

For the Love of Lychee

STORY BY CHERYL MARTIN



According to ancient Chinese culture, the lychee fruit (*Litchi chinensis*) is a mythological symbol of romance, beauty and good luck. Recorded accounts seemingly support this belief, like with the story of Teng Pao, a 5th century Chinese emperor whose favorite concubine was very fond of lychee. The emperor would send runners over 800 miles to obtain the fruit from the southern regions of China where it is said the best lychee grew. With tireless devotion, the runners would return with bundles of the exquisite fruit, just for the emperor's lover.

While China is still considered the world's leading producer of lychee, cultivation has spread throughout many varying regions, thriving in warm sub-tropical areas like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Queensland, Philippines, Madagascar and Brazil. Spelling and pronunciation of the fruit differs throughout many parts of the world, some variations include *leechi*, *litchi*, *laichi*, *lichu*, *lizhi*. Here in Hawai'i, lychee grows well under the island's favorable weather. Belonging to the Sapindaceae genus, lychee trees are considered evergreens that can grow to be tall and beautiful, some reaching heights of over

40 feet. The fruit itself is aesthetically interesting; lychees are roundish oval in shape, about 1½ to 2 inches in size, with a red-colored exterior that is bumpy in texture. Before eating, you must peel off the skin to attain the translucent, whitish-pink flesh that is juicy and glossy, much like the consistency of a grape.

If you've never tried lychee, you may wonder what it tastes like. Its flavor is completely unique and hard to describe, though some compare it to a fusion of strawberry and grape. Overall, lychees are sub-acid sweet with a very fresh and crisp taste. The fruit is an ideal choice for dessert or as a palate cleanser. Many lychee lovers in Hawai'i deem that the best varieties are those that retain their juices within the flesh of the fruit. Fresh lychee eaten straight off the tree is always best, but it can also be used to complement different foods and fruit blends. Favored recipes (some may seem bizarre) include lychees stuffed with cottage cheese, or mayonnaise and cheese, lychee-lime gelatin, and lychee lettuce salads. The exotic flavor is also an island favorite for sorbets, ice cream, smoothies, and adult drinks like infused martinis. Packing vitamins A, C, and potassium, it's a fruit that not only tastes good, but also is good for you.

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Lychee is known to have many medicinal values. Due to its high potassium content, lychee can help support a healthy nervous system, promoting regular heart rhythm, proper muscle contraction and control over the body's water balance. It can also decrease the chance of a stroke. The fruit contains an abundant amount of polyphenols, a beneficial plant compound that is known for its antioxidant and anti-aging properties. High levels of polyphenols make fruits "super" fruits," like mangosteen, pomegranate and açai. Through studies by pharmaceutical and nutraceutical manufacturers, we have begun to discover even more health and beauty benefits from the lychee fruit.



One manufacturer, Amino Up Chemical Company, is based out of Hokkaido, Japan and has discovered a way to extract polyphenol concentrates from lychee fruits. The company explains that when eaten conventionally, lychee may add some health benefits; however, the human body cannot easily absorb high levels of polyphenol in this form. Because of this, Amino Up created a polyphenol extract taken from lychee, which has a low molecular weight that the body can easily absorb once consumed. This increases the spread of the beneficial extracts. During 10 scientific trials, Amino Up looked at a number of different health conditions and used the extracts to create a supplement called *Oligonol*. Clinical studies proved staggering effects, all stemming from one important factor: researchers believe that compounds found in *Oligonol* can increase blood flow. The *Oligonol* supplement gently and effectively relaxes blood vessels, thereby increasing blood flow throughout the body. This could potentially generate impressive results, from reducing cardiovascular risks, diminishing tiredness and fatigue, to increasing skin beautification, anti-aging properties, and improving metabolic syndrome.

In a separate study done by the Department of Medical Management and Informatics at the Hokkaido University in Japan, it was discovered that by using *Oligonol* extracts, we may be able to prevent and treat obesity in many adults. In one trial, a group of healthy adults were asked to consume *Oligonol* while another group took

a placebo for a period of 10 weeks. The treated group experienced an average 12% reduction in visceral belly fat, a 3-cm reduction in their waist circumference and a decrease in body weight compared to baseline levels. This demonstrates that lychee extracts could potentially assist in preventing health epidemics caused from obesity, such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease and Alzheimer's—another big step in this "super food" discovery.

But the results don't stop there—lychee has also been proven to have positive effects when it comes to beauty. Because *Oligonol* stimulates blood flow, it is believed to increase anti-aging properties and improve skin conditions. After several tests, the supplement is said to have decreased facial breakouts, acne and even reduce the appearance of wrinkles and freckles on female test subjects. Over a period of time, women who consumed *Oligonol* claimed that they noticed better elasticity in their skin, making their appearance more vibrant, healthy and youthful. The *Oligonol* supplement has racked up several accolades over the past few years, including the 2008 Nutracon Award for "Top Science-Backed Product of the Year" and the "Scientific Excellent Award" by SupplySide West in 2011. It's amazing to think that just one fruit could contain so many useful properties. Whether enjoying lychee for its sweet and succulent taste or as a supplement to optimize your health, this is one exotic fruit that is worth trying. From its beautifying properties to incredible medicinal value, the Chinese may have had it right—lychee is definitely a fruit worth savoring.

With only 125 calories, one cup of fresh lychees has more vitamin C than oranges or lemons and approximately the same dietary fiber as an apple with the skin on and is potassium rich. Always consult your physician before starting any new treatments including natural supplements. The claims by Oligonol have not been evaluated by the FDA. For more information, visit www.qol.us.com.



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