

Cajun vs. Creole

BY SHANNON OELRICH One of our staff members told me that the difference between Cajun and Creole food boiled down to “brown and red, respectively” (i.e., roux- or tomato-based). Turns out, our readers have a lot more than that to say about Cajun and Creole cooking. Following are two readers’ thoughts on the subject, with a recipe from each.



Lee Franzel, Pedernales Electric Cooperative member, wrote:

Creole refers to city food using the more expensive local ingredients but with fancy European techniques. Cajun is country food containing many of the same ingredients, but tending to be less costly and using a simpler cooking style.

Creoles are the offspring of European settlers, born in the New World, but retaining their European high style. New Orleans was settled in 1718 as French, then became Spanish, then briefly French again until 1803 and the Louisiana Purchase. Africans and Caribbean people also were major components of the Crescent City’s amalgamated culture. Creole cooking might use butter whereas Cajun might start with an animal fat.

In the 1750s, the British tried expelling the French from Acadian Nova Scotia. Some of the French descen-

dants landed around St. Martinville in South Louisiana to add to the French-influenced local culture. The area is still called Acadiana, and the word “Cajun” is a corruption of “Acadian.” Since the Cajuns were out in the country and swamplands, ingredients might include game and recipes to stretch the meat, such as jambalaya. Some say you can tell a Cajun by the possum jambalaya on his breath.

EASY CRAWFISH ETOUFFÉE

- 1 pound frozen crawfish tails, thawed*
- 2 heaping tablespoons flour
- ½ stick butter or 1/2 cup canola oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ½ large bell pepper, chopped
- ¾ cup chopped celery (leaves and small stems)
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño, deseeded and finely chopped, or 1 can (10 ounces) Ro-Tel
- 1 can (15 ounces) diced tomatoes with juice
- ¾ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ teaspoon thyme, crumbled
- ½ teaspoon oregano, crumbled
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- Salt to taste
- Cooked rice
- Chopped green onion and fresh parsley

In heavy pot (but not cast iron) over medium heat, stir together flour and butter for about 15 minutes, until roux starts to turn a caramel color. Don’t rush, as it burns easily. Stir every minute or so.

Add onion, bell pepper and celery. Stir frequently and allow vegetables to “sweat.” Add garlic and cook a little longer. Add can diced tomatoes with juice and jalapeño (or Ro-Tel). Add paprika, cayenne, bay leaf, thyme, oregano, black pepper and Worcestershire sauce. Simmer uncovered for 15 minutes.

Add crawfish tails, stir and bring back to a simmer for 5 minutes. Taste and add salt as needed.

Serve over cooked rice and top with

chopped green onions and fresh parsley as desired.

**I found frozen pre-cooked crawfish tails at my local grocery store. If unavailable, cooked, peeled shrimp may be substituted for crawfish.*



Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative member **John Wayne Chauffe** wrote:

I am not a historian nor a professional chef, but rather the third son of a traditional South Louisiana family, having being born on Ruth Plantation on Christmas Eve in 1943. That area of the state, in the rich Atchafalaya basin, was neither Cajun nor Creole and consequently benefited from the best of both worlds.

Like many young men of that era, I moved to seek employment. The food did not compare to the memories of my adolescence. Every trip “back home” became a mission to learn the how-tos of the Cajun style. I soon realized that there were no recipes, only techniques and general rules of preparation. After 40 years of practice and perfection, I still do not prepare the same dish the same way each time.

Amateur and professional cooks alike often consider Cajun and Creole foods as a simple variation of similar cooking methods. False! There are four distinct styles of cooking in the southern portion of the state ... Cajun, Creole, Soul and the multi-dish French gourmet meals exemplified by some of the famous chefs of New Orleans. At least six distinct flavors of gumbo can be found on Louisiana tables: roux- or tomato-based, filé or not, okra or not, and that does not account for the many choices of meat or seafood to blend into the dish.

Cajun food, while traditionally hot, does not have to be. It tends to be roux-



TRACIE SNIDER *Pedernales Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Crawfish Pie**

based for gumbos and stews. Creole food, while employing more spices, does not have to be. It tends to be tomato-based for soups, gumbos and stews. Common cooking styles usually employ creativity, improvising recipes to match what is on hand, using the experience of smell, sight, taste and texture to judge doneness. Cooking a simple one-dish meal can be an enjoyment that requires up to four hours to prepare, and often as long to enjoy. No crockpots allowed!

SHRIMP CREOLE WITH A CAJUN TOUCH

- 2 tablespoons butter or olive oil
- 1 cup cubed bell pepper
- 1 cup cubed onion
- 1/2 cup cubed celery
- 2-3 tablespoons pre-made roux*
- 1 pound small shrimp (50-100 count; usually come peeled)
- 2 cans (10 ounces each) Ro-Tel
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon Liquid Smoke
- 1 teaspoon Louisiana hot sauce
- 1 pound medium shrimp (20-30 count), peeled and deveined
- 1/3 cup sliced green onion tops
- 3 tablespoons parsley
- 3-4 cups cooked rice

In large saucepan, place butter or oil and heat over medium heat. Add bell pepper, onion and celery and sauté for a few minutes, until limber. Blend in roux, adding additional oil if necessary to prevent this mixture from browning excessively. Roux must be thoroughly dissolved and not lumpy! Correct color is light brown.

Add small shrimp, and cook for another minute, adding water if necessary to keep sauce from getting too thick. Add Ro-Tel, Worcestershire, Liquid Smoke and hot sauce and continue to cook, lowering heat to simmer. Cook for another 15 minutes to allow the shrimp and seasoning to saturate the flavor of the base stock. Add additional hot sauce, salt or black pepper to taste.

Add medium shrimp, green onions and parsley and continue to cook on low heat until shrimp turn medium pink, about 3-5 minutes.

Serve over rice. Serves 6.

**If your local grocery store doesn't carry pre-made roux, you can order it online at www.cajungrocer.com.*

CRAWFISH PIE

- 1/2 sticks butter
- 1 cup chopped bell pepper
- 1 cup sliced green onions
- 1/4 white onion, chopped
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 small can (5 ounces) evaporated milk
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon crushed red pepper
- 2 tablespoons parsley
- 1/2 tablespoons paprika
- 2 pounds crawfish tails
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 deep dish pie shells
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup chopped green bell pepper
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt (more or less, to taste)
- 1 dash cayenne pepper (more or less, to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon thyme
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 quart chicken broth
- 8 ounces tomato sauce
- 2 cups converted rice
- Kitchen Bouquet, Tony Chachere Creole Seasoning or Tabasco Sauce (optional)

Melt butter in large Dutch oven. Add peppers, onions, celery and garlic powder. Simmer on low for 5-6 minutes to wilt vegetables. Add everything else except crawfish tails. Mix well and simmer about 10-15 minutes. Add crawfish tails and simmer for 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place one pie shell in deep pie pan. Pour mixture into this and use other pie shell to cover top. Bake until browned, 15-20 minutes. Serves 8-10.

Serving size: 1 large piece. Per serving: 406 calories, 18 g protein, 27 g fat, 23 g carbohydrates, 701 mg sodium, 140 mg cholesterol

CREOLE CHICKEN AND SAUSAGE JAMBALAYA

- 1 large fryer chicken
- 1 pound smoked sausage (Andouille preferred)

Boil fryer till tender. Don't use salt in water. Save broth. De-bone cooked chicken and cut into bite-size pieces. Slice sausage into bite-size pieces.

In large Dutch oven, sauté vegetables in oil till soft and onions are clear. Add seasonings, Worcestershire, broth and tomato sauce. Simmer about 15 minutes.

Add meats and rice. Stir well. Bring to slow boil. Cover and cook over medium-low heat about 30 minutes. Stir to prevent sticking. Remove cover and cook about 20 more minutes over very low heat without stirring. Taste; adjust seasonings.

You can add 1-3 teaspoons Kitchen Bouquet for a smoky flavor. Serve with Tony Chachere and Tabasco, so guests can spice to taste. Serves 6-8.

Serving size: 1 large serving spoonful. Per serving: 518 calories, 27 g protein, 25 g fat, 45 g carbohydrates, 1,419 mg sodium, 79 mg cholesterol

ELAINE BINDO

Pedernales Electric Cooperative

RECIPE CONTEST

October's recipe contest is **NOT YOUR ORDINARY MAC-AND-CHEESE**. Send your recipes to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You may also fax them to (512) 486-6254 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. The deadline is June 15. The top winner will receive a tin filled with Pioneer products. Runners-up will also receive a prize.