

# CASSAVA OF GUYANA

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## CASSAVA BREAD MAKING

Cassava bread is one of the foods given to the Guyana by the native people (*Amerindians*) of Guyana. It is traditionally one of the best known and consumed food. Its preparation is extensive work. In the days of difficult travel and trade, it served as a major staple and carbohydrate provider to their diet.



THE CASSAVA PLANT AND ROOT

WOMAN PEELING CASSAVA

Cassava grows all year long in Guyana and is about the easy crop to cultivate. It is as simple as placing a stem of the cassava plant into well tilled soil. The cassava plant matures in about seven months and is ready for harvesting. Once the cassava root is harvested, it must be peeled; it

reveals it's white under skin, similar to that of a potato but much larger. After washing the peeled cassava, it is grated. The cassava at this point looks like white cheese.



After the cassava is grated, it is placed into the long, thin structure called the **Matapee** or a woven sieve which is made from woven reeds or vines and used as a strainer.

The Matapee is then wringed so that it drains out the juices of the grated Cassava. The Wapisiano natives of the Kanuku Mountains along the upper Rupununi River in Guyana manufacture two alcoholic beverages called Parikari and Sarawi from this juice. The fully fermented Parikari is consumed all day by the adults and the weakly fermented form is relished by the children.

The now fully squeezed and dried grated cassava looks like flour but is an off white color. It is cooked by pouring a large scoop into a circular platform or tray over a fire. The cassava should be flipped over to allow the other side to cook. The cassava at this point should not have any loose pieces and is strong and sturdy. After cooking, the cassava is hung out to dry in the sun. They cassava bread making is now complete. The taste of this bread is quite bland but can be enhanced by adding flavoring. Pepper pot may be preferred eaten with cassava bread. A meal of pepper pot and cassava bread can be enjoyed in the very remote areas of Guyana Jungle and are made with only the native ingredients.



**Cassava bread for tasting**



**Blue Macaw of Guyana**

# CASSAREEP

THE PRODUCT OF THE BITTER CASSAVA



**Cassareep** is made from the juice of the bitter cassava root which is *poisonous*. It contains a large amount of hydrogen cyanide that is deadly. Traditionally called prussic acid and blamed for many deaths if not cooked properly. Amerindians from Guyana made an antidote by steeping chillie in rum. To make cassareep, the juice of the bitter cassava is extracted in the same manner with the Matapee, and then boiled until it is reduced by half its volume to the consistency of molasses. Flavoring of spices including cloves, cinnamon, sugar, salt and cayenne pepper is the added. All Guyanese are sure to bring back cassareep when visiting Guyana from abroad.

**Cassareep** is used for two distinct goals, which originate from two important aspect of the ingredient; its particular flavor and its preservative quality.

Cassareep is essential in the preparation of pepper pot and gives the dish its distinctive bittersweet flavor. A peculiar quality of cassareep which works as an antiseptic is that it allows food to be kept on the back of the stove for indefinite lengths of time, as long as additional cassareep is added every time meat is added. Most Guyanese has a few bottles of cassareep reserved for a special occasion.

Accordingly to legend, Betty Mascal of Grenada had a pepper pot that was maintained like this for more than a *century*. Dutch planters in Suriname reportedly had pepper pot in daily use that they kept cooking for many years. The native Amerindians used cassareep to preserve their meat thus enabling an ample supply for long periods.

Pharmaceutical journals are stating possible use of cassareep in the treatment of eye afflictions such as corneal ulcers and conjunctivitis.

Cassareep is used extensively by many Guyanese at home and abroad.

The dish of pepper pot is a major tradition with most Guyanese. It is regarded as a treat and is reserve for special occasions like holidays, birthdays or whenever the appetite craves. Saving the pepper pot dish over several days is difficult due to its mouth watering taste. It begs to be eaten completely.



Pepper pot is a stew meat national dish of Guyana. Beef, mutton and pork are the most popular used though some have been known to use chicken and even fish. Assorted wild meat like Labba, Tapir {wild cow}, and wild pig are also traditional meat added to this dish. Pepper pot is served with Rice, Roti, Cassava bread, or regular dense bread and can be eaten at anytime of the day.

The cassava root is also consumed as a vegetable in Guyanese dishes like soup, matemgee and dry food. Cassava can be used as dessert when made into cassava cakes and cassava pone.



**PEPPER POT-** The National food of Guyana. A food that means it is *Christmas* in the homes of Guyanese.

## Recipe for pepper pot

### Ingredients

- 1 bay leaf
- 4 cups water
- 2 sticks cinnamon spice
- 12 heads of clove
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 3 teaspoons brown sugar
- 2 table spoons seasoning salt
- 1 hot red whole hot pepper or 3 or 4 Wirri-wirri peppers if available
- 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 5 lbs salt beef (chopped)
- 5 lbs cow heel (chopped) optional
- 5 lbs beef (chopped)
- 1 bunch fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt or (add salt to taste)
- 1/4 bottle or 4 cooking spoons Cassareep

### Instructions

Wash and season meat that you have selected to use, with black pepper and seasoning salt Place all ingredients in a large pot of water, approximately 4 or 5 cups of water, enough to cover the meat.



**Peppers to flavor**



**The wirri-wirri pepper**

Cover and bring to a boil for about 2 hours, or until meat is very tender, and the water is 1/4 of its original content. This water becomes your pepper pot sauce.

Using Original Cassareep made with bitter cassava preserves this dish and prevents it from spoiling for one or more weeks un-refrigerated. In fact, one of the fantastic elements of Guyanese style Pepper Pot is its capacity to remain un-refrigerated for long periods of time.

Simply warm and re-use, however, care must be exercised when using a spoon in this dish, using a dirty (un-washed) spoon or a spoon that was used in any other food will deteriorate the Pepper Pot and cause spoilage almost immediately. Pepper pot should be served the day after cooking. Like good wine, Pepper pot gets a *lot tastier with age*.

This family style pepperpot is served extensively and almost exclusively at Christmas time, it is called pepper pot because of the spices added and the spicy taste that makes this dish especially wonderful.

This dish can be served at breakfast, lunch or dinner. It is a cuisine for anything and all times.

