

# Warm Salads Castaway Island, Fiji

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One of the key messages from Fiji's Ministry of Health is to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables to help prevent NCDs. Why? The ancestral diet of the iTaukei and most native civilisations including Indians and Chinese was based on plants, root crops, nuts and tree fruits. Most of the essential vitamins and minerals the human body needs to prevent disease come from the ground; especially raw and half cooked vegetables that retain all their nutrition and fibre.

In tonight's episode we explore how to get the family to eat more fresh vegetables by creating delicious warm salads and tangy tropical island dressings that burst with flavour. We also discover that fresh fruits can also be used in salads and provide a natural sweetness that compliments savoury ingredients.

Welcome to part two of the Castaway Island fusion episode of Taste of Paradise.

When you take a walk down the aisles of Fiji's outdoor municipal markets, can you identify every fruit and vegetable and how it can be cooked? Chances are that many varieties of Chinese leafy green vegetables are unfamiliar to local shoppers just as green jackfruit is only thought of as an Indian curry ingredient.

When I took my mother and father to Nadi and Namaka markets, they were amazed by the wide variety and relative cheap prices of Fiji's local produce. Mum was equally surprised that most of the locals she saw just walked straight past the Chinese vegetables and only bought the familiar cabbage, moca, bele, ota and rourou.

## **Learn more about fiji's local produce**

With the school year starting this week, it would be a great idea for students to include a tour of the municipal markets to help young people understand and identify the many fruits and vegetables that their parents probably did not see when they were younger.

Fiji's Chinese market gardeners have been busy planting new varieties of produce for the growing local Chinese residents, but they are also available for everyone to enjoy. Names like bok choy, choy sum, gai lan and pak choy may be unfamiliar but all of these leafy greens are available at most markets.

Education is key to learning how to use more of the local produce. If parents only prepare the familiar vegetables and recipes that they grew up with, their children will grow to do the same. The food and nutrition classes in school should help students and parents understand the health benefits of every Fijian-grown fruit and vegetable.

Matched with delicious recipes, this will help to encourage families and future generations to eat for health and medicine.

### **Constructing warm salads**

What do you think a salad looks like? Most readers will say its lettuce, tomato, cucumber and onion. Others might say it is potato salad, Caesar or coleslaw.

In many Fijian kitchens, salads are limited to a handful of recipes. And let's face it, many are just plain boring and tasteless. But warm salads are a combination of cold vegetable ingredients with grilled meats, seafood or sautéed vegetables. There are three major components to a warm salad; the cold salad ingredients, the cooked ingredient and finally the sauce or flavour that brings the dish together.

How you cut your vegetables is also another factor in how your salad stands up on a plate or bowl, and how your guests will eat your salad. Shredding or cutting them long and thin (julienne style) will encourage young and old to eat more, because it is easier to pick up and easier to chew and digest.

Like most dishes, it is the sauce that binds all of the ingredients together but a salad definitely needs some creative flavour. It could be mayonnaise-based, a vinaigrette, soy and sesame oil, citrus ponzu or even coconut-based, so long as it matches and highlights the ingredients.

### **Fijian fusion warm salads**

In tonight's episode, we return to Castaway Island Fiji to recreate several dishes from my 1808 menu; the warm Lemongrass Tea Chicken Salad, Masala Chai Tea Beef Salad, Thai Beef Salad and one of the most popular items on the menu, a sizzling Black Pepper and Honey Beef. For non-beef eaters you can simply replace it with any meat or leave it out completely for a full vegetarian version.

As we learn tonight, you can also add other components like nuts and raw citrus peel to create texture and contrasting flavours. Citrus fruit peels are often used in northern Chinese-style cooking and provide essential oils and vitamin C.

The bitterness combines with the other components to create an explosive burst of flavour. The dry rub marinade for the beef is Masala Chai Tea powder from Spices of Fiji, while the chicken is rubbed with FRIEND lemongrass tea. Let these marinate for at least one hour to allow the spice to penetrate the meat.

I'm sure when Sashi Kiran, Founder and director of FRIEND, created her range of herb teas and jams, she didn't expect a crazy chef to use them in his cooking!

### **One hour season finale**

\* Next week is the final 13 episode for season two of Taste of Paradise. The show now reaches 13 countries across the South Pacific and has been one of the most successful and influential local programs that is affecting a change in how families eat. The final "Ancient Fiji" episode was filmed over four days starting in Suva, then travelling through Tailevu to the Wailotua Caves and a brief stop in Rakiraki to visit Ratu Udreudre's grave. We then travel inland to the incredible and very traditional

Navala Village in Ba, where there are no overweight people, to cook inside a kitchen bure. It is then off to an ancient Tongan village atop Tavuni Hill Fort in Sigatoka, and head back to Colo-i-Suva to cook at the foot of the Waisilasila waterfalls. The final one-hour episode is not to be missed and is a stark reminder of how Fijians used to eat only one generation ago.