

# Mango Tree

India is the world's largest producer of mangoes, responsible for around 50% of mango production, and growing at least 1000 varieties, so it's unsurprising that summers here are marked by a countrywide mango craze. Mango season is eagerly awaited; from aamras to mango ice cream to mango falooda, the yellow fruit seems to creep into all types of dishes!



Read on to learn about the mango tree and the mango, which is the national fruit of India, Pakistan and the Philippines!

Species: *Mangifera indica*

Mangoes originated in Southeast Asia, and their impact on Indian culture and history has been immense. Their cultivation in India is over 4000 years old, with mango trees

being found in ancient architecture- for example, on a sculpture on the Buddhist Stupa of Bharhut that was approximately made in 110 BC- and mentioned in Vedic texts.

It is believed that Buddha rested with other monks in the shade of mango trees and so mangoes remain culturally significant for Buddhists even today.

In his trip to India, Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller who is said to be among the first people to carry the news of mangos to the rest of the world, described how the Mauryas planted mango trees along roads as a symbol of wealth.

The Mughal Empire is also famous for its unmatched mango love. Legend proclaims Babur was only willing to face the famed warrior Rana Sanga of Mewar because Daulat Khan Lodi used mangoes to lure him to India. Akbar planted the Lakh Bagh of 100,000 mango trees near Darbhanga, Shah Jahan is claimed to have placed Aurangzeb- who later succeeded him as emperor- under house arrest for mango hoarding, and Aurangzeb used mangoes diplomatically and as currency, for example, offering them to Shah Abbas of Persia for support in his fight to become emperor. Mangoes can be found in Mughal miniature paintings and the Mughal love of mangoes resulted in the grafting of thousands of mango varieties.

Other instances in which mangoes have been used as diplomatic gifts include Indira Gandhi to Leonid Brezhnev of Russia and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to foreign leaders.

The English name of the fruit today provides a glimpse into Indian colonial history: it is believed to be derived from the Tamil word *mankay* or Kerallan word *mangga*, modified to *manga* by Portuguese traders, and finally converted to *mango* by the British trading with South India in around the 15th and 16th centuries.



Hindu households hang mango leaves at the door during festivals like Hindu New Year and Diwali to bless the houses and Hindus sometimes use the twigs to brush their teeth on religiously significant days.

The mango tree is an evergreen tree that can grow up to 10-45m high. Its bark is rough and grey-brown and the leaves are long and thin, originally pink and eventually becoming green and firm. The flowers have a strong odour and grow in bunches, usually of around 300 flowers. The flowers have 4-5 petals that are pale yellow. The mango fruits usually ripen between April-July.

Mangoes have been used widely in Ayurvedic medicine.

The fruit has been found to have the bioactive Mangiferin which is an antioxidant with antiviral, anticancer and antidiabetic properties. It also has zeaxanthin, an antioxidant which may protect against macular degeneration. The pulp also contains Vitamin A and Vitamin C, both essential for skin and hair health, as well as  $\beta$ -carotene, which may protect against skin cancer.