

Beyond the smoothie – UP launches papaya-inspired recipe book

The Department of Consumer and Food Sciences at the University of Pretoria (UP) has launched a 376-page recipe book celebrating the vibrant tropical fruit papaya. *Beyond the Smoothie: Papaya Recipes for Every Occasion*, written by UP Culinary Arts lecturer Dr Hennie Fisher, is being launched during June to mark Papaya Month.

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According to the author, the book is a colourful tribute not only to papayas, but to the creativity and resilience that can take root even in the most uncertain of times. At the height of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, while most of the world grappled with uncertainty and isolation, Dr Fisher was stuck at home with crates of papayas and a request to create recipes. Five years later, what began as a project born out of curiosity has grown into a serious, flavour-filled publication.

“Most of us think of papayas only as a component of breakfast, or as a key ingredient in a delicious smoothie,” he says, “however, even though it is the ideal breakfast fruit, being refreshing, invigorating, and not overly sweet, it has much, much more to offer. This recipe book sets out to show that papaya has places to go beyond the smoothie!”

The idea for the book began with a simple request, Dr Fisher explains: “Papaya farmer Willem Schmidt from Neofresh approached me to develop a few recipes for their website. Neither of us could have imagined that this would blossom into a full-length book. What started as a small culinary experiment soon became a deeper exploration of an underrated fruit – one that is often overlooked once breakfast is done.”

His curiosity took over as he tested and tasted his way through countless ideas, along the way discovering both the challenges and the surprising versatility of papaya. Its high moisture content and low sugar levels made recipe development tricky, but not impossible. From wrapping cakes in papaya fruit leather to creating savoury salads and vibrant dressings, the journey revealed just how much potential this tropical fruit holds.

Behind the recipes lies a story of a cook who never stopped exploring. From earning a science degree at

UP to cooking in kitchens across London and Hong Kong, Dr Fisher's path has always been shaped by a hunger to understand food more deeply. With this book, he brings together that global experience and his passion for teaching to offer home cooks something refreshingly different – a new way of looking at papaya

He offered some examples of the categories and recipes to be found in the book:

- **Starters and first courses: Feta savoury cheesecake (p 14)**

“Most savoury cheesecakes are baked, so that the eggs used in them can coagulate, creating a firm product that can be cut,” Dr Fisher writes. “This savoury cheesecake is not baked, but is rather a frigid cheesecake, due to the papaya that is included. Papaya does not react well to heat, losing its elegant freshness. In this recipe, that freshness is retained along with delicious citrusy flavours, a bit of bite from onions, and richness from cream cheese and feta.”

- **Main courses: Papaya, red cabbage and crisp-crust chicken wraps (p 78)**

“Chicken in a crust is something South Africans, along with much of the rest of the Western world, cannot get enough of,” Dr Fisher says. “In this recipe, plain shop-bought rotis are used as wraps – but be adventurous if you dare and place the same filling in a warmed-up pita, or in an Iranian lavash, all of which are readily available in South Africa today,” Dr Fisher writes. “The piping hot crispy chicken should not sit around – this is a meal that should be assembled at the speed of light, so that one has a nicely warmed-up wrap, coleslaw, fresh papaya and herbs, all working together for an explosion of taste.”

- **Desserts: Tiramisu (p 200)**

“The delight on people's faces when you present them with tiramisu never fails to lift one's spirits,” Dr Fisher writes. “The traditional combination of mascarpone cream and coffee-soaked biscuits could have originated in culinary heaven. However, this recipe for a variation on the classic, which includes slices of fresh papaya, most certainly also does not disappoint – in fact, now and again a big portion of traditional tiramisu might be a little too rich. In this recipe, the fresh papaya cuts some of that richness and adds a hint of further interest.”

The recipes in the book also fall into the categories Salads and platters, Snacks, savouries and side dishes, Confectionaries and sweets, Sweet baked items, and Drinks.

Did you know – all about papayas

- Papaya is more than just a sweet fruit. Every part of the plant, from the leaves and seeds to the ripe and unripe fruit, has been used for its health benefits. It has been shown to help the immune system, reduce inflammation, and support healing.
- South African scientist Dr Aart Louw, a University of Pretoria alumnus and respected papaya breeding specialist, developed around 90% of the small, sweet, orange- or red-fleshed papayas commonly sold in South African supermarkets. He initiated a papaya breeding programme in 1993.
- Although the exact origin is unclear, papaya most likely comes from Central America. Spanish explorers helped spread it across the world. Today, it is grown in many warm countries, including South Africa.
- There are many varieties, with names like Solo, Maradol, and Singapore Pink. Some have been specially bred to bring out certain colours, flavours, or sizes.
- The papaya tree is unique, too – it grows fast, does not usually have branches, and can be male,

female, or both, depending on the environment.

- Papaya needs warm temperatures to grow well. In the right conditions, it can start producing fruit in under a year. If you live in a part of South Africa where winters are not too cold, you could even grow a tree at home.
- Papayas ripen quickly, which makes them difficult to store and transport. In South Africa, farmers use fungicide baths and wax coatings to help them last longer. The fruit is sorted into different grades: top quality ones go to supermarkets, while the others are used for juice or sold by street vendors.

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