



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.

Aunt Sarah's Rice and Cabbage

Serves 8

Sseko Designs is a fashion brand that seeks to hire women in Uganda to make sandals. Through this endeavor they are able to earn money that will go directly towards their college education. Over 60 women have realized their dreams of going to university, and Sseko currently employs 50 women in Uganda from all walks of life. How cool is that!

It is common practice for employers to provide a noontime meal to all employees, and at Sseko Designs workshop Aunt Sarah's Rice and Cabbage is a typical meal that everyone looks forward to all week.

Note: recipe is three parts –rice, cabbage, and spice mixture.

Ingredients for the rice:

2 tbsp. oil

1/2 of a medium onion, chopped

pilau masala spice mixture (see recipe below)

5-7 plum tomatoes, diced

1 tsp. salt

4 cups water

2 cups rice

Directions

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add onions to pan and let them brown for a few minutes. Add half of the pilau masala spice mixture, tomatoes and salt. Fry the mix together. After a few minutes add water and bring to a boil. Add rice and stir only once. Cover and let rice cook thoroughly, about 20 minutes.

Ingredients for the cabbage:

5-7 carrots, diced
3 tbsp. onion, chopped
3 plum tomatoes, diced
1 head of cabbage, shredded
salt to taste
pilau masala spice mixture

Directions

Place diced carrots, cut onions, and cut up tomatoes in the bottom of a cold saucepan. Next place shredded cabbage on top of mixture, cover the pan and bring the pan to moderate heat. Wait 20 minutes before stirring and discard extra water that comes from the cooking cabbage. Add salt to taste and the rest of the pilau masala spice mixture. When almost all the water has cooked away, add a few tablespoons of oil and mix thoroughly. Serve immediately over rice.

Pilau Masala

A traditional East African recipe for a classic blend of curry-style spices that is traditionally used to flavor curries and rice-based dishes.

Ingredients

1 1/2 tbsp. cumin seeds
1 tbsp. cardamom seeds
1/2 tsp. whole cloves
1/2 tsp. black peppercorns
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. dried piri-piri chillies (optional)

Directions

Heat a dry frying pan over moderate heat and add the cumin seeds. Fry for a minute, and then add cardamom and cloves. Continue dry frying until the spices become aromatic then tip the spices into a spice or coffee grinder along with black pepper, cinnamon and chilies. Grind to a fine powder and use immediately or keep in air tight container for several months.

Adapted from: <http://ssekodesigns.com/sseko-recipe-spotlight-aunt-sarahs-rice-and-cabbage/>

Photo credit: with permission from Sseko Designs

Cucumber Mango Salad (Tested)

Serves 4-6

Persian traders brought mangoes to East Africa in the 10th century. Serve this simple mango salad with any East African meal of stewed or braised meat.

Ingredients

2 cups thinly sliced English cucumber
½ cup finely diced red onion
½ tsp. salt
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 cups chopped, seeded tomatoes
¼ cup chopped dry-roasted peanuts
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped
½ tsp. coriander seeds, lightly crushed
¼ tsp. ground cumin
dash of ground cinnamon
dash of ground cloves
2 tbsp. lime juice
1 tbsp. oil
1 ½-2 cups diced mango (about 1 large mango)
2 tbsp. roughly chopped cilantro

Directions

Combine the cucumbers, onion and salt in a colander and let stand at least 20 minutes. Place the drained cucumbers in a bowl and add the rest of the ingredients, through the oil and mix well.

Add the mango chunks and toss gently. Garnish the top with the chopped cilantro and some more peanuts.

Adapted from: Cooking Light “Global Kitchen” by David Joachim

Photo by: Linda McElroy

East African Braised Chicken (Updated and Tested)

Serves 8

The Indian spice trade brought curry to East Africa. Using traditional African braising techniques dishes like this became popular.

Ingredients

3 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. ground black pepper
3 tbsp. ghee or vegetable oil
3 cups onions, halved lengthwise, then thinly sliced
2 tbsp. fresh ginger, minced
1 tsp. curry powder
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
½ tsp. ground cardamom
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup chicken stock
3 tbsp. lemon juice
1/3 cup chopped dates

Directions

Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Heat two tablespoons oil or ghee in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat. Add chicken and brown approximately four minutes per side. You may need to do this in batches so as to not crowd the pieces. Set chicken aside.

Add remaining tablespoon of oil or ghee to pot and reduce heat to medium-low. Add onions and cook for a few minutes, stirring. Add ginger, spices and garlic, stir and cook one minute. Pour in one cup of chicken stock and bring to a boil. Turn the heat down to a simmer and return chicken to pot along with the lemon juice and dates.

Simmer partially covered for about 20 minutes, or until the chicken is done.

Recipe adapted from: Cooking Light “Global Kitchen” by David Joachim
Photo credit: Linda McElroy