

IGBO NEW YAM FESTIVAL "IRI JI OHUU"

Yam is a tropical plant grown in Igboland in the Eastern part of Nigeria known in Europe as "*Maniok- root*". As Yam is a precious plant to the Igbos, many ceremonies and preparations are involved in the planting and harvesting of this basic food for Africans.



Yam for the Igbos is regarded as a special gift from God, and it plays a central and vital role in their lives. The origin of yam and its cultivation dates back beyond memory and is as old as the Igbo race. There also is a common belief that the God of Yam taught the Igbo ancestors the tradition of yam and other related activities surrounding it.

To the Igbos yam is more than food, in the traditional Igbo society it is a standard measurement of one's wealth. For a man's wealth is being measured by the number of yam barns he owns. Equally, yam plays a vital role in Igbo social life such as in marriages, child birth, etc.

Because of all those reasons the Igbos believe that yam is not something that can just be cultivated and consumed without any formality or ceremony. Igbos believe that certain ceremonies and rituals have to be performed to thank God and in His honour before the newly harvested yam can be eaten.



The Igbos are proud of and known for their rich cultural heritage. Among it the New Yam Festival – *Iri ji ohuu* ranks highly and is an important and indispensable tradition in Igboland. It dates back all the way to our far ancestors and is still practiced today.

In the New Yam Festival the Igbos thank God for protecting them from the planting to the harvesting season. As the New Yam Festival marks the beginning of the yam harvest, it is also a time for praying for a plentiful crop.

In the festival the new yam is welcomed into the homes and pots of the people. Above all the new yam is being formally presented to the "God of the Yam" who is called "Njoku or Ajokuji".



The yam festival is celebrated yearly and is a must before the new yam can be prepared in many different delicious recipes and be consumed. People believe that if they fail to honour the festival the omission may lead to a poor harvest or even natural disaster which in turn will lead to famine striking the whole land and its people.

There is the general believe that any person who eats the new yam before the traditional rituals are performed in the festival might die or suffer from serious sickness or at least from sore throat and cough.

Since the belief in the ancestors is central in Igbo religion and philosophy, this festival marks an opportunity for every family to thank their ancestors for their protection and assistance during the planting season and ask for more blessings and protection in the future. The festival is an arena through which peace and understanding is fostered in Igbo families. Families visit each other in this time of festivity and exchange gifts.

At the same time it is a time for reconciliation. Those who are quarrelling will usually try to make peace in this period. Those who have offended the God of Yam in one way or the other will use this time to ask for forgiveness and will appease the god.

The New Yam Festival is annually performed in the eighth month of the Igbo calendar and there are elaborate preparations before the actual event. The day of the occasion is a joyous and happy day in all areas of Igboland and all over the world wherever Igbos live and reside and is marked by colourful cultural dance performances to please the God of Yam.



On this day the head of the family assisted by the elders will perform all the rituals and ceremonies Once he has formally presented the new yam to the God of the Yam – *Njoku of Ajokuji* and asked for his permission to eat the new yam, the yam is declared fit and good for consumption.

A dish of roasted new yam is prepared for and served to the elders. The first yam is prepared in many different forms and dishes and the day is a day of happy yam consumption for everyone.

We hope you enjoyed this explanation of our traditional New Yam Festival "Iri ji ohuu"!

Chief Joseph U.C. Dim
IGBO National Union President



IGBO tradition

Ome na ani Igbo
Traditionelle Chief Symbole