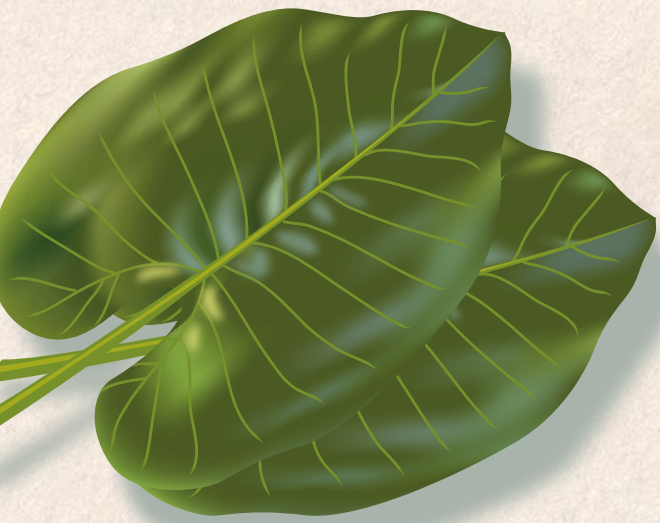


TARO IN PACIFIC COOKING

Traditional Pacific Island taro recipes

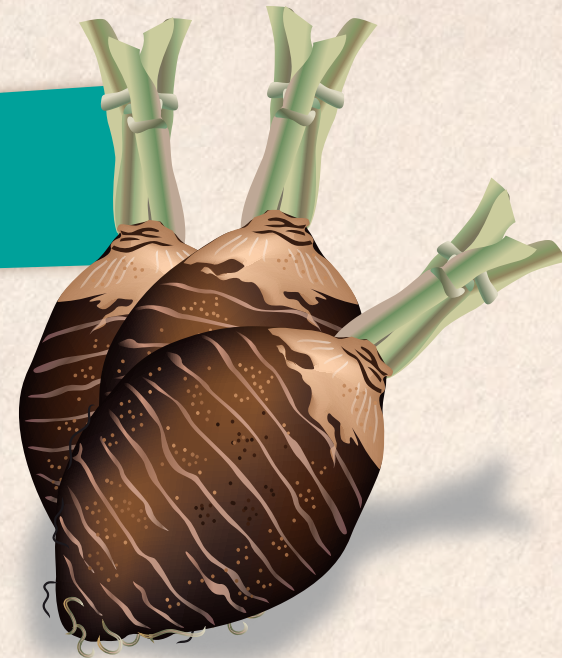


Pacific
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Traditional Pacific Island taro recipes



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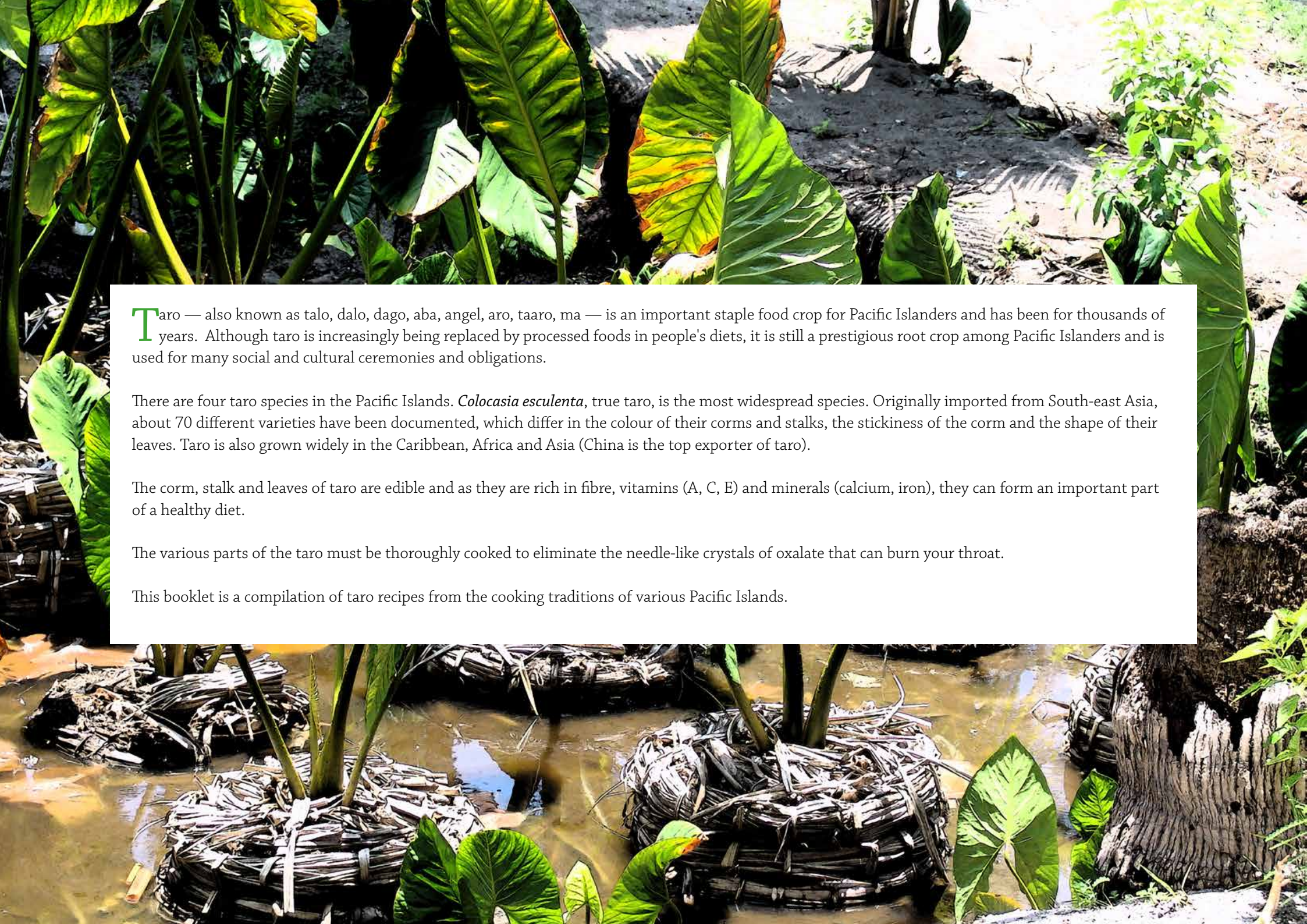
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Taro — also known as talo, dalo, dago, aba, angel, aro, taaro, ma — is an important staple food crop for Pacific Islanders and has been for thousands of years. Although taro is increasingly being replaced by processed foods in people's diets, it is still a prestigious root crop among Pacific Islanders and is used for many social and cultural ceremonies and obligations.

There are four taro species in the Pacific Islands. *Colocasia esculenta*, true taro, is the most widespread species. Originally imported from South-east Asia, about 70 different varieties have been documented, which differ in the colour of their corms and stalks, the stickiness of the corm and the shape of their leaves. Taro is also grown widely in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia (China is the top exporter of taro).

The corm, stalk and leaves of taro are edible and as they are rich in fibre, vitamins (A, C, E) and minerals (calcium, iron), they can form an important part of a healthy diet.

The various parts of the taro must be thoroughly cooked to eliminate the needle-like crystals of oxalate that can burn your throat.

This booklet is a compilation of taro recipes from the cooking traditions of various Pacific Islands.

LAP LAP (VANUATU)

INGREDIENTS (6 SERVINGS)

- 1 taro
- 400 ml coconut cream
- Fillings (optional): vegetables (tomatoes, onions, taro leaves) and, as desired, meat, chicken or fish
- 4 banana leaves (or baking paper)
- Tinfoil

DIRECTIONS

- Peel the taro and grate finely.
- Add 300 ml coconut cream and mix together to make a fairly liquid paste.
- Place the banana leaves on the fire or stove-top for a few seconds on each side to soften them and then lay them out to form a platter. Coat the leaves with a thin layer of coconut cream and place the taro mixture in the middle. Add the fillings and then a final layer of coconut cream.
- Close the banana leaves and wrap it all up in tinfoil.
- Place it in a oven-proof dish and bake for about two hours at 180° C.

This recipe can be made using other tubers, e.g. cassava, yam, either alone or mixed together, or with cooking bananas. Lap lap is the name for Heliconia leaves, which are preferred to banana leaves for making this dish as they are more pliable.





PALUSAMI (SAMOA)

INGREDIENTS (FOR 8 PALUSAMI)

- 32 young taro leaves
- 1 litre of coconut cream
- 2 onions
- Salt, pepper
- 8 sheets of tinfoil

DIRECTIONS

Remove the stalks of all the taro leaves.

Wash and cut 8 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.



In Tonga, people add fish, chicken or meat to the mixture.

FAIKAKAI (TONGA)

INGREDIENTS (6 SERVINGS)

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 bowls of mash for one bowl of cassava flour.

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

Make the caramel: heat the brown sugar in a pot, stirring constantly until it darkens (but don't burn it!). Then slowly add the coconut cream (be careful of splattering) while continuing to stir. Add as much coconut cream as you like (thicker or thinner caramel).

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



This dessert from Tonga is similar to Tahitian po'e: a purée base (fruit purée for po'e) mixed with cassava flour. However, for the Tahitian recipe, coconut cream is used in place of caramel to coat the cakes (see page 12).



BASEISEI (FIJI)



INGREDIENTS (4 SERVINGS)

20 young taro leaves
250 ml coconut cream
Lemon juice, chopped green onions, fresh red chilli
200 g cooked and shredded fresh tuna or canned tuna (optional)
Salt, pepper

DIRECTIONS

Wash and peel the stalks (remove the outer part of the stalks). Cut the stalks in 15 cm pieces and drop them into boiling water. Boil until fully cooked (soft). Then drain the stalks and cut them lengthwise with a fork (hold the stalk by one end vertically in front of you, stick the fork in the top and slide it down to the other end). That separates each stalk into several thin strips.

Mix the coconut cream, lemon juice, onions and fresh red chilli in a large bowl. Add seasonings.

Add the taro stalks and, if you want, tuna. Serve cold with a tuber such as taro, cassava or yam.

In New Caledonia, taro stalks are eaten in the same way by Melanesians in the Northern Province, except that taro leaves cut into strips are included in the dish and cooked along with the stalks.

TUNA AND TARO PATTIES (TUVALU)

INGREDIENTS (FOR 12 PATTIES)

- 1 medium-sized taro
- 1 can tuna in salt-water 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 cornstarch).

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.



You can add precooked diced vegetables to the mixture, e.g. carrots, onions, or taro leaves.
This recipe can be made with another starchy food such as sweet potatoes, breadfruit, or cassava.



TAKIHI (NIUE)

INGREDIENTS (6 SERVINGS)

- 1 white taro
- 2 papayas (pawpaws)
- 300 ml coconut cream

DIRECTIONS

Peel the taro and slice thinly (use 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 2 hours at 160°C.

In Niue, 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).



ROUROU (FIJI)

INGREDIENTS (SIX SERVINGS)

1 bunch of young taro leaves (about 500 g)
500 ml of coconut cream
1 onion
Ginger, garlic, lemon juice, fresh red chilli
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, grated ginger and chilli.
Cook for a few more minutes and then serve as a hot or cold side-dish.



Rourou is what taro leaves are called in Fiji. Rukau in the Cook Islands is a similar dish. Traditionally, the taro leaves and coconut cream were placed inside banana leaves and cooked in a lovo (traditional oven made from a hole in the ground and hot stones) for several hours.



TARO PO'E (TAHITI)

INGREDIENTS (8 SERVINGS)

- 1 taro
- 500 ml coconut water or milk
- 100 g sugar
- 1 vanilla bean (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Peel the taro and grate finely. Add coconut water or milk, sugar, and, if desired, vanilla (split the bean lengthwise and remove the seeds). Mix well to get a creamy paste.

Pour into a dish and bake for 90 minutes. Cut while still hot and pour coconut cream over it before serving.



People in Samoa make Fa'ausi: this is raw peeled taro grated very finely and then worked into a paste. This mixture is then placed on a banana leaf or tinfoil and baked in the oven at 240°C for about 30 minutes. Once it has cooled, the dish is cut into small pieces and covered in coconut-milk caramel (see page 7).

SIMBORO (VANUATU)

INGREDIENTS

1 taro
Slippery cabbage (bele) leaves
Coconut cream
Salt, pepper

DIRECTIONS

Peel the taro and grate finely.
Wash the bele leaves, remove their stalks, and fill them with the taro mixture.
Roll up the leaves like spring rolls and place them in a pot. Cover the simboro with coconut cream, put the lid on the pot, and heat. Bring to a boil and cook for 15 minutes.



This recipe can be made with any type of starchy food, e.g. cassava, cooking banana, sweet potato, following the same directions. Simboro can also be placed inside pieces of bamboo and cooked over a fire.



TARO CHIPS (NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS)

INGREDIENTS

- 1 taro
- Oil
- Salt
- Options: pepper, paprika, herbs

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 200°C. Peel the taro and cut into thin slices using a mandolin. Brush both sides of each chip with a light layer of oil and place on a baking sheet. Bake chips until golden brown. After baking, place chips on a paper-towel to remove the excess oil. Season to taste and serve hot or cold.



This recipe shows the influence of the Asian and American cultures in the Northern Mariana Islands.

LAKENO (SOLOMON ISLANDS)

INGREDIENTS (6 SERVINGS)

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. Cover them with a layer of 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.

Nalot, a traditional dish from Vanuatu, is also made from cooked taro mashed into a paste using a pestle. Coconut oil is added to blend the mixture (oil made by boiling coconut cream until two different textures appear, i.e. oil and curdled milk). The paste is then spread out, covered with the curdled coconut cream and, if desired, fresh or grilled shredded coconut.



KAPALOLO (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)



INGREDIENTS (4 SERVINGS)

- 1 taro
- 4 ripe bananas
- 300 ml coconut cream
- 1 onion
- 2 chicken breasts
- 4 banana leaves

DIRECTIONS

Peel the taro and bananas. Place the banana leaves on the fire or stove-top for a few seconds on each side to make them more pliable. Arrange them to form a platter. Place small chopped pieces of taro and banana in the middle. Add pieces of chicken and diced onion on top. Season and cover with coconut cream. Close the banana leaves to completely cover the mixture. Put some tinfoil on top and place it all into an oven-proof dish. Bake at a low heat for two hours.



Rennel Islanders (Solomon Islands) make a similar dish called Pota Sisi Gautango but replace the chicken with strips of taro leaves.



Pacific Community - Public Health Division
Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji Islands
Health-Enquiries@spc.int