



KALANAMAK
Fragrant variety;
grows well in
saline soil

Rice buffet

Choose a traditional rice variety to suit your dietary needs

BY HEMA VIJAY

Even as late as in the 1990s, two lakh indigenous varieties of rice were being cultivated in India. Such diversity implied that if a person wished to try a new rice variety every day, he could live for over 500 years without needing to repeat one. And, during Vedic times, there were four lakh native rice types in India, as estimated by eminent rice scientist R.H. Richaria.

Even more consequential is the fact that Ayurveda and Siddha texts ascribe an impressive array of therapeutic and nutritional benefits to many indigenous rice varieties. Some increase immunity, some help build muscle mass while others rejuvenate hair growth and cure skin diseases and some are used in eye therapy. Ironically, despite this abundance, most of us settle for just one or two rather mediocre rice varieties through our entire life.

Thanks to organisations like

the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS), Chennai, indigenous rice varieties may yet see a revival. CIKS is documenting and researching the nutritional and therapeutic properties of native paddy varieties. It has just concluded a pilot project, supported by HIVOS and Oxfam-Novib. Both organisations are based in The Netherlands; HIVOS is an international development organisation, while Oxfam-Novib is Oxfam's Dutch arm. The research has thrown up amazing findings which prompt a rethink on our choice of rice.

CIKS discovered that iron content in the Karungkuruvai variety is more than four times that in Ponnai; the former has higher energy and calcium content, too. Neelam Samba was found to be rich in calcium.

