributed in Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh come from the East Coast districts of Madras and Andhra States.

Cashewnuts are also produced

to some extent in Orissa and West Bengal, but practically no processing facilities exist in this area. As such, the nuts produced in these states, especially in West Bengal, are bought by the merchants from the producers at very low prices and shipped to factories in South India. The producers naturally do not get a fair price for their produce. If the nuts could be processed locally, a new industry would be developed which would benefit the producer

as much as the consumer.

Another important aspect of popularizing the cashewnut in the country would be to step up production. As it is, the production is not sufficient to keep the existing factories going throughout the year and large quantities of raw nuts have to be imported. An urgent need exists for intensifying cashew cultivation to meet the increased demand both within and outside the country.