

Asian Markets of Philadelphia

*Extraordinary food finds among
Philadelphia's Asian Grocery Stores*

Edible Southeast Asian tree and bush leaves

Posted on [January 5, 2017](#) by [David Dettmann](#)



Tips of of the Moringa or Drumstick tree

Happy New Year greetings! Although I wasn't able to post as much as I would have liked to in 2016, I was able to continue my careful exploration of interesting finds at our MANY Asian markets in Philadelphia (I now estimate there to be around 80 markets). In particular, I spent considerable time and energy this year getting acquainted with cooking with more obscure tree and bush leaves.

Over the course of this blog I have been hinting at the incredible edible plant diversity in mainland Southeast Asia with posts discussing [fresh herbs](#), [edible flowers](#), edible [vine leaves](#), and [long leaf green vegetables](#). As incredible as that selection is (even in Philadelphia), that is still the tip of the iceberg for edible plants of Southeast Asia.



Sweet leaf bush (in Thai: *phak waan baan* ผักหวานบ้าน)

If you visit Southeast Asian markets of South Philly's 7th Street (see [here](#) for my introduction to that area), or the [Seng Hong market](#) of upper North Philadelphia's Logan neighborhood, you'll be stunned by the variety of atypical edible greens. Vines, leaves, pods, and sometimes flowers.

I am inspired to learn how to cook with these less commonly used items. Each one has unique flavor and texture profiles, and each one is unique... they don't all taste like spinach or grass.

As I post on interesting market finds going forward in the coming year, this focus on more obscure edible greens will be a sub-theme.

Eventually, these finds will also make their way into my Green Vegetable and Herb Guide. Until then, enjoy a few recent highlights of my exploration!



I know this one from Isaan... *phak gadone* ผักกระโดน. It is a sour tree leaf that is delicious to eat with laab, papaya salad, and sticky rice.

Many of the bush leaves and vines that can be found are great in bland soups or omelettes. Here are examples of leaf inclusion in a Lao-style chicken and rice stew (I posted on a [similar kind of soup](#) previously)—this time I am using chile pepper leaves. Notice the tiny chiles still attached in some places! To use these in cooking, simply detach the leaves from the stem. They are great as a mild-flavored vegetable accompaniment:





Together with that stew, I am making an omelette with moringa, or drumstick tree leaves. Leaves of this tree are commonly used in Southeast Asia, and the long pods (drumsticks) are commonly used in India and Southern Thailand. In Thailand, these leaves are called *marum* sprigs ยอดมะรุม. These leaves are a tiny bit sour, but have a nice flavor when paired with something savory. In this case, it is a couple of eggs and a good squirt of fish sauce. Again, simply pull the leaves off the stem to use.



Finally, you can also use leaves like you would herbs, as final ingredients in stir fry dishes. Here is an example of “Sweet Leaf” (literally *phak waan baan* ผักหวานบ้าน in Thai)—this one’s stems were a bit tough, I’d probably remove them next time. Flavor was delicious though as a sturdy and mild flavored leaf:





More to come in 2017!



About David Dettmann

Food obsessed and frequently nostalgic.

[View all posts by David Dettmann →](#)

This entry was posted in - [Featured Food Discoveries](#), - [Featured Markets](#), [Cambodian food](#), [Indian food](#), [Thai/Lao food](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

3 Responses to *Edible Southeast Asian tree and bush leaves*



Sue ram says:

May 7, 2018 at 3:39 pm

You need to look for a weed called “manathangali” (Tamil) grows in the streets on the dirt sides of neworleans. They call it gold because of its nutrition. Small night shade plant with purple edible fruits. Plants are about a foot or two high. Not bushy stems branch out ugly. Leaves fruits are used in cooking little bitter leaves but combined with dials coconut and spices and eaten with rice its delicious. Common in south India. look for the botanical and English name for manathangali.

★ Liked by [1 person](#)

[Reply](#)



Victoria says:

July 21, 2020 at 8:39 am

I was reading this older post when I was reminded that the Central Asian Koreans (koryo-saram) use chili pepper leaves too. They usually pickle them in salt, sometimes adding whole green peppers too. These salted pepper leaves can be stored for a long time and before using they need to be soaked well. They can be used to make a type of namul. They are also delicious added to one of the most popular Koryo-saram stews/soups called Puktyai (the closest equivalent is the southern Korean Daenjang Jjigae, except that Puktyai can include eggplant, potato, cilantro and tomatoes.)

I need to see if our local Asian store has them, since it often carries unusual greens. My strategy is similar to yours—I buy whatever I haven’t yet tried and then come home to figure out how to make it.

★ Like

[Reply](#)



[David Dettmann](#) says:

July 21, 2020 at 9:01 am

Thanks for the tip Victoria! I’m not familiar with pepper leaves in any of the foods you referenced, but they sounds fascinating and certainly worth looking in to!

★ Like

[Reply](#)

