

BERMUDA NATIONAL LIBRARY

Bermuda Traditions ~ Gombey and Cassava Pie



At your service, Bermuda!

Where to see Gombey

The H & H Gombey troop will be out this Christmas and Boxing Day. They will leave Glebe Road at 9:30 a.m. on Boxing Day and dance in surrounding neighbourhoods. They are also scheduled to perform at Horizons Guest House at 1:00 p.m. on New Year's Day and will end their performance by dancing in the Warwick neighbourhoods.

Further Information

References in the Library:

R 394.25 N Nunley, John W. (John Wallace), 1945- *Caribbean festival arts.*

R 581.6103 U Usher, George. *A dictionary of plants used by man.*

R 581.632 B Bourne, M.J., Lennox, G.W. & Seddon, S.A. *Fruits and Vegetables of the Caribbean.*

R 581.69 S Schmutz, Ervin M. Ph.D., and Lucretia Breazeale Hamilton. *Plants that poison.*

R BDA 394.3 J Jackson, Louise A. *The Bermuda gombey.*

R BDA 823.914 B Butler, Dale. *Bermuda Christmas tales and traditions.*

Plus numerous cook books in the Reference Bermuda collection with other cassava pie recipes.

For research questions contact:

Local Studies Librarian

Available: 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Monday to Friday

Call for appointment to avoid disappointment

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THE BERMUDA GOMBEY

The tradition of the Bermuda Gombey is a very old one. Slaves who were allowed to gather on holidays, especially Christmas, started Gombey dancing. In 1761 they were banned from gathering for fear of revolt. This ban did not last and the tradition of dancing was continued. A written account of such dancing appears in Suzette Lloyd's "Sketches of Bermuda" which was published circa 1829.



Bermuda's Gombey dancers have evolved from several influences:

- They are of African origin ~ the word 'gombey' is Bantu meaning 'rhythm'.
- Their costumes are strongly influenced by American Indian culture ~ Gombey dancers carry tomahawks, bows and arrows and wear peacock feathers in their hats.
- The covering of their faces comes from the "Mummers".

The beating of the drums with sticks, and not their hands, is a British military influence.

There is a hierarchal structure in the Gombey 'troop'. The 'Captain' leads the dance; he carries a whip and a whistle. His cape is the only one with bits of mirror and ribbons fixed to it. The "Wild Indian" carries a bow and arrow. The 'Trapper' carries a rope. The 'Chiefs' carry tomahawks and shields while the 'Warriors' carry small hatchets.

Historically the dancers also danced plays such as 'Daniel in the Lion's Den'. In modern troops the dancing mainly consists of solos and dueling between the troops. The number of troops has declined through the years although it is possible to see them perform several times a year. Gombey dancers take part in the May 24th Parade, at Harbour Nights and other special events, and they normally roam neighbourhoods on Christmas and Boxing Day.



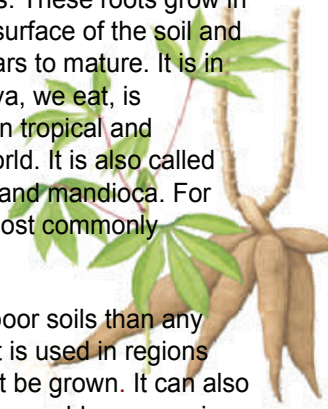
What is Cassava?

Cassava, *Manihot esculenta*, is a perennial woody shrub with between five and ten large, tuberous, starch-filled roots. These roots grow in a cluster just beneath the surface of the soil and take approximately 1-2 years to mature. It is in these roots that the cassava, we eat, is provided. Cassava grows in tropical and subtropical areas of the world. It is also called yucca (or yuca), manioc, and mandioca. For most people, cassava is most commonly associated with tapioca.

Cassava thrives better in poor soils than any other major food plant so it is used in regions where cereal grains cannot be grown. It can also tolerate drought. Around the world, cassava is a vital staple for about 500 million people. Cassava's starchy roots produce more food energy per unit of land than any other staple crop. Its leaves, commonly eaten as a vegetable in parts of Asia and Africa, provide vitamins and protein. Nutritionally, the cassava is comparable to potatoes, except that it has twice the fiber content and a higher level of potassium.

Cassava is used in many types of products such as foods, confectionery, sweeteners, glues, paper, plywood, textiles, biodegradable products, monosodium glutamate, and drugs. Cassava chips and pellets are used in animal feed and alcohol production.

There is a bitter, poisonous, as well as, a sweet, nonpoisonous variety of cassava. The skins on both plants are poisonous and should be peeled. Hydrocyanic acid is found in all parts of the plant and can result in cyanide poisoning to those unfamiliar with its preparation. The poison can be destroyed by various processing methods, such as grating, fermenting, heating or prolonged exposure to the sun. The peeled roots of the sweet variety can be eaten raw but are usually eaten cooked or baked, while the bitter root is poisonous when raw.



How cassava is used in Bermuda

Bermudians use cassava to produce a unique kind of "pie" which is traditionally eaten at Christmas and other special occasions. It dates back to before 1612 when the first settlers from England grew the cassava root for flour. These days, the cassava is purchased already grated and ready to use.

Every Bermudian family has its own recipe which varies flavourings and fillings but the basic recipe always calls for cassava, eggs, butter, sugar and salt. Traditionally, the "pie" had a filling of chicken, pork and beef. Over the years, first the beef and then the pork has been dropped from some recipes. Some families leave out the filling altogether but most families at least use the chicken.

This versatile side-dish (yes, it's treated as a side dish!) is usually served at Christmas with the leftovers warmed in a frying pan for breakfast the next day ~ and for many days following.

You may want to try one of the following recipes.

Recipe of Charlotte N. Powell submitted by Malikah Sheeheed, Library Assistant, Tech. Services

Cassava Pie (Charlotte's Style) - tried & tested since 1990!

Ingredients

5 lbs cassava 5 lbs chicken (thyme, salt & pepper)

Batter:

**½ lb butter 3 cups sugar 12 eggs 1 tsp ginger
2 tsp nutmeg 2 tsp vanilla 2 tsp salt (to taste)**

Instructions

Do this the night before:

Cook the chicken, season with thyme, salt & pepper.

Separate meat from juices and refrigerate both.

If frozen, put the cassava out to defrost, but make sure you put it back in the fridge during the day.

Next day:

Cut up chicken into small pieces and set aside.

Skim off any fat from juices and strain.

Pre-heat oven to 350° F.

Cream together sugar, butter, salt, gradually add eggs. When mixture is well mixed, add other batter ingredients.

While batter is mixing, fluff out cassava in another large bowl (do not squeeze).

Then add batter to bowl of cassava and thoroughly mix together. If more moisture is needed use some of the chicken stock.

Spray foil pan with Pam, line bottom of pan with plain batter spread chicken in the middle and layer more plain batter on top.

It takes a shorter time to cook 2 smaller pies than one real big pie.

After 30 minutes of baking, periodically baste with some of the stock. Bake at this temperature for approximately 45 minutes or until the top of the pie is brown. Then cover pie with foil and reduce temperature to 300° for remaining time.

Remember to test that the pie is cooked by sticking with a knife; if it comes out clean, pie is done.

Approx. baking time: 1 hour & 15 min. for small pies.

Recipe submitted by Ellen Jane Hollis, Local Studies Librarian, Technical Services

This is the recipe I inherited, transcribed as it was written. There are no instructions for the beginner as this recipe was made every year, and it is assumed that you know what to do! My instructions are based on how I've put the pie together in recent years.

According to family legend it is based on the Davis family recipe (my great-grandmother was a Davis) that originally called for beef, chicken and pork. There are other variations. Sometimes the volume of eggs was not quite right and one or two more eggs were added. When asked to quote the recipe from memory the majority of the family will say 2 dozen and 2 eggs, or 3 dozen and 1. It is obvious that the tradition of making cassava pie in my family calls for some flexibility as the greater part of assembling the pie is done by feel and appearance rather than the accurate accounting of weight or number.

Cassava Pie

Ingredients

*15 lbs cassava 1½ lbs butter 1¾ lbs sugar
3 dozen eggs 2 tbs salt
5 lbs chicken & 4 lbs pork (or 8lbs chicken breast)*

Instructions

Boil the meat and reserve the broth for basting. Once the meat is cooked, allow it to cool before dicing into 1-inch pieces. Mix the cassava with the butter, sugar, eggs and salt. Place half of the cassava mixture in a buttered roasting pan (the largest one you have!). Layer the chicken and pork on top of the cassava, leaving an inch around all sides. Carefully spoon the remaining cassava mixture on top of the meat, smoothing it out to form an even surface.

Bake at 275° or 300° for 8 hours, basting with the meat broth as needed (approximately every 30 to 45 minutes).

Allow the pie to cool before slicing.

Janet Nearon's recipe submitted by Michelle Nearon Richardson, Senior Library Assistant, Tech. Services

Cassava Pie

Ingredients

Cassava	5 lbs	10 lbs	15 lbs	20 lbs
Butter	1 lbs	2 lbs	2 ¼ lbs	3 ¾ lbs
Sugar	2 ½ cups	5 cups	7 ½ cups	10 cups
Eggs	15	30	45	5 dozen
Nutmeg	1 ¼ tbs	2 ½ tbs	3 tbs	5 tbs
Salt	1 ¼ tbs	2 ½ tbs	3 tbs	5 tbs
Crisco Butter	¼ cup	1 cup	3 ¾ cups	1 lbs
Chicken	5 lbs	5 lbs	10 lbs	10 lbs

Instructions

Cream the butter and sugar. Add eggs. Combine cassava and rest of ingredients.

Boil chicken thighs with salt to taste. Let cool, retain the liquid. Pick chicken from the bones; discard any bones, skin and fat

Pour ½ batter in pan, layer with chicken and chicken broth. Add top layer with more broth on top. Bake at 350° until brown, occasionally baste with more broth.

Enjoy!