Pacific Community
Communauté du Pacifique

Travels across the Pacific Region
THE WONDERFUL STORY OF THE BREADFRUIT



Facts

Name: *Artocarpus Altilis.* Better known as the breadfruit tree, it can reach a height of 25 m with a trunk that is 1.80 m in diameter.

Fruit: *'uru* or *maiore* (French Polynesia), *mei* (Tonga, Wallis, Niue), *uto* (Fiji), *'ulu* (Samoa, Hawaii).

Origin: Native to south-east Asia, the breadfruit tree spread across the Pacific through the different waves of migration. It is now found throughout the region, including on coral atolls.

Growing conditions: Breadfruit trees need space, sunlight, and well-drained soil. They take about 6 years to produce their first fruit and then can continue to do so for more than 50 years.

Harvest period: November to March and then July-August. Each tree can produce 50 to 200 fruit a year.



You can use every part of a breadfruit tree!

In addition to its fruit, the breadfruit has many other interesting features !

- Its light and flexible wood can be used for ocean-going canoes, furniture, musical instruments, or even houses!
- The leaves can be used to cover dishes or wrap up food before it is put into a traditional oven. They can also be eaten!
- Certain varieties, mainly found in Micronesia, have edible seeds that are a popular snack.
- The buds, bark and sap in the leaves are widely used in traditional medicine to treat asthma, sore throats and styes, and to cover wounds, treat fractures, bruises and joint pain.

Interesting facts
The breadfruit is often mentioned in the oral traditions of Pacific islanders. So, in Polynesia, the 'uru's origin is explained in the legend of Rua-ta'ata, an inhabitant of the Leeward Islands who changed into a breadfruit tree to feed his family during a famine. There are also songs about the breadfruit in Polynesia and Micronesia celebrating its nutritional qualities. The fruit of the breadfruit tree is pictured in many types of handicraft (carving, sewing, weaving, etc.)



Did you know?

There are hundreds of varieties of breadfruit across the world. The size, colour and weight of the fruit, as well as its taste, vary depending on the country where it is grown. Some fruit are dark green and weigh as much as a watermelon, while others are light purple and only the size of an apple (Solomon Islands variety).

This biodiversity is preserved in the *National Tropical Botanical Garden* (Hawaii) by the *Breadfruit Institute*, which is currently in charge of managing the largest collection of breadfruit trees in the world, with 300 accessions and 150 varieties. To learn more: https://ntbg.org/breadfruit

Interesting facts : A breadfruit tree overhangs the grave of William Bligh, the British captain who was send to Tahiti on *The Bounty* to bring breadfruit plants back to the West Indies to feed the slaves there. His first attempt was unsuccessful due to the famous mutiny, but his second expedition (1792) was a success and made it possible to introduce the breadfruit to the Caribbean.



The 'uru, a one-of-a-kind fruit

Made into bread or cake, served baked with cheese, as jelly, even as French fries, 'uru can be prepared in many different ways and served any way you like!

Eating

Mature breadfruit is eaten as a starchy staple. Some varieties like the *huero* ripen very quickly and can be eaten straight away. Others keep well and the full taste of the fruit comes out 2 or 3 days after they are picked.

Cooking

The traditional method of cooking breadfruit is baking in a earth oven (a hole dug into the ground that is lined with red-hot rocks) or on an open fire (over the hot coals) 'Uru is just as delicious when baked in a modern oven, steamed, fried or even boiled in water.

Preservation

Nowadays, you can find frozen and tinned breadfruit as well as breadfruit flour, but for a very long time, Pacific islanders had to use ingenious methods to store 'uru since it was only available 3 to 4 months each year. Storing breadfruit was extremely important since it allowed them to deal with food shortages (dry season, tropical cyclones, long ocean voyages). So, up to the 1970s, dehydration (drying) and fermentation were widely used. Fermentation was done by burying the chopped mature breadfruit in lined underground pits for several months, even up to a year. The fermented paste can be mixed with coconut cream and baked. Called MAHI in Tahiti, it took the name of MA in the Marquesas Islands, MASI in the Solomon Islands and MARATAN in the Federated States of Micronesia.

These traditional preservation methods were gradually abandoned when the islands, which now have regular shipping lines, no longer ran the risk of famine.

Nutritional qualities

An energy food, 'uru is known for its nutritional qualities. Stories tell us that a person can feed two generations by planting just 10 breadfruit trees!
Breadfruit is starchy and rich in fibre, two essential elements for regulating blood sugar levels, reducing cholesterol in the blood, or controlling weight gain since they have an effect on hunger. The amount of sugar in the fruit varies depending on how ripe it is when eaten. The 'uru is also a source of calcium and vitamin C.

Interesting facts : Its low glycemic index (half that of rice) make it a better choice of food for people with diabetes.

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