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Can't tell a duku from dokong? Head to the arboretum



DID you know that durian flowers are edible? Stir-fried with sambal belacan and chillies, they make a good side dish. I didn't know about it until my colleague Lydia told me recently. Apparently it is commonly found in Sarawak, even today.

I am more familiar with *pegaga* (penny wort), *ulam raja* (wild cosmos), and *pucuk paku* (fern shoots) — the common *ulam-ulaman* (herbal salads) that used to be part of my family's meal.

Some, we grew ourselves, others could be found at the fringe of the forest. Some

plants have medicinal value while others were seasonal indicators — you know it's a hot season when the lalang flowers, durian and watermelons make an appearance.

If you did not grow up in a village, chances are you would have been deprived of being acquainted with our indigenous flora.

I don't blame the city-born

who cannot differentiate between rambai and langsung at duku from dokong.

Some may not even know that the cashew nut is actually a seed and that it grows outside the fruit.

How many of you have seen a buah sentul?

It's about the size of a clenched fist, has thick leathery skin and flesh similar to duku's but is usually sour and fibrous.

You may know where Sentul is but don't even bother looking for the *buah* within the city limits today.

In fact, even the Gombak

durian, especially those for which Simpang Tiga (or Simpang Tiga in Minangkabau) was famous for, have not been spotted for some time now.

Older city durian lovers would remember the days when Gombak durians were in high demand — long before the idea for the Penang *Ang Heh* (Hokkien for red shrimp variety) and D24 were even conceived.

The foothills of Mimaland would be packed with durian stalls as city folk converged for the roadside durian feast twice a year.

I wish we could plant more

local fruit trees or herbs in the city — if not on the road sides then at parks.

Hardy trees like rambai, mangosteens or even mangoes can be considered for parks. Fragrant herbs like *serai* (lemongrass), *lengkuas* (galangal) or *kunyit* (turmeric) make lovely bushes on road shoulders or dividers.

Of course, it would be foolhardy to grow a durian tree anywhere near civilisation because of the unpredictability of falling fruits.

But mangosteens, buah sentul or even cashew trees would do little harm and are better

than yellow flames or the brittle *angsan*.

Today, if you want to look for a particular fruit, you would have to wait for it to be in season to find it at the hawker stalls, and some are not even homegrown.

Otherwise, you may have to visit the arboretum at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia.

And if you can't find them there, like the rarer *buah keranji* (velvet tamarind) or *buah belinjau* (gnetum gnemon), you may have to drive to the less developed parts of the country.