



Meet a Special Mother - Jovencia Belen



Written by her daughter Erlinda: I grew up on a small rural farm in the Philippines with 7 other siblings. My Mom, Jovencia, would take our freshly picked vegetables and sell them at Carbon Market. The largest market in Cebu City and the oldest in the Central Visayas. A bustling open-air market offering local produce and seafood fresh off the boat. As a little girl, I would help her by carrying a basket full of eggplant, okra, tomato, long green beans

and our special taro. Taro grew the best on our hillside farm, and it was nice seeing the smiles of customers finally holding our giant taro. Taro can get pretty big! We didn't have chairs so we would stand or sit next to our baskets and sell every single vegetable which would usually take 5 hours. The taste and simplicity bring me back to my childhood. It was a time when it was just my mom, her little girl, and a basket of taro.

Utan Visaya (Vegetable Soup)

A Special Philippines' soup that she made often during the summer months.

3 quarts water
1 thumb-sized ginger, peeled and crushed
2 stalks fine crushed or ground lemongrass
2 cloves crushed garlic
1 small onion, coarsely chopped
2 cups cubed squash kabocha peeled
2 cups cubed taro peeled
10 pcs string long green beans, cut into 2 inches long pieces
2 cups sliced Asian eggplant (or 1 medium)
1 large tomato, chopped
10 pcs okra, ends trimmed and cut in half
1 tbsp fish sauce
1 tsp salt or according to your taste
1/2 tsp ground black pepper or according to your taste
2 handfuls of spinach
Serve with: cooked rice or fried fish

Directions:

- Fill pot with water and throw in crushed ginger, lemongrass, garlic and onions. Bring to a boil over medium high heat. This should take about 10 minutes
- Lower heat and simmer for about 5 minutes.
- Throw in the squash, taro, green beans, and eggplant. Bring to a boil and simmer for another 5 minutes.
- Add the tomatoes and okra and cook for about 2-3 minutes.
- Season with fish sauce, salt, and pepper
- Turn off heat and add the spinach. Stir to mix.
- Let soup stand for a few minutes before serving.
- Serve it into individual soup bowls and warm cup of rice. Fried fish is another good choice.

Cook's Note: .Our lemongrass was very dry and didn't soften. If this is a problem for you, I would suggest grating or fine chopping it. This soup is so delicious and very healthy too.

About the Recipe: Growing up on a vegetable farm means you perfect the vegetable soup. Utan Visaya (vegetable soup) is my mom's most cooked recipe. My Mom would serve it with rice or fried fish bought fresh from the market. We would add new vegetables here and there to keep things new. Just remember to use a big taro straight from the hillside! That's what makes this a Jovencia classic.