

# UNITED HEMISPHERES

## The Other White Meat?

Jackfruit, the latest in meat substitutes, is so convincing that meat lovers won't even know what they're missing



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### CULINARY ARTS

If you're still singing the praises of tofu or seitan ("wheat meat"), you don't know jack. Jackfruit, that is. When ripe, this prickly, watermelon-size tropical fruit is often described as tasting like Juicy Fruit gum. But now, in its unripe form it's emerging as the rising star of meat substitutes, showing up on menus from food trucks to fine-dining spots.

Many trace jackfruit's rise to a 2012 *New York Times* story on vegetarianism that featured the BBQ jackfruit sandwich at Füd, a vegan eatery in Kansas City, Missouri. **"We received emails from all over asking about it, especially from chefs," says chef Heidi Van Pelt-Belle, who also makes a jackfruit Reuben and jackfruit hot wings. "People love it because it's not seitan. It's a whole food."**

Chef Jesse Kimball, of Philadelphia's Memphis Taproom, first tasted jackfruit in a stew at an Indonesian restaurant. He asked the chef what kind of meat was in it. "They were like, 'It's jackfruit,'" he remembers. "And I said, 'Yeah, but

what's the meat in it?' It was that good." He knew he had to add it to his menu.

"When I was breaking the fruit apart, it reminded me of cleaning crabmeat," recalls Kimball, who has since created a jackfruit po' boy and Old Bay jackfruit cakes with pineapple salsa and chili oil.

At Chicago's Ruxbin, chef Edward Kim's braised, pan-crisped jackfruit carnitas are a permanent fixture on the menu. "A lot of people like to say, 'It's just like pulled pork or chicken,'" he says. "I think when you present an ingredient as a substitute, it's a comparison that's often set up to fail. It becomes special if you can enjoy it for what it is."

Despite Kim's protestations, jackfruit has so far proven to be an effective substitute. Dave Newman of Baltimore's Blue Pit BBQ & Whiskey Bar agrees. "When slow-cooked over a smoker pit and slathered in barbecue sauce, you might swear it's one of the tastiest pulled-pork sliders around," he says. "We've had many vegans say, 'You gave me the wrong thing—this is meat!'"