

Berry special



• CHEF PANKAJ SHARMA

My trips to Banaras had nothing to do with food or anything remotely related to it. It was just about experiencing the serenity and spiritual pulse of the place. Even before reaching the city, I had visualised the long stretches of the ghats on the banks of the Ganga, the famous temples, the evening aarti, lustrous silk saris and the bustling bazaars of the holy city.

The streets were busy and crowded but with a nice old-world charm. The ghats were even more magnificent than I had expected, as were the temples and Sarnath. And not to my surprise, I spotted lots of tourists and locals enjoying the local delicacies like *golgappas* and *chaat*, the famous *Banarasi paneer, lassi* and *thandai*.

I saw people selling vegetables and fruits on carts and in small shops tucked in the busy old streets of the city. Most of the produce was quite common but a bright, berry-like fruit caught my attention. It resembled the Indian cherry. To be more precise, it was like a cross between the Indian cherry and fruits of the rose tree. When asked, the vendor mentioned

that in the colloquial language, it is called *karonda*. The name sounded familiar and then I recalled that most of us have eaten it as an ingredient in Indian pickles and chutneys. But I had never seen it fresh and unprocessed.

Out of curiosity, I picked up a berry and bit into it. It had a sharp acidic taste with a hint of bitterness. It had already caught my attention, so the next step was to find out more about it. Results of the research:

- It is called *carissa carandas*, a species of flowering shrub in the dogbane family.
- It grows in northern regions, Western Ghats, southern part of our country and has got culinary as well as medicinal applications.
- The berry has high acidic content, is a good source of iron and contains pectin.

The next step was to use the berry in my kitchen and bring out all the possibilities that it had to offer. Based on the flavour profile and the way it behaves with various cooking methods, we prepared innovative dishes such as *karonda sorbet* with sea salt and crushed pepper, baked *yoghurt* and glazed *karonda* and carbonated *karonda* drink.

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KARONDA DRINK

- Karonda 200 gm
- Sugar 100 gm
- Water 200 ml
- Whey of probiotic yoghurt 2 tbsp
- Fresh yeast 2 gm

METHOD

- Wash and cut the karonda into halves and discard the seeds.
- Make the sugar syrup by boiling together sugar and water.
- Put the karonda in the simmering sugar syrup and simmer further for 20 minutes.
- Blend every thing together and strain the liquid.
- If required, add sieve water to thin down the consistency. The mixture has to have a fairly thin, water-like consistency but taste has to be slightly sweet. If the sweetness goes down, mix in a little bit more sugar.
- Cool the mixture and add the whey of probiotic yoghurt.
- Let the mixture ferment for 24 hours.
- Once 24 hours are over, strain the mixture once again and mix in the yeast to it.
- Ferment the mixture for another 20 hours and then strain and pour it in a sterilised straight bottle. Keep the bottle at room temperature for 12 hours and then chill the bottle.
- The final yeast based fermentation will help the carbon dioxide to dissolve in the liquid.
- When the bottle is opened for consumption, it will have a nice fizz and refreshing taste.

KARONDA SORBET WITH HIMALAYAN SALT AND BLACK PEPPER

INGREDIENTS

- Karonda 200 gm
- White crystal sugar 200 gm
- Water 200 ml
- Five freshly crushed black pepper
- Himalayan salt 2 gm
- Roasted cumin seeds, crushed to make powder one tbsp
- Liquid glucose 30 ml

METHOD

- Cut the karonda into half and take out the seeds. These seeds tend to impart a bitter flavour.
- In a pot, put water and sugar together and bring to boil.
- Add karonda to it and simmer till the berries start to disintegrate.
- Take it off the flame and blend it using a hand blender; and make a smooth puree out of every thing.
- Pass the puree through a sieve.
- Mix in crushed black peppercorns, roasted cumin powder and liquid glucose to it. Stir it properly to make sure that the liquid glucose dissolves in the karonda puree.
- Churn the mixture in a sorbet machine, scoop out and serve sprinkled with Himalayan salt. Or freeze the mixture overnight, so that it becomes rock hard. Scrape off nicely with a fork and serve sprinkled with Himalayan salt.

