

# What is Cassava?

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[fao.org/WAICENT/faoinfo/economic/giews/english/giewse.htm](http://fao.org/WAICENT/faoinfo/economic/giews/english/giewse.htm)

## CASSAVA - A STAPLE FOOD IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

World consumption of cassava for food (fresh or processed) is concentrated in the developing countries. In **Africa**, about 70 percent of cassava production is used as food. The most popular processed products are commonly known as *gari*, *lafun*, *foufou*, *attiéké* and *chickwangué*. *Gari*, a dry granular meal made from moist and fermented cassava is most commonly used in West Africa. Other forms of processed cassava consumption include a sun-dried cassava known as *lafun* in southwest Nigeria and sticky or heavy soup made from fermented cassava known as *foufou*. In other parts of Africa, cassava is commonly made into flour from dried roots or chunks of roots, and consumed as flour commonly named *attiéké* and *chickwangué*.

### DESCRIPTION

Cassava is a shrubby perennial that grows to a height of 6-8 feet. It has smooth erect stems and resembles the cannabis plant in appearance. The large compound, dark green, reddish veined leaves are palmately divided into about seven leaflets. The stems contain a soft white pith and have nodes from which new plants are obtained.

### USE

The roots, which are the most valuable portions of the plant, grow in clusters of 4-8 at the stem base. Roots are from 1-4 inches in diameter and from 8-15 inches long, although roots up to 3 feet long are found. The pure white interior is firmer than potatoes and has a very high starch content. The roots are covered with a thin reddish brown fibrous bark that is removed by scraping and peeling. The bark is reported to contain toxic hydrocyanic (prussic) acid, which must be removed by washing, scraping and heating.

Two types of cassava recognized are "bitter" and "sweet." The sweet-type roots contain only a small amount of the acid and are boiled and used as a vegetable, along with the young leaves. The roots are also used for animal feed and the starch is used for glue, laundry starch, and tapioca pudding. Leaves are not eaten raw because of the poisonous substances.

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