

FOOD INTELLIGENCE

BIG IDEAS

Slade Rushing tops each bowl of his seafood gumbo with just a small scoop of basmati rice.



THE GASTRONAUT FILES

Secret to Great Gumbo

It's all about getting the roux dark and toasty.

"THERE ARE A LOT OF BAD GUMBOS OUT THERE because people are afraid to take the roux where it needs to go," says Slade Rushing about the classic base of flour and fat. Where it needs to go is from a pale beige to a mahogany brown. Rushing, the chef at New Orleans's revamped Brennan's, says the only way to achieve roux perfection is to whisk the flour and oil constantly, over moderately low heat, for 40 minutes, until the mixture turns dark and toasty. Then, he says, prepare the gumbo with whatever you like—sausage, seafood and game are all great. His seafood version is filled with lump crabmeat, oysters and shrimp, all in a spectacular crab stock. —SARAH DIGREGORIO

Seafood Gumbo

Active: 1 hr 20 min; Total: 3 hr 50 min; Serves 8

This superlative gumbo is loaded with Louisiana seafood, but you can substitute any local fish and shellfish.

CRAB STOCK

- 1 onion, quartered
- 1 head of garlic, halved
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 Tbsp. whole black peppercorns
- 2 gallons water
- 6 live blue crabs

GUMBO

- 1 cup canola oil
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ¾ lb. andouille sausage, finely chopped (2 cups)
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 2 celery ribs, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, finely chopped

- ½ cup finely chopped garlic (12 large cloves)
- ½ lb. okra, thickly sliced
- 1 lb. tomatoes, finely chopped
- ½ tsp. filé powder
- ¼ tsp. Creole seasoning, such as Zatarain's
- 2 thyme sprigs
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 Tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 lb. jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over
- 1 lb. large shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 2 dozen freshly shucked oysters
- 2 Tbsp. hot sauce, such as Crystal or Tabasco, plus more for serving
- Basmati rice and sliced scallions, for serving

Make the Crab Stock

1. In a large pot, combine all of the ingredients except the crabs and bring to a boil. Add the crabs and simmer briskly over moderate heat for 1 hour, skimming as necessary. Strain the stock into a pot. You should have about 12 cups; add water if necessary, and reserve any extra stock for another use. Discard the crabs.

Make the Gumbo

2. In a large pot, heat the oil. Whisk in the flour and cook over moderately low heat, whisking constantly, until the roux is deep mahogany brown with a nutty aroma, about 40 minutes.
3. Stir in the andouille, onion, celery, red and green bell peppers, garlic and okra and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables soften, about 10 minutes. Add the tomatoes, filé powder, Creole seasoning, thyme, bay leaf, salt and the 12 cups of crab stock. Simmer over moderate heat for 1 hour and 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Stir in the crabmeat, shrimp, oysters and 2 tablespoons of hot sauce and cook until the shrimp are white throughout, about 3 minutes. Discard the thyme sprigs and bay leaf. Ladle the gumbo into bowls and top with rice. Garnish with scallions; serve with hot sauce.

MAKE AHEAD The gumbo can be prepared 3 days ahead through Step 3. Reheat gently and cook the seafood just before serving.

WINE Fragrant, honeyed Loire Valley Chenin Blanc: 2011 Domaine des Baumard Savennières.

Roux Lesson

In French cooking, roux (a mix of fat and flour) is used as a thickener; in Cajun recipes, it's all about adding flavor. According to Slade Rushing, the roux is only done when it's a deep, rich brown and "it smells like a roomful of toasted hazelnuts."



1

START THE ROUX. Heat the oil in a large enameled cast-iron casserole. When the oil is hot, add the flour and whisk over moderately low heat until it is thoroughly incorporated.



2

WHISK THE ROUX. Cook the roux, whisking constantly; it will turn light brown after about 15 minutes.



3

FINISH THE ROUX. The roux is done when it is a deep, dark mahogany color and has a toasty aroma.