

ACEROLA

Family: Malpighiaceae

Genus: Malpighia

Species: glabra

Ethnic Names: Acerola, Cereso, Barbados Cherry, Antilles Cherry

Part Used: Fruit

DESCRIPTION	
Properties/Actions:	Astringent, Nutritive
Phytochemicals:	Ascorbic-acid, Dextrose, Calcium, Fructose, Iron, l-Malic Acid, Magnesium, Niacin, Pantothenic-acid, Phosphorus, Potassium, Protein, Riboflavin, Sucrose, Thiamine

Malpighia glabra is small tree or shrub that grows up to 5 meters in height in the dry deciduous forest and can be found growing wild and under cultivation on the sandy soils throughout Northeast Brazil. It is native to the West Indies and is also found in northern South America, Central America and Jamaica. Acerola is the fruit of the tree. It is bright red and 1 to 2 cm in diameter with several small seeds and has an appearance similar to the European Cherry. Acerola is also known as "Antilles Cherry" or "Barbados Cherry." The mature fruits are juicy and soft with a pleasant tart flavor and they contains about 80% juice and a large amount of vitamin C as well as iron, calcium and phosphorous.

The Vitamin C content of Acerola varies depending on ripeness, seasons, climate and localities and the vitamin C content is the highest while the fruit is still green. As the fruit begins to ripen, it loses a great deal of its vitamin content, and for this reason, much of the Acerola harvested is harvested green. Until camu-camu appeared on the scene, Acerola was considered the richest known source of Vitamin C, Oranges provide 500 to 4,000 parts per million Vitamin C or ascorbic acid, while Acerola has assayed in a range of 16,000 to 172,000 parts per million ascorbic acid. Acerola can be up to 4.5% Vitamin C compared to 0.05% in a peeled orange. Compared to oranges, Acerola provides twice as much magnesium, pantothenic-acid, and potassium. Other vitamins present include Vitamin A (4,300-12,500 IU/100g compared to approx 11,000 IU for raw carrots), thiamine, riboflavin and niacin in concentrations comparable to those in other fruits.

It's western use is mostly associated with its high content of vitamin C, which has come under a great deal of recent attention as a free radical scavenger due to its antioxidant properties. *Malpighia glabra* has also shown active anti-fungal properties. It can now be found in many over-the counter supplements in America as a natural form of Vitamin C in multi-vitamins. Recent research in cosmetology indicates that vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant and free radical scavenger for the skin as well. For this reason Acerola extracts are now appearing in skin care products which fight cellular aging. In addition to its vitamin content, Acerola contains mineral salts which has shown to aid in the remineralization of tired and stressed skin, while the mucilage and proteins have skin hydrating properties and promote capillary conditioning.

References/Footnotes:

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