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Sugar, spice and all that's nice



Coconut Blossom Sugar

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It may have the same calorific count as refined sugar, but in nutrition the prettily-named coconut blossom sugar is far healthier

I like sugar in my mug of coffee. I can't bear the thought of drinking the brew unsweetened. Hence, I am always on the lookout for natural sugars to use in place of the refined ones. I usually use jaggery in my coffee. But recently, my mother came across an interesting alternative. She promptly delivered the find to my home. It was in a neat pouch made of rough brown paper and that

appealed to my sense of eco awareness. It had the words 'Coconut Blossom Sugar' printed on it. I have heard of this sugar, but I was under the impression that it was a sweetener and not a natural sugar. The suggestions of use on the package were intriguing and I decided to try it out.

It resembles the Demerara sugar closely in colour and coarseness. The taste of it by itself is very clean and fresh, with an unmistakable sweetness of the elaneer. It is not overpoweringly sweet and when I added a little of it to my cold coffee, it tasted good. I noticed that it was free flowing and did not clump.

To my knowledge, the coconut blossom sugar is obtained from the sap of the coconut flower. A cut is made at the base of the flower for and the sap that oozes out is collected, allowed to evaporate and the residue from that is the natural sugar. This is the technique followed in many parts of the world.

However, at FARM MADE, in Palladam, they do it differently. Mr. Ram Mohan and his family have been in the business of coconut breeding and due to their association with agricultural scientists, they came across a method for extracting coconut sugar, patented by Dr. Hebber in Kerala. This resulted in a far purer extraction of this coconut blossom sugar.

After many trials Ram Mohan has refined a method to obtain the sap in a clean and fresh manner that brings down the risk of pollution. Ram Mohan also considers this a service to a society that wants to embrace healthier food options.

This sap or nectar is highly in demand in its liquid form and is referred to as Neerah. It then undergoes a highly precise heating process before being dehydrated. The farm is proud of this product as there is no compromise in quality standards during the production process. This vegan sugar is free of preservatives and is completely organic. The vermicompost for the coconut trees is made in-house.

The farm does not believe in plundering what nature has to offer. It is a system of respectful give and take. Studies in the Philippines have proved that coconut blossom sugar rates only 34 on the glycemic index (GI). That makes it a much healthier sugar alternative.

A low GI means that there is a slow release of sugar into the blood and does not lead to spikes in the blood sugar, if taken in reasonable quantities. The calorific count however is the same to refined sugar.

I learnt that the sugar was also great for baking. I was initially sceptical as I thought the flavours of this sugar was too light, but decided to try it out nevertheless and added it to my dark chocolate cake batter. I am happy to say that my apprehensions were misplaced. The dark chocolate cupcakes tasted every bit as delicious. My family was none the wiser until I enlightened them on the tiny change in that one important ingredient. Our cakes are most often made with wholemeal flour. Add a natural sugar with a low GI and we can change it to being a more nutritious indulgence.

The coconut blossom sugar is available for sale at the local supermarkets. There are plans afoot to soon launch more varieties of it with vanilla and all spice flavours, also cultivated in the same farm. It is a great way to add nutritive value to food for all those on a quest for healthy and natural options.

Read more about food on Shanthini's website www.pinklemontreerecipes.com