

Saffron - the most expensive spice in the world

**Authors: Balan Anastasia
Bahău Căţalina
Ling. cons: L. Plămădeală**

The following work relates to the precious Iranian Natural spice - called Red Gold or Saffron, which has wide utilization because of its natural coloring, aroma, taste, and different chemical substances.

The cultivation of saffron reaches back more than 4000 years, and even in Egyptian mummies fragments of saffron have been found. Due to its strong, exotic aroma and bitter taste, saffron is named among the sweet-smelling herbs in the Song of Solomon. A golden-colored water soluble fabric dye was distilled from saffron stigmas in India in ancient times. Shortly after Buddha died, his priests made saffron the official color for their vestment [1].

Saffron cultivation is made on a cyclical basis, and after the lapse of seven to nine years, the land in question should be switched to another crop such as grains for a period of approximately seven years to allow the land to restore its lost nutrients. It takes about 150.000 fresh flowers which weigh approximately 1 kg to get only 150 g of dry flowers of saffron that explains its value and price.

The substances in saffron which produce its special and desirable properties are: crocin for colour, picrocrocin for flavour and saffron for aroma. These substances add the unique quality to food and beverages. Saffron is used sparingly, and it is also important to note it is toxic and consequences which have been recorded from consuming as little as 1.5 g of pure saffron [2].

Scientific research shows that saffron has many medicinal effects such as prevention and treatment of digestive, respiratory, heart problems and cancer.

The use of saffron in the cosmetic industry is now improving just because saffron is a natural product

removes pimples. Centuries ago in Asia the women used saffron as a paste for their beauty; also pregnant women were drinking saffron solution with milk for golden skin of infant.

In antiquity, saffron was a very rare and expensive substance and also the color it produced signified a high statue or royalty. Only one unit of saffron is enough to color 100 000 units of water. For this reason saffron is also used in dairy products such as butter, cheese, also margarines as well as in confectionary, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and as a coloring agent for sausages [3].

Saffron is the most valuable crop species in the world and is the only plant whose product which is an important export commodity. It has great significance in Iran's agricultural economy because this country is a leading one in this domain: at present Iran with production of 65% of the world saffron is ranked as the largest producer.

Bibliography:

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