



A CARIBBEAN
DIET COOKBOOK
Winslow Nicholas

A Caribbean Diet Cookbook

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A Caribbean Diet Cookbook

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SNACKS

Chapter 1

There are no strict rules when it comes to snacks, however a snack is usually associated with a light and casual meal, one that is hurried, or a small amount eaten

There are no strict rules when it comes to snacks, however a snack is usually associated with a light and casual meal, one that is hurried, or a small amount eaten between meals. If you are trying to lose weight, whether it is a great deal or just a little, it would be prudent to abstain from heavy snacks and those which offer generous amounts of fat, sugar, and salt such as the readily available processed foods. This may sound very tedious and unexciting and no doubt you've heard it all before. Most health and diet books reiterate this firmly in the belief that their readers will heed to such invaluable advice, yet reams of data from hours of scientific research still suggest that the message is failing to reach home.

One person's idea of a snack may not necessarily be suitable for all. One could prefer whole-wheat crackers with cottage cheese or a selection of fresh fruit, those with a less salubrious tendency would ideally settle for a handful of sweets and a packet of crisps. Given such a contrast of choice, it would be safe both to the waistline and the healthiness of your diet to outlaw snacks between meals to begin with. Just treat them as small meals to enjoy on selective days, when you can't be bothered to cook for example, or when you feel like cooking but can't be bothered to get the pots and pans out simply because you dread the huge task of washing up afterwards, that's unless you are lucky enough to own a dishwasher.

Snacks should be sensible towards diet and health; filling enough to fill the parts that other snacks cannot reach, and not contain hidden dangers like saturated fat and a high sugar and salt content. Such treats will fill you all right; fill you with rubbish, nothing else. Wholemeal produce, fruit and vegetables, all high in fibre, is an ideal choice.

Fibre provides enormous benefits to health, it passes through the digestive tract and accumulates liquid and swells up to provide a good amount of soft bulk. This helps to speed up bowel movements and dilute fat metabolites that are associated with carcinogen formation, and help give protection from a number of diseases of the large intestine. You will also experience the added benefit of feeling full, so limiting the amount you eat in total.

Good nutrition should be taken into consideration also when preparing snacks. A good balance of vitamins and minerals is just as important as colourful and exciting food. I hope the following recipes will give some idea about snacks. These are light, and some are designed to serve as a side dish like the carrot and pumpkin dip for instance, this tasty dish could be enjoyed with a piece of crusty bread sliced thinly. The same would apply to the avocado cream dip. But take care not to include undesirable things like sweet or salty biscuits. If you are serious about your diet and you have a good deal of weight to lose, opt

for hearty salads or a fresh fruit cocktail without any fancy dressing with artificial ingredients.

CARIBBEAN COCKTAIL

20 black and white grapes

1 ripe mango

1 ripe papaw (papaya) Some

mild cheddar cheese

20 cocktail sticks

1 large grapefruit

This quick snack is ideal for parties or as a starter before a light meal. Don't worry about the calorie content, as it is very low indeed. Mango, papaw and grapes offer a wealth of goodness, so too does the cheese, rich in vitamin A, B12 and folic acid, and of course calcium.

To prepare, peel and chop the mango and papaw into small chunks suitable for a cocktail stick. Don't forget to remove the seeds from the papaw. Then cut the cheese into chunks and place one piece onto a cocktail stick by piercing the centre of the cheese with the stick, then slide the piece of cheese down towards the other end of the stick. Leave enough room at the bottom end of the stick to hold comfortably with your fingers while eating the cocktail. Next put a chunk of mango onto the stick and slide it along until it rests on the cheese then add a grape, then a piece of papaw, then finish with a grape. If you run out of room simply shift the cheese, and the rest of the fruit along the stick. Repeat this until all the cocktail sticks are used up, then carefully insert them into the grapefruit which could be placed on a colourful plate for serving. People sometimes cover the grapefruit with a piece of baking foil to make it more attractive. I think fruit is quite attractive enough in its natural form. Enjoy this snack on its own or compliment it with something else.

CARIBBEAN SUNRISE

1 grapefruit

1 orange

1 banana

2 tablespoons rum

A dash of cinnamon

Cinnamon works wonders with stewed fruits, pancakes, custards and rice puddings. The aromatic flavour of this beautiful spice is enough to bring any dish to life.

To animate your taste buds take one fresh grapefruit, carefully cut it in two without breaking it then scoop out the contents of each half and place it into a bowl. Keep the two grapefruit shells. Peel and segment the orange, cut each segment in half and place the pieces in with the grapefruit pulp. Peel and slice the banana into the bowl with the grapefruit and orange. Add the 2 tablespoons of rum and a dash of cinnamon, then mix

and serve in the grapefruit shells on a large plate. Spread any excess fruit on the plate next to the grapefruit.

AVOCADO CREAM DIP

1 large, ripe avocado pear
3 tablespoons mayonnaise
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 teaspoon sea salt
1 teaspoon lime juice
1 teaspoon lemon juice
A pinch of paprika

A truly exotic experience, rich in nutrients the avocado is a super-food which is favoured by most as a delectable starter. It is so versatile as it can be cut in half and filled with almost any dainty morsel like prawns for instance, or it can be peeled and sliced and added to colourful salads, or even mashed into a paste to make a variety of tasty dips. Here's one you can make for yourself.

Cut the avocado in half, remove the stone and set it aside, then peel and discard the skin. Slice the avocado halves into a bowl then mash them into a paste with a fork. Add the rest of the ingredients and continue to mash it until you are left with a smooth paste.

This highly nutritious and tasty dip can be eaten as a snack with pieces of fresh crusty bread, or with some plain or flavoured pitta bread. Store the avocado dip in the refrigerator in a bowl, and place the stone in the bowl with the mixture; this prevents discoloration.

CARROT AND PUMPKIN DIP

300g carrots, peeled and chopped fine
300g pumpkin, peeled and chopped
5 tablespoons lemon juice
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
3 teaspoons ground cumin

It could be said that most of us don't have enough fibre in our diet, especially those who choose to feast on many of the processed foods that are widely available from the supermarkets and the like. Fibrous foods like pumpkin and carrots are also available from these stores. They contain special types of fibre such as Cellulose and Pectin, which are found in whole-wheat flour, bran, beans, peppers, broccoli, apples, citrus fruits, green beans, potatoes and strawberries, plus a whole host of other fruit and vegetables.

Pectin works well by influencing absorption in the stomach and small bowel, as it binds with the bile acids, which in turn decreases fat absorption and lowers levels of cholesterol in the body. Reason enough to include essential fibre in your diet? This will not

be such a problem if you are used to a good helping of fresh fruit and vegetables in your diet anyway.

Pumpkin has little protein and fat but like carrots it is packed with carotene, which is converted into vitamin A by the body. Vitamin A prevents night blindness, and encourages growth, strong bones and protein synthesis.

This Carrot and Pumpkin Dip should provide enough goodness to keep you going for days. Boil the pumpkin and carrots in water until they are soft, and then fry the onion and garlic in the olive oil. Flavour with ground cumin, then add the vegetables to the frying pan and continue frying. Stir in the lemon juice and carefully mash the pumpkin with a fork while it is still frying until it is soft. Remove from the heat, and allow cooling before serving. This dip is best enjoyed with slightly warmed pitta bread.

SALMON DELIGHT

175g pink salmon, mashed
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon lime juice
100g cheese sauce
2 cloves of garlic, crushed
1 tablespoon chives, chopped
1 small onion, chopped fine
1 teaspoon olive oil

Salmon is rich in nucleic acids DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) and RNA (ribonucleic acid), which is the self-replicating material present in almost all living organisms. Also essential for synthesis of protein, renewing cells to prevent ageing, and is the carrier of genetic information.

To create your salmon delight, first fry the garlic and onions in olive oil for a few minutes then add the fish. Continue frying, then pour in the lemon and lime juice, the cheese sauce and the chives. Stir fry for a few minutes until it is creamy, then remove from the heat. Chill before serving. This dish can be enjoyed as a dip with fresh bread and stuffed olives, or simply with a light salad. Either way you choose, the salmon will delight your taste buds and rejuvenate your body, mind and spirit.

FRIED EGG PLANTAIN

3 medium sized eggs
1 large, ripe plantain
Cinnamon
2 tablespoons groundnut oil
Sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper

In India plantains are eaten extensively, as they are known to be a good aphrodisiac for improving sexual virility. They are well favoured in the Caribbean islands where they are often served as dessert, fried and then sprinkled with brown sugar and cinnamon, or flambé, with the island

favourite drink, rum. Plantains are mostly eaten with meat dishes

and other vegetables on most of the islands. It would be difficult to find a book on Caribbean cooking which excludes the use of these delicious vegetables.

Plantains can be eaten unripe, when the skins are green, half-ripe (yellow) or fully ripe (black) but they must be cooked first. Plantains are delicious when baked. In Antigua they make a tasty dessert; the Antiguan peel and cut the banana down the middle, sprinkle it with lime juice, brown sugar, rum and allspice, then bake the two halves in a hot oven for about 15 minutes. Once cooked, warm rum is poured over the top and flamed before serving.

This fried egg plantain recipe is similar to that of an omelette. Use a fully ripe plantain to create a sweet tasting dish. Chop the ends off the plantain, heat the oil in a frying pan then peel the plantain and gently slice 1-2 cm sized pieces into the oil. Fry them for a few minutes on both sides until browned.

Prepare the eggs by beating them in a small bowl, add a sprinkle of salt and black pepper, continue to beat, then pour the mixture into the frying pan. Spread out the pieces of plantain evenly around the pan, then sprinkle over a little cinnamon and leave to simmer over a gentle heat until the egg becomes solid. Take care not to burn the underside of the egg. This is easily done if the heat is too high. You may finish off by browning the top, then remove the pan from the heat and place it under a moderate grill for a minute or two. Serve hot with a little bread or on its own for a satisfying light snack.

BREADFRUIT FRIZZLE

1 ripe breadfruit

Olive oil

Sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon chopped chives

1 tablespoon lime juice

The versatile breadfruit is known to be a good energy provider, due to its generous starch content. It is considered a substitute for bread as it has a similar texture. On some of the islands in the Caribbean the locals make tasty biscuits by grating the dried breadfruit and mix it with coconut, raisins or any other dried fruit for extra flavour.

First prepare the breadfruit. Peel the skin with a sharp knife, then cut it in half and remove the core and the seeds. Chop the flesh into small slices and place them in a pot of salted water. Bring the water to the boil, then simmer on a medium heat for 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and drain away the water.

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan, then carefully place the breadfruit pieces into it. Add the lime juice, salt and pepper, and continue frying until they are golden brown. Serve them hot with a sprinkle of chopped chives.

LEMON BREADFRUIT PUDDING

1 small breadfruit

Butter

500 ml unsweetened coconut milk

175g dark muscovado sugar

1 tablespoon cinnamon

1 tablespoon clear honey

1 teaspoon lemon juice

Why not try this delicious lemon breadfruit pudding for dessert. Take your small breadfruit and prepare it as you did for the breadfruit frizzle, but instead of cutting the flesh into slices, cut it into chunks, place them in a pot with salted water and bring it to the boil. Simmer on a medium heat for 20 minutes, then drain and set aside to cool. In the meantime set the oven to 180°C/350°F (Gas Mark 4) then butter a large oven-proof dish. In a large mixing bowl mash the breadfruit chunks, then beat in the coconut milk, muscovado sugar, honey, cinnamon and lemon juice.

Pour the contents into the buttered dish and bake it in the hot oven for 40 to 50 minutes until golden brown. Enjoy your lemon breadfruit pudding on its own, as a simple dessert or treat, or with a spoonful of creamy yoghurt and a slice of fresh lemon.

SWEET POTATO AND APPLE PUDDING

500g sweet potatoes

100g muscovado sugar

3 large cooking apples

50g butter

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon sea salt

Potatoes provide an important amount of vitamin C in the Western diet. They also provide significant quantities of other important nutrients such as chloride, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur as well as trace minerals chromium, copper, iron, selenium and zinc. Sweet potatoes provide higher levels of nutrients plus vitamin A; they are more tasty than the ordinary potatoes and more versatile, as they can be used in desserts as well as vegetable dishes.

The sweet potato was introduced into Europe 50 years before the ordinary potato yet it still remains less popular here in the UK. Our nations' health would benefit enormously if we only realized the potential of the humble sweet potato. If you have not already done so, include sweet potato in your daily diet.

To make this mouth-watering pudding first boil the sweet potatoes in salted water until they are tender. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F (Gas Mark 4), then peel and core the cooking apples then slice them thinly. Grease an oven-proof dish with some butter then cover the bottom of the dish with a layer of sweet potatoes each cut to about 2 cm thick. Now add a layer of sliced cooking apples, and sprinkle them with muscovado sugar. Repeat the layers until all the potatoes and apples have been used up, then finish with a sprinkle of sugar, cinnamon and sea salt. Add a few knobs of butter on the top and place the dish in a hot oven and bake it until the topping is golden brown.

EGGPLANT AND BEAN SALAD

200g tin of mixed bean salad

2 eggplants, peeled and diced

2 teaspoons lime juice

3 tablespoons pure olive oil

3 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 tablespoon white wine vinegar

1 tablespoon brown sugar

Salt and pepper

Another versatile vegetable, the eggplant, can be enjoyed in both sweet and savoury dishes. It is a high water content food with a very low calorie value making it an ideal food for avid dieters. Eggplants, or aubergines as they are often called, come in a variety of shapes and sizes, the most common one is elongated and usually dark purple in colour. In some countries it is believed that regular consumption of the vegetable could do much to enhance the size of the male sex organ. Maybe this belief has been confused somewhere along the line with the shape of the egg plant which closely resembles a phallus. In order to put this theory to the test, first, if you haven't already done so, add one egg plant to your weekly shopping list, then try this wonderful eggplant and bean salad recipe.

Once you have peeled and diced the eggplant, place the pieces in to a bowl then add the lime juice and salt, then gently mix the pieces together. Leave it to stand for about 10 minutes, then drain it and pour in the mixed bean salad, oil, garlic, brown sugar and vinegar. Gently mix together once more, then add pepper to taste. Serve on a bed of fresh, crispy lettuce, or with shredded lettuce.

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SOUPS

Chapter 2

There are simply endless varieties of soup recipes available to create and enjoy, even more if you consider the many variations and adaptations. The good thing about soups

This is that there are no stringent rules on formulation or design. If you thought that there were, now is the time to break away from the unimaginative and start considering new adventurous ideas.

In times gone by soups were made with surplus vegetables from the previous days' meal, or even scraps of left-overs and bones which the fresh meat was stripped. Fresh bones are especially good for making thick stocks and, if they are broken first, as they cook, a gelatine substance is released from the marrow, which adds body to the soup. Fish can also be used in soups as well as poultry and meat. If you are a vegetarian, you can simply leave out the meat and add more fresh vegetables to the pot instead.

For the avid weight watcher, or for those keeping a keen eye on their figure, they are able to control their diet very effectively by replacing heavy meals with light vegetable soups, and by including dried peas, beans and lentils, this will enhance the flavours and boost the nutrient levels.

Children too can benefit from soups, in particular those little fussy eaters who dislike food such as fish or certain vegetables, which can be chopped fine and disguised in the soup, this method

may only be successful if the finicky little monsters show displeasure in the appearance of the food rather than its taste, like they often do, as it may

be quite difficult to mask completely a distinctive taste of a particular food. This problem may be overcome by cooking with lots of herbs and spices or even garlic, which are both nourishing and tasty, to disguise the taste. If this fails, you might like to try adding extra helpings of a particular food which they enjoy such as chopped tomatoes or mushrooms if they are reluctant to try garlic, herbs and spices.

Try not to be too formal when creating your own soups. They can be made with almost any meat or vegetable. You can even add a cooking apple to a spicy soup to attain a bitter- sweet or sweet and sour taste.

Caribbean cuisine works well in soups particularly yams, tannias, dasheen, chochos and green bananas, which are hard and could withstand lengthy boiling. Others such as plantains, sweet potatoes and okra have their own distinctive flavours and can be used to completely change the flavours in the soup. Pumpkin is a common ingredient in soups throughout the Caribbean islands, is versatile as it works well with almost any flavour and adds colour to the dish. Try these wonderful soups yourself.

CHICKEN & PLANTAIN SOUP

4 large ripe plantains
500g lean chicken thighs
2 onions, finely chopped
Some olive oil
2 large ripe tomatoes
1 teaspoon butter
Sea salt and ground pepper
1.5L cold water
1 teaspoon ground ginger
2 cloves of garlic

A simple soup to make and quick too. Once you have washed the chicken thighs, place them in a large pot with the water and onions then bring it to the boil, then simmer on a low heat. Chop the tomatoes and the plantains then add them to the simmering pot with a drop of olive oil, the teaspoon of butter, a little salt and pepper, ground ginger and the garlic.

Give the pot a good stir then leave it to simmer on a low heat for about 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Serve nice and hot. Feel free to add more salt and pepper to taste.

CALYPSO BAY CUCUMBER SOUP

3 medium sized cucumbers
25g butter
600 ml chicken stock
1 onion, chopped
25g flour
300 ml milk
150 ml single cream
1 tablespoon chopped chives
Salt and pepper
1 teaspoon olive oil

Cucumbers and cream make a delicious combination for a rich, creamy soup. They have a high water content also which makes them a good choice for weight watchers.

This delightful vegetable can assist in cleansing the body of unwanted toxins by flushing them out of the system as will most other high water content foods, and at around 10 kcal/100g there is no real need to worry about piling on the pounds. No doubt you will be more concerned about the calorie content of the milk and cream. Keep these low by using either low-fat milk or the virtually fat free type which has fewer calories. Plump for single cream, as suggested in the recipe this is lower in calories than most others.

Begin creating your delicious, creamy soup by first peeling then removing the seeds from the cucumbers. Cut them into slices then fry them in hot olive oil and butter for about 10 minutes over a moderate heat. Pour in the chicken stock and stir.

In another saucepan pour in the milk, cream and the chopped onion then bring it to the boil slowly. Once it is bubbling, remove it from the heat then gently pour it into the saucepan with the chicken stock mixture, while slowly stirring all the time. Bring it to the boil, then leave to simmer for around 12 minutes.

Sieve the flour into the soup while you stir, until it is thick and creamy. Simmer for a further 1 minute then remove from the heat ready to serve hot. Sprinkle over a little salt and pepper to taste and add some chopped chives prior to serving.

CHOCHO SOUP

1 teaspoon virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 large onion, chopped

2 sticks of celery, chopped

3 carrots, chopped

12g orange split lentils

2 medium sized chochos, peeled and diced

100g spinach, washed and chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

2 tablespoons tomato puree

1 teaspoon thyme

1 litre of water

Chocho is a member of the squash family those such as pumpkins and cucumbers. There are many varieties, equally an assortment of names, which are used by various nations to describe this delightful green vegetable. The chocho, or Choko, is referred to as Brionne by the French, Cho-choi in Australia, Christophine in the West Indies, and Mango squash or Mirliton by the Creole people. This could be because of its shape which is similar to a mango with deep ribbings.

Other strange appellations include Pipinello, Pepinella, Custard marrow, Chayote, Vegetable pear and Xoxo. But the most apt and worthy of them all, as most historians would agree, has to be the Christophine, named after the great voyager himself, Christopher Columbus. This name is popular and is known by most eating establishments throughout the Caribbean islands despite being referred to by some of the other names mentioned.

Chocho is an extremely versatile vegetable, it can be used for soups, stews and stir fries, and can even be consumed raw in salads. Delicious sweet pickles and pies can also be made with its succulent flesh. The ancient Aztecs made regular use of the chocho in a great number of their culinary dishes, they cherished and admired its texture and taste.

You can continue this tradition by creating this delightful chocho soup. Calories should not present a problem given the fact that the average raw chocho has a very low energy value indeed about 19 Kcal/100g, so you may eat to your heart's content.

To prepare the chocho for cooking first peel the skin with a sharp knife, although if the vegetable is very young and tender the skin may be left on. Use a potato peeler for best results. Once this has been done, cut the chocho into segments and remove its seeds, these are nutty in flavour and could be set aside for use as a garnish in salad dishes, and then dice the flesh.

In a large pot fry the onion and garlic in olive oil for a few minutes. Add the water and bring it to the boil. Reduce the heat then add the celery and carrots. Cook for about 10 minutes, then add the lentils, diced chocho and the spinach. Stir in 2 tablespoons of tomato puree and thyme, then season with salt and pepper. Stir the soup gently and continue simmering for a further 10-15 minutes, then serve and enjoy nice and hot.

SWEET PRAWN SOUP

500g sweet potatoes, peeled and diced

500g peeled prawns

1 tablespoon virgin olive oil

1 red pepper, de-seeded and chopped

2 onions, peeled and chopped

5 tomatoes, chopped

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

600 ml water or vegetable stock

3 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed

1 bay leaf

Sprig of thyme

Sprig of parsley

Seafood contains a wealth of nutrients which are essential to good health, particularly vitamin B12 and some useful minerals such as zinc, iron and selenium. Apart from some oysters most seafood contain little or no vitamin C. The sweet potatoes in this recipe make up for that loss, 500g will provide about 100 mg of vitamin C which represents 5 times the RDA (recommended daily allowance). In fact this sweet prawn soup is rich in vitamin C as the tomatoes, roughly 375g in total provide a total of 75 mg vitamin C alone. However, one has to consider some losses during the cooking process. In spite of this, soups are still the best choice as far as nutrient conservation is concerned. Water soluble vitamins such as vitamin C will leach out during the cooking process, but will be consumed in the soup itself instead of being poured down the drain, after boiling for instance.

To make your delicious sweet prawn soup, preferably on a cold, wintry day, first fry the garlic and onions in olive oil for a few minutes then toss in the prawns, red pepper and

chopped tomatoes and continue to fry for 2 minutes. Now add the diced sweet potatoes, then stir fry for about 1 minute before pouring in the water or stock. Stir in the bay leaf and the herbs, bring to the boil then cover and simmer gently for 30 minutes.

After the time has lapsed, uncover the pot and stir the soup gently then season it to taste with a little salt and pepper. Continue to simmer, uncovered, for a further 5 minutes then serve hot.

PLANTAIN PEA SOUP

125g pigeon peas (pre-soaked) or tinned

2 medium sized plantains, peeled and cut into chunks

2 tablespoons olive oil margarine

600 ml water

½ teaspoon sea salt

½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

1 tablespoon chopped coriander leaves

1 teaspoon turmeric

When choosing your plantain look for those with more green colour in their skins than yellow and black, as this indicates that the banana is almost ripe but not yet fully ripe (all black). Also, this particular stage offers an advantage because the flesh is hard making it ideal for soups and stews.

Pulses are extremely nutritious as they provide a good balance of the vitamins and minerals for a healthy diet. All pulses have good sources of vitamin E, carotene and the vitamin B complex, which consists of thiamine, riboflavin, nicotinic acid, pantothenic acid, pyridoxine, biotin, folic acid and B12. They also have good levels of vitamin C.

Pigeon peas, usually referred to as Gungo or Congo in the Caribbean, are native to the East Indies and were introduced to the Caribbean district from West Africa by the Spanish who used them in their delicious soups and stews. Even to this day they still manage to concoct fabulous soup and stew dishes from these highly prized legumes.

Before cooking with pulses, (dried peas, beans, and lentils) make sure that they are washed first in order to suppress any harmful toxins present in them. It is equally important to observe any soaking instructions on the pack first.

Begin your highly prized plantain pea soup first by finding a large pot. When you have done so, melt the margarine in the pot over a low heat then fry the cumin seeds, add the cayenne pepper and fry for a few minutes while stirring. Pour in the pigeon peas and the water then bring the contents to the boil. Add the salt and the turmeric then simmer on a moderate heat for about 30 minutes. After this time put in the plantain chunks, cover the pot and allow it to simmer on a low heat for about 25 minutes. Serve hot, sprinkled with chopped coriander.

CHICKEN AND DUMPLING SOUP

(TO MAKE DUMPLINGS)

125g plain flour

1 large pinch of grated nutmeg

1 teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon sea salt

1 knob of butter

3 tablespoons milk

1 egg yolk

(TO MAKE THE SOUP) CHICKEN & DUMPLING

1 kg chicken, cut into pieces

5 tomatoes, chopped

1 medium sized sweet potato, peeled and chopped

75g frozen green peas (or fresh)

75g frozen corn

1 small red pepper, (capsicum) de-seeded and diced

Freshly ground black pepper

Pinch of sea salt

2 medium sized carrots, peeled and sliced

1.5L vegetable stock or water

This wonderful recipe comes in two parts, a tasty chicken soup, and the delicious, fluffy dumpling to garnish. Make the soup first, as it takes less time to cook the dumplings and they can be made and added to the soup towards the end. However, in the meantime you may prepare the necessary ingredients and set them to one side for mixing later on.

Chicken remains one of the most popular dishes in the Caribbean due to both its versatility and abundant supply. Taste however plays its part also in making it such a celebrated dish. The sweet and succulent flavour of a freshly cooked, free-range bird is rather difficult to envisage unless you dine on one of the Caribbean islands, only then will you be able to witness this reverie-like experience. Some restaurateurs, in this country, however, have come close to this by applying their ingenious and resourceful talents with the use of herbs, spices and garnishes, but it is never possible to replicate the good taste of a complete dish of home grown organic food. It is truly said that home cooking is extremely difficult to beat.

If you happen to be lucky enough to live on a farm or own a large piece of land on which you grow your own produce, you may have already experienced delectable home cooking. If not then try this tasty soup for a near-home grown organic experience.

Place the washed chicken pieces in a large pot and cover them with water or chicken stock. Bring the water to the boil then lower the heat until it is simmering. Cover and simmer on a low heat for about 40 minutes. After this time add the rest of the ingredients (for the chicken & dumpling soup) and continue to simmer for a further 10 minutes, in which time you should begin making the dumplings.

To make your delicious dumplings, sift the baking powder, flour, grated nutmeg and salt through a sieve into a suitable mixing bowl, then add the butter and mix in until the

texture is crumbly. In another container, beat the egg yolk then add the milk and continue beating for a few minutes. Gradually add the egg mixture to the flour mixture. Mix in well until it becomes doughy then pinch off pieces and roll them in your hands into dumplings. Place the dough balls carefully into the simmering soup, and continue to simmer for another 10 minutes, then the soup should be ready to eat nice and hot.

PUMPKIN AND TANNIA SOUP

800g pumpkin, peeled, de seeded and cut into small chunks

1 kg tannia, peeled and diced

2 medium sized onions, finely chopped

4 tomatoes, chopped

1 scotch bonnet pepper, stems removed, cut in half

2 tablespoons virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 teaspoon sea salt

½ teaspoon dried thyme

1 garlic clove, crushed

500 ml water

Pumpkin is extremely nutritious in soups as all its flavour and goodness is retained during cooking. Pumpkin will cook much better if par boiled first. Do this by placing medium sized chunks, in their skins, in a pot of water with a pinch of salt then simmer over a medium heat for about 20 minutes. Or if you wish to save some time, put them in your microwave oven in a suitable dish with water and cover it with cling-film then cook them for 5 minutes on a medium to high setting. If using the microwave method, first chop the pumpkin into smaller pieces so that they can cook thoroughly.

Tannias provide good sources of calcium and vitamin C for a balanced diet.

Cooked the same way as yams, this valuable crop works well with meat and fish and is extremely popular throughout the Caribbean islands. The leaves from the plant, which are similar to spinach are sometimes used to make soups such as callaloo which is distinctly favoured by the Jamaican people. Tannia is also known as New Cocoyam, Pomtannia and Yautia.

For a delicious pumpkin and tannia soup, heat the olive oil in a large pot then fry the garlic and onions for a few minutes until they are soft. Add the chopped tomatoes then the scotch bonnet pepper and continue frying whilst stirring gently. After a few minutes or so, pour in the water and continue to stir, then add the parboiled pumpkin and the tannia, and flavour with salt, pepper and thyme. Bring the liquid to the boil then let it simmer gently on a low heat, with the cover on, for approximately 30 minutes. Remove from the heat, and serve hot with fresh crusty bread.

TROPICAL FISH SOUP

1 kg red snapper, heads removed, cut into 4 cm pieces, (or use sea bass or other white fish)

250g tomatoes, chopped

500g sweet potatoes, peeled and diced

250 ml coconut milk

750 ml water
3 garlic cloves, crushed
2 scotch bonnet peppers, stemmed and halved
1 teaspoon allspice
1 tablespoon virgin olive oil
1 bay leaf

Most of us would find it quite difficult to resist the delicate aromatic flavour of freshly cooked seafood, even more so the delicious odour of fish soup bubbling away pleasantly in a cooking pot. Red snapper is a popular fish throughout the Caribbean islands. It should be available here in the UK from most of the major supermarkets, however if you are unable to get it anywhere try using sea bass or any other white fish such as rockfish or dogfish, which are equally suitable for making delicious soups and stews.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan then gently fry the garlic and peppers for a few minutes until they are nice and soft. Add the tomatoes and sweet potatoes then allow them to cook for a few minutes, then add the allspice, coconut milk, water and bay leaf and gently stir a few times before adding the fish. Bring the contents to the boil, then simmer it gently for about 30 minutes before serving.

BLUE LAGOON CRAB SOUP

250g crab meat (fresh or canned)
150g okra, trimmed and sliced
250g eggplant (aubergine) peeled and sliced
1 small green cabbage, shredded
500g yam, peeled and diced
1 litre chicken stock or water
2 tablespoons palm or groundnut oil
3 tablespoons tomato puree
1 teaspoons sea salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon turmeric
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce

From the deep blue waters of the Caribbean comes an irresistible seafood, so full of flavour that one single mouthful is enough to make your taste buds dance with joy. I remember my first taste of crab a long time ago, when I was young, its flavour was so distinctive and sweet; I just wanted to eat it more and more. To this day I continue to enjoy its delicate flavour.

The most famous of all the Caribbean soups is probably the callaloo which consists of bacon or lean salt pork and crab meat. Of course there are other ingredients such as the all important callaloo leaves to provide texture, but it is the tasty crab meat which contributes the flavour.

Stuffed crabs are another speciality on the islands. Violet-coloured land crabs are used for this purpose from which the meat is taken then seasoned with deliciously nice

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