

Culinary Heritage of Guadeloupe

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Thanks to their warm climate and fertile soil, the Caribbean islands offer a remarkable variety of spices. Combined with a cuisine influenced by Amerindian, African, European, and Indian traditions, Caribbean gastronomy is among the most generous and flavorful in the world.

French Caribbean Cooking Spices

Health starts on your plate—and spices are exceptional allies for our well-being. Science has confirmed that their benefits are not just legend. Spices not only enhance the flavor of our dishes, but also offer healing properties.

Studies have shown that the compounds found in spices can help prevent certain types of cancer and inhibit the growth of cancer cells. Spices are also alkaline, which helps rebalance the body's acid levels. By stimulating digestive glands, they reduce bloating and cleanse the digestive tract.

There are several families of spices. In the Caribbean climate, for example:

- Orchids include vanilla,
- Zingiberaceae include turmeric and ginger,
- Piperaceae provide various types of peppercorns,
- Solanaceae include many varieties of chili peppers.

Vanilla



In Guadeloupe, a very rare type of vanilla can be found: “Vanilla Pompona,” also known as “banana vanilla” due to its banana-shaped pod. This versatile spice is widely used in cooking and for flavoring drinks.

Its delicate aroma makes it essential in desserts, savory dishes, or for making vanilla sugar or vinegar.

Vanilla also offers many health benefits:

- It stimulates the digestive system by boosting enzyme production and reducing gas.
- It is known for its calming and antidepressant effects, and is often recommended to help with insomnia and other sleep disorders.
- As a nervous system stimulant, vanilla can help relieve both physical and mental fatigue.

Its natural sweetness makes it a perfect ally for light desserts, helping reduce the amount of added sugar.

Turmeric



Turmeric is used to color dishes and add a slightly bitter, earthy flavor. It's a key spice in many Indo-Caribbean recipes, including the iconic Colombo dish.

Rich in curcumin, turmeric is known for its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anti-cancer, and antimicrobial properties.

It also contains potassium, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, and iron.

Turmeric may help:

- Relieve joint pain
- Stimulate digestion
- Support heart health
- Strengthen the immune system

Its healing properties are amplified when combined with oil and a pinch of crushed black pepper.

Studies have also shown that turmeric combined with ginger helps reduce inflammation in cancer cells.

Ginger



This zesty, lemony rhizome is one of the oldest known spices. It works well in both sweet and savory dishes.

Ginger can be used fresh or ground to flavor curries, stews, and sauces. It's also used in sweet preparations—candied for baking, as a syrup in drinks or ice creams, and more. As an herbal tea, it soothes nervous tension.

Ginger has powerful properties:

- Anti-inflammatory
- Antiemetic (helps reduce nausea and vomiting)

It has anti-ulcer properties, helps relieve digestive disorders, improves blood circulation, and strengthens the immune system. Regular use may help reduce inflammation associated with rheumatoid arthritis. However, be cautious—excessive consumption can cause heartburn.

Chili Peppers



When it comes to chili peppers, there's no shortage of options: Dried, pickled in vinegar or oil, pureed, fresh, or made into a paste. They come in all colors: green, yellow, orange, brown, and red.

Chili peppers are an essential ingredient in Caribbean cuisine, with many varieties including the iconic “Bonda man Jak” (a very hot chili) and "vegetarian" peppers (mild, aromatic peppers).

- The Bonda man Jak is one of the hottest chili peppers in the world, valued for its intense aroma and ability to spice up dishes.

- The vegetarian pepper is mainly used for its flavor without the heat, perfect for adding depth to dishes without spiciness.

Botanically speaking, chili peppers are fruits rich in:

- Capsaicin
- Carotenoids
- Flavonoids
- Vitamins A and C

They help:

- Stimulate blood circulation,
- Improve digestion,
- Boost metabolism,
- Aid in weight loss by triggering the release of norepinephrine and adrenaline, which help burn sugars and fats in the body.

Clove



Clove is the unopened flower bud of the clove tree, harvested and dried for preservation.

In cooking, it should be used in small quantities, as it can overpower other flavors. It pairs wonderfully with onion, cinnamon, meats, and is excellent in soups, cakes, puddings, and more.

Clove is known for its pain-relieving, anti-infectious, and anti-inflammatory properties, thanks to the compound eugenol it contains. It boosts the immune system by acting on the lungs, lymphatic system, and promoting the production of white blood cells.

This floral bud is also effective against toothaches, gingivitis, and ENT (ear, nose, throat) infections.

Cinnamon



There are nearly 300 species of cinnamon, but the two main varieties are Ceylon cinnamon and Cassia cinnamon. Cinnamon is derived from the inner bark of the cinnamon tree, which belongs to the same family as the avocado tree.

This highly aromatic bark has a sweet, mild flavor, and can be used ground or whole. The dried leaves are also used in cooking or herbal teas.

Cinnamon is mostly used in desserts, but it can also enhance savory dishes such as rice dishes, curries, or hot drinks like hot chocolate. It is available in sticks (which can be grated) or ground form.

This spice offers numerous health benefits. It plays a key role in helping to maintain stable energy levels, likely due to its antioxidant properties and its ability to stabilize blood sugar.

Its stimulating and tonic effects help strengthen both body and mind.

However, it should be consumed in moderation.

Nutmeg



Nutmeg is a widely used spice in Caribbean cuisine.

Its strong flavor means nutmeg should be used sparingly—just a pinch is usually enough to season a dish. Nutmeg is used in both sweet and savory cooking.

In sweet dishes, it's mainly used to enhance fruit salads, pastries, and desserts. In savory cooking, it's used to flavor soups, mashed vegetables, and meat dishes.

Nutmeg is often freshly grated just before use to preserve its full flavor.

This spice contains essential oils, antioxidants, and nutrients such as magnesium and copper. It has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antimicrobial properties.

Annatto (Roucou / Achiote)



Annatto, also known as roucou or achiote, is a spice mainly used for its coloring properties rather than its flavor.

In some regions, the seeds are harvested, dried, and ground into a powder or paste used to color dishes like rice, sauces, soups, and meat dishes. It's also used to color certain cheeses and dairy products.

In the Caribbean, the seeds are typically macerated in oil with a pinch of salt, then used to add a reddish tint to fish court-bouillon.

Annatto offers a natural alternative to artificial colorants like paprika or saffron.

When used in cooking, it also adds nutritional value to dishes, being rich in:

- Provitamin A
- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Selenium
- And containing 100 times more beta-carotene than carrots

Rich in nutrients, annatto seeds are a valuable source of antioxidants and antibacterial compounds.

Annatto oil is also well known for its benefits for skin and hair. Indigenous Caribbean peoples traditionally used it as body paint and to dye fabrics.

Allspice (Bois d'Inde / Jamaican Pepper)



Bois d'Inde, also known as Allspice or Jamaican pepper, comes from a tree whose leaves and small berries are sun-dried and used in cooking.

Allspice Leaves (Bois d'Inde) have a flavor reminiscent of cinnamon, nutmeg, and clove. The leaves are used whole, while the berries are ground into a spice.

This highly aromatic spice is a staple in traditional Caribbean cooking, used to flavor:

- Stews
- Sauces
- Soups
- Fish blaff
- As well as desserts and hot beverages

Bois d'Inde is known to support digestion and help relieve gas, bloating, and stomach discomfort.

It contains antioxidant compounds.

As an herbal tea, it can help soothe:

- Intestinal issues
- Rheumatism
- Bruises
- Headaches

When the leaves are macerated in rum, they create a powerful medicinal massage lotion.

French Caribbean Spice Blends

Colombo Powder



This spice blend gets its name from the Indian influence in the Caribbean region. Colombo powder is a signature spice of the French West Indies, used in the preparation of the traditional chicken, pork, or goat Colombo dishes.

It typically includes:

- Turmeric
- Cloves
- Fenugreek
- Cumin
- Mustard seeds
- Coriander seeds
- Black pepper

You'll find it either as a powder or as a paste.

Four-Spice Blend



This is a mix of four spices — cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and clove — used to add warmth and depth to both savory and sweet dishes. It's commonly used in fricassées, soups, vegetable dishes, cakes, and even desserts.

Graines à Roussir (Toasting Seeds)



Graines à roussir is a blend of toasted spices such as:

- Cumin
- Fenugreek
- Mustard seeds

They are mainly used to prepare Colombo, giving the dish its distinctive flavor.

This toasted spice mix is also commonly used to season:

- Stews
- Curries
- Meat dishes
- Peas, vegetables, and soups

Some Iconic Recipes and Their Origins

Sauce Chien ("Dog Sauce")

The famous "Couteau-Chien" (Dog Knife) was born from a long-ago meeting between a cutler from Thiers (Auvergne, France) and Guadeloupean cooks. This legendary table knife became a staple in every Antillean household and was often given as a wedding gift to newlyweds.

The sauce gets its name from this knife brand, because all the ingredients were traditionally chopped with it. Even today, it's still widely used in Caribbean kitchens.

Sauce Chien is perfect for seasoning meat, fish, or shellfish. It's especially ideal for grilled dishes and plancha cooking, and is considered essential at Caribbean barbecues.

For 6 people:

- 6 sprigs of chives (cive)
- 10 sprigs of parsley
- 5 garlic cloves, crushed
- ½ hot pepper (like scotch bonnet or habanero)
- Juice of 1 lime
- 200 ml hot water
- 70 ml oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Finely chop the chives, parsley, and hot pepper. Place them in a bowl. Add the garlic, lime juice, oil, salt, and pepper. Pour in the hot water and mix thoroughly.

Féroce d'Avocat (Spicy Avocado and Cassava Mix)



Féroce d'avocat is one of the signature starters of the French Caribbean. Originally, it was a hearty breakfast or snack eaten by agricultural workers.

The name “féroce” (fierce) likely comes from the presence of hot pepper in the recipe.

Today, it is mainly served as an appetizer or starter at gatherings and meals.

Serves 8–10 People

- 500 g (1.1 lb) ripe avocado, peeled, pitted, and diced
- 300 g (10.5 oz) cassava flour (*available on our website*)
- 300 g (10.5 oz) grilled cod chiktay (*available on our website*)
- 5 tablespoons oil
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon lime juice

Place the grilled cod chiktay in a bowl.
Add the lime juice, oil, and garlic.
Mash the avocado with the cassava flour, then mix it into the fish mixture until a firm paste forms.

Roll into small balls and arrange on a serving plate.

Cow Foot Soup

This traditional dish, usually served for Saturday night dinner, is a beloved part of Caribbean culinary heritage.

Serves 8 – Cook Time: 2.5 hours

- 1.1 kg (2.4 lbs) small beef feet, cut into pieces
- 400 g (14 oz) peeled Caribbean pumpkin (giraumon)
- 300 g (10.5 oz) carrots
- 300 g (10.5 oz) potatoes
- 150 g (5 oz) cabbage
- 150 g (5 oz) turnips
- 80 g (2.8 oz) leeks
- 1 celery stalk
- 1 onion
- 1 handful of washed rice (to thicken the soup)
- Salt, to taste

1. Place the beef feet in a covered pot with 3 liters of cold, unsalted water.
2. Cook for 1 hour and 30 minutes, then set aside.
3. In a large pot, add the cooked beef feet, diced vegetables, and 2 liters of salted water.
4. Bring to a boil, cover, and cook for 1 hour.
5. Add the rice and cook for another 5 minutes.

Salt Cod Fritters (Accras de Morue)



The history of salt cod fritters, or *accras de morue*, is closely linked to the arrival of the Portuguese in the Caribbean in the 15th century. They introduced salted cod to the region — a very practical preservation method at the time. African slaves later adapted salted cod by mixing it with local ingredients.

The word "accras" is believed to come from the Yoruba word "àkàrà", meaning "fried ball" or "heated fritter."

Makes about 30 fritters | Cook Time: 30 minutes

- 180 g (6.3 oz) salted cod chiktay (*available on our website*)
- 120 g (4.2 oz) flour
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tbsp chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp chopped chives
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 180 ml ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) water
- Hot pepper purée (*available on our website*)
- Oil for frying

1. In a mixing bowl, combine the flour and baking powder.
2. Add the salt cod chiktay, onion, hot pepper purée, garlic, parsley, and chives.
3. Whisk until well combined, then gradually add water, mixing until you get a thick, smooth batter.
4. Adjust seasoning to taste.
5. Heat frying oil in a skillet or deep pan.
6. Carefully drop spoonfuls of batter into the hot oil and fry until golden and crispy on all sides.
7. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels to absorb excess oil.

Callaloo

This flavorful dish is especially popular during the Easter season. Rich in taste and deeply aromatic, Callaloo reflects the diverse culinary influences of the Caribbean islands.

Its origins are debated — some say it is African, while others trace it back to Amerindian roots. The word “*callaloo*” is believed to derive from the Carib word “kallalou,” meaning “sauce.”

Over time, this thick, hearty soup has evolved, becoming even more delicious.

Crab Callaloo

Serves 4 | Cooking Time: 45 minutes

- 6 cleaned crabs, shell removed and rinsed with lime
 - 6 Madeira leaves (or spinach)
 - 200 g (7 oz) smoked pork belly
 - 10 okras, sliced
 - 2 onions, finely chopped
 - 3 sprigs of parsley
 - 3 sprigs of scallions (cives)
 - 3 garlic cloves, minced
 - 1 West Indian bay leaf (bois d’Inde)
 - Salt, to taste
 - Oil, for cooking
1. Wash and chop the Madeira leaves (or spinach).
 2. Boil the leaves for 30 minutes in 2 liters of lightly salted water, then drain and blend until smooth.
 3. In a large pot, sauté the chopped aromatics (onions, garlic, parsley, scallions), okra, smoked pork belly, and crabs in a bit of oil.
 4. Add enough water to cover, toss in the West Indian bay leaf, and simmer for 30 minutes.
 5. Add the blended greens and cook on low heat for another 15 minutes.
 6. Serve hot with white rice.

Colombo



Colombo is one of the most iconic examples of Indian influence on Caribbean cuisine.

After the abolition of slavery, French colonists in Guadeloupe and Martinique brought in Indian indentured laborers to work in the fields. These workers arrived with their spices and culinary traditions, which soon blended with local ingredients.

The dish Colombo is believed to originate from "Kuzhambu", a South Indian and Sri Lankan curry. Over time, the name evolved from "Kulambu" to "Colombo."

Today, Colombo is commonly made with goat, chicken, or even fish.

Goat Colombo

Serves 6 | Cooking time: 2 hours 30 minutes

- 1 kg (2.2 lbs) goat meat, cut into pieces
- 1 zucchini, chopped
- 1 eggplant, chopped
- 3 potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 1 green mango, sliced
- 1/2 cup chopped scallions (cives)
- 6 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 onions, chopped
- 3 tablespoons Colombo curry powder (*available on our website*)
- Hot pepper purée, to taste (*available on our website*)
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 tablespoon sugarcane vinegar with scallion (*available on our website*)
- Oil, for cooking

- Salt and pepper, to taste

Cut the meat into large chunks and season with salt, pepper, ground cloves, a mix of sugarcane vinegar and 3 crushed garlic cloves. Let it marinate at room temperature for about 30 minutes.

In a large pot, heat some oil over medium heat until hot, then add the goat meat, stirring frequently.

Next, add the Colombo curry powder, crushed garlic, sliced green mango, pepper, onions, scallions, and hot pepper, and stir well.

Pour in just enough water to cover the meat, bring to a boil, then lower the heat and let simmer for about 2 hours or more, stirring occasionally.

About 30 minutes before removing from heat, add the diced vegetables.

Soupe Z’habitants (Local Detox Soup)

This traditional soup is often made after festive occasions to help detoxify the body.

Serves 4 | Cooking time: 1 hour 15 minutes

- 200g (7 oz) salted beef
- 500g (1.1 lbs) mixed vegetables (carrots, turnips, cabbage, West Indian pumpkin)
- 300g (10.5 oz) leafy greens (malabar spinach, spinach, purslane, beet tops, leek greens, etc.)
- 1 celery stalk
- 1–2 garlic cloves
- 1 bouquet garni (parsley, scallions, thyme)
- 2 mild Caribbean peppers (piment végétarien)
- Oil, for cooking

The day before, desalt the beef (soak and rinse) and cut it into pieces.

Peel and dice the vegetables. Chop the leafy greens and herbs (bouquet garni).

In a pot, sauté the beef, then add all the remaining ingredients.

Sauté for a few more minutes, then cover with approximately 700 ml (3 cups) of water.

Cover and let simmer for 1 hour.

Let it cool slightly, then blend lightly (do not purée completely), and simmer again for a few more minutes on low heat before serving.

Creole Fish Court-Bouillon

This dish beautifully blends French cooking techniques with local Creole ingredients and flavors.

Serves 4 | Cooking Time: 25 minutes

For the fish:

- 600g (approx. 1.3 lbs) red snapper (about 4 whole fish or fillets)
- 1 lime or lemon

For the marinade:

- ½ cup vanilla-infused sugarcane vinegar (available on our website)
- 2 crushed garlic cloves
- ½ teaspoon hot pepper purée (available on our website)
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 cup water

For the court-bouillon:

- 2 peeled tomatoes, sliced
- 1 tablespoon tomato purée
- Juice of 1 lime or lemon
- 2 crushed garlic cloves
- 2 thinly sliced onions
- ½ cup chopped parsley
- ½ cup chopped scallions
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons bé rouj (roucou-colored lard, available on our website)
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 cups water

1. Clean and prep the fish:
Scale the red snapper and clean it with lime or lemon juice.
Cut into large chunks and place in a bowl.
2. Make the marinade:
In a small bowl, mix together the vinegar, garlic, hot pepper purée, salt, pepper, and water.
Pour the marinade over the fish and let it sit for at least 1 hour.

3. Prepare the court-bouillon base:
In a large skillet or deep pan, heat the bé rouj (roucou-infused lard). Sauté the onions, garlic, parsley, and scallions for a few minutes, stirring frequently.
4. Add the tomatoes and liquids:
Add the sliced tomatoes, tomato purée, lime or lemon juice, thyme, and bay leaves. Pour in 2 cups of water and bring to a boil.
5. Add the marinated fish:
Carefully place the marinated fish pieces into the court-bouillon. Simmer gently for about 15–20 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through.

Add the fish, tomato paste, thyme, bay leaves, and let simmer over low heat for about 15 to 20 minutes.

Serve with rice.

Soupe à Congo

Soupe à Congo is a stew made with vegetables and meat. It's a legacy from the times of slavery, when workers would gather whatever ingredients they could find near their homes to make this dish. Over time, this Guadeloupean culinary tradition has grown richer.

For 6 people / Cooking time: 90 minutes

- 250 g of Angola peas
- 250 g of soap peas
- 250 g of Boukoussou peas
- 250 g salted beef
- 250 g pork tails
- 250 g salted pork
- 300 g white/yellow yam or malanga pieces
- 250 g West Indian pumpkin (giraumon)
- 1/2 head of cabbage
- 2 carrots
- 2 onions
- Cloves, minced garlic
- 1 bouquet garni (parsley, scallions, thyme)

The day before, desalt the meats and soak the dried peas overnight. Chop the onions. Cut the cabbage into large strips and the other vegetables into cubes.

Put the dried peas in a pot, add the meats, carrots, bouquet garni, cloves, and garlic. Pour in 2 liters of water, cover, and simmer gently for 1 hour. Then add the root vegetables and continue cooking for another 30 minutes.

Dombrés



There are two versions of the origin of *dombrés*:

- One says the dish was made by Guadeloupean slaves when they had access to wheat flour and black peas.
- Another claims the name comes from the English term “dumb braid,” literally “stupid bread.”
- Yet another tradition attributes its introduction to Dutch Jews who, fleeing Brazil during the Inquisition, came to Guadeloupe and brought with them the idea of knèfes—dumplings or small flour balls.

Dombrés and Shrimp Tails

Serves 2 (about 70 dumplings)

- 320 g (11 oz) shrimp tails
 - 400 g (14 oz) tomato pulp
 - 1 tablespoon mild chili pepper purée (*available on our website*)
 - ½ teaspoon four-spice mix
 - 2 chopped onions
 - 4 garlic cloves, minced
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - A drizzle of oil
1. In a large pot, heat a drizzle of oil and sauté the chopped onions and garlic for about 5 minutes.
 2. Add the shrimp tails and brown them on both sides.
 3. Pour in 680 ml (about 2 ¾ cups) of cold water, then add the tomato pulp, mild chili purée, and four-spice mix.
 4. Season with salt and pepper.
 5. Cover and cook for 15 minutes, or until it reaches a boil.
 6. Take a small amount of dough (prepared beforehand) and roll it into a small ball in the palm of your hand.
 7. Drop each dumpling into the pot one by one, repeating until all the dough is used.
 8. Cook uncovered for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Matété Crabe (Crab Rice Stew)

In Guadeloupe, it's called "Matété", while in Martinique it's known as "Matoutou." The name likely comes from the word "*matoto*", a small woven palm basket the Kalinagos (Indigenous Caribbean people) used to serve meals. Originally, land crab was a prized food among the Amerindians. During the era of slavery, the population—converted to Christianity by force—replaced meat with fish and shellfish during Lent. Today, Matété Crabe is a traditional dish often served at Easter and Pentecost.

Serves 4 — 35 minutes cooking time

- 1 kg (2.2 lbs) land crabs, cleaned
 - 350 g (1¾ cups) washed rice
 - 100 g (3.5 oz) smoked bacon
 - 1 tomato, diced
 - 1 onion
 - 3 garlic cloves
 - 5 sprigs of parsley
 - 3 sprigs of chives (or green onions)
 - 2 mild chili peppers (piment végétarien)
 - 1 tbsp colombo powder
 - 1 bay leaf (West Indian bay leaf – bois d'Inde)
 - A pinch of hot chili purée (to taste)
 - Juice of 2 limes
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - 1 liter (about 4¼ cups) water
 - Oil
1. Marinate the crabs for about 4 hours (gently crack the claws first) with the juice of 1 lime, minced garlic, salt, and pepper.
 2. Finely chop the onions, chives, parsley, and dice the tomato.
 3. In a large pot, heat a drizzle of oil. Sauté the chopped aromatics and diced smoked bacon until fragrant.
 4. Add the marinated crab pieces to the pot. Stir in the colombo powder, tomato, remaining lime juice, and hot chili purée.
 5. Add the rice and stir well.
 6. Season with salt and pepper. Pour in the 1 liter of water and cover.
 7. Simmer on low heat for 30 minutes, or until the rice is fully cooked and has absorbed the flavors.