

## Jumpin' Jambalaya for Mardi Gras

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. Besides the rice, you will almost always find the addition of what is called in Cajun and Creole cooking "The Trinity", which is a combination of chopped onion, celery, and green bell pepper. My recipe highlights my family's favorite, the addition of Andouille sausage, chicken, and shrimp. You can personalize your jambalaya with your favorites, using ham, Tasso, or crawfish as substitutes. This one dish meal is a crowd pleaser at my house with a few of the boys adding the hot sauce at the table.

### 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 (optional)
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 deveined
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, remove from pan to plate. Add chicken pieces and brown, about 5 minutes. Using tongs, 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 set aside.

Reduce the heat to medium and add "The Trinity": the onion, green bell pepper, and celery, and cook until vegetables soften, about 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 – and just one more example of French influence on Cajun/Creole cooking. Add the drained tomatoes 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 tomato juice to the 2 cups chicken broth – if you do not have a total of 2 ¾ Cups of liquid, add additional broth or water. Add the broth 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. (However, there is an old Louisiana wives' tale that says whomever gets the bay leaf in their bowl gets to make a special wish and that could be a fun thing to do.) 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, but you can do what's best for you. Serve in low 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!

\*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. Jungle Jim's has an aisle of Creole and Cajun Seasonings and ingredients to choose from.

\*\*You may also make this dish with 3-4 cups of cooked rice. You will need to reduce the broth/liquid to ½ - ¾ 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. Adjust seasonings to taste, add the parsley, and serve with a sprinkling of chopped green onion.

With Fat Tuesday just a day away, hope this Jambalaya puts a little spice in your day and a smile on your face!!