



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ackee:

A handful of islands grow ackee as an ornamental tree, but only Jamaica looks at it as a tree that bears edible fruit.

The ackee fruit is bright red. When ripe it bursts open to reveal three large black seeds and bright yellow flesh that is popular as a breakfast food throughout Jamaica.

Ackee's scientific name, blighiasapida, comes from Captain Bligh, who introduced the plant to Jamaica from West Africa. Ackee is sold canned in West Indian markets.

Allspice, Pimienta:

Dark-brown berry, similar in size to juniper, that combines the flavors of cinnamon, clove and nutmeg.

Annatto:

This slightly musky-flavored reddish yellow spice, ground from the seeds of a flowering tree, is native to the West Indies and the Latin tropics. Islanders store their annatto seeds in oil--giving the oil a beautiful color. Saffron or turmeric can be substituted.

Arañitas:

Fried "spiders" made of julienne strips of green plantains.

Arrowroot:

Is a starch extract of the root of a tropical plant native to the Americas called maranta. Arrowroot is used for thickening sauces, juices and syrups; when heated the starch turns to jelly and so thickens the liquid. Its great advantage over cornflour is that it's completely tasteless (whereas cornflour can need cooking to get rid of its 'raw' taste) and gives a clear finish when used to thicken certain soups, fruit syrups or sauces.

Avocado:

Nature's butter, is very popular throughout the caribbean. Avocados grow on long stems and do not ripen on the tree, therefore they are always firm when harvested.

**Bammy:**

Is a traditional Jamaican deep-fried cassava flatbread. It is made from grated cassava root flour and salt. The mixture is lightly fried (usually in coconut oil), soaked in coconut milk or water and fried again. Visitors to Jamaica have described it as "fried cassava cakes dripping in butter".

Bay Rum:

The bay rum tree is related to the evergreen that produces allspice. Used to flavor soups, stews and, particularly, blaff, the small dark bay rum berry is called "maleguetta pepper" in the French West Indies.

Breadfruit:

Breadfruit was also introduced to Jamaica from its native Tahiti in 1793 by the infamous Captain Bligh. The breadfruit is a large green fruit, usually about 10 inches in diameter, with a pebbly green skin and potato-like flesh. Breadfruit are not edible until they are cooked and they can be used in place of any starchy vegetable, rice or pasta. Breadfruit is picked and eaten before it ripens and is typically served like squash--baked, grilled, fried, boiled or roasted after being stuffed with meat. It's even been known to turn up in preserves or in a beverage.

Bulla:

Is a firm flat round cake made from sugar, spice and flour.

Bun:

Bun is similiar to a sweet bread with currants. Often eaten with cheese as a sandwich of two slices of bun. This very popular snack is typically Jamaican.

Callaloo:

Spelled half a dozen different ways, this colorful word turns up in Jamaican records as early as 1696. This leafy, spinach-like vegetable is typical prepared as one would prepare turnip or collard greens. This variety of callaloo (*Amaranthus viridis*), better known



as Chinese spinach or Indian kale, should not be confused with the callaloo found in the eastern Caribbean, which refers to the leaves of the dasheen plant.

Carambola, Star Fruit:

Tart or acidy-sweet star-shaped fruit used in desserts, as a garnish for drinks, tossed into salads or cooked together with seafood.

Calabaza, West Indian Pumpkin:

Terms for a number of large squashes or pumpkins used in island stews and vegetable dishes. Hubbard and butternut squash are similar in flavor and make the best substitutes.

Cassareep:

Made from the juice of grated cassava root and flavored with cinnamon, cloves and sugar--this is the essential ingredient in pepperpot, the ubiquitous Caribbean island stew.

Cassava:

This tuber is also known as manioc and yuca. A rather large root vegetable with a 6- to 12-inch length and 2- to 3-inch diameter, cassava has a tough brown skin with a very firm white flesh. Both kinds of cassava can appear as meal, tapioca and farina and can be bought ready made as cassava or manioc meal, which is used to make bammie. Sweet cassava is boiled and eaten as a starch vegetable. Bitter cassava contains a poisonous acid that can be deadly and must be processed before it can be eaten. This is done by boiling the root in water for at least 45 minutes (discard the water). Alternatively, grate the cassava and place it in a muslin cloth, then squeeze out as much of the acid as possible before cooking. Bitter cassava is used commercially but is not sold unprocessed in some countries.



Chili Peppers:

Members of the Capsicum genus ranging from medium to fiery hot. Scotch bonnet pepper, the most widely used, can be replaced with serrano, jalapeno or other hot peppers.

Christophine, Chayote, Cho-cho, Mirliton:

A small pear-shaped vegetable, light green or cream colored, and often covered with a prickly skin. Bland, similar in texture to squash and used primarily as a side dish or in gratins and souffles. Like pawpaw (papaya, it is also a meat tenderizer.)

Coconut:

This member of the palm family, which is native to Malaysia, yields fruit all year long. Coconut is edible in both its green and mature forms. Both the water and the "jelly" of the green coconut find their way into island drinks, and meat from the mature coconut gives desserts a Caribbean identity.

Creole, Criolla:

Creole refers to the cooking of the French-speaking West Indies, as well as to southern Louisiana and the Gulf states. Criolla refers to the cuisine of Spanish-speaking islands. Both terms encompass a melding of ingredients and cooking methods from France, Spain, Africa, the Caribbean and America.

Curry:

A leaf which forms part of a generic term for a variety of spiced dishes. Some distinctive spices used in many, though certainly not all, curry dishes include turmeric, cumin, coriander, fenugreek, and red pepper. The word "curry" is derived from the Tamil word kari it literally means 'side-dish', which can be eaten along with a main dish like rice or bread. There are different characteristics between an Indian, Chinese and Caribbean curries.

Edoes/ Coco Yam/ Tannia:

This is a starchy tuber which comes in many varieties and is very versatile.

**Dasheen:**

Also known as coco, taro and tannia, dasheen is a starchy tuber that is usually served boiled or cut up and used as a thickener in hearty soups. While considered by some to have a texture and flavor superior to that of a Jerusalem artichoke or potato. Potatoes can often be used as a substitute for dasheen in recipes. Dasheen is often called coco, but coco is actually a slightly smaller relative of dasheen.

Festival:

Can best be described as a slightly sweet, crispy cornmeal fritter that is frequently served in Jamaica with any Jamaican dish. Festivals go very well with Jerk dishes and spicy fish recipes where the sweet festivals provide a deliciously complementary taste. (See also Dumplings).

Ginger:

The spicy hot, fruity tasting ginger plant is a native of the West Indies but is cultivated in many tropical areas today.

Gizzada:

Is a Jamaican coconut confectionary made from grated coconut and sugar adorned in a flour base made to look like a shallow cup. They are usually brown in colour but can also be white with pink on top.

Green Banana:

Look very much like ripe yellow bananas but are very different in several respects. Most notably their flesh is firm and tastes of starchy rather than soft and sweet like yellow bananas. Green bananas are eaten boiled and usually with some form of meat or relish. The bananas can be boiled with the skin or peeled and then boiled.

Guava, Guayaba:

Tropical fruit that has over a hundred species. It is pear-shaped, round and oval; yellow to green skinned, with creamy yellow, pink or red granular flesh; and has rows of small hard seeds. The smell and taste are intense and perfumy. Guava is used green or ripe in punches, syrups, jams, chutneys, ice creams and an all-island paste known as guava cheese.

**Irish Moss:**

Is a sea weed found along the coast of Jamaica. The weed is dried and used in cosmetics, medicines and as a thickening agent for puddings, ice creams and some soups. Irish moss is also used to make a very popular drink which is said to have aphrodisiac qualities.

Ital (Eye-tal) Food:

Is the food of the Rastafarians, a vegetarian cuisine that does not make use of salt.

Jack Fruit:

Is originally from India, and is one of the largest fruits cultivated in the tropics. Whilst generally consumed as a fruit, once harvested early they can be used as vegetables.

Jerk:

Is a style of cooking native to Jamaica in which meats are dry-rubbed with a fiery spice mixture. The term jerk is originally referred to the process of rubbing spices and acidic hot peppers onto strips of meat in order to tenderize and preserve them. There are many jerk seasoning combinations in the islands, most of which call for scallions, thyme, allspice, hot peppers, onions and garlic. Some jerk recipes use citrus juice or vinegar to add tartness while others use molasses to add sweetness. While jerk also complements fish dishes, it is traditionally used to prepare chicken or pork dishes.

Jonkanoo:

Is thick and extremely hot pepper sauce which is made with a blend of red peppers and spices used to flavour savoury dishes.

June Plum:

Is an oval shaped fruit that has a green skin which turns yellow when ripe. The fruit contains a large, spiky seed.

**Kola Nut:**

Look similar to coffee berries and may be used as a remedy for upset stomach or an antidote for some poisons.

Lemongrass:

Is an herb which has long, thin, gray-green leaves. It is considered one of the most important flavourings in Caribbean cooking.

Limes:

Caribbean limes have light yellow skins when ripe, though they are often picked green because they go bad rapidly when ripe. When overripe, they turn yellow and are an excellent source of vitamin C. For this reason, the popularity of these citrus fruits grew with the realization by the British Navy that they cured scurvy. Now limes are one of the most important ingredients in Jamaican sauces and marinades, and are used to perk up dishes from savory to sweet. Chicken and fish turn glorious with a mere squeeze of lime. And beverages, cakes and preserves wouldn't taste the same without it.

Malanga, Yautia:

A relative of dasheen or taro, this tuber is prevalent throughout the Caribbean.

Mamey Apple:

The large tropical fruit, native to the New World, yields edible pulp that's tangerine in color. With a flavor similar to that of the peach, mamey turns up most often as jam.

Mango:

Actually a native of India, this fruit has come to be known as "the fruit of the tropics." Mangoes are used in a variety of ways in the Caribbean. Green mangoes are used in hot sauces and condiments, while ripe mangoes appear in desserts and candies and in drinks. The best varieties of mango are the Bombay, East Indian, St. Julian and Hayden.

**Nutmeg:**

Caribbean cooks are insistent--when cooking their recipes, skip over the pre-ground nutmeg sold in supermarkets and buy the spice whole, grating it only as needed. Nutmeg, the inner kernel of the fruit is more flavorful when freshly grated. The spicy sweet flavor of this aromatic spice makes it an excellent addition to cakes, puddings and drinks.

Okra, Okroes, Bhindi, Lady's Fingers, Gumbo:

This finger-shaped vegetable, green-ridged and three to five inches in length, is fried as a side dish, used as a thickening agent in callaloo or mixed with cornmeal to make coo-coo.

Otaheiti Apple:

Yet another fruit introduced from the Pacific by Captain Bligh, the pear-shaped otaheiti apple ranges from pink to ruby red in color. This fruit is usually eaten fresh, though it can be packed in red wine or turned into a refreshing cold drink.

Papaya:

This native of South America is still called ""pawpaw"" by some Jamaicans. The papaya has an orange color when ripe, and it's bland flavor resembles that of a summer squash, making it a nice complement to the shaper flavors of other fruits. Green papaya is often used as an ingredient in chutney or relishes and makes a nice main dish when stuffed. When ripe, it is eaten as a melon, or served in fruit salad. Papaya juice makes a nice drink when sweetened with condensed milk or sugar.

Passion Fruit, Maracudja, Granadilla:

Oval-shaped fruit that has a tough shell and a color range from yellow-purple to eggplant to deep chocolate. The golden-yellow pulp is sweet and tropically exotic, and must be strained to remove the seeds. Used primarily in juices, desserts, drinks and sauces.

Pimento:

Just to keep things interesting, Jamaicans call what the world knows as allspice "Pimento"--a word that elsewhere refers o bell peppers or chiles. The more global name



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refers to the allspice berry, which has the taste of nutmeg, cinnamon, black pepper and clove. All the same, Jamaicans deserve a big say in this naming, since all but a tiny bit of pimento is grown in Jamaica, the remainder being grown in southern Cuba. Thanks to its embrace by English and Spanish colonist, allspice is used in numerous Jamaican classics, from Escoveitched Fish to Jerk Pork.

Plantain:

Cousin to the banana-family fruit, but generally regarded as a vegetable. Inedible raw, cooked plantains are served as appetizers or starchy side dishes. The unripe (green), are generally boiled compared to ripe (yellow) and very ripe (dark) plantains are used in Caribbean cooking are fried, roasted or boiled. They become slightly sweet as they ripen.

Roti:

It is a round, thin, flat bread sometime filled with "Dhal" and is usually served wrapped around portions of curried chicken or goat, shrimp, pork or vegetables. Roti is especially popular in Trinidad and Tobago.

Saltfish:

Saltfish is any fried, salted fish, but most often cod. With the increasing availability of fresh fish all over Jamaica, some cooks are moving away from this preserved fish dating back to the days before refrigeration. Still, Jamaicans have a soft place in their hearts for the taste of this salted cod (sold around the world in Italian, Spanish or Portuguese markets under some variant on the name bacalao). Ackee and Saltfish is the preferred breakfast of Jamaicans. When imported saltfish has been unavailable, Jamaicans have been known to make their own from fresh fish.

Scotch Bonnet Peppers/ Lantern Chili:

The fiery Scotch bonnet pepper, ranging in colors from yellow to orange to red, is considered the leading hot pepper in Jamaica, though several other varieties have recently been developed. Some peppers are sold whole, others are dried and ground, and still others are processed into sauces, such as Jamaica Hell Fire. If you can't get your hands (wash them afterward!) on Scotch bonnets, you can substitute habaneros or jalapenos.

**Sorrel:**

Brought from India by way of Malaysia, this unusual plant was introduced to Jamaica by the British soon after 1655. Also known as roselle and appealingly, flor de Jamaica, sorrel always blooms in December, when its deep red flower becomes an unrivaled floral decoration for two to three weeks before it evolves into Jamaica's traditional holiday beverage. At that time, the flower are dried and then steeped in water to make a bright red drink that has a slightly tart taste and is the color of cranberry juice.

Soursop, Corossol, Guanabana:

Elongated, spike-covered fruit, slightly tart and delicately flavored. It is used mainly in drinks, punches, sherbets and ice cream.

Star Apple:

An important part of a traditional dessert known as matrimony, the star apple is a succulent round fruit about the size of an orange. Native to Jamaica and the Greater Antilles, the skin of this fruit is either a shiny purple color or a less eye-catching green. No matter what color, the flesh of the star apple is delicious.

Stinking Toe:

Actually a pod that resembles a human toe, this bizarre fruit possesses an evil-smelling and rough exterior. The sugary power inside can be devoured on the spot or turned into a flavourful custard or beverage.

Sugar Apple, Sweetsop:

Is a fruit providing an interesting challenge to eat, the flesh of the sweetsop is actually a collection of black seeds surrounded by sweet white pulp. The sweetsop is native to the tropical Americas.

**Sweet Potato:**

Sweet Potato ranks 5th on the world's list of most important food staples after, rice, wheat, corn, cassava, as it constitutes a substantial source of carbohydrates and carotene

Tamarind:

This decorative tree produces brown pods containing a sweet and tangy pulp that's used for flavouring everything from beverages to curries and sauces--including Angostura bitters, Worcester Sauce and Pickapeppa sauce. It is also an important ingredient in Jamaican folk medicine.

Ugli Fruit:

Is from the tangerine and grapefruit family and ranges in size from that of an orange to a giant grapefruit. The extremely thick, yellow-green skin fits loosely over its large, juicy, yellow-orange pulp sections.

West Indian Pumpkin:

A member of the gourd, squash and melon family, this squash is also known as calabaza. Possessing a sweet flavor similar to that of butternut squash, this firm-textured vegetable is commonly found in soups, stews, breads and sweetened puddings. Though hardly the same, the best substitutes for calabaza are Hubbard, butternut and acorn squash.

Yam:

Similar in size and color to the potato, but nuttier in flavor, it is not be confused with the Southern sweet yam or sweet potato. Caribbean yams are served boiled, mashed or baked.

Yautía:

A member of the taro root family, the yautía is the size of a potato, but more pear-shaped. It has a brown fuzzy outer skin. The flesh is white and slimy and is custard-like when cooked. It is one of the most natural thickeners, used to thicken soups, stews, and bean dishes. There is also a purple yautía which is also called mora.



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Yucca:

Root vegetable similar in length and shape to a turnip, with scaly yamlike skin. Universally made into flour for breads and cakes, and used as a base for tapioca.

It is a long, slim tuber with bark-like skin and very starchy flesh that becomes almost translucent when cooked. It can be eaten boiled, baked or fried and can be ground into meal to make bread. Yuca is also used to make casareep.