Kenyan Cuisine

Kenyan cuisine was influenced by such far-flung countries as Portugal, China, India and Britain. "When the Portuguese arrived in 1496 on the coast of Kenya, they introduced foods from newly discovered Brazil, including maize, bananas, pineapple, chilies, peppers, sweet potatoes, and cassava. The Portuguese also brought oranges, lemons, and limes from China and India, as well as pigs.

"Pastoralism (cattle herding) has a long history in Kenya. Around A.D. 1000, a clan from North Africa called the Hima introduced cattle herding. By the 1600s, groups like the Masai and Turkana ate beef exclusively. Cattle provided meat, milk, butter, and blood.

"When the Europeans arrived at the shores of Kenya, they brought with them white potatoes, cucumbers, and tomatoes. The British imported thousands of Indians for labor, and curries (spicy dishes made with curry spice), chapattis (a flat, disk-shaped bread made of wheat flour, water, and salt) and chutneys (a relish made of spices, herbs, and/or fruit) became a traditional Sunday lunch for many Kenyans.

"The Kikuyu and Gikuyu grow corn, beans, potatoes, and greens. They mash all of these vegetables together to make irio. They roll irio into balls and dip them into meat or vegetable stews.

In western Kenya, the people living near Lake Victoria (the second-largest freshwater lake in the world) mainly prepare fish stews, vegetable dishes, and rice."

Kenyan Recipes

Our thanks to Carolyn Mayers for providing most of the following recipes. Questions about the following recipes? e-mail Carolyn at crmayers@mac.com

Note: if you would like a broader selection of recipes than I have provided here, I highly recommend you check out the ones from the last time we were in Kenya supporting The Boma Fund:

Cold Avocado Soup

Adapted from The Congo Cookbook

Avocados grow everywhere in Kenya. Smooth and creamy and rich, this soup recipe from 2009 when we were supporting another program in Kenya because it is SO good I wanted to make sure you didn’t miss it! A beautiful way to start your Kenyan meal.

Serves 6

---

Kenyan Etiquette

- **Beverages are not usually served with meals** since Kenyans think it is impolite to eat and drink at the same time. They are generally served at the completion of the meal.
- **Meetings seldom have scheduled ending times** since what matters is finishing the meeting in a satisfactory manner to all concerned. In fact, Kenyans are amused at the concept of an ending time.
- **Take off your shoes** before entering Kenyan homes.
- **Do not leave the meal area** unless invited to do so. **A small burp signifies satisfaction**.
- **Eat with your right hand**. If offered a spoon or fork, hold them in your right hand.

--Excerpted from www.etiquettescholar.com & www.kwintessential.co.uk

Menu

- Cold Avocado Soup
- M’bazi (Pea Beans, Nairobi Style)
- Kenyan Curried Cabbage
- Chicken Tikka
- Kariokor Nyama ya Kuchoma (Barbecued Meat)
- Sukuma Wiki (Kenyan Style Kale Tomatoes)
- Ugali
- Brandy Snaps

---

A farmer in Kenya sells her hot peppers to a local food company for processing and export to Europe.
1T vegetable oil
1 small onion, chopped
1T ground coriander seed
1T flour
3c chicken stock
10 asparagus spears, cut into 1 inch pieces (optional)
2 very ripe avocados, pitted, peeled and chopped just before adding
salt and pepper to taste (I also added a pinch of cayenne)
3T heavy cream (optional)
Chopped chives and paprika for garnish

Heat oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add chopped onion and sauté until onion is very soft, reducing heat if necessary to prevent the onion from browning. Add the coriander and flour. Stir and sauté briefly. Add stock, stirring and bring to a boil. Add asparagus, if using, and gently boil for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until asparagus is tender. You could save a few tips for garnishing if you like. If not using asparagus, then just gently boil the stock for about 5 minutes, stirring once or twice. Remove from heat and allow to cool to avoid burning yourself while blending. Put the avocado flesh in the bottom of a blender, add the stock and asparagus and blend until smooth. Add more stock if it seems too thick. Add salt and pepper, and cayenne if using, to taste. Blend until combined. Pour soup into bowl or serving container and stir in heavy cream, if using. Chill. To serve, garnish each bowl with a sprinkle of paprika and chopped chives, and any asparagus tips you have set aside. Serve cold.

---

**M’bazi (Pea Beans, Nairobi Style)**
Adapted from [http://www.celt.net.org.uk/recipes/miscellaneous/fetch-recipe.php?%20rid=misc-m-bazi]

This is served traditionally as an appetizer, cold, in lettuce cups, garnished with wedges of tomato and chopped parsley. It was a cold rainy day when I tried this recipe so we decided to have it hot with rice. Tom had some for breakfast cold the next day and pronounced it to be “edible” (his word for “Can you make this again?”) cold as well. Either way, it is delicious, and could also serve as a lovely vegetarian main course. Serves 4.

½ c dried beans (black-eyed peas are the closest to pea beans), rinsed and soaked for 6 hours
2T vegetable oil
1 small onion, minced
1 small green pepper (I used a cubanelle), minced
¼t red pepper flakes
½ to ¾c coconut milk, full fat recommended
½ to ¾t salt
Ground black pepper to taste
Tomato wedges (optional)
Chopped parsley (optional)
Place the soaked beans in a medium heavy saucepan and add water to cover by about an inch. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to Medium-low and simmer partially covered for about 20 minutes or until tender but not mushy. Drain and set aside. In a skillet large enough to hold everything in this recipe, heat the oil over medium heat and add the onion. Sauté for about 3 minutes and add the pepper and pepper flakes. Cook, stirring, for another 3 minutes. Add the cooked beans and salt and black pepper to taste and cook another 5 minutes, stirring to prevent sticking. Add the coconut milk and stir well. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring periodically, until the mixture is thickened, adding more coconut milk as necessary. If serving hot, serve with cooked rice. If serving cold, allow to cool and serve on individual plates in lettuce cups, garnished with tomatoes and parsley.

### Kenyan Curried Cabbage
Adapted from [http://recipes.wikia.com/wiki/Kenyan_Curried_Cabbage](http://recipes.wikia.com/wiki/Kenyan_Curried_Cabbage)

Sort of like warm curried coleslaw, only better than that sounds. Creamy, tasty and pretty, this works well with any main course.

Serves 6

- 2T vegetable oil
- 1 small onion minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1t curry powder
- 1 medium small head cabbage, shredded
- ¼ - ½t salt or to taste
- 1c shredded carrots
- ¼ c coconut milk (or more if too dry)
- Ground black pepper to taste
- Chopped parsley

Heat oil in large skillet or wok over medium heat. Add onion and sauté for 4 minutes. Add garlic and curry powder and cook 2 more minutes, stirring. Add cabbage, a bit of salt and 1 tablespoon of water and stir well. Increase heat to medium-high, cover and cook about 3 minutes. Uncover pan and add carrots and another tablespoon of water if the pan is dry, and stir well. Cover and cook 4 minutes. Stir in coconut milk and black pepper and cook, uncovered, a minute or two. It will probably need more salt at this point as the carrots make it sweet. Serve warm or hot.

### Chicken Tikka
Adapted from [http://recipes.wikia.com/wiki/Chicken_Tikka_II](http://recipes.wikia.com/wiki/Chicken_Tikka_II)

This is a delicious example of Indian influence on Kenyan cooking. Some recipes called for yogurt or cream in the marinade, but one recipe pointed out that most Africans are lactose intolerant so I omitted it with no loss of flavor. A wonderful addition to your grilling repertoire, it can also be cooked in the oven if you like.

Serves 6
2lbs. chicken parts (I used skinless thighs), scored with a knife to facilitate the marinade penetrating the meat
3T vegetable oil
3T lemon and/or lime juice
2T fresh ginger, minced
3 large cloves garlic, minced
1t ground coriander seed
1t garam masala (Indian spice blend)
½t red pepper flakes
¼ - ½ t salt
½t sugar

Whisk all the marinade ingredients together except the chicken pieces. Place chicken pieces in a large, leak proof plastic bag and add marinade. Close the bag securely and smoosh the chicken around until it is completely covered with the spices. Place in the refrigerator in a bowl to catch any sneaky leaks, and allow to marinate overnight or at least 6 hours. If you are going to bake the chicken, preheat oven to 375. Place chicken in broiler pan and cover with foil. Cook in the oven for 20 minutes. Uncover the chicken, turn the pieces and cook, uncovered, for another 20 minutes or so, or until the juices run clear when poked with a fork. If grilling, preheat grill. Cook chicken pieces, turning once after 20 minutes, over medium heat, indirect, approximately 35-45 minutes, or until nicely browned and cooked through.

Kariokor Nyama ya Kuchoma (Barbecued Meat as in the Nairobi Market)

With a name like that how could I not cook this one? Street food at its best, this is similar to another classic Kenyan barbecued meat street food called “Meat on a Stick”. Gotta love it. Spicy, salty and sweet. If you don’t like heat add less pepper.
Serves 4

1¼ - 1½lbs. meat of any kind, cut into 1½ -inch pieces (I used lamb)
1t salt
½t ground black pepper
1t red pepper flakes, or use some chipotle (about ½t for a smokier flavor)
2T sugar
1T fresh ginger, minced
4 cloves garlic, minced
1T vegetable oil

Mix all spices, salt, pepper and sugar together with the oil to form a paste. Smear the paste on the cubes of meat. You can do this either before or after you have threaded the cubes onto skewers but either way, it is a messy job. Place skewers of seasoned meat on a plate and cover with plastic wrap. Put in
refrigerator and allow to marinate for one hour. Preheat grill to medium-high. Cook meat on skewers for approximately 4 minutes per side for medium-rare. Serve warm.

Additional Recipes

**Sukuma Wiki (Kenyan Style Kale Tomatoes)**
Adapted from Whole Foods Market

“The name *Sukama Wiki* translates roughly to ‘push the week,’ implying the ingredient’s stellar ability to stretch meals, making them last to the end of the week. Throughout the country, the popular dish is eaten without utensils, with chapati (a variety of flatbread) or ugali (a type of cornmeal mush) used to scoop up bites instead.” --*Whole Planet Foundation*. Serves 4.

2 teaspoons canola oil
1 yellow onion, chopped
1 jalapeño, stemmed, seeded and finely chopped (optional)
3 ripe but firm tomatoes, cored and chopped
2 bunches kale or collard greens (about 1 pound total), ribs removed, leaves thinly sliced
1/2 cup water
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/4 teaspoon sea salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and jalapeño (if using) and cook, stirring often, until softened and golden brown, 7 to 8 minutes. Add tomatoes and cook until collapsed and juicy, about 10 minutes more. Add kale, water, lemon juice, salt and pepper, toss once or twice, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, until kale is tender and flavors have come together, 10 to 15 minutes. Spoon into bowls and serve.

**Ugali**
Adapted from [http://www.whats4eats.com/grains/ugali-recipe](http://www.whats4eats.com/grains/ugali-recipe)

Known as *ugali* in Kenya and Tanzania, this is a polenta-like side dish. Yield: 4 to 6 servings

4 cups water
2 teaspoons salt
2 cups white cornmeal, finely ground

Bring the water and salt to a boil in a heavy-bottomed saucepan.
Stir in the cornmeal slowly, letting it fall though the fingers of your hand. Reduce heat to medium-low and continue stirring regularly, smashing any lumps with a spoon, until the mush pulls away from the sides of the pot and becomes very thick, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool somewhat. Place the ugali into a large serving bowl. Wet your hands with water, form into a ball and serve.

Brandy Snaps

Brandy Snaps are sensational cookies served in Kenya, originally introduced by the British. Yield: 25 brandy snaps

4 oz. butter
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup corn syrup
1/2 tsp (or more, to taste) ground ginger
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
3 Tablespoons brandy
1 pint whipped cream

In a pot combine BUTTER, SUGAR, CORN SYRUP, GROUND GINGER. Stir over heat until well mixed. Cool for 10 minutes. Add FLOUR and blend into mixture. Pour mixture by spoonfuls into flat greased pan 3 to 4 inches apart. Bake at 350F until snaps flatten. Remove carefully with spatula and, when slightly cooled. Roll up into a tube. Combine: BRANDY with WHIPPED CREAM. Stuff tubes with whipped cream using a pastry bag.