



11-15-2002

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Recommended Citation

Suárez, Virgil (2002) "Tamarind," *Westview*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol22/iss1/13>

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Tamarind

by Virgil Suárez

That summer, after the great storms, we helped our mothers
make sweet squares out of tamarind pulp and sugar. We
climbed the trees, stripped the brown, finger-sized pods off. We
crowned the tree's roots with mounds of these pods. Piles, We
carried in our stretched-out shirts, ants crawling up our arms. We
entered the cool of our mother's kitchens, our mouths tart
with the sting of so much *tamarindo*, as we called out loud. We
heard our stomachs grumble. Sheets of brown, sugary pulp we
tore and ate, over and over, gobs of it sticking to the roofs of our
mouths, between our teeth, thick on our tongues, our throats. We
sang to this concoction that summer we stripped the trees bare. We
heard the rain pelt the tin roof of the empty chicken shacks. We
knew no other sweetness. Our mothers told us stories of seeds,
of these tiger-eye, black seeds we cracked out of each pod. We
dreamt of those seeds, of their blooming in our swollen bellies. We
heard their *pink-pink-pink* upon the leaves of the banana trees. We
kept time by how many seeds we kept in jars, as if they were fireflies,
as if they were the things that kept us alive when nothing else did.

