



O'AHU - TARO



HAWAII - MACADAMIA NUT



MAUI - 'ULU



O'AHU - KIWIFE



HAWAII - SWEET POTATO



FEATURE
{ SWEET SENSE }

UNIQUE FLOURS IN HAWAI'I

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INNOVATION IS IN THE DOUGH
ACROSS THE ISLANDS

KAUAI - CRICKET

HIDDEN IN OUR CAKE, chips, crackers, crust, cookies, and cereal, flour has found a calling. One of the most important cuisine ingredients in many of the world's cultures, and for some the defining ingredient, flour has become a staple. Many say that humans first became civilized when we began raising food instead of hunting for it, storing grain for later use and preparing it in different ways. There is evidence from 6000 B.C. of wheat seeds having been crushed between simple millstones and flour was made. Grains were traded for other necessities, a system of commerce was put in place, and eventually, crops from very distant fields could provide food for cities (or in our case, islands).

Flour is inexpensive and plentiful and is commonly made from wheat grown across huge swaths of midwestern America. In Hawai'i however, flour in the traditional sense will most likely never be produced. Land here is far too limited and expensive to devote to a crop such as wheat on the commercial scale. Taking into account the warranted concerns over Hawai'i's food security, sustainability, and the questionable nutrition of conventional flour, pioneers across our islands have begun experimenting with turning nontraditional crops into unique forms of flour.

THE SHORT OF IT

Something smells sweet in Hilo. Maria Short has always had a passion for baking. A student of the culinary arts and a former pastry chef for restaurants, catering companies and patisseries, she met her husband, Dien, as a pastry chef instructor, teaching Merchant Marines how to bake. Together they endeavored on Short N Sweet Bakery, opening in Hāwī on Hawai'i island 15 years ago then moving to a larger facility in Hilo in 2010.

"Several years ago, a friend started producing macadamia nut oil. He came to me with the by-product of the oil production, macadamia nut 'cake' and because I don't like to waste food, especially macadamia nuts, we started making the flour in small quantities," Maria explains. "Since then, Dien has been able to source enough macadamia nut cake that we need a commercial mill. It's amazing to me that what we are producing now would have been used as compost or worse yet, thrown away."

The macadamia nut flour has a warm, toasty flavor and a hint of sweetness. It was successfully used in her shortbreads, pie crusts and puff paste. Maria's resourcefulness was kindled.

"Once we got the mill we started thinking about all the other agricultural by-products that are considered waste and we came up with the Okinawan sweet potato flour. The sweet potatoes that we mill are the 'offs.' They

are normally undersized, or not pretty enough for the retail market, so they were just being tilled under."

Short N Sweet's now famous Hawaiian sweetbread is made in the Portuguese style and utilizes their hydrated sweet potato flour for a soft texture and an earthy yet sweet taste. Maria has plans to experiment with 'ulu, green papaya, coconut, kalo, and banana flours in the future.

Less than an hour away, on the slopes of Mauna Kea Volcano, Ahualoa Farm's macadamia nut trees sparkle under the sun. Parallel to Maria Short's technique, they take their mac nut pieces and press out the oil (which they also bottle and sell); flour is the result. The culinary possibilities are then endless: panko crust on fish, pesto, an addition to smoothies, pie or pizza crusts. The flour is made every week and is sold at farmer's markets and retail stores across the islands to allow for the creative home chef to experiment with macadamia nut flour too.

A BUG'S AFTERLIFE

Lourdes Torres calls them her "star ingredient," though they're a bit jumpy. For the last four years, she has run Sustainable Boost on Kaua'i, producing nutritionally dense flours and powders that are low impact and high yield. Among less eyebrow-raising flours such as green banana, turmeric, ginger and pacific spinach, Lourdes also produces a cricket and taro blend.

"I want to bring back some incredibly nutritious and delicious foods that have been living in obscurity," says Lourdes. "The United Nations has been talking about insects as viable crops for decades. They should not be seen as only a food for famine, but instead as a super sustainable crop which provides the highest quality protein of any food on the planet. They utilize only a tiny bit of natural resources and produce a ton of nutrients."

The concept of insects as food tends to be misconstrued, especially in America. While our precious lobster, shrimp and crab get a hefty price tag and a quality of indulgence, they are actually closely related to insects, just the sea-dwelling variety. Crickets are the most easily digestible protein on the planet, provide ten times more Omegas than salmon and an incredible amount of B12. Lourdes raises hers on a rich, plant-based diet and the final product is almost undetectable in foods, save for a mild, nutty flavor. She adds the flour to guacamole, oatmeal, hummus, soups, and calls it "magic dust" for smoothies.

"Some are predicting that insects will save the planet and I share that belief," Lourdes says. If edible crickets could lose their stigma, it would mean more people eating eco-friendly, high quality protein, produced using less water

