

Cajun Catfish Stew



RECIPE BY BB GILLEN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY MELISSA McGAW

Growing up on my family's pond, I loved catching catfish (aka "Mr. Whiskers") and I loved the challenge of being careful not to get barbed by their pointy little spines. To this day, I can't cook catfish without fond memories of my family.

My parents had different ways of cooking. Mom always went strictly by the recipe. Dad said, "Throw the recipe away. Put in a little of this and a little of that. It'll all come together."

I've been cooking since I was 10 years old and have learned to experiment with foods, including what flavors marry well together and how to tweak recipes. So, utilizing both of my parents' ways of cooking, I have been blessed to share it all as a facilitator with outdoor cooking classes.

When it comes to preparing catfish, the possibilities are endless. Catfish is a little denser than most fish and has a slight sweetness. I have two go-to recipes that I love to share in my classes. One is a Catfish Chowder. The other is this comfort-food, stick-to-your-ribs Cajun Catfish Stew. I love both recipes, but the stew has an awesome Cajun flair with just the right spices, spicy tomato juice, rice, a little shrimp and, of course, it wouldn't be Cajun without a little okra and some gumbo file' powder (if available).

I prefer to eat my stew with crackers, while some folks prefer the traditional hushpuppy. Whatever your preference, I promise that this recipe is a crowd pleaser.

INGREDIENTS

Yields: 10 servings
1/2 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped green pepper
1 clove garlic, minced
2 28-ounce cans diced tomatoes
1 bay leaf
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon dried whole oregano
3/4 teaspoon hot sauce
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 64-ounce bottle spicy V8 juice
1 pound unpeeled small fresh shrimp
1/2-cup uncooked long grain rice
1 pound catfish fillets, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 (10-ounce) package frozen cut okra, thawed
Gumbo file' (optional)

PREPARATION

1. Coat Dutch oven with cooking spray. Place it over medium heat and, when hot, add the onion and green pepper. Add the garlic last. Sauté until tender.
2. Add tomatoes, bay leaf, ground cumin, oregano, hot sauce, pepper and V8 Juice. Cover and reduce and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring often as ingredients can stick to the bottom.
3. Peel and devein shrimp, then set aside. A commercial deveining tool makes this a bit quicker with shells still on.
4. Add rice and catfish pieces to the mixture in the Dutch oven. Stir well. Cover, reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Stir in sliced okra and simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Stir in shrimp. Return mixture to a boil and remove from heat.
6. Remove the bay leaf from the mixture. Serve with gumbo file', if desired. (Gumbo file' is a seasoning made from dried, ground sassafras leaves.)



ONLINE:

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