

Accepted : September, 2010

Almond : A health diamond

MILIND PARLE AND MEENU BHORIA

ABSTRACT

Today, Americans offer a bag of sweet almonds, to their special guests as a token of happiness, romance, good health and fortune. Almond is a dry fruit obtained from a tree native of Morocco. The fruit of the almond is not a true nut, but a drupe, which consists of an outer hull and a hard shell with the seed (nut) inside. Almonds are cultivated for the nuts, used in candies, baked products and confectioneries, and for the oils obtained from the kernels. Phytochemically, sweet almond contains carbohydrates, sterols, flavonoids, vitamins and phenolic compounds. Almond is a folk remedy for asthma, cough, dyspnea, skin eruptions, gingivitis, heartburn, prurigo, spasms, stomatitis, and ulcers. In Ayurveda, almond is prescribed as a brain tonic. It is said to promote intellectual caliber and neuronal longevity.

Key words : *Prunus dulcis*, Almond, Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION

Almond is a native of Morocco. It has been cultivated from ancient times. The Romans called it as the 'Greek nut'. It was grown in Syria and Palestine during the days of the Bible. The almond has become a favorite ingredient of several recipes and finds application in several medicinal and healing procedures across the globe.

Biological source :

Almond is a fruit of *Prunus dulcis* (Mill.) D.A. Webb.

History :

Almonds enjoy a religious, ethnic and social significance. The Bible's "Book of Numbers" tells the story of Aaron's rod that blossomed and bore almonds, thereby making almond a symbol of divine approval. The Romans showered newly-weds with almonds as a fertility charm. Today, Americans offer a bag of sweet almonds, to their special guests as a token of happiness, romance, good health and fortune. In Sweden, cinnamon-flavored rice pudding with an almond hidden inside is a Christmas custom. It is believed that all those individuals, who are able to search this hidden fruit in given time, are blessed with good fortune for a year. Among the Hebrews, it is a symbol of watchfulness and promise due to its early flowering, while the Chinese consider it a symbol of enduring sadness and female beauty. Christians often

consider almond branches as symbolic of the virgin birth of Jesus. There are paintings, which depict almonds as a symbol of Mary encircling the baby Jesus. The ancient Romans used sweet almond oil extensively in skincare preparations. Almond oil was also embraced as a beautifier in Europe and the herbalist John Gerald sang its laurels as early as the 16th century.

Cultural aspects and folk medicine:

Almond is highly revered in traditional cultures of several countries. In Bible, the almond is mentioned ten times, beginning with Book of Genesis 43:11, where it is described as "among the best of fruits". The fruit of the almond supplied a model for certain kinds of ornamental carved work. The seed or its oil is used in folk remedies for cancer (esp. bladder, breast, mouth, spleen, and uterus), carcinomata, condylomata, corns, indurations and tumors. In traditional system of medicine, almond is recommended as an astringent, carminative, demulcent, diuretic, emollient, laxative, lithonryptic, nervine, sedative, stimulant and tonic. Almond is a folk remedy for asthma, cold, corns, cough, dyspnea, skin eruptions, gingivitis, heartburn, prurigo, sores, spasms, stomatitis, and ulcers. The kernels are added in diet, for preventing peptic ulcers. Oil is used as a flavoring agent in baked goods and perfumery. To this day, modern Jews carry branches of flowering almonds into the synagogue on spring festival days. Sweet almond oil is used for cosmetic creams and lotions. In crisis, almond