

Chapter Seven



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Mofo Gasy

(YEASTED RICE AND COCONUT PANCAKES)

Totally gluten-free, these light pancakes are made with soaked and ground rice, a little yeast for leavening, and coconut in three forms—there's coconut milk and shredded coconut in the pancakes, and the pancakes are cooked in coconut oil. While these pancakes are typically made in a special pan that forms them into spheres, we find the batter turns out beautifully when formed into silver dollar-style pancakes, cooked in a regular nonstick skillet. Serve them as is, drizzled with honey (that's how we like them best), dusted with confectioners' sugar, drizzled with maple or palm syrup, or topped with a spoonful of jam. Note that the rice needs to soak for at least 4 hours before cooking, and the batter itself needs about an hour to get the yeast going. Otherwise, they're quite simple to make, and the time-consuming part is totally hands-off.

MAKES ABOUT 40 SMALL
PANCAKES

1 cup long-grain white rice
(preferably basmati)

1 cup full-fat unsweetened
coconut milk

¼ cup unsweetened coconut
flakes

¼ cup granulated sugar

1 teaspoon active dry yeast

½ teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon ground cardamom

Coconut oil, for cooking

Honey, for serving (optional)

Place the rice in a fine-mesh sieve and rinse with cold tap water, stirring the rice gently with your hands, until the water runs clear, about 1 minute. Place the rinsed rice in a bowl, cover with cold water, and soak in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours or up to overnight. Drain the rice and place it in the jar of a blender. Add the coconut milk, coconut flakes, sugar, yeast, salt, and cardamom. Puree until smooth. Pour the batter into a large bowl, cover with a clean kitchen towel or plastic wrap, and let it sit in a warm spot in your kitchen until bubbles form on the surface and the batter has risen and is quite thick, about 1 hour.

Place about 2 tablespoons of the coconut oil in a large nonstick skillet set over medium heat and swirl to coat the bottom of the skillet. Once a drop of the batter sizzles on contact, drop spoonfuls of the batter into the skillet to form small pancakes about 2 inches in diameter, leaving plenty of space between them (the exact number will depend on the size of your pan). Cook until the undersides are golden brown, about 2 minutes, then carefully flip each pancake and cook until the second sides are brown, about 1 more minute. Transfer the pancakes to a serving platter, cover with a clean kitchen towel to keep warm, and repeat the process with the remaining batter (add coconut oil to the pan in between batches as necessary). Serve warm, drizzled with honey, if you like.



Akoho Misy Sakamalao

(CHICKEN THIGHS WITH GARLIC, GINGER, AND COCONUT OIL)

These very flavorful chicken thighs are incredibly simple to make. If you have the foresight, let the thighs marinate with the garlic, ginger, and salt in the refrigerator overnight—it will make a noticeable difference. If you don't have time to let the thighs marinate, no worries, they're still great. Cooking them in coconut oil adds tons of flavor. Serve them with cooked rice and a vegetable, like cooked greens or roasted tomatoes. Be sure to spoon the juices from the chicken over your rice.

SERVES 4

2 pounds boneless, skinless
chicken thighs
6 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons minced ginger
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons coconut oil

Place the chicken thighs in a large bowl with the garlic and ginger and sprinkle with the salt. Using your hands, rub the aromatics all over the chicken. If you have time, cover the bowl with plastic wrap, place it in the refrigerator, and allow the chicken to marinate for up to 24 hours.

When you're ready to cook the chicken, warm the coconut oil in a large cast-iron skillet or other heavy skillet set over medium-high heat. Add the chicken and cook, turning the pieces occasionally, until deeply browned and cooked through, about 15 minutes. Serve warm. Any leftovers can be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for up to a few days and then reheated in a 300°F oven or a skillet set over medium heat for a few minutes.

Braised Oxtails

While Ma Jeanne usually prepares this recipe with zebu meat—a very tough meat from a type of local cattle—we applied that preparation technique to oxtails, which have a similar meat-to-bone ratio and are more readily available in the United States. The meat literally falls off the bone and needs nothing more than cooked rice to soak up all the cooking juices. Speaking of rice, when you cook a pot of rice, do as Ma Jeanne and so many other home cooks in Madagascar do: make ranovola, or burnt rice tea. Scoop all your rice from the pot and leave behind whatever rice sticks to the pot. Let this stuck-on rice cook until it's browned, then fill the pot with water, bring it to a boil, reduce the heat, and let it simmer for an hour or two. Let the liquid cool, then strain it and drink it cold.

SERVES 4

2½ pounds oxtails

Kosher salt

½ cup canola oil

3 cups water

4 large tomatoes (preferably Roma)

2 large red onions, thinly sliced

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

Season the oxtails generously with salt.

Place ¼ cup of the oil in a large Dutch oven or other heavy pot set over high heat. Add the oxtails, working in batches if necessary, depending on the size of your pot, and cook, turning occasionally, until browned all over, about 15 minutes. Add the water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, partially cover the pot, and simmer the oxtails, stirring them every so often, until tender, about 2 hours.

Meanwhile, slice off and discard the tops of the tomatoes and squeeze out and discard the seeds. Thinly slice the tomatoes and set them aside.

Transfer the oxtails and their cooking liquid to a large bowl and set aside. Add the remaining ¼ cup oil to the pot and set the pot over high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion sizzles and starts to take on a little color on the edges, about 1 minute. Stir in the tomatoes, cover, and cook until the tomatoes begin to break down, about 1 minute. Return the oxtails and their cooking juices to the pot. Sprinkle with the sugar and stir well to combine. Cook until the liquid has mostly reduced into a thick sauce and coats the oxtails. Serve hot. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot over low heat (stir while you heat).

MA BAOMAKA'S

Katilesy

(BEEF AND POTATO FRITTERS)

Perfect for stretching leftover cooked meat into an entirely new meal, these fritters are best made with meat you have previously cooked, such as Braised Oxtails (opposite) or any type of stewed or braised beef (or any type of meat, for that matter). Simply shred the meat and discard whatever bones are left over and proceed with the recipe. If you are starting from scratch, you can simmer 2 pounds of beef stew meat (preferably on the bone for more flavor) in a little bit of water with some chopped onion and garlic for flavor. Cook until the meat is tender (probably about 2 hours) and then allow it to cool to room temperature before shredding the meat.

MAKES ABOUT 18 FRITTERS

2 large baking potatoes,
coarsely chopped

1 pound shredded cooked beef
(see recipe introduction)

1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus
more as needed

½ teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper

2 scallions, ends trimmed,
thinly sliced

Large handful of Italian parsley
leaves (about ¼ cup), finely
chopped

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 large eggs

Canola oil, for frying

Place the potatoes in a medium saucepan, cover with cold water, and set over high heat. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, and simmer until the potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes. Drain the potatoes and place them in a large bowl.

Add the beef to the potatoes and season with the salt and pepper. Use a potato masher or a fork to crush the potatoes and the meat together. Stir in the scallions and parsley. Break off small handfuls of the mixture and roll into golf ball-sized balls with your hands (you should end up with about eighteen balls).

Place the flour on a large plate. Place the eggs in a shallow bowl and beat them well with a fork or a whisk. Coat each meat-potato ball in the flour, then the beaten egg, then return them to the flour for one last coating.

Meanwhile, line a plate with paper towels and set aside. Heat 1 inch of oil in a Dutch oven or other heavy pot set over medium-high heat until the oil reaches 375°F on an instant-read thermometer or until a fritter sizzles on contact. Carefully place the fritters into the hot oil, working in batches as necessary, depending on the size of your pot, and fry, turning the fritters with a slotted spoon as they cook, until they are golden brown all over, about 4 minutes. Carefully transfer the fritters to the prepared plate to drain and then sprinkle with a little bit of salt. Serve hot.

MA BAOMAKA'S

Kadaka Akondro

(GREEN PLANTAINS WITH BRAISED BEEF)

Similar to Ma Josefina's Plantains with Coconut and Prawns (page 188) from Mozambique and Ma Mariama's M'tsolola (Fish, Yuca, Green Plantain, and Coconut Milk Stew, page 266) from Comoros, Ma Baomaka's simple stew makes the most out of a little protein with lots of plantains for heft. While Ma Baomaka uses over a dozen small green plantains that are readily available in Madagascar, we call for just six green plantains, since the ones available in the United States are much larger. You could also use lamb stew meat or goat instead of oxtails. Serve with plain white rice and an accompaniment like Lasary Legioma (Tomato Relish, page 234) or Ma Jeanne's Carrot Salad with Vinaigrette (page 232).

SERVES 4

Kosher salt
2½ pounds oxtails
¼ cup canola oil
1 large yellow onion, coarsely chopped
3 cups water
6 green plantains
2 tablespoons granulated sugar

Season the oxtails generously with salt.

Place the oil in a large Dutch oven or other heavy pot set over high heat. Add the oxtails, working in batches if necessary, depending on the size of your pot, and cook, turning occasionally, until browned all over, about 15 minutes. Add the onion and water to the pot and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, partially cover the pot, and simmer the oxtails, stirring them every so often, until they're tender, about 2 hours.

Meanwhile, prepare the plantains by first putting on a pair of disposable gloves to keep your hands from getting too sticky while you peel them. Using a paring knife to help you trim the ends and skins, peel. Cut the plantains in half lengthwise and then cut each half in quarters crosswise (you'll end up with eight pieces per plantain). Rinse the plantains in cold water to remove excess starch and then drain them.

Add the plantains to the pot with the meat and sprinkle with the sugar. Stir well to combine, turn the heat on high, and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and simmer until the plantains are tender, about 20 minutes. Season to taste with salt and serve immediately. Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a few days and rewarmed in a pot set over low heat (stir while you heat).

MA BAOMAKA'S

Mofo Akondro

(BANANA FRITTERS)

Almost like banana tempura, these fritters are made of ripe bananas dipped into a yeasted batter made with cassava flour that's light and crisp. (For more about cassava flour, see page 18.) If you can't find cassava flour, feel free to use all-purpose flour, although that would no longer make these fritters gluten- and grain-free. Serve these as Ma Baomaka does, with hot coffee. In fact, she says you must serve coffee to guests and that it would be wrong to have people come into your home and not serve them freshly roasted and brewed coffee. She makes her coffee just like Ma Gehennet makes hers (see page 54), by roasting green coffee beans in a dry pot and then grinding them and brewing them with hot water. The only difference is that Ma Baomaka builds her own fire to roast the beans and has a granddaughter grind them in a wooden mortar that's the size of a cinder block using a pestle that's taller than she is. (Ma Gehennet, who lives just outside New York City, uses an electric stove and an electric coffee grinder.)

SERVES 4

1½ cups warm water (at body temperature)

1 teaspoon active dry yeast

3 tablespoons granulated sugar, plus extra for serving

1 cup cassava flour or all-purpose flour

4 bananas, sliced on the diagonal into 1-inch-thick pieces

Canola oil, for frying

Place the water and yeast in a medium bowl and stir to combine. Let the mixture sit until the yeast has dissolved and the mixture is cloudy when you stir it, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the sugar and the flour to form a thick, smooth batter. Cover the bowl with a clean kitchen towel and allow the batter to sit until it has thickened and smells yeasty, about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, line a plate with paper towels and set aside. Heat 1 inch of oil in a Dutch oven or other heavy pot set over medium-high heat until it reaches 375°F on an instant-read thermometer or until a pinch of batter sizzles on contact. Carefully dip the banana slices in the batter, letting the excess drip back into the bowl, and place the fritters into the hot oil, working in batches as necessary, depending on the size of your pot (don't crowd the pot). Fry, turning the fritters with a slotted spoon as they cook, until golden brown all over, about 4 minutes. Carefully transfer the fritters to the prepared plate to drain. Sprinkle with extra sugar, if you'd like, and serve immediately, while hot.

Sliced Papaya with Vanilla Cream

This simple vanilla-infused cream makes ripe papaya even more special than it already is. Try serving the cream on other fruit (it goes especially well on sliced mango, pineapple, and berries). Be sure to throw the whole vanilla pod into the pot with the cream after you scrape the seeds out—the pod itself has a ton of flavor, even if it's not entirely edible. In fact, after the cream, you can rinse it off and place it in a jar, cover with vodka or bourbon, and let it sit in a dark spot to make your own pure vanilla extract. Keep adding pods to the jar after you scrape them for other recipes (such as Grilled Lobster Tails with Vanilla Sauce, page 269), and you'll end up with liquid gold in your cupboard.

SERVES 4

½ cup heavy cream

1 vanilla bean (preferably from Madagascar or Comoros)

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

Pinch of kosher salt

1 large or 2 small papayas, peeled, seeded, and cut into thick slices

Place the cream in a small saucepan set over medium heat. Slice the vanilla bean lengthwise and use the blunt end of a paring knife or a spoon to scrape out the seeds. Place the vanilla seeds and the scraped pod into the pot with the cream and add the sugar and salt. Cook, stirring, until bubbles form at the edges, about 3 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the mixture cool to room temperature. Remove the vanilla pod (see the recipe introduction for a good idea of what to do with it). Place the papaya on a serving platter and evenly spoon the vanilla cream over it. Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate for up to 6 hours before serving, then serve cold.





Ginger Spritz

Homemade ginger beer is popular throughout Madagascar, and our riff on it doesn't require any home brewing or fermentation. A quick blitz of fresh ginger, honey, and lemon (all prominent Malagasy flavors) in the blender makes a really assertive base that goes so well with seltzer or sparkling wine. You could also combine the ginger mixture with boiling water rather than seltzer and serve hot (this is particularly soothing if you have a sore throat or a cold).

SERVES 4

One 2-inch piece ginger, coarsely chopped (no need to peel)

¼ cup honey

¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

½ cup water

4 cups seltzer or sparkling wine

Ice, for serving

Place the ginger, honey, lemon juice, and water in the jar of a blender and puree until smooth. Pour the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a pitcher and press down to extract all the flavor from the ginger (discard the contents of the sieve). Stir the seltzer into the pitcher. Fill four glasses with ice and divide the drink among them. Serve immediately.