

Breadfruit: Blight of Captain Bligh

Posted on [April 20, 2011](#) by [Cynthia Bertelsen](#)



Captain William Bligh

When Captain James Cook entrusted thirty-three-year-old William Bligh (at the time a Commanding Lieutenant) with the HM Armed Vessel *Bounty* in 1787, breadfruit — not adventure — drove what became an infamous voyage. Bligh and his mutinous men sailed to Tahiti (the largest island in French Polynesia) to bring breadfruit trees back to Caribbean in hopes that the fruit would provide adequate food for the slaves working on sugar plantations there. (Bligh later undertook a second voyage as a captain and succeeded in introducing breadfruit to the Caribbean.)

Hearing of the recent devastating earthquake on the Caribbean island of Haiti (a former French colony) and in the southern city of Jacmel in particular, for just a moment, strangely enough, I flashed on the breadfruit fritters I ate one night at the hotel in Jacmel, where I stayed while conducting a food consumption study in the nearby village of Haut-Cap Rouge. The stories about Captain Bligh and all his troubles came to me when the waiter laid a gold-rimmed plate covered with steaming-hot golden morsels in front of me. “*L’arbre à pain*,” he whispered. Oh. Breadfruit.



Beach at Jacmel, Haiti (Photo credit: C. Bertelsen)

Cooked in the form of *beignet*, or fritter, that breadfruit looked nothing like the fruit hanging from the trees as I hiked to my work site every day along a steep ridge overlooking the most beautiful beach I have ever seen. Light, airy, and slightly sweet, those fritters remain extremely elusive, primarily because there's no place nearby now where I can buy a breadfruit in any shape, form, or size. (Except, maybe, in a can. Phew!)

So that's why, when I toured the Limahuli Botanical Gardens in Hawaii, the sight of a breadfruit tree spoke to me so deeply. I'd just heard about the Haiti earthquake and knew that Jacmel suffered a fierce blow.

I offer the following "slideshow" of breadfruit and the fritter recipe as a tribute to the memory of the cooks at the hotel who created such miracles and to the marvelous people who participated in the food consumption survey.

(Other ways of preparing breadfruit include fried slices, polenta-like purées and puddings (sometimes mixed with okra), and vichyssoise.)

Breadfruit Fritters

Makes about 12 fritters

1 cup boiled and mashed breadfruit
1/4 cup flour
1/4 t. baking powder
Pinch of salt
1 egg yolk, lightly beaten
1 -2 T. milk, more or less
Oil for deep frying

(Pre-prep: Boil peeled and chopped breadfruit in salted water for 20 minutes. Drain. Mash or purée. Let it cool.)

Sift dry ingredients together. Mix breadfruit mash with egg and milk. Add the liquid mixture to the flour mixture. Stir until well blended. Batter should sort of clump on spoon.

In a heavy deep skillet, heat oil to 375 F. Using a spoon, scrape off about 1 T. of batter at a time into the oil and cook until golden brown on all sides, about 3 to 4 minutes. Scoop fritters out of the oil with a slotted spoon and drain and paper towels. Serve warm.

*Incidentally, the gardens demonstrate the ancient Hawaiian agricultural system of *ahupua'a*, a sustainable method being studied today.

Breadfruit Seeds



Breadfruit Tree



Breadfruit Skin

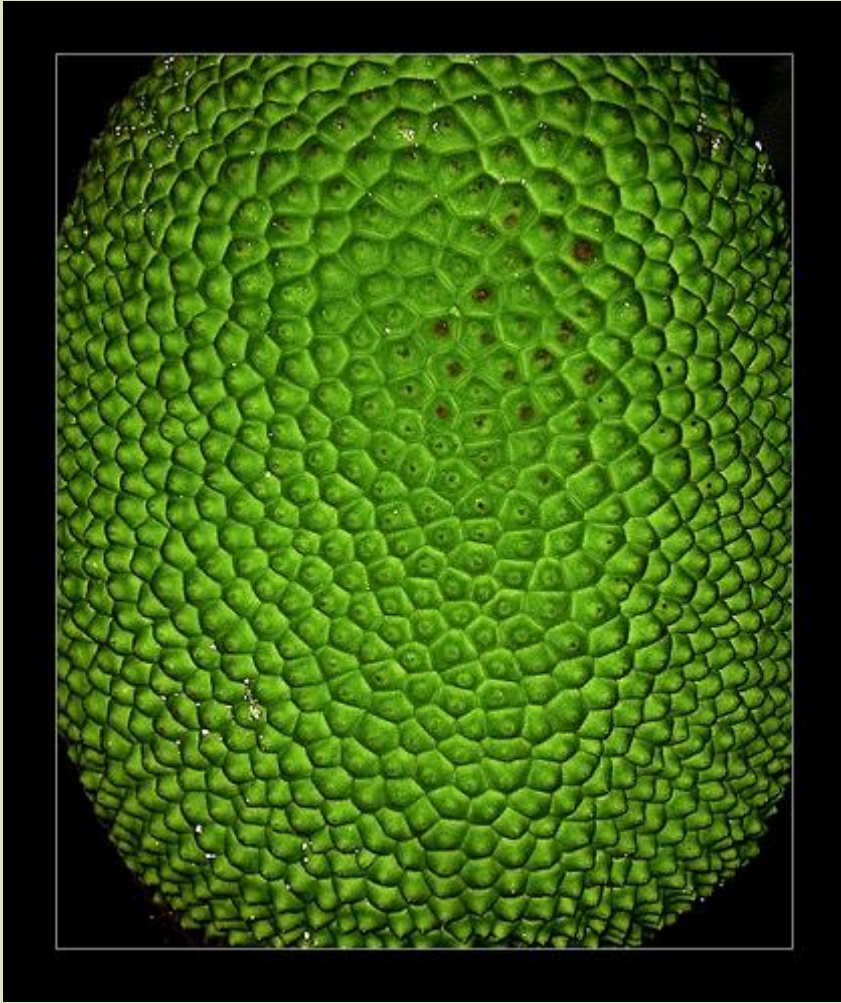


Photo credit: Richard Parker

Breadfruit, Up Close (and Seemingly Untouchable)



Peeling Breadfruit



Breadfruit, Cut Open



Photo credit: Richard Parker

Tahiti

Tahiti, East Coast (Photo credit: Taravana in Colors)

© 2011 C. Bertelsen

