

Florida Food Fare

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Malanga

Malanga is a root vegetable popular in the tropics and South America. In Florida, malanga is the most popular form of cocoyam, which is a general name applied to several species of *Xanthosoma*. It is also called yautia, cocoyam, eddo, coco, tannia, sato-imo, and Japanese potatoes. Leafy species of *Xanthosoma* not grown for tubers are called belembe and calalous. There are actually two different malangas: Malanga blanca (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*), considered the true malanga, which grows on dry land. The other is malanga amarillo (*Colocasia esculenta*) which grows in wet bog-like areas.

Generally, malanga resembles dasheen (taro) and the elephant-ear plant with large green leaves about 2 feet wide by 2 1/2 feet long. The malanga plant may attain a height of 5 feet or more. Edible tubers (cormels) are formed in the soil at the base of the plant. A central large tuber (corm) is formed, with a cluster of cormels, grayish brown to black lateral tubers, around it. Malanga are about the size and shape of a regular white potato; they look a little like an overgrown gladiola bulb, because the outside skin of the malanga is brown and somewhat hairy. It generally weighs 1/2 to 2 pounds, but can be heavier. The interior has an extremely crisp texture and can vary in color from cream, yellow or pink.

Malanga is widely grown and used in the tropics. In South Florida, it has been grown in small patches for many years and on a limited commercial sale since

1963 to meet the demands of Latin Americans living here. There were about 2,500 acres of malanga grown in Dade County, Florida, in 1995. Malanga, along with calabaza and boniato, make up most of the 14,000 acres of tropical vegetables grown in Dade County in 1996.

This root vegetable is available year-round in Hispanic markets and some supermarkets. Harvested malanga tubers can be kept in good condition at room temperature (79 F) and humidity (76 percent) for just a few weeks. They keep longer if refrigerated at 45 F. Tender tubers are washed and peeled before cooking. Some are so hard that cooking is required before peeling. They may be baked, mashed, fried, or otherwise used as potatoes. Malanga makes an interesting addition to stews and soups, adding flavor, thickness and creaminess. Be careful not to overcook or it disintegrates.

Malanga is often milled into flour, since malanga is probably the most hypoallergenic food in the world. Even persons with extensive allergies should do very well with this flour. The starch grains are the smallest and most easily digested of all complex carbohydrates. Malanga flour is used as a substitute for wheat flour to make cookies, quick breads, loaf breads, pancakes, bagels, muffins, doughnuts, dumplings, and similar items.

Malanga is high in calories, at 135 calories per 1/2 cup, cooked serving. It is a fairly good source of thiamine and riboflavin and contributes modest amounts of vitamin C and iron. There are about 1,530 calories in one pound of malanga flour. The composition of malanga flour is approximately: 75.5 percent carbohydrates, 5.1 percent protein, 1.6 percent fat, 9.8, percent fiber, 1.2 percent water, and 6.8 percent minerals.

Recipes:

Plantain and Malanga Soup

4 quarts water	3 green peeled plantains, diced
2 pounds malanga or potatoes, diced	2 cubes or packages of low sodium beef bouillon
2 pounds beef ribs, cut across in 1 1/2 inch pieces	

Boil the beef ribs in the water and beef stock. When meat is soft (after 25 to 30 minutes), add the malanga or potatoes and plantains. Reduce heat to medium/low and simmer for about 15 minutes. Serve hot in a soup plate. Add hot sauce or salsa and garnish with chopped chives or parsley. Serves 8.

Boiled Malanga

Malanga
Salt and pepper

Butter or oil

Pare malanga and cut into bite-size pieces. Add to boiling salted water and cook until they can be easily pierced with a fork. Drain. Toss lightly, so as not to mash, with melted butter or olive oil. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve warm or cold, as desired.

Note: Boiled malanga can be made into a salad like potato salad, substituting malanga for the potatoes.

Malanga Fritters

2 medium-large malangas, about 1 1/2 pounds	1 1/2 teaspoons salt, more or less to taste
2 large garlic cloves, minced	1 egg, beaten slightly
1 serrano or jalapeno chili pepper, seeded and minced	Peanut or vegetable oil for deep-frying
2 tablespoons minced parsley	Minced parsley for garnish
Lemon wedges	

Peel malanga and place in cold water. Using a standing hand grater, shred coarse; there should be about 3 cups. Add garlic, salt, chili pepper, egg and parsley; blend. Heat oil for deep-frying to 350 to 375 F, preferably in deep skillet or cooker. Form malanga mixture into, loosely packed balls in the palm of your hand, using about 1 1/2 tablespoons of mixture for each. Drop into hot oil and brown well. Do not crowd fritters while cooking. Set on heated plates, with lemon wedges and parsley garnish. Makes 6 servings.