

## PLANTS USED FOR CUBAN CONFECTIONERY.

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**D**URING a recent trip to Cuba Dr. Edward Palmer made an examination of the various forms of confectionery commonly sold on the streets and in the markets, in so far as it was manufactured from native fruits. He brought with him samples of many different kinds, and on his invitation a committee of local botanists in Washington met one day for the purpose of testing and passing opinion on the various dainties. The opinions herein expressed represent for the most part the judgment of the majority.

The fruits employed by the Cubans in candy manufacture are the more common tropical ones. The cocoanut, guava and cacao (chocolate) are, of course, staples; all the forms of oranges are used, as also the tamarind and the banana, though the latter is utilized purely for mechanical purposes, not as a basis for candy, its large leaves affording excellent wrappers for squares of paste. In addition to these the seeds of the sesame (*Sesamum indicum*), commonly called "benny seeds," are frequently employed.

In the following list the mode of preparation given is derived from original receipts furnished to Dr. Palmer by the candy women, one of whom prepared a special batch suitable for keeping until his return to this country.

1. Cocoanut (*Cocos nucifera*).

a. *Preserve*. This is sold in the Havana market, and is a regular article on the bill of fare of every large hotel in that city, but it is difficult to obtain in other parts of the island. The shredded meat is cooked in the milk of the cocoanut until the latter is about the consistency of thick syrup. The delicate flavor of the cocoanut is thus fully preserved, and the resulting dish is one of the most delicious of sweets.

b. *Candy*. This is sold in cakes of various shapes and sizes. It is white or brown, according to the color of the sugar employed. Though very good when fresh, the oil contained in the cocoanut is apt to turn rancid after a short while, and in this condition the candy is anything but delectable.

2. Cacao or Chocolate (*Theobroma cacao*).

The home-made chocolate candy of Cuba is a very different article from the prepared cakes sold by the various factories there and in the States. The latter contains merely chocolate and sugar, while the ordinary form is cooked with milk, and often contains only a slight flavoring of chocolate.

When used as a beverage chocolate is made very thick, and is eaten in connection with small sugar cakes.

3. Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*).

The tamarind is a member of the Pulse Family or Leguminosae, bearing large, thick pods with two or three seeds, the interstices being filled with a thick glutinous mass, of a pleasant acid flavor. These pods, stewed with sugar, form a thick, very rich preserve of delicious quality, but decidedly cloying to the palate.

4. Orange, bitter and sweet (*Citrus species*).

The bitter orange is cooked in light brown sugar and made into a soft paste, which is cut in squares and neatly wrapped in a banana leaf, tied with vegetable fiber. The sweet orange is cooked with sugar until it crystallizes, and sold in hard cakes, like cocoanut candy. Of these two confections the paste is superior, as the sweet orange is scarcely sufficiently pronounced in flavor to impart a taste to the confection.

5. Guava (*Psidium guayaba*).

This is one of the staple fruits of Cuba, frequently eaten uncooked, but more often made into a jelly (*jalea de guayaba*) or a paste (*pasta de guayaba*). These two "dulces," as they are called, or "sweets," may be found at all stores and markets, and on the bills of fare of nearly all restaurants. The jelly is made like other fruit jellies, but is of a very firm consistency; when fresh and properly prepared it is unsurpassed. The paste is prepared by cooking and mashing the whole fruit, and is more crystalline in texture; it is preferred by some to the other. Both products are put up in long rectangular wooden boxes.

6. Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*).

The seeds of this plant have a distinctive flavor not easily described. One pound of the raw seeds are cooked with twice their weight of sugar and the resulting mixture cut into small squares; or they may be parched and ground before cooking; but to American tastes the latter product is scarcely a success.

In addition to the above list there is a plain candy made of goats' milk and brown sugar which is fairly good when perfectly fresh.

There are no true confectionary stores in Cuba. The home-made candies are sold in the markets or on the street corners by picturesque old negresses, who frequently astonish you with their knowledge of English, and who prove, when questioned, to be natives of Jamaica. There are, however, numerous booths where endless varieties of little cakes and other sweetmeats are sold. In general it must be admitted that the native candies are not the equal of some of those made in our own country.