

## DOES THE COLOUR REALLY MATTER WHEN PURCHASING PALM OIL?

Palm oil is a staple in many Ghanaian households, prized for its rich flavour and versatility in cooking. But when it comes to buying palm oil, many consumers often focus on its colour, assuming that the redness of the oil equates to better taste and higher quality. However, the Food and Drugs Authority would like to shed light on some misconceptions surrounding the colour of palm oil.

Palm oil comes in various shades of red, ranging from light reddish-orange to deep red. This variation in colour is often due to factors such as the type of palm fruit used, the processing method, and the oil's exposure to heat. In the Ghanaian market, you may encounter different shades of palm oil, but it is essential to understand that these colour differences do not affect the taste or nutritional value or health benefits of the oil.

In Ghana, the primary types of oil palm fruits are Dura, Tenera, and Pisifera, each producing palm oil with different shades of red. Dura fruits yield deep orange-red oil due to high carotenoid content, while Tenera, a hybrid variety (locally called, "Agric"), produces a higher yield of oil with bright reddish-orange colour. Pisifera, mainly used for breeding, results in lighter reddish-orange oil with lower carotenoid levels and is less common for oil extraction.

The colour of palm oil can also vary based on factors such as soil composition, climate, and the ripeness of the fruits. These variations in colour do not significantly affect the oil's nutritional value or quality.

Unfortunately, some traders and consumers believe that palm oil with a deep red colour is of higher quality. This misconception sometimes leads unscrupulous sellers to add artificial colouring agents, such as Sudan IV dye, to enhance the redness of the oil, and thus, appeal more to consumers. Sudan IV dye is a synthetic dye used industrially in the manufacturing of shoe polish, textiles, and plastics to give them a vibrant red colour. Sudan IV dye is not a food additive and **MUST NOT** be found in food products, including palm oil. The dye is not edible and poses significant health risks when ingested. Its application in food is not permitted and is considered a contaminant. When intentionally and secretly added to palm oil or any other food to enhance colour and deceive consumers to believe it is the natural colour of the product, it is termed *adulteration*.

It is important to note that there is currently no reliable rapid test available for detecting this dye in palm oil at the market level. The only accurate way to test for the presence of Sudan IV dye is through laboratory analysis, which involves sophisticated equipment and procedures. This means that consumers and retailers cannot easily check for this adulterant on the spot. Therefore, it is crucial for consumers to purchase palm oil from trusted and reputable sources and be cautious of oil that appears unnaturally red.

The consumption of palm oil adulterated with Sudan IV dye can have dire health consequences. It is classified as a carcinogen, meaning it could increase the risk of developing cancer. Additionally, prolonged exposure to this dye may damage internal organs, including the liver and kidneys, leading to chronic health issues.

In Ghana, palm oil adulteration with Sudan dye, like any other form of food fraud is a crime, punishable by imprisonment.

The FDA Ghana strongly advises consumers to be vigilant when purchasing palm oil. If you notice that the palm oil from the same source or vendor is unusually red, it is better to avoid it. When in doubt, it is best to avoid purchasing the product and seek palm oil from trusted sources that guarantee purity and quality. Your health is far more important than the colour of the oil, so always prioritize safety over aesthetics.

While the colour of palm oil may be pleasing to the eye, it should not be the deciding factor when purchasing this essential cooking ingredient. The redness of the oil does not contribute to its taste or nutritional value. Instead, focus on buying from reputable sellers who prioritize your health and well-being. The FDA Ghana urges all consumers to be aware of the potential dangers of Sudan IV dye and to make informed choices when buying palm oil. Your health is your wealth—choose wisely!