

= Gumbo =

Gumbo is a stew that originated in southern Louisiana during the 18th century . It consists primarily of a strongly @-@ flavored stock , meat or shellfish , a thickener , and the Cajun holy trinity of vegetables , namely celery , bell peppers , and onions . Gumbo is often categorized by the type of thickener used , the vegetable okra , the Choctaw spice filé powder (dried and ground sassafras leaves) , or roux , the French base made of flour and fat . The dish likely derived its name from either a word from a Bantu language for okra (ki ngombo) or the Choctaw word for filé (kombo) .

Several different varieties exist . Creole gumbo generally contains shellfish , tomatoes , and a thickener . Cajun gumbo is generally based on a dark roux and is spicier , with either shellfish or fowl . Sausage or ham is often added to gumbos of either variety . After the base is prepared , vegetables are cooked down , and then meat is added . The dish simmers for a minimum of three hours , with shellfish and some spices added near the end . If desired , filé powder is added after the pot is removed from heat . Gumbo is traditionally served over rice . A third , lesser @-@ known variety , the meatless gumbo z 'herbes , is essentially a gumbo of slow @-@ cooked greens sometimes thickened with roux , with rice served on the side .

The dish combines ingredients and culinary practices of several cultures , including French , Spanish , German , West African , and Choctaw . Gumbo may have been based on traditional West African or native dishes , or may be a derivation of the French dish bouillabaisse . It was first described in 1802 , and was listed in various cookbooks in the latter half of the 19th century . The dish gained more widespread popularity in the 1970s , after the United States Senate cafeteria added it to the menu in honor of Louisiana Senator Allen Ellender . The popularity of chef Paul Prudhomme in the 1980s spurred further interest in gumbo . The dish is the official cuisine of the state of Louisiana .

= Etymology =

Scholars and chefs have offered various explanations for the etymology of the word " gumbo " . The dish was likely named after one of its two main ingredients , okra or filé . In the Bantu languages spoken by many slaves from West Africa , the vegetable okra was known as ki ngombo or quingombo ; the word is akin to the Umbundu ochinggômbo and the Tshiluba chinggômbô " okra " . In the language of the native Choctaw people , filé , or ground sassafras leaves , was called kombo .

= Variations =

Gumbo is a heavily seasoned soup or stew that combines several varieties of meat or seafood with a sauce or gravy . Any combination of meat or seafood can be used . Meat @-@ based gumbo may consist of chicken , duck , squirrel , or rabbit , with oysters occasionally added . Seafood @-@ based gumbo generally has shrimp , crabmeat , and sometimes oysters . Andouille sausage is often added to both meat and seafood gumbos to provide " piquancy , substance , and an additional layer of flavor " to the dish . With the exception of sausage and ham , beef and pork are almost never used . Most varieties of gumbo are seasoned with onions , parsley , bell pepper , and celery . Tomatoes are sometimes used in seafood gumbo , but traditionally few other vegetables are included .

= Thickeners =

Gumbo sauce or gravy derives from three primary thickeners : okra , filé powder , and roux . Traditionally , okra and filé powder are not used in the same dish , although this rule is sometimes broken . Roux can be used alone or in conjunction with either of the other thickeners .

Okra is more often used as a thickener in seafood gumbos than those with meat . This mucilaginous vegetable is usually cooked first , and other ingredients added once the desired

consistency is reached . According to The Oxford Companion to Food , okra @-@ based gumbos are becoming less popular , as changing tastes have made the okra texture less palatable .

Ground sassafras leaf , known as filé , is generally not added to the gravy until after the vegetables and meats or seafood have finished cooking and have been removed from the heat source . If added during the boiling process , filé makes the gumbo too ropey ; when added at the end , the gumbo gains a slightly stringy texture .

Roux has become the most popular thickener , made from cooking together a roughly equal proportion of flour and fat (traditionally hog lard , although increasingly made with butter since the mid @-@ 20th century) . The length of cooking time determines the final flavor and texture , since the longer the roux is cooked before being added to the gumbo , the darker it becomes and the less thickening power it retains . A very dark roux provides a much thinner sauce with a more intense flavor than a light roux .

= = = Cajun vs. Creole gumbo = = =

Gumbo is typically divided into two varieties . Combinations traditionally common in New Orleans and southeastern Louisiana are known as " Creole " after the Louisiana Creole people , descendants of French and Spanish settlers , who lived in those areas . " Cajun " combinations were common in southwestern Louisiana , which was populated primarily by Cajuns , descendants of the French @-@ speaking settlers expelled from Acadia (in northeastern North America) in the mid @-@ 18th century .

Cajun gumbo is usually identified by its dark roux , cooked until it is a color " a few shades from burning " . The roux is used with okra or filé powder . Seafood is popular in Cajun gumbo , but the southwestern areas of Louisiana often use fowl , such as chicken or duck , and sausage . The fowl is generally not deboned , and onions , celery , and bell pepper are not strained out of the dish . Cajun gumbo is usually topped with parsley and green onions .

Creole gumbo most often consists of seafood , tomatoes , and a thickener . This variety is generally not as spicy as Cajun gumbo , as cayenne pepper is used much more sparingly . Before the latter half of the 20th century , celery was rarely used in Creole gumbo .

= = = Gumbo z 'herbes = = =

When Catholics were expected to abstain from eating meat during Lent , a meatless variety of gumbo , known as gumbo z 'herbes (literally " gumbo with herbs ") , was often served . This variety combined a large number of greens ? typically including turnips , mustard greens , and spinach . The greens were cooked to mush and strained through a sieve to produce a thick green liquid . Preparation for this variety of gumbo was time @-@ consuming , and as Lenten restrictions have relaxed , the dish has become less popular . It is very rarely served in restaurants . In modern times , ham or crabmeat is occasionally added to this type of gumbo .

Gumbo z 'herbes may have originated with the French , Germans , or West Africans . It has similarities to the French dish potage aux herbes (" soup with herbs ") , as well as to the African callaloo . The meatless dish also bears striking resemblance to a dish often eaten in Germany on Maundy Thursday . German Catholics , obeying the Lenten rules , often served a stew made of seven different greens on this date .

= = History = =

= = = Background = = =

Gumbo is often used as a metaphor for the mix of cultures that exist in southern Louisiana . The dish combines the culinary practices of French , Spanish , indigenous tribes , and Africans , as well as Italians and Germans . In the 18th and 19th centuries , people from these cultures lived together

within a fairly small area with minimal mobility . This fostered an environment in which cultures could influence each other and meld to create new traditions and cuisine .

The establishment of New Orleans in 1718 marked the beginning of the French colony of Louisiana . French settlers allied with various native tribes including the Choctaw , Alabama , and Cherokee , from whom they learned new methods of cooking and ways to identify edible indigenous plants .

Slave ships began arriving in Louisiana in 1719 . The first ships carried rice and men who were experienced in its cultivation . The grain adapted well to its new environment , and within a few years , rice was commonly grown along the Mississippi River .

In 1721 , 125 Germans settled 40 miles (64 km) from New Orleans , and introduced the art of making sausage . By 1746 , the white population of Louisiana was estimated to be 3 @, @ 200 , with an estimated 4 @, @ 730 black people . Slaves outnumbered whites in most areas of Louisiana for at least the next 40 years .

The colony was transferred from French to Spanish control in 1762 . The Spanish government actively recruited settlers for Spanish Louisiana . About 2 @, @ 000 people from the Canary Islands moved to the area south of New Orleans . These settlers were primarily fishermen who soon began supplying large amounts of shrimp , crab , and oysters to the food markets in New Orleans . The Canary Islanders also brought " a love for well @-@ seasoned food " , including use of ground cayenne pepper , a spicy hot red chili pepper . Spanish authorities also granted permission for a large number of French @-@ speaking Acadian exiles to relocate from northeastern North America to Louisiana . From 1755 through 1795 , almost 3 @, @ 000 of these settlers , soon known as Cajuns , moved to the areas south and west of New Orleans . Louisiana was secretly returned to France in 1800 , then purchased by the United States in 1803 . The southernmost part of territorial Louisiana , including New Orleans , became the state of Louisiana in 1812 .

By 1800 , most Cajun families in Louisiana had purchased slaves . The new laborers introduced new foods , including the African vegetable okra , and hot pepper plants which likely came from Haiti . Onions and bell peppers were long part of cooking in both the Spanish and African traditions . Tomatoes were introduced to the region shortly thereafter .

= = = Origin = = =

Scholars agree that gumbo originated in Louisiana in the early 18th century , but its uncertain etymology makes it difficult to pinpoint the origins of the food . Although no conclusive evidence exists , cultural markers indicate several plausible scenarios .

According to one suggestion , gumbo is a reinterpretation of traditional African cooking . West Africans used the vegetable okra as a base for many dishes , including soups , often pairing okra with meat and shrimp , with salt and pepper as seasonings . In Louisiana , the dish was modified to include ingredients introduced by other cultural groups . Surviving records indicate that by 1764 African slaves in New Orleans mixed cooked okra with rice to make a meal .

Gumbo could instead be a derivation of traditional French soups , particularly the fish stew bouillabaisse . During the cold winters , Acadians generally cooked soups , using whatever ingredients were readily available . When the Acadians moved to Louisiana in the mid @-@ 18th century , they were unable to find many of their traditional ingredients , including turnips and cabbage . In this scenario , Acadian colonists substituted local ingredients for those commonly included in the original stew . Instead of the fish , settlers used shellfish . The dish was later modified to include ingredients common in other cultures .

Some culinary experts in the early 20th century , including Celestine Eustis , maintained that gumbo was an early special occasion dish for native tribes . This is further implied by a late 18th @-@ century Cajun practice . At that time , rice was a luxury for many Cajuns . They served gumbo over corn grits , a pairing common in the stews of native tribes . The use of corn and filé powder may imply that the dish was derived from native cuisine .

These theories are intermixed in the local legend of the Frying Pan Revolt , or Petticoat Insurrection . According to legend , in 1722 , female French colonists gathered in New Orleans at the home of Governor Jean @-@ Baptiste Le Moyne , Sieur de Bienville , to protest the lack of familiar

ingredients . Bienville 's housekeeper , Madame Langlois , taught the women how to improve the basic gumbo . Langlois used okra , an ingredient to which the women had previously been introduced by their slaves . Langlois introduced ingredients common in Choctaw cuisine ? rice , shrimp , crawfish , and filé powder .

= = = Development = = =

The first written references to gumbo appear in the early 19th century . In 1802 , John Sibley described " the dish they call gumbo which is made principally of the ochre into a thick kind of soup [sic] & eat with rice , it is the food of every body for dinner and supper . " The following year , French governor Pierre Clement de Laussat hosted a soirée in which 24 different gumbos were prepared . According to author Cynthia Lejeune Nobles , these two events " give clues to gumbo 's Spanish colonial popularity and illustrate that the dish could be both humble and refined " .

An 1824 cookbook , Mary Randolph 's *The Virginia Housewife* , was the first to include a recipe for gumbo . Called " Gumbo ? A West India Dish " , the simple recipe described how to boil okra and bore little resemblance to the stew commonly known as gumbo . The same book contained a recipe for " Ochra Soup " made with okra , onions , fowl , bacon , tomatoes , and lima beans thickened with flour . Although this recipe bore similarities to gumbo , it more closely resembled the Caribbean dish callaloo .

A more familiar version of the dish was described in an 1879 cookbook by Marion Cabell Tyree . Her *Housekeeping in Old Virginia* described " Gumbo Filit A La Creole " , a filé @-@ based gumbo with chicken and oysters and spiced with allspice , cloves , red and black pepper , parsley , and thyme . The 1881 cookbook *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking* , dictated by former slave Abby Fisher , contained three gumbo recipes . " Oyster Gumbo Soup " used a filé base , while " Ochra Gumbo " and " Chicken Gumbo " used okra as a base . Four years later , the cookbook *La Cuisine Creole* documented eight varieties of gumbo . None used sausage , but almost all of them contained ham .

Until the 1970s , gumbo was primarily popular on the Gulf Coast of the United States . It gained a broader profile after the death of United States Senator Allen Ellender . A native of Terrebonne Parish , Louisiana , Ellender had often cooked gumbo for his colleagues , including five American presidents . After Ellender died in 1972 , the Senate directed that their cafeteria add Louisiana Creole Gumbo , made with seafood , to its menu in his honor . The dish became more widely popular in the 1980s , when chef Paul Prudhomme 's popularity spurred interest in Creole and Cajun cooking .

= = Preparation and serving = =

Gumbo is cooked for a minimum of three hours , and often simmers all day . Meat (but not seafood) is often browned beforehand and removed from the heat . Okra and roux are cooked before other vegetables and seafood . Okra is removed from heat when it reaches the desired consistency , while roux remains in the pot . Seasoning vegetables are then added to the sauce . When these have turned to mush (more commonly called cooked down) , the meat and okra are added to the pot along with water and / or stock , then boiled uncovered until the desired tenderness of the meat is reached . Seasonings , including red , black , and white pepper , bay leaves , thyme , hot sauce , and salt , are added to taste . According to Nobles , " proper seasoning of gumbo is essential , and in Louisiana adding just the right zing is considered an art " . Because seafood cooks fairly quickly , it is not added to the pot until the end of the process . As the gumbo finishes cooking , green onions and parsley are sometimes sprinkled on it . When desired , filé powder is added last .

Creole and Cajun gumbos are served over hot rice , which helps the dish to feed a larger number of people . Gumbo z 'herbes is served with rice on the side . Gumbo is almost always served directly from the pot on the stove , although in wealthier or fancier homes the dish might be transferred to a tureen on the table . Often , gumbo and bread are the sole courses in a meal , although many Cajun families provide a side dish of potato salad . Occasionally , gumbo is served as part of a larger menu

Soniat gives examples of the main types of creole gumbos , along with descriptions of family traditions about them .

= = Social aspects = =

In Cajun Foodways , C. Paige Gutierrez describes gumbo as " an economical dish " useful for " feed [ing] a large number of people with a small amount of meat or seafood " . Nobles concurs that " one of the hallmarks of gumbo is that , with a big enough pot , it can easily be doubled or tripled and is always a good choice to feed a crowd " . With this dish , cooks can use up small portions of various ingredients that were not sufficient for an individual meal . The dish is an efficient way to use up leftover perishable meats and seafood .

Since the 19th century , gumbo has often been served at social gatherings or other special occasions in Louisiana . Local fais do @-@ do (dance parties) usually provided gumbo beginning at midnight . Many families " have a gumbo " , or host a casual social gathering where friends and family chat and enjoy alcoholic beverages and gumbo .

In rural Acadiana in southern Louisiana , gumbo is a central feature of Mardi Gras celebrations . On Mardi Gras , local men wander from house to house and beg for gumbo ingredients in an event known as courir de Mardi Gras . Members of the local community then gather in a central location while the men cook the gumbo . When it is ready , the group eats and dances until midnight , when Lent begins .

Gumbo is the official cuisine of the state of Louisiana . Many southern Louisiana cooking competitions center around gumbo , and it is a central feature of many local festivals . The self @-@ described " Gumbo Capital of the World " , Bridge City , Louisiana , holds an annual Gumbo Festival . The festival features gumbo cooked in a cast @-@ iron pot 3 ft (0 @.@ 9 m) deep and 5 feet (1 @.@ 5 m) in diameter . More commonly , festival gumbo pots measure 2 ft (0 @.@ 6 m) in depth and diameter .