

Mangosteen, the Healing Fruit of Thailand

by Jim Kosglow

MANGOSTEEN, "QUEEN OF FRUITS"

Many of us know that herbs and other botanicals can lead to substantial improvements in health. But why all the fuss today about an unusual little fruit called the mangosteen? How can a single fruit offer so many benefits? And why is it being introduced to the United States only now, even though it has been a part of natural health in the East for centuries?

The mangosteen fruit is grown in Thailand and other parts of southeast Asia and has been used for centuries to relieve digestive problems, inflammations, skin conditions and other ailments. It is roughly the size of a tangerine with a dark purple rind (pericarp) that is thick and tough. Encased within this protective coating is a snow-white fruit that separates into wedges, much like a citrus fruit. The taste of the fruit's flesh is exquisite. It is often referred to as the "Queen of Fruits" in areas where it is grown. The raw mangosteen is fragile, and the United States and other countries forbid its importation as a fresh fruit.



Mangosteens.

Photo courtesy Google photo archive.

WHAT ARE XANTHONES?

The mangosteen contains a large number of active substances including vitamins, catechins (potent anti-oxidants), polysaccharides, etc. However, modern science has examined the mangosteen, and the phytonutrients that receive the most scientific attention are xanthones which are biologically active, natural molecules found in a few plants.

Modern science has identified approximately 200 xanthones. The mangosteen contains an amazing 43 of them. Some herbs and plants like St. John's Wort may contain several xanthones but no plant compares with the quantity and vibrancy of xanthones available in mangosteen. In fact, mangosteen is the best known natural source of these powerful phytochemicals.

Each xanthone has a unique chemical formula that enables it to perform specific biologic functions in the human body. For example, alpha-mangostin serves as an anti-oxidant, gamma-mangostin as an anti-inflammatory and garcinone E as an anti-tumor agent. Xanthone derivatives show other beneficial properties . . . antiallergic, antiviral, anti-diabetic, antibacterial, etc.

Xanthones, possibly in conjunction with other biologically active substances mentioned above, are responsible for the wide range of medicinal benefits reported by people who consume the mangosteen.



Cross section of a mangosteen, showing fibrous interior. *Photo courtesy Google.*

MAJOR HEALTH BENEFITS

Recently, research and clinical observations have confirmed some of the health benefits of mangosteen's xanthones:

1. Anti-inflammatory - gamma mangostin, one of the xanthones in mangosteen, dramatically slows the production of the COX 2 (cyclo-oxygenase) enzyme, the major precursor to inflammation, without negative side effects. Some physicians have noted that mangosteen can be as effective as leading anti-inflammatory medications without serious side effects typical with drugs like Vioxx, Celebrex, and Bextra.

Vioxx, a selective Cox-2 inhibitor, was withdrawn from the market because it caused blood clots and an increased incidence of heart attacks. In experimental data, mangosteen did not affect blood-clotting mechanisms yet had all the anti-inflammatory benefits.

2. Anti-oxidant - the xanthone gamma mangostin was found to be a more powerful antioxidant than vitamin E.

3. Anti-cholesterol - the bad cholesterol, LDL, first must be oxidized before it can cross the artery's endothelial wall and become part of an atherosclerotic plaque. Oxidized LDL is one of the causes of atherosclerosis and heart disease. Scientists from Australia and Thailand concluded from in-vitro studies that mangosteen xanthones inhibit the oxidation of low-density lipoprotein (LDL).

4. Anti-tumor - Scientists in Taiwan tested Garcinone E against human cancer cell lines for primary liver, stomach and lung cancers. Garcinone E was capable of killing all cancer lines but one and it was more efficient than several anti-cancer medications commonly in use today.

5. Anti-diabetic - Some xanthones tend to reduce insulin resistance, the core defect in type II diabetes according to a leading clinician. Additionally, the Germans treat peripheral neuropathy with antioxidants based on the belief that diabetic complications can involve free radical damage.



Mangosteen trees (foreground) thrive throughout Thailand.

Photo courtesy Google photos.

MANGOSTEEN JUICE

Recently the fruit has become commercially available in North America, Europe and other parts of Asia as a bottled beverage. While the mangosteen pericarp is rich in xanthenes, it tastes quite bitter. Additional natural fruit juices are usually added to create a more appealing taste.

Most brands contain about 2 grams of natural sugar per ounce, making it possible for diabetics to consume the juice. In many cases it is believed to actually lower blood sugar levels and reduce reliance on medication.

This delicious juice has already influenced many lives and will continue to benefit people searching for natural alternatives to better health.

Jim Kosglow is a frequent contributor to health publications about informative tips on living a more natural holistic lifestyle. He lives in Aspen, Colorado and may be contacted at jimkosglow@aol.com. This article © 2006 by Jim Kosglow. Reprinted with written permission of the author for use in the THAI archives. All rights reserved.