Leaves in the Guatemalan diet and popular cuisine

Luis Villar Anleu

In the anthropological field, the word diet finds its broadest meaning in the usual set of foods prepared and consumed within a given culture. In a supplementary sense, it is also used to describe the flow of associated collective behaviors and behaviors, expressions of their social imaginary, and the con-substantial arrangement of what foods can be prepared and eaten, and in what way and at what times and spaces they are consumed by the common or by particular categories of individuals or groups. These simple principles contain the cultural food universe that provokes and fixes gastronomic identity in societies.

If, in the first case, a catalogue of regular dishes and preparations in this or that culture could be made, with it in hand its usual diet could be described in terms of diversity of food and drink. This is not always possible, given the daily culinary innovation and the influence of foreign cuisines, whose cultural, social or material contributions accelerate and sometimes guide the changes inherent to the practice of the art of cooking in a given community.

The spontaneous practice of this art is nourished by the popular knowledge accumulated in the course of the history of the community and increased by continuous anonymous contributions from its members. It forms a dual heritage: intangible in the orality it entails, its main vehicle for intergenerational teaching and learning, in the myths, legends, secrets, anecdotes and facts associated with it, in the recipes created, kept and transmitted from generation to generation, in the processes and procedures established, exercised and transferred along with the recipe books and even in the modes of production or harvesting of the necessary raw material.

The tangible component of heritage is evident primarily in the food, beverages and preparations resulting from the practice of the culinary arts, but also in the edible resources it uses, which become culturally identifiable as part of popular knowledge. Other materializations that make the art of cooking possible are the instruments used to produce, prepare and cook, among them the stick for planting corn, the stone mortar, the grinding stone, *hana* and *oürüwa* of the Garifuna cuisine (mortar and its mallet, in that order), for example.

The food and drink that a town prepares and consumes does not make up a chaotic whole. They respond to cultural patterns forged by a multitude of factors, some social and others ecological. Social inheritance creates taste and palatability towards certain dishes and disdain for others, and thus fixes them to the community way of life; the models of agricultural production,

also culturally maintained, guide the establishment of a certain type of cuisine; The natural resources that the ecosystem can provide, constituted in the environment of a certain population, pushes the formulation of its own foods. We still have a lot of fondness for *chipilín* because its consumption is a cultural heritage; the heavily cattle-raising villages in the southeast of the country enrich their recipe books with dairy products, and those in the mountainous southwest do so with lamb derivatives; the possibility of collecting *cordoncillo* leaves (also called mountain anise) in warm-humid undergrowth of the Atlantic Slope favors its use as a condiment for seafood broths.

The ways, times and spaces in which food and drinks are prepared and consumed is not the result of chance either. It is clear that we can distinguish popular cuisine from gourmet cuisine, identifying the former as that of the people, that of anonymous cooks and diners, which is of generational and spontaneous transmission, and the latter as the elitist cuisine that leaves anonymity, in which recipes and methods are individual patents that lead to generational transmission being lost. replaced by formal education.

In those ways, times and places lead to a diversity of popular types of cuisine. Since what we are interested in is visualizing the variables that determine them, the first thing we see is that there are foods that respond to basically home consumption. We call them traditional. Others are usually put on sale on city sidewalks, markets, dining rooms or restaurants, are described as autochthonous and can still be divided into family and globalized.

Finer variables within traditional cuisine allow us to distinguish other types: everyday, it is the day-to-day, the usual; sacralized that which is articulated to facts of popular religiosity; ceremonial is that which is intended for consumption within community solemnities, whether in civic or civic-religious environments; festive, which enriches parties and celebrations of a profane spirit, such as birthdays, weddings, banquets, fairs, receptions and canteen, among others.

As can be seen from the outline, considered in its most intimate details, the diet of a culture emerges as a rich and complex universe with intensely defined cultural, symbolic and cognitive dimensions. It transcends the gastronomic sphere to be articulated to spirituality, religiosity, magic and doctrine, medicine, social relations, natural history (fauna, flora, fungi, algae, bacteria, minerals), crafts, literature and other human arts.

Determining the place and role that vegetable leaves play in this wide world is an adventure full of fabulous milestones. We will try to venture through some of its twists and turns.

Primitive vegetarianism and herbivory

At the dawn of the history of food in our country, three activities dominated the styles of food procurement: hunting, fishing and gathering of plant products. Not essentially different from how they are practiced today, the fact of their current validity is a remarkable case of local ethnobiology, and proof of the supreme relevance of their methods.

In the mythological part of the Popol Wuj, the epic-historical book of the *K'iche'* People, the ethnologist Rafael Girard found the oldest recorded manifestation of ancestral food. Some myths guided his analysis of that part of history, and based on them he found four cultural horizons:

1. 1)Of gatherers-hunters-fishermen,
2. 2)From incipient collector-growers,
3. 3)Of domestication of corn,
4. 4)Development of native agriculture.

The first was characteristic of patrilineal societies of small families. The flagship myth is the one that describes the family environment of the demigod *Wuqub Kak'ix*, *Chimalmat* his wife and the two sons *Kabraqan* and *Sipakna*. *Wuqub Kak'ix* represents the archetype of the gatherer, who climbs trees [of nance] to cut fruits, his food; Sipakna that of the fisherman, and Kabraqan who "drools" over roasted birds. There are only two planes in the world, heaven and earth.

The second occurs mainly in patrilineal societies, organized in collectivist villages and governed by chieftain councils, but also in matrilineal collectivities that have the supreme merit of inventing agriculture. The descriptive myth involves Xibalba, the collectivist village ruled by the Kame Lords, in permanent antagonism with the matrilineal collectivity represented by the Ajpu' family. Its first cultivated plants are tubers, cassava, sweet potato and jicama, as well as squash and beans. They use fire, chaj (*ocote* in Nahuatl) and consume tobacco.

The third horizon marks the replacement of tuber cultivation by cereals. In *Popolwujian* mythology, the great protagonists are Ixmukane and Ixkik', respectively The Grandma and The daughter-in-law, who sow and harvest corn. The myth of Ixkik' in the Ajpu' house presents her as a prototype of the woman farmer who even tries the hybridization of the sacred grain, and is responsible for carrying the product home. In the magical-religious environment, female goddesses appear, "guardians of food".

In the fourth horizon, the man takes on more active roles in agricultural production, taking on his shoulders the responsibility of providing food for the family. The woman, more selective, tends to family gardens and grows species that she will use in her kitchen. Corn, chili peppers and beans are made into intensive crops, and with them the care, planting and

consumption of native species is strengthened. Invention of agricultural calendars. Among the characters who exemplify it are Junajpu and Xbalanke, when they assure The Grandma that they will make, take care of and harvest the cornfield. It is easy to fall into the temptation of assuming that the harvest was basically of fruits, since as food it is what the Popol Wuj mentions most for those early stages. He records that yellow and white cobs, *pataxte* and cocoa abounded, that there were countless trees of sapote, soursop, jocote trees, nances, *matasanos* and honey. He says that they were the best foods in that town of Pan Paxil, Pan K'ayala', as he identifies Guatemala.

But it is good to pay attention to the words that complete the story. He adds that "there was food, there were all kinds of food: small foods, large foods, small plants, large plants." It is logical to suppose that by large plants he would have to consider the trees, which ones more? that is, fruit trees, some really colossal such as sapote trees. It should not be too problematic to resolve the question of "small plants", if one takes into account that the contrast of paired elements in the indigenous text denotes ontological complementarity; So, in this case the pair should be fruit trees – edible herbs.

An excellent complement to the analysis is provided by the Memorial of Sololá, which dispels any hint of doubt in its creation myths by stating that, "when [the Creator the Former] made man, they made him from earth and fed him from trees, they fed him with leaves". To elucidate the mystery regarding which leaves were taken as food, a good option is to consider the one preserved by indigenous diets and that are still consumed today.

In foods of widespread contemporaneity, and clearly traditional, foliage whose consumption can be assumed to be of long ago is that of bledos, majcuyes, chipilines, chayas, palmitos, squash, pumpkin, chilacayote, quilete, tepejilote and many others that are applied as condiments or flavorings. I am referring here only to foliage that is eaten (after cooking), not to those that fulfill parallel functions, for example, in the wrapping of other foods. We will talk about all this shortly.

Leafy gastronomy

As it is reasonable to suppose, and I tried to capture in the previous section, it was native species that gave material to the first Guatemalan foods. An active pre-Hispanic regional trade incorporated some others, which would later be converted into cultivars. The invasion and subsequent Spanish conquest would import a considerable amount more, which also subjected to cultivation would increase the number of edible varieties available to the local cuisine. Imports were not exclusive to these historical moments, since after 1821 there were sporadic introductions of other lineages, until the present.

In natural sciences, the expression ecdemic is used in contrast to native, and qualifies the condition of an organism to be foreign, alien to the territory in which it is considered. The lineages and varieties of plants with edible foliage that reached our country due to the pre-Hispanic commercial mobilizations, the Hispanic interests of the Colony and the introductions after political independence are endemic.

On different occasions, in order to value as much as possible the popular cuisine of Guatemalans, I have emphasized the transcendence of native lineages in the creation of the most distinctive dishes of their diet. The case is different this time. Now the emphasis is on the meals themselves, because, as long as they are leafy, it does not matter if their ingredients are native or ecdemic. It is clear that behind meals there are the arts that produce them; Thus, with procedures, adjustments, seasonings and national recipes, the culinary identity is forged, strengthened and maintained.

On the other hand, it is necessary to specify the ways in which the leaves are used in the kitchen, as not all of them have the same destination. A summary of the forms of use is as follows: 1) some leaves are eaten, 2) certain leaves are not eaten, but are cooked together with warm foods or drinks to season or flavor them, 3) there are leaves that serve as wrappers for other foods, which does not exempt them from also seasoning or flavoring them, 4) certain leaves are applied only to decorate the dishes served.

Edible native leaves and their dishes

The list of native edible leaf plants is truly rich. Although not all of them have the same level of consumption, none is less traditional than the others. Their meals may be geographically restricted to very specific areas, and therefore they are little known, but where they are prepared they can constitute common dishes. They are usually preparations of indigenous cuisine, common in rural communities.

The best known species, and therefore the most numerous foods, correspond to bledos, majcuyes, chipilines, chayas and squash. A little less, although very important, are the various palm hearts, squash, *chilacayote, quilete* and *tepejilote*. And behind are those that few people distinguish as edible leaves, but which are nevertheless highly appreciated by those who know of their culinary benefits: *chichafuerte, dandelion, Santa Catarina flower, jocote, plantain, chump moco, olla nueva, tz'ite' and wixna'i.*

The wild spinach. Called amaranths, they are several species, the main ones being Amaranthus caudutus (quilete), Amarnthus dubius, Amaranthus hybridus and Amaranthus scariosus. One of the most consumed herbs in the country, it usually grows as a weed among crops, or is cared for in home gardens or is formally

cultivated. Most of it comes from collection in the wild.

There are countless ways to prepare them. The most common, quick, and delicious is in broth form. The lightest, but therefore no less exquisite, only requires tomato, onion, garlic and salt. A rich culinary advance over the broth is achieved from a greater seasoning, making a kind of stew whose *sauce* sometimes includes a few touches of fat. Either of these two dishes, with the leaves moderately drained, some are prepared vegetarian sandwiches of subtle palatability.

The foliage of wild spinach is very nutritious, healthy and abundant in beneficial fiber. There is almost no market that lacks them in its commodity inventory. Three bunches are worth about Q5.00, at the 2012 price, and the amount of leaf in them yields a medium-sized pot, enough for lunch for a family nucleus. (Chiggas are tablets of wild spinach seed in panela sugar, a sweet of great tradition; it is still prepared in San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango).

Majcuyes. Other common names for these herbs are herb and *quilete*. The most common species are Solanum americanum and Solanum nigrescens. It is one of the oldest plants in local cuisine, known as such by several sources that speak of its consumption. Each plant produces abundant foliage, its growth is spontaneous, sometimes it is kept in home gardens, very few are grown and there is no shortage of it in stalls.

It is prepared in the same ways as wild spinach, particularly in broths and stews. In more elaborate knowledge, meat is prepared, especially pork. Many cooks' resort to the mixture of majcuyes and wild spinach in the same pot, resulting in an unparalleled combination of their aromas and flavors. It shares with them the high nutritional richness and healthy qualities.

Chipilines. Small wild shrubs of the local flora, belonging to the species Crotalaria longirostrata and Crotalaria vitellina. The custom of majcuyes and wild spinach is to collect the whole plant, even with roots (although only the leaves are processed), while the branches of the squid are cut off, to separate the leaves when they are going to be cooked. Because of their reputed sedative properties, many people recommend them not only for being rich and aromatic, but also for tranquilizers.

There are many ways to cook them. Of course, you may have noticed by now that, for the leaves, broths are preeminent. Those of the ear tags are no exception. But in the case of these, chipilín tamales are an identity descriptor of Guatemalan culinary culture. To make them, the corn dough is stirred with the leaves of milpa or maxa'n and cooked. The final product is a true delicacy.

Another popular food in the town is chicken with rice and chipilín. It is

served as a brothy dish. How brothy or dry it should be prepared is a matter of personal decision, because in any of its varied consistencies it will constitute a desired dish of popular tradition, served even on festive occasions.

Chayas. Small shrubs, like nettles, whose siliceous spines can be very uncomfortable to the touch. However, its leaves are eaten, and with great delight, especially in the department of Petén and in its areas of influence of Quiché, Alta Verapaz and northern Izabal. The main edible species is Cnidocolus aconitifolius. Most of the harvest is made from vegetables planted by stake to form living fences, which are used to delineate properties.

As usual, one of the most widespread ways to eat them is in broths. But also fried with egg, with finely chopped leaves. There are those who add chorizo to the frying, which by the way is very good. They also give rise to the preparation of the famous chaya buns, corn tamales quite characteristic of petenera cuisine. With chaya in exchange for chipilín and the substitution of milpa leaf or maxa'n to wrap the bun, structurally they are very close to chipilín tamales.

Squash. The deeply domesticated Sechium edule is a wonderful plant and deeply rooted in traditional cuisine. A must in everyday cooking for its fruits, in harvest season of the tuberous roots, the ichíntals, these organs are also in high demand. But the apex of the stems and the tender growing leaves are a real delicacy of the kitchen. They are called squash tips.

Popular gastronomic creativity has come up with various ways of preparing them, all of them of supreme taste. One, well-known, is a frying: well chopped, mixed with egg, fried in a pan, either to obtain a cake or a scrambled egg; Once this is achieved, they are served, alone or accompanied by a mild or spicy chirmol, and warm tortillas. One more finesse is that of egg-wrapped tips, achieved with the identity procedures of the Guatemalan wrappers. The seasoned leaves serve as a cover for that peculiar variation of the tamales that the K'iche' es, q'eqchi'es, and poqomchi'es call boxboles.

One of the simplest ways is to know the tips in water, with no more than tomato, onion, garlic and salt. It is an incredibly tasty, nutritious and cheap broth. A very popular variant of great simplicity in its original version is the pot of tips in knowledge with black beans, seasoned only with onion, garlic and salt. True delicacy for the Guatemalan palate.

If you can't enjoy the pleasure of cutting the tips of your own *güisquilar* (you can have it in the backyard), the alternative is to buy the tips at a market. In the San Martín Market, in zone 6 of the capital, in 2012 three profuse bunches cost Q5.00, and that is enough to feed an average family.

Palmitos. It may seem strange that I include this structure of palm trees

here. In my defense I must say that, in botanical matters, the heart of palm trees, which is what is called a palm heart, is nothing more than the apical meristem and its enveloping leaf primordia, in the best sense of the term, very tender leaves. From then on, there are plenty of explanations to justify considering them edible leaves.

All palm trees produce edible palm heart, so it would be cumbersome to find the name of their species. Perhaps, at least, one of the most common; in order of highest to lowest intensity of consumption: corozo or monaco (Attalea cohune), palmo, palma real or corozo de olor (Attalea butyraceae), palmo or huano (Sabal guatemalesis and Sabal mexicana). Even from the small palms of the genus Chamaedorea (pacayas) and the "calves" (Euterpe precatoria) the tender edible heart can be obtained.

The farmers, in the days of work in the open air, like to consume in situ the palm of pacayas and calves. It can be eaten raw, which not only nourishes and refreshes, but also grilled to complete or make a good country meal. In any form it is very tasty.

Pumpkin. Cucurbita moschata is the squash, Cucurbita ficifolia the chilacayote, Cucurbita pepo the güicoy, Cucurbita argyrosperma the pepitoria. They are mentioned together because, in popular cuisine, their leaves exhibit equivalent forms of use. Probably the best known is that of boxboles (pronouncing boshboles), food for travel or for the house, corn, piloyes, pumpkin seeds and chili powder. The corn dough, molded as a tamalito, is placed on a leaf of any of the named cucurbits, or squash, so that more than one can fit on the surface; then, the leaves are rolled, with the tamales arranged in parallel everything is cooked well. They are bathed in tomato chirmol, pumpkin seed and chili. They are consumed with everything and the leaf.

Quilete. Various herbs are called quilete, for example the bledo A. caudatus and the majcuy S. americanum, but the true quile is Sinclairia sublobata, a shrub between one and two meters high (exceptionally up to five), whose leaves are edible and highly prized. They are prepared in soups, although they can also be added to beef broths or made into various fried foods. The sancocho enriched with quilete is very appetizing.

Tepejilote. The species Carludovica palmata is a plant that reaches up to three meters in height, wild in very humid forests of the Tropical Rainforest biome (for this and other biomes refer to the attached map) north of Quiché, Alta Verapaz and Izabal, of Petén and the southern slope of the Volcanic Mountain Range. (Humid Subtropical Forest biome). The consumption of its leaves is significantly low, and when it does occur it is of leaf buds, with which fried foods can be prepared. (As an edible plant, tepejilote is best known for its floral spadix, which are eaten in broth, on its own, or with vegetables.)

Chichafuerte. There are many species called chichafuerte, of the genus Oxalis. They are wild grasses much like clover, with fleshy bulbs and sometimes creeping stems. A well-known one is Oxalis dimidiata. The flavor of the leaves is acidic, sometimes very strong; even so, some eat them raw, in salads, or cooked as vegetables.

Dandelion. It is not certain that the species Taraxacum officinale is native. There are those who think that he is of European origin. However, it has long been well naturalized and grows abundantly in meadows. The leaves are eaten raw, in salads, although they are somewhat bitter (hence their other common name, bitter).

Flor de Santa Catarina. Dahlia imperialis. Herbaceous is between two and five meters high, with showy violet flowers that open in autumn. The tender leaves are eaten, mostly in broths, but also fried. Similar to the case of güisquil tips, they are also combined with beans or eggs.

Jocote. In particular, the species Spondias purpurea, mainly because of its juicy and pleasant fruits, is described as a tree integrated into the Guatemalan diet. But the twigs and tender leaves are eaten fresh, barely cut from the plant, and are also used to prepare salads. They are mildly acidic. They are sometimes cooked as a vegetable.

Llantén. The herb Plantago major is reputed medicinal, and is thus frequently used. For popular gastronomy its leaves are of great interest, of singular versatility: when they are tender they are prepared in more seasoned salads, they are cooked like wild spinach and majcuyes, and very ripe and hard they are cooked, ground and prepared as a rich puree.

Chump mucus. This herb (Phytolacca icosandra) can reach up to a meter and a half in height; it is usually planted as a living fence. It is well known that its roots, fruits, and mature stems (purple red) are toxic. But tender plants, less than fifteen centimeters, are not, and so the young leaves are usually eaten cooked.

Olla nueva. Galinsoga urticaefolia (quadriradiata) is a wild herb that does not exceed half a meter in height, hairy, frequent in open areas and in vacant lots. Popular cuisine uses its leaves to make broths or cook them in stews, and in more than one preparation they are combined with minced meat, tomato dressing, garlic, onion and salt.

Tz'ite'. The so-called "whistle tree" (Erythrina berteroana), as is well known, is consumed with great frequency its flower buds ("*machetillos*"). But also its leaf shoots, with the attached tender stems, cooked like any other vegetable. It is recommended to discard the first water, to reduce some toxicity that it carries.

Wixna'i. Spathiphyllum phryniifolium. As in the case of the tz'ite', the Wixna'i is better known for the edible use of its floral spadices than for

its leaves, because the consumption of these is low. However, the tender, well-cooked leaves are eaten as a vegetable in many places (well-cooked to reduce some existing toxicity=.

Native Seasoning Leaves and Their Dishes

A certain number of species of native flora, being integrated into the local diet, are not edible in the strict sense of the term. Such is the case with those that are used to give or increase flavors, smells and colors to food. They are grouped into the category of spices, natural condiments that even in small quantities have the ability to give up their aromatic principles, their taste derivatives or their chromatic properties, modifying seasonings and visual aspects.

These species persist in the wild countryside growing spontaneously, sometimes in cultivated fields, in home gardens, and on wasteland, even urban ones. Perhaps as inapparent herbs or as weeds, as trees, shrubs or even as lianas, they are plants that are part of the living heritage of the country, which through food become part of the cultural heritage and thus integrate the popular imagination. Some well-known ones are apazote, cordoncillo, bull grass (or basil cimarrona), pericón, pepper and samat.

Apazote. It corresponds to the species Chenopodium ambrosioides, a strong-smelling herb, between 40 cm and a meter and a half high. It grows wild in a wide variety of environments, even in large cities if there are abandoned plots or fractions of land between houses. It is granted antibacterial, anthelmintic and anti-inflammatory properties, among several others. As a condiment in several traditional foods, its leaves are irreplaceable, such as black beans with apazote, a very special viand, considered healthy due to the healing nature of the herb.

The Guatemalan touch of fish and seafood broths, including jute leaves broth, is given by the apazote (jute leaves: various species of edible, freshwater and estuary snails). Certain edible mushroom dishes include apazote in some recipes. An intensely rooted dish, the famous egg broth, is offered to those who wake up with discomfort after a day profusely washed down with alcoholic beverages. The most blessed ingredient in egg broth is apazote.

Cordoncillo. Or mountain anise, is an herb up to two meters high, which grows in the understory of warm and humid ecosystems, which are below 1,300 m above sea level. There it is a fairly common and abundant plant. The species is Piper auritum. The leaves, circular heart-shaped and scalloped edges, wider than long, can be up to 35 cm on the major axis. Now they are rarely used, but before they were highly appreciated as a condiment for soups and broths. There was a time when it was a very special distinction to prepare snail broth (jute leaves) and fish broth with cordoncillo, to give to friends, to invite distinguished guests or to share festively on the occasion of family celebrations. In some parts they are used in beef and chicken broths.

Bull grass. Also called cimarrona basil, it corresponds to the species Ocimum

campechianum. It belongs to the lamiaceae family, a group known for the production of aromatic essential oils. Bull grass, due to its appearance and smell, is very similar to Asian-African basil (Ocimum basilicum) but with a more intense smell. It grows in hot and humid regions, where it develops as a weed, less than half a meter high.

It is used with some intensity in Guatemalan popular cuisine, especially to season meats, stews, stews and beef or chicken broths. However, the popular one that tends to the areas of gourmet cuisine does not disdain it, particularly if it belongs to the villages, where it is common for people to plant it in their patios or home gardens. At this level, whether they have previously dried it or simply go to cut it and use it fresh, it is highly appreciated in pasta, homemade pizzas and all those dishes in which it can replace naturalized basil.

Pericón. Pericón (Tagetes lucida) is a small wild herb, which although it is better known for its medicinal properties, also has strong applications as a spice, in particular to flavor and flavor a variety of cornmeal beverage that is very popular in communities of the southwestern highlands, which is why it is called beverage of pericón. For the same purposes and in towns in the same area, it is used in the knowledge of corn. Infused or boiled, it produces a pleasant drink. They usually collect whole plants and use them in such a way, so it is difficult to separate an independent use of leaves, flowers or stems. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that its leaves are incorporated into the local cuisine.

Pepper. The native pepper, which belongs to the species Pimenta dioica, is a large tree that grows profusely in the humid tropics, with more abundance in the Humid Tropical Forest and Tropical Rainforest biomes. Planted, it is found in mountain lands, still above 1,600 meters of altitude. It is the famous allspice, whose fruits are an indispensable condiment in a multitude of preparations. Well, the leaves are used for the same purposes and almost in the same meals. But their seasoning is very soft, fine, which is why many cooks and master chefs prefer them to create touches of delicacy in their meals.

Samat. The samat, escorzonera, coriander or mountain coriander is the Eryngium foetidum that grows spontaneously in open fields, pastures and on the side of the roads. There is no shortage of those who grow it in gardens. Its aroma resembles that of Mediterranean coriander, so intense that the plants emanate it without the need to be crushed or cut. It is a pleasant smell that is diffused in food, whether it is broths, soups, stews or stews. The leaves are used, which grow at the base of the plant forming a rosette. Consumption is rooted among the Q'eqchi'es, from where it has radiated to other groups. The dish that is not considered complete if it lacks samat is the kaq ik, from the culinary identity of Alta Verapaz traditional chompipe broth. For cultural projection it is also added to the beef stew, or sancocho.

In Alta Verapaz, a very own chirmol is also prepared that has chopped samat leaves. In kaq ik and beef stew, the broths are expected to be boiling to extinguish the samat, thus releasing its unique aroma without cooking more than necessary. Petén's most traditional beef stew is also made with samat. Gourmet and contemporary ladino cuisines replace it with coriander (Coriandrum sativum), one of the condiments brought by the Castilians.

Inedible native leaves and preparations thereof

Within the elements of the kitchen, a certain amount is not edible. And I am not referring to pots, pots, crockery and other utensils necessary for the art of cooking, but to components of meals that, however, are not eaten. Such is the case of the leaves that are part of them, integrated not only by availability of environment (utilitarian ethnobotanical relations) but also because they carry symbolic foundations, or because they give up scents, flavors and colors (depending on condiments) or by cultural fixations.

In the satisfaction of requirements such as these, the leaves and the preparations of which they are part come to integrate indivisible units. The leaves are associated with their foods in such a way that they come to give them meaning, to provide them with identity. The most significant are those of cox, chocón, kanaq', corn, maxa'n, elderberry and tusas, the majority used as food wrappers.

Cox. The species is Canna tuerckheimii, a spontaneously growing herb that likes moist soils. Its large, lustrous and flexible leaves are in high demand in popular cuisine, where they are used to wrap meals. In towns of the western highlands, there is a marked predilection for its use in tamales, over that given to the maxa'n. Although I do not rule out some cultural reason for this, the truth is that cox is more common than maxa'n at higher altitudes.

These leaves have a prominent and strong vein, so their previous preparation requires particular skills, only acquired with practice. Once ready, they are used to wrap tamales, tamales, paches, fish, meats, and also to replace dishes and eat them.

Chocón. It is also known as "bobo chichicate" and corresponds to the species Wigandia caracasana. It is a robust, shrubby plant with small purple flowers that grows in the wild throughout the country. It is well known for its aggressive habits and for invading different spaces, it grows even on walls and walls, so it irreversibly damages abandoned houses and temples. Its large leaves, and stems, are covered with abundant thorns, although not as irritating as those of nettles.

It is widely used for the seat and cover of tamales in knowledge, for which, in the first, a mattress of leaves is made at the bottom; as a cover, the same amount of them is placed on the tamales to be cooked. Since cooking is steamed, its structure and permeability are ideal for this purpose. As a gain, they exhale an aroma that makes the most traditional tamales unmistakable. An unfortunate

thing: the urban kitchen has replaced this cover with highly toxic plastic sheets. They are also used in the knowledge of tamalitos, chuchitos and buns.

Kanaq'. It is Chiranthodendron pentadactylon. A species of very ancient use as a flavoring and of great magical-spiritual symbolism. It is a large tree, ecologically restricted to the highest mountainous areas of Guatemala and Chiapas, where mist ecosystems predominate. It is known that the ancestral Mayans had great respect for him, even recognizing some magical properties in him.

As far as contemporary gastronomy is concerned, its leaves are highly esteemed for flavoring tamales and tamalitos. For this purpose, and since tamales and tamales are steamed, a regular amount of leaves are placed at the bottom and top of the apaste or pot, so that they release their delicate aroma and transmit it to knowledge. As is done with the leaves of chocón, but in this case an articulation to popular religiosity is involved. For this reason, according to a modality of greater spiritual charge, corn tamales are wrapped in its leaves to be cooked on special occasions, when religiosity is high, such as in the celebration of Corpus Christi in Patzún, Chimaltenango.

Milpa leaf. The long leaves of the milpa, that is, of the corn plant (Zea mays), serve as a wrapper for the tamales of dough to get to know them. The cooks have developed a unique ability to wrap without ties, equivalent to that which diners possess to remove them before eating. They are usually served wrapped, still smoking, so that those who are going to eat them can be peeled off, it is a protocol of the indigenous cuisine of the western highlands! The tamalito takes on another flavor, and an elegant appearance because the vein of the leaf leaves a deep imprint along its length.

Maxa'n. (In English say mashán). Except that it is a different species from the cox (the maxa'n is Calathea lutea), because it is a leaf that is used to wrap food, the gastronomic considerations are very similar to those of the former. These are the ideal size for wrapping, and the underside produces a wax that in practice is indisputably useful. One of its flagship foods is tuq'unik pamaxa'n, a Tz'utujil expression that can be translated as "recado in maxa'n"; It is the famous "skate" of the ladinos.

It is also a must in the Quetzaltec paches; in tamalitos, especially in those of Chipilín, in Xep'es ("Shepes" in Spanish), in Subanik'es and in the Pachay Q'eqchi'. There are two Subanik'es, both of pre-Hispanic origin and divided into several ethnolinguistic groups. One is a tamalito with tomato and chili recado; By tradition it must be wrapped in maxa'n. Another is a recado that is seasoned with maxa'n leaves, in a special case in popular cuisine. These leaves have another particular function: according to some deep-rooted customs, certain foods must be served on them, as if they were dishes. With the iwaxtes (English: iguashtes) this thing happens. Although, in honor of the truth, tamales, paches, pachay and the like are eaten in their

leaves, which are only opened and that's it... eaten on a natural plate!

Elder. Sambucus nigra subsp. Canadensis, is a tree deeply linked to several facts of the traditional popular culture of Guatemalans. Because of this versatility, it is difficult to place it in a single descriptive category. As far as popular food is concerned, a subtle way of using it as a food flavoring, in which it only leaves its aroma and taste and is not eaten, occurs in towns of the western highlands: popular bread is marketed in its markets, brought from producing towns (San Carlos Sija, Santa Lucía Utatlán, Patzún, Quetzaltenango, among others) to the consuming villages in cane baskets. To maintain its softness and the aroma that distinguishes it, it is abundantly covered with fresh elderberry leaves. Hence it is called tz'oloj bread (tz'oloj is the Kaqchikel term for elderberry). In Spanish this bread is called de maxtante.

Tusas. If someone argues that tusas are bracts and nothing else, they should be reminded that bracts, as a plant structure, are modified leaves whose main function is the covering of propagules. So, tusas are modified leaves that coat the seeds of the corn on the cob.

Guatemalans are very familiar with the image of a chuchito wrapped in tusas. The thing is that chuchitos and tusas complement each other; Rarely do the chuchitos wrap themselves in something different. It would also be very rare to find a chambray tamale that is not wrapped in tusas. It is unthinkable that the popular candy store would stop using colored tusas in the making of fair rosaries, or artistically cut scraps to place on top of honeycombed coconut and panela sandwiches, or manzanillas in honey.

In a wonderful way, this partial mosaic of culinary expressions of genuine identity is associated with an extremely traditional plant part. Because if the tools for cleaning the kitchen utensils are part of it, I must indicate that the tusas arranged as appropriate served, serve and will serve to wash them.

Edible Ecdemic Leaves and Their Dishes

In order not to prolong the list of all those edible foliage's that the diet of Guatemalans has, and because some, which have been brought from remote regions by different cultures, have given rise to an overwhelming variety of dishes because they respond to tastes that are also imported, we will no longer dwell on fine considerations. but of a general nature.

I will not bring to the story the complete list of edible ecdemic plants or all the dishes they generate. The matter escapes the limits imposed on work. So, I will exemplify some cases taken at random, and by recording scientific names only of the relatively less common species. In this context, in our daily meals we find the presence of chard leaves, chicory (Cichorium intybus), kohlrabi (Brassica rapa, formerly Brassica campestris), spinach, lettuce, lettuce (Sonchus oleraceus), cabbage (including Brussels sprouts), purslane (Portulaca oleracea).

From chard, spinach, lettuce, cabbage and Brussels sprouts it would be impractical to try to add something to what the reader

already knows; and as I said, out of our reach. Look, for example, at spinach, which can be eaten raw in salads, in soup, as a vegetable, as a filling for bread and in gourmet cuisine by filling lasagna or ravioli. And variations on the same theme reach unimaginable complications.

One of the least known: chicory is an herb originated in the Old World, naturalized and now abundant in Guatemala. Its roots, roasted and ground, replace coffee. The leaves, which is what interests us, when they are tender, are prepared in salads, or cooked to make broths or accompany meats. When they are ripe, they should be cooked more, preferably eliminating the first water, because they are moderately toxic.

Also herbaceous, kohlrabi originated in the Old World and reached naturalization in our country. In that condition, and being intensely aggressive, she escaped from cultivation and grew spontaneously in the fields. It is now seen in equal abundance in them as in the markets. Many ways to consume it, from salads and broths to recados with pig meat and puliq'es.

The lechuguilla, from the Old World, was acclimatized and naturalized in Guatemala. Today it grows throughout the country, from 200 to 3,300 meters in altitude, as another wild herb. When tender they are eaten in salads, ripe they are cooked and consumed as if they were chicory.

Purslane is less common than the previous ones and its consumption is also lower. One of the most frequent forms of preparation is in the knowledge of tender leaves and stems mixed with egg, tomato, garlic, onion and salt as condiments. When tender, it is also used in salads.

Seasoning Ecdemic Leaves

The introductory considerations to the preceding section are fully valid for this one, as far as the high number of species originating outside our land is concerned, whose leaves are used in the seasoning of local foods. Even more unattainable is the possibility of naming all the foods they dress in. A single one, for example coriander, parsley or bay leaf, can be in dozens, if not hundreds of dishes.

The most common are listed in the following table, which indicates the recognised centre of biological origin:

Basil	Ocimum basilicum	Africa-Asia-India
Wormwood	Artemisia dracunculus	West Asia-South Russia
Cumin	Cuminum cyminum	Mediterranean region
Coriander	Coriandrum sativum	Mediterranean region- South Europe
Dill	Anethum graveolens	Mediterranean region- South Russia
Fennel	Foeniculum vulgare	Mediterranean region- West Europe
Bay	Laurus nobilis	Mediterranean region- Asia
Marjoram	Origanum majorana	Mediterranean region
Mint	Mentha piperita	Mediterranean region- West Europe
Oregano	Origanum vulgare	Mediterranean region
Parsley	Petroselinum crispum	Mediterranean region
Rosemary	Rosmarinum officinalis	Mediterranean region
Sage	Salvia officinalis	Mediterranean region
Thyme	Thymus vulgaris	Mediterranean region

All are now grown in Guatemala, before reaching the processing that will make them available for distribution and application. Around it, an active commercial movement originates that involves producers, distributors and consumers, in a market whose purpose is to achieve the enrichment of foods with natural smells, flavors and colors. The best option to give up harmful chemical cuisine and its plethora of flavoring products, sublimated by massified consumerist advertising.

Inedible ecdemic leaves and preparations thereof

I bring into consideration in this section, the banana leaf, so abundant, common, and used that it seems to have grown along with our meals. It is so old in the country, and some preparations depend so much on it, that many authors have considered it a native species.

Today it is considered an extra-regional origin of the species, Musa paradisiaca, most likely in the center of origin and diversification of South Asian cultivars. There is evidence that it was already known in the wide Mediterranean region by the year 650 AD, which in the fourteenth century passed to Africa from Madagascar and spread its cultivation there. A century later, in the fifteenth century, it burst into the Canary Islands brought from Equatorial Guinea. Once the island cultivation was established and America invaded, in 1516 the Spanish bishop Tomás de Berlanga transported it to Santo Domingo. That was his gateway to America.

Since then, its use has been multiple. Its broad leaves have served very diverse purposes. In terms of gastronomy, they compete with cox and maxa'n in food wrapping, either for cooking or for transportation, storage and consumption. If in the villages the preference is inclined towards the former, in the cities, as in the Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, it is for the banana leaf. It is probably due to greater availability in the market, which has gradually been forging habits.

In tamales, which have double wrapping, the custom of using banana leaf for the interior, usually called calzón, which is the one that comes into direct contact with the body of the food, has also been established. A number of cooks assure that the real wrapping of the paches is the banana leaf; they do so and vehemently defend what they consider to be "the right thing to do". The same happens in the case of the wrapping of chipilín tamales.

In short, in the complex cosmos of Guatemalan popular cuisine, no one has the last word in terms of recipes and procedures. What we all agree on, however, is that the most succulent dishes in the universe spring from it. Among them, of course, those that are made with leaves.

Corollary

There is no doubt that the leaves of vegetables were among the first meals of our most remote ancestors. Probably the species that we eat today began to be used since those times. Millennia of culinary evolution have not altered the taste we feel for them, and although the dishes we now enjoy are different, the gastronomic identity that was forged since very ancient times persists today.

Without intending to push a vegetarian meal, it is worth noting that foliosa preparations are incredibly nutritious and healthy. In general, the leaves provide high doses of provitamins, essential minerals and trace elements (iron, calcium, phosphorus and many more) in easily assimilated forms, fiber and compounds that are their own, some of medicinal value.

Leaves are so ubiquitous in everyday meals that few notice them. These notes were aimed at highlighting their presence, knowing that naming their species leads to seeing the behaviors and behaviors that humans develop in front of them. To value the edible flora in the dimensions that it opens up in their meals, conveying to them qualities that are binding on them: symbolic, magical, religious, mystical, biological, anthropological.

What better example of these values than that of the leaf wrapping of a tamale: it represents the Sun, covering and protecting the man (the flesh), his blood (the recado), placed in Nature (the mass) and embraced by the woman (the cibaque).

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