

# Mama's Crawfish Étouffée

Recipe courtesy of Chef Virginia Willis

SERVES 4 TO 6

A Cajun specialty, *étouffée* is a succulent, tangy, tomato sauce usually made with crawfish or shrimp. The word *étouffée* comes from the French *étouffer* (to smother), and that's it exactly: rich and tender crawfish tails smothered in a spicy blanket of flavorful sauce.

"First, you make a roux" is the start of many Creole and Cajun recipes (it's also the title of a popular cookbook from Louisiana published by the Lafayette Museum in the early 1960s). Roux is a cooked mixture of fat (butter) and starch (flour) used to thicken many sauces in classic French cooking. A Creole roux is not the classic French butter-flour mixture, but sometimes combines flour with an oil like peanut oil that can hold a high temperature. Unlike a French roux, which can be white to pale golden, Creole and Cajun roux are typically, at the very least, the color of peanut butter and progress to deep, dark brown. This process can take 45 minutes or so of constant stirring. It is dangerous stuff. If any splatters on you, it will be perfectly clear why this fiery, sticky combination of oil and flour is often referred to as "Cajun napalm!"

## INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 onion, preferably Vidalia, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- ½ green bell pepper, cored, seeded and chopped
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 5 green onions, green part only, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, very finely chopped
- 2 cups fish or shrimp stock (see below) or water
- 2 pounds crawfish tails, cooked
- Hot sauce, for seasoning
- Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

## \$20,000 RICE PILAF FOR ACCOMPANIMENT

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 small shallot, chopped
- 2 cups long-grain white rice
- Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley



## FISH STOCK AND SHRIMP STOCK

Seafood soup, stew, and gumbo all taste better when prepared with homemade stock as opposed to bottled clam juice, the favorite stand-in to freshly made stock. When you peel the shrimp, save the shells (heads also, if you are fortunate to have them), and rinse with cold running water. Place the shells in a pot and add enough water to cover. Add a few fresh bay leaves, sprigs of parsley and thyme, a quartered onion, chopped carrot and chopped celery, and bring to a boil. Decrease the heat to low and simmer until fragrant and flavorful, about 30 minutes. Strain the stock in a strainer layered with cheesecloth, discarding the solids. If I don't need to make shrimp stock every time I peel shrimp, I save the shells for later in a sealable plastic bag in the freezer. For fish stock, it's the same principle, but use bones instead of shells. Do not use oily or heavy fish such as mackerel, skate, mullet, or salmon; their flavor is too strong and heavy. Use approximately 4 pounds of fish bones to 10 cups of water to make 8 cups of stock.

## DIRECTIONS

### \$20,000 RICE PILAF

Preheat oven to 350. In a large, oven-proof saucepan, heat the butter over medium heat until foaming. Add the shallot and cook until clear and translucent, 2 to 3 minutes. Add rice and stir to combine. Cook, stirring constantly, until the rice is coated with butter and lightly toasted. Season with 1 teaspoon of salt and pepper to taste. Add the stock and stir to combine. Bring to a boil over medium high heat. Cover with a tight fitting lid and place in oven and cook until liquid is absorbed and rice is tender, 17 minutes. Remove from oven and let stand covered 5 minutes before serving. Add the parsley and fluff with a fork just before serving.

### MAMA'S CRAWFISH ÉTOUFFÉE

In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the flour, stirring slowly and constantly, and cook to a medium-brown roux, about 30 minutes.

Add the onion, celery, and bell pepper and cook, stirring constantly, until the vegetables are wilted and lightly golden, about 5 minutes. Add the parsley and green onion tops and stir to combine. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, 45 to 60 seconds. Add the fish stock and stir to combine. Bring to a boil over high heat.

Decrease the heat to low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thickened and reduced, about 20 minutes. Add the crawfish and stir to combine. Cook until heated through, 5 to 7 minutes. Season with hot sauce. Taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve with rice pilaf.