

## ***Jus de gingembre***

One of the many good things about Senegal was the widespread availability of fresh fruit, root and flower juices, typically sold in small plastic bags by smiley, buxom ladies on street corners. At first perplexed as to how one drinks from a plastic bag, we soon learnt you nip off a corner with your teeth and then suck out the delicious juice as you continue round the market. Nothing could be better on a hot, dusty day.



Ginger was our favourite; its intense zinginess can't fail to jolt you awake and fill you with an overwhelming sense of vitality. Also excellent were *bouye* (made from the fruit of the giant baobab tree), *ditakh* (some kind of cucumery tasting fruit we never identified), and *bissap* (infused with dried, crimson hibiscus flowers, often with mint).

Sadly most places geared up for foreigners served only Coca-Cola and the like, and we met travelers who'd somehow managed to cross Senegal without even realising these wonderful natural juices existed. But we became addicted to them (while bearing in mind the seller's likely water source).



Aside from the obvious economic benefits (our *CFA* went directly to the women who made our drinks), there were health benefits too. *Gingembre* is widely recognised to give energy, stimulate the appetite and aid digestion, while *bouye* is said to soothe tummy trouble – in fact we met a man who swore it cured the runs.



These real juices reflect the crops and wild foods in this part of West Africa. They must be just a few of the thousands of natural, local drinks around the world which find themselves in competition with the almighty and ubiquitous Coca-Cola. Practically the only hotel we found serving '*jus locaux*' was the wonderful Hotel le Djenné in Bamako, owned by Aminata Traoré, Mali's former Minister of Culture. Known for her strong anti-globalisation stance, Aminata would never serve Coca-Cola.

At our final destination, Green Turtle Lodge in Ghana, we made rounds of *gingembre* and *bissap* for friends on the beach. I pounded ginger from Takoradi market with my enormous Senegalese mortar and pestle (thus proving to Matt how useful the four giant mortars I had purchased would be). The juices went down a treat with a heavy lacing of Burkinabé rum.



**Serves: 4-6**

**Time: 45 mins (of which 30 sunbathing)**

200g fresh, chubby root ginger, washed

1 litre water

approx 100g caster sugar

vanilla essence (optional)



1. Scrape skin off ginger. Using a teaspoon is easier and less wasteful than using a knife. It doesn't have to be perfect.
2. Roughly chop ginger and then pound to a coarse pulp using a mortar and pestle. A deep wooden one works best, but any will do. The juices should start to run. Alternatively use a blender or processor, using a little water if needed to get it going.
3. Scrape ginger into a bowl and add water, washing out mortar as you do to catch all the gingery goodness. Give it a stir.
4. Let stand 30 minutes or more while you build up a thirst in the sunshine.
5. Strain through a fine-meshed sieve, then stir in sugar to taste until dissolved. Dilute if too fiery for you, and add a few drops of vanilla if you like (or use vanilla sugar).
6. Serve chilled with ice. Leftover juice will keep in a bottle in the fridge for a day or two, but quickly loses its vibrancy.
7. NB: If you don't want to waste the leftover ginger pulp, use it to make a second infusion, or spread out to dry in the sun then grind it to a powder, sieve and add to your spice collection.

