

REMEDIES AND RECIPES

CARIBBEAN REFLECTIONS ON HEALTH AND DIET



AN AGE EXCHANGE PUBLICATION

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INTRODUCTION

There is a strong tradition of folk medicine in the Caribbean. In the rural areas where hospitals and medical practitioners are few and far between, people use herbal medicine as a preventative against disease and also as a cure for common ailments. There is no question in anyone's mind as to the efficacy of the herbal treatment which may be administered in the form of baths, poultices, steam inhalations and teas.

Diet plays a very important rôle in the maintenance of health in the Caribbean, as everywhere else. Food is prepared from its whole state, as most people have their plots of land where they cultivate their daily requirements of ground provisions and vegetables.

Even with the move to Britain, Caribbean folk still prepare food from its whole state rather than buying processed and packaged convenience foods from supermarkets, as they are suspicious about the additives which they cannot see.

Caribbean people want to know what goes into their systems, and are willing to take responsibility for their own health and well-being. They therefore have a healthy scepticism regarding conventional medicine. In a country like Britain, where people depend on the National Health Service to keep them in a state of health, Caribbean people are relatively self-reliant and do not readily accept a system which leaves the individual with very little say regarding his or her own body.

What follows in this book are the contributions of the older generation Afro-Caribbean people whose conversations were tape-recorded and then faithfully transcribed to produce a document that not only reflects the collective folk memory but enshrines too the confident practice by which the "folk" survive and flourish with dignity.

Patricia German

Registered Medical Herbalist

EDITOR'S NOTE

This booklet can be used as a starter pack to act as a stimulus to encourage groups and individuals to talk and write about their diets and life-styles, their remedies and recipes.

We would like to be able to expand on the information contained in this booklet and publish a longer book containing more recipes, remedies and stories. We hope this would be the first in a series of books about approaches to health and diet as seen and experienced by different ethnic groups.

If you already have any relevant material which could be included in such a book, or would like information on setting up a reminiscence group to cover these topics, please contact Age Exchange, 15 Camden Row, Blackheath, London SE3, TEL: 01-318 9105

JAMAICAN MEDICINE & REMEDIES

Home remedy is a different thing from hospital medicine. Our tradition says that herbs are best, and there should be a distinction between 'medicine', and 'remedy' of course. The remedies we use for pains are herbal, natural.

In our country, we don't hardly go to the doctor, unless it's something really serious. All you do is go outside, pull some bushes, boil them up and drink them every morning, and that's it!

Mrs. Vassell

BUSH MEDICINES

Cold	Tamarind-bud and tamarind leaves.
Measles	Tamarind-bud and tamarind leaves.
Sprain	Jointer, tamarind leaves, dye, coconut oil, vinegar
Weak sight	White cleary
Shampoo	Ochro leaves
Billiousness	Pear leaf and zeb grass, carrion crow bush
Restorative Tonic	Young Water Coconuts
Gulley Root & Mini Root ...	Backache
Teasam	Cold & Fever
Zeb Grass	Billiousness
Sweet Broom	Cold
Quashi Bitters	Belley Ache
Carila Bitters	to purify the blood
Busy Busy	stiff neck
Monkey Apple Leaf	to vomit
Green Papaw	Reduce blood pressure
Iron Weed, white cleary	Luckeria
Bishop's Cap	tea
Carila bitters	blood purifier
Lemon grass	Fever

You see, back home I didn't really bother with going to see a doctor. I did go every now and then — if I wasn't feeling well and wasn't sure what was wrong. I'd go to the doctor for a check-up, and he would give me some medicine. If I didn't like it or want it, I would just go out and pick some bush, boil it, and drink it.

You see, you only really want to know what's wrong with you. If you're not sure you'll go to the doctor or hospital simply to find out. Then you just go out afterwards and pick the bushes that are right for that complaint.

Mrs. Thomas

CULTIVATION

I would watch while my folks pick the 'herbs'. They would stop me if ever I did anything wrong. If ever I'd pick the wrong bush they'd say; "Oh no, no! That's not good, that's poisonous, that one will kill you! This is the right one".

Miss Clarke



Jamaican Agriculture

My father was a butcher. As well as rearing pigs, goats and cows, he used to cultivate things like coffee, pimento, chocolate, coconut and sugar-cane.

When it was time to cut the cane, we'd all go to the field and help. We'd load up the donkey, or carry it on our heads back to the mill — we had our own mill not far from the house. Have you ever seen a cane mill? It's a big place, and it takes about three or four mules to draw it round. It's an all-night job when we make the sugar, and everyone helps, children, daddy — everyone.

When it gets pressed, the cane-liquor goes into a big thing we called a copper — as big as a house! We use wood underneath to stoke up a fire until it boils. We call this 'wet-sugar', and we tin it and sell it in the market.

Mrs. Wilson

We would grow many things on our land, in what we called 'walks'. You'd have your mango-walk, bread fruit-walk, avocado-walk, pineapple, yam, pumpkin. In between all these the shrubs grow, all around you the bush growing.

You got bush growing along the roadside. Some of them grow over the road until they come and clear it, chop it away. So much bush grow!

I can see myself now, just swing the gate open, go up the slope to where the little trees grow, to go and get the bush.

Mrs. Alexander



Planting Yam

All these things are there. When we feel ill, we just go to the bush and pick the leaf of this and that, and we drink it. We hardly go to the doctor back home.

Mrs. Wilson

Back home, when we cultivate, we just plant it in the dirt. We grow carrot, tomato, papchow, potato, cabbage — all different types of things. The papchow grows on a plant that looks similar to the mustard plant when it's grown: It has large green leaves and a white stalk — it's that part you eat, it looks like a white carrot. To cook, all you do is cut it up — slice it as you'd slice a carrot — and boil it, it's very nice! 'Papchow' — it's a Chinese word.

Mr. Brown

CURES FOR THE COMMON COLD

Well the main illness was the common cold, and nobody ever went to the doctor for a cold. The first things my mother used to run for were fresh lemons, honey, and cerosee. The orange would be juiced, and mixed up with the honey, and a little vinegar and salt and that was shaken up until it all blended. The end result was a sort of syrup, you take a teaspoon of that about three times a day or more.

These things were not drugs so whenever you had a tickly cough coming on you would run for this sweet syrup.

We used to have camphorated oil. That is the ordinary camphor that you would put in areas where clothes were stored to stop the roaches from eating them. The camphor was mixed up with rum and coconut oil and used as a rub. This was used for respiratory complaints. The hands were warmed over a lamp. When the hands were what you would call very hot, then the camphor oil was applied by massage to the chest and back.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

You can use Rum as a medicine you know, it's a doctor in itself!

If you've got a cold coming on, with a temperature or a fever, you'd wash yourself down with Rum. Rub it all over, and drink some. You'll sweat, but in the morning it'll be gone.

Then there's Pimento and 'Proof' Rum. If you got a pain in your joints, rub it with that. Just put a little in the palm of your hand and rub it in, — Rum is good for everything. But you can't drink Bay Rum, it's for external purposes only!

Mrs. Alexander



The bush that's called Leaf-of-Life is very good for colds. At home you can pick it anywhere, for it grows wild, but over here you have to pet it for it to grow.

You can rub it or grate it, or put it into a piece of gauze and squeeze it. Juice it out, tip a little salt in it and drink it, — quick as a flash, your cold's gone! You can also use it as an eye drop.

Leaf-of-Life is a wonderful remedy for everything.

This is what my mother would do to us if ever we got flu or fever; She'd pick the bush, all different types, — whatever you want really — Pimento-leaf, Sage, Jack-in-the-Bush. She'd put them all in a big pot and boil them down, reduce them.

Then she'd make us sit over a tub of hot water, on some planks, and cover us with a sheet, and pour this bush mixture into the bath. You'd be there for about fifteen to twenty minutes before you'd be allowed out. God, you should see that sweat come out, — you just sweat out the fever!

Mrs. Wilson

Water-Cress is a wonderful remedy for colds. We grow it a lot back home. All we do is pick the leaf and chew it. It grows near springs, and a lot of people cultivate it, so like most things we have it in abundance.

Let me tell you this. When I was young, my sister and I cured an Englishman with water cress. I was a teenager, I washed his clothes and things while he was a professor at the University, — an eye doctor. He came from England with a bad cold. I remember him asking, "Do you know any remedy I could use to get rid of this cold"? It was a really bad cold! "Oh yes", I said, "I'll go and tell my sister".

Well, she took a bundle of Watercress that she washed, cut-up, and put in a dutch-pot. Then, she cut-up some orange, and added that to the Cress along with about two quarts of water. She boiled the whole lot down to about one quart, with a little white sugar square, or loaf sugar, — just enough to sweeten-it.

We gave it to this gentleman, and he never finished the bottle before he's cured. He was trying to get the remedy, but my sister said, "Oh no, we won't tell"!

Cerasee has lots of flowers, and you'll find it grows right down on the ground. It has a little round green seed, which you can pick and eat straight from the plant. Otherwise, we pull-up the root, cut off a piece of the vine, and wash it. Then it's ready to be put into a saucepan and boiled, — it'll turn the water green!

It has a very strong smell, and if you're not used to it, — well you can't stand it; it's that strong. You can drink it cold or warm, and if you find it too bitter, you can put a tip of sugar in it and drink it that way.

You can just pour boiling water on to it instead, like tea. It really does depend upon the individual, whatever way they feel to be the best is probably the best way for them.

We at home drink Senna-Pod tea. Put Senna Leaves and Chamomile Flowers into water overnight, — to draw. Every morning, we'd wake-up early to hear our parents preparing this bitter thing for us to drink.

"Come on, come on", they'd say. "I don't want to take hat", was the usual reply. But we did take it, — we had to!

Mrs. Rowe

An old remedy for colds was to boil a rat and drink the water. I've never tried it, but it's supposed to work!

Miss Clarke

If you had a cold you made up a medicine yourself. Cold bush and cerasee mixed with lime, boil it up, strain it and drink it straight away. Serossee is a leaf and it grows like a vine. It has a red berry, but it is the leaf that is needed for boiling. Cold bush is almost the same as the mint bush over here.

Another method is with grapefruit or oranges, whichever you choose makes no difference, bake the fruit until soft, take out the middle and mix with honey that has come straight from the honey comb. This cuts colds.

The liquor from young coca pods was good for sores and cuts. It sealed wounds.

For headaches, bay rum was used. You'd rub the head and forehead with it. It can also be bought in this country. Something similar to this is McKenzies smelling salts, a very harsh smell but very good for headaches.

Mr. Lewis

CURES FOR VARIOUS AILMENTS



Banana Cultivation

Have you ever heard of Irish Moss? (We call it Irish Mash). You boil the Moss until it gets soft and dissolves. If it doesn't dissolve, you can take a spoon and squeeze it through a strainer, so that the sap dries out into a cup. When it's all done, you mix it with milk, sugar and some spice, — grated nutmeg, and or cinnamon. If you have any rum, put that in as well! It is a tonic in itself.

The banana skin is good too, you can boil it to make a tonic. You know the navel of the banana, —the tough pieces at either end? Well, I always cut them off, and put them either on or inside the stove to dry.

When they're dry, I boil them in a saucepan, and then mix it up in the same way as I would the Irish Mash. That's very good for your nerves, it calms you down.

You can use the whole of the banana. Mind you, it's very, very bitter, because of the high concentration of iron from its skin.

There was a fever back home called growing fever. Usually children from 11-13 years had this growing fever. Mother would always give us a hot bath and medication in the form of bushes, boiled up. This drink was bitter tasting and the main ingredient was aloes. This also purified the blood, and made us eat. We only attended the doctor when something was serious with us.

To heal wounds and sores, we'd use a bark called Baseda. This tree grew like a pear tree. You'd take a chopper and chop some of the bark. The liquid that came from the bark would be used to heal wounds.

Mr. Beckford

If you've got bad eye, you go with the Leaf-of-Life. You can grow it from a little piece of leaf, — you throw it down there and next year it'll still grow the same way.

You pick the leaf and clear it over the fire, it'll crinkle itself up and it get soft. You squeeze it and drip the juice in there, in your eye, and it'll clear up your eye. Or you can take the leaf and boil tea, this you can squeeze into your eye, and it clear up your eyes too!

I'm dying for a piece of leaf of life to squeeze to my eye, but I can't get it. The doctors say it's my nerves, but it doesn't matter, if I get it, I'll squeeze it into my eye and I'll get better. The glasses, them, they're no use to me.

Mrs. Brown

*She had Man Piabah, Woman Piabah,
Tom Tom Fall Back and Lemon-Grass,
Mini-Root, Gully-Root, Granny Backbone
Dean Man Sit Up and Lib and Turro
She had Fill-Up Fi Mamma, Fill-Up Fi Poppa,
Jacob Ladder, and Aligator Weed,
Lime-Leaf, Pear-Leaf, Soursop-Leaf.
The only thing she didn't have
Was the wicked Ganga weed!*

Sinkle-Bible is a very good medicine to just boil and drink. Another good medicine is derived from a thing we call Bitter-Wood. You get it by scraping the bark off this very big tree, though I forget what it's called now. Anyway, my grandmother would boil this up and give it to me as a child. It's very good for all complaints, but it's very bitter. It works on the blood as a purifier. She'd give me a herbal tea every weekend. I tell you something though, it was really good, because none of us children were ever ill. There is another thing called Fever Grass that we used to use if ever anyone had flu. What you do is boil it, put it in a bowl, and squeeze a lemon into it, and simply sponge yourself down.

In this country, you have a plant called Rosemary, and it has a similar effect. All you do is rub yourself down, right down from your head to your toes, with fresh Rosemary before you go to bed, — tomorrow morning you'll get up as strong as a lion! Rub yourself down, like you'd do with Bay Rum.

Mrs. Thomas

Tuberculosis, or we sometimes called it consumption. At that time young people on the whole used to be so frightened of this disease, because we had this thing built into our brains that if you get a cold and it doesn't clear up quickly, you would get consumption. And you would run a mile if anyone was thought to have this disease.

Somebody might just have influenza and you know with influenza you would get a cough, and maybe a slight temperature, and look a bit pale and washed out. Oh, that was the sign of T.B. and you would scare away. You wouldn't talk to that person — you would run a mile.

So it was a scary time when a person was ill with cold symptoms and fever. Naturally you had to call in a doctor, this would be the last resort if the person had not got better after being given all the bush baths as they called them, that was given for fever. Well there was one that I know was used a lot, that would be the leaves of a pimento tree, the leaves of sagem, cerosee, and fever grass or lemon grass, and sour sapp leaves. These would be boiled in a very large pot, I remember it had such a pungent smell. Well that is what you would be bathed in, your head would be soaked with bay rum, oh yes lemons would be cut and juiced and all thrown into the bath. Normally you would feel a lot better after these baths.

You would have these baths on most nights of the illness along with the syrup or elixir, and this really helped and one just got better.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

There's Kola-Nut, or Bissy, — that's an antidote. It's very good for food poisoning, for the digestion, and as a tonic for the blood.

As well as Breadfruit and Soursop Leaves being good for hypertension, you can use Pear-Leaves for high blood-pressure too.

Miss Clarke



Mrs. Alexander

I remember once, a relative of mine wasn't well. He was shivering so bad, I thought it was serious. Anyway, it was night, and I was afraid of the dark, but true, things looked dreadful. I just dashed outside, — turn here, go there — without really thinking. I picked bush, and rush back inside.

Well, I got back, boiled water, put it in the bath-tub — big tin thing — put a piece of board across it. He sit on the board, and I cover him over with a blanket. He cries, "You're going to burn me up"! I say, "No", and I open it every now and again to let the steam out.

The next morning, you'll ask him to tell **you** who the person was who was sick last night, it work so well!

Mrs. Alexander

SOME WEEDS AND BARKS USED TO CURE CERTAIN AILMENTS

1. *Capadulla*, (2) *Sasperilla*, (3) *Cockshan*, (4) *Graney back bone* — increase potency and stimulates sexual desire.

Man can do as much as he like but na as lang as e like.
Man can run but man caan hide.
Man na a get haas an waak.
Man na know e deh good tey e deh bad.
Man wa na know wa e want a wan fool.
Maasa sen daag, daag sen e tail.
Man na a kill wuck, but wuk a kill man.
Man a drink e matty rum ghee am big road fuh pass.
Man a blow 'at an cole wid e same mout'.
Man a sleep tiefman a wuck.
Man na a wuck cockroach crawl pan am.
Man a staave gat appetite.
Man got waan trick moe dan monkey.
Man na want teck advise e bruck tick a e ase.
Man who pay, e money mus call e tune.
Man a meck e bed 'ow a want fuh lie dung pan am.
Man na a get e praise tey e dead.
Me na gat wan herrin a you barrel.
Man wa deh pan dead 'ole aan, e na guh loose.
Man an e wife gat torey stranga tan waan side.
Me can watch a you doe mout an know how you 'ouse inside 'tan.
Man always look fuh wha e want fuh see.
Man Lin see monkey neck before ep ut chain a e waist.
Man caan do betta e seh na matta.
Man cant get pamawarri if e frighten plimpa guh chuk am.
Man gat mannas a get big foo- oo.

If your tummy hurts you, we got a little thing back home called cerasee. You boil it and drink it.

If you have a bad eye, you pick the leaf of life, put it over the fire and then sprinkle it on to your eye, and it will clear up. I'm dying for a piece of leaf of life to squeeze to my eye now, but I can't get it here. They say it's my nerves, but it doesn't matter, because if I could get it, it'd get better. The glasses I've got are no use to me.

If you have a headache, the breadfruit leaf is good. Some people bake it, or you can put it straight on your head. I hear that some people is drinking it now for blood pressure.

Mrs. Brown

For diarrhoea, they made from flour a type of paste, similar to a batter for frying, but only the flour was used, sugar was added while it was being heated. The end result was a thin porridge, they would give you that, or they would put a little flour into a frying pan, until it was brown then make that into a thin porridge. I think a different porridge was used in the latter, but in any case the two methods had the same effect of constipating.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

If you have a headache, the Bread-Fruit leaf is the thing. Some people bake it, or you can put it straight on your head. It's good, it works!

Then there's Tamarind bush. The leaf is good to boil if you have measles. Use it as a bath, or drink it . . . it's sour, but it works.

Tamarind Fizz

For this, you'll need about:

1½lb of shelled Tamarind

4 cups of sugar

3 pieces of grated ginger

1½ quarts of water, and 3 teaspoons of bicarbonate of soda

To start with, you'll have to soak the Tamarind in the water overnight. The next day, you add your ginger and soak it some more, — for about another hour.

With a spoon, remove all the pulp from the Tamarind and ginger mixture. Sweeten it up with the sugar, and then strain it.

To cool it down, you put it in a refrigerator, (if you have one), or on ice. Then, when it's ready to serve, you add the bicarbonate of soda, give it a stir, and it'll all fizz up.

Mrs. Brown

We used things like Piabah for knocks. You'd be running around bare-foot and bump — you'd bang your toes. It'd hurt like mad, so you'd put a poultice made from Piabah-bush to ease the pain. What you'd do is beat it down and boil it to make it stodgy, taking out any hard bits, and adding a drop of coconut-oil to keep it soft. It'd then be tied around your bruise, and kept in place with a piece of cloth. You'd scream from pain, but they just tie it down round your foot and it'd soothe the pain.

Then there's Sage and another one — oh I forget, I'm such a Londoner — oh yes; Jack-in-the-Bush! Don't ask me why it's called that, I don't know. They're good together — Sage, black or yellow Sage and Jack-in-the-Bush — I always boil them together for colds and things.

Mrs. Alexander

The tree of life, similar to a rubber plant, has thick leaves. You would beat the thick leaf and squeeze the juice, mix it with honey and lime. This was good for heavy chest colds.

The chinner mint leaf is thick and full of juice. Mix with bay rum, camphorated oil and make a spice bag. Place the spice bag on chest and back, and this helps to reduce temperature.

Take fresh cut bush, beat it until it becomes soft, and put it on a wound. It heals wounds and stops bleeding fast.

Beetle Nut, is an antidote for poison.

Boiled bread fruit leaf is good for blood pressure.

Sour sap leaf boiled and strained is good for kids still wetting the bed.

Tuna, similar to cactus, it brings back shine to hair.

Mr. McClean

GETTING TO THE DOCTOR

Back home, you'd have a chain, starting at home with the bush. If that doesn't work, you go to the little local hospital. If they couldn't manage, you'd get sent to the University Hospital in Kingston, with all the students learning, and professional doctors.

If they can't cure you there, most likely you can't be cured at all, — and they bury you when you're dead!

Mrs. Vassell



Rural Jamaican Transport

In order to get to a doctor you had to travel about nine miles usually on foot. It would have to be a case of extreme emergency. A person collapses or something like that. But then it was such a long way for the doctor to come, as well as for you to go, so if the patient can be brought to the doctor, then you would have a better chance. You see the doctor would have so many patients to look after, so if you were to wait until he could make it, you would have a death on your hands instead of a sick person.

Then you would just have to wait your turn. But there was always somebody who controlled the crowd and that person was the dispenser in most cases. Each doctor dispensed his own medicine.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

Very often it would be a cart, a mule cart, that would be hired to take you to the doctor. In the better districts you could hire a car. Some people were so far gone before they sought medical aid, that they would reach half way, and then have to turn back because the ill person had died.

There were a few cases in your own family where immediate medical attention was needed.

My brother had attended my aunt's funeral. After the funeral he was staying home for a few days in Kingston and he had this pain in his stomach. It was very peculiar because the whole of his abdomen was aching, not one particular area. So one of our cousins said she would go with him to the doctor. When they both went to the doctor and he was explaining to the doctor how he felt, his cousins interrupted and described his complaint as a stomach ache. The doctor prescribed medication according to how his cousins felt that he felt, and sent him home. After his visit to the doctor, he was sure that if he was home with his mother she would do a better job.

By the time he got home he was in a bad way, and we tried to get him back to the doctor that night, but the car that served the district was fully booked up.

The following morning we got the car and took him to the doctor. We got him there towards evening. The doctor had an appointment, because he was a religious person and had a speaking engagement that night. So he hurriedly gave him a dose of medicine, and almost immediately the pain in his stomach went. In other words he felt much better after the medicine.

The doctor told us that if he didn't continue to improve, we should bring him back. Well we didn't have thermometers, but he did feel warm to touch.

He came back home, he had no pain, he just lay there. He wasn't eating, and my mother noticed that his finger nails were getting blue, and his lips were getting darker, but he wasn't having any pain. So she said, "But Renard, you're not feeling any better," and he said "I am not having any pain Mum."

But Mum decided that she was going to take him back to the doctor because he did say to take him back if he wasn't feeling any better. When she took him back, they admitted him. Another doctor examined him. The doctor told us that he should have had an operation, when he had first come to see the doctor. As things stood an operation would have been pointless because peritonitis had set in. The appendix had burst. He couldn't live.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

Back home, if I was really sick, my mother would call-in the doctor, or take me to the local hospital. But, in Jamaica, we have the 'bush' medicine that we use instead of going to the hospital for little things.

Say for instance you have fever, you use Fever-Grass. You cut a piece of Fever-Grass, boil it, and drink it.

Mrs. Brown

It was very rare that you went to the doctor for him to diagnose any particular disease. You just did your own thing, and you got better, but in cases where these things were not helping, you would seek medical aid.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

When I was a little girl I had a very sweet tooth, and have bad teeth through all the sweets and sugar I ate. But I never have to pay to get my teeth take out at the hospital.

I'll explain: When I was a little girl, you go in the hospital, and you get a numbered ticket to wait. So you'd be in the waiting-room with your ticket, but the doctors might not come till the next day to make their rounds, so you have to come back the next day. When the doctors come, they call you, you go in and have your teeth taken out.

Once upon a time, they used to take out teeth without anaesthetic. I'll tell you what happened to me once: I hear them call number five, and because I'm number six, I run, — I just run away! I mean, no pain killer, nothing at all, and it really hurt you, you know? God! Later on though they began to use cocaine, and that was better.

Mrs. Brown



Jamaican Government Infirmary

In the old days in the countryside, midwives were not trained specially so maybe the grandmother took charge and delivered babies. If there was a problem with the birth, you had to attend a clinic. There was a clinic in Linstead, St. Catherine Jamaica, there was a clinic in Point Hill also.

Mr Lewis

DIET AND COOKING

Jamaican people are very strong about what goes into their systems, they will not eat what they think is not good for them. Here, people don't seem to mind — they go into the supermarket and pick-up all kinds of garbage. You'll find that among West Indians, most of their food is prepared whole; they're preparing their rice, they're preparing their chicken, they're preparing their yams and their plantains and their sweet potatoes. You see what I mean, **they** prepare their food? This is a very important thing amongst the West Indians, they are not eating food that is processed and packaged.

Patricia German

When I was a kid — as my father was a butcher — we kept goats and cows, and we drank their milk fresh. I remember we'd put corn-meal with it and boil it up, it's very good for children. It's also very good for mothers, it helps their breast feeding.

The meat we got was very fresh, my daddy killed it twice a week. If there was anything left after it was cut up, we used to corn it by putting a lot of that coarse salt on it.

Our fish is very different from the fish we get here. Ours comes straight from the sea — so it's really fresh. Roast fish at the seaside is a fantastic thing, you don't lose any of the flavour!

Mrs. Wilson

We produce sugar, and make it in heads — we call them sugar heads — or put ginger in it and call it ginger sugar. We eat it just like it is, we have grown up, and have been doing the same thing for years. We eat many types of sweet things — mangoes which are sweet, and oranges — many types.

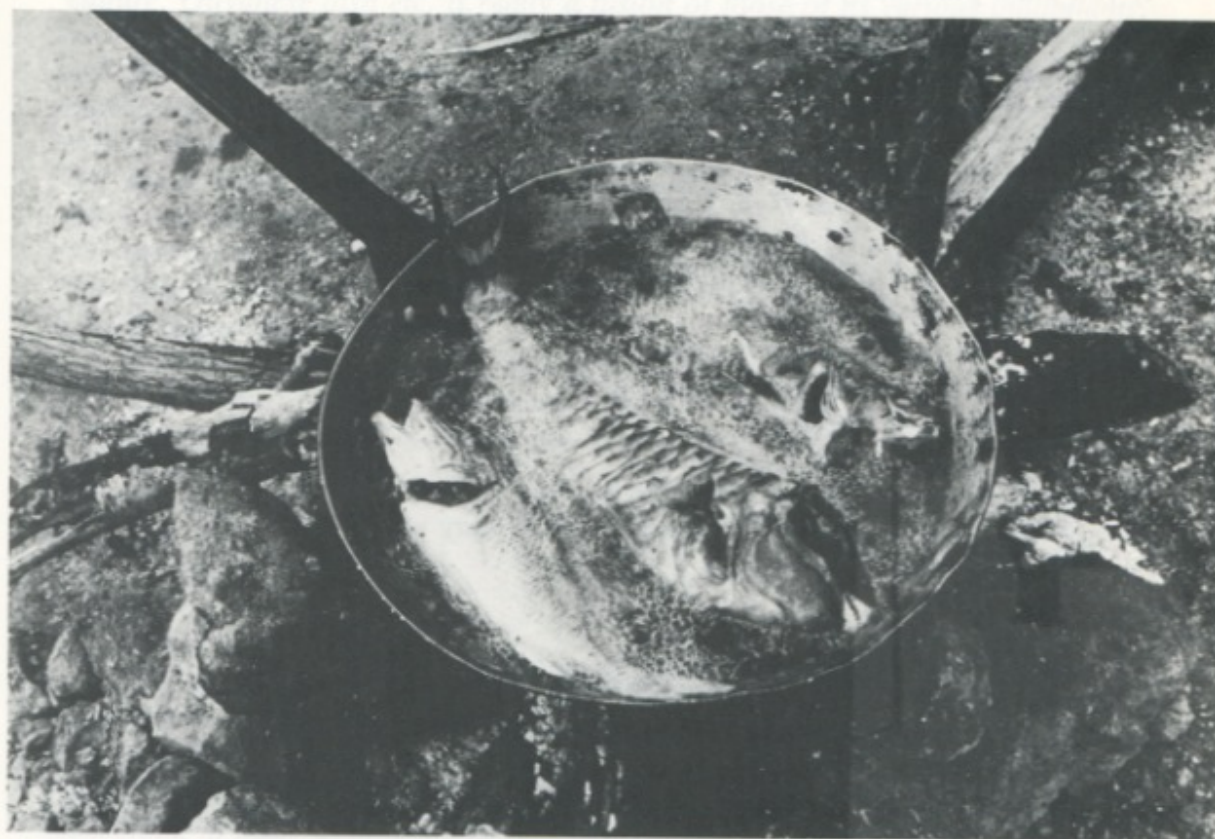
We're used to eating these things — we do it for years — and sugar gives you energy. It's not the real refined sugar, but natural sugar. Mind you, we Jamaicans will eat any sugar if we can get it.

At certain times of the year, our parents would give us some boiled bitter-bush or rice bitter tea — something to drink to purge us and to give ourselves a little washout. I'm thinking that many of the things that they say about sugar are misleading. I know if you eat it a lot it wouldn't be good, but as I say, you take a certain wash-out at certain times of the year — and you'll be fine!

Mr. Anderson

I was a country boy in St. Mary. The country was fruitful, and everyone was healthy. Dad grew lots of crops — corn, cocoa etc. Corn and cocoa was especially fruitful. Dad used to dry the corn and cocoa-pod, and bag them up. They could last for years like that. There was plenty to eat, and Dad could always sell his corn if things went short.

Mr. Beckford



Cooking Fish

The kind of cooker that we used was a built-up fireplace made from stone and concrete, or stone and cement, and built up like a big box. It wouldn't break down very easily! Across the open top of the box are two or three iron bars going one way, with another two or three going the other, like a grid. You don't hang the pots from this, you place them on top. The whole thing was called a fire-side, I think a fire-side is a nice thing to say!

We'd use the fire-side for cooking the main meal, but for baking we'd use an oven that would be built outside. This was a big thing, oval shaped, and the inside — the roof — would be a piece of galvanised iron. We didn't have brick in Jamaica, so the oven would be made of stone, then finished off with mud or maybe cement, it would be smooth right-over. The nearest thing it looked like would be an igloo. There was a door, so that the oven could be closed shut.

The wood went in the same door as the food. The secret was how not to get any smoke in the oven while cooking! The wood was burned first, burned down to charcoal to get the oven really hot, (this would take a good while), then pull it out. That way, no smoke was in there when you're cooking.

Mrs. Alexander

Fruits and Vegetables

*Hafa yam na k fuh shovel.
If you na like me berry na shake me tree.
If you plant plaintain you caan reap cassada.
If you na cut punkin you na know wa deh a e belley.
Motion wa rice gat a pat e na gat am a plate.
Na mine ow punkin vine run e mus dry up waan day.
Na mine ow punkin vine run e gat e en.
Ochro an cassada can meck soup a wan pat.
Oringe nebba fall too far from e tree.
Oringe yella but you na know if e sweet.
Only knife know wha deh a punkin belley.
Oringe yella caan tu'n green.
Plaintain yella caan tu'n back green.
Rose still smell sweet if yuh call am peach.
Punkin nebba bear calbash.
Rice na a bear flowa but e gat seed.
Rice a pat an rice a plate a two different ting.
Scrape you won calbash befo yuh scrape yuh matty wan.
Sour grape can meck good wine.*



Market Scene

GUYANESE DISHES

Guyana, being a cosmopolitan country, derives most of its cultural pattern etc. from the various continents from which its inhabitants come. The term Guyanese culture, Guyanese dish etc. is really a fusion of those of its various inhabitants.

Except for those we inherited from the Amerindians, and our legendary 'labba and Creek water,' a Guyanese dish could be any one of the following:

From the Amerindians, the indigenous people of Guyana: we got Pepper-pot, cassava bread, farine.

Africans: Metengee, cook-up rice, foo-foo, soup and conkey.

East Indians: Dhal and rice, dhal pouri, roti and currie.

Portuguese: Garlic pork.

Chinese: Chow-mein, low mein, fried rice.

Europeans: Roasts, mincemeats, pancakes, potato chips.

North American: Chicken-in-the-rough, fried chicken, hot dogs, hamburgers.

Our food is a highly seasoned sort of food. Everything we cook — no matter what it is — meat, chicken or fish, we do a thing called seasoning — you might call it marinading. To season, we use salt, pepper, bay-leaf, garlic, chives, mixed herbs, marjoram, thyme. We also use season-all, which has got a lot of different seasoning in it — that gives a certain sort of flavour to the meat.

We cook our meat until it's nice and well-done. I don't mean cremated, no, cooked well-done, so you don't have much chewing to do. That's the thing with coloured people all-over, they like their meat well-done, they don't like it rare or medium.

Christine Kentish

When you can't get the things you want, obviously you have to do without. I remember when I first came here, there was a lot of things I couldn't get. Since many more people have come across, the variety has increased.

Corn-meal was one thing. When I came here, I was living in Rye Lane, Peckham. I went into a shop, and asked the shopkeeper, "Do you have any corn-meal". Well, he opened his eyes wide and said, "What is that"? He'd never heard of it. "Wait", I said, "I'm going to send for some from my country and show you"!

I did, and later I took it round to this man for him to see. I don't know if it was just me, but anyway, from that he tells someone else and so on, and now you can buy corn-meal almost everywhere.

Indian shopkeepers have made it a lot better, because they know all about the things we're looking for.

As far as vegetables go, you've got much the same as we had back home. Mind you, in the first place there wasn't things like yam, plantain, sweet potato, choco and all the rest, but now you see them everywhere, just like the corn-meal.

Fruits and Vegetables

Ackees are another thing that aren't available to us fresh in this country, they come in tins. Back home in Jamaica they grow on trees, in a pod. When it's ripe, the pod opens up completely, so you can see the yellow fruit inside. You cook this like any other vegetable, you just boil it with a little salt.

As far as vegetables go, we use the usual — carrot, peas, cabbage. There's a thing called choco, it's very thin-skinned, so you peel thin, slice it up, and cook like marrow. It's in the same family as the marrow, but it grows on the tree as opposed to along the ground. It's hand-sized, green, and a watery sort of vegetable. When we cook West-Indian food, we have yam, which are like potatoes, and also sweet potatoes, bananas and green bananas — which is banana before it's ripe. We use plantains too.

Christine Kentish



A Jamaican woman shows her grand-daughter how to prepare breadfruit when making mutton soup.

These days, I don't buy much of the organic foods — the yam, sweet potato and that — once in a blue moon I'll buy a bit of yam. Mainly I'll eat the standard vegetables for this country — potato, carrot, turnip. Swede I don't eat that much, but most other things I eat plenty. Bacon I'll eat, and maybe a bit of ham. I still eat a lot of rice, and of course beans and peas.

Mrs. Alexander

Coconut is the master of everything. We cook rice with it, put it with porridge — you can even use it as a rub-down for your skin. I don't use coconut so much these days, mainly vegetable oil. Coconut is a staple thing in Jamaica, and we used it quite a lot. There's also the young coconut — not the hard coconut that you can get here — the green-skinned one. When it's just forming there's the nice water inside it, and you can also scrape out and eat the jelly — oh it's lovely!

If we didn't have a lot of time to put something together, we'd do a thing called seasoned-rice. What you do is fry up everything first, before you put the rice in — I'll explain: What you do is take a piece of salt port, or probably a bit of cod-fish, some tomato, onion seasoning and some margarine. You fry up all these things, turning them over to get them all browned up nicely. Then you put your water in, and add your rice to that. Simmer it all down, give it a while to steam, and then it'll be nice and juicy!

Maybe you'd have dumplings. They're easy — just equal amounts of white flour and corn-meal with a little water. Knead them up — biff, biff, biff — then you can fry them so they're crispy.

We use ackee with cod fish, or sometimes pork or onion, all fried up in oil or a dash of margarine. The thing about ackee is that he's a very fussy fellow. You have to cook him to himself until he's done, then add your seasoning and mix it in.

Mrs. Alexander



Jamaican couple with grandchildren eating traditional meal of fried snapper, (fish), dumplings, cocoa bread and patties.

I have this recipe for soup. To make it you need:

1lb of beef — with the bone in.

1lb of yam.

½lb of pumpkin.

3 carrots — not very big.

½ small cabbage — any sort, white or red.

2 or 3 dumplings — made from equal parts corn flour and plain flour.

1 sweet pepper.

First, you have to slice up the cabbage and the carrots, and boil them with the meat for about an hour or so.

After that, you slice up the yam and pumpkin and put those in, then simmer the whole thing for another hour or so.

Finally, put a drop of salt in, say two or three slices of onion, about three slices of the big sweet pepper, a drop of black pepper, a touch of butter and that's it.

When it's cooked, oh, it's really nice!

Mrs. Vassell



Buying Breadfruit

REFLECTIONS ON HEALTH CARE IN BRITAIN



I take tonics to try and keep me healthy. I try not to call in the doctor.

When I first came here from Jamaica, I brought some herbs with me. Now you can get them from a herbalist in Brixton market. He flies to Jamaica every now and then to stock up with more herbs.

I always drink a bush tea to keep generally healthy, I never drink ordinary tea or coffee.

Recipes. Cerasee bush — this is for use in any sickness. It has a very bitter taste and you should boil it with ginger and orange peel.

Black mint — for use in the case of vomiting.

Peppermint — for a tummy ache.

Rice bitters — for use during a bilious attack.

Ginger — for tummy aches and also for warmth in the winter.

Ram goat dash-along tea — for any sickness.

Dandy weed — for colds.

Search-me-heart — for a fresh cold.

Bitterwood — good for bilious attacks and also if you boil little chips of it, it is good for your blood.

Tonics — Guinness and saspirilla; Mackeson with brandy; make a punch using Sanatogen with egg and orange, beat it up and sprinkle with nutmeg.



Baldwin's

The place to go is down Walworth Road — to Baldwin's. In the 'fifties, with the uptake of the National Health medicine, a lot of these herbal shops just couldn't exist because no-one was patronising them, bar the West Indians. Mr. Baldwin stays on Walworth Road, and if you go there you'll see the queues — all the people coming there before they go to any doctor, and they have the right attitude!

Patricia German

I don't believe in all these pills, personally I don't like them.

As children, we saw our parents picking and using herbs, and whatever we see them doing, we learn from there. If we see our parents go over there to pick a bush, we learn what that herb does, so we know what to pick.

All these things are good remedies for us, for everyone in fact!

Miss Clarke

If we could get the same home-remedies in this country, the way we could get it at home, a lot of us would be better off . . . but in most cases we can't. We have to stick to what we got, which is generally the doctor's medicine.

With a hospital, you have to queue-up, and all the doctor is giving you is tablets and pain-killers, — and I'm still here suffering.

With herbal medicine you feel much better.

The Government don't want Bush Weed, — Ganja, — coming into this country . . . they're very strict against it. If we did get it, we wouldn't have a lot of the complaints that we get!

We boil it, make tea, and drink it. If you had asthma, you'd drink a cup of that every morning, — as a tea, a leaf with hot water on it, — the asthma will just go!

You can't bring it over though. If you get to customs, they'll say, "What's that for"? They won't believe you, and take it away!

Mrs. Vassell

Cancer is a big industry — diabetes and **all** these things are a big industry, but in the alternative world, we don't look at the symptom and name it, we look to restore a balance to the body as a whole. With illness, what you do is regenerate the organs that have broken-down — you stimulate them, and in some cases you relax them, but in most cases you have to get them going. So we don't look at the problems in the same way.

The medical profession have gone so far away from service to people, they have become so involved with drug companies. Drug companies are not seeking to eliminate sickness — the more sick people, better for the drug companies.

We in the alternative medicine look at the whole life-style of the individual. The person has to be involved with the cure, that's the alternative view.

You have to realise that diet and life-style play an important part in the healing process. You don't want too much stress, you don't want to have your adrenalin working overtime — you don't want to drink too much coffee and all these various things. The only way to produce health is by a balanced diet, and the right attitude toward life — right frame of mind in what you're doing.

Folk medicine isn't a money-spinner. Everybody should be able to go out there and pick whatever they want and do it — which is how they operate in Jamaica. Now you see, the younger generation haven't grown-up with any of these things, and there's no encouragement from the establishment to bring this knowledge to a wider range of people.

Patricia German

A good thing to use if you've got a tickly cough is cod-liver oil and honey. A good thing for babies is Castora-Oil, not Castor-Oil, but Castora-Oil.

I remember when my boy was small, when he was teething in fact, I went to the doctor. I was worried that the sores in his mouth would cause him trouble.

The doctor told me to go out and buy some of this Castora-Oil, and give that to him. I did. In fact I kept on giving him this Oil until he was six years old, and do you know, he wasn't sick once in all that time!

I'd still be using it, but you can't buy it in this country.

Mrs. Thomas

I was suffering with a stuffy nose, and always feeling my ears paining me, always hurt!

I went to a private doctor, and paid £10. That doctor and medicine was no good.

I went to a herbalist, and told him what was wrong. He gave me eight tablets, I started to take them, and in four days time, — when I could blow my nose, — oh God man . . . I didn't realise those things was in my head!

If you go to a private doctor who isn't a herbalist, he's only going to give you the same medicine as the NHS. You might as well go to a herbalist and look after yourself.

Mrs. Vassell



Mrs. Rowe, Mr. Brown and Mrs. Williams talking about health at the Abeng Centre.

The thing that I would like is something to get me off the tablets I take for diabetes, like herbs.

I was feeling weak and generally fatigued, so I went to the doctor. I've been going down to the hospital too, but they've not been able to find out what's wrong with me, so they've prescribed pain-killers for me. They said it was weakness!

Mrs. Williams



They sell Tamarind in Deptford Market, but I wouldn't buy it because they're selling it for £1 a pound (lb!) When it's on the tree, it drops, and you just pick up what you want. What you don't want, you sweep up and you throw it away!

You know the herb Sinkle-Bible, that's good for colds. I see they're selling it in a shop in Lewisham. I laughed, because a little piece they have in a pot was selling for £2 something! Back home, you pick it up off the ground, make-tea, and drink it.

Say, for instance, your tummy hurting you, we've got a little thing called Cerasee. You just pick-it, boil-it and drink it . . . it's bitter! They're selling it in Brixton Market, I think it must be selling at the health shops too.

I used to give it to my children when they have tummy-ache. In fact, when my grand-daughter was born, I gave my daughter Cerasee to give to her. Well, she made it, and the baby wouldn't drink it. "Mummy", she says, "this is an English baby, you can't give Cerasee tea to an English baby"!

Mrs. Brown

The thing is this — because the herbs are not grown, they're not available. They're available from America and Poland amongst others, and we use those, but a lot of the English herbs which were used in former times are not grown because it doesn't pay anybody, it's not economic. The lack of availability and price has made it a specialised market, and amongst the English people it's become a very middle-class thing.

However, the original people who came from the West Indies with their families, a lot of their practices have carried over — but among a lot of the youngsters, they don't want to know any of the West Indian food.

Patricia German

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