

Small producers find it difficult to sell their wonderful products. Consumers lose out because so much good stuff just doesn't reach them. *Civil Society* happily makes the connection so that everyone benefits. Here is how you can pick up some traditional rice and, better still, gift it.

A GIFT OF RICE

FROM Onam to Pongal is the festive season when we meet and greet friends and families. We agonize over the right gift. Will it be this or that? A sari or a shirt? A tablet? Chocolates, maybe?

Instead of picking from a medley of typical stuff, opt for an unusual gift — a box of wondrous rice varieties, brimming with health and organic goodness. After all, the aroma and satiety which a plate of rice offers is still unmatched.

Choose from an assortment of beautifully packed gift boxes thoughtfully curated by Sempulam Sustainable Solutions, which works with small farmers who cultivate long forgotten rice varieties organically.

India once had millions of extraordinary varieties of rice which could survive drought and floods. Rice, it is said, originated in India. But over the years older rice strains have been ousted by a handful of varieties aggressively promoted by commercial interests. Reviving some of them has been a delicate and tough task for Sempulam and the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS).

The good news is that you now have a choice. You can look beyond Basmati and Sonamasuri and pick and choose the rice best suited to your health profile. Here is an array of interesting options on offer.

The Pride of Tamil Nadu Rice Gift Box has 38 sample varieties, each weighing 100 gm and unique to one of the 38 districts in the state. It costs ₹1,800. The box is emblematic of the rich biodiversity of Tamil Nadu and its hardworking farmers. The festival of Pongal in Tamil Nadu coincides with the harvesting season of rice. It is a celebration of rice, the state's staple food.

If you are a rice connoisseur, opt for the Luxury Collection Gift Box for ₹675. Rich in flavour, it comprises six varieties, each with a distinct taste. Kitchili Samba is an easily digestible and high energy rice. Kuzhiyadihan is calcium-rich and ideal for porridge and sweet Pongal, and Kulakar is a low glycemic variety which can be converted into *idlis* and is excellent for diabetics.

Or savour the fragrance of rice with the Aromatic Collection Rice Gift Box. It has six varieties with delicate flavours and is high in nutrition and medicinal value. Try a forbidden rice from the fields of Manipur. Sample a rare variety grown only in a single district in Kerala. Experience an aromatic rice that was enjoyed by the Buddha himself, and

carried by monks to remind them of the Enlightened One. For just ₹800.

The box includes the famed Kalanamak, a mineral-rich variety from the Gorakhpur region. Mullan Kaima is an aromatic variety, infused with Vitamin A and minerals, from the Wayanad region of Kerala. Chakhao Poireiton is an aromatic, exotic black sticky rice from Manipur, rich in antioxidants, anthocyanins and fibre. There is the famous Gobindobhog, a protein- and fibre-rich variety with aroma from West Bengal.

Also available is the Women's Special Gift Box for ₹750. It contains the deliciously aromatic Seeraga Samba Raw Rice, known to have a calming effect. It's high in iron and calcium. The other boiled rice, Sivappu Kuruvikar, is an iron-rich variety. Also included are protein-rich amaranth seeds, that keep your bones healthy and prevent osteoporosis. And there are Salem Samba Rice Flakes along with a pack of organic jaggery.

Boost your resistance to illness with the Immunity Collection Rice Gift Box. It has six traditional varieties. Navara is high in iron and calcium, and builds immunity against respiratory disorders. Kattu Yanam has potassium, iron, calcium, magnesium, zinc and phosphorus. Soorankuruvai too has calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium and zinc and is well suited for diabetic patients. There is also Kaivara Samba, Kalanamak and Karuppu Kowni.

Also included is The Red Rice Collection, for ₹675, which has six red rice varieties with medicinal and nutritive properties that cleanse the blood, improve metabolism and fight aging: Kuzhiyadihan is rich in antioxidants and calcium. Kullakar has iron and zinc. Mappillai

Samba is a low glycemic index variety. Poovan Samba is protein-rich. Iravai Pandi has a high content of calcium, phosphorus and minerals.

The Mother and Child Collection contains a set of delicious, nutritious and easy to digest rice varieties ideally suited for children, young mothers, and mothers-to-be. It is priced at ₹675.

The Anudhinam Rice Box has 30 rice varieties, each with its own distinct aroma, taste, vitamin index, antioxidant properties, immunity builders, low glycemic index and much more. This collection, which costs ₹1,199, comes from the Northeast, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. All the packs are hygienically vacuum packed and meet food safety standards. ■



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