

# SPICY RED GUMBO (ALA CELESTIN'S)\*

1 C flour	2T crushed thyme
½ C vegetable oil	3 bay leaves
1 T vegetable oil	1 ½ t whole oregano (Mexican)
3 C onion (chopped fine)	¾ vial of Zatarain's Gumbo Filé*
3 C celery (chopped fine)	4Qts chicken or vegetable stock**
3 C bell pepper (chopped fine)	2 cans tomato paste
1 T cayenne pepper	1½ t black pepper
1T paprika	Sausage, chicken, seafood, etc. (2-3 lbs of each)

**Prep:** Make sure you have a big enough stock pot! This recipe makes over a gallon of stock. Once you add the extras (sausage, chicken, shrimp, scallops, crab, etc.) it can get huge! I know it seems like a lot, but you can freeze the leftovers and use the stock again and again. It's worth it to make the big recipe, if you have room in your freezer.

**Start Stock:** In a large stockpot, heat 1 T of oil. On medium high heat, sauté onions until starting to brown. Add bell pepper and celery. Stir briefly to coat with oil. Add filé and other spices (except black pepper). Stir briefly. Add chicken or vegetable broth (including water, if using bouillion!), reserving two cups. Add tomato paste. You should have over a gallon of stock in your pot by now. Heat over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Make roux while stock heats.

**Make Roux:** This oil-and-flour mixture is the key to good gumbo and many other Cajun dishes. It takes a while. Have patience. In a 2-quart pot, heat ½ C oil over medium heat. Use a heavy-bottomed pot, if possible, for best heat distribution. Add 1 C flour, stirring *constantly* over medium heat until brown. A wooden spoon works best. Lower heat and continue cooking and stirring until dark brown. It takes time! There may be some experts' trick, but it always takes me at least 15-30 minutes! Maybe because I'm cautious with the heat. I don't want to burn it and have to start over. Don't rush it or skimp on the "brown." If you so much as scorch the roux, **START OVER!** When dark brown, add the 2 C of reserved stock. Stir well to loosen roux from pot, then add it all to the stockpot.

**Finish Stock and Add Extras:** Bring stock to a boil, stirring occasionally. Lower heat and simmer for one hour. (Start cooking rice in a separate pot once stock is simmering) Strain out vegetables, if desired (I don't). Add sausage (Andouille is a traditional Cajun sausage. Polish and hot links also work great.), ham, chicken, seafood, etc., according to cooking or heating time required and continue to simmer. Raw chicken or sausage: 30 minutes. Cooked chicken or sausage: 15 minutes. Shrimp, scallops, crab, oysters, lobster: 5-15 minutes. Just at the end, add black pepper and stir thoroughly, or add at table.<sup>(Note)</sup>

**Serve:** Over hot, cooked rice. Add a salad (or not!) and you've got a complete meal.

**Leftovers:** Freeze in amounts you are likely to use. It's not a bad idea to strain it, as the meat and especially seafood are best when cooked fresh. Seafood may give it a funny taste if frozen. You can add extra onion, bell pepper, and celery next time, for texture, if you like and refreeze leftovers again, if there are any. The stock just gets richer every time you use it. Just be sure to use safe food handling methods: **cool and freezer leftovers quickly!** Any combination of meat and seafood (or tofu, tempeh, seitan or mock meat) can be used, depending on your preferences.

\* In the spice section. Not every market has it. You might want to call around. In Sacramento, FoodsCo has it.

\*\*I use "Better Than Bouillon." It's less expensive than canned broth, not as salty as bouillon cubes, and environmentally friendly because you get the equivalent of about 18 cans of broth in a single glass jar. You can get it at Trader Joes in Chicken, Turkey and Beef flavors. If you want vegan or vegetarian broth, look for the Vegetable flavor. Hard to find. I've only seen it at the military commissary, believe it or not! Try the internet? Or just use canned, boxed, or homemade vegetable broth

**Note:** Add black pepper late in the cooking process because overcooking can cause it to become bitter. Better yet, let diner's add it at the table if you're going to freeze leftover stock.

**\*Credit where credit is due: I worked at Celestin's French-Caribbean Restaurant, in Sacramento, for four years and caddged the ingredients list from one of the chef's. Of course... that was for a ten-gallon recipe! Besides cutting it down to (somewhat) home-sized, over the years, I've added my own techniques and ingredients. If this recipe looks like too much work, I encourage you to visit Celestin's for this and other fabulous food! Their Curry Chicken and Fritaille are to die for!**