

The Akee or Vegetable Brain

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Back in a day when African slaves were being imported into the western hemisphere, there arose a rather serious food shortage due to this importation into the West Indies. It was this need for food which sent the now famous Captain Bligh and H. M. S. Bounty into the south Pacific to bring back the bread-fruit tree. History tells us that after two tries he finally succeeded in his efforts, but to no avail. The Negroes in the Indies did not take to this new food. Later another fruit was brought in for them, one more to their taste, a fruit from their native Africa, called the akee. It was christened with the botanical

name *Blighia sapida*, as a tribute to that tough old captain of the Bounty.

The akee has grown well in tropical America and has become a favorite food among all its inhabitants. Its use in our own southern Florida, however, has been primarily as an ornamental.

The tree of the akee is fast growing, with a straight trunk and rounded head. Its branches are slender and break easily in the wind. The leaves are pinnate compound, with four or five pairs of stiff leaflets, moderately glossy on the upper surface.

One is likely to find flowers and fruits on the akee during any season. Its del-



—Courtesy Horticulture.

Flowers and Fruits of the Akee.

icate, greenish white flowers have a spicy, clove-like aroma. The fruits are about three inches long, hanging in loose groups on long slender stems. They are divided into three parts longitudinally, with definite seams along which they split when mature to expose three shiny black seeds embedded in creamy edible arils. The name "vegetable brains" is given to the akee fruit due to the resemblance of its arils or meats to the brains of small animals.

Harvested when the fruit begins to split, the fruit is opened and the meats separated from the seeds and from any membranes which may be present. The meats should be firm, and free from soft or moldy spots. Akee is best prepared for

the table by pan-broiling, as one would prepare mushrooms, in hot butter.

The stories of the poisonous qualities of the akee are grossly exaggerated. According to J. J. Bowrey, analytical chemist to the government of Jamaica, the edible part of the akee fruit is quite safe to eat as long as it is ripe, fresh, firm, bright in color and free from decay or mold.

Although the akee is tropical in origin, it will stand moderate frost. The chief difficulty in growing it is its dislike of high alkalinity. However, when its growth requirements are better understood, I'm sure it will become increasingly popular with gardeners in southern Florida. —Condensed from *Horticulture*,

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The Carob in California

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The carob, *Ceratonia siliqua*, a pod-bearing tree of the legume family, has been grown in California for many years. While the plant will tolerate considerable drought and heat, it is truly a hardy subtropical and will withstand only 18 to 20 degrees F. without serious injury. The development of an extensive root system

provides considerable adaptation to drought conditions; hence the tree frequently will survive where other species perish from lack of soil moisture. Adequate commercial production of satisfactory crops is obtained in the Mediterranean region when 12 to 15 acre inches of water are available, although the tree



Remnant of abandoned 800 acre carob orchard near Riverside, California.