

Mango, melon mania hits Chennai

[B VIJAYALAKSHMI](#)

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Erythrosine B are injected to melons to increase their shelf life, enhance the colour and ripen them over a short period of time.

Artificially ripened mangoes dumped after FSSAI raids in the city. (Photo - DC)

It is scorching summer and let's indulge in mangoes and melons. But these seasonal delights pose a threat to our health every year. The crackdown on shops in Koyambedu and other parts of Chennai by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India officials this week revealed that mangoes, king of summer fruits, can be a health hazard.

Fruit merchants buy and stock mangos in pre-ripening stage and use chemicals like calcium carbide or ethylene for quick ripening. Such mangoes would be uniformly yellow unlike the naturally ripened ones which have uneven green and yellow shades and sometimes blackish spots.

Similarly, toxic colouring agents like Erythrosine B are injected to melons to increase their shelf life, enhance the colour and ripen them over a short period of time.

Shops were sealed, cases booked, several tonnes of artificially ripened mangoes seized and destroyed during the raids in the city. While FSSAI has permitted the use of only 100 ppm of gaseous ethylene for artificial ripening of fruits, vendors, brazenly, place ethylene sachets in direct contact with the fruits. FSSAI guidelines allow one sachet of ethylene to ripen five kgs of the fruit. The fruits must either be covered in paper or ethylene sachets must be placed in perforated small containers to prevent ethylene deposition on fruits during ripening. However, food safety guidelines and awareness programmes don't leave the desired impact on some vendors who continue to put consumers' health at risk.

Artificially ripened fruits can cause diarrhoea, abdomen pain, ulcers, gastric trouble and even allergies.

Watermelons injected with artificial colours, which are carcinogenic, are dangerous to consumers.

While this is the status of seasonal fruits sold in shops, several food apps have cropped up promising sale of 'organic' mangoes and melons. Their claim that no chemicals are used cannot be tested.

With no compulsory certification required to sell 'organic' products and no authorities checking them, consumers have no guarantee that the products are organic.

So, it is better we go for fruits which are not too perfect and too uniform in size, shape and colour.

They may be tampered with and not as sweet as naturally ripened fruits. Whether ripened naturally or artificially, wash the fruits thoroughly in running water, and wherever possible, remove the peel.

These small checks may help in enjoying the exotic taste of mangoes, be it raw, ripe, sweet, juicy and pickled, without any qualms.