



CRIOLLA TASTING

By Angela J. Cassity

On Thanksgiving, November 2015, Tim Kazmierczak, a Horticulturist at United States Potato Genebank, Sturgeon Bay and his wife, L’Erin Kazmierczak, graciously hosted a potato tasting party featuring four strains of Criolla, a Columbian potato, as compared to Skagit Valley and Yukon Gold, as the ‘control group’.

The potatoes involved in the tasting were grown by Hancock Research Station, Hancock and by Curzio Caravati of Kenosha Potato Project, Kenosha.

Other participants included Dr. John Bamberg, Director of International Gene bank, Sturgeon Bay, along with his wife, Ingrid, and son, Joe, a chef for the Wisconsin Club, Glendale. Curzio Caravati and I, Angela Cassity, both members of the Kenosha Potato Project, also attended.

This was an educational and quite successful venture into evaluating the vagaries of rating and comparing potato flavors, textures and colors.

In a blind taste test of Criolla #5, Criolla #8R+, Criolla #9 and Criolla #12, along with the benchmarks, Skagit Valley and Yukon Gold, the seven tasters displayed their individual preferences in regards to amount of bitterness versus

sweetness flavors of the skin/flesh as well as the flaky versus waxy or creamy textures of each kind of potato.

The goal of growing different strains of Criolla potato is to find a strain that produces well in the Midwest or other parts of the United States and is similar in taste, texture, and appearance to the Criolla lovingly remembered and coveted by Colombian Americans craving for a fresh local Criolla to cook up in their festive traditional dish of Ajiaco Colombiano.

Ajiaco (ah-hee-AH-coh) Colombiano is a thick potato soup, stewed with pulled chicken, corn and three distinct types of potatoes: papas

Above: (L) Curzio Caravati, Kenosha Potato Project and (R) Dr. John Bamberg, Director of United States Potato Genebank Gene bank, Sturgeon Bay, enjoy the camaraderie at Tim and L’Erin Kazmierczak’s Thanksgiving Criolla potato tasting party. L’Erin Kazmierczak is in the background, behind Dr. Bamberg.

criollas, sabaneras and tocarreñas (yellow, red, and white potatoes respectively are these potatoes in the U.S. as noted in the recipe link page 51).

Of the three types, papas criollas, tiny yellow wild potatoes that grow at high elevations, are the most important for this soup which also calls for a strong herb called guascas.

Papas criollas break up and dissolve almost completely as the soup cooks, infusing the soup with a wonderful unique richness. Amigo Foods, www.amigofoods.com, is an online source for papas criollas in jars and guascas, not available as fresh produce in the U.S.

It is served with cream, capers, rice and avocado on the side. Here is a link to an American version of this soup (see next page):



www.thekitchn.com/recipe-colombian-ajiaco-chicken-and-potato-soup-35078

A few of us did have an opportunity to taste the original Criolla potato and found it to be nutty and somewhat similar to a yam in texture with a very dark yellow flesh color. All agreed it held a very distinct and unusual flavor and color.

Although none of the strains was exactly like the original Criolla, some did come acceptably close. The true test of these Criolla strains would be to cook them in the traditional method and serve them to Colombian Americans who are familiar with the original Criolla potato.

It is important to note that none

of the seven tasters is of Colombian descent and only two of them have cooked the traditional Colombian dish that features the Criolla potato.

Keeping the traditional, hardy and nutritious strains of the Criolla potato thriving and available is part of what the United States Potato Genebank and Kenosha Potato Project are working to achieve.

The results of the taste test revealed that the Skagit Valley potato (grown by the United States Genebank), was the favorite in taste, texture and appearance.

Skagit Valley, named after the state of Washington valley in which it originated, was bred and developed by independent plant breeder Tom Wagner.

Left: The Colombian traditional dish of Ajiaco Colombiano, a thick potato and vegetable soup, involving three kinds of Colombian potatoes (papas criollas, sabaneras and tocarreñas). Find an Americanized version of the recipe here: www.thekitchn.com/recipe-colombian-ajiaco-chicken-and-potato-soup-35078.

Right: Many of the research stations, including Hancock and the United States Genebank, engage in potato tasting in order to determine which potatoes yield the most desirable taste traits such as sweetness, bitterness and texture as was quantified in this taste test.

Criolla #8R+, Criolla #5 and Criolla #12 were next with only a two-point separation.

Criolla #9 and Skagit Valley were entered as a double blind with interesting results.

Skagit Valley and all the Criolla strains

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Tim Kazmierczak is shown here at left at his Criolla potato tasting party with one of his guests, Joe Bamberg (at right), a chef for the Wisconsin Club, Glendale, WI and son of Dr. John Bamberg, Director of International Gene bank, Sturgeon Bay.

share a parentage from Yema de Huevo (translates to ‘cream of egg yolk’), a Colombian potato grown in Colombia. Yema de Huevo tuberizes at the equator under day neutral growing conditions in a very long growing season.

Rating for the potatoes was based on a five-point scale with (1) being best and (5) worst. The lowest number of points is the winner.

Skagit Valley was preferred over the Criolla varieties with Criolla #8R+ ending up the winner of the Criollas with just one point away from Skagit Valley, earning comments such as “a little yammy, good flavor, chestnut flavor and mild, thin skin.”

The conversation during the tasting party revolved around seed preservation, marketing of new potato varieties, cooking variations and favorite recipes.

We also discussed the importance of growing some of your own food, spending time cooking from scratch

instead of relying on prepared foods and educating the public about fresh, local produce, good nutrition and good health.

Tim Kazmierczak reminded us that potatoes produce the most carbohydrates per acre and are a food that helped build nations.

In addition to his work as a horticulturist, Tim has been experimenting with producing a new potato product, Bottle of Spuds, which is wheat based, beer-flavored and enhanced by adding potato juice.

Each bottle of beer contains the added nutritional benefits of Potassium and Vitamin C of one potato. Spuds beer is a clear, refreshing light beer.

Tim’s future plans involve producing a pure potato beer that would be gluten-free, grain-free and contain the nutritional value of the potato. Bottoms up, Tim!

Find more info about potato breeding

and growing: kenoshapotato.com and www.ars-grin.gov/ars/MidWest/NR6/BCT

POTATO TASTE TEST RESULTS 11/29/2015

Place	Potato Type	Total Rank Points
1	Skagit Valley	15
2	Criolla #8R+	16
3	Criolla #5	18
3	Criolla #12	18
5	Criolla #9	24
6	Yukon Gold	35
7	Criolla #9	40
8	Skagit - Curzio Caravati	45

Note: there are two #9s due to the double blind: two #9 potatoes were entered into the tasting as separate potatoes.