

Chaami and Buddu go round the Mulberry Bush



Shikha Hajela

Chammi came home from school and could not find her mother anywhere. Chammi's mother is usually home when she comes back from school. Now that her mother was not home she became very restless. Her grandfather informed Chaami that her mother had gone over to Sharmilla Aunty's nursery. Sharmila Aunty has a huge backyard, which she has converted into a nursery. Chammi quickly changed her school dress, ate a banana and ran to her grandfather, Babaji, babaji, she cried, can I go over to Sharmila Aunty's place. Chammi I cannot allow you to go alone, replied her grandfather. Don't worry Babaji, I will ask Buddu to come along. Bye...

Buddu and Chammi soon reached the nursery, laughing and talking along the way. Buddu asked Chammi "what do you think Aunty is getting. I am pretty sure she must be getting Pansy and Dianthus"? "She got phlox, sweet pea and Dahlia last week", Chammi replied. On reaching the nursery Chaami started looking for her mother but she was not to be found anywhere in the perennials section. So Chaami and Buddu strolled leisurely looking at different types of plants. "Chammi, I am always surprised by the large variety of plant that nature has given us. There must be at least a million types of plants" said Buddu. Chammi agreed and replied "But what I find even more amazing is that how generous and giving the plants are. Man can definitely learn something from these plants."

"Chammi, Buddu come here, let's play - here we go round the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush", Sharmilla aunty's four year old daughter was singing. They found her with Sharmila aunty and Chammi's mother, eating.... "Oh my God! Chammi look, they are eating caterpillars. Aunty, did you roast them before eating, how come they are black and red", Buddu exclaimed. "Buddu, calm down", said Chammi. "They are not eating caterpillar, they are having mulberries. Come on, have some. Eat these dark red coloured one and then tell me how it tastes". Buddu tries some berries, "these are sweet with a bit of eh... you mean to say tarty". "Buddu, I like tarty taste of black mulberries, the refreshing tart taste is in some ways reminiscent of grapefruit" said Sharmila Aunty.



Chammi turned to her mother, "Ma, I thought you would be getting perennial flowers, what are you doing here"? "I am buying flowers but I am also getting seeds of shahtoot commonly known as mulberry for my backyard. Mulberries can be grown from seed or planted from large cuttings. I am taking seeds for my backyard. For now, I am enjoying these mulberries. Sharmila aunty was just telling me that Shahtoot is a threatened medicinal plant. Due to over-exploitation from their natural habitats many medicinal plants are becoming extremely threatened Let us all become aware and take steps to conserve the plants from becoming extinct". Chaami and Buddu both nodded in unison.

Sharmila aunty then added, "as you can see children, the aggregate fruit is composed of lots of berries stuck together, each with its own seed, is long-oval in shape, and hangs from a short, slender fruit stalk. You know what; the raw juice from the ripe fruits can be preserved for about 3 months in refrigeration and about 12 months if bottled. Mulberry fruit pastes and syrups are widely available in Chinese markets, and the people use the paste to make tea like drinks, a drink which can sharpen the hearing and clear the vision". Buddu smiled and told Chaami that she needed this.....

MERRY MULBERRY

Morus species
Family: Moraceae

Common Names

English: Mulberry Hindi/Urdu: Shahtoot
Sanskrit: Tuta Marathi: Tuti

In Persian Shahtoot means King's or "superior" mulberry

Species: White Mulberry (*Morus alba*), Black Mulberry (*Morus nigra*), American Mulberry, Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*). Hybrid forms exist between *Morus alba* and *Morus rubra*.

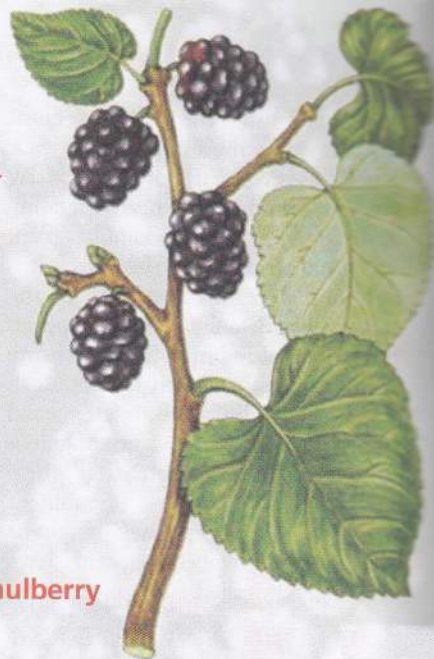
Where am I found?

The plant species is native to China, while it is extensively cultivated in the other parts of the world as well. Else than China in Asia, it is mainly found in Northern India, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Syria, Armenia, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan.

How do I look like?



The white mulberry (*Morus alba*) is a short-lived, fast-growing, small to medium sized mulberry tree, which grows to 10–20 m tall. On young, vigorous shoots, the leaves may be up to 30 cm long, and deeply and intricately lobed, with the lobes rounded. On older trees, the leaves are generally 5–15 cm long, unlobed, cordate at the base and rounded to acuminate at the tip, and serrated on the margins. The leaves are usually deciduous in winter, but trees grown in tropical regions can be evergreen. The flowers are single-sex catkins, with catkins of both sexes being present on each tree; male catkins are 2–3.5 cm long and female catkins 1–2 cm long. The fruit is 1–2.5 cm long; in the species in the wild it is deep purple, but in many cultivated plants it varies from white to pink; it is sweet but bland, unlike the more intense flavour of the red mulberry and black mulberry. The seeds are widely dispersed by birds, which eat the fruit and excrete the seeds.



Mulberry fruit is not a Berry

Botanically the mulberry fruit is not a berry but a collective fruit. When the flowers are pollinated, they and their fleshy bases begin to swell. Ultimately they become completely altered in texture and colour, becoming succulent, fat and full of juice. The aggregate fruit is composed of lots of berries stuck together, each with its own seed, is long-oval in shape, and hangs from a short, slender fruit stalk.

The colour of the mulberry fruit does not identify the mulberry species. White mulberries, for example, can produce white, lavender or black fruit. White mulberry fruits are generally very sweet but are lacking in tartness. Red mulberry fruits are usually deep red, almost black. Black mulberry fruits are large and juicy; with a good balance of sweetness and tartness that makes them the best flavoured species of mulberry.



What are my Uses?

Mulberry fruit is used to treat weakness, dizziness, tinnitus, fatigue, anemia, and incontinence.

- Its leaves are used to promote sweating, and the branches and bark help lower blood pressure.
- It can help treat chronic diseases of the digestive tract, improve digestion, stimulate the appetite, promote gastric juice secretion and eliminate constipation.
- White mulberry leaves are used as feedstock for silkworms. They are also cut as food for livestock, such as cattle and goats, especially in areas that experience dry season, restricting the availability of fodder.
- The fruits of Mulberry plant are eaten raw and also used to make wine, by drying them.
- The fruit has much significance in traditional Chinese medicine, which uses it to treat prematurely graying hair. It is also used to purify blood and treat constipation and diabetes in Chinese medicine.
- The bark is used to remedy cough, wheezing, edema, fever, headache, and red, dry and sore eyes. It also promotes urination.
- The leaves of the plant work to stimulate the nervous system and help in maintaining proper functioning of the digestive tract. It also has a positive effect on the respiratory and cardiovascular system, as well as the uterine system.

Mulberry JAM Recipe

Wash the berries carefully, drain, and remove the caps and stems. To each 100 gram of prepared fruit allow an equal weight sugar. Crush the berries and bring slowly to a boil, stirring constantly. Add the sugar and boil until the fruit mixture has thickened to jellylike consistency. Stir throughout the cooking. Pour into hot sterilized jars and seal. If the seeds in mulberries are objectionable, boil the fruit for a few minutes, then put through a fine sieve to remove the seeds before weighing the fruit and adding the sugar. This is a real delicacy.

