

One of Carl's favourites - CHICKEN JAMBALAYA

This week, Carl's culinary adventure takes us to the "melting pot" of cultures that makes up the United States of America. True to their French ancestry, Cajuns employ many of the ingredients and cooking techniques of French cuisine. These, combined with African and native Indian influences and a distinctly Spanish use of hot spices, are applied to regional ingredients such as seafood, game birds, sweet potatoes, aubergines and okra and locally produced spicy smoked pork sausages. The result is hearty, tantalizing and entirely unique.

There are all sorts of theories about the origin of the word JAMBALAYA but the most common one is that it comes from the Spanish word JAMON, or the French word JAMBON meaning ham and as all jambalaya recipes include ham it's not surprising.

JAMBALAYA is a descendent of Spanish paella, which was brought over in the occupation in the late 18th century but instead of saffron that colours the dish, Cajuns use cayenne instead.

Most JAMBALAYAs are made on the stove top but once all the ingredients are sautéed it can be transferred to a casserole and baked in the oven. Some recipes call for the rice to be added to the dish as its still cooking, but you run the risk of either the rice being too hard or it absorbs all the liquid, so add the cooked rice when your jambalaya is seasoned and ready to serve.

CHICKEN, ANDOUILLE & PRAWN JAMBALAYA serves 6-8

1tsp salt
1/2tsp cayenne pepper
1/2tsp black pepper
1/2tsp dried thyme
2 large chicken breasts, diced
2Tbsp vegetable oil
3 stalks celery, chopped
2 medium onions, chopped
2 medium green peppers, chopped
2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
4oz Tasso or other smoked ham, chopped
6oz andouille or other spicy sausage, sliced
1Lb tomatoes, seeded & chopped
8oz tomato passata
8floz chicken stock
8oz peeled prawns
4oz spring onion, chopped
1.25 lb cooked rice to serve

In a bowl mix together the salt, cayenne, black pepper & thyme. Toss the chicken until well coated.

In a large frying pan, heat to oil, sauté the chicken till well browned. Add the celery, onions, peppers and garlic and cook for about 5 minutes.

Add the ham, sausage, tomato sauce, chopped tomatoes and the stock and stir until bubbling. Simmer until the tomatoes have cooked down and you have a rich red broth. Add the prawns and cook for about 3 minutes until they have turned pink. Adjust the seasoning, add the spring onions and enough cooked rice so the mixture is neither soupy nor dry.

Carl Stevenson, Chef