

Artificially ripened fruits find place on racks despite crackdown

Wilson Thomas

COIMBATORE , MAY 15, 2019 01:04 IST

Unsavoury signs

- The peel in artificially ripened fruits will have uniform colour with no trace of green
- Chemically ripened fruits will be harder than the ones that ripen normally
- Will not have the smell the normally ripened fruits have
- In mangoes, the flesh of the fruit ripened chemically will not have uniform colour
- Mango will have less juice if ripened artificially
- The skin of the mango will remain tight for more days if ripened artificially
- Flavour and sweetness will be less

Calcium carbide stone and ethylene powder are widely used by traders

Despite repeated checks done by the Food Safety Department, artificially ripened fruits find place in markets and shops in Coimbatore.

In summer, mangoes top the list of fruits that find entry into markets after treated chemically, largely for uniformed ripening, colour and shelf life.

Papaya, some varieties of plantains, orange and pineapple are the other common fruits ripened artificially.

“Food safety officers are inspecting fruit stalls and godowns to check the use of ripening agents in fruits in summer. More than a tonne of artificially ripened mangoes and more than two tonnes of rotten fruits were seized and destroyed as they were unfit for consumption. The checks will continue in the coming days too,” said B. Vijayalalithambigai, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) designated officer in Coimbatore.

It is also a tough task for the FSSAI team to have regular inspections at the 600-odd fruit stalls and godown in the district.

Ukkadam, Gandhipuram, Sulur, Mettupalayam and Pollachi are the main markets where fruits arrive for distribution to retailers.

Calcium carbide stone and ethylene powder are widely used by traders to ripen the fruits artificially in Coimbatore.

“Last year, we had more incidents of using calcium carbide. This year, we seized fruits ripened using ethylene powder in crude methods while use of calcium carbide was not found. We conducted awareness sessions for traders and those harvesting mangoes on proper use of ripening agents which are not harmful to humans,” she said.

Crude methods of using ethylene powder wherein it comes in direct contact with the fruit is not permissible, the same agent in gas form in limited levels is allowed for use in specially designed fruit ripening chambers.

Sources with fruits traders said that they were lacking such chambers in the district forcing them to go for cheaper ripening methods.

According to city-based gastroenterologist V.G. Mohan Prasad, calcium carbide has traces of arsenic and phosphorus which are toxic to human body.

“These toxic contents can trigger nausea, infection in throat, diarrhoea and burning sensation in stomach. Chronic consumption of fruits ripened using agents like calcium carbide can even cause cancer. Though the use of chemicals for ripening fruits is banned in several countries, it is unfortunately available in India,” he added.

Cheap rate and fast result are also factors that force traders to use calcium carbide as ripening agent.

C. Eswari, a home maker from city, said that it was not easy to identify artificially ripened fruits from the stocks displayed at shops and supermarkets.

According to Ms. Vijayalalithambigai, it is always better to follow some check-list to avoid buying and consuming artificially ripened fruits.