



# Chaya Recipes

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For the Whole Family!



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Editorial: ECHO Inc.

17391 Durrance Rd. North Fort Myers, FL 33917 USA

Contributors: Penny Rambacher, Euda Morales, Pedro Rodríguez, Cecilia González, Gabriela Rossal, Nadezda Amaya, Andrea Guzmán, Nathan Flood.

2019 Edition (English)

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# Nutritional Benefits of Chaya

**Chaya is very nutritious; a 100 gram serving (about 50 - 60 fresh leaves) contains the following:**

- **Protein:** It has the same amount of protein as an egg. Protein is important for muscle development.
- **Iron:** It has two times the iron of a serving of spinach. Iron enriches blood and helps prevent anemia.
- **Calcium:** It has more calcium than most vegetables. Chaya has two times more calcium than spinach. Calcium is important to strengthen bones.
- **Vitamin A:** It contains a good amount of this vitamin which is important in the prevention of blindness and reduces the severity of infections and sickness like diarrhea. It is an essential nutrient for children's growth.
- It is also a source of Vitamin C, folic acid and Vitamin B, which are essential for health and wellbeing.

**Additionally, experts say chaya has other health benefits. It is possible that eating chaya could help with the following:**

- Improved circulation, digestion and vision.
- Improved memory and brain function.
- Reduced inflammation.
- Reduced cholesterol levels and help in weight loss.
- Fight against diabetes, arthritis and renal issues.

# Preparation of Chaya

In this section you will find different fast and easy recipes found in traditional rural kitchens that use the chaya as a main ingredient.

It is important to note that just as in certain other green leafy vegetables, chaya needs to be boiled with water in order to be eaten because it contains a natural substance called CYANIDE, which is toxic.

Please! Be sure to boil it in a non-aluminum cooking vessel without the lid. Since the cyanide toxin will be released into the air, be sure to cook the chaya in a well-ventilated area.

## One serving of chaya:

In this recipe book a serving of chaya (100 grams) is equivalent to the following:

- 50 to 60 fresh leaves = 1 bunch = 1 cup cooked chaya

## How to cook it?

1. First, remove the stems and wash the chaya leaves with clean water.
2. Cyanide is easily eliminated by boiling the chaya uncovered for 15 minutes in a pot that is NOT made out of aluminum. Do not use the lid on the pot! Cook only in a well-ventilated area.

Once cooked, chaya can be used as indicated in the following recipes.





**50 to 60 fresh leaves = 1 bunch = 1 cup cooked chaya**

If you don't have chaya, you can substitute it in the recipes with other leafy green vegetables like chipilín (a "cousin" of the spinach plant), mora (macuy), amaranth (bledo), or chard. Spinach, kale, collard greens, and mustard greens are also good substitutes, as are the tops of turnips and beets.



**Chipilín**



**Mora (macuy)**



**Amaranth (bledo)**



**Chard**

# Baby Foods with Chaya

Complementary feeding should start from 6 months of age. It is during this time that babies should receive pureed foods after drinking breast milk.

The following recipes are easy to make and easily digested by babies. They require few ingredients, including half a bunch (25 - 30 leaves) of chaya.



**Half a serving of chaya is equivalent to the following:**  
25 to 30 leaves = 1/2 a bunch = 1/2 cup cooked chaya

It is suggested that no sugar, salt or condiments are added to these recipes because babies do not start distinguishing flavors until they are 12 months old.

It is important to remember that chaya has to be boiled before being consumed just like eggplant, cassava and another plant called chipilín. Additionally, it should be consumed right after being prepared so that babies can take advantage of the nutrients.



*Fruit Purée*



# Fruit Purée



## Ingredients:

3 cups of water

½ bunch of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)

1 fruit (banana, apple or mango)



## PROCEDURE:

1



In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.

2



Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3



When the leaves are tender, add the chunks of fruit and let it boil 8 more minutes.

4



Drain the leaves and fruit, saving some of the water. Mash and purée together, adding a bit of the water as needed.



*Puréed Vegetables*

# Puréed Vegetables



## Ingredients:

3 cups of water

½ bunch of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)

1 vegetable (chayote, carrot or potato)



## PROCEDURE:



In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



When the leaves are tender, add the chunks of vegetables and let it boil 8 more minutes.



Drain the leaves and vegetables, saving some of the water. Mash and purée together, adding a bit of the water as needed.



*Puréed Cereal with Chaya*

# Puréed Cereal with Chaya



## Ingredients:

5 cups of water (3 cups to cook the chaya, 2 cups to cook the rice or cereal)

½ bunch of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)

1 cup of rice (or another cereal like barley)




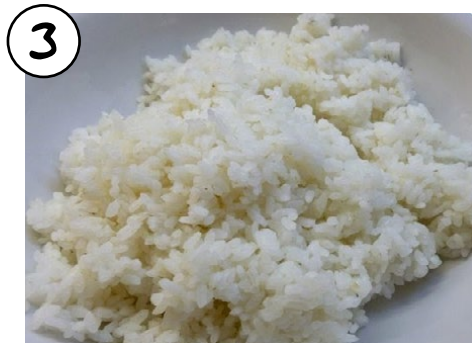
## PROCEDURE:



1 In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2 Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated. 



3 Prepare the rice (or barley) as usual using 2 cups water and 1 cup of the cereal.



4 Mash the rice with the drained chaya leaves, adding a bit of the water as needed.



*Corn Flour Purée with Chaya*

# Corn Flour Purée with Chaya



## INGREDIENTS:

3 cups of water  
½ bunch of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
½ cup of corn flour masa, prepared according to package directions to make tortilla dough



## PROCEDURE:



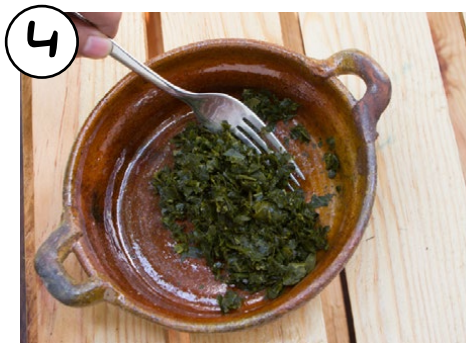
In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



Add the masa flour ball and boil until cooked, for approximately 8 minutes.



Grind the drained chaya leaves with a fork or a mortar and pestle.



Mash and puree the masa and chaya together, adding a bit of the water as needed.





# Rural Cousine

The following recipes are rural Guatemalan dishes which are of great benefit to the health and nutrition of children.

The procedures can vary slightly according to the region or family tradition, but the procedure for cooking chaya will always be the same.

It is very important to wash the leaves without the stem and boil them in clean water in a non-aluminum pot for at least 15 minutes. Boil uncovered and in a well-ventilated area.





*Soup with Chaya*

# Soup with Chaya



## INGREDIENTS:

1 bunch of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)

Vegetables of your choice (corn, chayote, cabbage, carrots, onion)

Water to cover the vegetables in the pot

Salt to taste



## PROCEDURE:



1 In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2 Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3 Add the vegetables chopped in medium pieces and salt to taste. Cover vegetables completely with water. NOTE: If desired, lid may be used at this time.



4 Cook on high until water starts to boil, then simmer until vegetables are cooked.



Tamales with Chaya

# Tamales with Chaya




## Ingredients:

Desired amount of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
Masa corn flour  
Water  
Salt to taste  
Dried corn husks for tamales (soften before use by soaking in clean water) or fresh banana leaves that have been lightly steamed to make pliable




## PROCEDURE:

**1**



In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.

**2**



Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.

**3**



Prepare the masa flour as if you were making tortillas, using the drained chaya water and adding the drained chaya leaves and salt.

**4**



Place small balls or spoonfuls of the masa in the softened corn husks or steamed banana leaves

**5**



Close the corn husks or banana leaves tightly and wrap with a natural string. Boil in or steam over salted water for at least 40 minutes.



*Beans with Chaya*

# Beans with Chaya



## Ingredients:

½ bunch chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
3 cups plus 2 quarts of water  
1 pound beans  
2 Tbsp vegetable oil  
1 large onion, chopped  
3 garlic cloves, minced  
Cumin, to taste  
Salt, to taste  
Chopped cilantro, to taste  
Cheese to sprinkle on top (optional)



## PROCEDURE:



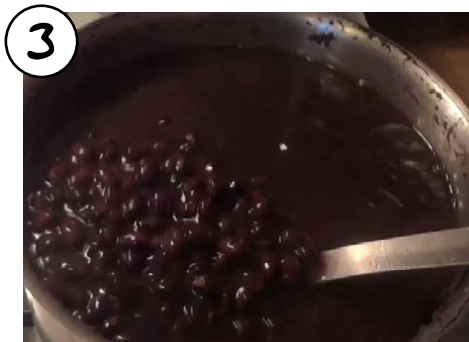
1

In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2

Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3

In another pot cook the beans as usual, using a total of 2 quarts of water (use the drained chaya water and clean water together, if desired).



4

In a frypan, heat the oil and add the chopped onion, the drained chaya leaves, the minced garlic cloves, the cumin and salt to taste.



5

In a bowl, serve a portion of the beans, place some of the stir fried chaya on top, and lastly, top with chopped cilantro and cheese, if desired.



*Rice with Chaya*



# Rice with Chaya



## Ingredients:

- ½ bunch chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)
- 3 cups plus 2 cups of water
- 1 cup of uncooked rice
- 1 onion, chopped
- ½ carrot, chopped, julienned, or cut into thin strips
- ½ cup peas
- Salt to taste



## PROCEDURE:



**1**  
In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



**2**  
Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



**3**  
In a pot, add the rice, the chopped onion and carrot, the peas and the drained chaya leaves.



**4**  
Add 2 cups of water to the pot and let it boil. Lower the heat, cover and simmer until the water has been absorbed by the rice and the rice is tender.



*Pasta with Chaya*

# Pasta with Chaya



## Ingredients:

½ bunch chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
3 cups plus 1 quart of water  
1 pound of pasta  
1 large onion, chopped  
1 red bell pepper, chopped  
1 - 3 tomatoes, chopped (optional)  
Vegetable oil  
Salt to taste  
Cheese to sprinkle on top (optional)



## PROCEDURE:



1 In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2 Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3 Cook the pasta of your choice as usual, using a total of 1 quart of water (use the drained chaya water and clean water together, if desired). Follow package directions.



4 In a frypan with some oil, fry the chopped onion, the drained chaya leaves, and the chopped sweet pepper. Add salt to taste.



5 If you would like, you could add tomatoes to the recipe and make a sauce, cooking the tomatoes in the same water the pasta was boiled in.



*Chaya with Peanut Sauce*

# Chaya with Peanut Sauce



## Ingredients:

50 - 60 chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
2 quarts water  
1 cup crushed peanuts (crushed in mortar & pestle or blender, or very finely chopped) or peanut butter  
1 cup of milk or water  
3 Tbsp vegetable oil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 garlic clove, minced  
1 cup chopped vegetables (like carrots, bell peppers, potatoes, etc.)  
Salt and spices to taste



## PROCEDURE:



1  
In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2  
Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3  
Crush or blend the peanuts adding  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk (or water) little by little until you obtain a paste.



4  
Stir fry the onion, garlic and vegetables until they are cooked. Add the peanut paste and the rest of milk (or water), mix and cook on medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes.



5  
Add the chopped boiled chaya, mix well and cook in medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes more. Serve with rice, tortilla, or another side dish.



# Snacks

The recipes in this section show us some ways of adding chaya to dishes so that children can take a good snack to school or eat it at home.

These are foods that will provide kids the nutrients needed to grow healthy and strong.





*Salsa with Chaya*



# Salsa with Chaya



## Ingredients:

15 chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
1 quart water  
6 tomatoes, whole  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 sprig of mint leaves, remove leaves from stem and mince  
Salt to taste  
1 lime



## PROCEDURE:



1

In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2

Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



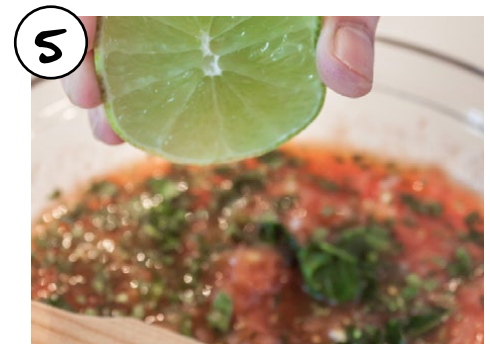
3

In another pot, boil water with salt and add the whole tomatoes. Cook for 3 minutes.



4

Peel the tomatoes and mash them with the chopped garlic, onion and mint leaves.



5

Add the drained chaya, season with salt and lime juice.



*Chaya with Pumpkin Seeds*

# Chaya with Pumpkin Seeds



## Ingredients:

25 chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
1 quart water  
Pumpkin (pepita) seeds, ground  
1 medium onion, sliced  
Lime juice to taste  
Salt to taste



## PROCEDURE:



1

In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2

Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3

Drain the chaya leaves and place on a plate.



4

Toast pumpkin seeds in a heavy pan and grind them or use ground pumpkin seeds. Sprinkle on top of the chaya to taste and mix with salt and lime juice. Top with sliced onion.



*Tortillas and Nachos  
with Chaya*

# Tortillas and Nachos with Chaya



## Ingredients:

50 - 60 chaya leaves  
(with stems removed and  
chopped into small pieces)  
2 quarts plus 1 cup water  
Masa corn flour  
Salt to taste




## PROCEDURE:



1 In a non-aluminum pot,  
bring the water to a boil.



2 Add the clean chopped chaya  
leaves, and cook at least 15  
minutes. NOTE: Do not use  
the lid and be sure the  
area is well-ventilated. 



3 Drain the leaves and grind  
them (approximately one  
cup of cooked leaves for  
one and one-half cups of  
masa).



4 Mix and add salt to taste  
and make tortillas in the  
traditional way.



5 Once ready, they can be  
sliced in triangles like  
nachos and toasted in a  
heavy fry pan.



*Cheese Dip  
with Chaya*

# Cheese Dip with Chaya



## Ingredients:

- ½ bunch of chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)
- 1 quart water
- Vegetable oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 10 basil leaves, minced
- ½ cup cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup parmesan cheese, shredded
- Salt and pepper to taste



## PROCEDURE:



**1**  
In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



**2**  
Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



**3**  
In a pan, heat the oil and fry the garlic for one minute.



**4**  
In a bowl, mix the drained chaya together with the basil, cream cheese and pepper.



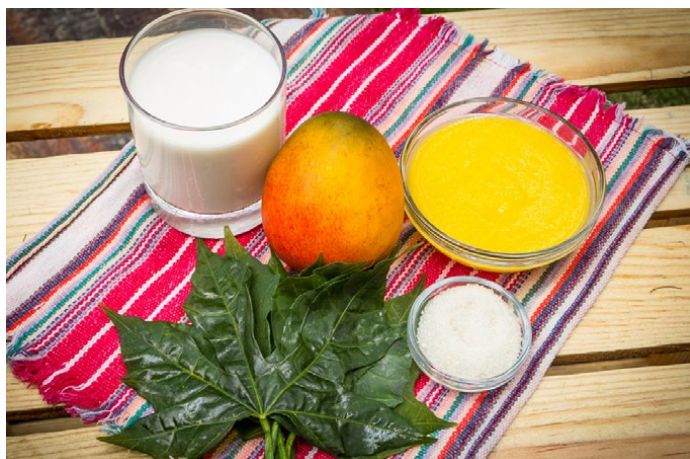
**5**  
Add the fried garlic and parmesan cheese and mix until creamy. Add salt and pepper to taste.



*Mango Smoothie  
with Chaya*



# Mango Smoothie with Chaya



## Ingredients:

- 20 chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)
- 1 quart water
- ½ cup of milk
- 1 mango chopped into pieces
- 2 Tbsp sugar



## PROCEDURE:



1

In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2

Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3

Place milk, mango, sugar, and drained chaya leaves into a blender and blend for two minutes on high speed. Serve immediately.



*Chaya Rice Pudding*

# Chaya Rice Pudding



## Ingredients:

20 chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
1 quart water  
½ cup uncooked white rice  
2 cups of milk  
1 cup water (use the drained chaya cooking water)  
4 Tbsp sugar, brown sugar, or honey  
2 cinnamon sticks  
Pinch of salt  
Raisins or dried fruit (optional)  
Cloves or other spices (optional)  
A pinch of ground cinnamon (as garnish) (optional)



## PROCEDURE:



1 In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2 Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated.



3 In a non-aluminum pot, combine the rice, milk, chaya water, sugar, cinnamon, spices and salt.



4 Cook on medium for 30 minutes, mixing every once in a while to avoid sticking.



5 Add the well chopped chaya (and dried fruit, if desired), mix and cook 5 more minutes. Let cool a little before serving. Decorate with ground cinnamon if desired.



*Lime Popsicle  
with Chaya*

# Lime Popsicle with Chaya



## Ingredients:

20 chaya leaves (with stems removed and chopped into small pieces)  
3 cups of water  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup lime juice




## PROCEDURE:



1 In a non-aluminum pot, bring the water to a boil.



2 Add the clean chopped chaya leaves, and cook at least 15 minutes. NOTE: Do not use the lid and be sure the area is well-ventilated. 



3 Once the cooked chaya and water are cooled, mix with the rest of the ingredients. Place in popsicle molds and freeze. You can also drink this as a juice instead of freezing by adding additional water to taste.

# Collaborators



Penny Rambacher, R.D.  
Founder and Director,  
Miracles In Action  
[www.miraclesinaction.org](http://www.miraclesinaction.org)



Euda Morales, Educating Chef,  
Journalist, and Author  
[eudamorales.com.gt](http://eudamorales.com.gt)

Pedro Rodríguez, Chef  
Director, El Infinito  
[www.elinfinito.org](http://www.elinfinito.org)

Cecilia González, Food Scientist  
Regional Leader, ECHO Latin America and the Caribbean  
[www.echonet.org](http://www.echonet.org)

Gabriela Rossal, Nutritionist  
Ambassador Program, ECHO Latin America and the Caribbean  
[www.echonet.org](http://www.echonet.org)

Nadezda Amaya, Agricultural Economist  
Value Chain and Genre Specialist, Bioversity International  
[www.bioversityinternational.org](http://www.bioversityinternational.org)

Andrea Guzmán, Nutritionist  
Program Manager, Mayan Health Alliance  
[www.wuqukawoq.org](http://www.wuqukawoq.org)

## More information and resources:

**Chaya Brochure:** <http://edn.link/chayaunasolucion>

**ECHO Technical Note:** <http://edn.link/tn-53-chaya>

**Plant Information Sheet:** <http://edn.link/plantinfo-chaya>

**Crop Information:** <http://edn.link/edn-72-chaya-climates>

**Video: Food Rainbow:** <https://youtu.be/O1Sxp-Bd1P4>

**Video: Chaya a Solution (Spanish):** <https://vimeo.com/76380600>

**More videos by Miracles in Action:** <https://miraclesinaction.org/photos-docs/videos/>

**More resources from Miracles in Action:** <http://edn.link/miraclesinaction>

**More resources from ECHO:** <https://www.echocommunity.org/>

**More resources from Bioversity International:**

<http://www.nuscommunity.org/nus/neglected-underutilized-species/chaya/>

# Chaya Recipes

For the Whole Family!

Mayan spinach, commonly known as chaya or chatate, is a plant native to Mesoamerica with exquisite nutritional and culinary characteristics. The purpose of this recipe book is to promote the use of this plant to take advantage of its nutritional benefits for children and families, and also to promote traditional Guatemalan cooking. Here you will find easy compote recipes for babies, main dishes and some recipes ideal for snacking.

This edition was produced with thanks to:

**Miracles in Action:** [www.miraclesinaction.org](http://www.miraclesinaction.org)

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