

YUCA – PLU 4819



Description/Taste

The large tapered Yuca roots are similar in size and shape to a sweet potato and can be anywhere from one to several pounds in size and can grow up to 4 feet below the ground. The starchy flesh of the Yuca root is a light white or cream color with a grainy texture similar to potatoes. The meaty flesh is mild, sweet flavor that has a somewhat nutty taste.

Seasons/Availability

Yuca root is available year-round.

Current Facts

Yuca, pronounced YOO-ka, is the root of the Cassava plant which is known botanically as *Manihot esculenta*. The name of this particular South American root has caused a bit of confusion due in part to its similarity to a desert plant native to the southeastern United States, the yucca pronounced YUHK-a. The two are entirely unrelated, though the spelling is used interchangeably in texts and articles. The general rule is one 'c' for the tropical, starchy, South American tuber and two 'c's for the desert succulent. Yuca root is also referred to as Cassava, Medioc or Mandioca and Tapioca throughout the tropical regions of the world it is grown in. In the United States, the name "tapioca" most often refers to the starch and other derivatives made from the root.

Nutritional Value

Yuca root is the third largest source of carbohydrates in the world and is considered a main food staple for millions. The starchy tuber is high in calcium, dietary fiber, potassium, and vitamins B6 and C. Yuca has relatively no protein but does contain high levels of essential fatty acids and twice the calories of potatoes. The young leaves of the Yuca plant are rich in vitamin K and have more protein and nutrients than the root. Yuca root is gluten-free and the starch made from it is easily digested by anyone with dietary sensitivities. Yuca has been found to contain goitrogens, which are substances found in other cruciferous vegetables like cabbage that can block the intake of iodine by the thyroid. The presence of the goitrogens can increase the levels of iodine deficiency in areas where the Yuca root is the primary source of energy.

Applications

Yuca has been referred to as the most versatile vegetable by some, including cookbook author and journalist Steven Raichlen. Due to compounds present in raw Yuca, the root must be cooked prior to consumption. Yuca can be used just like potatoes in many dishes, it can be boiled and pureed, mashed and roasted. A popular application for Yuca in Columbia and Venezuela is fries. The root is cut into long, thick slices and is boiled first to a translucent state and cooled before frying. Yuca is used in a traditional Brazilian dish called “bollos pelones” – the root is peeled and boiled then chilled. The cool root is grated into a mash and made into hollow balls so they can be filled with meats or cheeses and fried. In Ghana and other parts of Africa, Cassava is used to make a traditional dish called fu-fu. Yuca is soaked in water for a few days (which can ferment the root for other uses like beverages) and then mashed with a mortar and pestle and wrapped in banana leaves. The packets are steamed and served like bread with stews and soups or on its own. Yuca root stores well and can be kept refrigerated or in a cool pantry for up to a month; it can be stored underground for a longer period. Prepared Yuca root should be used within a day.

Ethnic/Cultural Info

In northern Brazil, Yuca is used to make a dish referred to as ‘tapioca’ made from the starch of the Yuca root. Tapioca starch is mixed with water for a sand-like consistency and is then spooned into a heated non-stick frying pan and spread out to make a crepe. The tapioca mixture sets, gets flipped, then is topped with cheese, chocolate, fruits, and more, and folded over to make a little pocket. Also in Brazil, a dessert made from tapioca starch and coconut called “cuscuz branco”; the name translates to “white pudding”. Often the tapioca starch is homemade by blending the root with water to create a paste, which is then dried and rubbed over a mesh strainer to produce a powder. The starch is mixed with sugar and coconut shreds then a mixture of milk, coconut milk and sweetened condensed milk is first boiled then poured over the tapioca and coconut mixture. After the wet and dry ingredients have been combined, the dish is covered and left at room temperature until it sets. The finished dessert is topped with more shredded coconut and is traditionally served during winter holidays. In Peru, masato is an alcoholic beverage made by locals, who masticate the root and then spit the chewed root into jars, where it sits for several days to ferment. This is a beverage offered to guests and refusal can mean social suicide.

Geography/History

Yuca is a highly drought-resistant crop and is a mainstay in the diets of millions of people living in tropical and sub-tropical regions around the globe. It is a good crop for regions where rain is unpredictable and potentially scarce. Brazil, Nigeria and Thailand are the predominant producers of Yuca in the world. Native to South America and parts of the Caribbean, the name “Tapioca” comes from the Tupi word tipi’oka. Tupi was the language of the natives living in Brazil when the Portuguese explorers first came to the Americas. The word tipi’oka refers to the process of making starch from the tuber. The root is still referred to as Tapioca in northeast Brazil, whereas Madioca and Aipim are more common names for Yuca in northern and central Brazil. In the United States, Yuca is commonly known as Cassava, most likely to distinguish it from the desert yucca plant.

Yuca with Garlicky Onions



Active time: 20 MIN **Total Time:** 50 MIN **Yield:** Serves 8

Yuca, or cassava, is a starchy tuber that can be boiled, fried, or baked like a potato. For this Cuban side dish, photographer Romulo Yanes likes to simmer the root until tender and flaky then dress it in a hot onion- and garlic-infused oil.

Ingredients

- 4 1/2 pounds fresh yuca, peeled and cut into 3-inch rounds
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 2 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium white onions, halved and thinly sliced lengthwise

How to Make It

Step 1

Place yuca in a large saucepan and add cold water to cover by 2 inches. Add vinegar and 1 1/2 teaspoons salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high; reduce heat to medium and simmer until yuca splits open and is soft throughout, 30 to 45 minutes, depending on thickness of yuca.

Step 2

Meanwhile, heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high until shimmering. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until garlic begins to soften and turn golden, about 20 seconds. Reduce heat to medium; add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until onion is light golden and crisp-tender, about 10 minutes. Season with remaining 1 teaspoon salt.

Step 3

Drain yuca in a colander. Gently separate the chunks into large pieces and remove the tough core if necessary. Arrange yuca on a platter or in a wide serving bowl. Pour the hot oil, garlic, and onions over the yuca. Serve immediately.