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**ECO NEWS**  
FOR SCHOOLS ON NEVIS  
Nevis Historical & Conservation Society

The Nevis Historical and Conservation Society exists to promote the effective management of the historical, cultural and natural resources of the island of Nevis for the benefit of all its people.

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Love it or hate it, the curiously sour taste of sorrel is one you'll always remember. And whether it's one of your favourite flavours – or you absolutely loathe it – it simply wouldn't be Christmas in the Caribbean without it.

## ORIGINS OF SORREL

With the botanical name of **hibiscus sabdariffa**, sorrel is believed to have originated from West Africa. Sorrel must have been familiar to enslaved Africans in the West Indies, as the dark red drink made from this pretty plant was popular in their native continent.



## THE DRINK WITH MANY NAMES

Reflecting its African legacy, sorrel drink in Nigeria is called **Zobo drink**, while in Senegal and Burkina Faso it's known as **bissap**. In Egypt, sorrel is **karkade**– the drink of the Pharaohs. And in Central America, sorrel's rather romantically dubbed **Rosa de Jamaica**. One of the most amusing names is **currant currant**– the drink that is so good they named it twice in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

## WHY IS SORREL ASSOCIATED WITH CHRISTMAS?

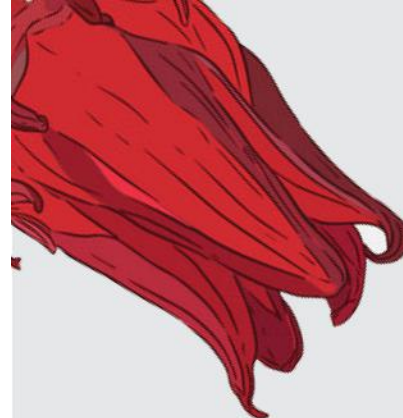
Sorrel is a classic drink for the Christmas holiday, adding colour and cheer to the festivities. Its tangy savour – sometimes with rum added by grown-ups to give it a bit of zip – can be served hot or cold.

The sorrel plant is a '**short day plant**', which means it flowers when the days become shorter over the last three months of the year.

Farmers and gardeners typically plant the crop in August or September – or even earlier if there's enough rain to keep it moist. Sorrel plants are then fully-grown by November when they begin to flower. At this time, the yellow flowers resemble hibiscus or cotton.

After flowering, the petals drop, but the **sepals** remain around the plant's seedpod. At this rainy time of year, they become thick, scarlet and juicy until they are picked in December – just in time for Christmas.

We should be proud of sorrel grown on Nevis. Unlike many other things enjoyed throughout the yuletide season, such as Christmas trees and turkeys, we don't import sorrel. It's a plant that thrives on our little island and is a big part of the culture.



## QUIZ

What do you know about sorrel?

Where does sorrel grow on Nevis?

Why do people drink it at Christmas?

What other drinks do Nevisians enjoy at this time of year?

What is the derivation of the word sorrel?

Does your family have a special sorrel recipe? If so, what is it?



rum. Arrange cheesecloth on top of parchment paper, and un-mould cake onto it. Sprinkle top and sides of cake with remaining rum. Wrap cheesecloth closely to the surface of the cake, then wrap with paper.

Place in an airtight tin, and age for at least 10 weeks. If storing longer, douse with additional rum every 10 weeks.

## HO, HO, HO

Other drinks are popular on Nevis at Christmas, including:

**Ginger beer** Europeans brought ginger – along with tobacco and indigo – to the island. Before the cultivation of sugar cane, this Asian import was grown on the **Hermitage Estate**, in **Rawlins** and elsewhere in **Gingerland**. Used in sorrel drink and sugar cake, this once indigenous root is now imported mainly from Dominica.

**Mawby (mauby, mabi or Colubrina Ellipta)**. The name of this distinctive bitter-tasting drink made from mawby bark is thought to derive from the Amerindian language. Golden in colour, it's blended with orange peel, cinnamon, mace, cloves, brown sugar and water.

**Sasparilla** From the **smilax ornata plant**, as well as being a delicious thirst-quencher, sasparilla can be used to treat skin diseases, and protect the liver and kidney.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Sorrel is also a girl's name originating from the old French word "sur", which means sour. It also means "reddish-brown hair", a reference to the plant's russet-coloured seeds. "Surele" is the equivalent of sorrel.



Sorrel plants at Bath Village Farm

## SORREL SOWER

**Navita Persaud** grows sorrel at her farm near Bath Village along with okra, eggplant, passion fruit and other produce.

"I plant sorrel seeds in June every year and reap the crop in September or October," she explains. "There are a lot of varieties and you do see the white version on Nevis, but people want the red one for Christmas."

Navita says sorrel isn't difficult to grow. "It

holds up and doesn't need a lot of attention." She adds that some people dry and preserve the plant, but she picks and sells it fresh in the market.

As well as sorrel drink, Navita says there are other scrumptious uses for the plant: pie, cake, jam, jelly, mousse, ice cream and even an ingredient in smoothies.

\* Old traditions carry into the modern age, with sorrel sold in local supermarkets, such as Rams, with all the ingredients and instructions required to create the drink packaged in one bag.

## SORREL IS GOOD FOR YOU

Sorrel is thought to be 'full of virtues', as it's rich in **polyphenols** (micronutrients) which help eliminate harmful **toxins** from the body. It also promotes blood fluidity – excellent for reducing **hypertension** (abnormally high blood pressure) and reducing the risk of **cardiovascular** (heart) disease.

In a recent study at Boston University, researchers found that drinking three cups of sorrel (bissap) juice a day for at least six weeks reduced systolic **blood pressure** by more than 7%.

A miracle plant of sorts, Sorrel's full of vitamins, proteins, minerals and **antioxidants**. It's used as a diuretic (to help pass urine), digestive and antiseptic and can help prevent **urinary tract infections**.



## SORELL DRINK RECIPE

with thanks to Chef Michael Henville from  
Charlestown Primary School

Boil ½ tsp ground cinnamon, ¼ tsp ground (or about 12) cloves, 1 tbsp fresh ginger root, peeled and chopped (or ¼ tsp ground)

ginger and bay leaves with 2 cups of dried sorrel flower sepals in 10-12 cups of water for about 10 minutes until the water turns red. Then leave it to cool and soak for at least 24 hours, but preferably a few days. Add 1½ cups white or brown sugar and vanilla essence. Serve it chilled, with or without rum. Makes about 10 servings.

## BLACK CAKE

Black cake, frequently served with sorrel drink, is a West Indian twist on classic English Christmas pudding, "with some slight changes – hence the rum", says Guyanese historian Sushima Naraine.

If you'd like to make this dense fruit and nut Caribbean Christmas speciality, here's a recipe **The Hermitage Plantation Inn** has kindly provided.

### Ingredients:

1/8 cup chopped dried cherries	1 egg
1/8 cup chopped dried mango	1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup dried cranberries	1/8 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 cup dried currants	1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons chopped candied citron	1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 cup dark rum	1/4 cup molasses
1/2 cup butter	2 tablespoons milk
1/4 cup packed brown sugar	1/4 cup chopped pecans
	1/4 cup dark rum, divided

### Method:

Soak cherries, mango, cranberries, currants, and candied citrus peel in ¼ cup of rum for at least 24 hours. Cover and store at room temperature. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C). Butter a 6x3-inch round or loaf pan and line with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, cream together butter and brown sugar until fluffy. Beat in egg. Whisk together flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon; mix into butter and sugar in three batches, alternating with molasses and milk. Stir in soaked fruit and chopped nuts. Scrape batter into prepared pan.

Bake in preheated oven for 40-45 minutes.

Cool in the pan for 10 minutes and sprinkle with 2 tablespoons rum.

Cut out one piece parchment paper and one piece cheesecloth, each large enough to wrap around the cake. Moisten cheesecloth with 1 tablespoon