

Ruby

Contributed by Administrator
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In this ancient fruit, scientists are finding more and more fascinating benefits that the ancients have known all along, but have not the means to prove. What is it about this full round fruit with a spiky crown that had inspired poets, painters and artists to wax lyrical about it? For one thing, the presence of this crown-like structure has led many to call it the royal fruit. Homer, Shakespeare and Chaucer had had their say extolling the virtues of this fruit. Often mistaken as native of China (this fruit is also referred to as Chinese apple), the pomegranate is a native of Persia. It was brought to China only in the first century BC during the Han Period. Popular in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and in some parts of Asia, its goodness has been acknowledged with credits ranging from it being a symbol of fertility, hope and prosperity to one that promises eternal life. The early Christians saw the pomegranate as a symbol of hope while to the Jews it was a symbol of prosperity, bounty and eternal life. The same worldview still holds to an extent. In Iran (at one time also known as Persia) the fruit signifies immortality and fertility. In ancient Persian, a child being inducted into the religion of Zoroastrianism was required to chew a pomegranate leaf. As material for fashion accessories in the Old World, the pomegranate had many uses. Its skin cured is useful as 'leather'. Pomegranate juice will stick to your clothes if not washed off immediately. For this it has been used as a dye on non-synthetic fabrics in the past. Pomegranates contain ruby red arils that are delicious and heavy with juice. Inside each aril is a tiny edible seed valued for its fibre. The white membrane that surrounds the arils is best left alone. These glistening ruby seeds add colour, flavour and texture to appetizers, salads, entrees and desserts. A look at recipes from the Mediterranean region shows the pomegranate's pride of place in cuisines of the region. The ancient Arabs valued pomegranates for their medicinal properties. Powdered pomegranate peels were used on burns and to treat infections on cuts and wounds. Soaked pomegranate juice is believed to be effective for sore throats, stomach troubles and indigestion. The fruit soaked in boiled water and taken with honey was believed to ward off heart trouble. Touted as the hot new "super food" that tastes as good as it looks, the pomegranate is rich in minerals such as calcium, potassium, and iron plus compounds known as phyto-nutrients that can help protect against heart disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and cancer. The powerful antioxidants in the fruit are believed to help slow down ageing. It is also believed to neutralize twice as many free radicals as red wine and seven times as many as green tea. Everything about pomegranate is bursting with goodness, even down to its crunchy seeds that are purported to help flush out fats from the digestive tract. Preliminary tests on humans also show that the juice of the pomegranate is effective in reducing heart disease risk factors - those that may contribute to atherosclerosis and cardiovascular disease in the long run. But now it even complements beauty treatments that promise radiant complexion. Is this just a case of: if it is good enough to eat, then it is good enough to put on my skin? Apparently not! And still, on a brighter note, the juice has also been found to have antiviral and antibacterial effects on dental plaque. Flash that smile!