

Seafood Gumbo

Contrary to what certain gumbo purists spout, there is no one way to make seafood gumbo. It doesn't have to have roux, okra, or file; it can have land-based meat, tomatoes, and even smoked sausage and corn. In fact, there are about as many variations on seafood gumbo as there are kitchens in Louisiana. Fittingly, the word gumbo is used as slang for "all together" or "all at once" — "gumbo ya-ya" means everyone is talking at the same time.



L-R: Cara Ranieri; Chef John Folse; LK&C publisher Susan Ford. Chef did a gumbo demonstration.

And while Louisiana lays claim to seafood gumbo, it is a perennial favorite all along the Gulf Coast. Chef John Folse and his business partner Rick Tramonto went on a seafood gumbo expedition along the Mississippi Gulf Coast when they were developing the menu for Seafood R'evolution (new last fall in Jackson, Mississippi). The gumbo at their popular New Orleans restaurant, R'evolution, has won awards, but they discovered different flavors and consistencies in gumbo coming out of the kitchens in the Mississippi coastal counties. There, and along the Alabama and Florida coasts, cooks like to make a lighter seafood gumbo in the summer months when tomatoes and okra are in peak season and fishermen are bringing in beautiful Gulf shrimp and crabs.



Gumbos vary in color and thickness from one kitchen to another; generally, lighter varieties are summer gumbo.

Louisiana gumbo tends to be thicker and heavier than varieties found further east and is more popular in the fall and winter months. New Orleans gumbo almost always has tomatoes — many speculate that it probably evolved from the French bouillabaisse. The further west you go in Louisiana, the less likely you are to find tomatoes and okra in the gumbo pots; instead, it's thickened with filé powder, which is a fine powder ground from dried sassafras roots. From New Orleans on east along the coast you'll find gumbo served over hot cooked rice; over in Cajun country you'll find a scoop of potato salad in it or a baked sweet potato, and sometimes boiled eggs.

There are even different schools of thought as to the origins of the name gumbo — some think it comes from the Bantu (African) word for okra, which is *ki ngombo*, others point to the Choctaw word for filé, which is *kombo*.

On the following pages you'll find several different recipes; we suggest you try them all, then develop your own version based on your family's preferences. ♦



On the left, dry roux; on the right, the same roux with liquid. Note how much darker the roux becomes after adding liquid to it.



- The darker the flour, the less effective it becomes for thickening. This is because the flour grain degrades as it bakes and darkens, thus limiting its ability to soak up liquid and deliver a heavier viscosity.
- When you open the oven door while the roux is baking, you will most likely notice a puff of what appears to be smoke escaping the oven. No worries - it's just a dust cloud of flour.

Dry Roux

Dry roux has been called Yankee Roux, Yorkie Dust, and, by some gumbo purists, crap, but toasted dry flour is a very useful ingredient once you understand it. An oil-free roux is easier to prepare, healthier because fat is not needed, and the end result is nearly the same as a traditional roux. All-purpose flour is toasted in the oven while you tend to your other gumbo duties, and is stirred just once every 20 minutes instead of constantly.

To make: preheat your conventional oven to 375°F (convection ovens can't be used, picture the fan blowing a huge mess of flour and you'll understand why.) Place no more than 2 cups of all-purpose flour in a large rimmed baking pan. Level the flour into a single layer covering the entire surface of the pan. Bake at 375°F



for 20 minutes. Remove from oven; the moisture in the flour will have caused it to cake up. Sift it back into a fine powder with a sifter or, using a metal spatula, press down flat over the clumped roux and rotate spatula in circles, repeating all over the pan until the lumps are gone. Once again, spread flour evenly over baking pan and return to oven; bake another 20 minutes. Remove from oven and stir the lighter and darker patches of roux together (it shouldn't be caked this time). Repeat until the flour is browned as desired.

Note: the color of toasted flour is deceiving. It will always appear 4 times lighter than it truly is when it becomes mixed with a liquid; see photo at left. To test the true color of your dry roux, mix a teaspoon of the toasted flour with a teaspoon of water in a small bowl; evaluate and decide. Continue baking in 20 minute intervals, stirring in between, until the desired color is achieved. The finished product can be stored tightly in a cool dry place for up to a year.

To use: the dry toasted flour needs to be hydrated before it can be added to the liquid called for in your recipe. Place one to three tablespoons toasted flour (per final cup of liquid, depending on how thick final results should be) in a mixing bowl. While whisking, slowly add only enough liquid to form a paste. Once lump free, keep whisking in small additions of liquid, until desired amount is incorporated and proceed with your recipe. You'll need to sweat your vegetables separately.

-David Gallent



Many a bond has been formed over a bowl of seafood gumbo. Chef Chase approved of Chef Folse's contribution.

Leah Chase's Okra Gumbo

- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 3 pounds fresh okra (sliced thin)
- 3 medium blue crabs
- 1½ cups chopped onions
- ½ cup chopped green pepper
- ½ cup chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1½ quarts water
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon chopped garlic
- ½ teaspoon whole thyme
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 pound shrimp (cleaned and deveined)

For this recipe, a heavy pot is needed (I use Magnalite). Heat the pot. Add oil and okra. Heat must not be high, as the okra must cook slowly. Stir the okra often, cooking for 20 minutes. Add the crabs, onions, green pepper, and celery. Cook for another 15 minutes. Give this pot a lot of attention or the okra will stick. Okra should be soft (not fried to a crisp). Add tomato paste and stir well. Slowly add the water. Stir in crushed red pepper, cayenne pepper, paprika, garlic, thyme, salt, and bay leaves. Cook for 10 minutes, then add the shrimp and continue cooking for another 10 minutes. Serve over rice.

Serves 4 to 6.

From *The Dooky Chase Cookbook*, by Leah Chase





Debbie Guidry-Gautier's Seafood Gumbo

Cajun country, Breaux Bridge, Louisiana

- 1 3½-ounce bag of dried shrimp**
- ¼ cup vegetable oil**
- 2½ cups chopped onions**
- 2 cups chopped bell peppers (if you can, use red and green peppers)**
- 2 medium cloves of garlic, minced**
- 2 cups prepared roux**
- 7 to 8 quarts of water, chicken, or seafood stock (or use half water and half stock)**
- 2 pounds medium shrimp, peeled and deveined**
- 1 pound crabmeat (claw and/or white lump)**
- 1 pound crab claws**
- 1 pound crawfish, peeled and deveined**
- 1 pint raw oysters with liquid**
- parsley and sliced green onion tops**
- salt and cayenne pepper**
- hot cooked rice, for serving**
- filé powder**

Place dried shrimp in a bowl and cover with 1 cup very hot water; set aside to soak for 30 minutes. Heat vegetable oil in a large stock pot over medium-high heat. Add onions, bell pepper, and garlic and sauté until onions are slightly transparent. Add roux and stir well; you will have to start adding water/stock a little at a time to dissolve roux. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to a low boil, and cook for about 45 minutes. Add remaining water or stock and reconstituted dried shrimp with soaking liquid. Bring back to a slow boil and cook for 1 hour. Add remaining seafood, parsley, and green onions 15 minutes before serving; season to taste with salt and cayenne pepper. Serve over hot rice topped with a sprinkle of filé.

Serves 12 to 14.



Note: The variety of seafood you use is really up to you. I use about 5 pounds total.

Chef Danny Trace's Creole Seafood Gumbo

Brennan's Restaurant, Houston, Texas

- 1½ to 2 pounds large hard-shell crabs**
- ¾ cup canola oil**
- ¾ cup sifted all-purpose flour**
- 3 medium yellow onions, medium dice**
- 1 bunch of celery, medium dice**
- 4 medium green bell peppers, medium dice**
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic**
- 1 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes**
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- pinch each of dried oregano, basil, and thyme**
- 4 large bay leaves**
- salt and freshly ground pepper**
- 1 pound okra; sliced ¼ inch thick**
- 3 quarts stock (fish, shrimp, or crab) or water**
- 1 pound medium shrimp, shelled and deveined**
- 1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat**
- 1 quart shucked oysters, in their liquor**
- Louisiana hot sauce and Worcestershire**
- 1 bunch green onions, thinly sliced**
- filé powder**
- hot cooked rice, for serving**

Remove the top shells and gills of the crabs and discard. Crack the crabs in half; set aside.

Heat oil in an 8-quart Dutch oven until smoking, about 5 minutes. Gradually add the flour and cook over high heat, stirring constantly until the roux is the color of milk chocolate, 3 to 5 minutes, being careful not to burn. Add the onions, celery, bell pepper, and garlic and cook for 5 minutes until wilted. Add the tomatoes, cayenne pepper, herbs, bay leaves, and salt and pepper. Cook about 3 minutes.

Gradually add stock to the pot, stirring constantly. Add the crabs and okra. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 1 hour; stirring often. Add the shrimp and cook for 5 minutes. Add the crabmeat, oysters, and their liquor and bring just to a boil over moderate heat. Taste and adjust seasoning. Serve immediately over rice and garnish with green onions and a dusting of filé.

Makes 5 quarts.

Mississippi Seafood Gumbo

- ¾ cup vegetable oil**
- ¾ cup flour**
- 2 medium yellow onions, diced**
- 1 green pepper, diced**
- 1 bunch thinly sliced green onions**
- 2 to 3 tablespoons minced fresh garlic**
- 2 large ripe tomatoes, diced**
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley**
- 2 quarts seafood stock, or as needed**
- 1 pound andouille or smoked sausage, sliced into ¼-inch rounds**
- 2 pounds fresh okra, sliced**
- 4 gumbo crabs, cleaned**
- 2 pounds (after cleaning) Louisiana shrimp, in all**
- 3 bay leaves**
- 2 teaspoon thyme**
- 4 teaspoon salt**
- 2 teaspoon pepper**
- 1 teaspoon cayenne**
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- 10 whole allspice**
- 8 cloves**
- ¼ teaspoon mace**
- ½ pound crab meat, picked over hot cooked rice**

Heat oil in a heavy Dutch oven until it shimmers. Add flour and stir to incorporate, breaking up any lumps. Cook over medium heat until the roux is milk chocolate brown in color, stirring and scraping the bottom of the pan constantly. If you don't have experience making roux, do this over low heat; it may take as long as half an hour. Take care not to burn.

Add onions, green pepper, green onions, and garlic to roux and stir to incorporate; cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables soften. Add the tomatoes and parsley, stir to coat with pan mixture, and cook, stirring frequently, until tomatoes soften, about 2 minutes. Add 1 cup of stock and stir to thin roux and vegetables. Add remaining stock, sausages, okra, gumbo crabs, ½ pound shrimp, bay leaves, thyme, salt, pepper, cayenne, lemon juice, allspice, cloves, and mace; stir to combine.

Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook, stirring often and scraping the bottom and sides of the pot each time, for about 2 hours or until the okra disappears. Add more stock or water as necessary.

Add the remaining shrimp and the crabmeat, simmer for 5 minutes, remove from the heat, and let rest for 20 minutes. Serve over hot steamed rice; pass Saltine-style crackers and your favorite Louisiana-style hot sauce.

Serves 10 to 12.





Florida Shrimp and Okra Gumbo

- 2** pounds Gulf shrimp (or blue crab or spiny lobster) medium, peeled and deveined
- kosher salt**
- pepper**
- cayenne pepper**
- ½** cup olive oil
- 2** pounds okra, chopped
- 1** tablespoon tomato paste
- 1** tomato, chopped
- 1** cup chopped onion
- 4** cloves garlic, minced
- ½** cup chopped celery
- ½** cup chopped green bell pepper
- 6** cups water or low-sodium vegetable stock
- ½** cup chopped green onions

Season the shrimp with salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste and set aside.

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the okra and sauté for about 12 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the tomato paste, tomato, onion, garlic, celery, and green bell pepper and sauté for 15 minutes. Add the water or stock and season to taste. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 45 minutes.

Add the shrimp and simmer for 6 minutes. To finish, add the green onions and stir thoroughly. Serve with hot cooked rice.

Serves 8 - 10.

Recipe courtesy of Fresh from Florida: Gulf Seafood