

Improvisational cooking is king

'New Orleans by the Bowl' by John DeMers with Andrew Jaeger illustrates the bold improvisational nature of Louisiana cooking.

Some say that the cooking in New Orleans gets dull when times are good. Most anything that moves or grows in the swamps has found its way into the pot, especially when there is little or no money. They show a general tendency to take a cheap, tough or tasteless meat/fish, cook it for a long time in lots of gravy and serve it over rice.

Creole Seasoning
5 tablespoons paprika
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 tablespoon ground white pepper
1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
1 tablespoon dried thyme
2 tablespoons garlic powder
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon chile powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
Blend the ingredients together well. Store in a tightly sealed jar. Yields 3/4 cup.

Alligator Soup
Stock
2 pounds cleaned alligator meat
2 stalks celery, coarsely chopped
1 head garlic, peeled and chopped
1 coarsely chopped onion
salt
8 cups water
Soup
1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup oil
3/4 cup chopped onion
3/4 chopped leek, white part only



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• postscript

1 cup tomatoes, chopped
1 teaspoon Creole seasoning
2 hard boiled eggs, chopped for garnish

In a large pot, combine meat, celery, garlic, onion and water. Season with salt. Cook over medium heat for about 30 minutes. Skim and strain the stock. Keep warm over low heat. Chop the meat into bite sized pieces. Discard the celery, garlic and onion.

For the soup, stir together the oil and flour in a large skillet over medium heat. Stir until brown. Add onion, leeks and tomatoes. Simmer until onion is soft. Add mixture and meat back to the stock. Season with Creole seasoning. Serve with a splash of sherry in a soup bowl and garnish with chopped egg. Serves 6 to 8.

Flaming Pontchatoula Strawberries
1 pint fresh strawberries. Trim and cut into 2 or 3 pieces.
1/4 cup water
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup Grand Marnier
vanilla ice cream

Combine strawberries with water and sugar in a large sauté pan over

medium high heat. Stir until sauce thickens into a bright red syrup. Carefully add the Grand Marnier and set on fire using a long match. Let the alcohol burn off. Spoon quickly into dessert bowls over ice cream. Serves 4.

Red Beans and Rice

1/4 cup unsalted butter
2 tablespoons chopped garlic
1 3/4 cups chopped celery
1 1/4 cups chopped onion
1 3/4 cups chopped green bell pepper
1 pound andouille or other smoked sausage, thinly sliced
2 bay leaves
8 cups water
2 pounds red beans, soaked overnight
1/2 tablespoon liquid smoke

3 or 4 tablespoons Louisiana hot sauce
3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
3/4 tablespoon chile powder
salt and ground black pepper
3 or 4 cups cooked white rice

Melt butter in a large stock pot over medium heat. Sauté garlic until you can smell the aroma, around 2 minutes. Add celery, onion and bell pepper. Sauté 8 to 10 minutes until transparent.

Add smoked sausage and continue to cook until brown on the edges, 5 to 7 minutes. Add bay leaves, water, red beans, liquid smoke, hot sauce, Worcestershire sauce and chile powder.

Bring to a boil, lower heat to simmer, and simmer uncovered for about 3 hours or until beans are tender. Season with salt and pepper. Discard bay leaves. Serve over rice. Serves 6 to 8.

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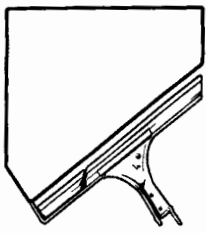
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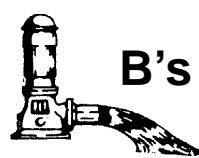
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