



Beef and Spinach Stew (Gboma Dessi) (Tested)
Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

2 to 3 tbsp. red palm oil (a must have ingredient for authentic results and flavor, but regular oil can be substituted)
2 lbs. stewing beef, cut into cubes
3 small yellow or white onions, peeled and sliced thin
4 large cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
1 tbsp. minced fresh ginger root
2 to 4 piri piri hot peppers, depending on taste (these peppers are *hot!*)
2 beef bullion cubes
3 cups water
14 oz. canned tomato sauce
1 ½ tbsp. Gbotemi spice (see recipe below)
1 tsp. salt
1 lb. fresh spinach (about 2 large heads)

Directions

In a large wide frying pan, heat a couple tablespoons of oil. Add half of the beef cubes and brown on two sides over medium heat. Remove to a plate and brown the second batch of meat. Remove again.

Sauté the onions in the same pan, if you need a bit more oil add another tablespoon. When the onions are softened and colored, add the garlic, ginger and hot peppers and sauté for a few more minutes.

Add the rest of the ingredients, except for the spinach, and simmer covered for about 3 hours. The meat must be absolutely tender when pierced with a fork. I used pre-cut beef cubes from the

butcher and they were on the large side and it took 3 hours. If your beef cubes are on the small side it may take less time.

Check every so often to see if it needs a bit more water added and stir to make sure it is not sticking to the pan. Remove the cover during the last half hour of cooking if the stew is looking soupy and you want to reduce it a bit.

In the meantime, you can prepare the spinach. I prefer to use large mature heads of spinach for this dish rather than pre-washed baby spinach. It holds up better and you can use all the stems as well. Remove the root end of the spinach and wash well in a couple changes of water. Put the spinach with the water still clinging to the leaves into a large pot and cover with a lid. Steam the spinach for 5 to 10 minutes, stirring once or twice until it is all wilted. Remove and drain, let cool. Coarsely chop the spinach and set aside until ready to add to the stew.

When the stew is ready, taste for seasoning and add the spinach, warm through for a minute or so. Serve in bowls accompanied by Djenkoume.

Recipe adapted from <http://ethnicfoodsrus.com/around-the-world-recipes/african-cuisine/togolese-cuisine/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Gbotemi Spice Recipe (Tested)

Makes about 1 ½ tablespoons, enough for one recipe

Ajwain seed is mostly found in Indian cooking. It has a pungent thyme/cumin fragrance. If you can't find ajwain seed I recommend substituting cumin seed.

Cardamom seeds are very expensive to buy. I purchase the whole pods and crack them open to remove the seeds. You'll need 20-25 green pods. Crush with the flat side of a chef's knife, or break up in a mortar and pestle.

The spice will keep, stored in a cool, dry place, indefinitely. You may want to double or triple the recipe though, because I guarantee you will want to make the recipe again!

Ingredients

1 tsp. whole cloves
1 tsp. anise seeds
1 tsp. ajwain seeds (can substitute cumin seed)
1 tsp. cardamom seeds
1 tsp. ground ginger

Directions

Mix all the above ingredients (except the ground ginger) together in a small sauté pan and toast over medium flame on the stove until the spices are fragrant and turning brown.

Grind the toasted spices with a mortar and pestle until it is one consistent powder. Pick out any bits of clove stems that you can visibly see. Add ground ginger to taste, mix and blend together thoroughly.

Recipe adapted from : <http://ethnicfoodsrus.com/around-the-world-recipes/african-cuisine/togolese-cuisine/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Tomato Cornmeal Cakes (Djenkoume) (Tested)
Serves 8

Ingredients

2 tbsp. red palm oil (a must have ingredient for authentic results and West African flavor, or substitute vegetable oil)
1 medium-sized onion, peeled and minced
4 large cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 tsp. freshly grated ginger root
15 oz. canned diced tomatoes
4 cups chicken broth
1 ½ tsp. salt
2 cups cornmeal

Directions

In a flat wide frying pan, sauté the garlic, ginger and onion in the red palm oil over medium-high flame until softened and fragrant. Stir in the tomatoes and adjust the heat to a gentle simmer, cook the mixture about 15 minutes until a thick sauce forms. This breaks down the tomatoes and melds all the flavors together. Use a wooden spoon if need be to further break down any large chunks of tomato.

Now pour the chicken stock and add the salt to the seasoned tomato mixture and bring to a boil. Gradually whisk in the cornmeal until it is all incorporated and the mixture is very smooth.

Simmer the mixture for about 10 minutes, until nicely thickened. Stir often with a flat bottom wooden spoon to scrape the mixture off the bottom of the pan. The cornmeal will be speckled with bits of onion and tomato.

Serve your Djenkoume while nice and hot. This is a good accompaniment for Gboma Dessi. You can form the mixture into cakes and serve on a separate platter, or place a scoop in your bowl with the stew to help sop up the delicious sauce.

Recipe adapted from : <http://ethnicfoodsrus.com/around-the-world-recipes/african-cuisine/togolese-cuisine/>

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Customs and Cuisine – Provided by Hope Through Health

Local Cuisine

Among the smallest countries in Africa, Togo occupies a narrow strip of land flanking the Gulf of Guinea. The southern third of the nation is ideal for agriculture and growing crops such as coffee, cocoa and maize. Fusing deeply rooted local traditions with both French and German colonial influences, Togolese cuisine is considered one of the finest and most unique on the continent.

Maize is a key component of meals in Togo. In fact, there's an ancient Togolese proverb that says, "Do not roast all your corn in the winter." Maize is by far the most common starch found in meals, but other sources of starch include yams, cassava, plantains and rice.

The Togolese typically consume two to three meals per day, each consisting of a starch and a source of protein. Breakfast in Togo may consist of fried eggs, various cereals or sliced avocado. Breakfast is always accompanied by tea, coffee, or Milo, an Ovaltine-like powdered drink manufactured by Nestle. During midday and evening meals, one can enjoy meals rich in flavor that include spiced chili sauces, peanut paste and palm oil. Chili sauces are often made with tomato paste, oil and onions, and can even incorporate dried fish. Fish is a readily available source of protein due to the country's location along the Atlantic. Togolese dishes often combine a variety of vegetables such as spinach and okra, which are grown in the country's fertile farmland.

A staple of Togo's cuisine and culture is fufu. Fufu is a traditional dish made from boiled yams, which are mashed into a dough and served with a variety of sauces and side dishes. Pates, another culinary staple of Togo, are made from maize flour or cassava and are also served with sauces made from vegetables or meats. Togo is also home to delicious fruits. Mango trees are common and pineapple is in season year round. Foreign foods such as baguettes and German beers are commonly found in urban areas of Togo as well.

Dining Etiquette

Table manners in Togo are similar to those of neighboring Western African countries. Most meals are eaten without the use of utensils and are placed in a large communal bowl. The left hand in Togo is considered dirty and indecent; as such, all meals eaten without utensils are to be eaten with the right hand only. This notion even extends to the preparation of meals. Women who are cooking will never use their left hand while handling food.

The Togolese make for generous dinner hosts and take great pride in entertaining guests. It is expected that a guest will treat the meal they receive with gratitude and appreciation. Avoid asking what a meal contains or smelling it before eating, as this is considered insulting to the host. A modest burp at the end of the meal is viewed as polite and a sign of satisfaction. Meals in Togo often continue even after eating has ceased, as they are highly social in nature.

Cultural Rituals and Customs

Togolese people hold interpersonal relationships, presentation and first impressions in very high regard. Looking sharp when going out each day is important. Many people will adorn colorfully patterned *pagne*, dresses and two-piece outfits called *complets*. It's not uncommon for family members to wear matching clothing, either. The Togolese insist on greeting each and every person they come across on the street with a simple "good morning!" With individuals with whom they're more personally familiar, people will ask a number of questions ranging from "how is your family?" to the more abstract "how is your patience today?"

Sources:

<http://www.mapsofworld.com/togo/culture/>

<http://globaltableadventure.com/2013/06/18/about-the-food-of-togo/>

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