



Tilapia in Coconut Lime Sauce (Tested)

Serves 6

Tilapia, or “ngokah,” is also referred to as “Nile perch” because it is abundant all along the Nile River region. Now that California aqua farmers are successfully raising this delicate perch-like fish, we can find it in our supermarkets, bringing this once “only in Africa” fish to our dinner tables. If perch is available in your area you can substitute perch for the tilapia. Other worthy stand-ins are red snapper or cod, or any white fish that you enjoy.

Note that this recipe calls for *either* fresh hot pepper or green sriracha sauce and that these ingredients are added at different times in the recipe.

2 tbsp. peanut oil or vegetable oil
1 small onion, chopped, about 1 cup
2 large cloves garlic, sliced
One (2-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and slivered
1 fresh hot pepper, chopped, or 2 tsp. green sriracha sauce
2 cups sliced mushrooms, about 6 oz.
14 oz. coconut milk, canned or homemade
1 lime
1 tsp. kosher salt
2 lbs. tilapia
2 green onions, chopped (white and green parts)
Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish

Heat a skillet large enough to contain all the fish and coconut milk. Add the oil to the skillet along with the onion. Sauté for 2 minutes until slightly softened, then add the garlic, ginger, and hot pepper, if using. Cook for one minute.

Add the mushrooms and stir for one minute. Cover the pan and let the mushrooms steam for a few minutes. Remove the lid and let the mushrooms finish cooking.

Add the coconut milk. Using a zester or grater, grate the lime peel right over the pan, then cut the lime in half and squeeze the juice into the pan. Add the green sriracha, if using, and the salt. Bring the sauce to a simmer.

Lay the fish in the sauce, and sprinkle with the green onions. Cover, and simmer until fish is done. This could take anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the thickness of your fish. Remove the fish to a platter and reduce the sauce if it looks thin and you would like it to thicken. Pour sauce over the fish and garnish with parsley.

Recipe adapted from: "Zainabu's African Cookbook," by Zainabu Kpaka Kallon

Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Eggplant Avocado Dip (Kobo Kobo Avocado Honey Plasas) (Tested)

Serves 8 as an appetizer

Odd as this recipe sounds, have faith. I think I was attracted to the funny name. "Kobo kobo" refers to eggplant, or "gardenegg," which is so charming! And the word "plasas" means "sauce" in West African languages. I'm glad I took a chance on this one. The disparate sounding ingredients come together to create a dip unlike anything you've ever tasted.

For this recipe I made fresh ginger paste by grating a piece of fresh ginger on a microplane. Ginger paste can also be made in a blender or purchased at the grocery store.

Fun fact: male eggplants have fewer seeds than female eggplants and are therefore more desirable. If you find large pockets of seeds in your eggplant after roasting, you can remove and discard them.

Ingredients

1 medium eggplant, about 1 pound
¼ cup sesame seeds, toasted and ground
1 large ripe avocado, diced fine
1 tbsp. honey, warmed
1 tsp. sesame oil
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. fresh ginger paste
½ tsp. curry powder
Juice of 1 lime
Pinch cayenne pepper
Pita wedges, grilled

Directions

To roast the eggplant: Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Poke a few holes in the eggplant with a skewer so that it doesn't burst in the oven. Line a sheet pan with foil or parchment paper, and place the eggplant on the pan.

Slide the pan into the oven. Giving the pan a turn every 10 minutes, bake for 40 to 50 minutes. The eggplant should feel completely soft and tender, with the exception of the stem end. It will look deflated, and you should see some juices collecting on the pan.

When cool enough to handle, make a slit lengthwise down the eggplant. With your fingers you should be able to peel the eggplant skin from the flesh. Start at the bottom and pull upward toward the stem end. Remove the stem end with a knife. Tear the flesh into strips; if there are any large pockets of seeds discard them. Place the flesh into a strainer to drain for 30 minutes; discard the liquid. Turn out onto a cutting board and chop. Place in a mixing bowl.

To toast and grind the sesame seeds: Place the sesame seeds in a heavy, dry skillet (cast iron is great) over medium-low heat. Stirring constantly, toast the seeds for 3 to 5 minutes, until they start to turn a darker shade and smell toasty. If you can crush a seed between thumb and forefinger, the seeds are done. Let them cool completely, then grind in a spice grinder or coffee mill. This took me only two short bursts with my coffee grinder to obtain a coarse powder. Alternatively, you could use a mortar and pestle. Set aside one tablespoon of the ground sesame seeds for garnish.

Add the ground sesame seeds (less that reserved for garnish) to the mixing bowl with the eggplant. Add the avocado, honey, sesame oil, salt, ginger paste, curry powder, lime juice, and cayenne pepper. Blend with a fork and continue to mash any large pieces remaining.

Arrange on a platter on top of a pretty lettuce leaf and surrounded with pita wedges. Before serving, drizzle a little oil on top and sprinkle with reserved ground sesame seeds.

Do ahead tip: You can prepare the eggplant one day ahead of time and store in the fridge. You can also toast and grind the sesame seeds one day ahead of time.

Recipe adapted from: "Zainabu's African Cookbook," by Zainabu Kpaka Kallon
Photo credit: Linda McElroy



Sesame Seed Bites (Bennie Bites) (Tested)
Makes approximately 20 bites

Sesame plants are referred to as "bennie" plants in Africa. Africans have always enjoyed the nutty flavor and great aroma of bennie seeds, since the African continent is the land of their origin, and they have many uses for the seeds as well as for sesame oil and sesame paste. Here is a very simple sweet snack, to be enjoyed at any time of day with a cup of tea.

Note that black sesame seeds are optional in this recipe, but they do create a more interesting look, so it's worth using them if you can find some.

Ingredients

- 1½ cups sesame seeds, toasted
- 2 tbsp. black sesame seeds, toasted (optional)
- ¾ cup honey
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ¼ cup roasted and salted peanuts, coarsely chopped

Directions

To toast the sesame seeds: Place the sesame seeds in a heavy, dry skillet (cast iron is great) over medium-low heat. Stirring constantly, toast the seeds for 3 to 5 minutes, until they start to turn a darker shade and smell toasty. If you can crush a seed between thumb and forefinger, the seeds are done.

Place honey and butter in a small saucepan and heat over a medium-low flame until the mixture begins to bubble; simmer for about 3 minutes.

Stir the sesame seeds into the honey mixture and spread out onto an 8 by 8 or 7 by 9 buttered baking pan. Sprinkle the peanuts on top and lightly press into the mixture. Allow to cool.

Pinch off pieces of the mixture and roll them into balls.

Do ahead tip: This recipe can be made one day ahead of time except for rolling into balls. Do that closer to serving time as they have a tendency to soften up.

Recipe and photo credit: Linda McElroy

Customs and Cuisine

The Dogon region of Mali, where Tandana Foundation works, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to about 350,000 Dogon people, as well as a large number of Peuls (Fulani) and Bambara. Agriculture is focused mainly on subsistence farming, including millet, sorghum and peanuts.

Though the Dogon region has strong influences from Islam, French colonization and Christianity, many of the traditional ways of life and shared cultural heritage have been maintained. Crafts include masks, sculptures, and dyes, done with both indigo and mud techniques. Many festivals and ancient dances are celebrated. According to Tandana Foundation, the daily struggles of life experienced in the region serve to deepen the joy of the Dogon people in celebrating their accomplishments and new friendships.

Chronic food insecurity is a significant issue in Mali. Approximately 24 percent of households in Mali are moderately to severely food-insecure. Approximately one in every three children under the age of five is stunted due to malnutrition. Parts of Mali experience an agricultural lean season, which makes the problem even more severe.

Hear a Tommo So language lesson: <http://tandanafoundation.org/language.html>

Learn about traditional Dogon medicine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9QAxEqySCo>

Sources: The Tandana Foundation, UNEP