



September 2014

Customs and Cuisine of Uganda

By Linda McElroy, curator

Ugandan cuisine is quite the melting pot, taking culinary influences from the Arabs and British, and especially from India. The food is not typically spicy, but seasoned with tomatoes and onions to create flavorful, pleasing dishes. The diet is based on a combination of a starch and a “sauce” at each meal. The starch may consist of Ugali (a type of cornmeal paste) or Matooke (mashed plantain), and is always topped with a sauce or stew made of groundnuts (peanuts), vegetables, or meat.

Although Uganda is home to the largest fresh water lake in the world the lake has been over- fished, and fresh fish is very hard to obtain unless you live near the source. But smoked fish can be found quite readily and is often added to a dish containing meat or beans to add complexity and depth.

Other commonly found foods include bananas, pineapple, beans, cassava, sweet potatoes, cabbage, and spinach. Groundnuts are a vital staple, and are most often turned into a sauce. Rice is expensive and not typically consumed.

Most people who live outside urban centers produce their own food and generally eat two meals a day - lunch and supper. Breakfast is often a cup of tea or porridge.

Indian samosas (triangular, fried pastries stuffed with spiced vegetables or meat) have been completely assimilated into the local cuisine, and in the larger cities you will find vendors selling these snacks by the roadside, as well as the more regional snack of fried grasshoppers!

Tea (chai) and coffee (kawa) are popular beverages. Alcoholic beverages are enjoyed as well, with the majority of wine coming from South Africa. The national drink is *waragi*, a banana gin.

Etiquette

- Shaking hands is the normal form of greeting. Casual dress is considered appropriate in the daytime and evening.
- Etiquette is important at family meals. When a meal is ready, all the members of the household wash their hands and sit on floor mats.
- Visitors and neighbors who drop in are expected to join the family at a meal.
- Normally a short prayer is said before the family starts eating.
- Leaning on the left hand or stretching one's legs at a meal is a sign of disrespect.
- When the meal is finished, everyone in turn gives a compliment to the mother.

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Recipes



Bufuke with Tomato and Onion Sauce (Tested – see The Proven Platter, Sept. 2014)

Ingredients

2 ½ to 3 lbs. sweet potatoes, (orange ones are best, Garnet or Jewel)
1 15-oz can black beans, rinsed and drained
1 cup peanuts, roasted and salted, roughly chopped
salt and freshly-ground black pepper, to taste
red chile powder
cilantro leaves for garnish

For the Sauce

6 roma tomatoes (1 ½ pounds), halved and thickly sliced
2 onions (1 pound), halved and sliced
1 cup water or vegetable stock
1 cup coconut milk

Directions

Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Grease a casserole dish or baking pan large enough to fit the sweet potatoes. Ideally this will be the pan you are serving the dish from. Peel and dice the sweet potatoes into large chunks, toss into the greased pan, then season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with whatever type of red chile powder you like - I used chipotle chile powder. Drizzle with just a bit of oil, cover with foil and bake for about 30 minutes, or until soft. Remove from oven.

To prepare the sauce, heat a little oil in a pan, add the onions and fry for about 10 minutes, or until onions are soft and lightly browned, then add the

tomatoes and the water or stock, bring to a simmer and cook gently until the mixture starts to thicken and tomatoes break down, just a couple more minutes. Pour in the coconut milk and continue simmering, stirring frequently until the mixture thickens but is still soupy. Season to taste with salt. It shouldn't take more than about 15-20 minutes to make the sauce. You still want your sauce to be chunky.

To serve, heap the roasted sweet potatoes on a large serving dish (or use the dish you baked it in), sprinkle with the black beans, pour over the tomato sauce, sprinkle with chopped peanuts, and garnish with cilantro leaves.

To serve this dish pot-luck style I would suggest bringing the dish with the sweet potatoes and black beans together, and the sauce and garnishes kept separate. Assemble when ready to serve. Serves 8 – 12

Recipe adapted from CeltNet.org

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Samosas

Samosas are a common snack food you can buy at stalls on the side of the road. There are generally two types of Samosas, beef or vegetable, and the mixture of spicy vegetables and/or meat is wrapped in a thin sheet of pastry and then fried. In this case we'll use phyllo dough for our pastry (perhaps not always so traditional) and bake them. Following the recipe I've included a short, 2-minute video on how to fold phyllo pastry into triangles that I think you'll find helpful.

Ingredients

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
½ teaspoon mustard seeds
¾ cup finely chopped onion
1 teaspoon finely chopped ginger
½ cup peas (frozen are fine)
1 tablespoon ground coriander
1 teaspoon ground cumin
¼ teaspoon red chile powder
½ to ¾ teaspoon [garam masala](#) (Indian spices)
kosher salt to taste
splash of water
1 lb and 5 ounces potatoes, peeled, boiled until soft and crushed into large lumps
4 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
1 package frozen phyllo pastry dough, thawed
5 tablespoons melted butter, for brushing (olive oil can be used as well)

Directions

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Heat the oil in a small nonstick pan. Add the mustard seeds and fry for about ten seconds, or until they begin to splutter, next quickly add the onion and ginger, and cook for 2 to 3 minutes over high heat. Add the peas, remaining spices, salt to taste, and a splash of water. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes and remove from heat. Add the pea mixture along with the chopped cilantro to the potatoes and mix thoroughly. Taste the mixture and adjust the seasoning as necessary - potatoes can absorb a lot of salt so you may need to add more. Make sure this mixture is cool when you use it to fill the phyllo pastry - you can make it one day ahead.

Unroll the phyllo dough, cover with plastic wrap and a damp tea or kitchen towel. Peel off one sheet and keep the rest covered so that it doesn't dry out. Lay the pastry sheet flat on a clean surface, with the short side facing you, and brush it with melted butter. Fold in one third of the pastry lengthwise towards the middle. Brush again with the butter and fold in the other side to make a long triple-layered strip.

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Place one rounded teaspoon of the filling at one end of the strip, leaving a 1-inch border. Brush a little melted butter along the bottom edge of the strip, this will help the pastry stick together on your first fold. Take the right corner and fold diagonally to the left, enclosing the filling and forming a triangle, pressing down on the buttered edge to seal well. Fold again along the upper crease of the triangle. Keep folding in this way until you reach the end of the strip. When you reach the end of the strip, brush the end again with more melted butter to help seal the package, and brush the outer surface with more butter. Place the triangle onto a baking sheet and cover while you make the rest of the samosas. Bake in the center of the oven for 30 to 35 minutes, or until golden and crisp, turning halfway through the cooking time.

Note: Samosas can be made ahead of time and frozen, unbaked. Just add a few more minutes to your baking time - no need to defrost them.

(Here's a [short video](#) from BBC GoodFood that shows how to use phyllo dough – <http://bit.ly/1nH29i3>)

Recipe source - SsekoDesigns.com



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Meatballs in Yogurt Sauce

Makes 12 to 16 small meatballs

Meatballs are a common part of Ugandan meals and they are made in a range of ways and served with a whole selection of sauces. In this case, the dish has an Indian influence, with a yogurt-based sauce.

Ingredients - for the Meatballs

3 slices of white bread
1 pound ground meat (any kind or combination)
2 eggs, beaten
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
½ cup soft breadcrumbs
1 cup chopped onions
2 teaspoons freshly-grated ginger
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
¼ cup flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
1 dried hot chile, crushed and chopped
½ teaspoon salt
oil for frying

Ingredients - for the Sauce

Combine the ingredients for the sauce, and set aside until needed.

2 cups plain yogurt
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 dried hot chile, crushed and finely chopped
3 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped
freshly-ground black pepper, to taste

Directions

Coat a frying pan with a bit of oil and sauté the onions until lightly browned. Place the bread slices in a bowl, cover with water and set aside to soak for 2 minutes. Drain the bread, squeeze out the excess moisture, then crumble into a bowl. Add onions and all the rest of the ingredients and mix thoroughly. Shape the mixture into meatballs about the size of walnuts. Using the same frying pan, heat a few tablespoons of oil, add the meatballs, and fry until richly browned on all sides (about 4 minutes). In the meantime, warm the yogurt mixture until hot to the touch - don't let it boil or you will have curdled milk on your hands! Stir the meatballs into the sauce and serve. Make sure to scrape up all the delicious crusty drippings from your pan and stir into the yogurt sauce.

Recipe source - CeltNet.org



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Chocolate Peanut Butter Banana Pops **Makes 8 to 12**

Although this dessert may not be Ugandan in origin, it is in spirit! Bananas and peanuts show up in all manner of Ugandan recipes, and so I thought this would be a fun and easy dessert to showcase these two ingredients.

Ingredients

4 ripe bananas
2 cups chocolate chips
 $\frac{1}{4}$ peanut butter
chopped peanuts

Directions

It's best to start with bananas that are perfectly ripe. (The greener the banana, the more likely it will split when you put in the sticks.) Slice the bananas in half and then cut off the ends so they are nice and neat.

Using candy-making sticks (purchase at any craft store), push a stick into each banana half about 1-1/2 inches. Alternatively, you could use popsicle sticks, or short (6") wooden barbeque skewers. Don't worry if some bananas start to split a bit, they'll eventually all get filled with yummy chocolate.

Next, you'll need to freeze the banana halves for about 30-45 minutes. This step is important because a cold banana means that when you dip it in the chocolate, it will harden quickly and you'll avoid a drippy, chocolaty mess. When the bananas are frozen you can make the chocolate coating. In a microwave-safe bowl, melt the chocolate chips and the peanut butter. A 2-cup glass Pyrex measuring cup is just about the right size for the task of dipping the bananas. Microwave for 60-90 seconds, stirring every 30 seconds, until the chips are melted and the chocolate mixture is smooth.

Now it is time to dip! Dunk each banana in the chocolate mixture. Use a spoon to cover the entire banana (also use the back of the spoon to scrape off excess chocolate).

Once covered, roll them in chopped peanuts and then place on parchment paper while you finish up the rest. Once you've finished coating all the pops (the chocolate mixture should make enough to coat four bananas—eight pops), transfer to the freezer to finish chilling. 1-2 hours later, you'll have hardened chocolate with smooth, frozen banana in the middle. Once they are frozen through, you can transfer them into a zip-top bag and store them in the freezer. Let soften a bit at room temperature before serving.

Recipe source – BackToHerRoots.com