

South Florida Tropicals: Carambola¹

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“Golden Star” is the most common tart variety grown commercially in South Florida.

Young carambola trees may be damaged or killed at temperatures below 29°F. Because of this, commercial production is centered in South Florida (i.e., Miami-Dade, Broward, and Lee counties).

Carambola trees produce golden yellow fruit with 4 to 6 ribs that, when sliced in cross sections, are star-shaped. That’s how “star fruit” got its name.

Availability

Carambolas flower and fruit several times during the year. The fruit is generally available from July through March.

Selection

Carambolas vary in length from 4 to 5 inches and are about 2½ to 3 inches in diameter. A waxy rind encloses juicy pulp which is tart or sweet depending on the variety. The flesh of a carambola is crisp, with a distinctive flavor.

Background

The carambola or star fruit (*Averrhoa carambola*) is native to Southeast Asia. It was introduced in Florida about 100 years ago. There are two types of carambola: sweet and tart. “Arkin” is the most common sweet variety and

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Tree-ripened carambolas have superior flavor. When most of the tinges of green are gone and the fruit takes on a glowing gold appearance, it is ready for use.

Ripen carambolas at room temperature, and refrigerate them in covered containers or plastic bags. Normally they keep 2 weeks or more in the refrigerator, but the sooner they are eaten, the better the flavor.

Uses

Carambolas are best used fresh in salads or just on their own. Although they may be frozen, pickled or preserved, their delicate flavor is not enhanced by any of these preserving methods.

Nutritive Value

Carambolas are low in calories, and a good source of potassium and vitamin C. They also contribute small amounts of other minerals and vitamins.

One cup of raw carambola contains:

91% water
45 calories
trace protein
trace fat
11 grams carbohydrate
310 iu vitamin A
29 mg. vitamin C
223 mg potassium

Source: USDA NDB Number 09060

Food Safety During Preparation

- Following these steps will help reduce your risk of foodborne illness.
- Wash hands with hot soapy water before and after:
 - handling fresh produce
 - handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
 - using the bathroom
 - changing diapers
 - handling pets
- Wash fresh carambola fruit with cool tap water just before preparing or eating. **Don't use soap or detergents.**
- Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Table 1.

To Sanitize
Mix one teaspoon unscented chlorine bleach in one quart water.
Pour the mixture onto surface and let sit at least one minute.
Rinse well with hot running water.

- Don't cross contaminate! Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce. If you can, use a separate cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.
- Use a cooler with ice or ice gel packs when you take perishable foods outdoors. This includes cut fresh fruits and vegetables.

To Freeze Carambolas

Pack fresh slices of carambola in airtight containers and cover with cold syrup made from equal portions of water and sugar. Leave ½ inch headspace. Seal, label, and store at 0°F

Alternate method: Instead of using water and sugar, layer the slices and sprinkle with sugar after each layer. Leave ½ inch headspace and store in the same manner as the water and sugar pack.

NOTE: Freezing carambolas does not improve the look of the outer skin. Use frozen slices to float in punch or as a garnish.

Using Carambolas

Tropicals vary in natural pectin, acid, and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate.

Carambola Fruit Salad

1 sliced, seeded carambola with brown edges removed
1 orange, peeled and sliced
1 banana, sliced
Juice of 1 lime

Lightly mix fruit with lime juice. Serve cold over lettuce leaves or as fruit cups.

Carambola Slices

- Float carambola stars in a punch bowl or in beverage glasses.
- Garnish baked ham or turkey with sugared carambola slices. Brown in oven before serving.
- Sauté with chicken, shrimp or meat.

Carambola Pie

1 quart sliced ripe carambolas
1 cup sugar
¼ cup quick cooking tapioca
2 Tbsp. butter or margarine
Nutmeg to taste
Pastry for 2 pie crusts

Prepare carambolas by cutting off the edges of the ridges. Remove seeds and slice in ½-inch slices. Combine tapioca and sugar and lightly mix with sliced fruit*.

Line a 9-inch pie pan with pastry. Spread prepared fruit over pastry. Dot with small pieces of butter and sprinkle with nutmeg. Roll the top pastry so it will be large enough to make a good seal. Cut gashes to allow steam to escape.

Bake in a pre-heated oven at 425°F about 35 minutes, or until pastry is golden brown.

*Add ¼ cup of lime juice if carambolas are very sweet.

Carambola Pickles

4 cups carambola slices
1½ cups sugar
½ cup vinegar
1 stick cinnamon
½ teaspoon whole cloves

Place carambola slices in glass jar or bowl. Make a syrup of sugar, vinegar, and spices. Bring to a boil and pour over carambola slices. Let stand overnight in the refrigerator. Next day, drain off syrup and bring to a boil. Place carambola slices in hot, sterilized jars and pour boiling syrup over, leaving ½ inch headspace. Wipe jar mouths and adjust lids. Process in boiling water-bath canner 10 minutes.

Chicken Salad with Carambola

Prepare a standard chicken salad recipe. Cut the ribs off one or two carambola (do not use central part with seeds). Then dice these ribs, making small chunks. Add to chicken salad. The piquant carambola and bland chicken make a refreshing combination. Serve with romaine or iceberg lettuce.

Carambola Juice

2 quarts sliced carambola

Wash carambola carefully in cold water. Cut into small pieces. Blender chop a few pieces at a time until carambolas are converted into a thick puree. Strain juice through a fine sieve. Serve carambola juice these ways:

CARAMBOLADE - Dilute with water (use about 1 cup of juice for every 2 cups of water). Add sugar if carambolas are sour. Serve over cracked ice. Garnish with thin carambola slices.

CARAMBOLA PUNCH - Sweeten juice to taste and freeze in ice cube trays. Serve 2 or 3 frozen carambola cubes in ginger ale. Garnish with fresh carambola slices.

Carambola Bread

1¾ cups flour
1 tsp. salt (optional)
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1/3 cup cooking oil
½ tsp. each: cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice
¾ cup brown sugar
1½ tsp. soda
6 to 8 carambolas
1 tsp. vanilla

Cut and remove seeds from fruit and process to fine puree; retain juice to make 2 cups. Combine above ingredients in large bowl and blend well; add fruit puree. Pour into a greased pan 9x5x2½ inches and bake at 350°F for 1 hour or until done (soft - aldenté).