

Ekaterra Offers Indigenous West African Spices to the Global Chef

Houston-based Ekaterra launched in 2019 with over a dozen spices unique to West Africa. Now, two years later, the brand offers 26 indigenous, wild-harvested spices giving everyone, everywhere the chance to taste flavors of the African Motherland.



Ekaterra launched in 2019 with over a dozen spices unique to West Africa. Now, 2 years later, the West African spice brand features 26 indigenous, wild harvested spices and mixes such as alligator pepper, iru, and country onions, which are processed using centuries-old practices of sun drying, shade drying, fermenting and smoking.

Ekaterra was founded by Ex-Googler Affiong Osuchukwu, when she realized that despite West African Cuisine being highly beloved and popular, the spices that make the flavors unique are very hard to find in Europe and the United States.

Afrobeats, African Diaspora, and West African Cuisine

West African influence on global pop culture is on the rise. West African cuisines are among the top 5 regional cuisines influencing menus in 2022 according to the US Restaurant Association. This is partly due to the global popularity of Afrobeats music originating from the region, as well as the strength and size of the West African Diaspora. Nevertheless, even in international cities such as New York, Houston, and London (where Osuchukwu was born and raised), culinary adventurers wishing to explore the flavors from this region are left disappointed. Popular spices like Dawadawa (fermented locust beans), Guinea Cubeb (African bush pepper), and Grains of Selim (known for its woody, smoky flavor) remain relatively unknown and very hard to find.

The idea for Ekaterra was spurred by Osuchukwu's move to Nigeria in 2010, where she followed her heart to join her now husband. While on business and vacation travels throughout the region, she visited dozens of local markets across West and Central Africa. Through regular visits to cities in Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, she found spices that were similar but known by different local names. Further, Osuchukwu observed countless must-have spices that define the complexity of dishes like Jollof Rice, Okra Soup with Fufu, and Pepper Soup, which were not widely available outside of these markets. "Globally, everyone has heard of jollof rice and Afrobeats, but indigenous West African spices remain widely unknown in major American and European cities. This is true even among cooks of West African descent who haven't heard of these spices, because of the growing popularity of flavor-enhancing seasoning cubes, which are heavily marketed to the African community by large multinational companies". Osuchukwu wanted to make sure that the everyday chef or home cook, whether they live in Houston, London, Accra, or Lagos, can easily access authentic, indigenous West African spices which are not only highly potent but also extremely medicinal. "Ekaterra ensures that these spices, which help me fondly recall the Nigerian recipes lovingly prepared by my mom and grandmother, don't become forgotten or obscure," said Osuchukwu.

Ekaterra means Motherland

The name Ekaterra is derived from the word Eka, the Ibibio tribe of Southeastern Nigeria's translation for Mother, and Terra, Latin for Earth or Land. Osuchukwu doesn't just want to influence American or European palettes with spices. She wants to ensure that the knowledge of local West African food and spices is featured for their uniqueness and health benefits. She wants to increase awareness of West African food culture and its connection with heritage, family, and the earth. "I want to give everyone, everywhere the chance to savor the true flavors of the African Motherland."

Osuchukwu emphasized the origin story of Ekaterra's inspiration. "These spices have been used for centuries in West Africa and while there has been improvisation of African food across the diaspora, many of the dishes remain very similar to the original, take gumbo for example. What's missing is the original flavor from the spices and spice mixes specific to this region." West African cuisine, though sometimes overlooked, has very strong and direct ties with cuisines of the Caribbean, Latin America,

and the American South. Ekaterra's mission is to create sustainable availability of these original West African spices for the global consumer.

Ekaterra (not to be confused with a tea company that has recently taken on the same name) currently features 26 unique spices and mixes, all available online at www.ekaterra.com

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About Ekaterra: Ekaterra is an African spice company that is committed to creating access to wild harvested, indigenous West African spices and teas which are sustainably and equitably sourced directly from origin. These spices and teas have been used by West Africans to nurture, nourish and heal generations for centuries, yet they are slowly disappearing from our kitchens. Ekaterra's focus is on building a route to market for these authentic flavors, making them approachable and accessible to culinary adventurers everywhere. Ekaterra also uses digital channels to educate and immerse consumers in African food and food culture, while reconnecting the West African diaspora to their culinary roots. Currently, Ekaterra operates out of two locations: Houston, TX USA, and Lagos, NIGERIA.

To learn more about Ekaterra's spices, or for recipes that use African ingredients, contact: info@ekaterra.com Or Visit www.ekaterra.com

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Source : Ekaterra

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