

Cajun or Creole

"Often the answer is in the food"

People often ask what's the difference between Cajun and Creole. The answer is often found in the way food is prepared and the history behind each area Louisiana was settled. Cajun and Creole cuisines have many similarities. Both are Louisiana born, with French roots, both depended heavily on whatever foods were available.

The Cajuns trace their heritage directly to the Acadian French, who upon being expelled from Nova Scotia by the English, eventually relocated to South Louisiana. The Creoles trace their heritage to the French, Spanish, Italians, Africans, and any other people who chose New Orleans as their home.

Our family would be considered Creole, from the geographical sense, as the first ancestor in our family tree (paternal side) came to New Orleans from Moudon, Switzerland in the mid 1700's.

The Creole 'culture' finds its roots around the early 1700's. At that time, the French began settling la Nouvelle Orleans with Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville (founder of New Orleans) governing the territory. During the French colonial period, New Orleans population was made up of French, Africans, and Choctaw Indians.

During the French colonial period, the food was characterized by the traditional French sauces. The food was mild in flavor, yet complex in preparation. Meals were prepared by African cooks, who brought their distinct knowledge of food with them from Africa. Gumbo comes from the African word Gumba, which means okra - hence, okra gumbo. Slow cooking over a low flame for more intense flavors is also attributed to the African slaves. The Choctaw Indians, who were here, revealed the secrets of the indigenous food products such as bay leaves and file' powder, along with most corn dishes characteristic of South Louisiana, such as sagamite and macque choux.

The Louisiana territory was traded to Spain in 1763. Basically, the Spanish made three contributions to Creole cooking. First, they began mixing meat and fish in one dish. Until this time, a sausage and shrimp jambalaya was not common. Second, they began serving food over rice, such as beans or gumbo over rice. Finally, the Spanish cooked with hot peppers and prepared highly seasoned dishes to suit their tastes. The three Spanish contributions combined with the complex French sauces, using indigenous food products, comprise the base of Creole food.

After the Civil War, Creole food took a turn to the right with the influx of Italians to New Orleans. They brought with them red tomato sauces and delicious pasta. Soon after, the Irish and German immigrants arrived and contributed the best of their food to our evolving Creole fare.

The term 'Cajun' comes from the corruption of the word Acadian. The Cajuns came originally from France, specifically Normandy and Brittany, and settled around Nova Scotia in 1604. In 1755 England acquired Nova Scotia and the Acadians were forced to leave.

The Acadians wandered for the next thirty years. Some returned to France where they were not accepted due to high unemployment and the French-English war. The Acadians were not French loyalists. Others headed for the thirteen American colonies, but these did not provide the home the Cajuns sought. Over the years, groups of Acadians found their way to southern Louisiana. Finally, in 1785, the Spanish Crown recruited the remainder of the displaced Acadians to settle the Louisiana territory. The Spanish desperately needed people to settle this territory and the Acadians desperately needed a place to live.

The Cajuns were allowed to choose the area of the territory they wanted to settle - New Orleans or the swamps. Being country people by nature, the Acadians chose the country instead of the city. The rich swamp areas of southwest Louisiana (around Lafayette) provided the Cajuns with a bounty of fresh fish and wild game. The rich soil produced delicious fruits and vegetables.

Like all other people coming to Louisiana, the Cajuns quickly learned to cook with available ingredients. To add excitement to their food, the Cajuns experimented with herbs and spices to find the best and hottest flavors. They cooked with the knowledge they had brought over from France in the early 1600's, but adapted this to the indigenous products.

The distinctions between Creole and Cajun are subtle yet important. Creole dishes incorporate much Italian influence. A red jambalaya (using tomato sauce) is characteristic of the Creoles, while a brown jambalaya is typical of the Cajuns. Pasta dishes are rarely found in a purely Cajun cookbook. Today we are seeing both cuisines evolve and change along with the cultures. A gentle merging of Creole and Cajun food can be detected as communication and travel between the two regions increased. In restaurants, little distinction remains. It's now Louisiana cooking.

There are many good Louisiana cookbooks available at your local bookstore, but below find a few recipes that are special to the Guitrau family. Please note the author purposely left out "smothered okra and toma-

toes" for personal reasons...and if you want a recipe for "sticky chicken and okra" ask around, some Guitrau has it. The first recipe was a "must" any time Maw Maw (Catherine Brown Guitrau) visited with her children and grandchildren. She had a special touch when making these rolls that not many can duplicate. They go well with any gumbo, jambalaya, or crawfish stew.

Maw Maw's Yeast Rolls

Ingredients:

- 3 cups - All-purpose Flour
- 1 pkg. - Rapid Rise Dry Yeast
- 3-4 TBS. - Crisco or vegetable oil
- 1 Cup - Milk - Lukewarm
- 2 TBS. - Sugar
- 1 TSP. - Salt

In one large bowl mix flour, 1 1/2 tbs. sugar and the salt. Set aside.

Heat milk to scolding,; cool some, and then combine in a separate bowl combine the yeast, 1/2 tbs. Sugar, and the milk. Let sit 5 to 10 minutes; stir until yeast granules thoroughly dissolve. Add oil to liquid mixture and stir. Add half of liquid mixture to flour. Mix with hands to moisten flour as much as possible. Add remainder of liquid mixture to dough and mix until flour is thoroughly incorporated. Turn onto a lightly floured surface and knead by hand until smooth and elastic to the touch, about 15 minutes, gradually adding a little flour to keep dough from sticking. Place in a large greased bowl and then invert dough so top is greased; cover with a dry towel and let stand in a warm place until doubled in size; about 1 hour. Punch down dough. Pinch off enough to make about 1 1/2 inch balls. Roll dough into smooth balls with hands. Pop any large air bubbles by pinching them. Place on a greased baking pan. Cover and let rise until doubled in size; about 35 to 45 minutes. Bake at 400 degrees until brown. (Contributed my Mary Ann Guitrau)

Uncle Al Guitrau's Jambalaya

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. - Smoked sausage cut in 1" lengths
- 3/4 - lb. - Pork loin or country style ribs - cut in 1" lengths
- 4 - Chicken breasts (boneless) - cut in 1/2 to 1" cubes
- 4 - Onions - yellow, medium - chopped
- 4 - Garlic cloves (1 whole pod) - peeled and chopped
- 1/2 - Bell pepper - chopped fine
- 3 - Celery stalks
- 1 - Tomato sauce - 8 oz.
- 1 Tbs. - Kitchen Bouquet (A brown seasoning sauce)
- 2 1/2 Cups - Rice (uncooked) Brown or white
- 1 1/2 Cups hot water

Salt, black pepper, red pepper

Fry sausage. Sprinkle pork with black pepper, red pepper and salt. Salt & pepper chicken breasts. Brown all meat. This makes a crust in the bottom of the pan, which disappears when you add the onions.

Remove meat. Remove top grease leaving about 1/4 inch. Add chopped onions, bell pepper, garlic, and celery. Stir. Put pork on top of vegetables. Cover and reduce heat to medium. Smother for 10 minutes.

Add tomato sauce and Kitchen Bouquet. Reduce to low heat covered for 10 more minutes. Add rest of meat. Add 1 cup hot water and bring to a boil. Add 2 1/2 cups of rice. Stir just to make sure rice is covered. Add water if necessary to cover rice. Add 2 teaspoons of salt. Return to boil, reduce heat to low and cover. Simmer for 10 minutes. Stir (bring bottom to top). Cover 10 more minutes and then roll again. Total time - start to finish - approximately 1 1/2 hours. You can use a food processor to chop all the vegetables.

Aunt Sissy's Oyster Dressing

Ingredients:

- 20 - Chicken gizzards
- 5 - Chicken livers
- 1 - Turkey gizzard and liver
- 6 - dozen Oysters
- 1 - Celery - bunch
- 15 - Green Onion sprigs (about 2 bunches)
- 15 - Parsley sprigs (about 1 bunch)
- 1 - Cup corn oil
- 1 - stick butter
- 3 - Cups cooked yellow cornbread
- 2 - Onions - medium
- 1 - Green bell pepper
- 1 - Small stale French bread or 1 cup bread crumbs
- Salt, black pepper, red pepper to taste

Boil livers and gizzards (keep broth). Soak and drain French bread in broth. Grind or chop very fine all greens in blender at medium speed. Save parsley for last and keep separate. Grind all gizzards and livers. Pick through and remove any gristle. Cut up oysters. Heat oil. Brown all vegetables except parsley. Add French bread and simmer. Add gizzards and livers. Simmer again. Add oysters and oyster juice, cornbread, butter, and parsley and a little broth to make mixture moist but not runny. Add salt, pepper, red pepper to taste. Cook in pan for about 10 minutes on medium, stirring occasionally. Place in baking dish and back uncovered in a 350 degree oven for 30 minutes.