

Gumbo Royale Briant Smith© 2006

This is what would happen if Louisiana Creole met classical French cuisine. So, what exactly is Gumbo? The only thing the food scholars agree on is that it originated in Louisiana in the 18th century. The name came from...who knows? Many believe it's an African term 'Ki ngombo' (okra), while others say that it's a Choctaw word for filet' (kombo). In 1803, the French Governor, Pierre Clement de Laussat, hosted a party which featured 24 different gumbos. I've cooked this for a number of people who say, "Man! This is great, but it ain't gumbo." (What they really mean is 'that ain't the way my mama made it') That's when I hit them with an old French expression...chaque cuisinier connait son meilleur pot. That roughly translates into, "Every cook knows his own pot best". Old blue eyes sang it perfectly, "I did it MY way!"

- NOTE: 1. I won't lie, this recipe requires a little time.
2. Read the postscripts first.
3. Read the recipe all the way through a couple of times so you can put an 'attack plan' together.
4. Don't even think about cooking until all of your prep-work is done!

Ingredients:

- 1 - Whole chicken (4 – 5 lbs).
- 1 - lb. Lardons* - cut into ½ " cubes ¹
- 1/3 C. flour
- 1/3 C. Unsalted butter @ room temp.
- ¼ C. – minced shallots
- 5 - celery stalks (8 " long) small dice 3 of them.
- 2 - T. minced garlic
- 2 C. – fresh brown mushrooms – finely sliced
- 2 – C. rich red wine such as a Merlot or Pinot Nor.
- 1 C. – Demi glace ²
- 1 – 16oz. jar cocktail onions – drained and lightly rinsed
- Salt, pepper, and cayenne – to taste

For the stock:

- 3 – medium carrots – peeled and cut into 3" pieces
- 1 – whole onion – quartered
- 2 – celery stalks – cut into 2 to 3 inch pieces
- 1 T. – tomato paste
- 2 T. olive oil (in all)
- 6 qts. – water
- Bouquet garni* made from 2 sprigs thyme, 2 stems fresh basil, & 3 bay leaves.

Preheat oven to 400°.

Coat stock vegetables with 1 T. olive oil and tomato paste. Place in a lightly oiled sheet pan, place in oven, and roast until lightly browned, 20 –30 minutes.

Place chicken in heavy stockpot and add water, ensuring that the bird is covered by 1 inch. Add browned vegetables and bouquet garni. Heat to boiling, reduce heat to simmer. During the first 15 – 20 minutes, skim off any foam/fat etc. that rises to surface. Cover pot and simmer until chicken is tender and easy to remove from bones (approx. 45 min.) Remove chicken (reserving the stock) and allow to cool enough to handle. De-bone bird and remove all fat, gristle, etc. Cut larger pieces of meat into 1” pieces.

Return bones to stock and cover. Simmer for 1 hour. Strain stock, reserving liquid.

While stock is simmering, sauté lardons in remaining olive oil on medium heat in large skillet. When crispy, remove them with a slotted spoon and put them on paper towels to drain. Drain remaining oil from skillet and return skillet to burner.

Add butter and melt on med/low, whisking lightly. When butter starts to lightly brown along the edges, add flour and whisk continuously to make roux. When roux has turned light brown and most foaming has stopped, slowly whisk in 2 C. of reserved stock and whisk, deglazing the skillet. Stir in wine until all of the liquid is well blended. Raise heat to medium and, with the exception of the onions, add all chopped, sliced, minced vegetables and bring to simmer. Add salt and pepper(s). Cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes or so.

Pour roux/vegetable mix into simmering stock. Stir, bring to boil, then reduce heat to simmer. Add lardons and taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes.

Add chicken and simmer for 15 minutes more. Add onions and simmer for 15 more minutes. Adjust seasonings and skim off any fat that has risen to surface.

Serve over rice with slices of fresh French bread on the side.

¹ Lardons = French term for thick sliced, fatty bacon.

² Demi glace = Veal stock which has been simmered and reduced 75%. It also takes 24 hours to cook. If you want to make it from scratch, I’ll send a recipe. Most grocery stores carry it in powdered form and/or a thick, highly concentrated paste. Just follow the package directions.

³ Bouquet garni – Fresh herbs tied in a cheesecloth sachet. In this case, 2 sprigs fresh thyme, 3 bay leaves, and 2 sprigs fresh basil. Put the sachet in the stock while chicken is simmering. Leave it there until you strain the stock when done.