

THREE SEASONS AYURVEDA



What Is Jaggery?



Jaggery is not widely known in the West and is predominantly made in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. Jaggery is a form of unrefined and non-distilled sugar made from the sap or juice of plants that contain a considerable amount of sucrose, including sugar cane and certain palms like date palm and palmyra.

Jaggery has played a large part in Indian culture and is used in many religious activities, rituals, and customs. The sugar cane Jaggery is considered most sacred and is consumed before the commencement of a new venture, journey, business endeavor, childbirth, and funerals. It is also an integral part of almost all harvest festivals celebrated in India, where rice is cooked in sugar cane Jaggery to make pongal, a dish offered to the gods after the harvest.

Although automated mills have sprung up in the modern age, Jaggery is still mostly manually manufactured and is sometimes referred to as “country sugar” since it is prepared in rural households and on small farms. Recently the price has skyrocketed because the palms from which the sugar is extracted are getting older and not being replanted quickly enough—mostly because of modernization and land being developed for other uses.

The process of manufacturing involves crushing sugar cane or palm and then extracting the juice from it. The juice is then poured in a large, shallow, but thick iron vessel or pan, called a kadhai, and is brought to a boil over earthen ovens. It is continuously stirred using large ladles to avoid sticking at the bottom of the vessel, and it is cooked for many hours until most of the water from the juice has evaporated, leaving a thick, golden to brown paste. Its color and taste depend upon the degree of boiling.

There are four main types of Jaggery. All are made with the same processes but differ depending on the original sugar used. The four main types are:

Sugar Cane Jaggery: golden to dark brown, very sweet in taste with a hint of saltiness.

Date Palm Jaggery: golden to dark brown, very sweet in taste with an aroma of dark chocolate.

Palmyra Jaggery: white to pale yellowish, very sweet in taste with an aroma of white chocolate.

Toddy Palm Jaggery: golden brown, very sweet in taste with an aroma of sulfur.

For centuries it has been in use as a lung, throat, and respiratory tract cleanser, as well as an additive to the local remedies for coughs and colds. The cleansing property of Jaggery has been proven over many generations and its regular intake is particularly recommended for those who work dusty workspaces and for all who are exposed to pollution and possible respiratory issues.

Jaggery is more complex than refined sugar and does not increase blood sugar levels very quickly, ultimately providing energy for a longer period of time. It aids in the body’s overall metabolism, water balance, digestion, and bone health because of its diverse amount of minerals, which include:

Boron: Improves bone health, brain function, helps prevent cancer and Alzheimer’s, and is anti-aging.

Calcium: Reduces arthritis, insomnia, symptoms of menopause, PMS, cancer, and high blood pressure.

Chromium: Helps glucose uptake, improving diabetic symptoms.

Iron: Aids in hemoglobin formation, metabolism, anemia, brain function and regulates body temperature.

Magnesium: Helps with high blood pressure, diabetes, menopause, and asthma.

Iodine: Alleviates gout, regulates thyroid function, improves skin disease, and helps prevent cancer.

Phosphorus: Improves bone health and brain function and optimizes metabolism.

Manganese: Improves osteoporosis and metabolism, reduces fatigue and inflammation.

Copper: Improves brain function, arthritis, and hemoglobin function, boosts immunity and circulation.

Potassium: Regulates blood pressure and water flow, manages diabetes and kidney disorders.

Selenium: Prevents free radicals and aids in overall bone growth and health.

In Ayurveda, Jaggery has the qualities of being sweet and heating and is grounding for Vata but can bring Pitta and Kapha out of balance with overuse.

You can find Jaggery in Indian stores and on Amazon. It comes in a block (which requires chopping or grating or you can find it powdered, which is easier to handle).