

Roots, Fruits, Shoots and Leaves

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INTRODUCTION

Few places capture Hong Kong better than a fresh food market: the cacophony as vendors hawk their goods; the wafting aromas of ripe fruit, dried seafood and medicinal plants; the bright colours of the *gai lan* perfectly arranged in a bamboo basket; and the bustling pace of shoppers elbowing their way to a bargain. These markets provide one of the best ways to get a sense of how Hong Kong people live their lives.

The local way of food shopping is to visit the market every day, buying only what you need for the day's meals. This means that every day you are eating the freshest and healthiest produce possible instead of those droopy leaves lurking at the back of your refrigerator. The liveliest time of day to visit a market is in the morning when the produce is at its perkier but there's often a second surge around 6pm when people stop at the market on their way home from work.

Hong Kong's food markets are traditionally called wet markets, referring to the regular hosing down of the floors to keep them clean. These days the only part of the market that is bound to be wet is the seafood area.

There are many good reasons for buying food at fresh food markets. Prices are often significantly lower than in supermarkets and the quality is high. You will find a wider variety: not just bananas but banana flowers; not just dragon fruit but dragon fruit flowers (also called hegemony flowers). And the produce is seasonal so what's available

in the spring differs greatly from what's available in the fall, a reminder that we needn't pay a fortune for produce that's been picked before it is ripe and shipped in refrigerated containers. When you follow the season you can buy produce when it is at its peak of flavour and nutritional value at a reasonable price.

Seasonality is important. Most people make seasonal adjustments to their clothing and the same should hold for food. By shifting your eating habits to whatever is in season, your tastebuds won't get bored and, according to Chinese medicine, you will be feeding your body what it needs to keep in tip-top shape throughout that season. Chinese medicine classifies foods as heating, cooling or neutral. During Hong Kong's hot and humid summers it is best to eat cooling foods (such as watermelon, daikon and cucumber) whereas during the albeit mild winter your body needs heating foods (such as chilli, chives, walnuts and onions).

The environmental reasons for shopping at local food markets are also compelling. Because most (but by no means all) of what is sold at these markets is produced within the region, the food involves fewer food miles. You are also eliminating the packaging which most supermarket foods are sold in and which causes the produce to sweat and begin to deteriorate.

History lurks in the stands of food markets. Many of the fruits and vegetables listed

in these pages are immigrants to Hong Kong. Cashew apples, dragon fruit, custard apples, sweet potatoes and Buddha's hand gourd, for example, arrived from South and Central America via Portuguese and Spanish sailing fleets. This serves as a reminder that the globalisation of food has been occurring for centuries and that the roots of what are considered 'traditional' foods are not as simple as one might think.

This guide is meant to make shopping at a Hong Kong fresh food market easy whether you are a Hong Kong resident who lacks the linguistic and culinary know-how or a tourist who wants to explore Hong Kong's culinary sights. With the guide in hand you will be able to identify foods by their photos, determine how foods are sold through the explanations of the Chinese character signage and locate some of Hong Kong's liveliest food markets with the detailed directions that are given.

The list of foods in the guide is not exhaustive but rather includes those commonly found in Hong Kong's food markets. Some foods go by multiple names so an additional name is included in those cases. Foods commonly found in other parts of the world, such as apples and bananas, are included in a vocabulary list without photos. Some foods, such as cucumber and pumpkin, are featured in the section with photos because they look different than in other parts of the world.

I hope this guide helps you to discover what is available and to have the same pleasure I have had in finding new foods to enjoy eating. Happy shopping!

Pam Shookman

FRUIT

水果

seoi2 gwo2



CASHEW APPLE

(also called Wax Apple and Java Apple)
tin1 tou4

天桃

also called lin4 mou6 蓮霧

Season: May to August

How to eat: Cut into pieces



CENTURY PEAR

seoi2 zing1 lei4

水晶梨

Season: September to December

How to eat: Peel and remove core



CUSTARD APPLE

faan1 gwai2 lai6 zi1

番鬼荔枝

Season: May to August

How to eat: Gently pull off outer skin,
cut into wedges and eat around the
seeds



DRAGON FRUIT

fo2 lung4 gwo2

火龍果

Season: May to August

How to eat: Pull away the skin and slice



DUCK PEAR

aap3 lei4

鴨梨

Season: September to January

How to eat: Peel and remove core



DURIAN

lao4 lin4

榴槿

also called gam1 zam1 tau4 金枕頭

Season: May to August

How to eat: Saw open and remove the soft flesh inside



FRAGRANT PEAR

hoeng1 lei4

香梨

Season: November to April

How to eat: Peel and remove core



GOOSEBERRY

cou3 leot6

醋栗

Season: June to August

How to eat: Eat whole