

RESEARCH NEWS

BAEL FRUIT LEATHER AND QUALITY ASPECTS

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The bael (*Aegle marmelos*) fruit is grown in dry, intermediate and wet zones of Sri Lanka and it is native to India. The ripe fruit is eaten as desert and pulp is often processed into nectar or squash. The bael fruit is also a good laxative. It cleans and tones up the intestines and also has many other medicinal properties. A considerable amount of surplus is lost due to lack of related products and preservation methods. Therefore, development of an acceptable new product is important to overcome the post-harvest losses and popularize this underutilized fruit. Fruit leather preparation is one of the simplest and cheapest preservation technique which can be easily adopted.

Bael fruit pulp was extracted using naturally ripe fruits. This was mixed with 10% sugar and 0.1% citric acid on pulp weight basis and heated up to 70-75°C for 2-3 minutes. The mixture was spread on glycerin applied trays to about 6-7mm thickness and dried at 60-65°C for 12 hours.

The dried fruit leather had a thickness of 2.5mm, 13.3% moisture, 4.3 pH, 17% total soluble solids, 18.03mg/100g Vitamin C, 18.03g/100g reducing sugar and had a color of Orange group 28A-B. Very low total colony count (9/1g) was observed after 6 months of storage. Sensory studies showed that the product had high consumer acceptability.

Acceptable good quality bael fruit leather can be prepared with ripe fruit pulp with 10% sugar and this can be kept for more than six months in proper packaging. This leather can be eaten as a snack and also for preparation of drink.