



## Breadfruit – the Story and History



Latin name: *Artocarpus altilis*

- Trees grow to a height of 66 feet
- Pollinators are fruit bats
- The compound, false fruit originates from 1,500 to 2,000 flowers, visible on the skin of the fruit as hexagon-like disks.

The Breadfruit is one of the highest-yielding tropical food plants, a single tree producing to 200 or more football sized fruits per season. But even some of our most seasoned tropical plant lovers in Florida have never seen or heard of it. This fruit, eaten cooked or used ripe for making a sweetened drink, has a rather enthralling story which has connections and familiarity to us we have never been made aware of.

Between 1780 and 1786 the island of Jamaica suffered from alternating hurricanes and long periods of drought that destroyed crops. Slave provision grounds were hard hit and there was a major food shortage. The sugar planters were concerned because they knew that without a reliable food source, their slaves would die of starvation, or worse, revolt.

For many years there had been talk of a tree in the Pacific Islands that provided a source of 'bread' all year round. The planters offered large rewards to any ship's captain who would bring back such a miraculous plant. Captain William Bligh, an experienced 33-year-old seaman who had sailed with Captain Cook on his second voyage around the world from 1772-75, was named commander of this expedition.

His crew set sail from Portsmouth, England for Tahiti and Timor on The H.M.S. Bounty a few days before Christmas in 1787. Their mission was to collect seedless breadfruit plants and deliver them to Jamaica. The Bounty arrived in Tahiti, set up camp, and Bligh began the process of collecting the plants. So tireless was Bligh's pursuit of the plant that he soon earned the nickname "Breadfruit Bligh". Five months and over 1000 plants later, Bligh decided to set sail for the Caribbean.

Two weeks into that 1789 ocean voyage, however, members of his crew, led by the first mate, mutinied. They set Bligh and 18 crewmembers loyal to him adrift in an open boat and threw the breadfruit plants overboard. Some were even used to stone Bligh. This treasonous act, which was turned into a famous history now terms the most famous mutiny ever, may have been committed because the first mate wanted to return to Tahiti where he had found his true love. Others say the reason for the crew's anger was Bligh's arrogance and his excessive concern about the survival of the precious breadfruit cargo; Bligh is said to have denied crewmembers water in favor of using it to irrigate the plants.

The mutineers set a course for Tahiti, leaving Bligh with very little food, dependent on his pocket watch, sextant and his navigational skills for survival. Luckily for him these skills were outstanding. Bligh completed what many feel is still one of the greatest recorded feats of navigation. He covered over 3600 miles in 41 days before setting foot back on land. It is no wonder that many consider Bligh one of the greatest sailors to have ever lived. So can you guess what famous movie this story inspired? Of course, ***'Mutiny on the Bounty'***.

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