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ACKEE

Not Just Rice & Peas

Celebrating Windrush in Devon



Ackee's Origin

Ackee fruit (*Blighia sapida*) is native to tropical West Africa. Its English name is derived from the West African Akan people, in what is present day Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Its scientific name honours Captain William Bligh, who transported the fruit plant from Jamaica to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England in 1793. There it would be introduced to science.

How it arrived in the Caribbean

Ackee was first imported from Ghana, in West Africa to Jamaica, early as 1725, on a slave ship for the plantation owners to provide cheap food for their enslaved Africans forced to work on the island's sugar plantations.

How it's cooked and prepared

The ackee needs to open fully; this allows the natural removal process of the poisonous toxins. Jamaicans say when it has "yawned" or "smiled", it's a sign it is ripe and ready to pick. Then you can remove and discard the black seeds, trim the yellow arils which are firm to the touch, par-boil in salted water, drain and use as required.

The use of ackee in Jamaican cuisine is widespread, often fried or sautéed in butter or vegetable oil with onions, sweet peppers and tomatoes simmered in coconut milk. When combined with saltfish you have the unique national dish of Jamaica, 'Saltfish and Ackee'.



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Ackee fruit, ripe and ready to pick



Interesting facts

Ackee is part of the Sapindaceae (soapberry) family including lychee and longan fruit. Commonly called ackee, it is known on different continents by various names such as ankye, ahee, akee, ackee apple or aye, to name a few, and is now found growing in many of the Caribbean Islands, Central and South America.

Ackee is ubiquitous in Jamaica - it's the national fruit - and is a dietary staple. It can be bought fresh in bags by the dozen from street vendors during ackee season, or picked from roadside trees. A Caribbean delicacy, it is eaten for breakfast, lunch, snack or dinner, and features in diverse Caribbean cuisines, globally renowned.

Despite its long-held reputation of being poisonous, ackee is safe to eat if prepared properly, and it contains unsaturated fat and nutritional benefits of protein, Vitamins B and C, zinc, calcium, and fibre. Due to increased demand, ackee became a commercial commodity for Jamaica, Haiti and Belize - canned in brine for global export, where it is readily available in major UK supermarkets and online.

This versatile fruit has other uses practised in West Africa and rural areas of the Caribbean islands: it is used as soap due to having properties associated with laundering agents and is also used in African traditional medicine.