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Published: March 31, 2011 00:00 IST | Updated: March 31, 2011 04:03 IST

### Coolers au naturel

*health Beat the heat this summer with Kelpalm's nongu-based juices and products*



There is no better way to cool off on a hot summer day than with an ice-cold drink; more so when it's nature's gift. Go the natural way this summer with palmyrah fruit products from Kelpalm, a State-owned enterprise that has opened up three outlets in the city – in front of the SMSM Institute, at Vanchiyoor near the Bar Council office, and in front of Central Jail, Poojappura.

#### 'Ice-apple of the South'

*Nongu* (fruit of the palmyrah) is known as the 'ice apple of the South' for its cooling effect and translucent, ice-like flesh. In Kerala, Palmyrah trees grow only in few places such as Palakkad and the border areas of Thiruvananthapuram district. To cope with the shortage of the fruit in the State, they are procured in bulk from Tamil Nadu. At Kelpalm outlets, fans of *nongu* can have it mixed into *nongu* water for Rs. 30, while *nongu* by itself is available for Rs.10. *Nongu sarbath* is available at Rs.20 for a glass. It's great for those with a sweet tooth as it blends *nongu* with banana, grapes and cardamom. Palm pine (Rs.30), on the other hand, blends the rather bland taste of *nongu*, with the sweetness of palm candy and the slightly sweet-sour taste of pineapple.

"*Nongu*, *nongu sarbath* and palm pine are the fast moving items these days," says Bobby, an employee at one of the outlets. And most of the customers turn regulars, she adds.

The outlets also sell soft-drinks sweetened with palm candy (added refined white sugar), in six flavours – Palmora (orange), Palmger (ginger), Palmjeer (jeera), Palmla (cola), Palmle (lemon) and Palmlite (a 7-up-like flavour), at Rs. 9 per 200 ml.

Three varieties of squashes sweetened with palm candy and sugar are available. The flavours are Palmora (orange), Palmgrav (grapes) and Palmpil (pineapple). Each 500 ml bottle is priced at Rs. 55.

Neera (*accani* in local parlance), the sap from Palmyrah trees which is obtained by tapping the unopened spadix, is available at Rs. 30 for 500ml. Fermented *accani* can be used as a substitute for yeast or coconut toddy for softening and sweetening appams.

Palm candy and Palmghur (*karupatti* in local parlance) comes packed in attractive palm leaf boxes. Palm candy is rich in minerals and vitamins and also has added health benefits. Likewise, Palmghur, a product of neera which is commonly used in Ayurveda and for making traditional health foods, is also available. All the products available at Kelpalm are prepared from pure neera. Palmghur is superior to refined sugar as it contains traces of iron, calcium and phosphorous. "Recent market trends indicate a growing demand for natural palmyrah products," says Don Bosco, managing director, Kelpalm.

The outlets not only provide summer chillers but also hats made of palm leaves to beat the heat. "We also plan to

market other palm leaf handicrafts and palm furniture through these outlets," adds Don Bosco. Plans are afoot to launch *nongu* ice-cream and other value-added products. One of Kelpalm's aims is to plant palmyrah trees in fallow lands and open spaces to meet the increasing demand. Seven more outlets are being planned in the city. The outlets are open from 10 a.m. to 6 pm, except on Sundays.

### **Health benefits**

And in another corner of the city, at the National Institute of Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST), Pappanamcode, research is going on to explore the health benefits and potential uses of palm products. "There is a lot of scope in developing value-added products from palm, which can be enjoyed both for its taste and health benefits," says A. Sundaresan, Reshma. M. V. and Nisha, scientists at the Agro Processing and Natural Products division of NIIST.

Their prime focus is to investigate health benefits of neera and develop a value-added product – palm syrup from it. Palm syrup has been found to be a source of sugars, antioxidants and minerals and hence can be used as a sweetener. Further investigations are underway to look into the presence of other bio-actives in both neera and palm syrup. The project is being funded by Kerala State Council for Science Technology and Environment in collaboration with Trivandrum District Palm Products Development Cooperative Federation, Parassala.

So stay cool and healthy this summer with these natural coolers.

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