



Sofrito Sensation

1 Puerto Rico, a Caribbean island rich in history and remarkable
natural beauty, has a cuisine¹ all its own. Immigration to the island
has helped to shape its cuisine, with people from all over the world
making various contributions to it. However, before the arrival of
5 these immigrants, the island of Puerto Rico was already known as
Borikén and was inhabited by the Taíno people. Taíno cuisine
included such foods as rodents² with sweet chili peppers, fresh
shellfish,³ yams, and fish fried in corn oil.

Many aspects of Taíno cuisine continue today in Puerto Rican
10 cooking, but it has been heavily influenced by the Spanish, who
invaded Puerto Rico in 1508, and Africans, who were initially
brought to Puerto Rico to work as slaves.⁴ Taíno cooking styles were
mixed with ideas brought by the Spanish and Africans to create new
dishes. The Spanish extended food choices by bringing cattle, pigs,
15 goats, and sheep to the island. Africans also added to the island's
food culture by introducing powerful, contrasting tastes in dishes like
piñon–plantains layered in ground beef. In fact, much of the food
Puerto Rico is now famous for—plantains, coffee, sugarcane,
coconuts, and oranges—was actually imported by foreigners
20 to the island.

A common assumption many people make about Puerto Rican food
is that it is very spicy. It's true that chili peppers are popular; ají
caballero in particular is a very hot chili pepper that Puerto Ricans
enjoy. However, milder tastes are popular too, such as *sofrito*. The
25 base of many Puerto Rican dishes, sofrito is a sauce made from
chopped onions, garlic, green bell peppers, sweet chili peppers,
oregano, cilantro, and a handful of other spices. It is fried in oil
and then added to other dishes.

How to Make a Basic Sofrito

Ingredients:⁵

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- 1 yellow onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 green bell pepper
- 3 to 4 sweet chili peppers
- 3 cilantro (coriander) leaves
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon dried whole oregano

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Green pepper



Yellow onion



Cilantro



Chili peppers



Oregano



Garlic

Directions:

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Remove skins from onion and garlic. Clean and prepare green bell and sweet chili peppers. Wash in water. Then finely chop⁶ these ingredients, including the cilantro leaves. Place a heavy-bottomed pot over low heat; add oil and oregano. Add the chopped ingredients. Continue cooking for about three to four minutes, stirring⁷ occasionally.



¹ The **cuisine** of a place is its style of cooking.

² A **rodent** is a type of small animal such as a mouse or rat.

³ **Shellfish** are small animals that live in the water and have a hard covering called a shell.

⁴ A **slave** is someone who is the property of another person and has to work for that person.

⁵ **Ingredients** are any foods used in making a dish.

⁶ When you **chop** something, you cut it into small pieces.

⁷ When you **stir** something, you mix it, for example, with a spoon.

▲ Sofrito is used as the base of many Puerto Rican rice, bean, or stewed dishes.