

# National Fruit - The Ackee

Our National Symbols are representative of our rich history and culture. They define us as a people &ndash; Jamaicans who are proud of where we are coming from.

## Ackee (Blighia Sapida)

“Carry me ackee go a Linstead Market, not a quattie wud sell&rdquo; is a line in the popular Jamaican folk song &lsquo;Linstead Market&rsquo;. Ackee is the national fruit of Jamaica as well as a component of the national dish &ndash; ackee and codfish.

Although the ackee is not indigenous to Jamaica, it has remarkable historic associations. Originally, it was imported to the island from West Africa, probably on a slave ship. Now it grows here luxuriantly, producing large quantities of edible fruit each year.

Ackee is derived from the original name Ankye which comes from the Twi language of Ghana. The botanical name of the fruit &ndash; Blighia Sapida &ndash; was given in honour of Captain William Bligh of &ldquo;Mutiny on the Bounty&rdquo; fame, who in 1793 took plants of the fruit from Jamaica to England. Captain Bligh also brought the first breadfruit to Jamaica. Before this, the ackee was unknown to science. In 1778 Dr Thomas Clarke, one of the earliest propagators of the tree, introduced it to the eastern parishes.

The ackee tree grows up to 15.24m (50ft) under favourable conditions. It bears large red and yellow fruit 7.5 &ndash; 10 cm (3-4 in.) long. When ripe these fruits burst into sections revealing shiny black round seeds on top of a yellow aril which is partially edible.

There are two main types of ackee identified by the colour of the aril. That with a soft yellow aril is known as &lsquo;butter&rsquo; and &lsquo;cheese&rsquo; is hard and cream-coloured. Ackee contains a poison (hypoglycin) which is dissipated when it is properly harvested and cooked. The fruit should not be gathered until the pods open naturally. In addition, the aril must be properly cleaned of red fibre and the cooking water discarded.

Jamaica is the only place where the fruit is widely eaten. However, it has been introduced into most of the other Caribbean islands (for example, Trinidad, Grenada, Antigua and Barbados), Central America and Florida, where it is known by different names and does not thrive in economic quantities. Jamaican canned ackee is now exported and sold in markets patronized by expatriate Jamaicans.

Ackee is a very delicious fruit and when boiled and cooked with seasoning and salt fish or salt pork, it is considered one of Jamaica&rsquo;s greatest delicacies.