

Amber Rice, Vegetables and Fruits with Terms in Arabic Dialects

by **Wafaa' Al-Natheema**

Translated by
Osama AttarBashi
Misbah Kamal

This modest study presents some integrated information about agriculture and food, taking into consideration few agricultural products in Iraq like Anber Rice, vegetables and fruits, how they are cultivated and the problems affecting productivity. The study attempts to explain the health benefits of some vegetables and the proper way to cook them.

This will hopefully be the first of a series of articles about agricultural production and food in the Arab world aiming to enlighten the public, especially the youth and women, how to cultivate different agricultural crops, achieve self sufficiency and to choose and prepare healthy food. Each article will contain a table of literary and colloquial Arabic and English terms related to the subject discussed.

Rice Cultivation & Production in Iraq

The aroma of Anber rice as I remember it in Iraq in the 60s and 70s of the last century was quite distinct. Whenever this type of rice was cooked, a relaxing and appetizing aroma spread outside the house.

Last year when we were celebrating the International Seed Day on 26 of April, Anber rice was mentioned in some e-mail. Until then I did not realize that Anber rice was cultivated in Iraq during the international embargo on Iraq [August 1990-May 2003], but after several investigations, lasting more than one year, it became clear that Anber rice was really cultivated in Iraq, although in lesser quantities than before; this was because the flow of irrigation water in the 1990s during the rice cultivation season was insufficient, which made the Ministry of Agriculture to decide to decrease the lands for planting rice by 50% and push farmers to grow other crops that require less water than rice like

other grains (wheat, barley and others). Rice seeds require plenty of water and daily irrigation. Initially, the plant needs to be submersed in water for about 20 days. The whole period of cultivation is about 130 days. All this makes rice a very water consuming plant. The highest production of rice was in Diwaniya and Najaf areas of the south where the best types of rice used to be grown.

In the early years of the embargo (1990-1994) rice production was more or less constant at about 200 thousand tons per year although during the same period the cultivated area increased from 85,000 hectare in 1992 to 100,000 hectare in 1994, but in 1995 & 1996 there was a significant leap in the area cultivated and in production, the first increasing to 148,000 hectare and production reaching 300-350 thousand tons. This level of production was maintained for the next 4 years (1995-1999) at approximately 300,000 tons annually.

The following years (2000-2003) were years of drought, so the cultivated areas slumped to 100,000 hectares and rice production especially declined in 2001 and 2002 to 150-170 thousand tons.

When we compare these production figures, affected by the reduced availability of water, with what happened after the 2003 occupation and the severe water shortage of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, we notice the continued decline in rice production. In 2006, for instance, the rice-cultivated area in Najaf was 186,247 donums and production was 141595 tons, and in Diwaniya the cultivated area was 145,112 donums and production was 114,462 tons; whereas in 2009 the rice-cultivated area in Najaf dropped to 173,639 donums and in Diwaniya became 111,599 donums, knowing that in Iraq a donum equals 2500 square meters (its measurement differs in other Arab countries) and one hectare is about 4 donums.

The Iraqi city of Nasiriyah (ThiQar) has been the most severely affected southern city in terms of rice production; the cultivated area in 2006 was 26,525 donums whereas in 2009 it sharply decreased to only 4,394 donums, while Diyala governorate (in central Iraq) was the most affected Iraqi city and water shortage there became an emergency. The rice production area there provides sufficient evidence on the dire situation facing Diyala's people. It dropped from 61,219 donums in 2006 to no production in 2009. Diyala, with its beautiful orchards, used to be known as the 'City of Oranges' for the quality of its oranges, other citrus fruits and pomegranates.

Since 2004 water resources began diminishing because of the drop in the level of waters in the rivers and in the rainfall. This forced rice producers to use 'Shital' or seedling planting where instead of planting seeds they use seedlings. This saves about 10-20% of water requirement, as seedlings, unlike the planting of seeds, do not require to be constantly immersed in water. This Rice Intensifying System (RIS) also reduces the percentage of seeds per donum, therefore it improves efficiency of production. This method was used in Simawa (Al-Muthana governorate) in 2008 and in Najaf and Diwanya (Qadisiya governorate) in 2009 and the outcome was reported to be successful, but no statistics are available to judge its degree of success.

Vegetable & Fruit Production in Iraq

The production of vegetables and fruits in Iraq is directly affected by wars, the level of water in the rivers and the amount of annual rainfall. During the first three years of the sanctions 1990-1993 Iraq imported some of its agricultural produce from Jordan, but in general and since the end of 1993 till 2000 imports of vegetables stopped and all requirements were provided by local production.

When I used to visit Iraq during the years of the embargo, I was amazed by the taste of the fruits and vegetables there in contrast to the USA where they are tasteless, odourless, and sometimes they have unusual colour. I still remember the sweet taste of carrot and the delicious lettuce with its long leaves forming a green-yellow rainbow. After inquiring from the specialists I realized that they all were produced from local seeds and few of the carrot seeds were imported. Fortunately after the 2003 occupation, most of the following vegetables are still produced from local seeds and so Iraqis should continue using them because they are healthier and to give a boost to the local economy:

Okra, parsley, coriander, dill, cress , leek* , mint, basil , spinach and sour orange.

But unfortunately, after the [2003] occupation, the majority of lettuce and carrot seeds were imported. The same was the case with radish, cauliflower, tomatoes and green beans. As to eggplant, the majority of its seeds are produced locally. During the year 2005-2006 five tons was grown from local seeds, although local demand stood at nine tons. Also, most cucumber seeds have been imported and in the same year, production of cucumber from local seeds was eleven tonnes whereas fifty-five tons was needed!

* The green part without the white top.

Beetroot & Spinach

Lately, I became more interested in spinach and beets for health reasons; both are still planted with Iraqi seeds.

It is known among the scientific community that people eating what is planted in their own environment and consumed in its season is healthiest. Beetroot has the property of fighting cancer-causing substances and has a high percentage of carbohydrate and low calories, making it an excellent diet for weight loss. Beetroot is also a good source of folic acid, vitamin C and is rich in antioxidants, which help to lower cholesterol and thus avoid heart disease. Many scientific experiments have demonstrated that beetroot reduces the risk of colon cancer. It contains betacyanine, a substance that gives the red dye to beetroot, absorbed by blood cells – a process that increases the oxygen-carrying capability of blood by 400%.

Farmers should be advised not to remove the green leaves from the crop so that they are sold together with the rounded red roots because these leaves are rich in potassium, calcium, iron and vitamin C.

The green leaves can be steamed for ten minutes to which lemon and olive oil or grated cheese is added and eaten with the main dishes. Beetroot and its green leaves is one of the most important vegetables for women during the post-menstrual period for the reasons mentioned above and for containing a good proportion of calcium that women need particularly in this period. Beetroot also contains vitamin A.

In general, the growing season and harvesting of beetroot is May to December. In Iraq, it is October and November. Beetroot matures in two or three months after planting; it is harvested when the diameter of the red root is between 5 to 8 centimetres. That is why it is best to eat beets in this period, cooked from fresh, not canned. In case of having to use canned beetroot, it is best to use the one preserved in glass jar.

As for Spinach, it is an excellent source of vitamins B6, C, K and E, magnesium, folic acid, iron and calcium. It is also a good source of protein with abundant fibre. For those who wish to eat less or no red meat, spinach is a good alternative. Spinach is grown in Iraq in October and November. It is easy to grow in house gardens. A weekly intake of spinach is very healthy.

Spinach, like beetroot, is high in antioxidants, which help avoid heart disease and cancer. It also contains beta-carotene and this together with vitamin C protects the intestine and colon cells. Iron is useful for

anaemia and for women during the menstrual cycle. Being calcium-rich, spinach is essential for women during menopause when many are exposed to significant shortfall in bone density. Moreover, vitamin K reduces the activity of those cells that weaken the bone while the good bacteria in the intestines transforms vitamin K1 to K2, which stimulates the Osteocalcin protein in the bones.

The best way to eat spinach is when it is fresh and raw in salads because the chlorophyll and vitamins A and C are burnt out in cooking. As with all green leafy vegetables, spinach should be marinated in a solution of water and white vinegar (with 5% acidity) for a quarter of an hour to sterilize and then washed ready for use in salads. For doubling the benefit, salad should be made with uncooked spinach, boiled beetroot, and relished with any kind of berries or pomegranate, lemon and olive oil.

The other good way of cooking spinach is by steaming in a perforated wooden bowl (after the Chinese and Japanese style) or in a metal strainer over a pan with water boiling for ten minutes or less, then eaten with lemon and olive oil alone or with main dishes such as potatoes and fish.

Main Indicators for Paddy and Sunflower Crops by Governorate for the Year 2006

المؤشرات الرئيسية لمحصولي الشلب وزهرة الشمس حسب المحافظة لسنة 2006						
MAIN INDICATORS FOR PADDY AND SUN FLOWER CROPS BY GOVERNORATE FOR THE YEAR 2006						
Table (3/4)						جدول (4/3)
Governorate	Sun Flower	زهرة الشمس		Paddy		الشلب
	الغلة (كغ/دونم)	الانتاج (طن)	المساحة المزروعة (دونم)	الغلة (كغ/دونم)	الانتاج (طن)	المساحة المزروعة (دونم)
	Yield (Kg/donum)	Production (Ton)	Cultivated Area (donum)	Yield (Kg/donum)	Production (Ton)	Cultivated Area (donum)
Nineveh	398.4	1381	3466	--	--	--
Kirkuk	438.4	5950	13571	--	--	--
Diala	442.0	656	1484	771.6	47235	61219
Al-Anbar	--	--	--	--	--	--
Baghdad	285.6	3343	11706	--	--	--
Babylon	320.2	741	2314	725.1	7777	10725
Kerbela	--	--	--	--	--	--
Wasit	345.0	2568	7443	469.2	13319	28389
Salah AL-Deen	505.1	3797	7517	--	--	--
Al-Najaf	--	--	--	759.5	141595	186427
Al-Qadisiya	588.2	120	204	816.3	118462	145112
Al-Muthanna	--	--	--	623.2	10255	16455
Thi-Qar	--	--	--	444.8	11799	26525
Maysan	391.3	9	23	465.3	12896	27713
Basrah	--	--	--	--	--	--
Kurdistan Region:						
Duhok	--	--	--	--	--	--
Arbil	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sulaimaniya	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total	389.0	18565	47728	723.0	363338	502565

Source: MoP/COSIT/Iraq

Source: Mop: Ministry of Planning COSIT: Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology

Table Number 7 [Taken from a source containing other tables]
Area (in donum) Planted with Rice by Governorate

جدول رقم (7) المساحة المزروعة بالشلب (بالدونم) حسب المحافظات لسنة 2009

التسلسل	المحافظة	المساحة المزروعة بالشلب / بالدونم	النسبة %
1	نينوى	30	0.01
2	كركوك	-	-
3	ديالى	-	-
4	الانبار	-	-
5	بغداد	-	-
6	بابل	3665	1.08
7	كربلاء	-	-
8	واسط	-	-
9	صلاح الدين	-	-
10	النجف	173639	51.2
11	القادسية	111599	32.9
12	العتشى	12046	3.6
13	ذي قار	4394	1.3
14	ميسان	33088	9.8
15	البصرة	582	0.2
	المجموع	339043	100

Multilingual Glossary of Fruit & Vegetable

As part of my interest in nutrition and its health impact on the mind and body, I began to collect information on grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits, and their names in literary and vernacular Arabic and in English.

The table below lists the names of some fruits and vegetables in English, literary Arabic and their equivalent in Iraqi, Moroccan and Lebanese dialects.

I hope that readers will provide us with the colloquial terms of these vegetables and fruit in other countries.

Fruit/ Vegetable	Literary Arabic	Iraqi Vernacular	Lebanese Vernacular	Moroccan Vernacular	English
V	--	Bezalya	Bezella	Jelbana	Peas
F	Batteekh	Reggi	Batteekh	Dallaa'	Watermelon
V	--	Temata	Banadoura	Matteesha	Tomatoes
F	Batteekh Asfar	Batteekh	Shammam	Mooska	Cantaloupe
F	Teen	Teen	Teen	Karmoos	Fig
V	Jazar	Jizar	Zhazar	Khizzoo	Carrot
F	--	Yengidinya	Akkidinya	Limzaah	Loquant
V	Karnab/Malfoof	Lahhana	Malfoof	Limkewar*	Cabbage
V	Shmander - Benjer	Shwender	Shmander	Barba	Beetroot
V	?	Ma'danoos	Ba'doonis	Ma'danoos	Parsley
V	?	Kuzbara	Kizbara	Qazboor	Coriander
V	Sabanikh	Sbaynagh	Sabanikh	Lizbeinakh	Spinach
V	Bamyaa'	Bamya	Bamya	Milookhiyya	Okra
V	Khiyar	Khiyar	Khiyar	Khiyar	Cucumber
V	Zaytoon	Zaytoon	Zaytoon	Zaytoon	Olives

Note on the pronunciation of some terms in the above table.

* Pronounced by emphasizing on the letter 'w'

1. The 'g' in the above terms is pronounced as the 'g' in 'garden'
2. The 'kh' is pronounced as the 'ch' in Bach
3. The 'gh' is pronounced like the French 'r'
4. The 'Zh' is pronounced as the 'zh' in Zhivago

The planting of *barba* (beetroot) started in Morocco for the first time in 1963.

References

1. Dr. Nakid Khamees Al-Tamimi, Seeds Expert and Project Manager, FAO (UN Food & Agricultural Organisation)

2. International measurements of *donum* in English
<http://wapedia.mobi/en/Dunam>

* In Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan one donum equals 1000 square meters.

3. The benefits of beetroot http://hubpages.com/hub/Health_Benefits_of_Red_Beets

4. Dr. Saleh Bader, Director General, General Organisation for Agricultural Research, IRAQ (since 2004)

© Copyright the Institute of Near Eastern & African Studies (INEAS), 2010.
All rights reserved for INEAS, 2010.