

Chicken and Andouille Gumbo

Ingredients:

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup bacon drippings, lard, oil or shortening
1 to 1-1/2 pounds boneless chicken breast
1 pound andouille or smoked sausage, sliced
2 to 3 cups chopped onion
1 cup chopped scallions (green onions)
1 cup chopped bell pepper
1/2 cup chopped celery
1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
4 to 6 garlic cloves, minced
3 quarts poultry stock (see above)
Salt, black pepper and hot sauce to taste
Seasonings for chicken: garlic powder, black pepper, cayenne pepper and paprika
Oil for frying the chicken
Plenty of cooked rice
Filé powder

- First chop your vegetables and parsley, mince the garlic, and put your stock in a pot on a back burner.
- Now make a nice dark roux, following the instructions given above. When the roux has progressed to the dark chocolate stage (about forty-five to fifty minutes), add the onions, then the bell pepper and celery, stirring vigorously all the while. You'll want to be heating your stock by now. Continue to stir the roux, and after a few minutes add your chopped scallions and parsley. Once the onions are nearly transparent, add the minced garlic to the roux. After a minute or two more of energetic stirring -- don't burn the garlic! -- start blending in the hot stock, perhaps a cup at a time. Let each addition of stock be absorbed into the roux before adding more. It will take you several minutes at least to add the stock in this way. Once you've added all the stock, you've got the base for your gumbo. You've been stirring continuously for more than an hour at this point, but finally you're ready to reduce the heat to a simmer and let the gumbo pot more or less take care of itself, just giving it the occasional stir.
- Add the andouille or other sausage to the gumbo pot, and turn your attention to the chicken. (I assume here that whatever kind of sausage you are using is already completely cooked. Some folks would first brown the sausage slices in a little oil, regardless.) Cut the chicken into bite-sized pieces and sprinkle with garlic powder, black pepper, cayenne pepper and paprika. Start heating the oil in which you will fry the chicken pieces. You will want the oil to be quite hot. The chicken pieces should sit at room temperature for a while to let them absorb the flavor of the spices. Next shake the chicken pieces with flour in a large plastic bag, then shake off excess flour in a colander or large strainer. Fry the chicken pieces in batches so that the oil doesn't cool off too much. Use a slotted spoon to remove the fried chicken pieces from the oil, and set aside. Once the last batch is done, add all of the fried chicken to the gumbo pot.

One reason that I prefer to start the gumbo pot first, then fry the chicken, is that this way the chicken doesn't wind up falling apart or getting soggy in the gumbo pot. On the other hand, if you begin by frying the chicken, you can reuse the fat in which you fry the chicken, and even the excess flour used to coat the chicken, when you make your roux. A difficulty with this latter method is that you may wind up with burnt bits in the fat after you've fried the chicken, which can damage the roux. I've done it both ways, and waiting until after making the roux to fry the chicken seems to produce better results.

- Assuming that your chicken was completely cooked when you added it to the gumbo pot, you're now ready to start tasting and seasoning the gumbo. Although the gumbo is still going to cook for another forty-five minutes or so, we want to give the flavors time to marry in the pot, so now is the time to start adjusting the spiciness of the mixture. I typically use a few drops or more of each of several bottled hot sauces, along with plenty of freshly-ground black pepper. (I like to use some of each of Louisiana brand, Tabasco and El Yucateco.) Add the hot sauce conservatively! You don't want a fiery hotness that