

Title:

Regional Cuisine Of The United States: Louisiana Cajun Cooking

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507

Summary:

Louisiana Cajun cuisine originated with a group of French residents of Nova Scotia, who were expelled by the British in 1755. They eventually, after years of a nomadic existence, settled in the Southern Louisiana swamplands. There they adapted their native cooking methods to use ingredients that were available in their new land. This cuisine is the food of hardworking country people, used to difficult conditions. It is practical, strong country food, taking advantage of easil...

Keywords:

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Article Body:

Louisiana Cajun cuisine originated with a group of French residents of Nova Scotia, who were expelled by the British in 1755. They eventually, after years of a nomadic existence, settled in the Southern Louisiana swamplands. There they adapted their native cooking methods to use ingredients that were available in their new land. This cuisine is the food of hardworking country people, used to difficult conditions. It is practical, strong country food, taking advantage of easily available local ingredients, often an entire meal prepared all in one pot. This style of cooking became the hallmark of these people, called Acadians, which was later shortened to Cajuns.

Authentic Cajun recipes can be hard to come by, as they were traditionally passed down verbally from one generation to the next. They also tend to change a little with each generation, each adding their own flair. There are hundreds of recipes for most common dishes, as the independent nature of the Cajun people is reflected in their cuisine, each kitchen adding their own special touches.

Some of the specialties of Cajun cuisine include gumbos, stews, etouffees, and rice dishes, such as jambalayas. Cajun dishes often begin with a roux, which is butter or oil cooked with flour. Roux is used to thicken, and for flavor. There are three types of roux, depending upon how long it is cooked. There is light or blond, medium, and dark roux. The light and medium types are primarily used for thickening gumbos, etouffees, and sauces, while the dark roux is used for

flavor.

The common ingredients of this cuisine are easily available and native to the Southern Louisiana swamplands. Seafood is very common, such as crawfish, shrimp, oysters, red fish, speckled trout, and crabs. Rice is a staple ingredient. Other ingredients frequently used are pork, homemade sausages, beans, black-eyed peas, tomatoes, yams, okra, figs, pecans and oranges. Game is also used, such as wild turkey, duck, turtles and frog.

There are relatively few spices used in Cajun cuisine. The unique flavor comes primarily from the long simmering of the dishes prepared. One spice that is used liberally in this cuisine is Cayenne pepper. It is a fiery, finely ground spice made from the Cayenne Chile. It is usually used along with white and black pepper. Another seasoning common to Cajun cooking is file powder, also called gumbo powder. This is made from sassafras leaves that are dried and ground. Creole mustard is also used in many dishes. This is a coarse and spicy local mustard. Tabasco and other hot pepper sauces are standard condiments on the Cajun table

Cajun cuisine is unique to Southern Louisiana, making the best of the native resources, but still retaining the French influence brought to it by the migrants many years ago. It is varied and flexible. Whether you are craving a touch of the exotic, or a little down-home comfort food, this cuisine has managed to include both, often in one big pot. There is something for everyone to enjoy when experimenting with this wonderful style of cooking.