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Deliciously tangy and one of the most highly prized natural foods in South Asia, the tamarind is gaining recognition and appreciation throughout the world. Its botanical name is

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exceptionally tall trees of the Fabaceae family, such as peas, beans and other legumes mostly in the warmer, dryer areas of Asia, Mexico and India.

Tamarind trees produce an abundance of long, curved, brown pods filled with small brown seeds surrounded by a sticky pulp that dehydrates naturally to a sticky paste. The pods look like huge, brown, overly mature green beans.

After harvest, tamarinds are sometimes shelled in preparation for export where they are often pressed into balls and layered with sugary water or syrup or sometimes salted.

Like most ancient foods, tamarind has a long history of medicinal uses. Many involve easing stomach discomfort, aiding digestion and use as a laxative. Tamarind preparations are used for fevers, sore throat, rheumatism, inflammation and sunstroke. Dried or boiled tamarind leaves and flowers are made into poultices for swollen joints, sprains, boils, haemorrhoids and conjunctivitis.

Similar to the natural gums and pectin found in other foods, the sticky pulp contributes to its dietary fibre content. They bind with bile to help flush waste through the colon, decreasing the chances of it sticking around.