



Notes about:

Food and Culture of Haiti



Introduction

Food is an important part of the Haitian culture. Their cuisine is strongly influenced by African and French flavors and there also is a presence of Spanish and Indian flavor.

Haitians may be reluctant to try new foods when in new countries and they are very proud of the tradition and culture that is represented by the foods that are often preferred.

It is important to remember that just like language dialects, many of the food preferences are influenced by the region in which a person might have grown up or spent time. The availability of certain foods in parts of Haiti is localized and will also influence a person's food preferences.

How to use these notes:

These notes are meant to be used as a guide and are not meant as a comprehensive guide to food preferences among immigrants from Haiti. We compiled these notes by looking through written sources and amending and altering them through review of our public health co-workers here at Clark County Combined Health District. We expect that these notes may need to be updated. Thank you for checking back for updates of this documents.

Common Foods

- Meat/Poultry/Fish: beef, pork, goat, chicken, turkey, and a variety of fish (tilapia, red snapper, etc.), sometimes lamb
 - Beef used for Haitian cuisine are usually roasts, stew meat, steaks; ground beef can be used for side dishes, such as part of lasagna or macaroni and cheese. These foods may be commonly served although are not necessarily considered Haitian dishes.
- Eggs/Legumes: chicken eggs; a variety of beans such as black beans, black-eyed peas, chickpeas, soybean, red beans
 - Lots of uses for eggs: boiled, fried, etc.
- Cereals/Grains: bread is very common; cassava (mashed yuca), cornmeal, short-grain rice, wheat
- Fruits: avocados, bananas and plantains, breadfruit, cashew apple, coconut, guava, soursop, jackfruit, lemons, limes, mangos, papayas, pineapple, grapefruit, orange juice, tomato
 - In Haiti, plantains (green) and bananas (yellow) are both referred to as bananas
 - Breadfruit is called lam; cashew apple is called nwa
 - In Haiti, lemons and limes are not necessarily differentiated other than "the green one" or "the yellow one". So it is common for someone to indicate they want lemon (or citron) when they were really looking for a lime (the green one).
 - Avocados: very popular as a good food any time; avocados with cassava bread is an example of a good food
 - Pineapples: there is some thought that a woman on her period should be careful when eating pineapple because it will increase the bleeding; additionally, some people believe that eating pineapple in the

middle of the day (when the sun is out) will make a person sick. So pineapple is something eaten in the early morning or later in the day.

- The cashew apple is a meaty fruit that grows on top of the cashew
- Vegetables: arracacha (a root vegetable), arrowroot (a tuber), cabbage, calabaza (a squash type vegetable), cassava, chiles, corn, djon-djon mushrooms, peppers, potatoes, squashes, sweet potatoes
- Seasonings: anise, annatto, bay leaf, chiles, cinnamon, coui, garlic, onions, pimento, recaou, thyme
- Bouillon (interchangeable with broth) is commonly used.

Meals

- Breakfast (dejne) is small; usually coffee, bread, fruit juice, and an egg; often bread and coffee is sufficient.
- Lunch (manje dine) is the largest meal of the day. Usually rice, beans, and meat. These are considered “heavy” foods.
- Evening meal (soupe) is light; often soup or hot cereal.
- Snacks between meals can be fruit.
- Desserts are not commonly expected as part of a meal, as they are more available for wealthier people.

Traditional Dishes

- Black eyed peas and rice
- Poulet rôti à la créole (Plantain and chicken)
- Barbecued goat with chili peppers
- Akasan (Milky cornmeal beverage)
- Pikliz (Spicy carrot and cabbage condiment)
- Citrus-marinated chicken with boiled cashews
- Griot (Fried pork cubes marinated in sour orange juice and garlic)
- Soup Joumou (pumpkin soup)
- Fresca (Haitian shaved ice)
- Tonm Tonm Ak Sos Kalalou (Mashed Breadfruit)
- Marinad fritters (Haitian chicken fritters)
- Lalo (jute leaves)
- Konfiti Chadek (grapefruit jam) with bread
- Tchaka Mayi (Corn Soup): a Haitian soup with corn and beans

Drinks

- Coffee (strong) is most popular in the morning. Haitians feel that Haiti has the best coffee and the best honey!
- Fruit juices and water are consumed throughout the day, especially after a meal.
- Tea is more commonly drunk when a person is sick as it is thought to have a therapeutic value.
- Water is not treated or safe in some parts of Haiti (particularly urban areas, such as Port-a-Prince; therefore, people are used to bottled water and may not trust water that is from a spigot or unknown source.

Teas and food to take during illness

Many times, a family will try traditional or natural medicine before seeking healthcare. Here are some foods used:

- Garlic Tea: to help treat hypertension (but sometimes salt is added)
- Soursop fruit/Guanabana: prevents cancer
- Tea from Leaves of Soursop tree: tea for when a person has the flu or if the person can't sleep
- Ginger Tea: use when cold outside; sometimes flavor with cinnamon

- Tea from Asosi Leaf (cerasee): a tea to take during fever
- Tea of Pigeon Pea Leaves (Fey Pua Kongo): a tea to treat diabetes
- Lalwa (aloe vera): prevent cancer, clean the blood; typically peel and eat or put with ice to make juice; lemon can be used to flavor
- Orange Juice: for vitamin C
- Pigeon meat: is felt as useful to help treat anemia
- Coffee: gives energy, helps to sustain health
- Cinnamon: can help sleep well (mixed with porridge or as part of a tea)
- Honey: even though sugar (both white and brown sugar) is used, honey is preferred sweetener to help maintain health; honey is also thought of as helping for brain health (increased memory, etc.)

Balance: Heavy vs. light foods and cold vs. hot foods

Haitians believe in balance and a balance is necessary to be healthy. Illness can be caused by imbalance. Two types of balance can be heavy vs. light foods and cold vs. hot foods.

In literature about Haiti and food, there is often mention of “hot” illnesses, such as diarrhea, that need “cold” foods, such as mango, banana, etc. to help restore balance. Through discussion with the team here at CCCHD, it seemed as though the balance between hot and cold was not as prevalent as the balance between heavy vs. light.

Examples of heavy foods include meat, rice, beans, corn meal. Examples of light food would be soup, broth/bouillon. A designation as heavy vs. light includes the amount of time it takes to prepare the food and the ease of the body’s ability to digest the food. Heavy foods are more for mid-day while light foods are morning and evening. Heavy foods are avoided when the body is recovering from diarrhea due to typhoid.

Symbolic/Holiday Foods:

The most celebrated food in Haitian culture is soup joumou (pumpkin soup). Joumou is eaten on New Year’s day or Haiti’s independence day. It is consumed as a celebration of freedom from slavery. The slaves were not allowed to eat joumou as it was considered superior.

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