

Besides herbaceous plants we have certain fruit products which are consumed as vegetables and ordinarily rank as such, viz., the tomato, cucumber, vegetable marrow, pumpkin, aubergine (or egg-apple) and the squash or melon-pumpkin.

All are of a fleshy nature, capable of being eaten in a raw state, but better for digestion if cooked.

The actual nutritive value of all of these is very low—they cannot be said to form food; but their value in other ways is great; they are cooling, laxative, and contain mild medicinal properties.

*Fruit* as an article of diet has a most favourable effect on the system, but if we took it alone as a staple food the direct contrary would be the result. "Its proportion of nitrogenous matter is too low, and its proportion of water too high, to allow it to possess much nutritive value;" (Dr. Pavy) "it is chiefly of service . . . for the carbo-hydrates, vegetable acids, and salts it contains . . . Of a highly succulent nature, and containing free acids and principles prone to undergo change, it is apt, when ingested out of proportion to other food, to act as a disturbing element, and excite derangement of the alimentary canal."

Fruit is of particular value as a set-off to dried or salted foods, to bread, and to meat. Where a vegetarian, for instance, may make a perfect meal from seeds, as pulse, beans, etc., with the addition of bread, fruit, and milk, having thus all the constituents required for repair and rebuilding, the non-vegetarian will fall short if to meat and bread he add neither succulent greens nor fresh fruit.

The practice of eating a little bread with fruit—cooked or uncooked—is a good one.

The apple heads the list of fruits in order of popularity, and even we might say in order of good, for its virtues are many and its uses innumerable. The smallest apples grow in Siberia (Siberian crabs), and America has by processes of cultivation contrived to produce the largest and finest, though not the best-flavoured, apples ever seen. The British Islands take the palm when flavour is in question; it is well that fruit-growing is at last becoming a better-known industry amongst us, as, owing to the peculiarity of our much-abused climate, we may take the first rank wherever we choose.

As fruit ripens the starch it contains undergoes transformation into sugar, and the insoluble pectose into pectin, gum, and gelatinous substance. The agreeable taste of ripe fruit owes its existence in part to the due relation of acid, sugar, gum, pectin, etc., and the amount of water it contains. Over-ripe fruit loses its flavour because, on account of oxidation, the sugar and acid both become destroyed, and consequently deterioration has begun.

The sour taste of certain fruits, like the gooseberry and currant, is caused by the amount of free acid they contain being greater in proportion than the residue of gum and pectin is capable of disguising. Cultivation increases the proportion of sugar, as we notice when we compare the cultivated with the wild strawberry, raspberry, blackberry, etc.

*Oranges*, with lemons, citrons, limes, shad-docks, pomegranates, and quinces, all of the *pomaceous* tribe, have strongly similar features and properties. Of them all the two first-named are the most useful, as they are also the best known. The orange is with us now all the year round, more or less, as when the consignments fail us from one source—when Lisbon is orangeless, Seville all consumed, and Malta cleared—Jaffa and far China take up the tale, thus perpetuating the supply that pours into English ports. The rind of an orange is slightly tonic; it contains a quantity of volatile oil, and is largely used, apart from the juice, as a flavouring agent.

The true *Seville orange*, of which there is but a limited importation, is obtainable only for a certain period in the early part of the year. It is immediately replaced by the *bitter orange*—*par complaisance* Seville also—and few people know the difference, one being almost as good as the other for preserving purposes.

*Lemons* and *limes* are strongly anti-scorbutic; hence in all affections of the blood, the skin, etc., and for gout, they are invaluable.

*Shaddocks* are more common in America than with us. They are a refreshing fruit, and make an excellent preserve.

The rind of the *pomegranate* is strongly astringent, and is sometimes used in medicine on this account. The pulp is refreshing and mildly astringent.

The many varieties of *plums*, *cherries*, with peaches, nectarines, apricots, olives, and dates, all called *drupaceous*, present a quite different kind of fruit to the foregoing. They all have a hard stone or kernel, surrounded with a fleshy substance, more or less acid. In either the unripe or over-ripe stage all these fruits are unwholesome, and because of their excess of acid they should only be eaten in moderation even at the most perfect stage.

Large quantities of plums are imported from abroad in a dried state, and known as *prunes*. These, when well-cooked, are more digestible and more nutritive than any kind of fresh plum.

In plums pectous substances preponderate over all other substances except water. The amount of sugar varies according to the kind of plum, some kinds possessing so little as to make them absolutely uneatable whilst raw.

*Cherries*, like plums, should be eaten in moderation. *Kirschwasser* and *Maraschino*, two highly esteemed liqueurs, are both prepared from cherries. Cherries contain a greater proportion of sugar and water, and a less amount of pectous substances than do plums.

*Peaches*, on the other hand, are remarkable for the small amount of sugar they contain; but as the amount of free acid is also small, and that of the pectous and albuminous substances is large, the fruit becomes one of our most valuable, refreshing, and luscious articles of diet.

*Dates*, both fresh and dried, count as a staple food with the Arabs. Cakes of dates, pounded and beaten together, form the "bread of the desert." The fleshy part of this fruit contains fifty-eight per cent. of sugar, with a large amount of gum, pectin, etc. The tree bears its fruit in clusters, which weigh heavily—from twenty to twenty-five pounds.

*Olives* are chiefly valuable for the oil that is obtained from them; they contain this in a large quantity. When ripe the fruit is black, but in its green state it is imported into France and England for table use, either as an appetiser or as a dessert, preserved in a solution of salt. Spanish olives are larger, richer, and oilier than those grown either in Italy or the South of France.

To the *baccate* tribe belong most of the fruits of the berry kind which have stones or pips, like the grape, gooseberry, and currant. The pulp of the grape possesses wholesome, refrigerant, and nutritious properties, and besides its uses as a fresh fruit it is dried and imported under the form of raisins and currants, the dried currant being the fruit of a vine which grows in the Ionian Islands. The process of drying both grapes and currants by the sun and air causes them to lose their acid properties, and leaves the sugar more abundant; consequently they are less refreshing than the fresh fruit, but more nutritious. If eaten too freely they are apt to set up derangement of the digestive organs.

Cultivation has made our *gooseberry* the fruit that it is now. Originally it was a wild, prickly shrub, common enough in Asia. It is

a most wholesome and useful fruit. Both *currants* and *gooseberries* have similar dietetic properties, and both are natives of Asia and North America. Cultivation has produced the white currant from the red, and in Russia a yellow currant has been produced from the black variety.

Cranberries, bilberries, barberries, and elderberries are all hedgerow fruits, more or less common and indigenous to our islands and to America. They are all far too acid to be eaten in their natural state, but when cooked they are both useful and delicious.

The cultivation of the strawberry, raspberry and (more recently) of the blackberry is a testimonial to what skill may effect. The common wild strawberry of the field and thicket would hardly dare to proclaim itself as the parent stock of a British Queen, yet, if we go back to find origins, it certainly is so.

The *strawberry* contains a large percentage of sugar, and, in proportion to other fruits, a large percentage of albuminous substances; but, as usual, we have over eighty per cent. of water here as well.

The *mulberry* has almost gone out of cultivation as a fruit; it used to be highly esteemed for dessert, and was both wholesome and refrigerant, while a very agreeable wine was made from it.

*Figs* are allied to dates with regard to the nourishment that they contain; either in a ripe state or dried and pressed they are nutritious enough to form an important part of the food of the inhabitants of warm countries. The figs grown in England are inferior in flavour to those grown in sunny climates; the best of all are known as Smyrna figs. A very large proportion of sugar is found in figs, especially when they are dried and compressed.

We have still another group of fruits which may be called the *gourd* tribe: these are the melon, pineapple, plantain or banana, guava, and the mango; also the bread-fruit, common to the Polynesian Islands, almost unknown in our own.

Melons and pineapples are most familiar and popular with us, although bananas—the smaller plantain—run the two first-named very close. The pineapple is one of the very finest and most luscious fruits that we possess. Plantains and bananas, when dried, furnish a fine meal that is much used for infants and delicate persons: it is said to be easy of digestion. It consists principally of starch, but, having a certain percentage of nitrogenous matter, it is more valuable than other purely starch foods, like arrowroot, etc.

The mango, a fruit we rarely see, is highly prized in parts of India, Ceylon, and Jamaica. It is large, luscious, and refrigerant.

The bread-fruit holds the same position in its native clime that corn holds in our own.

The fruit of the carob tree—almost the only tree that grows in Malta—is commonly called *St. John's bread*, as it is supposed to have formed the chief food of St. John the Baptist. In times of scarcity it has served as a most useful article of diet.

Hence we see that in certain climates a reliance placed upon fruit as a staple article of diet is not only practicable but also is almost necessary. The question of its being so suitable in our own climate and to our more complex needs is quite another matter, although there are many people who try to prove that a fruit diet is the only perfect one.

Here again, however, as we look upon the abundance and variety that is ours to avail ourselves of, we may say we have them "richly to enjoy," and be glad and grateful that it is so; using as many as it is possible for us to do, using them wisely and temperately, and so add another pleasure to living.

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