

## COOKING IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Nothing is more delicious than Highlands kaukau hot from the fire unless it's a mud clam from a mangrove swamp in Milne Bay cooked with fern leaves and coconut cream or Dia, a Central District delicacy combining sago, bananas and thick coconut cream or ..... It really depends where you are. All villagers are expert in cooking food specific to their area.

Ingredients and cooking methods vary from area to area in Papua New Guinea. As coconuts are common in coastal areas, coconut milk is an essential ingredient in most coastal cooking but in the Highlands the use of the coconut is rare.

In almost all areas food is considered to be divided into three main types - edible greens (kumu); meat, fish or poultry (abus); and staples. In some areas cooks will only combine two of these food groups where in others everything can be placed into the same cooking pot. All food groups can be combined in mumu pits. Other than kumu and the staple vegetables, only a few vegetables are used regularly.

Ripe fruit and nuts are usually considered as snack foods so it isn't very common to consider these in meal planning.

The three basic food groups are expanding with the introduction of food from other areas and cultural groups influencing Papua New Guinea. Rice is now a staple all over the country as bread is in the larger centres. Tinned fish and bully beef are eaten in many homes everyday. Chinese cabbage as well as western type cabbage is popular. Choko leaves are popular in many areas but it was Europeans who introduced the fruit as an edible vegetable.

Probably the strongest influence on ingredients used in Papua New Guinean cooking has been the introduction of foods and spices that increase flavour. Traditionally coconut, salt and in some areas lemon leaves were about all that were used specifically to enhance the taste of cooked foods.

Coastal women used sea-water for salt and salt in the Highlands was obtained infrequently through trade or from the ashes of fires built on certain rocks near lakes. Ginger, which in many areas is chewed on as a tasty snack, or perhaps for medicinal or magical reasons is now used in some areas to flavour fish dishes. Tomatoes, chilies, onions, and garlic are increasing in popularity and curry powder and pepper are sold in most trade stores.

Traditionally villagers cook over an open fire. Food is either wrapped in leaves or placed directly into the fire. In some areas the food is cooked in clay pots or green bamboo placed in the fire.

Usually a mumu pit is used to cook for large groups or special events. Some people mumu as an everyday method of cooking\* To mumu a large pit is dug, rocks placed in it and a fire lit. When the fire is out and the rocks are red hot a layer of leaves is placed over the rocks so that the food can be placed in the pit. On the coast coconut milk is poured over all the food. Further layers of leaves are used to enclose all the food. Then earth or more leaves will be piled on top so that the food can be left to steam for