

Jambalaya

By

Leah Wanner

Word Count = 290

Although the relationship didn't work out in the end, making jambalaya with Steve remains one of my favorite food-related memories. On a Friday night after a long week of teaching, he showed up with a bag of ingredients and a photocopied recipe. Relaxing acoustic guitar music streamed from my computer while we chopped, measured, and stirred. We traded stories about our day, at times drowning out the music with our laughter. We moved around each other easily, sharing the space and playfully hugging in between tasks. He chopped peppers, I sliced andouille sausage, and our mouths watered as the aroma filled the kitchen. We were pleased when the plated entree resembled the photo, and even more pleased with the delicious taste. We washed down the spicy concoction with a sweet reisling, satiated and proud of our success.

A year and a half later, I have yet to prepare this recipe a second time. However, the photocopy is tucked safely amongst the cookbooks in my cupboard. Steve's handwritten grocery list is on the back. Every now and then, I read it and can't deny the warm feeling it stirs up within me. I think about him taking the time to plan our special evening: perusing the internet for the just-right recipe, carefully jotting down ingredients. His slanted but legible script bares his earnest intention to please me. His desire to make me smile over an enjoyable culinary experience is evident in the pencil strokes of simple words like okra, garlic and shrimp. I marvel at the power a grocery list has over me, at once making me feel cared for, cherished...if not a bit remorseful. I can't help but wonder if Steve ever thinks of ME when he eats jambalaya.

YIELD: ABOUT 6-8 SERVINGS

## JAMBALAYA

Learn how to make this easy and delicious homemade jambalaya!

⌚ PREP TIME: 15 MINS ⌚ COOK TIME: 40 MINS ⌚ TOTAL TIME: 55 MINS

### INGREDIENTS:

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 ribs celery, chopped
- 1 white onion, diced
- 1 small red bell pepper, cored and diced
- 1 small yellow bell pepper, cored and diced
- 1 small green bell pepper, cored and diced
- 1-2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and finely chopped (\*more/less to taste, see note below)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 pound andouille sausage, thinly sliced into rounds
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 (14 ounces) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 1/2 cups uncooked white or brown rice
- 2 tablespoons Cajun or Creole seasoning (\*\*more/less to taste, see note below)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon thyme, crushed
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 pound raw shrimp, peeled and deveined
- (optional) 1 cup thinly-sliced okra
- salt and pepper
- (optional garnishes: chopped fresh parsley, thinly-sliced green onions, hot sauce)

### DIRECTIONS:

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large saute pan over medium-high heat. Add celery, onion, bell peppers, jalapeno and garlic. Saute for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are soft and mostly cooked. Add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil, chicken and sausage, and stir to combine. Continue sauteing for an additional 5 minutes, or until the chicken is no longer pink and mostly cooked.

Add the chicken stock, tomatoes, rice, Cajun spice, bay leaf, thyme, and cayenne, and stir to combine. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for about 25-30 minutes, or until the rice is cooked, stirring occasionally. (Don't forget to stir, or the rice may burn on the bottom of the pan.)

Once the rice is tender, add in the shrimp and okra and stir to combine. Let the mixture continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp are cooked and pink. Remove bay leaf and season the jambalaya with salt and pepper and hot sauce and additional Cajun/Creole seasoning if needed. Remove from heat and serve with optional garnishes if desired.