Slow Food®

Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity

Sierra Leone
From Earth to Table
Traditional Products and Dishes

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Eat locally

Breakfast in the majority of African hotels involves condensed milk, instant coffee, Danish butter and European jams. Most of the rice consumed in Africa comes from Thailand, and the markets sell European vegetables and American and Asian grains and even imported meat. This is the main challenge that African agriculture must face today.

Communities' traditional products are considered inferior and unsafe in terms of food hygiene. The continent's extraordinary wealth of food diversity is not valued, and many varieties of fruits and vegetables, grains and legumes, animal breeds, breads and other products are at risk of being lost. Along with these products, agricultural knowledge, local cultures and culinary traditions risk disappearing.
Cultivating traditional varieties, raising native breeds and eating local products means helping the fight against poverty and teaching younger generations about a proper diet and safeguarding biodiversity, the environment and cultural identity.
With this publication, Slow Food wants to promote local products and traditional recipes from around Sierra Leone.

Slow Food is an international association with members in over 150 countries around the world, promoting access to **good, clean** and **fair** food for everyone.

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Sierra Leone

www.slowfood.com

A journey through Sierra Leone
to discover **plant varieties,**
animal breeds,
local products and traditional recipes.

Eat locally!
Cultivating, breeding and eating local food is good for the economy because it supports small-scale producers, is often healthier as produce is fresher, and is good for communities as it gives them pride in their heritage and territory, and safeguards local food traditions.

Image source: www.laif.de © Paola Viesi

1 Grains

Unlike other West African countries, Sierra Leone's traditional cuisine does not use many different types of grains. Rice (African or Asian varieties), cooked simply in salted water or ground into flour, accompanies the majority of fish, meat and vegetable dishes. Women prepare the rice according to a traditional technique: cooking it for few minutes and then drying it under sunlight. The rice precooked in this way (a type of parboiling) can conserve for long periods. Other grains are eaten on special occasions, like fonio (*Digitaria exilis*), sorghum (*Sorghum Spp.*), millet (*Pennisetum americanum*) and maize (*Zea mays*). These grains are grown primarily as subsistence crops and have different growing and harvests times, thus guaranteeing a year-round supply. In Sierra Leone, as in many other countries in Africa, the consumption of local grains is falling, and they are being replaced by varieties imported from other continents, predominantly rice from Asia.

Image tirée d'une photo de © Paola Viesi

The fragile **mangrove ecosystem** of Sierra Leone's coast is under threat from increased human activity such as salt extraction and wood collection. If mangroves disappear, saltwater will enter the river, salinizing the soil and negatively impacting on fishing. Protecting this ecosystem means preserving local small-scale productions, fishing and agriculture.

Mangrove Rice

Scientific name: Oryza sativa

Rice production in Sierra Leone has been devastated by a combination of 30 years of civil war and global market mechanisms. Today, it is mostly grown on a small scale, but it still remains the staple of the daily diet. Whether boiled or ground into flour, it is an essential ingredient in many traditional dishes and carries a great cultural value.

The most interesting rice variety in terms of productivity, disease resistance and cultivation technique is mangrove rice. The cultivation method is linked to the geography of West Africa's Atlantic coast, indented with many waterways that feed into the ocean. Their banks are lined with mangroves, which protect the soil and increase its fertility. The communities who live along the coast build dikes using mangrove trees and soil, with drainage canals to let the salt water flow out from the basins and rainwater saturate the ground. The land can be cultivated immediately following the rainy season, when salinity levels are low. The salt still present in the ground helps.

Rice Akara (Sweet Rice Balls)

Ingredients
4 soft ripe bananas, peeled
160 grams (1 cup) rice flour
warm water
100 grams (1/2 cup) sugar
oil for frying

Method
Mash the bananas into a paste in a bowl. Alternate adding rice flour and a little warm water (to keep the mixture moist but not liquid), mixing with a wooden spoon. When all the flour has been added, beat well. Stir in the sugar. The mixture should hold together enough so that it slowly drops off a spoon held upside down. Leave in a cool place for about 15 minutes.
Heat enough oil in a saucepan to deep-fry the dough. Drop spoonfuls of the mixture into the hot oil and fry until golden brown. Drain on kitchen paper to remove excess oil.

2 Vegetables and Legumes

Local varieties of vegetables and legumes are grown in small family plots and feature in many dishes from Sierra Leone's culinary tradition. The most common are okra, used for its leaves and fruit; jakato, a small, flavourful eggplant; onions; groundnuts/peanuts native to South America and introduced to the country during colonial times and grounded into a paste; tomatoes; nutritious pigeon peas; egusi watermelons, used for their seeds; cassava, pounded into fufu, a paste eaten almost every day; and tubers like cocoyam and Chinese yam.

Traditional varieties of fruits and vegetables have adapted over the centuries to the local climate and soil conditions. This makes them more resistant, and they don't need chemical inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) to flourish. They cost less and are better for our health and the environment.

Cassava

Local names: sakie, yoka, odumboh, tanga-yamba
Scientific name: Manihot esculenta

An important source of carbohydrates, cassava is very versatile in the kitchen. The root is commonly cooked in stews in households and is used in various street food dishes. Ground into flour, it can be used to make breads and other dough-based dishes. Grated and fermented for a few days in jute sacks, it becomes gari, which can be eaten fried or turned into eba. Normally served with various kinds of sauces, eba is made by cooking gari and water together until it reaches the preferred consistency. The leaves, rich in iron and vitamin A, must be cooked for a long time to get rid of their bitterness, and are most popularly used in a sauce to accompany grains, meat and fish.

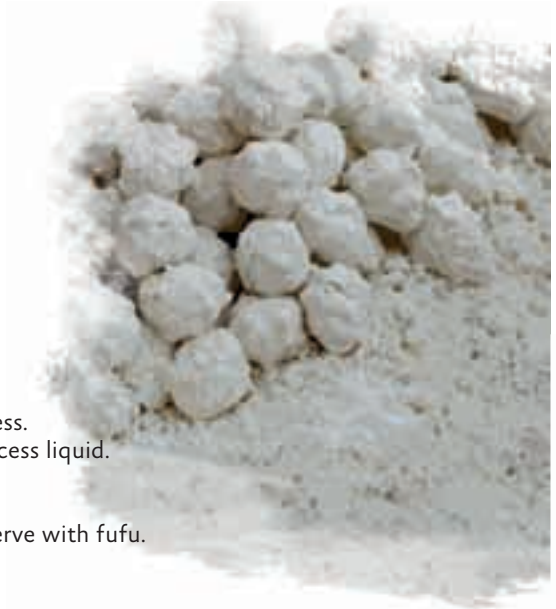
Cassava Leaf Stew

Ingredients
2 bunches of cassava leaves
450 grams (1 lb) meat, chicken or fish
¾ cup (180 ml or 3/8 pint) palm oil
30 broad beans, cooked
4 tbsp crushed groundnuts (peanuts)
5 garden eggs (small white eggplant), chopped
2 tbsp chilli powder
sounbareh seasoning
salt & pepper

Method
Trim the stalks and any damaged parts and wash the cassava leaves thoroughly. Pound the leaves in a mortar and pestle or use a food processor to obtain a soft green paste.
Bring a pot of water to the boil and add the cassava paste, covering the pot.
Once the smell of raw cassava leaves has been cooked out of the mixture, add the oil and the meat, chicken or fish and cover the pot again.
Add the onion, beans, peanuts and garden eggs and cook until tender.
Season to taste with salt, pepper and sounbareh.

Fufu

Fufu, a common staple in many West African countries, requires laborious preparation. After cassava root has been boiled until it is falling apart, it is ground in a wooden mortar, an arduous process that can take several hours. The paste is then shaped by hand into small balls, which are dipped into sauces and stews of meat, fish or vegetables. One very common dish is fufu with sour sour, also known as sorrel (Rumex acetosa), a wild leafy vegetable with a tart flavour.



Sorrel (Sour Sour) Soup

Ingredients
1 bunch of sorrel (sour sour)
1 small dry fish
water
salt and pepper

Method
Remove the stalks from the sorrel.
Wash the leaves and cook them with a little water,
changing the water a few times to help reduce the sourness.
Pound the cooked sorrel into a paste, and squeeze out excess liquid.
Put the fish in a pot and cover with water.
Add the sorrel and season with salt and pepper
before bringing to a boil and cooking for 5-10 minutes. Serve with fufu.

Okra

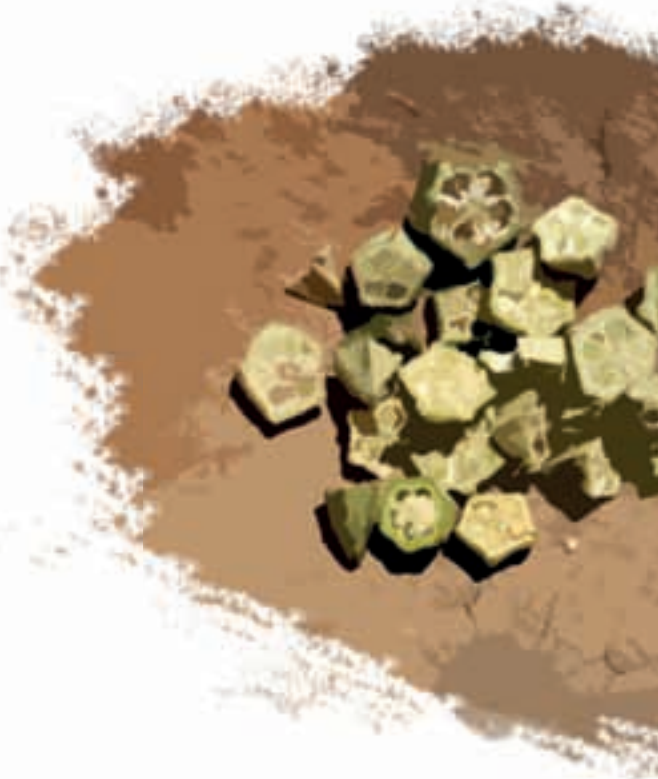
Scientific name: Abelmoschus esculentus

The okra plant has much more to offer than its beautiful yellow flowers. The long pointed green pods are an ingredient in many soups, and they can be used whole or cut into rounds. Okra leaves are also used in the kitchen, generally boiled, though they can also be dried and ground into a powder used to flavour grain-based dishes. Okra is easy to grow and produces a good yield, so it is often found in small family food gardens. The pods contain black seeds that can be used as a substitution for beans or to make highly nutritious oil.

Okra Stew

Ingredients
1 cup (1/2 pint) palm oil
450 grams (1 lb) okra, thinly sliced
3 onions, chopped
2 garden eggs (small white eggplant), chopped
450 grams (1 lb) fish or meat
3 chilli peppers, minced
water
salt to taste

Method
Warm the oil in a pot with a little water.
Add the okra, then the onions and garden eggs,
and bring to a boil. Add the salt, fish or meat,
and chilli and cook for about 20 minutes.



Jakato

Scientific name: Solanum aethiopicum

Jakato is a small, bright-red, intensely flavoured eggplant, similar in appearance to a tomato. It is usually picked when unripe and still green or yellow, and used to make sauces and soups. It is mostly grown in small family gardens and both the fruits and leaves can be commonly found in markets around the country. The leaves are eaten boiled, as an accompaniment to meat, fish or grain-based dishes.

Cocoyam and Chinese Yam

Cocoyam scientific name: Colocasia esculenta

Chinese yam scientific name: Dioscorea cayenensis

Cocoyam corms and Chinese yam tubers are prepared in a similar way. Both plants are poisonous if eaten raw and must be cooked for a long time before being used in traditional dishes. After being cut into large pieces and boiled in salted water for 20-25 minutes, the tubers become very soft and are ready to be used in many different ways: baked, fried or added to soups and stews.

Egusi

Scientific name: Citrullus lanatus

Africa's native watermelon, the egusi, was originally domesticated in the Kalahari Desert in Namibia and has since spread to many countries around the continent. The large fruits have a firm flesh, creamy white or orange in colour, with a green or yellow rind. The flesh of some types can be eaten, but the most interesting parts of the melon are its numerous white seeds. Once cleaned of their surrounding pulp, the seeds are toasted, husked and used to make a paste also called egusi. Flavourful and nutritious, it is used to season and thicken vegetable soups.

Pigeon Pea

Local names: konsho bean, akonsho, ukonshoha, Congo peas
Scientific name: Cajanus cajan

Due to its high resistance to drought, this small legume is mainly grown in the north-eastern regions (Bombali and Koinadugu), where rain is scarce, though humidity is high. The time between sowing and harvest is long, but this is not a disadvantage: the pigeon peas turn green, indicating ripeness, when other plants have already been harvested and consumed, and thus provide an important food resource. They are also highly nutritious – the small, white seed has a protein content of 20 per cent. For this reason, farmers generally eat them on the toughest days of work or on the worst days of the rainy season.

Three Ways to Cook Pigeon Peas

Stewed Pigeon Pea

Clean the pods and shell the pigeon peas. Place the beans in a pot covered with water, bring to a boil and cook until tender. Drain the beans and pound them gently.
Return the pounded beans to the pot and add palm oil, fish or meat, salt and pepper. Leave to cook for about 1¼ hours, add finely chopped raw onions, cook for another few minutes and serve.

Pigeon Pea With Ash

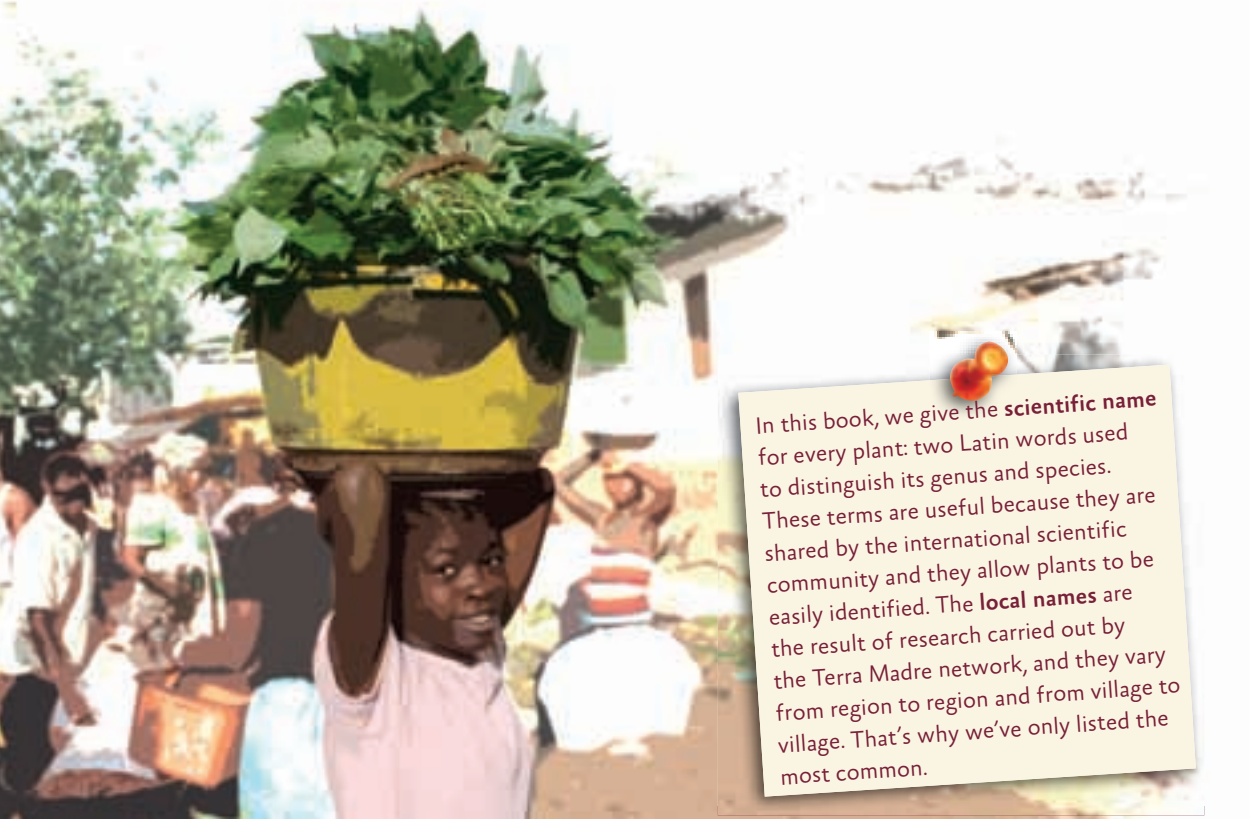
Clean the pods and shell the pigeon peas. Mix the beans with wood ash in a pot. Add enough water to dissolve the ash, cover the pot and cook for about 5 minutes. Rinse the beans in a calabash, repeating three or four times to remove all the ash, and transfer them to a mortar and pound them gently. Wash the pot and return the beans to the pot and cover with water. Bring to a boil and cook for about 20 minutes. Drain the beans and add fresh water. Add palm oil, fish or meat, salt and pepper and leave to simmer for about 30 minutes. Add finely chopped raw onions, cook for another few minutes and serve.

Pigeon Pea Flour

Dried and shelled pigeon peas are pounded into a fine powder. The powder can be added to a mixture of water, fish or meat, pepper and salt, and later onion. After boiling for 30 minutes the sauce is ready.

LEAFY GREENS

The extraordinary variety of leafy vegetables that grow across the African continent represent an immense resource to the villagers who pick them and sell them at local markets or cook them for their families. Among the most highly prized are moringa, used for its leaves and seeds; amaranth and sweet potato tops, both native to South America; crain crain, a plant common around Africa; bologi and broad bologi, plants rich in nutrients and vitamins; and sour sour and cassava which, together with rice, are the staple foods of the population.



In this book, we give the **scientific name** for every plant: two Latin words used to distinguish its genus and species. These terms are useful because they are shared by the international scientific community and they allow plants to be easily identified. The **local names** are the result of research carried out by the Terra Madre network, and they vary from region to region and from village to village. That's why we've only listed the most common.

Moringa

Scientific name: Moringa oleifera

Originally from the regions around the Himalayas, the moringa tree has been known in Africa since the time of the Ancient Egyptians.

As it ripens the moringa seedpod opens into three parts, freeing the seeds. A white membrane covers the black spheres, and each contains a small, oil-rich kernel. Everything the plant produces can be used: leaves, seeds, pods and roots. The leaves are eaten on their own or as an accompaniment to couscous, rice or other grains. The pods can be cooked in the same way, or collected when unripe to harvest the seeds. The seeds can be boiled and used to extract oil for cooking, lamps or soap. The leaves are rich in vitamin C and A and calcium and can be dried, ground into a powder and used to flavour dishes.

Amaranth

Local names: pigweed, green, tahundee

Scientific name: Amaranthus spinosus

Brought from Central America by Portuguese explorers, amaranth is mostly known in Africa as a leafy vegetable, though in its native countries only the seeds are used. In Sierra Leone, amaranth quickly became one of the most popular leafy vegetables. The leaves are picked when still tender, carefully washed and sliced into thin strips with a sharp knife, then sautéed in a frying pan with oil or used to make soups.

Crain Crain

Scientific name: Corchorus olitorius

Though crain crain is native to Africa, the shiny-leaved plant is common throughout in Asia, where it is grown exclusively to make jute, the strong, long-lasting fibre produced from the plant's stems.
In Sierra Leone, however, it is mostly used as an ingredient in soups and stews. Before being cooked, the leaves and stalks must be cut finely with a knife or a special machine. When cooked, the leaves release a substance that gives the final dish a prized gelatinous consistency.

Crain Crain Stew

Ingredients
4 large bunches crain crain
450 grams (1 lb) fish or meat
sounbareh seasoning
2 tie (balls) of ogirie seasoning
2 dried fish
salt and pepper

Method
Discard the crain crain stems and wash and slice the leaves. Put the fish or meat in a pot with the ogirie and sounbareh, salt and pepper to taste. Cover with water and bring to a boil. Add the prepared crain crain leaves and the dried fish and simmer for around 20 minutes. Add the onions, boil for another 3-5 minutes and serve with rice, millet or sorghum.

Sweet Potato

Scientific name: Ipomea batatas

Native to South America, the sweet potato is known in Africa for its leaves and in America for its root. The small and tender young leaves, rich in vitamins A, C and B2, are used in traditional cooking in soups and side dishes.

Sweet Potato Leaf Sauce

Ingredients
4 bunches sweet potato leaves
1½ cups (350 ml or ¾ pint) palm oil
2 tie (balls) of ogirie seasoning
1 dried fish
110 grams (4 oz) beans
2 small onions, chopped
salt and pepper

Method
Discard the stems and wash the young fresh leaves thoroughly.
Hold the leaves together in one hand and use a sharp knife to slice the leaves into very thin slices. This makes them easy to cook and eat.
Put the fish, beans and ogirie in a pot with palm oil. Season with salt and pepper and cover with water. Bring to a boil and cook for about 30 minutes.
When just a little water remains in the pot, add the sliced leaves and boil for no more than 15 minutes. Add onions and cook, covered, for about 5-10 minutes, and then serve the sauce as a side dish or with rice, sorghum or millet.

Bologi and Broad Bologi

Bologi scientific name: Solanecio biafrae or Crassocephalum biafrae
Broad bologi scientific name: Basella alba
Though similar in name and use in the kitchen, bologi and broad bologi are actually two different species. The bologi plant has small leaves and climbs up tree trunks, growing up to three meters tall. The flavourful and nutritious leaves contain iron and calcium. Broad bologi is a common plant in many parts of the continent, mostly in humid zones. Also climbing, and with beautiful flowers, broad bologi is used as an ornamental plant in gardens and hedges. The leaves, rich in iron and vitamin A, are also eaten once they have been carefully washed and boiled. Both plants are used to make soups or to accompany meat or fish dishes.

Bologi and Broad Bologi with Beans

Ingredients
450 grams (1 lb) bologi or broad bologi leaves
2 cups (360 grams) beans
one dry fish
2 tbsp crushed groundnuts (peanuts)
salt and pepper

Method
Wash and debone the dry fish.
Remove the bologi or broad bologi leaves from the stems; wash the leaves carefully and slice. Sprinkle the leaves with salt and massage thoroughly with the hands to help reduce bitterness and unpleasant odour.
Add the fish, beans, groundnuts, salt and pepper to a pot, cover with water and bring to a boil.
When the ingredients have cooked down into one consistent sauce (except for the groundnuts) add the leaves to the pot and cook for around 5 minutes more.

3 Condiments

The industrial stock cube, omnipresent on market stalls and supermarket shelves in Sierra Leone, threatens to wipe out the huge variety of traditional condiments prepared by the country's women. They are often made by fermenting the seeds of different plants, like the locust tree or benniseed. Leaves, seeds and flowers and even the roots of plants like ginger, tola and patmangi are used to enrich different dishes, adding colour, flavour and nutrients.

The Slow Food Presidia are communities of producers who work together and decide how to produce and promote their products. Their objective is to save local breeds, plant varieties and quality artisanal food products at risk of disappearing. Together, the Presidia producers promote the local area, preserve traditional techniques and knowledge and develop sustainable cultivation and farming techniques.

Palm Oil

Scientific name: Elaeis guineensis

The African oil palm is native to West Africa, specifically the forests of Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone. Now the area is home to plantations as well as many wild trees. Communities harvest the big bunches of red fruits from the wild trees and process them artisanally, obtaining dense, orange-coloured oil with scents of tomato, fruit and spice. This delicious and nutritious oil is commonly used in the traditional cuisine of Sierra Leone.

Tola

Scientific name: Beilschmiedia mannii

The tola tree grows in swampy, humid areas and is known mostly for its wood, which is red and easy to work. In some countries, like Sierra Leone and Liberia, it has many other uses: the flowers are used to flavour rice; the seeds are toasted and ground before being added to soups, rice and vegetables as a thickener; and the leaves are brewed into a fragrant tea.

Patmangi

Scientific name: Ocimum basilicum

An aromatic herb belonging to the species that gives us most culinary basils, patmangi has an intense, sweet flavour. The leaves are picked before the plant flowers, and added in small quantities to soups and stews, usually on festive days and other important occasions.

Ginger

Local name: gingai

Scientific name: Zingiber officinale

The rhizome of the ginger plant is dried in the sun and used to make refreshing drinks and flavour different dishes. Smaller and darker than the ginger from Asia or South America, Sierra Leone's ginger is also more flavourful and fragrant and is renowned as one of the best in Africa. When you taste the local variety, the difference is clear. Despite this, its cultivation was almost completely abandoned during the years of civil war. Today it is grown in the villages and sold almost exclusively at local markets.

Locust Tree

Local names: locos, nereh, ta bei
Scientific name: Parkia biglobosa

The locust tree grows wild in much of Africa, especially in savannah or semi savannah areas such as the Kabala region in Sierra Leone. It is known by different names, but the most common are locust tree, neré, caroubier africain and forroba. Children love the sugary pulp inside the long pod and the juice made from it, while travellers appreciate that it can keep for a long time. The locust tree has many other qualities: the fruits are rich in protein, vitamins and minerals; the tree is very resistant to parasites and disease, so requires little attention; and the leaves are rich in nitrogen and other minerals that enrich the soil as they decompose. For these reasons, many farmers plant the trees around their fields. The seeds inside the pods can be dried and then fermented to make sounbareh, a condiment known under similar names in many West African countries (soumbalà in Mali, for example). When used in small quantities, it acts as flavour enhancer.

Sounbareh or Kainda

Inside the yellow pulp of the locust tree pods are small brown bean-like seeds, used by the women to prepare sounbareh (kainda in the Krio language), a common seasoning in West Africa. Sounbareh is used to flavour rice and leafy vegetables. Dissolved in water, it is also a key ingredient in a broth served at important banquets and on feast days. It is in effect the traditional, artisanal (and much healthier) version of the modern industrial stock cube.

Women prepare the Sounbareh, while the men have the task of collecting the pods. The seeds are removed from the pods and fermented in ashes for three to four days. They are then boiled for a whole day and fermented again for three days. The mixture is then left to dry in the sun until it turns black. At this point it can be sold or stored for up to a year. To obtain the final product, the mixture is toasted again and ground in a mortar with chilli, dried fish and salt.

Benniseeds

Local name: mandai
Scientific name: Sesamum indicum

The sesame plant prefers humid areas, so it is mostly grown in the wetter northern provinces, intercropped with rice. The small white seeds, the only edible part of the plant, are traditionally prepared in two ways: toasted and ground into a powder, which is mixed with rice flour and water to obtain benni mix, a nutritious children's food; or boiled for a long time and left to ferment in closed jute sacks to obtain a powder which is wrapped in banana leaves and smoked. The resulting product, ogirie, is one of the most common seasonings in Sierra Leone, used to flavour soups and other dishes. It must be used with caution, as the pungent smell can become offensive if used in large quantities. It should also be cooked for at least 10-15 minutes to minimize its strong odour.

Tamarind

Scientific name: Tamarindus indica

The tamarind tree has a short trunk and very thick foliage, making it ideal shelter for both people and animals. The fruit is a hard, dark pod, containing dozens of seeds surrounded by pulp. The tamarind has many uses in the kitchen because its tart flavour is similar to lemon, and it is found in numerous dishes and sauces. The pulp can be eaten seasoned with salt and pepper, but the most common product made from tamarind is juice, made by macerating the pulp in water and sugar. Sweet little balls of tamarind seeds are often sold at the markets, prepared by women on the spot.

Tamarind Juice

Ingredients

250 grams (9 oz) tamarind fruits
5 cups (1¼ litres) water
sugar to taste

Method

Wash the tamarind and place in a pot covered in water.
Boil until the skins burst (about 20 minutes)
and transfer to a big bowl with half the cooking liquid.
Mash the tamarind with a fork and filter into another bowl using a strainer, mashing as much of the pulp as possible through. Strain once more and add sugar to taste.

4 Animal Breeds

Animal farming spread through Sierra Leone with the nomadic Fula people, who settled in the northern parts of the country. The life of the Fula people is closely connected to their animals. Young brides, for example, receive a cow as a gift, and become the owners of its calves and milk. The Fula taught animal husbandry techniques to the Mandingo, Yalunka and Susu people. The most common local breeds are N'dama cattle, West African Dwarf goats and Djallonké sheep. With the long civil war, livestock numbers have fallen dramatically.

Local breeds are hardier and need less attention, because over the centuries they've adapted to the territory and climate. Local breeds and their products (like milk, meat or wool) are an asset to local communities and must be preserved.

N'dama

Thanks to centuries of adaptation, the N'dama cow is immune to the bite of the tsetse fly. This makes it one of the few breeds suited to living in the swampy, humid north of the country. The N'dama is small, and is called different names depending on the colour of its coat. The black Waneh is the most resistant to adversities like lack of water and green pastures, and is also used for rituals and sacrifices. The red Wordeweh is the most common, and its meat is eaten on special occasions, to celebrate weddings or births. Finally, the white cow, Pulli or Reneweh, is very rare and considered to have the best meat. It is a symbol of good fortune, and a farmer with many white cows in his herds is considered to be very lucky.

Goats and Sheep

Cattle-farming communities almost always keep some smaller animals as well, like sheep or goats, as they are easier to sell than the cattle.
The most common goat breed is the West African Dwarf (WAD), also known as Djallonké, and is farmed mostly for its meat. The most common sheep is also called Djallonké, or forest sheep, and is found throughout West Africa. Both are resistant to the bite of the tsetse fly.

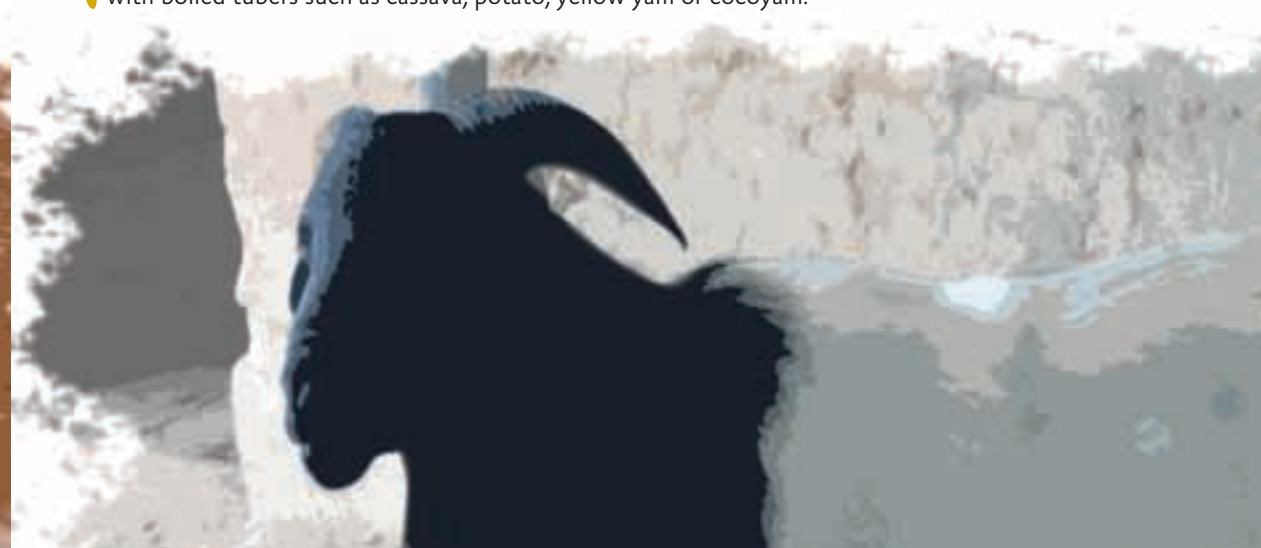
Quick Fried Soup

This soup is fast and easy to prepare, especially useful for people with busy schedules. It is not a typical dish among rural or remote farmers in Sierra Leone.
Boiled yams, cassava tubers, bananas and other starches can be eaten with the soup. No quantities are indicated because you can use whatever type of vegetable and meat or fish you prefer, in your preferred quantity. In this example recipe we have used meat, onion and garden eggs (small yellow eggplant).

Heat some oil in a pot. Fry the meat. Add sliced onions, garden eggs and ground chilli pepper. Cover the ingredients with water and add salt. Cook for 10-20 minutes, with a lid on the pot.

Groundnut Soup

Follow the preparation method for the Quick Fried Soup, but add some groundnut paste (peanut butter) to the pot after the fish or meat and garden eggs have been fried. This soup can be eaten with boiled tubers such as cassava, potato, yellow yam or cocoyam.



5 Atlantic Fish

The families who live in villages along the Atlantic coast of Sierra Leone mostly make their living from fishing. In the province of Freetown (Kent), traditional fishing practices are still carried out with respect for nature and the sea's resources. Men go out with their pirogues and cast their nets at night, then draw them in the next morning. The women take care of processing the catch, using smoking or drying techniques. Many traditional dishes are based on fish, and over 70 per cent of the animal protein consumed in the country comes from the sea.

The most common species include round sardinella *(Sardinella aurita)*, known as herring in Sierra Leone, ladyfish (*Elops senegalensis)*, lati *(Ilisha africana)* and bonga shad *(Ethmalosa fimbriata)*. Like the rest of West Africa, Sierra Leone's rich waters are attracting more and more big fishing boats who often fish illegally, entering exclusive economic zones (areas in which foreign fishing boats cannot fish without authorization from the country) and using illegal methods like trawling with small-mesh nets. This means they indiscriminately catch fish, mammals and sometimes even birds, unscrupulously taking fish that are too small or at risk of extinction.

One-Pot Fish Stew

Ingredients

fresh or dried bongas/herrings (approx one small fish per person)
½ cup (125 ml or ¼ pint) palm oil
2 onions, sliced
4 peppers, sliced
fresh tomatoes, chopped
1 sprig of patmangi
rice/gari

Method

If using fresh fish, clean and fillet. If using dry fish, remove the skin and the bones.
Heat the oil in a pan and add the onions, peppers and tomatoes and some of the fish. Cook through and remove a portion of the sauce from the pan. Add the rest of the dried fish and the patmangi to the pan and then add the rice and cover with enough water to cook rice. If gari is used, soak lightly and add to the stew. When the rice is ready, place the sauce set aside earlier on top of the dish, and mix through when ready to serve.

Be curious !
Sample traditional products and you'll rediscover forgotten flavours: try replacing a stock cube with a pinch of **sounbareh**, imported rice with **local rice.**

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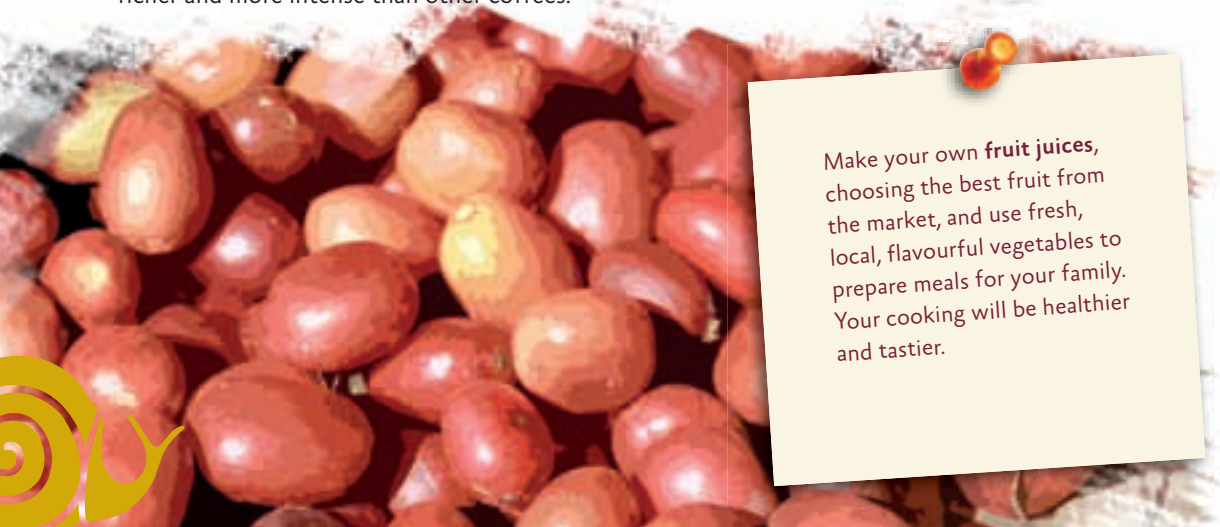
6 Fruits and Teas

All around the country, roadside traders sell fresh fruit, juices and syrups. The fruits and herbs used include many wild species (like soursop and black tumble), varieties native to West Africa (like the aromatic tea bush and bush tea bush, niangon trees and kola nuts), those native to other parts of the continent (like tamarind, native to East Africa) and fruits native to other continents that have acclimatized to Sierra Leone over the centuries (like banana and mango, commonly used in cooking, including in savoury dishes with couscous or meat).

Coffee

Scientific name: Coffea stenophylla

Almost all the coffee consumed in the world belongs to two species, Coffea arabica and Coffea canephora (known as Robusta). Robusta grows on the hills of Sierra Leone, but so do wild trees of Coffea stenophylla. This hardy plant produces abundant purple fruits. Inside each berry are two seeds, the coffee beans. The variety has almost completely disappeared because it is not considered profitable, taking nine years to reach maturity and start fruiting – two more than Arabica and five more than Robusta. Picked by hand, the coffee cherries are laid out on cloths to dry in the sun. Once the pulp has been removed from the beans, they are toasted to bring out their fragrance, which is richer and more intense than other coffees.



Make your own **fruit juices**, choosing the best fruit from the market, and use fresh, local, flavourful vegetables to prepare meals for your family. Your cooking will be healthier and tastier.

Niangon or African Almond

Local name: boaboi

Scientific name: Heritieria utilis

Though mostly known for the high quality of wood in its trunk, the niangon tree has another characteristic: its small fruits, which ripen near the end of the dry season, are very sweet and highly nutritious. Commonly known as African almonds, they are delicious and also rich in calcium, iron, magnesium and vitamin A, important nutrients for children and pregnant women.

Black Tumble

Scientific name: Dialium guineense

The fruits of this wild tree have a dark and velvety shell containing an orange-coloured pulp and a single seed. The fruit is eaten after being shelled, and has an astringent flavour, similar to baobab but sweeter. Rich in vitamin C, the pulp can be macerated to make a very refreshing beverage.

Slow Food Kenema Kola Presidium

Local names: kola, akola, twii, worray, worro, uthukay, goroh
Scientific name: Kola nitida

The kola nut's name might recall the world's most globalized beverage, but the two have little in common. The kola nut is the fruit of the kola tree, which belongs to the same family as cacao, Sterculiaceae. The tree is native to the tropical forests of West Africa, and still grows wild in Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. There are around 140 species of kola, but the most widely consumed in Africa are the wild Cola acuminata, also known as small or bitter kola, and the cultivated Cola nitida, known as big kola or kola nut. Cola acuminata is brown, while Cola nitida can be of different colours, ranging from yellow to pink to red when fresh and from brown to dark red when dried. The fruits contain caffeine, kolatin, theobromine and tannic acid.

For centuries this fruit has been a vital part of different areas of daily life and given it important symbolic meaning; it is used in religious practices, as a sexual stimulant and in social customs. In Sierra Leone, kola nuts are consumed during rites and ceremonies, to welcome guests, as a symbol of friendship, to seal an agreement or to mark reconciliation. During Ramadan, soft drink producers make a kind of ginger ale with water, ginger, kola, chilli and sometimes sugar. They only use white kola, because oddly its juice is darker red in colour than other types of kola nuts.

Kola is used in traditional medicine; chewing a piece after meals helps digestion, and the caffeine in the fruits aids concentration. It is also used to reduce hunger pangs. The Mandingo and Temne ethnic groups also use the nuts as a brown dye for fabrics, after they have been ground and soaked in water. In the south-eastern regions of Sierra Leone (Kenema and Kailahun districts), Cola nitida is grown intercropped with coffee and cacao, smaller plants that like the shade cast by the large kola tree. The fruits are picked twice a year, between July and September and December and February. After the harvest the fruits are cut open to extract the nuts.

One fruit contains 8 to 10 nuts, each protected by a yellow skin. To remove this, the nuts are laid out on the ground on a mat, covered with banana or mango leaves, and soaked with water. The skin rots in about a week, making it easy to remove. The nuts are then washed with fresh water before being stored in baskets or sacks lined with fresh mango leaves.

The humidity of the leaves is essential to stop the nuts drying out, and thus the nuts can be kept for more than six months and easily transported.
Kola nuts from south-eastern Sierra Leone are known for their flavour and texture (crisp rather than fibrous), and many traders come to Kenema from as far away as Senegal, Guinea and Mali.

Image tirée d'une photo de © Paola Viesi

Tea Bush and Bush Tea Bush

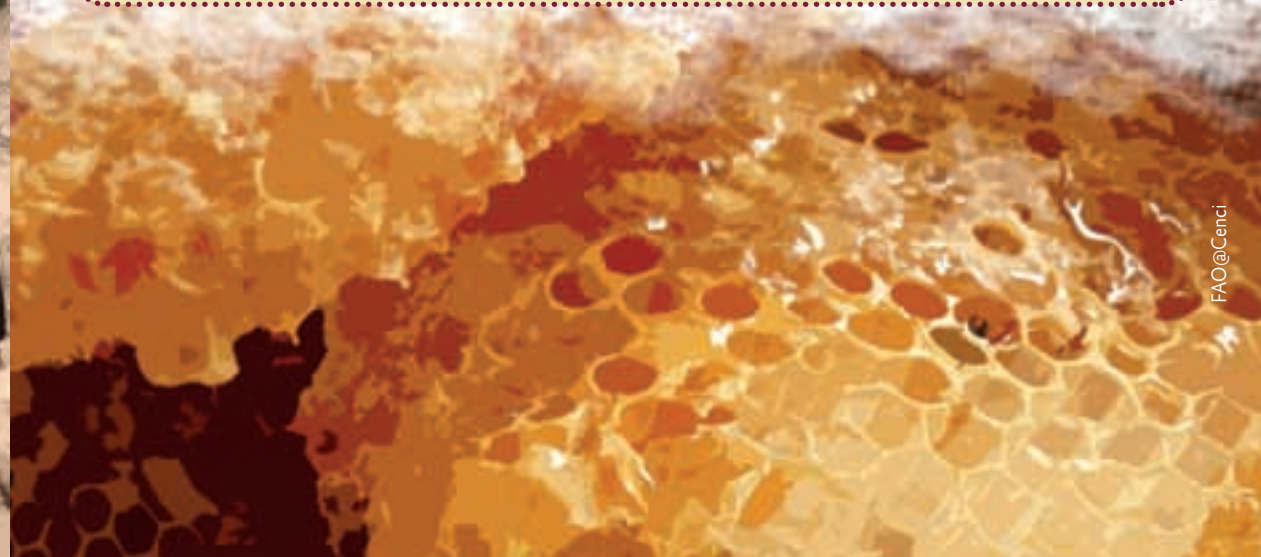
Local name: fever plant
Tea bush scientific name: Hyptis suaveolens
Bush tea bush scientific name: Ocimum gratissimum or Ocimum viride
A wild plant that is dried and used to make a herbal tea. Only the leaves are harvested. Transported in large wicker baskets, they are left to dry in the sun for a few days before being sold. There are two varieties, tea bush and bush tea bush. The first has a bitter flavour and is only used for medicinal purposes; the fresh leaves are eaten to calm stomach ache and digestive problems. The bush tea bush also has therapeutic properties; used especially to calm stomach pains, it is also brewed into fragrant, citrusy teas, served with milk or honey.

Soursop

Local names: sweety sharp, sour sharp
Scientific name: Annona muricata
This small tree grows in courtyards, and its fruit is rarely found in local markets. Dark green in colour, they have a sugary, juicy pulp with a sweet scent. The seeds, ground into powder or processed into oil, are used to ward off head lice and bedbugs.

Koinadugu Honey

Thanks to the different flowers on which the bees feed, the honey produced in the forests of the Koinadugu region is very unusual, with an intense, caramelized flavour, a thick consistency and a dark brown colour. In recent years, honey extraction techniques have been improved, allowing beekeepers to produce a better quality product, highly prized in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries. The beekeepers harvest the honey in the dry season, when work in the fields has slowed. The hives are placed in trees, according to tradition, but they are now hung slightly lower than before, so that the women can also help with the harvesting phase.



Where to buy local products

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The Slow Food Presidia are projects for safeguarding local, traditional and quality products at risk of extinction. There are over 350 Presidia in 50 countries around the world. **Sierra Leone has the Kenema Kola Presidium, come discover it!**

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A Thousand Gardens in Africa
In 2010 Slow Food has embarked on an ambitious project: to create a thousand food gardens in schools, villages and on the outskirts of cities in 25 African countries.
The thousand gardens will be concrete models of sustainable agriculture, sensitive to different contexts (environmental, socioeconomic and cultural) and easily replicable.
If you wish to know more about the project or buy local products from the gardens contact the local coordinators:

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Together the **food communities** make up the Terra Madre network: groups of people who produce, process and distribute quality food in a sustainable way, maintaining a strong link with the local area. **Buy their products when you can!**

Join Slow Food

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By joining Slow Food you will support

a sustainable system of food production and distribution;
the development of food education projects around the world;
the promotion of food cultures and biodiversity;
and the pleasure of food and a slow way of life.

To receive the newsletter with the latest updates on the Terra Madre network and Slow Food activities visit www.slowfood.com

If you would like to become a member of Slow Food or open a local group in Sierra Leone, contact Michela Lenta, m.lenta@slowfood.it or visit our website.

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