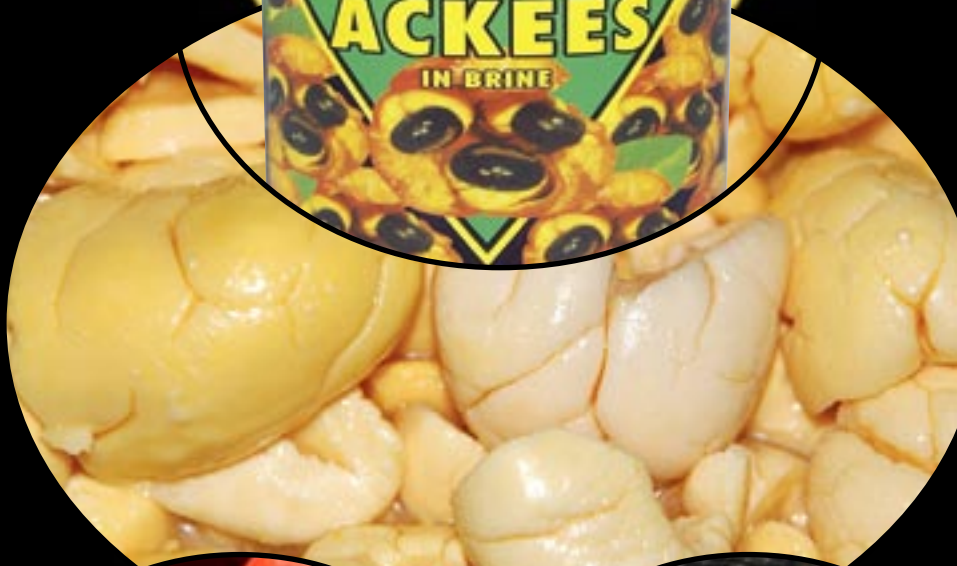


ACKEEES

“National dish of Jamaica”



By Peter Spyros Goudas
transcribed by Bernadette Scott

ACKEES

Question: What are Ackees? What do they look like? How do they taste?

Answer: They look like the picture on the cover and tastes like scrambled eggs.

Hello dear reader: My name is Spyros Peter Goudas and I have heard questions like the above hundreds of time through my career in the food industry.

Let us travel back in time to the 1970's. That was not so long ago. Maybe some of you were not even born yet.

Back then, I had a store on Baldwin Street in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. This area was, and still is, referred to as Kensington Market, or Jewtown.



My book the Cow Foot Story portrays the efforts, the pain and the effects of my undertaking to satisfy my customers. The story is written in a comedy format and I hope someday you



will find a copy, read it and have a good laugh.

Nevertheless, let us mentally go back to that time and imagine there is no internet, no google, no ipad, no iphone, no Wikipedia, not even a Fax machine. (And no, we did not travel by horseback!).

Imagine a Greek immigrant, who spoke very little English, trying to cope with the needs of my customers, most of whom were immigrants like me.

Since I had mastered the Cow Foot, to many of my customers, I was now considered an authority in the Caribbean Culture.

On the other hand, to me, this was the beginning of an adventure I could never have imagined or dreamt of.

Some of my customers were beginning to realize that I was willing to go to lengths to accommodate their requests. Now, I was being asked for Ackees.

Above, I state "some of my customers". The reason I say some is that the Caribbean population consists of many islands, e.g. Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica, Dominica, Cuba, St. Vincent, Montserrat, etc., etc.

I spent a considerable amount of time to understand that each of the islands has its own culture, way of talking, and the most importantly, different eating habits and dishes.

So the question came to me from SOME.

Do you have any Ackees?

Me: How do you spell it? What does it look like? What does it taste like?

Customer: I have a friend who has a small farm in Port Antonio he cultivates Ackees and sells them down in Kingston, Jamaica.

Me: How can I get in contact with him? Does he have a website or an email address? Oh I forgot, internet and email were not yet discovered.

Customer: He have access to a phone when he is in Kingston on Sundays, down by the market at Halfway Tree.

Me: Does that mean that he will be there at 3:30 p.m. Sunday afternoon?

Customer: Nah, man. Halfway Tree is a place in Kingston.

Me: Could you be here on Sunday so that I can communicate with him because my English is not perfect?

Customer: Okay, Peter, I will be here on Sunday. Just have some food so that me and my wife can have lunch. Some Curry Goat will be fine with yellow yam and eddoes too.

Now Sunday has arrived. We had a wonderful lunch and discussion about Ackees. I learned a lot about the fruit.

Most importantly that the fruit had to be opened naturally, not by force.

I asked him why and he stated, and I recall clearly, If the fruit is not opened

naturally, YOU ARE GOING TO DIE MAN, YOU ARE GOING TO DIE.

He further advised that there are 3 seeds inside. Do not eat them.

Again I asked Why.



Response: Do not eat any of them Peter

Me: WWWWwhyyy!

Response: BECAUSE YOU ARE GOING TO DIE MAN!

Me: Do I have to know anything else?

Response: Yes, there is one more detail. Behind the fruit and the seed is a something like a fishing net that holds the whole fruit together.

You have to remove it before eating.

Me: Why?

RESPONSE: Because YOU ARE GOING TO DIE, DIE man!

Suddenly, I began to wonder, What am I getting into? I am going to make this phone call, along with funeral arrangements because any small error and, apparently, I will die.

Finally, the telephone call was made.

Arrangements were made to prepay for the goods and the freight through the bank. Hopefully, someone in Port Antonio after receiving the money, will not disappear, and will fulfill his promise.

Two to three weeks later I received a telephone call from a Customs Supervisor at the Airport for me to attend a meeting at the Airport and identify the shipment.

Customs Supervisor: Are you Mr. Spyros Peter Goudas? Me: Yes Sir!

Customs Supervisor: Do you have a shipment coming up from Port Antonio? Me: Yes Sir!

Customs Supervisor: Do you know that in Port Antonio there is cultivation of a particular tobacco? Me: I do not know about that sir.

Customs Supervisor: Do you know what is in this box? Me: Yes Sir. It should be of something that they call Ackee.

Customs Supervisor: What is Ackee? Me: I do not know sir. But I guess it is a fruit.

Customs Supervisor: What do you know about the fruit? Me: The only thing I know sir is that there are three (3) seeds in each fruit and

if you eat them you will die. Also that there is something like a fishing net behind and if you eat it you will die.

Customs Supervisor: Let us get this story straight. So you ask somebody, somewhere in Port Antonio, Jamaica, some one whom you do not know how he looks like you do not know his first or last name ,you have no knowledge of him. You also prepay for the goods and the freight, for something you do not know anything about and you tell us that if we eat it, we will die?

It must be poisonous. Is it fair to say, that we should call the Food and Drugs Administration along with some RCMP guys to investigate this box.

Me: I do not know too much about all these things that you are telling me sir. The only thing I know is that I will be very happy to receive my box.

Customs Supervisor: Well if that is the case, let us open the box and look at it.

Upon opening the box, it contained a tray of Ackees with the closed pods.

Customs Supervisor: Let us open the pods and look inside.

Me: Sir, you cannot open the pods because they have to open naturally. If you force them to open it and you try to eat it, you will die.

Customs Officer: So what do you expect us to do? You want us to look each of them taking its time to open naturally?

Me: Yes sir, if that is the case, we will do it that way so that I can go ahead with

my procedures. Should all go well, I will can it in my factory, so that it may be preserved with a long life expectancy, so that I can sell in the open market.

There was silence in the room. I am waiting for an answer. I looked at the Supervisor and the other officers.

It appeared that each was looking to the other for an answer.

They retreated outside the office for a meeting. Only to return to inform me that I can have the box, with the promise that I will give him a few cans to try upon completion of the canning process.

I would like to pause here for a moment to let you know that at that time I had not yet established the Mr. Goudas line of products (over 1,000 products as of 2011), therefore my name was not known to anyone, and I did not have the recognition that I have today.

With my new task at hand, I tried every possible way to complete the canning process. That meant that I had to wait for the Ackees pods to open naturally, then to remove the black seeds and fishing net.

With different heating proportions for sterilization, I ended up with some soft Ackees, like a puree. Some of the cans were blown up which is a sign of non-proper sterilization. And, some almost perfect, which I considered to be a partial success.

I took these cans to the Customs Supervisor and there was an in-house Jamaican fellow who was invited for testing the canned Ackee.

I told the gentleman that I have removed the seeds, the net and I had let them open naturally before canning.

He looked at me and said. You know Mr. Goudas, I have never seen a can of Ackee before in my life. Back home in Jamaica, we had an Ackee tree in the back yard and any time we needed we picked our Ackees and made a dish.

While there, I formally requested that I be allowed to import a few skids (i.e. a few thousand pounds) at a time for further investigation and experimentation of the canning process in order to identify the cost of the unpasteurized and unsterilized products or the softness.

It was then that I had the good news and the privilege of being allowed to receive further shipments on an experimental basis.

It took me quite some time to formulate and record the procedures for the sterilization and the heating penetration process to avoid spoilage, over processing, under processing, blown up cans, etc. Finally, I had the procedures for canning. Now I needed someone to can the Ackees since, it was not possible to can Ackees in Canada, given that the fruit has to be opened naturally and takes its



own sweet time to ripen. In addition, high temperature levels are necessary for the fruit to open naturally.

Therefore, the ideal country for production was Jamaica, the county of origin.

Upon investigation, I discovered that The Eve Company, Jamaica, was equipped with the canning equipment, and with my documented processing and sterilization requirements, they were very willing to undertake the responsibility to complete the task. The only requirement was to wait for the Ackee Season.

Now, I needed financing. I successfully made arrangements with La Preferida Company in New York with the man in charge Easy Hopperfield, who, based on my information we agreed on processing two container loads.

The destinations were: one shipment for Canada and one for New York.

Oh Happy Day! The shipment has arrived. A day for celebration.

I called all my customers who had inquired about Ackees in the past.

They immediately inquired as to the cost. I responded, approximately \$2.00 per can. I heard responses like

WWWhhaaaTTT????!

I did not like this response.

I explained that there was a lot of work involved in the canning of the Ackees. However, the immediate response was almost always: We get the Ackees in Jamaica for FREE, We have three Ackee Trees in the back yard.

Any time we needed Ackees, we just

climbed the tree and picked them. Why should we buy the Ackee in the Can?

(I would like to pause for a moment to let you know that a loaf of bread cost 25 cents at the time.)

Now, suddenly I was stuck with a good product, and customers who are not willing to pay the price. What am I going to do?

For some period of time, I distributed a few cases to other stores with similar clientele, e.g., Sansi Banana, Alvis Caribbean on Kensington Avenue, Piris Dixeland (Lawrence and Pharmacy), Joyce's at Bathurst and Bloor, Winstons Lord (Landsdowne and Queen), among others. (Some of the old timers will recognize these stores.)

I had a small display in my store and somewhere along the line I was selling a couple cases per week. Therefore, in my estimation, I had enough products to last me for the next four to five years, since the total shipment was 1,000 cases, with 24 cans per case.

I had Ackees for breakfast, Ackees for lunch, Ackees for dinner!

Including, cooked Ackees in the store for customers to try.

I was more of a Yardie than a Yardie. (Yardie is the term Jamaicans use to refer to themselves.)

I tried to market the Ackees to other Caribbean patrons. However, for some reason, other Caribbean people were not familiar with the product.

Around this period, I was beginning to

be able to determine as soon as a customer entered the store, based on their facial expression, the hair grooming process, the eye and body movements, I knew exactly which island they were from, especially, the way they spoke. As a consequence, if the customer were not Jamaican, I would refrain from offering them Ackees.

My financing was tight. Mr. Hopperfield called me three times a day for his money. The production facility in Jamaica wanted to know if I needed any more product and when. I was in stress and distress.

But, the Good Lord Above, The Almighty God heard seen my situation and He enlightened someone in a popular Toronto newspaper to write an article: that drugs coming up to Canada from the Caribbean, including Ganja, in the form of shipments, even in the canned goods.

Suddenly, customers coming into the store and asking me if I knew anything about the article. I responded that I had heard about it, in fact I have a few cases here which may be subject to the wrong products in the wrong cans.

The customers responded with eagerness. At times, purchasing five cases at a time with no questioning or bargaining for the price.

Within one week, I sold my inventory at a higher price than I was expecting. What a relief!
Even some Police came by requesting a few cans.

All my finances were back in order and

Mr. Hopperfield was quite happy to receive payment.

The next few weeks I had comments from customers.

Peter, I have good news and bad news.

I requested the BAD news first.
You would not believe,
There Was NO Ganja in the Cans.

I then requested the good news!

The response was that they had never had such good Ackees, not even in Jamaica. The Ackees were nice and firm.

I hope that you have had a good laugh reading about my experience introducing Ackees into Canada.

Now, I will describe a little bit about THE ACKEE, the national fruit of Jamaica.

In addition, I have included a couple recipes, which may not be typical to Jamaicans who already know how to cook them, but for other nationalities who have read this article and are curious.

The tree was brought from West Africa by Captain William Bligh around 1793.

The Ackee is a pear shaped fruit (composed of 5 petals), green in colour in clusters on an evergreen tree.

Upon reaching maturity, the fruit turns red in colour. Continued exposure to the sun causes the petals to split open to reveal three (3) large shiny black seeds attached to soft, pulpy flesh which is yellow in colour, called arilli.

Traditionally, it is at this specific time

that they are ready for harvest and the arilli are removed and cleaned.

The freshly harvested Ackee is now ready for cooking or canning. This delicacy, cooked with Cod Fish is enjoyed island-wide, at breakfast, or as an entrée.

The canned product is also enjoyed by both locals and visitors to the island.

In the past, the Ackee fruit was considered to be poisonous.

It is now well known that only if the fruit is eaten before it is fully ripe, it will cause a problem.

The common illness is referred to as Jamaica Vomiting Syndrome (JVS).

When the fruit is unripe, it contains a certain Amino Acid, which causes bouts of vomiting.

Interestingly enough, only consumers who are suffering from chronic cases of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency seem to be affected by this syndrome.

This incident is now considered a rare occurrence because of the increased awareness of the necessity for consuming only the ripe, opened Ackees.

Companies such as Goudas Foods, implement meticulous quality control policies, and in conjunction with the company's educated and qualified suppliers, it is ensured that only wholesome, sun-ripened Ackees, with pods naturally opened, are harvested for canning.

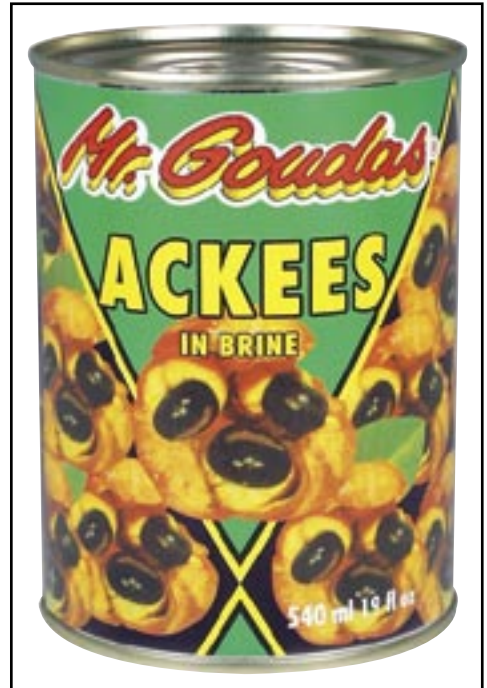
Allowing for the release of all harmful gases, followed by the proper cleaning and removal of seeds, qualified inspectors then eliminate the soft fruits.

The canning process involves the sterilization of the fruit through the application of appropriate temperature levels, and a specified length of time within the retorts. Further care is taken to maintain high levels of consistency from the beginning to the end of the process, which includes cleaning firm, sun-ripened Ackees, and following impeccable sterilization procedures.

At one point during a TV interview, they asked me: "Not including your brand, if you were to recommend a brand on the market, which one would it be?"

After a considerably long pause, which indicated in-depth thought on my part, and a few deep sighs, I responded: "I have been marketing Ackees for over 35 years and I am one of the largest importers to Canada.

Over the years I have seen brands come and go, and I would have to say that





Grace and Montego are the only other brands I recommend, since I have to refrain from including my own”.

Now that we know a bit of the history of this delicacy, it is time to reveal how to prepare it.

It is important for anyone to know that a can of Ackee is a bit expensive.

The average retail price is between \$6.00 and \$8.00 depending on the season, some with lower quality soft or broken is \$4.00 to \$5.00

It is considered to be one of the most expensive fruits in the world.

On an experimental basis you may ask your Jamaican friend to bring you some cooked Ackees from home.

If you are not this fortunate though, the following 2 methods of preparation are suggested.

We know for a fact that all Jamaicans can cook Ackees in various methods... so, for the rest of us, good luck!

Method 1 Ackees and Codfish (Saltfish)

- 1 lb Codfish (saltfish or baccala),
- 1 can Ackees
- 1 large onion
- 1 green pepper
- 1 sprig fresh or dried thyme
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 fresh green onions (scallion, if possible)
- Salt and Black Pepper
- 3 tablespoons of butter or vegetable oil
- 2 tsp of Scotch Bonnet Pepper Sauce

Place the codfish in cold water and allow it to soak overnight. We suggest that you change the water a few times to remove the saltiness from the codfish.

Bring a pan of water to a boil and add the codfish. Reduce the heat level and gently simmer for 20 minutes (until is tender).

During this time, chop the onion, garlic, green pepper, green onions and thyme into small cubes. Drain the codfish from the water and allow it to cool.

Melt the butter or vegetable oil in a frying pan and add the above ingredients, including black pepper, a little salt if necessary, and Scotch Bonnet Pepper Sauce. Stir fry for 3 to 4 minutes.

If you do not have Scotch Bonnet Pepper Sauce you may use Mr. Goudas Trinidad Style Hot Sauce.

(Please do not use Tabasco Sauce it will overpower the flavour of the Ackees).

Break the codfish into small pieces and add to the mix. Continue stir-frying gently for a few more minutes and then add the Ackees.

Stir very gently so as to avoid breaking the Ackees. We carefully selected and packed these Ackees to ensure that they come to you whole, and I would be very upset if you were to break them up!

Once the Ackees are thoroughly heated, remove from stove.

Serve on a bed of rice or as is. Or serve it the Jamaican way with boiled green banana and a piece of yam. Yah mann.

Method 2 Vegetarian's Delight.

Ingredients: Same as Method 1
but delete CODFISH

Add: 2 tomatoes (diced)

Add tomatoes after sautéing onions and follow the steps of the recipe above.

Sauté for a few minutes.

Add Ackees and continue stir-frying for a few more minutes.

As you can see 40 years later, I still did not die from the Ackee.

In fact, the Ackee consumption out of Jamaica has increased every year to the point that Jamaica herself can not produce enough to meet the demand.

Therefore, I have made arrangements to produce Ackees in Ivory Coast in Africa to fulfill the increasing demand.

I hope you had a good laugh with the story.

Also, I hope that you will look for my brand or other brands that I have recommended.



The picture below was taken at the time frame of the story in the 1970's.



This is me 40 years later 2011, I have survived the Ackee adventure.

In fact, I am fully ripened like the Ackee pod.

Over the years, I have studied and created products, not only from the Caribbean, but from every part of the world.

You may see my products in the ethnic aisles of grocery outlets which carry them.

I suggest you support the stores that carry my products, which in reality are Your Products!



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