LAGIKWAY

(Abelmoschus manihot)

INDIGENOUS VEGETABLES OF THE PHILIPPINES

No. 1 / 2018

LAGIKWAY

Abelmoschus manihot (L.) Medikus ssp. *manihot*

English names: Sunset hibiscus, Aibika

Philippine local names: *Lagikway* (Tagalog), *Agitoway, Alikway, Likway* (Visayan), *Barakue* (Batanes), *Glikway* (Subanon), *Gikway, Nating Saluyot*

GET TO KNOW LAGIKWAY

This perennial shrub can grow up to twice as tall as a grown person. Its leaves try to avoid crowding each other by arranging themselves alternately on the branching, woody stems. Now, spread your hands in front of you – that is how the leaves look like, and your forearm could be the petiole (3-25 cm long) that attaches the leaf to the stem. The "fingers" or leaflets, though, can have many different shapes so that there can be variants in the way that Lagikway leaves can look like.

Leaf colors can also be in shades of green, or even red or purple, although Lagikway in the Philippines is generally green.

Lagikway may not be too generous with its large, bell-shaped flowers if the tops are regularly harvested, but there will definitely be more branches – and more of this leafy vegetable to harvest.

SPOTLIGHT ON AN UNDERAPPRECIATED BUT VERSATILE VEGETABLE

In the Philippine countryside, the lowly shrub Lagikway can be found thriving in backyard gardens and along roadsides. Grown primarily as a leafy vegetable, Lagikway is widely believed to be a mystical plant that is endowed with healing, anti-aging and regenerative properties. It is also widely believed in these areas that eating Lagikway regularly contributes to health, well-being and longevity especially among elderly persons, and provides relief from sore throat, stomach ache, inflammation and kidney disorders. The plant is also considered as an aphrodisiac which can enhance an individual's sexual prowess if eaten regularly.

The introduction of Lagikway into the country by Chinese traders is believed to have predated Spanish occupation and the crop has assumed many names such as *lagikway, likway, gikway, agitoway, barakue* and *nating saluyot*. Like this last namesake, Lagikway leaves have a slimy consistency. But unlike saluyot, its more neutral taste makes it blend well with fish, meat or even dishes with *gata* (coconut milk). In the province of Quezon and in the Bicol Region, Lagikway leaves are used in *tinolang manok* (chicken stew), a hot soup dish for mothers who have just given birth. When boiled and mixed with boiled root crops, Lagikway leaves are also given as first solid food for infants. The high dietary fiber content of Lagikway leaves makes them ideal for the preparation of herbal laxatives and food formulations.

Despite the ubiquity and versatility of Lagikway, it has remained an underappreciated and underutilized vegetable. Today is therefore the opportune time for Lagikway to take its place among the major vegetable crops of the Philippines

WHERE LAGIKWAY GROWS

By now, you may realize that Lagikway can actually be found in many places – you just did not notice them before. Thus, it is common to hear locals say that you can find Lagikway "just around the place", or "in the surrounding areas" at any time. It is commonly grown as part of the home garden or as a live fence, along field margins, or along roadsides.

In a tropical country like the Philippines where its rains practically year-round, Lagikway can grow in a wide range of environments. However, it is known to grow best at altitudes below 1200 meters where soils are loamy and well-drained.

HOW TO GROW LAGIKWAY

Lagikway is commonly grown by stem cuttings, preferably with at least 3-4 nodes. These are planted in holes of about 15 cm depth, and spaced one meter apart. Do this at the start of the rainy season so that plants are less stressed and easily grow new leaves.

Cuttings may be planted first in a bag of compost and garden soil where they grow roots, and transplanted into the field after 3-4 weeks. The field must be cleared of weeds, but the newly planted cuttings like some grass mulch. Other annual crops may also be grown between the Lagikway plants.

After about 3 months from planting, monthly harvesting of the shoot tips and young leaves is possible for up to a year.

ENJOY A DISH OF LAGIKWAY AT HOME

Dishes consisting of the young leaves and stem tips of Lagikway have been reported in Southern Tagalog, Western Visayas, and Eastern Visayas regions and in Mindanao.

Here's a quick list of how Lagikway leaves may be used as a vegetable in different dishes:

- In fish *sinigang*, along with other vegetables
- In *ginisang munggo*, it can alternate for *sili* (Capsicum) tops or *alugbati* leaves
- Blanched and served as a salad with soy sauce and *calamansi* dip
- In *lao-uy*, a clear soup of assorted vegetables similar to *inabraw* in the north and the *laswa* or *linapwahan* of the Ilonggos
- Cooked in coconut milk, with other vegetables
- As a wrap for fish or meat
- Dipped in egg and deep-fried, tempura-style

The literature also mentions Lagikway leaves as a thickening agent in soup, or as flour extender in making noodles and bread. If you like the *alugbati* of the Visayans or the *saluyot* of the Ilocanos that make soups thicker and have a sticky consistency, then Lagikway is for you.

Some, though, may be averse to slimy vegetables like the Lagikway, but it is a vegetable that babies can enjoy, too. The World Health Organization says its easy-to-mash, boiled young leaves are also easy to digest and are thus baby-friendly.

DID YOU KNOW?

100-GRAMS OF BOILED LAGIKWAY LEAVES PROVIDE:

92.4	**g**	**water**	**0.7**	**g**	**dietary fiber**
30	**kcal**	**energy**	**120**	**mg**	**calcium**
1.3	**g**	**protein**	**27 mg**		**phosphorus**
0.4	**g**	**fat**	**0.8**	**mg**	**iron**
5.3	**g**	**carbohydrate**	**0.5**	**mg**	**niacin**

Source: Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI). The Philippine Food Composition Tables 1997. p.37. Department of Science and Technology.

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LET'S KEEP LAGIKWAY AROUND

This roadside Lagikway seemed to stand its ground amidst an ongoing road project – but eventually, had to make way for countryside development. Hope of its survival lies in the hands of community members taking home cuttings to plant in their gardens or in their fields. Lagikway is not difficult to grow.

In Laguna, the Vegetable Breeding Section of the Institute of Plant Breeding (IPB), College of Agriculture and Food Science at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) maintains a field collection of germplasm from the provinces of Laguna, Quezon and South Cotabato. Indeed, this seemingly lesser-known and underutilized indigenous vegetable has its share of research and development investment, including crop improvement.

So, let us keep our Lagikway around – along with so many other indigenous Philippine vegetables. After all, our indigenous vegetables are part of countryside development, sustaining local communities with a diversity of nutritious food that is friendly on the budget and on the environment.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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These small pamphlets are intended to spark renewed interest in the conservation, use, production and promotion of Philippine indigenous vegetables that have always been part of Filipino food culture and are key to household food and nutrition security.