# FORGOTTEN GARDENS

## CHAYA, ANCIENT GREENS FOR MODERN TABLES



56 CHAYA RECIPES

HENNIE FISHER & RICHARD HAY

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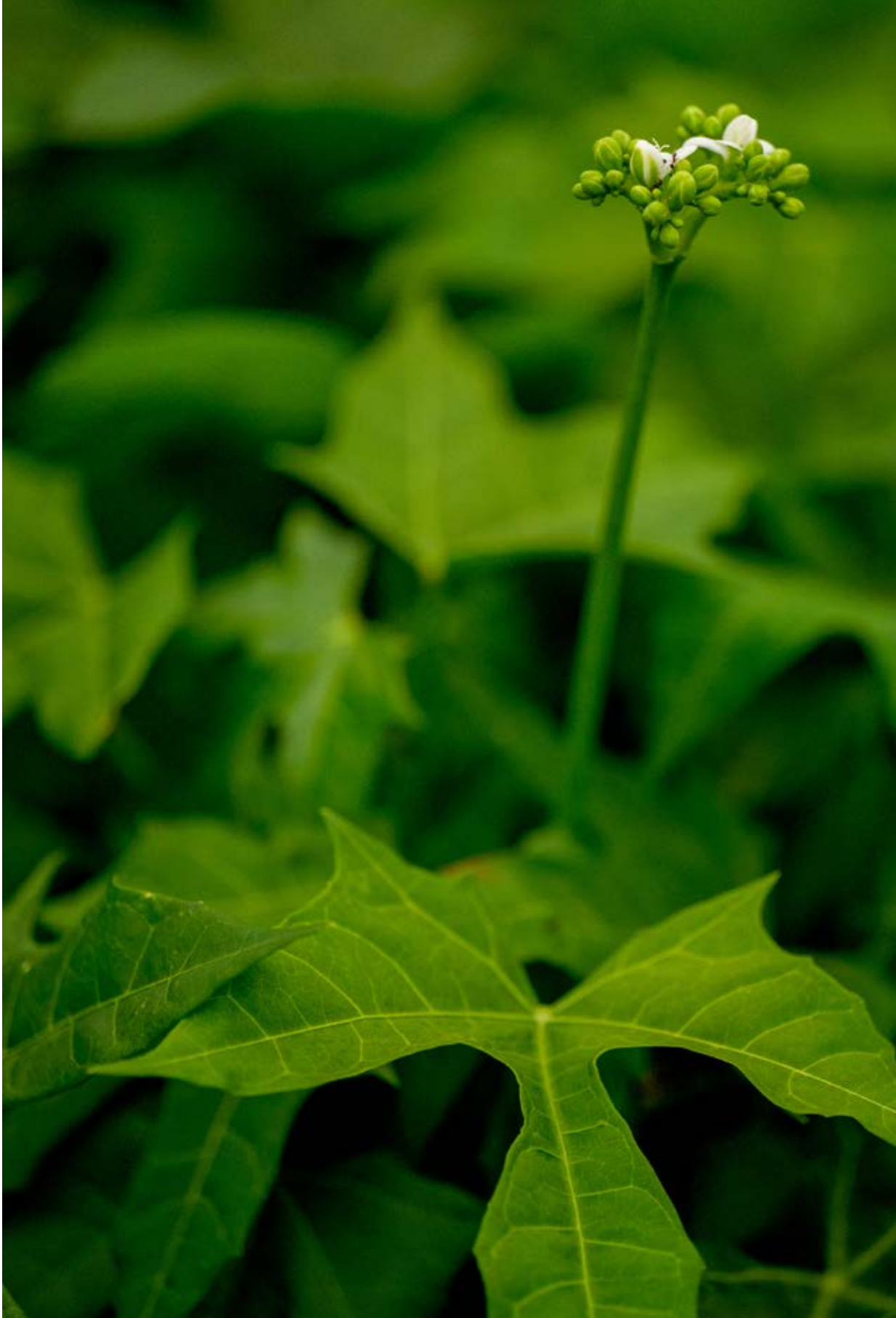
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HENNIE FISHER & RICHARD HAY

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
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# FOREWORD

**Chaya, Mayan tree spinach or to give it its full name "chaya-mansa", is one of those food plants that one dismisses as too good to be true when one first hears about it.**

A fast growing, drought, heat and pest resistant tree that is co-incidentally considered potentially the most productive leaf crop on Earth, while at the same time being one of the most nutritious. Easily grown from cuttings, chaya can be tucked away in a forgotten corner of a garden and harvested from daily.

### Clearly over-hyped, wouldn't everyone know about it if so?

Not until one reads a bit further, takes the time to obtain material, grows and uses the plant, feeds one's family and others with it, does the plant's true value become clear.

Domesticated by a sophisticated, agricultural people and eaten as a staple food for thousands of years, chaya is one of nature's best kept secrets. Outside chroniclers of the Maya in the sixteenth century wrote that the common people would carry these small trees around and plant them in multitude where they settled.

Chaya-mansa means "home/domesticated chaya", as opposed to the wild "chaya-bruto", which is the wild plant that has divided leaves and stinging hairs like a nettle, something the domesticated plant does not have!

"The modern Mayan people regard the plant as a "tree of life", and are reported to say, "if you have no meat, cook with chaya-mansa".

This book is a love letter to a plant that should be grown in every backyard in Africa, and comes at a time when the World Health Organisation is warning that lower income South Africans are at risk of the 'fat and hungry paradox', that is, malnutrition caused by the overconsumption of highly processed, cheap, foods.

Leafy greens are enjoyed by people in all walks of life, and cooked chaya is incredibly nutrient dense, from protein to Vitamin C, iron, carotenes and calcium at levels beyond comparison with most other vegetables, the only real superfood competitor in the edible plant kingdom is Moringa, however, chaya tastes much better in an everyday meal!

Enjoy these recipes, plant some chaya and spread the word (and the plant) to whoever will benefit from it.

*I promise, it is a life changer.*

**Head Curator: Jason Sampson**
Manie van der Schijff Botanical Garden,
University of Pretoria



# HOW THIS BOOK CAME ABOUT

## FORGOTTEN GARDENS

### CHAYA, ANCIENT GREENS FOR MODERN TABLES

HENNIE FISHER & RICHARD HAY

**Many people obsess, unhealthily, about what they consume. Acclaimed nutrition and dietitian experts offer a simple mantra for healthy adults: eat everything in moderation.**

Today, we produce more food than ever before, with trade connections spanning the furthest corners of the globe, yet, despite being spoiled for choice, societies globally are, by and large, eating an increasingly simplified diet. In the last century, an estimated 75 per cent of crop cultivars (cultivated varieties) have been lost as agri-food systems transitioned to modern cultivars bred for high-yields under mechanised, input-intensive agricultural production systems. The Future Africa Indigenous and Orphan Crops Collection (FA IOCC) was established as a specialist collection of the University of Pretoria's Manie van der Schijff Botanical Garden to function as a living library of agrobiodiversity—the diversity of edible and medicinal plant species and cultivars—at the Future Africa Institute.

Tackling agrobiodiversity decline, however, is complex and requires economic, social, and political interventions at all tiers of governance and societal organisation. As a chef and gardener embedded in the administrative capital of the Republic of South Africa, we recognise the limits of our ability to influence policy and political will, but believe we are uniquely positioned to drive change within communities.

Libraries can only be impactful if they are embedded in, accessible, and relevant to the broader community. Promoting the crops of the FA IOCC living library has been a lesson in collaboration and coordination across academic disciplines, and this book is the product of it: a guide to the culinary application of a novel crop species in the South African context, while providing real-world value to the academic assignments of the undergraduate students at the heart of its creation.

The nutritional value of food is complex, influenced by many factors, including methods of growing, rearing, harvesting, slaughtering, transport, storage, preparation, and cooking before it enters our bodies. In a world of long supply chains which disconnect consumers from producers, many of these factors are beyond our control. It may also be healthier not to overthink the nutritional and health benefits of everything we eat, from multiple perspectives, particularly through a psychosomatic lens. Incorporating a greater variety of species into our diets and sourcing as locally as possible to increases the nutritional "bucket" from which we scoop. The authors of this book and the accompanying recipe compilation are passionate supporters of increasing the use of available foods in our diets. To explore lost and underutilised foods, to delve into modern interpretations of recipes using ingredients that may be nutritionally sounder than their commercially produced equivalents.

Research regarding the potential of lost, forgotten or underutilised nutraceutical and medicinal plants in Southern Africa indicates that there are over 5 000 such species (Mudau et al. 2022). The forgotten garden is, therefore, of utmost importance for a sustainable future food system. Such "forgotten gardens", those that have been largely overlooked in mainstream agriculture, are of utmost importance for their potential to contribute to food security, nutritional diversity and resilience to climate change (Yesuph et al. 2025).

***Welcome to Forgotten Gardens: Chaya, Ancient Greens for Modern Tables, a South African homage to a Mexican crop with global application.***





# HENNIE FISHER

**Hennie is a senior Culinary Arts lecturer in the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Pretoria.**

He holds a PhD in Food Management for which he developed and validated a Food Literacy Measurement Instrument using Rasch Modelling. Other research involves Cultural Foods such as the Chikanda of Zambia, Sensory Research regarding Mogodu (a local tripe dish), Recipe and Product Development using indigenous ingredients such as tiger nuts, Kei apples, Indigenous flowers and Indigenous green leafy vegetables, as well as collaborative work in areas of food waste, and modernising culinary training through flipped learning and on-line submission of practical preparation documents.

Hennie authored his first book in 2025, called Beyond the Smoothie: Papaya Recipes for Every Occasion (ESI Press), as well as having co-authored various book chapters, such as Eating and Drinking in Southern Africa, edited by professor Herbert Meiselman and published by Springer (2020 and re-issued in 2026), A Food Route Traversing West African Cuisine along with Gerrie du Rand and Irene Darkwa, also published by Springer (2026), The Double-Edged Role of Cuisine in Both Research and Practice in Contemporary Advances in Food Tourism Management and Marketing edited by Francesc Fusté-Forné and Erik Wolf and published by Routledge (2023), Cultural Innovation of Chefs and Food Tourism Development: the Case of South Africa in the Handbook of Food Tourism, edited by Eerang Park and Sangkyun Kim and published by Edward Elgar (2024), and Regenerative Food Tourism at Grootbos: A South African Case Study in The Routledge Handbook of Regenerative Tourism, edited by Francesc Fusté-Forné and Asif Hussain (2025).

Hennie holds an advanced diploma from Le Cordon Bleu and a two-year diploma from the Cape Wine Academy. He gained cooking experience at the Michelin-starred Gidleigh Park restaurant in Devon, England, under Shaun Hill; at The Wilds Restaurant in Fulham, London and as a restaurant manager at Lucy's Restaurant in Stanley, Hong Kong. Back in South Africa, he co-owned Sirocco, a Mediterranean restaurant in the Gerhard Moerdyk Village in Sunnyside, and Mufuti Restaurant in Riviera, which served modern Pan-African cuisine.

# RICHARD HAY



**Richard is a plantsman passionate about biodiverse landscapes, plant-people relationships, and building more equitable food systems and urban greenspaces.**

He holds a BScAgric in Applied Plant and Soil Sciences (University of Pretoria), a Postgraduate Diploma in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (University of the Western Cape) and a MScAgric in Agronomy (University of Pretoria).

At the time this book was created, Richard held the position as curator of the FA IOCC at the University of Pretoria's Manie van der Schijff Botanical Garden. His interest in plants is sporadically documented on social media under the handle @HarvestOfHay.



# INTRODUCTION OF CULINARY ARTS STUDENTS 2025

**Various undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are offered in the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Pretoria. For both the BConSc Hospitality Management and BSc Culinary Science degrees, final year students enrol for the Culinary Arts subject as one of their compulsory final year subjects. In 2025, the 14 full-time enrolled students worked alongside the authors to compile this collection of recipes.**

Initially, students were provided with a design brief to develop or adapt green leafy vegetable recipes into three categories: a baked item, an ambient shelf-stable product, and a recipe adapted from one traditionally prepared with spinach. In a South African context, the word 'spinach' is somewhat of a misnomer. The vegetable many people in South Africa call spinach is more correctly Swiss Chard (*Beta vulgaris subps. vulgaris*), while true spinach *(Spinacia oleracea*) is a much softer, more delicate vegetable typically labelled and packaged as 'baby spinach' in South Africa. From a cultural perspective, many underutilised green leafy vegetables are collectively and colloquially referred to as morogo or imfino, which is often loosely translated as 'wild spinach'. In Sepedi, "morogo refers to any form of leaves which can be cooked and eaten as a vegetable, which falls in the same category as "spinach", which also means that in Sepedi, there are different types of morogo, for example: leroto/lerote, dithaka, monawa, thepe, and letelele, which means that there is no such thing as "wild spinach" (Ramusi and Mothiba, 2023).

In addition to the 42 recipes generated in this first round of recipe conceptualisation, students were tasked with another recipe in each of the various recipe divisions, bringing the total number of recipes in this collection to 56. Students tested all their recipes and made sensory amendments, which were again prepared for the food photographs.

## Why should Culinary Arts students, and you, worry about what's on your plate?

The previous century saw unprecedented gains in agricultural production, with average cereal yields rising by 210 per cent since 1961 (Ritchie et al. 2022). This is attributed to a complex mix of factors, including mechanisation, the invention and adoption of an expanded range of agrochemicals, such as synthetic fertilisers, increased irrigation efficiency, and breakthroughs in plant breeding techniques. Today, more food is produced than ever before on an increasingly smaller land footprint relative to the harvest, sparing an estimated 1.81 billion hectares that would have been required had yields not increased (Ritchie et al. 2022).

However, an unintended consequence of the widespread adoption of high-yielding modern cultivars was the loss of landrace cultivars and a simplification of the broader food system.



Today, just six of the world's 300 000 edible plant species account for 57 per cent of global agricultural produce by weight (FAO 2023). This heavy reliance on a few crop species and a handful of cultivars, leaves the agri-food system vulnerable to external shocks and stressors, including environmental disasters such as drought and outbreaks of pests and diseases, which are all predicted to increase in frequency and intensity as a result of anthropogenic climate change (Lesk et al. 2016, Savary et al. 2019). Increasing dietary diversity not only improves consumer dietary outcomes, it also builds resilience into food systems and creates additional opportunities for farmers.

# CULINARY TEACHING

In the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences at the University of Pretoria, students, or young culinarians, are required to take a compulsory fourth-year subject called Culinary Arts. This subject is a compulsory final-year subject for two degrees: the BConSc Hospitality Management degree and those following the BSc Culinary Sciences degree. Students take other final-year compulsory subjects within these two degrees, such as Recipe Development. Fostering creativity, inquisitive minds, following the scientific method in experiments, and cultivating an aesthetic sense are among the indirect outcomes of these subjects.

Indigenous foods, including indigenous ingredients such as green leafy vegetables, are central to cultural heritage, sustainable diets, and food security in South Africa, yet they remain underrepresented in South African Higher Education (SAHE) culinary and hospitality curriculum (Masina et al. 2025). Improving culinary education through the celebration of culture and tradition, emphasising the commonalities and differences with other global cuisines, has been shown (Gangiah 2024). Research also shows that integrating Indigenous Knowledge, such as examples and resources from culture, could be highly successful in the classroom (Mashoko 2018). Young student culinarians would, in the future, be the next generation of food industry workers, and their knowledge and practices of Heritage Food, along with their exposure to indigenous ingredients, would affect their ability to contribute to authentic South African cuisine when they enter the job market.



# WHAT IS CHAYA?

Chaya (*Cnidoscolus aconitifolius* (Mill) I.M. Johnst) is a large, leafy shrub of the family *Euphorbiaceae*, native to Central America (Amaya et al. 2020). The leaves and tender shoots of the species have been used extensively by indigenous peoples of the region for approximately 4 000 years as food and medicine, and were an important part of pre-colonial food systems, particularly in the Yucatán Peninsula (Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz 2002). Writings by Fray Diego de Landa in the sixteenth century, presented in *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (De Landa and Kintana 1959), describe the species as a small tree with soft branches which holds a great deal of milk, while the leaves are eaten cooked and is well paired with rich, fatty food such as bacon.

In the wild, the species is known for its urticating hairs, causing intense itching and irritation when touched. The specific epithet—*aconitifolius*—refers to the leaves of the wild-type's resemblance to those of plants of the genus *Aconitum*, which were well-known to European botanists for this same defence mechanism. Cooking has traditionally been used to remove the urticating properties of the wild type, however, centuries of cultivation have also produced cultivars which are distinctly hairless, such as *Chayamansa, Estrella, Picuda,* and *Redonda* (Grubben and Denton 2004). This species is exceptionally easy to grow, rooting readily from cuttings. Many cultivars have weak points at the base of branches, likely due to centuries of selection for branches that were easily harvested and replanted. Chaya grows best in full sun to maximise photosynthesis and leaf production; however, it is tolerant of shaded conditions. It is known for its high drought tolerance and maintained leaf production under adverse growing conditions, making it a suitable candidate for food production in marginal agricultural areas as well as urban areas where access to irrigation water is limited (Amaya et al. 2020, Kuti and Kuti 1999, Kimayong et al. 2024). There are no significant pests or diseases known for the species, and its high pest tolerance is likely a result of the milky latex characteristic to members of the family *Euphorbiaceae* (Amaya et al. 2020, Peregrine 1983).

Chaya is nutrient-dense and an important source of Vitamin A, Vitamin C, protein, carbohydrates, polyunsaturated fatty acids and minerals such as calcium, iron, zinc, phosphorus and magnesium (Amaya et al. 2019). In comparison to both Swiss chard and spinach, chaya is substantially higher in Vitamin C, protein and fibre (Figure 1), and is found to have significantly greater quantities of beta-carotene, ascorbic acid, iron, potassium, calcium, crude fibre and crude protein than spinach (Kuti and Kuti 1999).

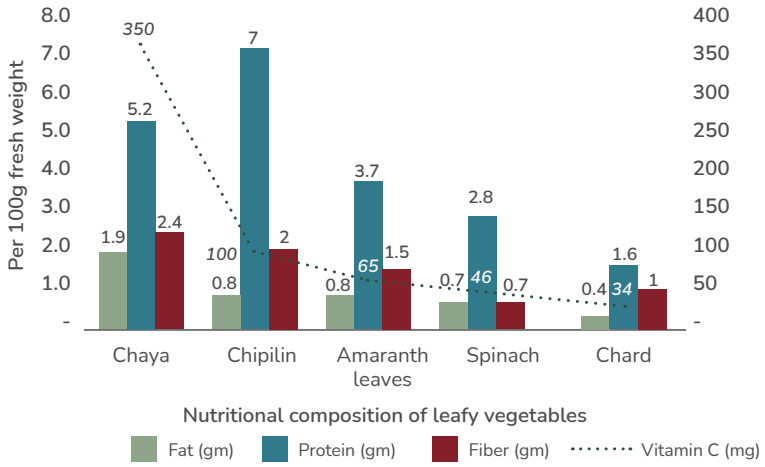



*Figure 1: Value chain analysis of chaya spinach compared to other leafy vegetables consumed in Central America*
*Source: Amaya et al. (2020)*

Several bioactive compounds, such as phenolic acids, alkaloids, saponins, flavonoids and terpenoids, are found in chaya, many of which have unique structures exclusive to this genus (Panghal et al. 2021). Numerous pharmacological studies on these compounds have concluded nutraceutical benefits, such as anti-diabetic, hepatoprotective and antimicrobial effects (Panghal et al. 2021) as well as positive metabolic activities and functions in the body, including antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, platelet-aggregation-inhibitory and immunomodulatory effects, acting at different molecular levels (Kuri-GarcÃa and GuzmÃ 2017).

These combined properties, that is, easy to cultivate, tolerant of adverse growing conditions, with its nutrient density, have made chaya a popular choice in many community food security projects. In Guatemala, chaya is the key ingredient in two of the twenty dishes served by the Chiquimula city's school food programme which serves approximately 81 000 students (Borelli et al. 2020), while research from Ethiopia has shown that the cultivation of chaya 'will enhance food and nutrition security of community suffering from malnutrition in drought prone areas' (Gobena et al. 2023). In Indonesia, studies have demonstrated that incorporating chaya leaves into a waffle product increased the iron content and showed potential to address anaemia in adolescent girls within the community (Guevara-Cruz et al. 2021).

In modern culinary applications throughout Mesoamerica, fresh chaya, such as larger, mature leaves, is preferred for wraps, while young, tender leaves and apical shoots are simply boiled in salted water for 10–20 minutes (Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz 2002). Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz (2002) continue by saying that the broth is occasionally consumed alongside the greens, and that the greens are often combined with other vegetables and/or meat in soups and stews.



These authors maintain that boiled chaya greens, covered with ground-roasted Pepitas (*Cucurbita pepo*) and cooked tomato and chili, are eaten as a burrito or in a corn tortilla. It is also often mixed with other ingredients such as corn and eggs, and is mainly used in stews with chicken or pork (Uuh Narvaez et al. 2025). The most famous chaya dish is probably *Dzotobllchay* (often spelt *tzotobichay or dzotobichay*), which is made from diced chaya leaves that are mixed with nixtamalized corn dough and is then covered with a sauce or vegetables and diced eggs, all of it wrapped in banana leaves or other chaya leaves, and cooked to make a tamale (Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz 2002). These same authors continue saying that other popular Yucatec dishes include stuffed chiles served over chaya leaves, and they maintain that they collected around 70 recipes for chaya from the literature alone, including four dishes with indigenous Yucatec names. Apart from using chaya in modern recipes, as demonstrated by Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz (2002), it has been a central ingredient to Yucatec diets for centuries due to the plant's drought resistance and numerous health benefits. Furthermore, chaya is deeply rooted in the Yucatec culture with the cook often singing to the leaves while it is being cooked to ensure the toxins are removed from the leaves (Hammond 2011). Singing to the chaya leaves while it is being cooked or boiled is also a method to ensure that it is treated long enough to remove the toxins.

## Why not a South African species?

When the idea of this book was first discussed, a number of potential species from the FA IOCC were screened. These included both indigenous and non-indigenous options. At the time, it was decided that this book, as a proof of concept, should focus on a species with the greatest potential impact on community projects, and the most obvious option was chaya. It is also partly why many of the recipes in this collection are fairly uncomplicated.

South Africa already has a long history of consumption of crops from the Americas, including common crops such as maize, potatoes, tomatoes, peanuts, pineapples and sweet potatoes. There are, however, several widely consumed, semi-wild leaf vegetables that, while thought to be indigenous to the region, are ecologically exotics introduced accidentally through trade and colonisation. These include some of the most common *morogo* species, such as amaranth (*Amaranthus spp.*) and blackjacks (*Bidens spp.*).

The long-term vision for this book is an annual series highlighting a wide variety of underutilised species with potential in the South African kitchen, both indigenous and exotic. At the time of publication, work on the next in this series has already begun, with a focus on a truly South African genus.

# METHODOLOGY

The compilation of recipes for this work followed a qualitative research methodology rooted in ethnographic and gastro-botanical frameworks. Gastro-botanical methodology focuses on the study of plants used as food or a culinary flavourant within the context of traditional dietary health maintenance. This approach investigates the sociocultural, nutritional and organoleptic (taste, smell, texture) properties of plants within culinary contexts (Asowata-Ayodele et al. 2016). Firstly, an *a priori* framework definition (Bealer 2017) was established: a set of rules established before any data is collected, which acted as a pre-defined lens through which observations were filtered and understood. Students were given an assignment including the inclusion criteria for recipes. This, of course, included the botanical scope, such as specifying the scientific name of the vegetable (for example, *Cnidoscolus aconitifolius*) to avoid confusion with other names. The vegetable was available, however, the geographic scope was omitted. The plant's seasonal leaf growth had to be considered. The assignment considered three food trends for 2025, and all three were applied. Baked items, an ambient shelf-stable convenience food product and lastly, a recipe adapted from one that would have been prepared in the past with spinach. The last category was not necessarily a trend, but through their research into the application of the chaya, students would have come across many traditional, well-known recipes using spinach, such as eggs Florentine, quiche Florentine, or spanakopita. In a cultural heritage context, this, of course, addressed a socio-cultural heritage food trend.

During the data collection phase of the research, students compiled a range of potential recipes that adhered to the design brief. Potential recipes were discussed with a panel of culinary experts, and selections were made. Thereafter, two sets of recipe standardisation (the laboratory phase) rounds were conducted, informing the metric conversion, the yield and retention factors, and validation through "member checking". Finally, recipes were prepared for food styling and photography, which was conducted in October 2025 at the laboratories of the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences, employing the services of professional photographers.

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Approval number NAS239/2025).

# AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To provide a scientific background on the current literature of chaya as an edible green leafy vegetable. To conceptualise, test and provide photographic evidence of a collection of recipes utilising this product in various culinary contexts, acknowledging some of South Africa's culinary heritage.

# LIMITATION

It is well documented that different cooking techniques of chaya could alter its nutrient profile and bioactive compounds (Uuh Narvaez et al. 2025). This book in no way investigated any analysis of cooking methods; it simply reports on the application of chaya in a culinary context.

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# SNACKS





# CHAYA CHIPS

Shane Labuschagne

8 Portions | 150°C | Snack

## INGREDIENTS

**200 g Medium sized chaya leaves, fresh, whole, washed**
**30 g Garlic finely minced**
**10 ml Coarse sea salt**
**30 ml Olive oil**

Pre-heat the oven to 150 °C.

Wash the chaya well and dry thoroughly using a salad spinner or paper towel. Ensure the leaves are completely dry prior to cooking to allow for even drying and crispness of the chips and to prevent steaming.

Place the chaya leaves flat onto a large baking tray. Do not overcrowd the baking sheet to ensure the best drying results.

Mix the olive oil, garlic and salt together in a bowl.

Using a pastry brush, brush the olive oil mixture onto the leaves.

Turn the leaves to the other side and repeat the brushing process.

Place the leaves on the baking sheet, and into the oven — allow it bake for 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes, turn the chaya leaves over, and then bake for another 10 to 15 minutes or until crisp.

*Chips originated in 1817 with thinly sliced fried potatoes in a recipe book by William Kitchinier and were later famously popularised as "Saratoga Chips" in 1853 (Scribd n.d.). Over time, the concept expanded beyond potatoes giving rise to vegetable chips: crispy, seasoned snacks made from vegetables like sweet potatoes, carrots, and kale. Today, they are valued as a healthier alternative to traditional chips, offering both flavour and nutrition (Scribd n.d.).*

***Chaya chips** are a light, crispy and a flavourful snack made from fresh chaya leaves brushed with olive oil, garlic and salt, then baked for a delightful crisp treat. Nutritious, yet indulgent, they offer a healthy alternative to traditional chips without compromising on taste.*



# CHAYA ENERGY BARS

Jenna Meyer

4 Bars | Chill 2 hours | Snack

## INGREDIENTS

**11 g Chaya, dried powder (see method)**
**125 ml Rolled oats, toasted**
**60 g Peanut butter**
**30 ml Golden syrup**
**40 g Raisins**
**30 g Sunflower seeds**
**1.25 ml Salt**
**1.25 ml Ground cinnamon**
**30 ml Water**
**50 g Chocolate, dark**

Wash the chaya leaves. Place a few at a time on a piece of baking paper on a plate and microwave in short bursts on high until completely crisp. Blend in a spice blender to a fine powder.

Combine chaya powder, oats, raisins, sunflower seeds and cinnamon in a large bowl.

In a separate bowl, mix together the peanut butter, syrup, salt and water.

Pour the wet mixture into the dry ingredients and mix.

Line a baking tray with parchment paper and press the mixture firmly into the pan, not too thinly.

Chill in the fridge for 2 hours.

Cut the bars into equal sizes.

Melt the dark chocolate in the microwave and spread over the chaya bars.

*Energy bars were initially developed for astronauts, as a non-frozen, ready to eat item providing energy and nutrients. However, they became more popular among athletes. Over time, energy bars began to replace meals or were consumed as snacks for individuals with a busy lifestyle.*

***Chaya energy bars** are a nutrient packed, plant-based snack that combines the rich minerals and vitamins of chaya leaves with peanut butter and oats (Dhanvijay and Kamdar 2025). These deliciously flavoured bars provide a boost of energy, finished with a spread of dark chocolate.*







# CHAYA CHEESE STRAWS

**Juanike Cronje**

| 8 Portions | 200 °C | Snack |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**400 g Chaya, cooked, chopped, drained**
**200 g Cheddar cheese, grated**
**2 Eggs, large, lightly beaten**
**10 ml Paprika**
**2 sheets Puff pastry**
**10 ml Salt**
**Eggwash**

Preheat the oven to 200 °C and line a baking tray with parchment paper.

Roll out the puff pastry on a lightly floured surface—do not roll out too thinly, you just want to remove the folds.

Evenly sprinkle the grated cheddar, chopped chaya, paprika and salt over the pastry.

Use a rolling pin to press the toppings gently into the pastry.

Fold the pastry sheet in half lengthwise to enclose the filling.

Cut the folded pastry into strips, approximately 2.5 cm wide, using a sharp knife.

Twist each strip into a spiral shape, pulling it slightly at either end.

Arrange the strips on the prepared tray, leaving space between each one.

Brush the tops with beaten egg for a glossy finish.

Bake for 12–15 minutes, or until puffed and golden brown.

Allow to cool slightly on a wire rack before serving.

*Cheese straws have long been a popular savoury item, known for their crisp, flaky texture and rich, cheesy flavour. Traditionally made with puff pastry and cheese, they are enjoyed as snacks or to accompany a bowl of soup. By incorporating* ***cooked chaya leaves****, this variation pops with both colour and nutrition, enhancing the classic cheese straw with a wholesome twist. The result is a crispy, golden-brown finger food that balances indulgence with the health benefits of leafy greens.*



# CHAYA SAGO WAFERS

**Mas'ooda Milanzie**

| 4–6 servings | 120 °C | Snack |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**125 g Sago pearls**
**125 ml Water**
**2.5 ml Salt**
**2.5 ml Black pepper, ground**
**30 ml Chaya leaves, dried, powdered (see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**
**500 ml Oil, vegetable (for deep frying)**

Preheat the oven to 120 °C.

Place the sago in a medium bowl and soak in water for about 30 minutes, or until softened.

Transfer the soaked pearls to a saucepan on medium heat. Add the chaya powder, salt and pepper and cook until the sago becomes translucent. Add more water to the mixture if it becomes too dry.

Remove from the heat and allow the mixture to cool completely.

Spoon portions onto a silicone mat or baking paper and spread into thin, even layers.

Bake at 120 °C for 60–90 minutes, or until fully dried.

Deep-fry at 120 °C in hot vegetable oil until puffed and crisp.

Serve immediately.

*Sago wafers, also known as **vadams**, are a South Indian snack traditionally prepared during the summer months. Families would dedicate early mornings to spreading the cooked sago mixture on terraces, courtyards or open spaces, making use of the sun's heat to dry them thoroughly. What seemed like a laborious task was in fact, a cherished seasonal ritual—an opportunity to prepare a year's supply of wafers that could later be fried into crisp, light snacks enjoyed with rice or as a treat on their own (Cook & See 2025).*

*Building on this tradition, **chaya sago wafers** offer a modern twist. By infusing nutrient-rich chaya leaves into the classic recipe, the wafers gain a subtle earthy flavour and added nutritional value while retaining the familiar crunch and translucency of sago. This fusion bridges heritage and innovation, preserving the cultural essence of vadams.*



# CHAYA PLUM LEATHER

Jenna Oosthuizen

2 Sheets | 65 °C | Snack

## INGREDIENTS

**280 g Very ripe plums (or peaches), rinsed, pitted**
**280 g Very ripe plums, rinsed, pitted**
**60 g Chaya, boiled for 20 minutes refreshed**
**45 ml Water**
**30 ml Honey**

Preheat oven to 65 °C.

Line a 11 x 17 cm baking tray with a silicon mat or baking parchment. Set aside.

Puree the fruit, chaya, water and honey in a blender or food processor until smooth. Thereafter, strain through a sieve.

Pour the fruit mixture onto the prepared baking tray and spread to about 3 mm thick.

Pound the baking sheet on the counter a few times to evenly distribute the fruit mixture.

Place the baking tray in the oven and dry for 6–8 hours, until the pan is set and the centre is not tacky. Check regularly during this time.

Remove from the oven and cool to room temperature.

Gently peel off the fruit leather from the silicone mat or baking parchment. Cut into squares or strips using a knife or roll up into rolls.

Store in an air-tight container for up to a month.

*The Levant were among the first to discover that pureed, cooked and dried fresh fruit could be preserved year-round as fruit leather. Apricot was an early flavour, and antiquarian cookbooks confirm the treat's Persian or Armenian origins. Armenian cookbooks, for example, refer to it as* ***bastegh*** *(Robyn 2009) and include recipes that detail the traditional preparation method. This process involved pouring the cooked and pureed fruit onto muslin sheets, hanging them in the sun to dry, and then peeling and drying them again until firm. Modern recipes use ovens or dehydrators for quick, reliable drying.*







# CHAYA PARMESAN SHORTBREAD BISCUITS

Ruthie Matutu

| 12 biscuits | 180 °C | Snack |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**96 g Butter, salted, cold**
**96 g Parmesan cheese, finely grated**
**70 g Flour, cake**
**23 g Chaya, dried, powder**
**(See Chaya Energy Bars recipe)**

*Shortbread originated in the twelfth century in the British Isles, where it was first known as "biscuit bread". It was traditionally made from leftover bread dough, sweetened with sugar and baked until hard, resembling the texture of a South Arican rusk (British Food: A History 2012).*

*Over time, the recipe evolved, with the addition of butter making it a richer, more indulgent treat. Due to the increasing cost of butter, shortbread became a luxury treat reserved for special occasions. These* ***chaya and Parmesan shortbread biscuits*** *have even more richness from the Parmesan, while the chaya balances it with a unique earthy taste.*

Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Line a 30 cm baking tray with baking parchment.

Rub half the amount of the butter (48 g) into 46 g of the flour until a crumbly dough forms.

Add half of the Parmesan cheese (48 g) to the dough.

Mix the remaining flour with the dried chaya powder. Rub the remaining butter into the chaya flour to form a crumbly dough and add the remaining Parmesan.

On a lightly floured surface, roll both the plain and chaya doughs together to form a log (3 cm in diameter) so that it is now one dough.

Wrap the dough in cling wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour or until firm.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator and using a sharp knife cut 10 mm thick circles.

Bake for 30–35 minutes until lightly golden.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool before garnishing with a sprinkle of dried chaya powder and serve.



# CHAYA MULTI-SEED SAVOURY CRACKERS

Cerina Mokhabele

48 crackers | 180 °C | Snack

## INGREDIENTS

**230 g Whole wheat flour**
**115 g Semolina**
**4 ml Salt**
**55 g Sesame seeds**
**55 g Flaxseed**
**55 g Pumpkin seeds (slightly smashed)**
**2.5 ml Garlic powder**
**2.5 ml Paprika**
**2.5 ml Dried thyme**
**2.5 ml Cumin, ground**
**210 ml Water**
**15 ml Honey**
**60 ml Vegetable oil, plus extra for greasing**
**60 ml Dried chaya leaves, powder**
**(see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**

Preheat the oven to 180 °C. Line 2–3 baking trays with non-stick baking parchment.

In a large bowl, mix the flour, semolina, salt, sesame seeds, flaxseed, pumpkin seeds, dried chaya powder and the spices together.

In a separate bowl, whisk the water with the honey and oil.

Add the wet mixture to the dry ingredients and mix to a medium-firm dough.

Knead the dough for five minutes. Cover and set the dough aside for 20 minutes.

Oil your work surface and roll the dough to a thickness of 3 mm.

Cut the dough into rectangles or diamonds, approximately 5 x 15 cm.

Place the crackers on the prepared trays close together but not touching.

Spray the crackers with water.

Bake the crackers for 35 minutes.

Transfer crackers to a wire rack to cool.

*Crackers have a surprisingly rich and global history, evolving from simple snacks into culinary staples. The journey begins in twentieth-century Belgium with the buttery, airy Tuc crackers, which offered a lighter alternative to traditional breads and quickly became popular for their versatility alongside cheeses and soups (Singh 2024). Over time, crackers diversified in flavour and form, embracing everything from cheese and herbs to bold combinations such as sweet chili and lime.*

*Today, savoury crackers serve not only as snacks, but as key components in appetisers and gourmet dishes, showcasing their enduring appeal and culinary flexibility (Lynch 2021). This recipe has been adapted by incorporating* ***dried chaya powder****, a nod towards cooking with orphan crops that will add a unique flavour and nutritional boost.*



# CHAYA FALAFELS

Mia Hugo

3–4 servings

Soak 8-10 hours

Snack

## INGREDIENTS

**140 g Chickpeas, dried**
**8 g Bicarbonate of soda**
**200 g Chaya leaves, fresh**
**15 ml Coriander, fresh, chopped**
**2 u Garlic cloves, peeled**
**8 g Cumin, ground**
**3 g Salt**
**8 g Cake flour**
**2 g Baking powder**
**230 ml Vegetable oil, for frying**

Serve the falafel piled on a plate or tucked inside pita bread with a generous amount of tahini.

In a colander, rinse the dried chickpeas and place them in a large stainless-steel bowl or pot. Add enough water to cover by 5 cm. Stir in the bicarbonate of soda and leave the chickpeas to soak for 8 to 10 hours or overnight.

Blanch and refresh the chaya leaves.

In a large food processor, pulse the blanched chaya until coarsely chopped.

Drain the chickpeas well, then add to the food processor along with the coriander, garlic, cumin, salt, flour and baking powder. Pulse until the mixture is finely chopped but not puréed, about 1 minute. Place the mixture in a bowl and refrigerate for 15 minutes.

Using about 2 tablespoons of the falafel mixture for each ball, form the falafel into thick patties about 5 cm in diameter.

Set a large skillet over medium-high heat and pour in enough oil to reach a depth of 6 mm. Once the oil reaches 160 °C, carefully fry the falafel in batches of 4 or 5 until golden brown, 1.5 to 3 minutes per side.

Move to a wire rack and season with salt.

Drain on kitchen paper.

*The history of the Falafel begins in Egypt with the Coptic Christians. This original version, called "ta'amiya", was made from fava beans. The dish later spread to the Levant, where the recipe was adapted to use chickpeas, which is the version more commonly known globally today (Roden 2008). The name "falafel" likely derives from an Arabic or Aramaic word describing its peppery flavour or round shape (Roden 2008). In the twentieth century, falafel's popularity surged as immigrants from the Levant introduced falafel to the rest of the world (Kantor 2002). Today, falafel is a global street food sensation, beloved for being a flavourful, affordable and vegetarian-friendly option, enjoyed in sandwiches, salads and platters.*

***The perfect falafel is a masterpiece of texture and flavour:*** *a deeply crunchy, golden-brown shell and a light, fluffy, and vibrant green interior. Each bite is a burst of fresh parsley and cilantro and coriander.* ***Chaya leaves are an excellent base*** *for these falafels adding to the texture, body and nutrition of the product. This recipe's essential secret lies in using soaked, uncooked chickpeas, the key to achieving that coveted light and airy texture.*



# CHAYA POPCORN

Jenna Meyer

2 portions

Snack

## INGREDIENTS

**125 ml Popcorn kernels**
**45 ml Sunflower oil**
**20 g Chaya leaves, fresh**
**1.25 ml Paprika**
**1.25 ml Garlic powder**
**2 ml Salt**

Wash the chaya leaves, then blanch them in boiling water for 5 minutes.

Drain and pat completely dry with a kitchen towel.

Place the leaves in a single layer between two sheets of paper towel and microwave on high power for 2 minutes, or until dry and crispy.

Once cooled, grind into a powder.

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Then add the kernels and cover. Shake occasionally until popping slows, then remove from heat.

In a bowl, mix together the dried chaya, paprika, garlic powder and salt. Shake over popcorn, tossing until evenly coated.

*Popcorn dates back thousands of years, around the 3600 BC. Popcorn was not only used as a snack, but also for ceremonies and decoration. The pieces would be strung together and worn as headdresses. It became a movie theatre snack after the invention of the first mobile popcorn machine in 1893, as well as its affordability during the Great Depression (BBC 2025).*





# STARTERS AND LIGHT MEALS



# CHAYA AND CHICKPEA PATTIES

Jenna Meyer

10 portions | Frying pan | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**400 g Chickpeas, tinned**
**12 g Basil, chopped**
**74 g Chaya, boiled and chopped**
**1 Egg**
**65 g Carrot, grated**
**65 g Onion, grated**
**6 g Garlic clove, minced**
**1.25 ml Salt**
**15 ml Paprika**
**5 ml Cumin, ground**
**2.5 ml Pepper, black**
**45 ml Oil, sunflower**

In a bowl, mash the chickpeas with a fork.

Add all the chopped vegetables (basil, chaya, carrot, onion and garlic) to the chickpeas and mix together.

Add all the spices and the egg and mix everything together.

Divide the mixture evenly and form 10 patties.

Heat a frying pan, then add oil and cook the patties until golden brown.

*Chaya is known for its high protein, mineral and vitamin content. When combined with chickpeas, which are high in fibre and protein, these patties offer a nutritious, plant-based alternative to the traditional meat patties (Ajay et al. 2024).*

*The traditional burger patty began with the Romans and Egyptians. The concept was very simple during those times with the patty consisting of only ground meat and spices (Turnbull 2025). Simple to make yet full of flavour, they offer a healthy and satisfying option for a starter or light meal.*



# CHAYA EGGS FLORENTINE

**Mas'ooda Milanzie**

1 serving

Starter
Light
meal

## INGREDIENTS

**50 g Chaya leaves, petioles removed, leaves chopped**
**1 English muffin**
**2 Eggs, large**
**2 ml Salt**
**40 ml Vinegar**
**80 ml Hollandaise sauce (choose your favourite recipe)**

Bring a small pot of water to a boil.

Blanch and refresh the chaya.

Drain well, pat dry and season lightly with salt.

Sauté the chaya in butter, salt, black pepper and nutmeg.

Slice the English muffin in half and toast on both sides until golden brown.

Bring a small pot of water to a gentle simmer. Add vinegar and salt.

Crack the egg into a small bowl, then gently slide it into the water.

Poach for approximately 3 minutes for a soft yolk. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towel. Repeat with the second egg.

**To assemble:**

Place the toasted muffin halves on a plate. Spoon the cooked chaya on top of each. Top each with a poached egg and a generous spoon of hollandaise sauce.

Garnish with fresh herbs.

*Eggs Florentine is a classic variation of the beloved eggs Benedict, where sautéed spinach takes the place of ham or bacon, creating a lighter, greener dish. Its origins lie in France, where "Florentine" historically refers to dishes made with spinach, inspired by Catherine de' Medici of Florence who popularised spinach in French cuisine.*

*In this unique twist, **chaya is used instead of spinach.** This version of eggs Florentine celebrates both tradition and innovation: the elegance of French-inspired brunch with the resilience and nutritional richness of an indigenous plant.*











# CHAYA TORTILLA

Rune Wessels

10-15 portions | Frying pan | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**260 g Cake flour**
**5 ml Salt**
**160 ml Warm water**
**75 ml Butter, melted**
**150 g Chaya leaves, trimmed**

### Filling suggestions:

**Cheese and beans:** cooked beans with crumbly cheese or melted cheese.

**Chicken and avocado:** shredded chicken, avocado slices and a squeeze of lemon.

**Beef and chiles:** spiced minced beef with roasted chiles.

### Make the dough:

Boil chaya leaves in water for 15–20 minutes, drain, then puree until smooth.

Stir the salt into warm water until dissolved.

In a bowl, mix flour and melted butter until crumbly.

Add the pureed chaya and most of the salty water, stirring until a dough forms. Add more water if too dry.

Knead on a floured surface for 2–3 minutes until smooth. Cover and rest for 15 minutes to 2 hours.

Divide into 10 balls, flatten into disks and roll into thin 15-20cm rounds. Stack with parchment between them or roll as you cook, feel free to use a tortilla press should you have one.

### Cook the tortillas:

Heat a skillet on medium-high. Cook each tortilla for 30 seconds until it bubbles, then flip and cook 1–2 minutes until lightly browned.

Keep tortillas warm in a cloth while cooking the rest.

*Tortilla comes from the Spanish word for cake, first used in the 1600s. The corn flatbread itself dates back to about 10 000 B.C.E. in Mexico, when corn was first domesticated. For the Aztecs and Mayans, tortillas were a staple food, eaten plain, with chili sauce, or filled with beans, squash or meat. (Chapala 2017).*

***Chaya is added to tortillas** to make them more nutritious, flavourful and colourful. Once the leaves are boiled to neutralise the toxic cyanogenic glycosides, they are pureed and mixed into the corn dough, giving the tortillas a fresh, spinach-like taste.*



# CHAYA CREAM SOUP

Rune Wessels

8 portions

Starter
Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**500 ml Water**
**2 u Vegetable stock cubes**
**250 ml Milk**
**2,5 ml Salt**
**2,5 ml Pepper**
**125 ml Sour cream**
**1 Medium – large onion, chopped**
**30 ml Butter**
**350 g Chaya**
**400 g Potatoes, peeled and boiled until soft**
**5 g Chives, for garnish**

Sauté onions in the butter.

Add everything else except milk and sour cream. Boil for 20 minutes.

Puree soup. Add milk and cream.

Taste for seasoning and correct if necessary.

Can be served hot or chilled, garnish with more cream and chives.

*The chaya cream soup is adapted from the classic spinach cream soup, a well-loved comfort dish recognised for its smooth texture and delicate flavour (Bauer 2025). In this variation, chaya is used as the key ingredient, offering a nutrient-rich alternative to spinach while maintaining the creamy consistency that makes the original recipe so appealing. The combination of chaya with onions, potatoes and a blend of dairy elements creates a soup that is both hearty and refined. Served hot or chilled, this recipe highlights the versatility of chaya in transforming a familiar dish into a nourishing and distinctive alternative.*



# CHAYA RISOTTO

Mas'ooda Milanzie

1–2 servings | Frying pan | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**500 ml Chicken stock**
**90 g Butter**
**40 g Onion, white, peeled and finely chopped**
**180 g Arborio rice**
**40 ml White wine vinegar**
**60 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**60 g Chaya leaves, chiffonade**

Blanch and refresh the chaya leaves briefly, then set them aside.

In a large, heavy-based saucepan, bring the chicken stock to a gentle simmer.

Melt 25 g of butter in a separate pan, then add the onions and sauté until soft and translucent. Stir in the blanched chaya and cook until just tender.

Add the rice to the mixture, stirring well to coat each grain in butter without allowing it to brown. Pour in the vinegar and cook until it has been fully absorbed.

Begin adding the hot stock, just enough to cover the rice. Stir continuously, only adding more stock once the previous addition has been absorbed. Continue this gradual process for 18–20 minutes, until the rice is creamy, tender and only a slight bit of resistance remains.

Remove the pan from the heat, then fold in the remaining butter and freshly grated Parmesan.

Serve at once, while warm and luscious.

*Risotto originates from Northern Italy, particularly the Lombardy and Piedmont regions, where rice cultivation flourished after being introduced from Asia around the fourteenth century. Italians adapted rice into a unique cooking style that involved slow cooking in broth, producing the creamy, rich texture that distinguishes risotto. The technique of stirring rice with broth gradually became a hallmark of Italian cuisine, with saffron risotto (Risotto alla Milanese) emerging as one of the earliest and most iconic versions in the sixteenth century. Over time, risotto evolved into a versatile dish, incorporating a wide range of local ingredients such as seafood, mushrooms and seasonal vegetables, while maintaining its status as a staple of Italian culinary tradition.*

***Chaya risotto is a twist on the traditional Italian dish**, incorporating chaya leaves for added nutritional value and a unique herbal flavour. This dish combines the creaminess of arborio rice with Parmesan cheese and butter, while the chaya contributes dietary fibre, vitamins and minerals, making it both wholesome and satisfying.*



# CHAYA PARMESAN BISCUIT TIRAMISU

Ingrid Pienaar

6–8 servings | 180 °C | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

For the chaya biscuits:

**60 g Fresh chaya leaves, blanched, refreshed and finely chopped**
**100 g Cake flour**
**60 g Parmesan cheese, finely grated**
**60 g Butter, chilled and cubed**
**1 Egg yolk**
**15 ml Cold water**
**2.5 ml Salt**

For the cream layer:

**250 g Mascarpone cheese**
**60 ml Heavy cream**
**1 Garlic clove, finely minced**
**5 ml Lemon juice**
**2.5 ml Salt, table**
**1.25 ml Black pepper, ground**

For assembly:

**100 g Sundried tomatoes in oil, drained and chopped**
**30 g Breadcrumbs, toasted (for sprinkling)**

**Prepare the biscuits:**

Preheat oven to 180 °C. Line a baking tray with parchment paper.

In a bowl, combine flour, Parmesan, and salt. Rub in butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.

Add egg yolk, chaya and water. Mix gently until dough forms.

Roll out to 5 mm thickness and cut into rectangular biscuits.

Bake 12–15 minutes until golden. Cool completely.

**Assemble the savoury tiramisu:**

Spread a thin layer of mascarpone cream on the base of a plastic lined terrine mould.

Arrange a layer of biscuits, lightly brushed with sundried tomato oil if desired.

Spread with half of the mascarpone cream, then scatter with chopped sundried tomatoes.

Repeat with another biscuit layer and finish with cream.

Refrigerate for at least 2 hours to allow flavours to meld.

Before serving, turn the tiramisu out, sprinkle with toasted breadcrumbs.

**Prepare the cream layer:**

In a bowl, whisk mascarpone and cream until smooth and lightly thickened.

Stir in garlic, lemon juice, salt and pepper.

*Tiramisu has long been a symbol of Italian culinary creativity, with its distinctive layered structure balancing contrasting textures and flavours. While traditionally prepared as a sweet dessert with coffee-soaked ladyfingers and mascarpone cream, modern adaptations have reimagined tiramisu in savoury forms, highlighting how the dish's structure can carry bold, unconventional ingredients (Del Conte 2013).*

***Chaya biscuit tiramisu embraces this innovative approach.*** *Crisp chaya–Parmesan biscuits are layered with a mascarpone cream flavoured with garlic and lemon, while sundried tomatoes add bursts of savoury depth and Mediterranean character. The result is a refined starter or light main that unites Italian inspiration with the nutrient-rich qualities of chaya, offering a memorable twist on a timeless classic.*



# CHAYA GNOCCHI

Ingrid Pienaar

4 servings | 200 °C | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**500 g Potatoes**
**60 g Chaya leaves, stalks removed**
**125 g Cake flour (plus extra for dusting)**
**1 Egg, lightly beaten**
**5 ml Salt**
**1.25 ml Nutmeg, ground**

Preheat the oven to 200 °C. Prick the potatoes with a fork and bake on a baking sheet for 45–60 minutes until tender.

While the potatoes cook, blanch the chaya leaves for 3–5 minutes in boiling water, then plunge into ice water. Drain and finely chop.

When the potatoes are cool enough to handle, peel and mash them until smooth. Spread out slightly to release excess steam.

On a floured surface, combine the mashed potatoes, chaya, flour, salt, nutmeg, and egg. Gently bring the mixture together to form a soft dough—avoid over-kneading.

Divide the dough into four pieces. Roll each into a long rope about 2 cm thick and cut into 2 cm pieces.

Optional: Press each piece lightly against the back of a fork to create ridges.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add gnocchi in batches and cook until they float to the surface (2–3 minutes). Remove with a slotted spoon.

Serve immediately with pesto, butter, or tomato-based sauces.

*Gnocchi, a type of Italian dumpling, has a long history of being a comforting and adaptable dish across regions of Italy. Traditionally prepared with potatoes, flour and eggs, gnocchi is known for its pillowy texture and ability to absorb sauces, making it a versatile staple in both home kitchens and restaurants (Del Conte 2013). While the base ingredients are simple, many variations have emerged over the centuries, incorporating seasonal vegetables, herbs and cheeses to create regional specialties.*

***Chaya Gnocchi introduces a nutritious twist** by blending blanched and finely chopped chaya leaves into the dough. This addition not only deepens the flavour with subtle earthy notes, it also enhances the nutritional profile with protein, iron and vitamins. The result is a wholesome variation that maintains the light, fluffy character of traditional gnocchi while offering a health-conscious update.*



# BAKED CHAYA EMPANADAS

Maru Ramoroka

10 portions | 180 °C | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**Dough:**

**375 g Cake flour**
**5 ml Salt**
**125 g Butter, chilled**
**2 Eggs**
**80 ml Water**
**100 g Chaya leaves, blanched, refreshed**

**Filling:**

**175 g Potatoes, diced**
**340 g Ground beef**
**225 g Onion, diced**
**65 g Carrot, diced**
**40 g Celery, diced**
**1 Garlic clove, minced**
**5 ml Chilli, fresh**
**5 ml Cumin, ground**
**5 ml Salt**
**5 ml Cinnamon, ground**
**5 ml Black pepper, ground**
**180 ml Beef stock**
**20 ml Olive oil**

**Dough:**

Preheat oven to 180 °C.

In a bowl, sift the flour and salt thoroughly.

Rub in the chilled butter and mix in until the texture resembles breadcrumbs.

Add the eggs to the flour mixture and mix until combined.

Add the water and chaya to a blender and puree. Add pureed mixture to flour mixture.

Knead until smooth and allow to rest for 30 minutes.

**Filling:**

Heat oil in a saucepan over medium heat.

Brown the ground beef in the saucepan, add the diced vegetables and minced garlic.

Season with chilli, salt, cumin, cinnamon and black pepper.

Add the beef stock and reduce to desired consistency for filling, not too runny and not too dry.

**Combine:**

Divide the dough into 10 portions.

Roll out the pieces and place a spoonful of filling in the middle.

Fold the filling in the pastry and egg wash.

Place the pieces on a lined baking tray and place in a heated oven.

Bake for 20–25 minutes, until pastry is golden.

*Empanadas are pastry turnovers filled with meat, cheese, vegetables or fruit, and can be baked or fried. The word comes from the Spanish empanar, meaning "to wrap in bread". They originated in Galicia, Spain, and may have been influenced by Middle Eastern pastries introduced during the Moorish rule. Spanish colonists brought Empanadas to Latin America, where they were adapted to local tastes and ingredients. In this case, the* ***empanadas incorporate the crop (chaya)*** *to the dough to add that green colour and an earthy green flavour.*



# STEAM CHAYA DUMPLINGS

Maru Ramoroka

10 dumplings | Bamboo steamer | Starter Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

### Dough:

**400 g Flour**
**250 ml Water**
**50 g Chaya leaves blanched, refreshed**

### Filling:

**15 ml Olive oil**
**5 ml Ginger, peeled and grated**
**225 g Onion**
**96 g Mushroom**
**96 g Carrot**
**75 g Cabbage**
**200 g Chives**
**2 ml White pepper**
**5 ml Soy sauce**
**5 ml White sugar**
**5 ml Salt**

**Dough:**

Sift the flour in a bowl.

Add water and chaya in a blender and puree, mix into the flour and combine until a dough forms.

Knead the dough and place in a bowl covered with a dish cloth and allow to rest.

**Filling:**

Finely chop the mushrooms, cabbage, carrots, onions and chives and sweat them in the olive oil using a saucepan.

Cut the dough into desired sizes and roll out in a circular form.

Place the chaya filling in the middle and close.

Place in a bamboo steamer and steam for 10–20 minutes until cooked.

*Steamed dumplings are dough parcels filled with meat, vegetables or seafood and cooked by steaming. They are an important part of Chinese cuisine and have a history dating back to ancient China, with some legends attributing their invention to Zhang Zhongjing during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 C.E.). Originally developed as a nourishing food, they became popular for their simplicity and versatility.*

***In this recipe the dumpling wrappers are given a vibrant green colour.***



# CHAYA AND SWEET POTATO FRITTERS

Cerina Mokhabele

20 fritters

Starter
Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**680 g Sweet potatoes**
**320 g Bananas, peeled**
**2 Large eggs**
**120 g Oat flour**
**15 ml Cinnamon, ground**
**5 ml Vanilla extract**
**100 g Chaya leaves**
**30 ml Vegetable oil**

For yoghurt dip:

**152 g Plain Greek yogurt**
**10 ml Cinnamon, ground**
**5 ml Vanilla extract**
**10 ml Maple syrup**

Blanch the chaya leaves by boiling them in a pot of water for 20 minutes, then refresh.

Once cooled, slice the chaya into thin ribbons to create a chiffonade.

Peel and grate the sweet potatoes.

Place the grated sweet potato in a cheesecloth or towel and squeeze firmly to remove as much liquid as possible.

Peel the bananas and place them in a large mixing bowl to mash with a fork.

Add the eggs and whisk them together.

Add the grated sweet potato, the chaya chiffonade, oat flour, cinnamon and vanilla extract, and mix until well combined.

Turn a griddle to medium-high heat and grease it with vegetable oil.

Use a spoon to scoop out 20 even portions.

Place the balls on the heated surface and push down with a spatula to flatten them into fritters.

Fry the fritters until golden on each side, about 3–4 minutes per side.

While the fritters are frying, combine all the dip ingredients in a small bowl.

Whisk until the dip's texture is smooth and creamy.

Serve the fritters warm with the yogurt dip.

*Fritters—crispy, golden bites enjoyed across cultures—have ancient origins dating back to Greece and Rome where early versions were made from wheat flour, olive oil and honey. In Asia, Chinese cooks crafted fritters from rice flour, often filled with sweet or savoury ingredients. The term "fritter" stems from the Old French friture, meaning "fried food". During the Middle Ages, fritters flourished in Europe, especially in Italy, where frittelle became a festive staple. European colonists later brought fritter recipes to the Americas, where they evolved into regional favourites like apple fritters and corn fritters. African cuisine also shaped fritter traditions in the US, contributing iconic dishes like hushpuppies (Walter 2025).*

*Today, fritters remain a versatile treat—whether sweet or savoury, traditional or modern—and continue to symbolise cultural heritage and culinary creativity, often originating as a simple way to use up leftover vegetables or grains. This modern recipe, inspired by The Peachee Pear, elevates the classic fritter with nutritious sweet potatoes and a delightful yogurt dip, creating a flavourful and wholesome treat for any time of day (Arias 2017).*



# CHAYA PANCAKES

Mia Hugo

8 pancakes

Starter
Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**125 ml Milk**
**500 g Chaya, fresh, leaves**
**3 Eggs, large**
**30 ml Butter, melted**
**12 g White sugar, granulated**
**3 g Salt**
**120 g Cake flour**

Cook the chaya leaves in plenty of boiling water for approximately 15 minutes.

Blend the cooked chaya leaves in a food processor. Put the chaya pulp in a mousseline cloth and press to extract 180 ml of chaya liquid.

Pour the hot chaya liquid and butter into a bowl and mix.

Place the milk and eggs in a bowl and whisk to combine.

Whisk in the butter and chaya mixture.

Place the flour, salt and sugar in a large bowl. Add about ¾–1 cup of the liquid and mix gently to form a smooth paste. Take care not to over-mix.

Add the rest of the liquid and mix to form a smooth, watery batter.

Cover the batter and allow it rest for at least 20–30 minutes. The batter can be kept in the fridge for up to two days.

Preheat a non-stick pan over medium heat.

Brush a layer of butter on the heated pan. Use a pastry brush, but one can use a butter-soaked paper towel or cloth as well.

Pour ¼ cup of the batter into the hot pan, and swirl to coat the bottom of the pan. Swirl and spread the batter along the edge of the pan first and then fill the middle with the remaining batter. Make sure the batter is as evenly spread as possible.

Place the pan back on the heat to allow the pancake to cook.

Flip the pancake to cook on the other side using a turner spatula.

Stack the cooked pancakes on a plate or wire rack.

*Archaeological evidence suggests that Stone Age cooks were grinding cattails and ferns into flour to make a simple, unleavened flatbread cooked on a hot, greased rock. This rudimentary pancake existed over 30 000 years ago. The ancient Greeks and Romans also had their own versions, called tagenias, which were made from wheat flour, olive oil, honey and curdled milk.*

*The fluffy American style pancake we know today is a more recent innovation. Dutch immigrants brought their pannekoeken to the colonies, but the real transformation came in the nineteenth century with the invention of chemical leavening agents like baking soda and baking powder. This allowed for the creation of the thick, light and airy texture that distinguishes them from their thinner, flatter ancestors like the crêpe. The first ready-mix pancake flour was introduced in 1889, making this beloved breakfast even easier to enjoy.*

***These fluffy green pancakes are a culinary concept that we as consumers are not familiar with. It brings a splash of colour and excitement to either a savoury or a sweet dish.***



# CHAYA SPANAKOPITA TRIANGLES

Jolene Nair

14 large triangles

180 °C

Starter
Light meal

## INGREDIENTS

**80 g Onion, red, small dice**
**250 g Butter, melted**
**200 g Chaya, fresh, chiffonade**
**80 g Parmesan, grated**
**150 g Mushrooms, white button, chopped**
**5 g Garlic, fresh, minced**
**1 Egg, large**
**1 g Salt**
**1 g Pepper, ground, black**
**480 g Phyllo pastry**

Preheat the oven to 180 °C.

Sauté onions in a portion of the melted butter until soft and translucent.

Add garlic and mushrooms, cook until most of the moisture has evaporated.

Stir in the chaya leaves and cook lightly until wilted. Remove from heat.

Mix in Parmesan, salt, pepper and the beaten egg to bind the filling.

Brush a sheet of phyllo pastry with melted butter, layer with another sheet and cut into 7 cm strips.

Place a spoonful of filling at one end of each strip and fold into triangles.

Repeat with remaining filling and pastry.

Arrange triangles on a lined baking sheet and brush the tops with butter.

Bake for 25–30 minutes until golden brown and crisp.

Serve warm, accompanied by a dipping sauce of your choice.

*Spanakopita is a traditional Greek savoury pastry made with phyllo dough and a spinach-based filling. **This version uses chaya leaves instead of spinach**, providing higher levels of protein, calcium and iron. Combined with mushrooms, Parmesan and seasonings, the filling is wrapped in crisp, buttery phyllo, creating golden triangles that are ideal as a snack or appetiser.*











# MAIN COURSES





# CHAYA LASAGNA ROLLS

Shane Labuschagne

| 4 portions | 180 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**250 g Lasagna sheets**
**15 ml Olive oil**
**20 g Garlic, cloves, minced**
**280 g Chaya, washed, chopped**
**250 g Ricotta**
**150 g Mozzarella, grated**
**5 ml Salt**
**400 g Pomodoro sauce**
**65 g Parmesan cheese, grated**

Pre-heat the oven to 180 °C.

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook lasagna sheets in boiling water, stirring occasionally, until tender yet firm to the bite (approximately 8 minutes). Drain the sheets then lay them flat onto a flat surface and cover them with a damp cloth.

Heat olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook while stirring until fragrant (approximately 2 minutes), then add in the chaya and sauté for 10 minutes. Transfer garlic and chaya to a large bowl.

Add ricotta, mozzarella and salt to the bowl and stir until evenly combined.

Spread a heaping ¼ cup chaya mixture into the middle of each lasagna sheet. Roll sheets firmly around filling then arrange the rolls in a greased casserole dish.

Pour the tomato sauce over the rolls and then top with grated Parmesan. Cover the casserole dish with aluminium foil.

Bake in the pre-heated oven for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes remove the foil and bake for a further 5 minutes to give the dish a caramelised colour.

Serve with a side salad of your choice.

*Lasagna, in the singular, refers to the Southern Italian variation of what Northern Italians call lasagne, in the plural (McNamee n.d.). The name is believed to derive from the Latin word lasanum (cooking pot), although some etymologies trace it to the Greek laganon, a flatbread known in Italy since at least the time of Augustus Caesar (63 BCE–14 C.E). Traditional Italian lasagna is a layered casserole made with sheets of pasta, ragù, béchamel or ricotta and cheese (McNamee n.d.).*

***Chaya lasagna roll-ups offer a modern twist on the classic Italian favourite.*** *Tender lasagna sheets are filled with a creamy blend of ricotta, chaya, mozzarella and garlic, rolled and baked in a rich tomato sauce, then topped with Parmesan. This individually portioned format delivers all the comforting flavours of traditional lasagna in a lighter, elegant presentation which is perfect for both family dining and even entertaining.*



# CHAYA AND FETA PIES

**Chrizelle Mienie**

| 6 muffin tin sized pies | 180 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**Velouté sauce:**

**12 g Butter**
**12 g Cake flour**
**5 ml White stock powder**
**240 ml Warm water (mixed with the stock powder)**

**Chaya filling:**

**20 g Pine nuts**
**1 Egg, for egg wash**
**1 g Oregano, dried**
**7.5 ml Olive oil**
**350 g Puff pastry, ready-made**
**1.25 ml Cayenne pepper**
**1.25 ml Salt**
**1 ml Nutmeg, ground**
**2.5 ml Coriander, ground**
**2.5 ml White pepper, ground**
**20 g Butter**
**10 g Cheddar cheese**
**70 g Feta cheese**
**145 g Red onion**
**80 g Chaya**
**100 g Bacon, streaky or diced**

Preheat the oven to 180 °C and prepare muffin tins with non-stick spray.

Make the velouté sauce by melting the butter, whisk in the flour to form a blond roux. Add the stock slowly while whisking to prevent lumps. Allow the sauce to come to a boil to slightly thicken. Turn down the heat and set aside to cool.

Render the bacon on the stovetop in a skillet slowly until very crisp. Remove it from the pan to cool.

Quickly toast the pine nuts in the bacon fat, remove from the pan.

Small dice the red onion and sauté in the bacon fat until translucent and tender.

Remove any hard petioles from the chaya, then finely chiffonade the chaya and sauté in a different pan in melted butter. Add 30–45 ml of additional water to the chaya while cooking to ensure it cooks properly. Just before removing from the heat, add the spices and seasonings, allow to toast briefly.

Roughly chop pine nuts and bacon. Crumble feta. Grate the cheddar cheese.

Combine all the ingredients into the cooled velouté sauce.

Slightly roll out the puff pastry dough on a lightly floured surface. Cut circles (10 cm diameter cutter for lining muffin pan, 7.5 cm diameter cutter for top of the pie).

Line the pan with the 10 cm circles, leaving an edge around the top, fill the pie with filling, brush the top edges with egg wash. Add the tops of the pies, by stretching the dough slightly thinner to fit the pie and use a fork to tightly enclose each pie, sealing and pressing the edges shut.

Brush the pies with egg wash. Take a small sharp knife and make 3 small slits into the top of each pie to allow for steam to escape (after egg wash).

Bake at 180 °C for 35 minutes until golden brown.

*This chaya and feta pie recipe is an example of how classic European pastry traditions can be adapted with unique and nutrient-dense ingredients to create a dish that is both familiar and innovative. The use of puff pastry and velouté sauce reflects French culinary influence, as velouté is one of the traditional mother sauces in French cuisine forming the base of many savoury preparations (Escoffier 1903).*

***Chaya (Cnidoscolus aconitifolius), however, introduces a Central American element, as it is a leafy green native to Mexico and the Yucatán Peninsula.*** *It has been used for centuries in Mayan diets for its rich nutritional profile, being especially high in protein, iron, calcium and vitamins A and C (Kuti and Torres 1996; Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz 2002). The addition of feta cheese and pine nuts highlights Mediterranean flavour influences, while bacon contributes savoury richness and balance. By combining French technique, Mediterranean ingredients and a traditional Mayan leafy vegetable, these pies demonstrate how cross-cultural culinary practices can create unique dishes that are both nutritious and gourmet.*



# CHAYA AND RICOTTA RAVIOLI

**Juanike Cronje**

6 portions

Main Course

## INGREDIENTS

**For the ravioli filling and pasta:**

**1 Garlic clove, chopped**
**320 g Chaya, fresh, chopped, blanched, refreshed**
**100 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**450 g Ricotta, drained**
**5 Eggs, large**
**400 g Cake flour**
**5 ml Paprika**
**5 ml Black pepper, ground**
**5 ml Salt**

**For the creamy white sauce:**

**45 g Butter**
**30 g Cake flour**
**500 ml Full cream milk, warmed**
**125 ml Fresh cream**
**50 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**2.5 ml Nutmeg, ground**
**5 ml Salt**
**5 ml Black pepper, ground**

Place the flour on a clean surface and make a well in the centre.

Crack the eggs into the well and mix gradually with a fork, bringing in the flour from the sides.

Knead until a smooth dough forms. Wrap in cling film and allow to rest for 30 minutes.

Heat a drizzle of olive oil in a pan, add garlic and sauté briefly.

Add the chaya and cook until softened (about 15 minutes). Transfer to a colander, squeeze out excess liquid and cool.

Combine the ricotta, Parmesan, cooked chaya, paprika, salt and pepper in a bowl. Mix thoroughly to make the filling.

Divide the rested dough into 6 pieces and roll out thin sheets using a pasta machine or rolling pin (approx. 1.2 mm thick).

Place small spoonfuls of filling on one sheet, cover with another and press around the filling to seal.

Trim into neat shapes using a ravioli cutter or knife.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.

Cook the ravioli in batches for 2–3 minutes, or until they float. Remove with a slotted spoon and keep warm.

**Prepare the creamy white sauce:**

Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat.

Stir in the flour and cook for 1–2 minutes to form a roux.

Gradually whisk in the warm milk, stirring constantly until smooth and thickened.

Add the cream, Parmesan, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Cook for 3–5 minutes until velvety and well combined.

Spoon the creamy white sauce onto plates.

Arrange the ravioli on top and drizzle with extra sauce.

Garnish with freshly grated Parmesan and a sprinkle of nutmeg if desired.

*Ravioli, an Italian classic, is traditionally filled with ricotta cheese and herbs. By adding chaya, the filling gains a subtle earthy flavour and additional nutrients.* ***Instead of the traditional tomato sauce, this recipe pairs the ravioli with a smooth white sauce made from cream, butter and Parmesan,*** *offering a rich, velvety complement to the delicate pasta parcels. This variation highlights the versatility of chaya, while maintaining the indulgent comfort of a pasta dish.*



# CHAYA FILLED BAKED AUBERGINE

Jenna Oosthuizen

4 servings | 200 °C | Main Course

## INGREDIENTS

**2 Eggplants, large, whole**
**30 ml Oil, olive**
**5 ml Salt**
**2.5 ml Black pepper, freshly ground**

**For the chaya & cheese filling:**

**30 ml Oil, canola/sunflower**
**1 Onion, medium, finely chopped**
**2 Garlic cloves, minced**
**500 ml Chaya leaves, cooked (boiled for at least 20 minutes, refreshed and drained well)**
**120 g Cheese, cheddar, mature, grated, plus extra for topping**
**230 g Cream cheese, softened**
**1-2 ml Cayenne pepper, or to taste**
**2.5 ml Salt, coarse**
**2.5 ml Black pepper, freshly ground**

Preheat the oven to 200°C.

Slice the eggplants in half lengthwise. Score the flesh in a crosshatch pattern, being careful not to cut through the skin.

Brush the cut sides with olive oil and season generously with salt and pepper.

Place the halves cut side up on a baking sheet.

Bake for 25–30 minutes, or until the flesh is tender and soft. Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly.

Once cool enough to handle, use a spoon to carefully scoop out the cooked eggplant flesh, leaving a 1 cm border of flesh attached to the skin to form a "boat". Roughly chop the scooped-out flesh.

While the eggplant roasts, heat the oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until soft and translucent, about 3–4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for another minute until fragrant.

Stir in the chaya and the reserved chopped eggplant flesh. Cook for 2–3 minutes, stirring to combine. Remove the pan from the heat.

Stir the cheddar cheese and softened cream cheese into the chaya and eggplant mixture. Season with cayenne pepper, salt and black pepper to taste.

Spoon the filling evenly into the hollowed-out eggplant halves. Top with extra grated cheddar cheese.

Return the stuffed eggplants to the oven on a baking tray and bake for another 10–15 minutes or until the cheese is melted, bubbly and golden brown. Serve hot.

*Stuffed aubergine is a signature dish in Middle Eastern cooking, particularly prominent in Spanish Andalusia, Valencia and Catalonia. The recipe involves hollowing out halved aubergines and filling them with a savoury mixture, often featuring minced meat, vegetables and cheese. A topping of grated cheese or béchamel sauce is then added, and the dish is baked until it is golden and cooked through.*

*This delicious and adaptable meal has a history stretching back to the Middle Ages. Aubergines were first brought to Spain by the Arabs, who prepared similar vegetable stews seasoned with spices. Spanish Jews also created their own versions, stuffing aubergines with meat or fish according to their dietary customs. Over time, stuffed aubergine became a beloved part of everyday Middle Eastern cuisine, with different regions developing their own unique variations (Kassis 2021).*



# CHAYA PASTA WITH CREAMY SAUCE

Ruthie Matutu

| 4 servings | 180 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**For the pasta:**

**200 g Chaya, blanched, refreshed**
**5 ml Salt**
**60 ml Water**
**15 ml Oil, olive**
**250 g Bread flour**
**2 Eggs**
**1 Egg yolk**

**For the sauce:**

**40 g Chaya leaves, blanched, refreshed, roughly chopped**
**2 u Garlic cloves, minced**
**45 ml Oil, olive**
**120 ml Stock, vegetable**
**240 ml Cream, heavy**
**110 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**2.5 ml Nutmeg, ground**
**300 g Tomato, cherry, whole**
**2.5 ml Salt**
**2.5 ml Pepper, black**
**2.5 ml Basil, fresh**

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

In a food processor, blend the chaya, salt, water and olive oil (15 ml) until smooth. Set aside.

Pile the flour on a surface and make a well in the centre of the flour. Add the eggs, the egg yolk and the chaya puree into the well in the centre of the flour.

With a fork, bring the edges of the flour into the centre to begin to form a dough. Continue by kneading the dough for 5 minutes, adding additional flour if the dough is too sticky.

Wrap the dough in cling wrap and rest for 15 minutes.

Cut the dough into 4 equal portions. Working with 1 portion at a time, sprinkle flour onto the portion and flatten slightly with the palm of your hand.

Using a pasta machine, roll out the dough and cut into fettuccine shape. Toss with a little flour to prevent sticking. Set aside and repeat with the remaining portions. Set aside.

Toss the cherry tomatoes in 15 ml olive oil, half the garlic, salt and pepper. Roast in an oven casserole dish for 20 minutes or until reduced and jammy.

In a saucepan, sauté the remaining garlic in 30 ml olive oil until soft. Add the stock and allow to boil for a few minutes until it starts to reduce.

Transfer the stock mixture to a blender and add the blanched chaya. Blend until a smooth green sauce forms.

Return to the saucepan and add the heavy cream, grated Parmesan and nutmeg while the heat is on low until the cheese is fully melted. Remove from heat and set aside.

Boil the chaya pasta for 2 minutes in salted boiling water until al dente.

Once the pasta is cooked, drain it and toss it in the cream sauce.

Add fresh basil leaves and the roasted tomatoes as garnish. Serve.

*The origin of pasta is uncertain, but early Italian types include lasagne and vermicelli. Fettuccine Alfredo was created by Alfredo di Lelio in 1908 for his wife, using semolina pasta, butter, and Parmesan (Cesari, 2022). The dish gained fame after he opened his Rome restaurant in 1914 and became internationally popular following visits from Hollywood actors. Today, pasta making has evolved, with ingredients like spinach added to enhance flavour, colour, and complement creamy Parmesan sauces.*



# CHAYA STUFFED MUSHROOMS

Ruthie Matutu

| 5 mushrooms | 190 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**80 g Chaya, blanched, refreshed and roughly chopped**
**30 ml Oil, olive**
**5 Large portobello mushrooms, stems removed (reserve)**
**115 g Cream cheese**
**15 g Butter**
**1 u Garlic cloves, minced**
**½ u Onion, white, peeled and thinly sliced**
**2.5 ml Salt**
**2.5 ml Pepper, black**
**25 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**30 g Breadcrumbs, dry**

Preheat the oven to 190 °C. Grease a 30 cm baking tray.

Brush the outside of the mushrooms with olive oil and place on the prepared baking tray.

Bake for 12–15 minutes until just tender.

Mince the mushroom stems. Sauté the stems, garlic and onion for 2 minutes, in the butter.

Add the blanched chaya and cook until it dries out, allow to cool.

Add the cream cheese, salt and pepper and stir together.

Remove the mushrooms from the oven and turn over to drain any excess liquid. Fill the mushrooms with the chaya filling and sprinkle over some of the breadcrumbs and Parmesan cheese.

Bake for 10 minutes or until golden brown at the same temperature. Serve.

*Mushrooms are the fruiting bodies produced by filamentous fungi which grow above the ground and are widely used in various dishes including vegetable dishes, sauces, garnishes and as a main dish such as stuffed mushrooms. Stuffed mushrooms date to the 19th century when Italians began stuffing vegetables such as zucchinis and eventually extending to mushrooms (Fin, 2020).*

***One of the most popular fillings include spinach, making these chaya stuffed mushrooms a perfect substitute.***



# CHAYA STUFFED CHICKEN BREAST

Jolene Nair

| 4 servings | 190 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**150 g Chaya leaves, washed, thinly sliced**
**8 g Garlic, minced**
**113 g Cream cheese**
**30 ml Mayonnaise**
**25 g Parmesan cheese, freshly grated**
**1 g Red pepper flakes (optional)**
**4 Boneless, skinless chicken breasts**
**1 g Salt**
**1 g Garlic powder**
**1 g Paprika**
**1 g Black pepper, ground**
**60 ml Olive oil**

Preheat oven to 190 °C.

Heat 15 ml olive oil in a large oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Sauté minced garlic and chaya until wilted and fragrant. Transfer to a medium bowl.

Add cream cheese, mayonnaise, Parmesan and red pepper flakes to the chaya. Mix until smooth and well combined.

Using a sharp knife, cut a pocket along the long side of each chicken breast without cutting all the way through. Season the chicken with salt, garlic powder, paprika and black pepper.

Stuff each chicken breast with approximately 60 g of the chaya mixture. Secure with toothpicks if necessary.

Heat the remaining 15 ml olive oil in the skillet or griddle over medium-high heat. Sear the chicken breasts on each side until golden brown.

Transfer the skillet to the preheated oven. Bake the chicken for 30–35 minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches 74 °C.

Remove from oven and allow the chicken to rest for 10 minutes before serving.

*The practice of stuffing meat dates to ancient times, when cooks learned that fillings could enhance flavour and retain moisture in their dishes. In Roman cuisine, a preparation called pullum frontonianum consisted of chicken breasts filled with minced meat, herbs and spice (Foster 2023).*

***This recipe makes juicy chicken breasts filled with a creamy chaya and cheese mixture.*** *This dish is elegant enough for a special dinner, yet simple enough for a weeknight meal (Kanell 2023).*



# CHAYA AND BACON QUICHE

Chrizelle Mienie

| 1 large quiche | 180 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

### Crust:

**2 ml Salt**
**200 g Cake flour**
**8 ml Mustard powder**
**160 g Butter**
**150 ml Cheddar cheese, finely grated**

### Quiche filling:

**1 packet Mushroom soup powder**
**500 ml Cream**
**500 ml Chaya, finely chopped and boiled**
**100 g Onion, chopped**
**10 ml Vegetable oil**
**6 Eggs**
**250 g Feta cheese, crumbled**
**250 ml Cheddar cheese, grated**
**2 ml Salt**
**2 ml Black pepper, ground**
**250 g Mushrooms, chopped**
**250 g Bacon, streaky, chopped**

**Crust:**

Mix all the dry ingredients together, except the cheese.

Rub the butter into the dry ingredients and add the grated cheese.

Mix and push together to form a dough.

Place in the fridge for 30 minutes.

Push the dough into the quiche pan to form an even crust.

**Filling:**

Pre-heat the oven to 180 °C.

Mix the soup powder and cream together and allow to rest for 15 minutes.

Cook the onions, mushrooms and bacon in the oil over medium heat until the onions are translucent.

Add the cooked chaya, eggs, feta cheese, cheddar cheese and the soup mixture to the onions and mushrooms. Mix well and add seasonings.

Pour the mixture into the unbaked crust.

Bake for 45 minutes until set and cooked through.

*This chaya and bacon quiche recipe blends the classic French tradition of quiche with locally available ingredients, creating a dish that is both nutritious and unique. Quiche, particularly quiche Lorraine, originated in France and is characterised by a savoury custard of eggs and cream baked in a pastry crust, often including bacon and later cheese additions. The inclusion of chaya (Cnidoscolus aconitifolius), a leafy green native to Mexico and Central America, provides an interesting regional twist.* ***Chaya is highly valued for its nutritional profile, being rich in protein, iron, calcium and vitamins,*** *although it requires thorough cooking to remove toxic compounds (Kuti and Torres 1996; Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz 2002). By combining traditional quiche elements such as eggs, cheese, cream and bacon with nutrient-dense chaya, this recipe illustrates how global culinary frameworks can be adapted to incorporate local, health-promoting ingredients, producing a dish that is both familiar and distinctive.*



# CHAYA AND SALMON ROULADE

**Michelle Cronje**

6 servings | 180 °C | Main Course

## INGREDIENTS

**45 ml Butter**
**60 ml Cake flour**
**60 ml Milk, warm**
**4 Eggs, extra-large, separated**
**1 ml Salt**
**1 ml Pepper, ground**
**125 g Chaya**

Filling:

**200 g Cream cheese**
**212 g Salmon, cooked, flaked**
**1 ml Salt**
**1 ml Pepper, ground**
**1 Medium lemon, zested**

Line and grease a 23 × 32 cm Swiss roll pan—use good quality parchment paper. Set aside. Preheat the oven to 180 °C.

First make the roulade base. Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Stir in flour and cook gently for 1 minute. Slowly whisk in milk and cook until smooth and thick. Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly.

Beat egg yolks with seasoning. Mix into the cooled sauce. Set aside.

Boil chaya leaves in water for at least 20 minutes (to remove toxins). Afterwards, drain well, chop and stir into the sauce.

Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form. Gently fold into the chaya mixture with a metal spoon.

Spread mixture evenly in the pan. Bake at 180 °C for 8—12 minutes, until set and firm to the touch, but not over cooked.

Turn out onto a clean kitchen towel. Roll up from the short side with the towel and allow to rest until cool. Carefully unroll and remove from the towel.

Whisk cream cheese until smooth and spreadable. Mix in the fish and seasonings. Spread evenly over the roulade.

Roll up again tightly, in the same way as the first roll.

Slice and serve with fresh rocket or herb salad.

*The recipe is adjusted from a spinach and salmon roulade. The chaya and salmon roulade is a visually striking and flavourful dish that combines a light green vegetable-based sponge with a creamy cheese and salmon filling. According to Snowflake's version of the recipe, the roulade is constructed by first cooking spinach and folding it into a white sauce with egg yolks, then folding in beaten egg whites to give the base a delicate, airy texture before baking (Snowflake n.d.).* ***The adjusted recipe cooks with chaya instead.*** *Once baked and cooled, it is filled with cream cheese and flaked salmon, then rolled and sliced for serving. The roulade format allows for dramatic presentation, making it suitable for luncheon menus, elegant dinners or buffet spreads. Snowflake includes this recipe among its 'Quick & Easy' lunch and dinner offerings, highlighting its appeal as a dish that appears impressive, yet remains accessible for home cooks (Snowflake n.d.).*



# CHAYA PHYLLO SNAKE PIE (M'HANNCHA)

Mia Hugo

| 4 portions | 180 °C | Main Course |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**750 g Chaya, stalks removed, medium chopped, cooked in salted water, refreshed**
**30 ml Olive oil**
**160 g Onion, brown, finely chopped**
**250 g Leeks washed, trimmed, finely chopped (white and pale green part only)**
**500 g Fennel bulb and a few leaves, finely chopped**
**30 g Garlic cloves, minced**
**5 ml Dill, dried (or 10 ml fresh finely chopped)**
**5 g Lemon zest, finely grated**
**15 ml Lemon juice**
**125 g Cream cheese**
**110 g Halloumi, grated**
**30 g Parmesan or Pecorino, finely grated**
**25 g Parsley, chopped**
**10 u Mint leaves, finely chopped**
**2 g Salt**
**2 g Pepper, freshly ground**
**6 Phyllo pastry sheets**
**60 ml Butter, salted, melted**
**15 ml Sesame seeds, black or/and white**

Preheat the oven to 180 °C.

Heat a large nonstick frying pan and add 10 ml of olive oil. Fry the onion, leeks and fennel until translucent over medium to low heat for about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for one more minute. Add the chaya and cook until the mixture is dry.

Add the dill, lemon zest and juice and cook for another 5 minutes. Allow to cool slightly.

Once cooled, stir through the cream cheese, halloumi, Parmesan, chopped parsley and mint. Adjust seasoning to your taste, adding salt and black pepper as required.

Remove the sheets of phyllo from the roll. Quickly seal the remainder of the pack and either re-freeze or refrigerate until further use.

Brush one sheet of phyllo with melted butter. Roughly divide the mixture into 6 parts. Place the first sheet on a work surface with the thinner side at the bottom and spread one-sixth of the mixture along the bottom in a log shape. Roll the log of chaya up. Brush outside with more butter.

Start rolling the log into a spiral and place in a greased cake tin.

Repeat with the remaining 5 sheets of phyllo, joining and twirling it into the cake tin. Allow a little space between the rolls, however, it should be snug. It does expand slightly when baked.

Brush the top generously with melted butter and sprinkle sesame seeds over the top.

Bake for 40 minutes until golden. Serve on its own or with tzatziki.

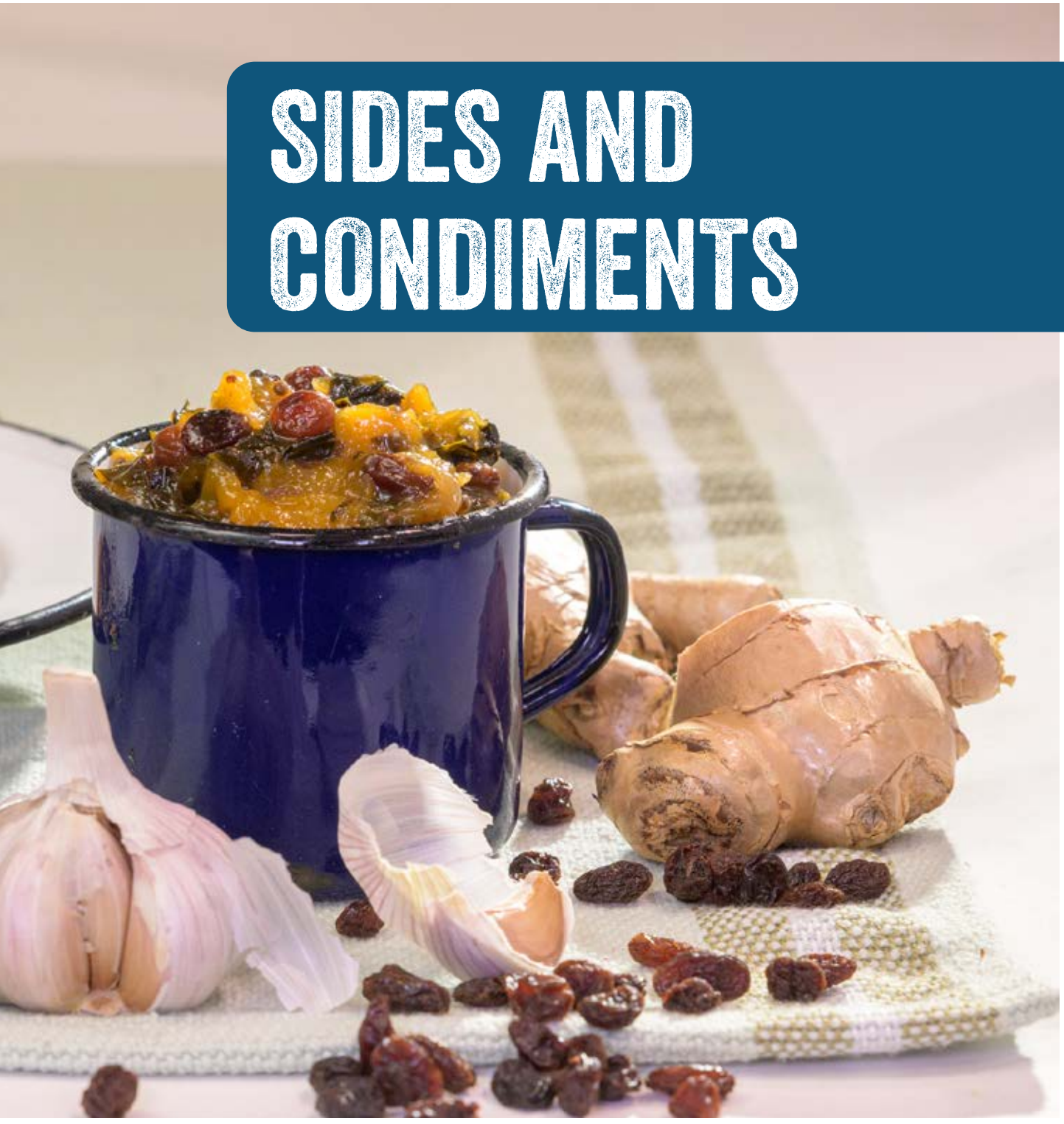
*The origins of this celebrated pastry are deeply rooted in the culinary traditions of Morocco. It is believed to have been created in the opulent kitchens of the Saadian dynasty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period of great artistic and cultural flourishing in Morocco (Linsell 2024). The use of paper-thin dough, similar to phyllo, is a technique that likely travelled to North Africa from the Ottoman Empire. This delicate pastry, combined in the traditional cake with the almonds and fragrant orange blossom water of the region, gave birth to the classic sweet version of M'hanncha.* ***Over time, savoury variations emerged, showcasing the versatility of the concept and incorporating local ingredients and spices*** *(Linsell 2024). The "phyllo snake pie" is constructed from multiple layers of delicate phyllo that are brushed with butter, filled and then rolled into a long, cylindrical "snake". This "snake" is then artfully coiled into a spiral, resembling a resting serpent, before being baked to a golden-brown crispness.*







# SIDES AND CONDIMENTS





# CHAYA PICKLE

**Chrizelle Mienie**

20 portion

Refrigerate for 2 days

Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**450 g Chaya, fresh**
**500 ml Water**
**150 g Sugar, white, granulated**
**125 ml Vinegar, white**
**10 ml Salt**
**5 ml Black peppercorns, whole**
**15 ml Mustard seeds**

Wash and dry chaya. Chiffonade.

In pot, combine water, sugar, vinegar, salt and peppercorns, bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

Pack the chaya into the jar, pour over the boiling pickling liquid, close and seal.

Refrigerate for 2 days before serving.

*This recipe combines chaya with a traditional vinegar pickling method, one of the oldest forms of food preservation used since ancient Mesopotamia to extend the shelf life of food and enhance flavour (Behera et al. 2020). The addition of sugar balances the vinegar's acidity, while mustard seeds and black peppercorns not only add flavour, they may also contribute mild preservative qualities.*

***By pouring boiling pickling liquid over the shredded leaves and then refrigerating it, the recipe both ensures food safety and allows flavours to develop,*** *blending Central American ingredients with a universally recognised preservation technique.*

*However, you may be concerned about the potential toxic nature of chaya, blanch and refresh the chaya before picking.*



# CHAYA HUMMUS

Rune Wessels

500 ml

Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**250 g Chickpeas, cooked until soft**
**60 ml Lemon juice**
**60 ml Tahini**
**5 g Garlic clove, sliced**
**30 ml Olive oil**
**2.5 ml Cumin**
**5 ml Salt**
**45 ml Cold water**
**250 g Chaya**

Destem chaya leaves and boil the leaves in water for 15–20 minutes to remove toxins. Drain well, allow to cool slightly, then puree until smooth and set aside.

In a food processor, blend tahini and lemon juice for 1–1.5 minutes until creamy. Add olive oil, garlic, cumin and ½ teaspoon of salt, blend for another minute until smooth.

Add half the chickpeas to the processor along with the pureed chaya and blend for 1 minute. Scrape the sides, then add the remaining chickpeas and process 1–2 minutes until thick and creamy.

With the processor running, slowly add 2–3 tablespoons of cold water until you reach your preferred texture.

Taste and adjust seasoning with salt or lemon juice if needed.

*Hummus, traditionally made from chickpeas, tahini, lemon, garlic and olive oil, has a history that stretches back centuries. Its exact origins are debated; many Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries claim it. The word hummus itself comes from Arabic for "chickpeas". A thirteenth-century Egyptian cookbook mentions a chickpea dish similar to hummus, while the Levant also has a long tradition of using both chickpeas and tahini. Over time, the Ottoman Empire helped spread hummus across the region, and in the twentieth century, migration carried it worldwide (Munchery 2023). Mixing chaya into hummus is a smart way to boost both flavour and nutrition.* ***The pureed chaya blends smoothly with chickpeas****, adding extra protein, iron and vitamins without overpowering the classic creamy taste. It gives the hummus a fresh, slightly earthy note while making it more nourishing, turning a simple dip into a healthier and more unique spread.*



# CREAMED CHAYA WITH CHAYA SEASONING MIX

Rune Wessels

8 servings | Crushed chaya | Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**Spice mix:**

**60 ml Chili powder**
**25 ml Cumin, ground**
**25 ml Dried garlic**
**25 ml Paprika, smoked**
**25 ml Oregano, dried**
**10 ml Salt**
**10 ml Pepper**
**70 ml Chaya, destalked**

**Creamed spinach:**

**45 g Unsalted butter**
**80 g Finely chopped onions**
**2 Garlic cloves, finely chopped**
**480 ml Heavy cream**
**3 g Salt**
**1 g Black pepper, freshly ground**
**2 g Nutmeg (freshly grated or ground)**
**50 g Finely shredded Parmesan**
**900 g Chaya, destalked, finely chopped**

Boil the chaya leaves for 5–10 minutes, then drain and squeeze very dry.

Dehydrate the leaves (oven or sun-dry) until fully dry, then crush into a fine spice.

Mix the crushed chaya with the other spices to make the chaya seasoning mix.

Melt butter in a pan over medium heat.

Add onions and cook until soft.

Add garlic and cook for 1 minute.

Pour in cream, season with salt, pepper and nutmeg, and add some of the chaya seasoning mix.

Simmer for approximately 10 minutes until slightly thick.

Stir in cheese until melted.

Add chaya and mix well.

If watery, cook a bit longer.

Taste, adjust seasoning, serve piping hot.

*Creamed spinach is a classic dish that mixes European tradition with American creativity. It started in Europe during the Renaissance, when cooks began combining wilted spinach with creamy sauces to make the vegetable tastier and richer. French and Italian chefs later improved the dish using techniques like béchamel sauce, which went on to influence cooking around the world (Sorensen 2023). Adding chaya seasoning mix to creamed spinach gives it a fresh, earthy boost.* ***The chaya adds a subtle spinach-like flavour****, while the herbs and spices make the dish more interesting and tastier. It also adds extra nutrition, making a classic side healthier without changing the creamy texture so loved. This simple twist turns ordinary creamed spinach into something unique and flavourful.*



# CHAYA PESTO

Ingrid Pienaar

250 ml

Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**60 g Fresh chaya leaves, destalked**
**30 g Fresh basil leaves**
**60 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**60 g Pine nuts, lightly toasted**
**2 Garlic cloves, peeled, chopped**
**125 ml Olive oil, extra virgin**
**2.5 ml Salt, table**
**1.25 ml Black pepper, ground**
**15 ml Lemon juice**

Bring a small pot of water to a boil. Blanch the chaya leaves for 3–5 minutes, then immediately transfer to ice water to stop cooking. Drain thoroughly and pat dry.

In a food processor, combine the chaya leaves, basil, Parmesan, pine nuts, and garlic.

Pulse until coarsely blended.

With the motor running, slowly, stream in the olive oil until smooth and emulsified.

Season with salt, pepper, and lemon juice.

Transfer to a sterilized glass jar and store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

*Pesto is a vibrant Italian sauce with origins in the Ligurian region, where the abundance of basil and olive oil inspired cooks to create a fresh, aromatic paste. Traditionally ground by hand with a mortar and pestle, the sauce combined basil, pine nuts, garlic and cheese into a fragrant mixture that quickly became a symbol of Genoese cuisine (Capatti and Montanari 2003). Its popularity has since spread worldwide, valued for its ability to elevate simple dishes such as pasta, bread and roasted vegetables with bold, herbaceous flavours.*

***In this modern variation, blanched chaya leaves are incorporated alongside basil, adding earthy depth and enhanced nutrition to the classic recipe.*** *Rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, chaya not only complements the traditional ingredients, it also transforms the sauce into a health-conscious fusion that bridges Italian culinary heritage with innovative food sustainability.*



# CHAYA MANGO CHUTNEY

Jolene Nair

3 cups

Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**15 ml Canola oil**
**2.5 ml Red chilli flakes**
**100 g Fresh chaya, destalked, chopped**
**150 g Brown onion, medium dice**
**15 g Fresh ginger, finely chopped**
**10 g Fresh garlic, minced**
**800 g Fresh mangoes, slightly underripe**
**200 g White sugar, granulated**
**125 ml White vinegar**
**50 g Sultanas**
**5 ml Garam masala**
**1 g Salt**
**5 g Yellow mustard seeds**

Peel, pit and cut the mangoes into 1 cm cubes. Set aside.

In a medium saucepan, heat canola oil with mustard seeds and red chilli flakes over medium heat until the mustard seeds start to pop. Add diced onion and cook until softened.

Stir in chopped ginger and minced garlic, cooking for about 1 minute until fragrant.

Add the cubed mango, sugar, vinegar, sultanas, garam masala and salt. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil.

Reduce the heat to low and stir in chopped chaya. Simmer uncovered until the mango softens and the chutney thickens to a syrupy consistency, approximately 45–60 minutes.

Transfer the chutney to a clean sterilised jar, allow to cool, cover and store in the refrigerator.

*Chutney is a traditional Indian condiment made by combining fruits, vegetables, herbs, and spices. The word comes from the Hindi term chatni, meaning "to crush or grind." Originating in ancient India, chutney has long been enjoyed as a flavourful accompaniment to meals. This recipe makes a vibrant, spicy South African-style chutney combining slightly underripe mangoes with fresh chaya, onions, ginger, garlic, and aromatic spices.* ***This condiment is perfect to serve with grilled meats, sandwiches, or as a dipping sauce.***



# CHAYA TAHCHIN

**Juanike Cronje**

10 servings

Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**400 g Boneless, skinless chicken breasts**
**200 g Chaya leaves, destalked, blanched, refreshed**
**20 ml Salt**
**2 g Turmeric**
**2 g Parsley, dried**
**1 g Garlic powder**
**1 g Black pepper, ground**
**15 ml Extra virgin olive oil**
**30 ml Lemon juice**
**750 ml Basmati rice**
**2 g Saffron, crushed**
**4 Egg yolks**
**500 ml Plain thick yoghurt**
**30 ml Butter**
**10 ml Sugar, granulated**
**15 ml Pistachios, chopped**
**15 ml Almond slivers**

In a small bowl combine saffron with 2 tablespoon hot water and set aside.

In a small bowl combine ½ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon turmeric, ½ teaspoon dried parsley, ¼ teaspoon garlic powder, ⅛ teaspoon black pepper. Season both sides of each chicken breast.

Heat a pan over medium high heat and add 1 teaspoon extra virgin olive oil. When oil is hot, add the chicken breasts. Cook chicken until browned, about 5 minutes.

Flip chicken over and brown other side. Reduce the heat of the pan and add 2 tablespoon lemon juice. Cover pan and cook until chicken is done, about 10 minutes.

Remove chicken from heat and shred it with two forks. Add 1 teaspoon of saffron water to chicken juices in the pan and mix with shredded chicken.

Add the blanched chaya leaves to the shredded chicken. Reserve.

In a medium-sized bowl soak rice with water. Gently wash the rice by stirring it in the water with your hand. This helps wash some of the starch and grit out. Pour out the water and repeat the process twice more.

After washing the rice a third time, rinse and then cover the rice with water and add 1 tablespoon salt.

In a non-stick pot, add 8 cups of water and 15 ml salt and bring to boil. When the water has come to boil, pour out the water in the bowl containing the soaking rice. Add the wet rice to the boiling water.

When the water boils again and the rice floats to the top of the pot (approximately 6 mins), pour the contents of the pot into a fine colander. You know your rice is ready to strain if you bite a rice kernel and the centre is still uncooked. Allow rice to cool slightly before mixing with yogurt and eggs.

Preheat oven to 260 °C.

In a very large mixing bowl, whisk together yogurt and egg yolks until smooth. Stir in remaining saffron water. Add the drained and cooled rice and gently mix until all the rice is coated and yellow.

Use 15 ml butter to grease the bottom and sides of a round oven proof casserole.

Spread half of the rice mixture evenly into the bottom of the pan.

Spread the shredded chicken and chaya mix over the rice layer.

Top with the remaining half of rice mixture.

Cover with tinfoil and place in the oven. Reduce heat to 230 °C and bake for 30 minutes, then reduce to 180 °C and bake for 1 hour. Rotate the dish halfway through the cooking time to insure even browning.

Right before serving, heat a small pan over medium high heat. Melt 15 ml of butter and add the sugar. Once sugar is mixed and combined, remove from heat.

To serve, remove foil and place a large serving platter over the rice. Carefully invert and remove the pan, then brush with the butter sugar mix. Top with chopped pistachios and almond slivers.

*Tahchin, which translates to "arranged at the bottom," is a celebrated dish from Iran with a rich history. While pinpointing its exact origin is difficult, it is a refined form of Persian steamed rice (chelow) that evolved into a sophisticated main course. It is often referred to as "Persian rice cake. "Historically, Persian cuisine has held rice in high regard, developing numerous elaborate methods for its preparation. Saffron, a key ingredient in Tahchin, has been cultivated in Iran for millennia and is central to many of the country's most luxurious dishes. The combination of yogurt, egg, and saffron to create a rich, savoury custard for the rice is a uniquely Persian innovation.*

*Traditionally, Tahchin is a centrepiece dish served at celebrations, weddings, and formal gatherings.* ***Its impressive, cake-like appearance, which is revealed when it is inverted onto a platter, makes it a showstopper.*** *Tahchin is a savoury, baked rice dish that resembles a golden-crusted cake. Its most famous feature is the* ***tahdig****—a thick, crunchy, and deeply golden layer of rice that forms at the bottom of the pot.*



# CHAYA DOUBLE BAKED SOUFFLÉ

Jenna Oosthuizen

6 servings | 200 °C | Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**Chaya base:**

**15 ml Canola Oil**
**1 Onion, medium, peeled and finely chopped**
**1 Garlic clove, minced**
**250 ml Chaya leaves, fresh, cooked, refreshed (boiled at least 20 minutes, drained well and finely chopped)**
**0.3 ml Cayenne pepper**
**1.25 ml Salt, coarse**
**1.25 ml Pepper, black, freshly ground**

**Béchamel sauce:**

**60 ml Butter, unsalted**
**60 ml Cake flour**
**375 ml Milk, full-cream, warmed**
**1.25 ml Nutmeg, ground**
**1.25 ml Salt, coarse**
**1.25 ml Pepper, black, freshly ground**
**50 g Parmesan cheese, grated**
**5 Eggs, separated**
**30 ml Mustard, mild**

**To finish:**

**180 ml Pouring cream**
**50 g Parmesan cheese, grated**

Preheat oven to 200 °C. Grease six 236 ml ramekins generously with butter or use a greased muffin tin.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened and lightly golden, 3–4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute more.

Stir in the cooked, chopped chaya. Season with cayenne pepper, salt and pepper. Cook 2–3 minutes, stirring until dry. Remove from heat.

Now make the béchamel base in a saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook until foamy but not browned, about 1 minute.

Gradually whisk in the warm milk. Bring to a boil, then cook, stirring until smooth and thickened, about 2 minutes. Season with nutmeg, salt, pepper and mustard. Add Parmesan.

Mix the chaya mixture into the béchamel. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Whisk in the egg yolks, one at a time.

Using a stand mixer or whisk, beat the egg whites with a pinch of salt until stiff peaks form.

Fold a quarter of the egg whites into the chaya base to loosen it, then gently fold in the rest of the grated cheese until just combined.

Divide the mixture into the ramekins and bake for 12–15 minutes, until puffed and golden.

Allow the soufflés to cool slightly, then run a knife around the edges and gently turn them into a large greased ovenproof dish.

Evenly pour over the cream and scatter over the Parmesan.

Return to oven for 6–8 minutes until bubbling and browned on top.

*The soufflé is a classic dish with a history that goes back to eighteenth-century France. While its invention is often attributed to chefs of the time like Antoine Beauvilliers, the original recipe was a simple mix of sugar and egg whites. It became a favourite among the French elite and has since evolved to include many different flavours.*

*The twice-baked soufflé, however, is a modern innovation. This technique was developed to solve a common problem: the traditional soufflé's tendency to deflate. The two-step process allows the dish to be prepared ahead of time, ensuring a reliable rise when it is reheated and served.*



# CHAYA GOMA-AE

Cerina Mokhabele

4 servings

Sides & condiments

## INGREDIENTS

**150 g Chaya leaves**
**60 ml Mirin**
**120 ml White sesame seeds**
**20 ml Maple syrup**
**30 ml Soy sauce**
**10 ml Rice vinegar**
**10 ml Water, to thin dressing**

Rinse chaya leaves thoroughly and remove any tough stems.

Boil the chaya leaves in a pot of water for 15–20 minutes to neutralise natural toxins.

Transfer the cooked leaves to cold water to stop the cooking process, then drain and gently squeeze out excess moisture.

Finely chiffonade the cooled chaya into thin strips.

Toast the sesame seeds in a dry pan until fragrant, then grind them into a paste using a blender or mortar and pestle.

Blend mirin with the ground sesame, maple syrup, soy sauce and rice vinegar. Add water if needed to adjust the consistency.

Toss the chaya leaves with the sesame dressing until evenly coated.

Portion into small bowls, sprinkle with extra toasted sesame seeds and chill (optional) before serving.

*Goma-ae is a classic Japanese side dish that features blanched vegetables—most commonly spinach—dressed in a rich sesame sauce. The name combines goma (sesame) and ae (to dress), describing the technique of coating vegetables in a nutty, umami-forward dressing. Historically, goma-ae is believed to have originated in Japan's Kansai region, where sesame seeds have long been a staple in everyday cooking (Excitedfood.com 2025).*

*Over the centuries, the dish spread across the country, becoming a beloved part of home-style meals and bento boxes thanks to its simplicity, nutritional value and adaptability. In this recipe, using chaya aligns with the dish's wellness-focused philosophy—**incorporating seasonal greens like chaya leaves—boiled thoroughly**—while preserving the dish's traditional balance of flavour and texture. This adaptation honours the dish's heritage while elevating it with contemporary culinary mindfulness (Pauly 2025).*



# BAKED GOODS AND SWEETS





# CHAYA BROWNIES

Shane Labuschagne

| 8 large brownies | 180 °C | Baked goods & sweets |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**100 g Chaya, fresh, washed, chopped**
**80 g Blueberries, fresh**
**60 g Cake, flour**
**110 g Sugar, white**
**60 ml Cacao powder, unsweetened**
**1.25 ml Bicarbonate of soda**
**1.25 ml Salt**
**120 g Chocolate chips**
**60 g butter**
**2.5 ml Vanilla essence**
**1 Egg, large**

Pre-heat the oven to 180 °C and prepare a 12 cm x 12 cm square cake tin with baking parchment.

In a blender, place the chopped chaya, blueberries and 2 teaspoons of water. Blend until a smooth puree forms. Add a little more water if needed, you want the mixture to have the consistency of a smoothie.

In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, cocoa powder, baking soda and salt.

Melt the butter and chocolate chips in a bowl with the double boiler. Once the chocolate chips have melted, remove and set aside (you can also melt the chocolate chips in the microwave for approximately 1 minute, stirring throughout. Be very careful not to burn the chocolate).

Pour the blended chaya and blueberry mixture into the melted chocolate along with the vanilla. Stir to combine.

Make a well in the flour mixture, pour the chocolate mixture into the well. Add the egg, and with a fork, mix everything until combined.

Pour the brownie batter into the prepared pan. Bake in the preheated oven for 40 minutes, until the middles are done and no longer wet to the touch.

Remove from oven, allow brownies to cool before slicing.

*Brownies originated in 1893 at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, where a recipe was created for Bertha Palmer, a well-known socialite. Palmer requested a dessert that was both elegant and easy to serve at the World's Fair. This creation became the first brownie and paved the way for one of the world's most beloved desserts (Dello Mano n.d.).*

***Chaya Brownies deliver all the indulgent flavour of classic chocolate brownies with a wholesome twist.*** *Made with a hidden blend of chaya and blueberries, these rich, cake-like brownies are moist, fudgy and packed with nutrients. A perfect treat for satisfying a sweet tooth while sneaking in extra health.*



# CHAYA CUPCAKES

Chrizelle Mienie

15 cupcakes | 180 °C | Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**Cupcake batter:**

**2 Eggs**
**125 g Butter**
**130 g Sugar, castor**
**100 g Cake, flour**
**5 ml Baking powder**
**125 ml Milk**
**2 ml Salt**
**5 ml Vanilla essence**
**120 g Chaya, washed, dried, destalked**

**Cream cheese icing:**

**60 g Butter, softened**
**325 g Icing sugar**
**100 g Cream cheese**
**5 ml Vanilla essence**
**5 ml Lemon zest**

Preheat the oven to 180 °C.

Microwave chaya to dry out and crush to a fine powder, strain through a fine sieve.

Beat together castor sugar, vanilla and butter.

Add eggs one at a time, mix well.

Sift flour, baking powder, 30 ml chaya powder and salt together.

Alternate incorporating milk and flour mixture into butter mixture.

Line 12–15 cupcake papers in a muffin tray. Divide the batter amongst these. Bake for 15–17 minutes until done.

Whip icing sugar, butter, cream cheese and vanilla together until fluffy and smooth.

When cooled, decorate cupcakes with more chaya powder.

*These chaya cupcakes illustrate how traditional baking can be enriched with nutrient-dense, regionally significant ingredients to create a product that is both indulgent and health-promoting. Cupcakes, which emerged in the United States during the nineteenth century as individually portioned cakes, are now a global favourite for their convenience and versatility in flavour adaptations (Davidson 2014).*

*The innovation in this recipe lies in the incorporation of chaya (Cnidoscolus aconitifolius), a leafy green native to Mexico and Central America that has long been a staple in Mayan diets. Chaya is prized for its high levels of protein, calcium, iron and vitamins, often surpassing spinach in nutrient density, but requires proper cooking or drying to neutralise toxic hydrocyanic glycosides (Kuti and Torres 1996; Ross-Ibarra and Molina-Cruz 2002).* ***By converting the leaves into a powder and folding it into a sweet batter, this recipe demonstrates how a traditional leafy vegetable can be repurposed in modern baking****, blending cultural heritage with contemporary culinary trends. The cream cheese frosting, a classic accompaniment in Western baking, balances the earthy chaya flavour with sweetness and richness, resulting in a cupcake that is both unique and accessible.*











# CHAYA AND CHEESE SCONES

Jenna Meyer

12 portions

220 °C

Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**153 g Cheddar cheese, grated**
**185 g Cake flour**
**1.25 ml Salt**
**1 Egg**
**20 ml Baking powder**
**60 ml Sunflower oil**
**125 ml Milk, full cream**
**176 g Chaya, destalked, boiled and chopped**

Preheat the oven to 220 °C.

In a large bowl, sift all the dry ingredients together.

In a separate bowl, add together the egg, oil and milk, and mix.

Add the grated cheese and cooked chaya to the dry ingredients and mix.

Make a well in the centre of the chaya mixture, then add the wet ingredients and mix together.

On a slightly floured surface, pat out the mixture to about 2 cm thick and cut with a scone cutter (or one can make square scones if you like).

Place scones onto a greased baking sheet.

Brush the top of the scones with milk.

Bake the scones for 10 to 15 minutes or until golden brown.

*The term "scone" dates back to Scotland, where it was referred to as a large round cake made of wheat or barley meal, baked on a griddle and cut into four pieces. Over time, scones began to be baked in ovens and were enriched with other ingredients such as butter, milk and eggs, making them softer (Sayers 2005).*

*These chaya and cheese scones are a delightful twist on the traditional plain scone.*

***Packed with nutrient rich chaya and cheddar cheese, they are soft, fluffy and flavourful.***



# CHAYA FOCCACIA

Juanike Cronje

6 portions | 220 °C | Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**300 g Chaya, blanched, refreshed, finely chopped**
**500 g Bread flour**
**75 ml Extra virgin olive oil**
**10 g Salt**
**5 ml Sea salt, flaky**
**390 ml Warm water**
**6 g Instant yeast**

In a bowl, combine the warm water, 2 tablespoons of olive oil, yeast, chaya and salt. Stir in the bread flour until a sticky dough forms. Rest for 15 minutes.

Stretch and fold the dough several times around the bowl. Cover and rest again for 15 minutes.

Repeat the stretch-and-fold process once more, then leave the dough covered to proof at room temperature for 1–1.5 hours, or until doubled in size.

Drizzle a 23 x 23 cm baking tray with olive oil.

Transfer the dough to the tray, gently spread it out.

Cover and leave to proof for another 1–1.5 hours.

Drizzle with the remaining olive oil and scatter flaky sea salt on top.

Preheat the oven to 220 °C.

Bake for 18–24 minutes on the lower rack until golden brown and crisp at the edges.

Cool slightly on a wire rack before cutting into squares and serving warm.

*Focaccia is a traditional Italian flatbread, prized for its soft, airy texture and fragrant olive oil crust. It has been a staple of Mediterranean cuisine for centuries, often flavoured with herbs, salt and seasonal toppings.*

***In this variation, finely chopped chaya is incorporated into the dough,** giving the bread a distinctive green colour and added nutritional value. The result is a wholesome focaccia that balances rustic charm with a modern, health-conscious twist.*



# CHAYA SOURDOUGH BREAD

Michelle Cronje

10 portions

200 °C

Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**500 g Bread flour**
**350 g Water, slightly warm**
**100 g Activated starter**
**10 g Salt**
**80 g Powdered chaya (see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**

Add warm water to active starter.

Add flour, chaya and salt.

Incorporate to make dough. Allow to rest for 30 minutes.

Stretch and fold and leave to rest for 30 minutes. Repeat over 2 hours.

Leave to rise for 8 hours.

Shape and place into a proofing basket, cover and leave in the fridge overnight.

Take out of fridge and allow to come to room temperature.

Bake at 230 °C for 15 minutes.

Bake for another 30 minutes at 200 °C.

Allow to cool. Ready to serve.

*The chaya sourdough bread is a creative adaptation of the traditional sourdough loaf, which is valued worldwide for its tangy flavour, chewy crumb and natural fermentation process. Classic sourdough relies on a simple mixture of flour, water, salt and an active starter; this recipe builds on that foundation by incorporating dried and powdered chaya.*

***The inclusion of chaya enhances the bread's nutritional value, adding plant-based protein, vitamins and minerals, while also contributing to its distinctive colour** and earthy undertones. By combining the timeless method of sourdough baking with the functional qualities of chaya, this recipe offers both familiarity and innovation in every slice. The recipe was adapted from a home-made sourdough recipe written by Alexander Stafford (2025).*



# CHAYA BREAD STICKS

Mas'ooda Milanzie

4 to 6 servings

190 °C

Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**15 g Active dry yeast**
**300 ml Warm water**
**30 g Sugar, white**
**60 ml Olive oil**
**10 ml Salt**
**540 g Bread flour**
**40 ml Chaya powder (see note below)**
**1 Egg, beaten (for egg wash)**
**30 g Sesame seeds**

Note:
To make chaya powder: blanch whole destalked chaya leaves, refresh and dry. Dry in a dehydrator until crisp, then grind into a fine powder.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the yeast, warm water, and sugar. Allow the mixture to stand for a few minutes until foamy.

Stir in the olive oil, salt, chaya powder and 240 g of the flour. Mix until smooth.

Gradually add the remaining flour, kneading until the dough is soft, smooth and elastic, approximately 5 minutes.

Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface, allow it to rest briefly, then roll into a rectangle approximately 6 mm thick.

Cut the dough into 24 even strips. Roll each strip into a rope, twist and shape into breadsticks. Arrange on a parchment-lined baking sheet.

Brush with egg wash and sprinkle generously with sesame seeds. Leave to rise until doubled in size (approximately 20 minutes).

Bake in a preheated oven at 190 °C for 12–15 minutes, or until golden brown.

Cool slightly before serving warm.

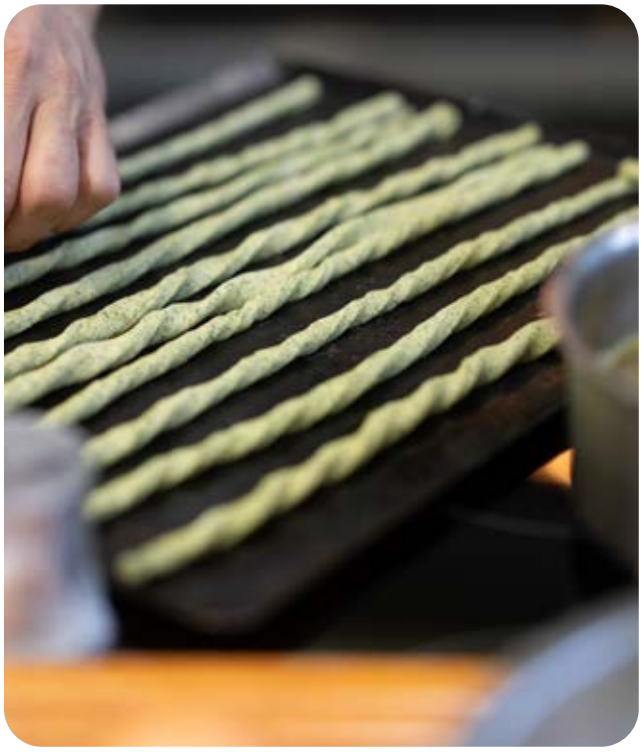
*Breadsticks, or grissini, trace their origins back to seventeenth-century Turin, in the Piedmont region of Italy (The Nibble 2010). They were first created by a local baker, Antonio Brunero, at the request of the royal court physician to help Duke Vittorio Amedeo II of Savoy, who suffered from digestive issues and could not eat regular bread. The thin, crispy texture of breadsticks made them easy to digest, while still being nourishing. Over time, grissini became popular across Italy and eventually spread throughout Europe as a light, crunchy accompaniment to meals. Today, breadsticks are enjoyed in both their traditional long, slender form and modern variations, often flavoured with herbs, seeds or cheese.*

***Chaya breadsticks are a delightful twist** on the classic, blending subtle earthy notes of chaya with the familiar warmth of fresh bread. Crisp on the outside and soft within, they are perfect for sharing at the table, pairing with soups, or serving as a snack with dips. The addition of sesame seeds lends a nutty aroma, while the chaya brings a unique depth of flavour, turning a simple breadstick into something truly special.*













# MACARONS WITH CHAYA GANACHE

Jenna Oosthuizen

24 macarons

115 °C

## INGREDIENTS

**Macarons:**

**100 g Sugar, icing**
**25 g Corn flour**
**50 g Almond flour**
**60 g Eggs, whites**
**65 g Sugar, castor**
**2.5 ml Vanilla essence**
**7.5 ml Chaya powder (see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**

*Optional: green gel food colouring*

**White chocolate chaya ganache:**

**200 g Chocolate, white**
**85 g Cream, fresh**
**20 ml Chaya powder (optional) (see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**

### Macarons:

Preheat the oven to 115 °C. Line two large baking trays with parchment paper.

In a food processor, pulse the icing sugar, cornflour, almond flour and chaya powder for 1 minute until well combined. If the mixture is not fine enough, use a pestle and mortar. Sift the mixture to remove any lumps and set aside.

In a separate, grease-free bowl, beat the egg whites on medium speed until they are foamy. Gradually add the caster sugar and any desired gel food colouring, beating until the meringue forms stiff peaks.

Gently fold in half of the dry almond flour mixture using a spatula until no dry spots are visible, add the remaining almond flour mix.

Transfer the macaron batter to a piping bag. Place a macaron template under your parchment paper as a guide and pipe uniform rounds onto the sheets. Tap the baking sheets lightly on the counter to release air bubbles.

Bake for 20 minutes, avoiding direct placement in front of the oven's fan. Allow to cool completely on the baking sheet.

### Ganache filling:

Chop the chocolate finely and place it in a medium sized bowl.

In a saucepan, heat the cream and whisk in the chaya powder until it starts to simmer. Pour the mixture over the chocolate.

Allow it to sit for 1 minute before stirring until the chocolate is melted and smooth.

Refrigerate the ganache for at least 40 minutes or until it is firm enough to pipe.

Once the shells are cool, pair them up by size. Pipe the chilled ganache onto one shell and gently sandwich it with a matching shell.

Dust the top of the assembled sandwich with a light coating of chaya powder.

*The macaron we know and love today has evolved from a recipe that dates back to eighth-century Italy. This delicate cookie is said to have arrived in France in 1533, when Italian noblewoman Catherine de' Medici wed King Henry II. Her personal pastry chefs brought their almond-based cookie recipe with them, and the treat quickly became a favourite among French royalty. Initially a simple confection of almonds, egg whites and sugar, macarons were a staple at royal events, including the lavish gatherings at the Palace of Versailles under King Louis XIV. Over the centuries, this humble cookie transformed into the elegant and colourful creation it is today.*







# LEMON POPPY SEED CAKE

*Lemon poppy seed cake is a delightful fusion of ancient ingredients and modern baking traditions. Its roots stretch back to Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisines, where lemons were prized for their bright acidity and poppy seeds were valued for their nutty flavour and medicinal properties. The pairing likely emerged from cross-cultural culinary exchanges, especially as baking techniques evolved in European kitchens. By the time cakes became a staple in Europe, bakers began incorporating poppy seeds for texture and lemon for its vibrant taste.*

*The cake gained popularity for its sensory contrast: the zing of lemon zest and juice balanced by the subtle crunch of poppy seeds. Over time, it evolved into various forms—light sponge cakes, dense bundt cakes and even muffins—with additions like lemon curd or cream cheese frosting enhancing its appeal. Today, it remains a versatile favourite, celebrated for both its flavour and adaptability in health-conscious and indulgent variations alike (Eleanor 2024).* ***This recipe has been given a South African-inspired twist by adding dried chaya powder,*** *which lends a mild, earthy flavour and a nutritional boost.*





# CHAYA LEMON POPPYSEED CAKE

Cerina Mokhabele

12 slices

70–80 °C
176 °C

Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**Cake:**

**60 ml Dried chaya powder**
**(see first step in recipe method)**
**325 g Cake flour**
**8 ml Baking powder**
**1.25 ml Baking soda**
**2.5 ml Salt**
**112 g Butter, room temperature**
**120 ml Vegetable oil**
**310 g Sugar**
**2.5 ml Vanilla extract**
**4 Large eggs**
**180 ml Milk**
**120 ml Fresh lemon juice**
**30 ml Fresh lemon zest**
**30 ml Poppy seeds**

To dry the chaya, cook the destalked leaves for 20 minutes, then drain and pat them dry. Place the leaves on a baking sheet and bake at 70–80 °C until they are brittle. Process the dried chaya into a fine powder.

Preheat the oven to 176 °C and prepare three 20 cm cake pans by greasing the sides and placing parchment paper circles on the bottom.

In a medium bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and powdered chaya, and set aside.

In a large mixer bowl, add the butter, oil, sugar and vanilla extract, and beat until light and fluffy, approximately 1.5 to 2 minutes.

Add the eggs one at a time, mixing until each is mostly combined. Scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed.

Add half of the dry ingredients and mix until mostly combined.

In a separate bowl, combine the milk and lemon juice, then slowly add the mixture to the batter and mix until well combined.

Add the remaining dry ingredients and mix until well combined and smooth, but do not overmix.

Gently stir in the lemon zest and poppy seeds.

Divide the batter evenly between the three cake pans and bake for 22–25 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out with only a few crumbs.

Remove the cakes from the oven and cool for 2–3 minutes before transferring them to cooling racks to cool completely.

# CHAYA LEMON POPPYSEED CAKE

Cerina Mokhabele

| 12 slices | 70–80 °C 176 °C | Baked goods & sweets |
|---|---|---|

## INGREDIENTS

**Frosting:**

**452 g Cream cheese, room temperature**
**172 g Butter, room temperature**
**15 ml Dried chaya powder**
**(see first step in recipe method)**
**1 150 g Icing sugar**
**15 ml Fresh lemon juice**
**15 ml Fresh lemon zest**

**Lemon curd:**

**6 Eggs**
**430 g Sugar, white**
**250 ml Fresh lemon juice**
**120 g Butter**

**Frosting:**

To make the frosting, beat the cream cheese and butter in a large mixing bowl until smooth.

Add about half of the icing sugar and mix until well combined.

Add the lemon juice and zest and mix until well combined.

Add the remaining icing sugar and powdered chaya and mix until well combined and smooth.

**Lemon curd:**

To make the lemon curd, mix together the eggs, sugar and lemon juice in a pot.

Stir the mixture on medium heat until it has thickened. Remove from heat, strain and add cold butter. Cool before assembling cake.

**Assemble cake:**

To assemble, use a large, serrated knife to remove any domes from the tops of the cakes.

Place the first cake layer on a serving plate and spread about 1 cup of frosting on top, making a border on the edges of the cake.

Pour 60–80 ml of the cooled lemon curd in the centre of the cake.

Add the second layer and another cup of frosting, then top with the final layer and frost the outside of the cake (optional).

Refrigerate the cake until ready to serve.



*Bagels were developed in 1683 to honour Polish King Jan Sobieski's victory over the Ottoman Empire, shaped like a stirrup to commemorate his horsemanship which is likely a myth. The true history of the bagel is rooted in the Jewish communities of Poland.*

*The first known mention of the word "bajgiel" (the Yiddish precursor to bagel) appears in the community ordinances of Krakow, Poland, in 1610. The documents stated that bagels were to be given as a gift to women following childbirth, suggesting they were already a well-established custom at the time. These early bagels were a staple food for Ashkenazi Jews, who refined the unique preparation method that defines the food to this day: the dough is first boiled in water and then baked. This process gelatinises the starches in the crust, resulting in the bagel's signature dense, chewy interior and shiny, crisp exterior.*

*Bagels remained largely an ethnic food until Eastern European Jewish immigrants brought them to North America in the late nineteenth century, with a particularly strong concentration in New York City. For decades, their production was controlled by the Bagel Bakers Local 338 union, which kept the craft exclusive. The bagel's journey into the mainstream began in the 1960s with the invention of the automated bagel machine by Daniel Thompson. This, along with the efforts of brands like Lender's to freeze and package them for supermarkets, transformed the bagel from a regional, handcrafted specialty into a breakfast staple across the continent.*

***Bagels is a delicious base for a special breakfast, lunch or snack**. Here follows a few serving suggestions: chaya bagel filled with a generous amount of chicken mayo, garnished with bright edible flowers, or a sophisticated breakfast bagel with crème fraîche and smoked salmon. This recipe makes it possible for one to create an intriguing and colourful, yet nutritious dish.*

# CHAYA BAGELS

Mia Hugo

8 chaya bagels

200 °C

## INGREDIENTS

**600 g Chaya leaves, fresh, destalked**
**360 g Water**
**8 g Yeast, active, dry**
**520 g Bread flour, plus more for work surface and hands**
**15 ml Sugar, granulated**
**10 ml Salt**
**10 g White sesame seeds**

**For coating the bowl: nonstick spray or 10 ml of softened butter or olive oil**

**Egg wash: 1 egg white beaten with 15 ml water**

**For boiling:**

**2 l Water**
**85 g Honey**

Preheat the oven to 200 °C.

Blend the chaya leaves and water in a liquidiser.

Strain the chaya liquid. Discard the remaining fibre.

Heat the chaya liquid in a saucepan to reach between 38–43 °C.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook attachment, whisk the warm chaya liquid and yeast together. Cover and allow to stand for 5 minutes. If you do not have a stand mixer, use a large mixing bowl and mix the dough with a wooden spoon or silicone spatula in the step that follows.

Add the flour, brown sugar and salt, and beat on medium speed for 2 minutes, until the dough comes together and pulls away from the sides of the bowl. The dough should be stiff and will look somewhat dry.

Knead the dough: Beat on low speed for an additional 6–7 minutes or knead by hand on a lightly floured surface for 6–7 minutes, until the dough feels smooth, supple and elastic.

Lightly grease a large bowl with nonstick spray, butter or oil. Place the dough in the bowl, turning it to coat all sides in the oil. Cover the bowl with a damp tea towel. Allow the dough to rise at room temperature for 1.5–2 hours, or until doubled in size.

Line three large baking sheets with good quality parchment paper or silicone baking mats.

Shape the bagels: When the dough is risen, punch it down to release the air. On a lightly floured surface, divide the dough into 8 equal pieces. Shape each piece into a ball. Press your index finger through the centre of each ball to make a hole. Arrange the shaped bagels on the prepared baking sheets. Loosely cover the shaped bagels with a damp kitchen towel and allow them to rest for 5–10 minutes.

Water bath: Fill a large, wide pot with 2 L of water. Whisk in the honey. Bring the water to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat to medium-high.

Drop 2 to 3 bagels in at a time, making sure they have enough room to float around. Boil the bagels for 1 minute, then use a spatula to flip each bagel over and boil for 1 minute more. Using a slotted metal spatula, lift the bagels out of the water, letting the excess water drain off. Place the bagels back on the lined baking trays. Repeat with remaining bagels.

Using a pastry brush, brush the egg wash on top and around the sides of each bagel and dip each bagel in sesame seeds or seed mix of choice.

Bake for 20–25 minutes until the bagels are dark golden brown. Allow the bagels to cool on the baking sheets for 20 minutes, then transfer to a cooling rack to cool completely.



# CHAYA AND MACADAMIA NUT COOKIES

Jolene Nair

25 cookies | 180 °C | Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**120 g Butter**
**60 g White sugar, granulated**
**90 g Brown sugar, granulated**
**1 Egg, large**
**2.5 ml Vanilla essence**
**1 g Salt**
**150 g Cake flour**
**1 g Bicarbonate of soda**
**60 g Macadamias, dry toasted, roughly chopped**
**150 g White chocolate chips**
**8 g Dried chaya, finely ground (see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**

In a mixing bowl, cream together butter, white sugar and brown sugar at medium speed for approximately five minutes, until pale and fluffy.

Beat in egg and vanilla essence until fully incorporated.

In a separate bowl, combine salt, flour, dried chaya powder and bicarbonate of soda. Gradually add this dry mixture to the creamed butter and sugar, mixing until just combined.

Fold in toasted macadamias and white chocolate chips evenly throughout the dough.

Portion the dough into 30 g balls and place on parchment paper–lined baking trays, spacing about 5 cm apart to allow for spreading. Bake at 180 °C for 10–12 minutes, or until the cookies are golden brown and cooked through.

Allow cookies to cool on the baking sheet for 1–2 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

*Delicious cookies combining the nutty flavour of macadamias, the sweetness of white chocolate, and the subtle earthy taste of dried chaya. Perfect as a snack or dessert, with a crisp edge and soft centre. Baked to a golden finish, they deliver crisp, delicate edges with a soft, chewy centre that keeps each bite satisfying.*



# CHAYA AND CARAMELISED ONION PINWHEELS

Shane Labuschagne

12 pinwheels

200 °C

Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**15 ml Butter, salted**
**75 g Onion, brown, diced**
**2.5 ml Salt**
**115 g Cream cheese, softened**
**2.5 ml Garlic powder**
**100 g Chaya, fresh, destalked, washed**
**250 g Puff pastry sheet**
**50 g Mozzarella, grated**
**1 Egg, beaten**

Preheat the oven to 200 °C. Line a baking tray with parchment paper.

In a pan, cook onions in the butter until caramelised. Add garlic and chaya, cook for another 8 minutes. Allow to cool slightly.

In a bowl, mix chaya mixture with cream cheese and grated cheese.

Slightly roll out puff pastry on a floured surface—only smooth out creases. Spread filling evenly on top, then roll it into a log—roll from the short side.

Slice into 1–1.5 cm pieces and place cut side down on the baking sheet. Flatten slightly.

Bake for 15–20 minutes or until golden brown and puffed.

*The origins of pinwheel pastries are traced back to Europe where the first recorded recipe was noted down in the eighteenth century in France (Acadofchoc2025). Over time, these pastries spread across Europe and the world and evolved from sweet pastries to pastries with any type of filling (Acadofchoc 2025).*

***Flaky puff pastry wrapped around a creamy mix of chaya, cream cheese, caramelised onions** and melted cheese. Golden, crisp and bite-sized, these pinwheels make the perfect quick appetiser for parties or holidays.*



# CHAYA AND BLUE CHEESE PIZZA

Rune Wessels

1 pizza | 190 °C | Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**30 g Parmesan, shaved**
**50 g Blue cheese, crumbled**
**70 g Green olives, pitted and halved**
**1 Jalapeno, thinly sliced**
**120 g Mozzarella, grated**
**2 Garlic clove, minced**
**15 ml Olive oil**
**100 g Chaya leaves, destalked**
**30 g Parmesan, grated**
**30 g Pine nuts**
**5 ml Lemon juice**
**500 g Bread flour**
**7,5 ml Instant yeast**
**7,5 ml Salt**
**500 ml Lukewarm water**
**30 ml Olive oil**

**Chaya pesto:**

Boil chaya leaves for 15–20 minutes, drain and cool.

In a blender or food processor, combine boiled chaya, garlic, nuts, grated Parmesan, olive oil, lemon juice and salt.

Blend until smooth and creamy. Adjust salt or lemon to taste.

**Pizza dough:**

Combine all the dry ingredients.

Add water, stir with a spoon until a loose wet dough has formed.

Knead the dough.

Place dough in an oiled bowl, ensuring all the surfaces are covered. Cover.

Proof for 1–2 hours.

**Pizza:**

Preheat your oven to 245 °C and place a pizza pan or heavy-duty baking tray inside to heat. A hot pan helps create a crisp crust.

Stretch or roll your dough to about 35 cm. If you like, toss it lightly to get an even thickness.

Carefully and lightly lay it out on the back of another upturned baking tray or use a pizza peel or paddle. Use some coarse mielie meal to make sure the pizza base is very loose from the tray and can move around.

Spread about 100 g of the chaya pesto evenly over the dough, leaving a small border around the edges for the crust.

Scatter the minced garlic evenly over the pesto. Then layer the shaved Parmesan, followed by the jalapeño slices and halved olives.

Sprinkle the blue cheese crumbles evenly across the pizza. Finish with the grated mozzarella.

Slip the pizza into the oven onto the hot pizza stone by firmly sliding it off the baking tray (or pizza peel/paddle).

Bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes, or until the cheese is golden and the crust is crisp. Rotate the pan halfway through baking, if needed, for even cooking.

Remove the pizza from the oven and allow it to rest for 2–3 minutes before slicing. This helps the cheese set slightly.

Dollop on a bit more pesto.

Slice and serve.

*Blue cheese has been around since the Middle Ages, first discovered in caves in Roquefort, France. Made with Penicillium mould, it gets its sharp flavour and blue-green veins through aging. While long used to add taste to different dishes, it was not until the 1980s in the US that blue cheese made its way onto pizza. Since then, it has become a bold, flavourful twist on the classic. This pizza combines the bold, tangy flavours of blue cheese and Parmesan with the earthy, slightly spinach-like taste of chaya, a nutrient-rich leafy green popular in Central America. (Pizzanea 2025).* ***By turning chaya into a vibrant pesto,*** *it adds a fresh, green layer that balances the strong cheeses and briny olives, while the jalapeño adds a subtle kick. With no traditional tomato sauce, this pizza lets each ingredient shine, creating a unique and flavourful twist on a classic gourmet-style pizza.*















# CHAYA MUFFULETTA

Ingrid Pienaar

1 large round loaf

200 °C

Baked goods & sweets

## INGREDIENTS

**For the chaya bread:**

**500 g Bread flour**
**30 g Chaya powder (see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**
**10 g Salt**
**7 g Instant yeast**
**10 g Sugar**
**300 ml Warm water**
**30 ml Olive oil**
**20 g Sesame seeds**

**For the olive relish:**

**150 g Green olives, pitted and chopped**
**150 g Black olives, pitted and chopped**
**50 g Roasted red peppers, chopped**
**30 g Capers, drained**
**30 ml Red wine vinegar**
**60 ml Olive oil**
**2 Garlic cloves, minced**
**2 g Dried oregano**
**2 g Black pepper, freshly ground**

**For the filling:**

**100 g Gouda cheese, sliced**
**100 g Mozzarella cheese, sliced**
**100 g Salami, sliced**
**100 g Ham, sliced**

**For the chaya bread:**

In a mixing bowl, combine flour, chaya powder, salt, sugar and yeast.

Add warm water and olive oil, mixing until a dough forms.

Knead for 8–10 minutes until smooth and elastic.

Place dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover and proof for 1–1.5 hours until doubled in size.

Punch down, shape into a round loaf, place on a baking sheet, and sprinkle sesame seeds on top.

Allow to proof for another 30–40 minutes.

Bake at 200 °C for 25–30 minutes, until golden brown and hollow when tapped. Cool completely before slicing.

**For the olive relish:**

Combine all relish ingredients in a bowl and mix well.

Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours (overnight is best for flavour).

**Assembling the muffuletta:**

Slice the cooled chaya loaf horizontally. Remove a little bit of the inside if the bread is too doughy inside.

Spread half of the olive relish on the bottom half.

Layer the meats and cheeses evenly.

Top with remaining relish and place the top half of the bread on.

Press down gently, wrap in foil and allow to rest for at least 30 minutes to meld flavours.

Slice into wedges to serve.

*The Muffuletta is a classic Italian-American sandwich originating from New Orleans, traditionally made with a round sesame loaf filled with layers of cured meats, cheese and olive relish.* ***This adaptation reimagines the dish by preparing the bread from scratch and enriching it with chaya powder, adding earthy, nutrient-dense qualities to the loaf.*** *The result is a wholesome, hearty sandwich that balances the robust flavours of the olive relish and cold cuts with the subtle nutritional benefits of chaya.*



# BEVERAGES AND DRINKS





# CHAYA DATE TEA

Michelle Cronje

24 portions | Serve hot | Drinks

## INGREDIENTS

**200 g Dates, oven dried**
**200 g Chaya, powdered**
**(see Chaya Energy Bar recipe)**
**50 g Citrus peel, finely chopped, dried**
**150 g Lavender, dried**
**50 g Ginger, finely chopped, dried**
**120 g Honey**
**48 u Lemon slices, halved**

Combine dried ingredients.

Use three teaspoons and tea ingredients per 250 ml water.

Boil together.

Add 1 teaspoon of honey per cup and serve hot.

*The chaya date tea presented in this collection is a modern adaptation inspired by traditional date and herbal teas, which are well known for their natural sweetness and restorative qualities. Dates have long been used in Middle Eastern and African tea blends to provide both richness and depth of flavour, while herbs such as lavender and ginger are frequently incorporated for their aromatic and soothing properties.*

***Building on this foundation, the recipe introduces chaya, a highly nutritious leafy green native** to Central America, which has been dried and powdered to complement the natural sweetness of dates. The addition of citrus peel provides a refreshing balance, while honey and lemon may be adjusted to taste, allowing for a versatile beverage that is both comforting and functional. This recipe, therefore, takes inspiration from traditional herbal tea infusions, but elevates them with chaya as a distinctive ingredient. The recipe draws inspiration from a ginger date tea (Marvellina 2019).*



# CHAYA SMOOTHIE

Maru Ramoroka

4 portions (250 ml each)

Serve cold

Drinks

## INGREDIENTS

**200 g Banana**
**150 g Chaya leaves, boiled, rinsed**
**80 g Fresh peach, stone removed**
**250 ml Greek yoghurt**
**80 ml Milk**
**5 ml Honey**

Cut the banana, peach and chaya into small pieces.

Place these ingredients in a blender.

Pour milk, yoghurt and honey over, blend until combined.

Adjust seasoning as necessary.

*A green smoothie is a blended drink made with leafy greens like spinach or kale, combined with fruits and a liquid base such as water or almond milk. It retains all the fibre of whole foods and is rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, making it a popular choice for a healthy snack or meal replacement.*

*While not rooted in traditional diets, green smoothies gained popularity in recent decades with the rise of health and wellness trends.* ***In this case, the leafy green used is the Middle American crop leaf, chaya.***



# CHAYA AND GINGER CORDIAL

Ruthie Matutu

100 ml | Serve over ice | Drinks

## INGREDIENTS

**100 g Sugar, white, granulated**
**250 ml Water**
**20 g Ginger, fresh, sliced**
**100 g Chaya, dried**
**250 ml Sparkling water**

Bring the water to a boil in a small saucepan. Add sugar, sliced ginger and the dried chaya leaves.

Simmer for 30 minutes allowing the flavour to fully infuse.

Remove from the heat and allow to cool for an hour. Strain the liquid.

To serve, pour 15 ml over ice in a glass, top up with sparkling water. Enjoy.



*Cordials were invented during the Renaissance period by Italian apothecaries for medical purposes intended to reviving the spirit (Botha, 2021). These early cordials included herbs and spices infused in alcohol, lacking the sweetness we associate with them today. Modern cordials, however, are infused with fruits, herbs and* ***other flavourings making them flavourful and refreshing. This chaya and ginger cordial blends the earthiness from the chaya and warmth from the ginger, pairing well with the sweetness.***



# GREEN TEQUILA AND CHAYA COCKTAIL

Maru Ramoroka

1 portion (200 ml) | Cocktail | Drinks

## INGREDIENTS

**For the juice blend:**

**50 g Chaya**
**120 g Celery**
**100 g Apples, peeled**
**30 ml Lime juice**
**15 ml Agave syrup**
**25 g Fresh parsley**
**60 ml Water**

**For cocktail:**

**20 ml Mezcal Koch**
**40 ml Chaya juice blend**
**15 ml Grapefruit juice**
**15 ml Tonic water**

**Making the juice blend:**

Blanch and refresh the chaya leaves.

Add all the juice blend ingredients into a blender and blend on high for 1 minute.

Strain the juice to remove the pulp.

**Making the cocktail:**

In a cocktail shaker, add the mezcal, juice blend and grapefruit juice. Add a few ice cubes and shake well.

Double strain over fresh ice into a glass. Top with tonic water. Stir until combined.

*The original version of the tequila green mezcal was created in the 1930s or 1940s. It used tequila, lime juice, spinach and grapefruit juice as the base.* ***In this recipe the spinach is substituted with chaya leaves to celebrate the Middle American heritage of this drink.***













CERINA MOKHABELE



CHRIZELLE MIENIE



INGRID PIENAAR



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HENNIE FISHER



RICHARD HAY

# THE TREE OF LIFE FOR MODERN TABLES

Chaya - often called Mayan tree spinach or chaya-mansa - is one of those rare food plants that sounds too good to be true. Domesticated thousands of years ago by a highly sophisticated agricultural society, this fast-growing, drought-resistant tree was carried by the Maya wherever they settled, revered as a literal “tree of life”. Yet, outside its native Central America, it has long remained one of nature’s best-kept secrets. Potentially the most productive and nutrient-dense leaf crop on Earth, cooked chaya is packed with protein, Vitamin C, iron, and calcium at levels that leave ordinary vegetables far behind - and it tastes delicious in an everyday meal. In a modern world facing an increasingly simplified, heavily processed diet, this ancient green offers a vibrant antidote to the paradox of modern malnutrition. Born out of a collaboration at the University of Pretoria’s Future Africa Institute, The Forgotten Garden is a love letter to a crop with global potential. This book serves as both a practical guide and a creative showcase, offering 56 ingenious, student-tested recipes. From simple everyday snacks to elegant main courses, it invites you to reclaim a piece of agricultural heritage, plant chaya in your own backyard, and bring ancient greens to the modern table.

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