

Louisiana Jambalaya for Fat Tuesday

What would a Mardi Gras celebration be without the traditional and scrumptious Jambalaya! Versatility is the key word in Jambalaya recipes as there are as many variations as there are bayous that crisscross Louisiana.

Basically, it's a rice dish containing a variety of ingredients - originally what was plentiful at the time. Traditionally, in addition to the rice, you will have what is called in Cajun and Creole cooking, "The Holy Trinity", which is simply a combination of chopped onion, celery, and green bell pepper.

My Jambalaya recipe includes my family's favorites, the addition of Andouille sausage, chicken, and shrimp, as they prefer a substantial one bowl meal. You can personalize your jambalaya with your favorites, using ham, tasso, or crawfish as substitutes. Make sure you serve with a bottle of Louisiana hot sauce for those that need to add more heat!

Margie's Jambalaya

8 oz.	Smoked Andouille Sausage or your favorite smoked Sausage, cut into ½" slices.
1 lb.	Skinless, boneless Chicken Breast Halves or Thighs, cut into 1" pieces
2 Tab.	Canola or Peanut Oil
1	Medium Onion, chopped
1	Medium Green Bell Pepper, chopped
½ Cup	Celery, chopped, including leaves
3 Cloves	Garlic, minced
1 Tsp.	Tomato Paste
2 Tsp.	Creole or Cajun Seasoning*
½ Tsp.	Dried Thyme, crushed
1 Tsp.	Dried Sweet Basil, crushed
¼ Tsp.	Cayenne Pepper
1- 14.5 oz.	Can of Diced Tomatoes, drained, juice reserved
2 Cups	Chicken Broth**
1 ½ Cups	Long Grain White Rice, uncooked***
1	Bay Leaf
½ lb.	Raw Shrimp, peeled and de-veined
¼ Cup	Fresh Parsley, chopped
1 bunch	Green Onions, sliced (garnish)

In a heavy large saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat and brown sausage pieces, about 3-4 minutes. Using tongs or slotted spoon, remove from pan to plate.

Add chicken pieces and brown, about 5 minutes. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, remove from pan to plate. (If pan is large enough, you can brown at the same time – just don't crowd the pan or the meats will steam, not brown.) If you are adding pieces of ham, brown them quickly, too, and place on plate.

Reduce the heat to medium and add "The Holy Trinity", the onion, green bell pepper, and celery, and cook until vegetables soften, about 3-4 minutes. Add garlic and cook one minute more. Add tomato paste and cook just until the paste begins to brown. (This French cooking method is called "pince" (PIHN say) and adds color and flavor to the dish.)

Add the drained tomatoes, reserving the liquid, and the chicken and sausage back into the skillet. Sprinkle on the additional seasonings: Creole seasoning, thyme, basil, and cayenne pepper. Stir thoroughly

Add the reserved juice from the tomatoes to the 2 cups chicken broth – if you do not have a total of 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ Cups of liquid, add additional broth, white wine, or water. Add the liquid and cook until heated, 2-3 minutes. Add the rice, cover and simmer over medium heat for 20 minutes or until the rice is tender and most of the liquid has been absorbed. Add the shrimp, stir, cover, and continue to cook 5 minutes or until shrimp are opaque. Remove bay leaf and discard. (There is an old Louisiana wife's tale that says whoever gets the bay leaf in their bowl gets to make a special wish and that could be a fun thing to do with family or friends.) Taste and add salt and pepper if needed. Add the parsley, stir, and take pan from the heat.

I bring the pan to the table to serve family style, but you can do what's best for you. Serve in shallow bowls with sliced green onion for garnish. Add a bottle of hot sauce to the table for the folks who want to add a little more heat. Enjoy!

Margie's Tips:

*Use your favorite Creole or Cajun Seasoning; however, since salt and pepper are ingredients in most Creole or Cajun Seasonings, don't add additional salt and pepper until you've tasted the dish. Also, some are hotter than others and that may determine how much cayenne pepper you add as well.

**You may also make this dish with 3-4 cups of cooked rice. You will need to reduce the broth/liquid to $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup. Simmer the vegetables with the meats until the meats are completely cooked and flavors have melded, about 10 minutes. Add the cooked rice and cook until rice is heated through and then add shrimp, cover and cook until the shrimp are opaque. Remove and discard bay leaf. Salt and Pepper to taste, add the parsley, and serve with a sprinkling of chopped green onion.

Hope this Jambalaya makes your Fat Tuesday the best day of the week! Celebrate Louisiana style!

Jungle Jim's Margie Potts