

A Taste of MARDI

By *Suzan Jackson*

My husband and I used to live in New Orleans and loved everything about the city, especially its food. When we moved north just before our sons were born, we began hosting an annual Mardi Gras party, introducing our northern friends and family to the Cajun and Creole cuisine that we most missed. Now in its 20th year, our celebration has become a cherished tradition in the true spirit of Mardi Gras — a gathering of loved ones for a big buffet of Big Easy-style fare. Here are four New Orleans delights, including Jambalaya and Red Beans and Rice, which also happen to rank among our kids' all-time favorite dishes.

Photographs by Bill Milne • Food styling by Marie Piraino • Prop styling by Ann Lewis

King Cake

Mardi Gras season begins on January 6, known as Twelfth Night or Three Kings Day, and King Cake — topped with purple, green, and gold sugars signifying justice, faith, and power, respectively — represents a jeweled crown to celebrate the three kings who came bearing gifts at Jesus' birth. Each cake hides a tiny, toy baby inside, with tradition dictating that whoever finds it must host the next party (or serve the next King Cake).

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GRAS



Big Easy Shrimp Etouffée



The first step in making etouffée is sautéing what New Orleans chefs call the holy trinity: onion, celery, and green bell pepper. This dish is often made with crawfish, but our shrimp version tastes just as delicious. Serve it over white or brown rice.

- 1 Heat the oil and butter in a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion, celery, bell pepper, and garlic and sauté until they are soft and tender, about 8 minutes.
- 2 Stir in the flour until it is heated through, about 1 minute. Gradually pour in the broth in increments, stirring after each addition, until the mixture has thickened. Add the tomatoes, thyme, cayenne, salt, paprika, oregano, and hot sauce, reduce the heat to medium, and cover and simmer the mixture for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 3 Stir in the shrimp and parsley and cook the etouffée until the shrimp is no longer pink, 3 to 5 minutes. Serve over hot rice.

Ingredients:

- ½ tablespoon butter
- ½ tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- ½ green bell pepper, chopped
- 3 teaspoons minced garlic
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 (14½-ounce) can petite diced tomatoes
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- 6 drops hot sauce (we used Tabasco brand)
- 1 pound peeled, de-veined shrimp
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- 4 cups hot cooked rice, white or brown

Hands-on Time: 15 minutes Total Time: 35 minutes Serves: 5



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Jumbo Jambalaya

This hearty dish, which features Andouille, a mildly spicy Cajun-style sausage, is perfect for feeding a crowd (and it's a favorite at our annual party). To cut down on the heat for little ones, reduce the amount of cayenne pepper or hot sauce.

- 1 Warm the oil in a large stockpot over medium-high heat. Add the onion, pepper, and celery and sauté until they are soft and tender, about 10 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook for 5 minutes more.
- 2 Stir in the tomatoes, broth, bay leaf, cumin, thyme, cayenne, hot sauce, and browning sauce and bring the mixture to a boil. Add the rice, chicken, and sausage, cover the pan, and reduce the heat to medium-low. Cook the jambalaya until almost all of the liquid is absorbed, about 30 minutes. Stir it occasionally to keep the rice from sticking to the bottom of the pot.
- 3 Remove the pot from the heat and let the jambalaya stand until all of the liquid is completely absorbed, about 10 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and serve.

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 large onions, diced
- 2 green bell peppers, diced
- 4 celery stalks, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (16-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 2 (14½-ounce) cans reduced-sodium chicken broth
- Bay leaf
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- ½ teaspoon hot sauce (we used Tabasco brand)
- 1 teaspoon browning sauce (we used Kitchen Bouquet brand)
- 2 cups long grain white rice
- 1½ pounds boneless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
- ¾ pound Andouille sausage, cut into ½-inch thick half moons (we used pre-cooked chicken and turkey Andouille)

Hands-on Time: 35 minutes **Total Time:** 1 hour, 30 minutes **Serves:** 10

Red Beans And Rice



Historically, red beans and rice were served on Mondays, the traditional household wash day. While women tended to the laundry, the dish could slowly cook on the stove. Our family's version, using canned beans, doesn't require a day of cooking, but it's so good my sons could eat it every week. They love its mild spices and slightly creamy consistency.

1 In a large pot, warm the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion, bell pepper, and garlic and sauté until they are soft and tender, about 8 minutes.

2 Stir in the broth, bay leaf, thyme, hot sauce, and beans and bring the mixture to a boil. Leaving the pot on the stove, partially mash the bean mixture with a potato masher or the back of a wooden spoon, leaving most of the beans whole. Stir in the sausage, then cover the pot and reduce the heat to medium-low.

3 Simmer the mixture, covered, for 10 minutes, then uncovered for an additional 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the bay leaf, and serve over hot rice.

Suzan Jackson now lives in Delaware and writes for *Disney FamilyFun's* "Our Favorite Things" department.

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 small green bell pepper, diced
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 (16-ounce) can reduced-sodium chicken broth
- Bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- 4 to 6 drops hot sauce (we used Tabasco brand)
- 3 (15½-ounce) cans small red beans (we used Goya brand), rinsed and drained (you can also substitute kidney beans)
- 1 pound reduced-fat smoked sausage, sliced into bite-sized pieces
- 6 cups hot cooked rice, white or brown

Hands-on Time: 15 minutes Total Time:
35 minutes Serves: 6



JUMP

King Cake

Hands-on Time: 30 minutes Total Time: 4 hours 30 minutes
(includes rising and cooling time) Serves: 18

- 1 For the cake, microwave the butter and milk in a small bowl until the butter has almost melted, about 1 minute. Stir it, then microwave it until the butter has completely melted, about 30 seconds. Stir in the vanilla, then allow the mixture to cool to a lukewarm temperature (around 110°F).
- 2 Meanwhile, in another small bowl, add the yeast to the water, stir once, then let it rest for 5 minutes.
- 3 In a large bowl, use a whisk to combine the flour and sugar. Make an indentation in the middle of the dry ingredients, slowly pour the yeast mixture into the indentation, and use a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to fold and combine. Add the butter mixture, folding to combine, then add the eggs, folding to combine them as well.
- 4 Transfer the dough onto a clean, lightly floured surface. Knead the dough until it is smooth and stretchy, about 8 minutes, adding more flour if the dough is too wet. Place the dough in a large, clean, generously oiled bowl and cover it with plastic wrap. Allow the dough to rise in a warm place until it has doubled in size, about 2 hours.
- 5 For the filling, combine all the ingredients with a fork until they are well blended.
- 6 Line a 13- by 16-inch baking sheet with parchment paper. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface and roll it into a 10- by 16-inch rectangle. Spread the filling over the dough, leaving a 1-inch strip uncovered at one of the long ends. Beginning at the opposite long end, roll up the dough jelly roll-style, pinching the seam closed with your fingers.
- 7 Place the roll on the prepared baking sheet and shape it to form a 13-inch wide ring. Lightly wet the edges of the ring's ends with water, then pinch them to seal them together. With a knife, cut slashes, about 1/2 inch deep, into the top of the dough around the entire ring. Cover the ring with plastic wrap and let it rise for 45 minutes. (Tip: To keep the ring from closing during baking, fill the center hole with a ramekin about 2 inches tall and 3 inches wide.)
- 8 Heat the oven to 350°. Bake the cake until it is light brown, about 30 minutes. Place it on a wire rack to cool, about 3 to 5 minutes, then insert the toy baby into the top of the cake. Cool the cake for an additional 30 minutes.
- 9 Meanwhile, prepare the icing by whisking together the confectioner's sugar and water or milk. Ice the cake while it is still slightly warm, then immediately top it with the purple, gold, and green sugars, alternating the colors (this will hide the baby's location).

Ingredients:

For the cake:

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 packet active dry yeast
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 5 3/4 cups flour
- 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- Small plastic toy baby

For the filling:

- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 3/4 cup dark brown sugar, packed
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon

For the topping:

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1 to 2 tablespoons water or milk
- Gold, green, and purple colored sugar

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

A TASTE OF MARDI GRAS

King Cake (FROM PAGE 18)

Per serving (1/18 of recipe) **Calories** 297 •
Total Fat 10 g (15%) • **Saturated Fat** 6 g (29%) •
Cholesterol 59 mg (20%) • **Sodium** 68 mg (3%) •
Total Carbohydrate 48 g (16%) • **Fiber** 0.9 g (4%) •
Sugars 21 g • **Protein** 5 g (10%)

Big Easy Shrimp Etouffee

Per serving (1/2 of recipe) **Calories** 448 •
Total Fat 6 g (9%) • **Saturated Fat** 2 g (8%) •
Cholesterol 176 mg (59%) • **Sodium** 730 mg (30%) •
Total Carbohydrate 66 g (22%) • **Fiber** 4 g (16%) •
Sugars 7 g • **Protein** 31 g (62%)

Jumbo Jambalaya

Per serving (1/10 of recipe) **Calories** 399 •
Total Fat 7 g (11%) • **Saturated Fat** 1 g (6%) •
Cholesterol 54 mg (18%) • **Sodium** 617 mg (26%) •
Total Carbohydrate 43 g (14%) • **Fiber** 3 g (13%) •
Sugars 7 g • **Protein** 27 g (54%) • **Vitamin C** 32 g (53%) •
Protein 27 g (54%) • **Vitamin C** 32 g (53%) • **Iron** 4 g (20%)

Red Beans and Rice

Per serving (1/6 of recipe) **Calories** 545 •
Total Fat 16 g (25%) • **Saturated Fat** 5 g (25%) •
Cholesterol 49 mg (16%) • **Sodium** 1244 mg (52%) •
Total Carbohydrate 72 g (24%) • **Fiber** 9 g (35%) •
Sugars 5 g • **Protein** 27 g (54%) • **Vitamin C** 32 g (53%) •
Protein 27 g (54%) • **Vitamin C** 25 g (42%) • **Iron** 4 g (20%)

