



Taro

A SYMBOL OF THE PACIFIC'S RICH COOKING HERITAGE

TAKIHI: ENJOY THE SWEET/SALTY TASTE OF THIS TRADITIONAL DISH FROM NIUE

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 6)

- 1 white taro
- 2 papayas
- 300 ml coconut cream

DIRECTIONS

Peel the taro and slice thinly using a large vegetable peeler or mandolin. Do the same thing with the papayas. In an oven-proof dish, put a layer of taro, then a layer of papaya and cover with coconut milk. Repeat several times. Cover the dish with tinfoil and bake for two hours at 160°C.

Takihi is served with all types of dishes (meat or fish). Originally, the prepared ingredients were placed on banana leaves and put into an 'umu' (traditional oven made from a hole dug in the ground and hot stones).



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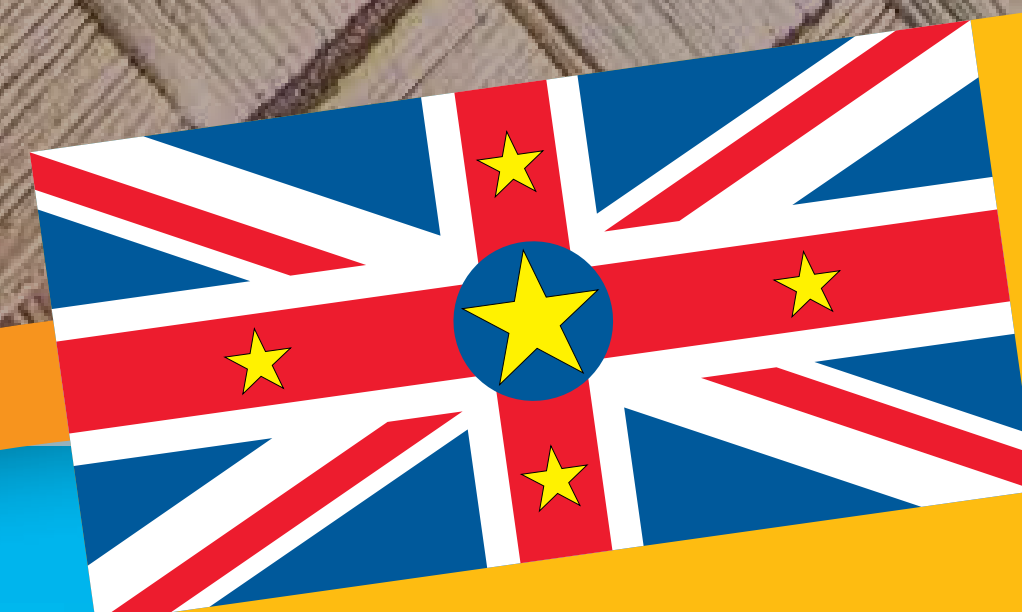
TARO, AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR NIUE

Over the past few years, the Government of Niue has mainly focused on tourism to promote the country's economic development. Recently actions have also been taken to recommence taro exports. The pink taro – or Niue taro – is very popular in the Pacific region, particularly in New Zealand, making it an important economic opportunity for Niue.

DID YOU KNOW?

The world's largest taro producer is Niger (5,387,000 tonnes per year). Three Pacific countries are among the top 20 taro producers: Papua New Guinea (5th), Fiji (14th) and the Solomon Islands (18th). Fiji is also the second largest taro exporter in the world (behind China) with 12,661 tonnes of taro exported each year, mainly to New Zealand, Australia and the United States (US).

Source : Pacific Islands taro market access scoping study – March 2011



NIUE

Niue is an independent country in free association with New Zealand. It is a 259 sq.m coral island with limestone cliffs along its coastline and a central plateau whose highest point is 68 metres above sea level.





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TUNA AND TARO PATTIES FROM TUVALU: BLENDING TRADITION AND THE MODERN WORLD

INGREDIENTS (FOR 12 PATTIES)

- 1 medium-sized taro
- 1 can tuna in brine or fresh cooked and shredded tuna
- Grated ginger, chopped green onion, lemon juice
- 1 egg
- Breadcrumbs
- Salt, pepper
- A small amount of cooking oil

DIRECTIONS

Peel and cube the taro and cook it in a pot of water.

When the taro is cooked, mash it and add the drained tuna, green onion, ginger, and a dash of lemon juice. Add seasonings.

Make patties with the palms of your hands (if the mix is too sticky, add a bit of maize flour).

Beat the egg in a shallow bowl.

Dip each patty in the egg mixture and then coat it with breadcrumbs and place in a frying pan. Fry the patties until golden brown on both sides, drain them and serve with a salad or sautéed vegetables.



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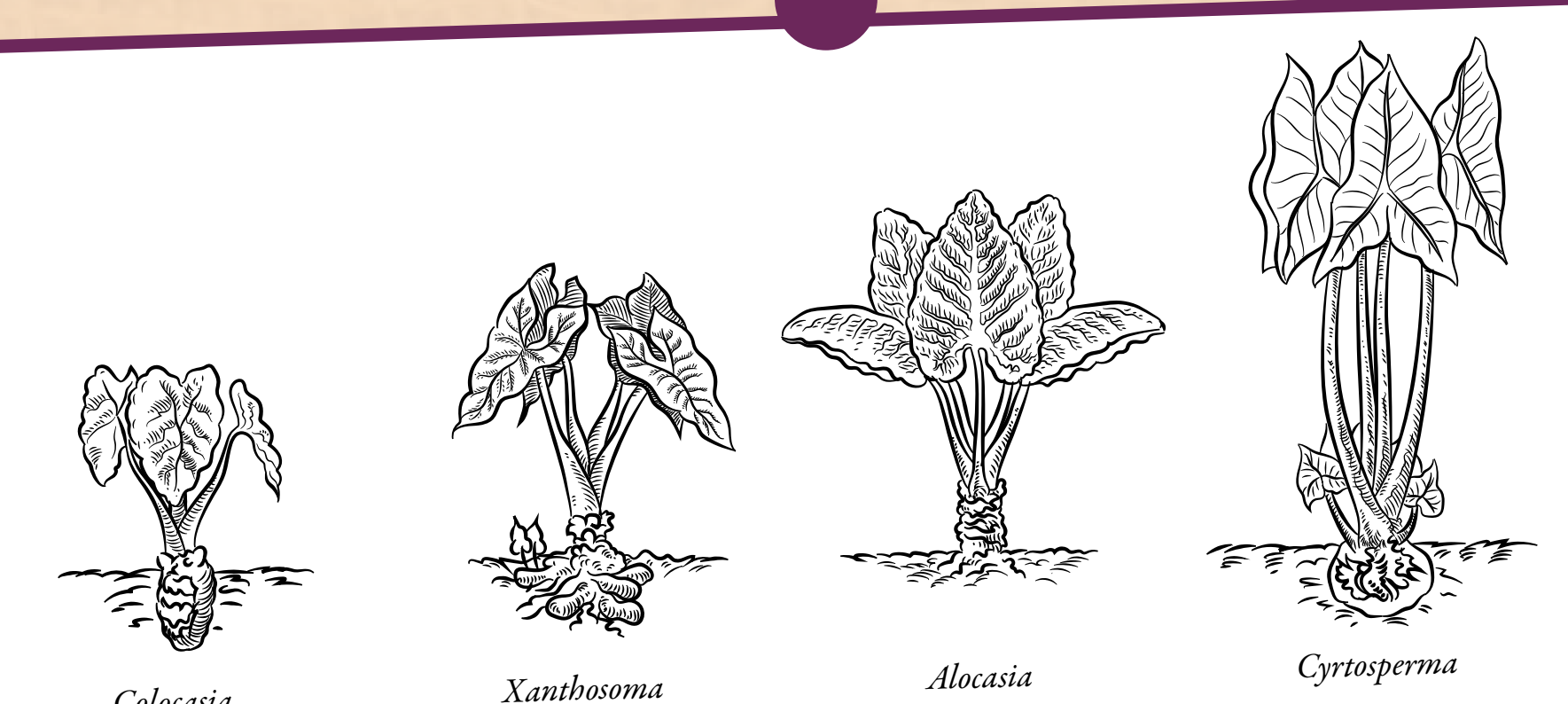


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THE VARIOUS VARIETIES OF TARO AVAILABLE IN THE PACIFIC

There are four varieties of taro in the Pacific; the most common is *Colocasia esculenta*, or true taro. However, the variety grown in Tuvalu is the giant swamp taro (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*, or *Pulaka*, in Tuvaluan). This is a much larger plant with wide arrow-shaped vertical leaves. This species is especially well adapted to atolls as it can grow in salty, sandy earth and is resistant to strong winds.



DID YOU KNOW?

The taro is used as a medicinal plant in certain Pacific Island countries. The leaves can be heated over a fire and used to treat boils. A decoction made from taro leaves is known to bring on menstruation, relieve stomach problems and treats cysts. The sap from leaf stems can be used to treat pink eye (conjunctivitis).

Source: Medicinal plants in the South Pacific, WHO Regional Publications, Western Pacific Series no. 19, 1998.



TUVALU

Tuvalu is a group of islands consisting of nine coral atolls. Originally only eight atolls were inhabited, which is where the name Tuvalu, which means 'eight' in Tuvaluan, comes from. Due to its isolation, fragile natural environment, and very low-lying atolls, this island group is vulnerable to climate change and its consequences, such as rising sea levels. Upwelling contributes to a scarcity of drinking water, soil salinisation, and gradual loss of subsistence crops. The average elevation in these islands does not exceed three metres above sea level. Tuvalu is the first sovereign country that could become uninhabitable in 50 years' time.



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PALUSAMI: A SAMOAN RECIPE THAT IS POPULAR THROUGHOUT THE PACIFIC!

INGREDIENTS (FOR 6 PALUSAMI)

30 young taro leaves
1 litre coconut cream
2 onions
Salt, pepper
8 sheets of tinfoil
(about 30 X 30 cm)

DIRECTIONS

Remove the stalks of all the taro leaves and wash thoroughly.

Set aside 24 leaves for constructing the parcels, and cut the remaining sixteen taro leaves into thin strips.

Peel and dice the onions.

Mix the onions, taro leaf strips and coconut cream. Add salt and pepper.

Lay three taro leaves on each piece of tinfoil. Gently make a 'nest' with the leaves, being careful not to rip them, and then place a small amount of the mixture inside. Gently wrap it all in tinfoil to make small parcels.

Place the palusami parcels in an oven-proof dish and bake for one hour at 180°C.

This traditional Samoan recipe has been adopted by neighbouring Polynesian countries such as Tonga, Tuvalu and Hawaii.



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TARO: SAMOA'S STAR FOOD

The taro is king in Samoa.

It is widely grown for home consumption but also for export. It is a key player in the country's economy. What's more, in Samoa, taro is pronounced 'talo' and money is 'tala'. In the 1990s, a fungus that causes taro leaf blight spread throughout Samoa and led to a 95% drop in taro production, which had a serious financial impact on farmers and families. This farming tragedy did, however, encourage product diversification in Samoa, which now exports copra, noni, cocoa and coffee.

DID YOU KNOW?

The taro is a plant that originated in India and then spread east to Myanmar and China, and south to Indonesia. It was introduced into Papua New Guinea about 5000 BC, then to the rest of Melanesia and Polynesia in about 700 AD.

Source: la culture du taro d'eau, Agriculture et développement n°4, 1994



SAMOA

The first Pacific country to gain independence in 1962, the independent state of Samoa occupies the western part of the Samoa Islands, with the other part under US administration (American Samoa). Samoan tourism is based mainly on agriculture (two-thirds of jobs) and tourism (25% of GDP).





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LAKENO: TARO SHOWS OFF

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 6)

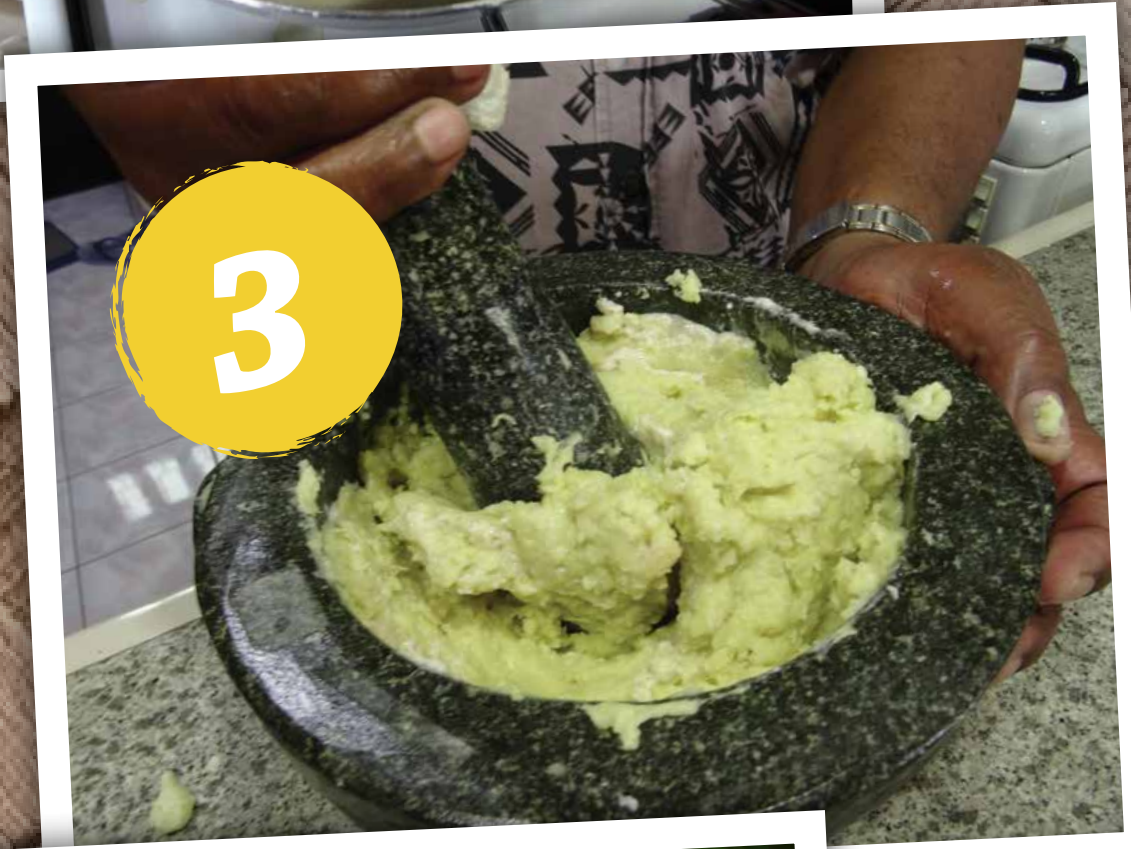
2 taros
500 ml coconut cream
6 banana leaves

DIRECTIONS

Peel and boil the taro. While it is still hot, mash it into a smooth paste using a pestle. At the same time, bring the coconut cream to a boil (it should thicken).

Lay out the banana leaves to make a rectangular platter. Baste them with coconut cream so that the taro mixture doesn't stick to the leaves. Spread the taro paste over the leaves and then cover with the boiled coconut cream. Using the leaves, fold the paste by bringing the four sides towards the middle (the coconut cream is in the centre of the mixture). Wrap the mixture in the banana leaves and put in a hot oven for about 20 minutes.

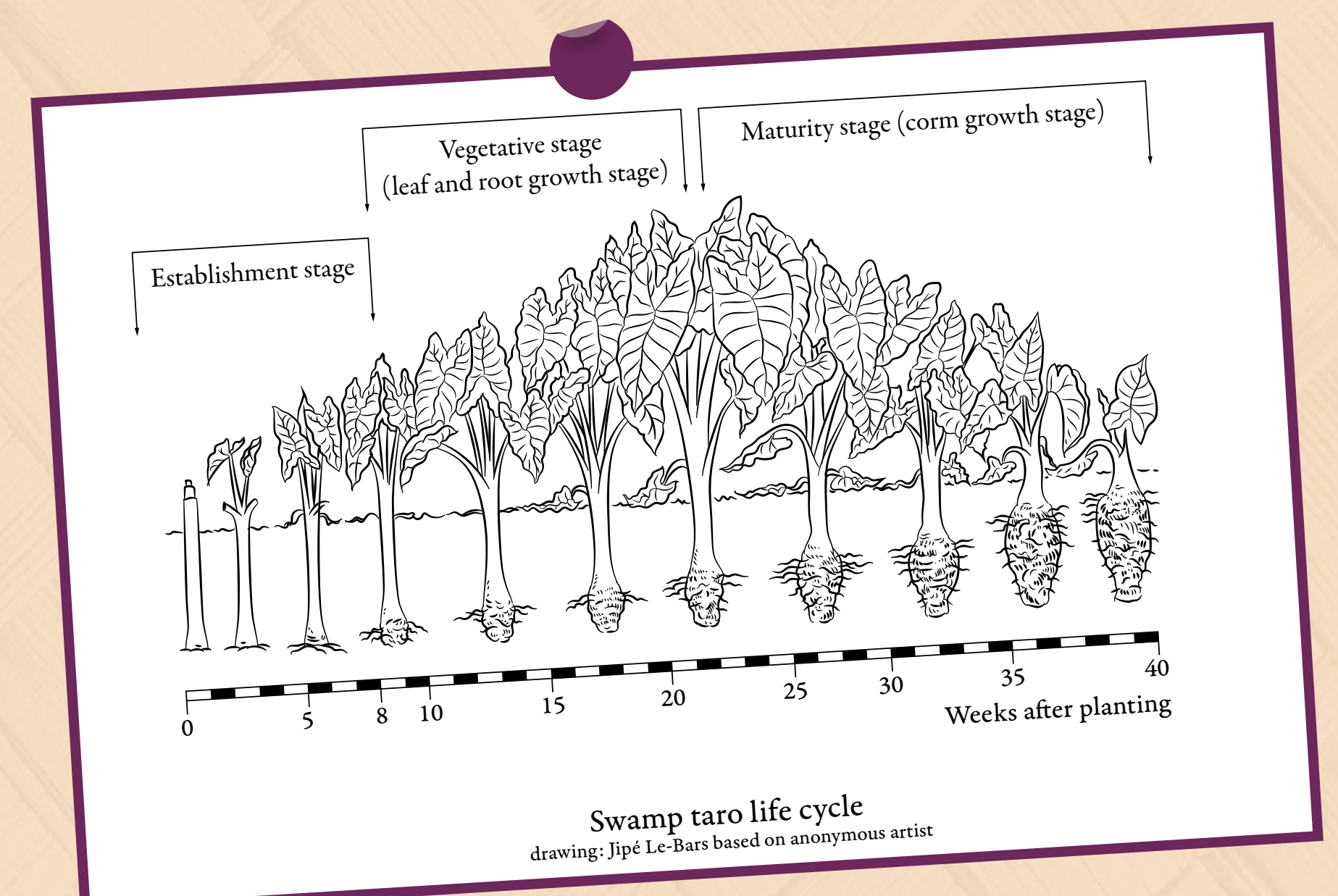
Remove from the oven, open the leaves and cut into slices. Serve as a side-dish for fish or grilled meat.



HOW IS TARO GROWN IN THE PACIFIC?

Taro is grown in the wet tropics between 30°N and 30°S on either side of the equator.

Taro is produced as a rain-fed or irrigated crop or in swampy areas. Any technique that makes it possible to preserve moisture is good, particularly mulching with coconut leaves. Taro withstands flooding, but the water must not be allowed to stagnate, as that causes the corms (the underground part of the taro) to rot. In very wet areas, farmers can get two crops each year.



DID YOU KNOW?

Taro is the 14th largest subsistence crop in the world. Globally, nine million tonnes of taro are grown on some two million hectares every year.

In addition to its importance in diets, taro farming is closely linked to social and cultural life. It is given as a gift on formal occasions and indicates one's social status (taro growers hold very high status in Pacific Island culture).



SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomon Islands consist of about 1000 islands divided into nine provinces, with more than 580,000 inhabitants and nearly 120 different languages. After being the scene of violent battles between the Allied Forces and Japan during the Second World War (Battle of Guadalcanal), the country gained its independence on 7 July 1978 and joined the Commonwealth. Located in the 'Ring of Fire', a zone where tectonic plates meet, the country is regularly affected by earthquakes.



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FAIKAKAI: THE SWEET TASTE OF TONGA

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 6)

1 bunch of young taro leaves
150 g cassava flour
400 g brown sugar
500 ml coconut cream

DIRECTIONS

Wash the taro leaves and remove their stalks. Cut the leaves in strips and boil them for at least 30 minutes.

When the leaves are thoroughly cooked, drain and mash them, adding a little bit of the cooking water.

Mix the taro leaf mash and cassava flour in the following proportions: three cups of mash for one cup of cassava flour.

Place the mixture in an oven-proof dish and bake at a low temperature for about 45 minutes. Let cool and then cut into 5 cm squares.

To make the caramel, heat the brown sugar in a pot, stirring constantly until it darkens – be careful not to burn it! Then slowly add the coconut cream while continuing to stir. Be careful of splattering! Add as much coconut cream as you like, for a thicker or thinner caramel.

Cover the pieces of taro-leaf cake with caramel and serve at room temperature.



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TARO NUTRIENT CONTENT

The taro corm is part of the starch family. It contains carbohydrates but as it also has fibre, its glycemic index (54) is well below that of white bread. It also provides five times more iron than rice and a significant amount of calcium (33 mg/100 g).

Taro leaves and stems are low in calories and are an excellent source of fibre, Vitamin A and calcium.



DID YOU KNOW?

When uncooked, the various parts of the taro (corm, stems, leaves) contain oxalic acid, which can cause burning and itching upon contact with the skin and mouth. Taro must always be well cooked before eating to eliminate this irritant.



Today the Kingdom of Tonga is the only monarchy in the Pacific region. The country has more than 170 islands, divided into three island groups, and approximately 106,000 inhabitants. The economy is based on farming and tuna fishing, which cover most exports and jobs. The King has supreme power, but it is the government, headed by the Prime Minister, that runs the country.



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'CÔVÖ' TARO STEM: KANAK TASTES AND TRADITIONS

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 2)

10 taro leaves with their stems
200 ml coconut cream
Juice of one lemon
Salt, pepper

DIRECTIONS

Wash taro leaves and stems and chop them up. Boil for at least one hour until soft. Drain and cool.

Pour coconut cream into a salad bowl, add lemon, then the cooked leaves and stems.

Serve this dish with a starchy food (taro, yam) and grilled fish or meat.



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KANAK TALE: THE TWO BROTHERS

Once upon a time, two brothers boasted about their accomplishments and showed off their knowledge on two mountain slopes located on either side of a river. They decided to each make a taro patch and shared the water source that irrigated them. There was always plenty of water until one day it became scarce. They then began to fight about the water.

The elder brother said to the younger one, 'Hey, you. You're hogging all the water because you take it further upstream than I do.' The younger replied, 'No, not at all! You're wrong!' So the elder brother picked up two rocks and threw them into the younger one's taro patch, which broke in two spots: one in Caraé and the other in Puu-pö. Furious, the younger brother also picked up a rock and threw it into the elder's taro patch, which also broke.

Even now, you can see the broken rocks from that well-known day, which is why there are rocks in both places.

Story taken from the Kanak Languages Academy.

DID YOU KNOW?

In Kanak culture, the taro represents wet farming and women. This is in contrast to the yam, which represents dry farming and men. What's more, it is often women who take care of taro patches in the Pacific.

NEW CALEDONIA

New Caledonia is a French territory that has a main island, the *Grande Terre*, and several groups of smaller islands: the Belep Islands in the north, the Isle of Pines in the south, the Loyalty Islands in the east (Ouvea, Lifou, Mare and Tiga), and farther west, the Chesterfield Islands and Bellona Reefs. Several different ethnic groups live together in New Caledonia: the Kanaks (Melanesian people there long before the arrival of Europeans); the descendants of convicts deported to the island from 1864 to 1924; people of Asian descent (brought over to work in the mines); and Polynesians (mainly Wallisians), totaling approximately 270,000 inhabitants.



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POPOI: A DISH PREPARED BY WOMEN IN THE AUSTRAL ISLANDS

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 6)

- 10 taros
- A bowl of fermented popoi
- A bowl of water
- Cordyline leaves (*Tahiti Auti*)

DIRECTIONS

Cook the unpeeled taro in a pot of water. Add water if needed during cooking. When the taro are cooked, remove the skins.

Mash the taro one by one using a pestle. Regularly add small amounts of water during this step along with the fermented popoi. Mash until smooth. Then knead the paste by hand to make it light and airy.

Put a small amount of the mixture on the cordyline leaves and make small parcels (called *penu*). Let sit, and serve with coconut cream.



THE LEGEND OF THE MERMAID, OROVARU - TE VAHINE OROVARU OIA HOI, TE VAHINE TETEA

One day, someone began stealing taro in Vaioivi on the island of Rurutu. So the taro farmers decided to watch over the taro patches all through the night. On the second night, they saw a woman digging up taro in one of the fields and they decided to catch her. They chased her to Matonaa Cliff, where she dove into the water and disappeared. They then made some nets and waited for her to come back to the taro patch to catch her. She was taken to the village so she could become 'civilised'. The woman, Mama Orovaru, learned the Rurutu language and quickly became civilised. When she was questioned about her lifestyle and her home, she said that her people could live both on land and under water.

A short time after that, the people discovered that Mama Orovaru was pregnant. She asked to go home to give birth and then die.

She explained that she would have a Caesarian to get the baby out and that she would have to die to allow her little one to live, as was the custom of her people.

They replied that neither one of them would die because when a woman gives birth on land, both the mother and baby live. Finally the big day arrived and she had a baby boy who was named Tururaroiterai. The villagers then discovered that Mama Orovaru had gills. When they opened the baby's mouth, he had gills, too. That explained the underwater lifestyle of Mama Orovaru's people. When the child grew up, he married a woman of Rurutu and had many children.

DID YOU KNOW?

Popoi can also be made with breadfruit (*Kaaku* from the Marquesas Islands). In the past, the mixture was kept underground for several months to prepare for famines.



FRENCH POLYNESIA

French Polynesia is a French overseas territory made up of five island groups with 118 islands, 67 of which are inhabited: the Society Islands with the Windward and Leeward Islands, the Tuamotu Islands, Gambier Islands, Austral Islands and Marquesas Islands. Fishing, cultured pearls, copra oil and vanilla are the territory's main resources.



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ROUROU SOUP: TARO LEAVES TAKE CENTRE STAGE

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 6)

1 bunch of young taro leaves (about 500 g)
500 ml coconut cream
1 onion
Ginger, garlic, lemon juice
Salt and pepper

DIRECTIONS

Wash the taro leaves and remove their stalks.

Put the coconut cream in a pot and bring it to a boil.

Cut the taro leaves in strips and cook them in the coconut cream for at least 30 minutes. Once the leaves are cooked, mash them. Add diced onion, garlic, lemon juice and grated ginger.

Cook for a few more minutes and then serve as a hot or cold side-dish.



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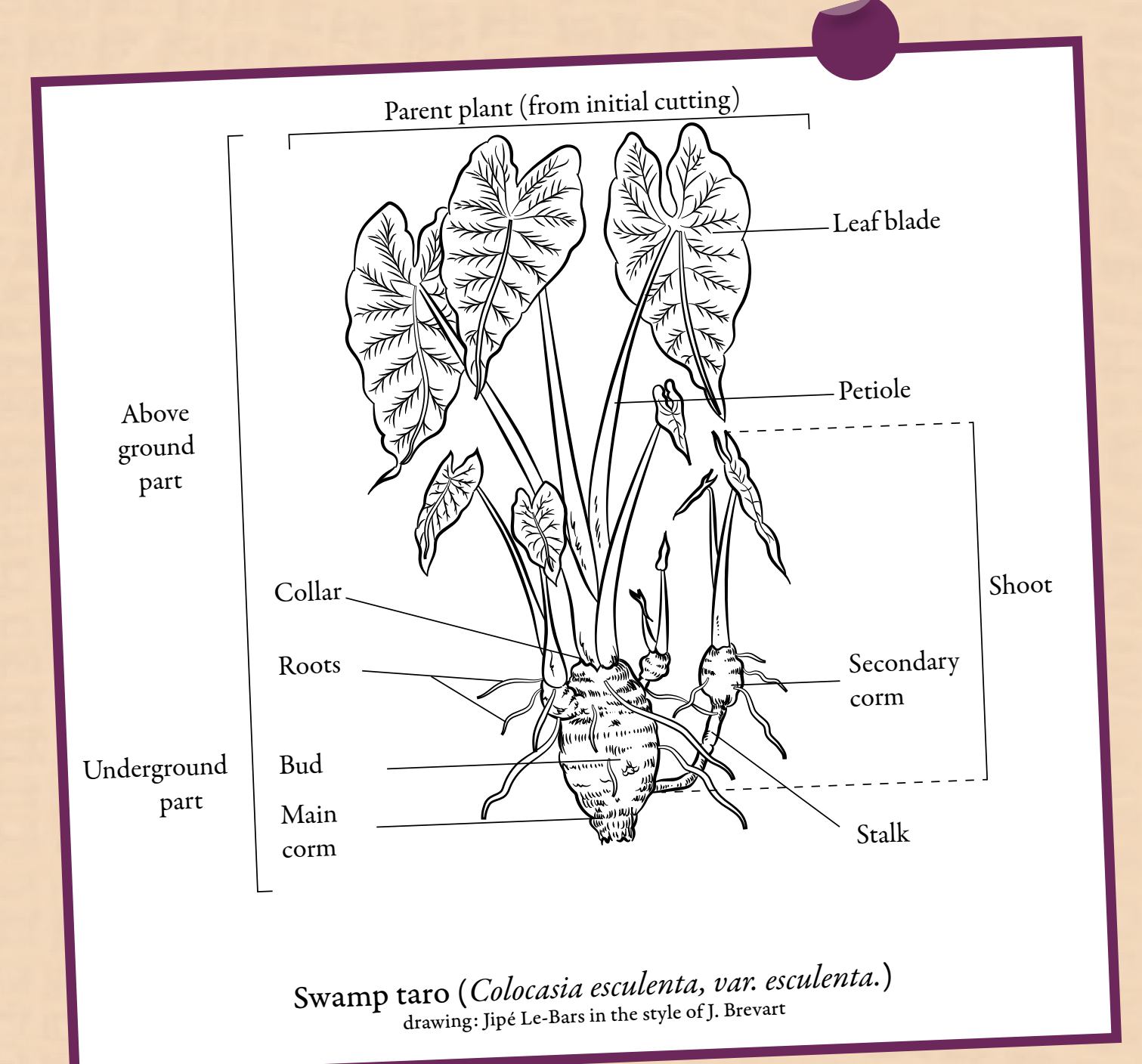
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WITH TARO THE WHOLE PLANT IS EDIBLE!

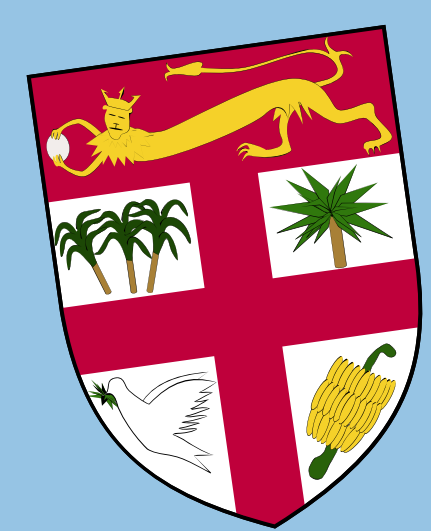
The taro is the only tuber in the Pacific that can be eaten in its entirety. Recipes can be found in the region for its corm, stems and leaves.

Traditionally boiled or steamed, taro corm is now eaten as chips (fried) and is often served by well-known chefs. Ground into flour, it is added to all types of dishes as a substitute for wheat flour, and is even used to make ice cream! Taro is proof that modern contemporary food is compatible with the Pacific's traditions, crops and culinary heritage.



DID YOU KNOW?

Other tuber leaves are edible too, but generally people don't eat them. They do, however, provide an excellent source of fibre and vitamins. That is the case with sweet potato leaves.



FIJI ISLANDS

The Republic of Fiji, a former British colony, comprises 322 islands and more than 800,000 inhabitants. The indigenous Fijian population (Itaukei) lives alongside the descendants of Indo-Fijians, indentured labourers brought to the islands by Fiji's British colonial rulers in the 19th century to work in the sugar cane fields. The country's economy is mainly based on tourism (31% of the GDP), sugar cane and fishing.



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