

Recipe for Toh (Oro Dja), traditional food of the Dogon people

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prep time: 2 -3 hours
Makes 3 medium sized bowls
Serves: one family meal

Ingredients:

Husked millet
Water
Dried okra
Dried fish- 3 small,
Dried Baobab leaves
Ball of fermented hibiscus seeds
mixed with ash for potassium

Equipment:

3 sizes of wooden mortar and pistils
stone slab for grinding and grinding stone
3 large and 3 small calabash gourd bowls
medium size wooden bowl
long handle wooden paddle for stirring
3 large wooden serving bowls

Method:

Pound millet seed in husk in a large mortar and wood pistil until the husk comes off pour into a large calabash bowl. Pour it into another bowl so the wind will take the chaff away.

Pound husked millet seed with a little bit of water in large mortar. Rinse 3 times with water, pounding and draining each time. Let it sit and drain more [about 10 minutes] to soften seeds. Put wastewater in goat feeding pan making millet milk.

While waiting for millet to drain, prepare sauce ingredients:

Pound dried baobab leaves in small mortar, until it is a smooth powder like flour. Remove skin and fins from dried fish. Pound fish into powder. Pound a small ball of dried hibiscus seeds and ash from the fire for potassium into powder. Pound 1 cup dried okra into finds powder in small mortar. Keep in separate small calabash bowls.

Start fire in one spot using 8 branches about the size of a quarter in diameter. You need places for two pots, one large and one smaller. Lay the wood in a row with one set of ends in the ashes. Put a small amount of kindling [millet stalks] on top. Start fire with matches. Smoke immediately comes out the door. Scrub pots with nylon scrubber or inside of baobab fruit. Put large pot on the fire and fill to ½ with water, cover with lid.

Get small pot of millet milk from drained millet. Set aside. Take drained millet and pound in medium size mortar until powder. Sift out millet flour into bowl and pound remaining seeds until powder. Do this 3 times to make sure all millet seeds are now a powder. Sift after each pounding. This takes about 250 hits. Use a stone on stone grinding method for the last little bit of seeds. Sift remains into bowl of flour. Then sift whole bowl again.

Add more wood [about 3 sticks] to fire.

Stir big pot of boiling water with Paddle, cover. Add small amount of water to about 1 Cup of the sifted flour in a bowl, then add hot water from the pot to the gourd and stir, then add mixture in gourd to big pot. Stir and cover. Tilt pot slightly forward to make it smaller and a better size for the amount of ingredients.

Test for consistency, and as it gets thick, add all the remaining flour to the big pot. Stir and cover. Add reserved millet. Add millet milk to get right consistency. Take paddle and vigorously stir the flour mixture in the big pot for about 3 minutes or until it becomes dough like and forms a ball. Cover. Move wood from big pot fire to small one but leave 1 stick and embers under big pot.

Wash out wooden bowl and add paste ingredients for sauce.

Put sauce ingredients, except for ground ball, okra and fish in wooden bowl, add hot water to form a runny paste. Stir, and put in the small pot and place on second fire spot. Make a small fire with stalks under the small pot. Tilt pot forward slightly. Move some of the wood from one fire center to this smaller space. Stir with a paddle that has been dipped in millet milk and dried. Bring sauce to a boil uncovered. Add water to gourd with other ground ball except for the fish and okra. Pour into small pot and cook without a cover. Add the fish and then okra to the small pot, add salt to sauce and cook uncovered for about 10 minutes until it becomes the consistency of heavy cream. Peel and pound in mortar about 6 cloves of garlic or small onions and add to sauce. Cook until boiling and sauce is thick. Take the sauce off fire.

Turn millet dough into 3 bowls and shape into big balls with hands. Dip the wet handle of the paddle into the sauce and, make a hole in the center of each mound of Toh. Pour sauce into each hole, enlarging hole as necessary to hold the sauce. Cover bowls. Serve to three groups.

Eat by scooping a bit of millet dough out of the common bowl with the fingers of your right hand. Dip it into the sauce. Scoop it out using your right hand fingers and catching some sauce on the dough and eat. Enjoy!!

Mrs. Tembiné started learning to cook when she was about 10 years old and has been preparing Toh since she was 15. She goes to collect firewood every other day. At the beginning of the cooking process, she wants a full force fire, but at the end she wants a low heat to finish and steam the Toh, so she takes some wood out of the fire and moves it from under one pot to the other. She likes having 2 sources of heat. The ashes from the fire are used in various ways. Most of the ash goes into the animal compost that eventually goes into the fields. Some is put in the bags of grain that is stored on the roof or in the house to help conserve it and keep insects out. And some is used to make potassium to add to the food.

The smoke often hurts her eyes and she will cook outside as much as weather permits, but rain or sun heat will keep her inside. The traditional hole for ventilation in the older homes doesn't work well since the wind is always changing directions.

She uses a nylon scrubber to clean the bowls and utensils.

She dislikes pounding the millet and stirring the Toh on the fire the most. She lifts the aluminum pots off the fire with her bare fingertips.