

Jim's Okra and Seafood Gumbo

This is my favorite Cajun-Creole recipe. I make this nearly every Saturday night that we eat at home. I have developed it over the last 15 years, to the point where I can make it in about an hour and a half.

You can leave out any or all of the seafood if your a strict vegetarian, or you can add smoked sausage (kielbasa, tasso, etc.) if you need a fix of meat. Make it as hot as you like or not, don't let the pepper scare you off, it's delicious either way. And if your a low-fat freak just don't use as much butter.

Serves 4 people.

● Ingredients

1/2 lb of large shrimp 1/2 lb of cleaned squid

1 lb of okra. If you are not experienced with buying okra, you should be able to snap the skinny end off between your first two fingers and your thumb.

3-4 reasonable sized tomatoes

1 large onion

2-3 green onions

1/4 lb butter (adjust according to desired FAT intake).

2 chopped cloves of garlic (CLOVES are the little things that break off from the BULB). Don't make my friend Gary's mistake - he used two whole bulb's of garlic...we laughed a lot about that, mostly because we couldn't eat it.

1 tbspn (15ml) of Thyme

1 tspn (5ml) of freshly ground Black Pepper

2 tspn (10ml) of salt (adjust according to TASTE)

1 - 2 tspn (5-10ml) of Cayenne Pepper (adjust to desired HEAT intake)

● Instructions

Clean and de-vein the shrimp. Set shells aside for stock. Clean the squid, slice into small strips. Remove the top and bottom of the okra pods. Keep the discarded part for the stock.

● Stock

All good gumbos start with the stock. This is very important. Don't try to make gumbo with water or canned or packaged stock, it will not work...(you've been warned). Fill a large soup pot with 8 quarts of water. Add all the parts of the ingredients that you would otherwise throw away. i.e., the shrimp shells and heads, the ends of the okra, the skin of the onion and garlic, the ends of the green onion, etc., Bring to a boil and then let simmer until you need it. The longer the better, but even a few minutes is better than nothing.

● Gumbo

Cut half of the okra lengthways in four and then crossways in half inch pieces. Put the other half of the okra aside until later. Put 1/4 cup cooking oil (canola or sunflower is best) into a heavy soup pot on medium-high heat. When oil is hot put in okra. Add the black pepper and cayenne pepper and let fry until the okra starts to brown, about 5 minutes.

Add the coarsely chopped onion and continue to fry, periodically stirring and scraping the bottom of the pot, until the onions are cooked.

Now turn on your overhead fan, or open the window for this next bit.

Take a cup of the stock, be careful about this, and pour it into the pot. It will hiss and steam up at you. Stir and continue to cook for a minute.

Add coarsely chopped tomatoes and cook for a few more minutes until tomatoes are softened and mixed in with the okra mixture. Add another cup of stock and continue cooking for another few minutes. At this point the mixture should be a reddish brown color and be pretty mixed together.

Now add the butter, garlic, thyme, and salt. The aroma will be magnificent. Cook for a minute or two.

Add 2 or 3 cups of stock to the mixture, bring to a boil while stirring, and reduce to a slow simmer. The mixture should have a little thickness, not too watery, but remember you still are going to add more good stuff.

Now for you meat eaters, its time to add the chopped kielbasa or tasso. You non-meat eaters can try those imitation sausage things, or tofu if you like.

Add salt according to taste, and let simmer while you get the rice ready.

● **Rice**

I like the rice for this made in the oven, but if you have another way of cooking rice, go right ahead. In an oven proof pot with a cover, place 2 cups of converted long grain rice. Add 3 cups of stock, and teaspoon of salt. Cover and place in 350° oven for half an hour.

● **Back to the Gumbo**

Slice the remaining okra crossways in 1/4 inch slices, and add to the gumbo. Cook for about 10 minutes. Now add the seafood and chopped green onions. Turn heat to high. Once it starts to boil, turn it off and remove from heat.

● **Serve it Up**

Put a half cup of rice in the center of a wide shallow bowl. Generously spoon the gumbo over the rice, making sure everyone gets some of the good stuff. Serve with a piece of avacado on top.

Put some pepper sauce (tabasco, West Indian, etc.,) on the table for people who like it hot. A nice chilled dry white wine (Pinot Grigio or Bordeaux), or lite red (Valpolacello, Bardolino, or Chianti) goes nice with this.

● **Footnote**

I have tried to keep it simple and thoroughly explain this recipe for those of you who aren't very experienced in the kitchen. Just remember, there are no rules. Adjust to your taste and requirements. Make it fun, and make it yours.

Please write me at jimlongo@rdiv.com with any questions, and let me know how it went.