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RESEARCH NEWS

THE EXISTING UNDER-UTILIZED FRUIT SPECIES AND THEIR DIVERSITY IN SRI LANKA

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Sri Lanka has a rich diversity of fruit species comprising of indigenous and introduced species. These are important due to nutritional, therapeutic, environmental and cultural values. Although crop diversity is high, low demand and, unorganized marketing, have resulted in less attention paid to commercial cultivation of these species.

Beli (*Aegle marmelos*), Wood apple (*Feronia limonia*), Jombu (*Syzygium jambos*), Pumello (*Citrus maxima*), Veralu (*Elaeocarpus serratus*), Lovi (*Flacourtia inermis*), Jakfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), Uguressa (*Flacourtia indica*), Lavalu (*Chrysophyllum spp.*), Sapota (*Manilkara sapota*) and Gaduguda (*Baccauria motleyana*) etc., are considered as under utilized fruit species. Beli, annona, jombu, veralu, lovi, uguressa, lavalu, jakfruit are distributed throughout the country. Wood apple is more confined to the dry zone while gaduguda is grown in a limited area of the wet zone. Ber (*Ziziphus mauritiana*) is abundant in dry and intermediate zones. Velvet tamarind (*Dialium ovoideum*), Mora (*Euphoria longana*), Madan (*Syzygium cumini*), Damunu (*Grewia damine*), Koon (*Scheleichera oleosa*), Palu (*Manilkara hexandra*), Weera (*Drypetes sepiaria*), Eraminia (*Zyziphus spp*) and Karamba (*Carissa spp*) etc. are found naturally existing in jungles and unexploited areas.

Fruit morphological characters showed a high diversity especially in fruit size, shape, weight, external and internal colour, seed number and brix value. For example, beli showed variations in fruit weight (76-1370 g), seed number (0 - 90), diameter (4.5-31.5 cm), peel thickness (0.2-0.7 cm) and flesh colour (yellow to orange) and pumello showed variations in fruit weight (455-2240 g), seed number (0-163), internal colour (red purple, red, green, yellow groups) and brix value (5-14.6). Jombu showed variations in fruit weight (7.75-52 g) and external colour (red, green, orange). Ber had differences in external colour, size and shape of fruits and seeds. Germplasm of velvet tamarind did not show much variation.