

Romancing the Orange

by Shaheen Perveen



Do you wish to make someone love you for ever? Trust the orange – the golden apple of Hesperides. An elixir of love can easily be concocted with a few gratings of candied orange peel. But if your wish is just to dream of your beloved at night, you can make it come true by carrying two pieces of orange peel in your pocket during the day. In any event, the orange boasts a long record of appreciation, and is traditionally regarded as a symbol of fecundity. Orange blossoms are tucked to bridal head-dresses, bouquets and even the wedding cakes. After all, Zeus had presented Hera with an orange at their wedding.

On a more everyday basis, the versatility of the orange is virtually limitless – orange juice, fresh or frozen, orange in cakes and puddings, orange in sauces, orange liqueur, orange essential oil... surely, the orange deserves to be taken seriously.

Roman naturalist, Pliny the Elder, spoke of citrus as a medicinal fruit, antidote, moth repellent and source of aroma. He was the first to use the word 'citrus'. One of the earliest scientific treatises on the citrus fruits was presented by the 12th century Chinese who suggested that the peel of the *chu* (orange) was very good when prepared and used as a tonic. A Roman Jesuit, Ferrarius in 1646 recorded interesting juicy orange anecdotes of his times. He mentions the use of orange flowers (by fermentation) as a remedy for the heart and the production of snuff from the orange rind. Fresh or dried orange flowers added

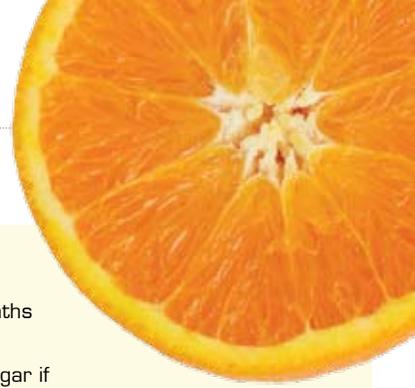
to a bath is believed to make one attractive.

Because of its colour (an aircraft's 'black box' is not black but orange for easy detection), aroma and flavour, the orange is a very appetising fruit. The most important orange derivative is its oil for essence and used in perfumes, candies, food products, and juice. Andalusian women (noted for their fiery glances) add few drops of orange juice to their eyes to make them sparkle. Because of the high concentration of nutrients found in orange juice it is commercialised as fresh, pasteurised, concentrated, with or without pulp and powdered.

At its earliest, oranges (the bitter variety) are believed to have been used for the fragrance of their rind. They were treasured as perfume and also used in flavouring. The sweet smell of orange grove can be created by putting orange peel (better if you can procure the Seville variety) in a small pan of water and allow it to simmer on the stove. Your house will smell as good as a grove.

For all the attention the orange has attracted throughout its long history, the controversy regarding its birthplace remains unsettled. Perhaps, as some historians believe, the orange tree is native to southern China or Indo-China. It has also been argued that the orange first saw the light of day beyond Mohenjodaro. From there, the seeds were purportedly taken north and south in Sumeria. The theory has also been advanced that the orange originated in the Malay archipelago and then migrated to India, the eastern coast of Africa and the Mediterranean region. The Japanese believe that the orange was brought from the eternal land at the request of their Emperor.

Oranges are eaten as emblems of good fortune on the second day of the Chinese New Year. It is revered as a sacred, heavenly fruit responsible for everlasting life. Greatly helped by the Roman conquests, the opening of the Moslem trade routes, and Islamic expansion, the golden fruit began to spread. And in 1399, the orange was the peer of the distinguished delicacies that graced the banquet table at the coronation of King Henry IV. A guest in Imperial Rome could evaluate himself by the number of oranges placed on the host's table.



Few species, however, are as extensively cultivated as the mandarin and the common sweet China orange varieties. Much before the sweet orange made its debut, the sour variety had travelled throughout and was equally well received. Seville (Spain) is still famous for the bitter variety. These bitter oranges are exported to England where they are processed for marmalade and medicinal uses.

Vasco da Gama's return to Portugal after the discovery of the sea route produced a superior kind of sweet orange. The Portuguese orange was referred to as 'China orange' and was popular throughout Europe. In Greece it is still called *Portukali*.

Too exotic to be afforded, the orange rested its laurels until it began to make an appearance in English theatres, where Elizabethan young women sold them to the audiences. Baskets filled with colourful oranges became part of the theatre setting, and so remained for a long time. The first greenhouses were called 'orangeries' because the fruit becomes damaged by frost and so the nobles of Europe would not risk such a delicious fruit.

The orange has a modest mineral content. One cup of orange juice provides up to two times your daily Vitamin C requirement (60 milligrammes) which disables the free radicals that harm the blood vessel linings. A cup of frozen orange juice provides around 100 microgrammes of folic acid, which is vital to pregnant women, as it reduces the risk of premature delivery and of birth defects. Orange juice lowers the blood levels of homocysteine – an amino acid linked to an increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Besides being a cardiac medicine, orange juice is also a hepatic tonic that provides a sense of well being by purifying the blood and keeping in control the extra production of bile in the liver. Intake of orange juice also controls high blood pressure as it is rich in potassium that helps to maintain the body's proper fluid balance and to transfer nutrients to the cells.



Orange juice is specially recommended for winter months to ensure a regular supply of Vitamin C. Prefer honey to sugar if a sweetener is desired. When one is not

able to digest anything, orange juice can be considered as it exerts the least pressure on the stomach while transforming it into body elements. In fact, the orange refreshes the body and purges the system of toxic substances that feed on the blood and muscles of the human structure and are the root causes of excessive thirst. Orange juice can also be mixed with barley. It is used in rituals in place of wine.

Unripe oranges are believed to benefit the teenage pimples and adult acne. After extracting the pips, dry them in the sun and grind them. Milk is added to make paste which is applied on the eruptions. Those suffering from bronchitis can place a split orange in a saucepan. Stir in a teaspoon of raw honey and a quarter cup of extra orange juice. Simmer until very soft. Consume the whole preparation, including the skin, twice daily. Varicose veins can be prevented by the intake

of orange peel. The peel can be made palatable if it is drunk as orange wine.

Cellulose of oranges or lemons impart a laxative effect and for this reason the Mediterranean people prefer the white peel. They remove the outer rind while leaving the white peel intact on the orange and consume it together with the fruit.

Mughal King, Mohammad Shah Rangila was fond of oranges and after procuring the best ones, he got them peeled and immersed the pulp in syrup so that it absorbed sweetness and ate it after three hours. Oranges, if kept in an earthen pot in ice for sometime, become exquisitely fragrant. Teeth can be saved from the effects of acidity if oranges are taken along with a pinch of salt and pepper.

Not to worry if you have consumed too many oranges. Any such indigestion can be counteracted by taking salt or jaggery. 🍊