



African American Heritage Month

Mini- Cookbook:

Healthy Recipes with Rich History

The Austin Health and Human Services/ Travis County Health Department encourages African Americans, the group hardest hit by cancer, to incorporate African American food history into low-fat, high-fiber diets to reduce cancer risk.

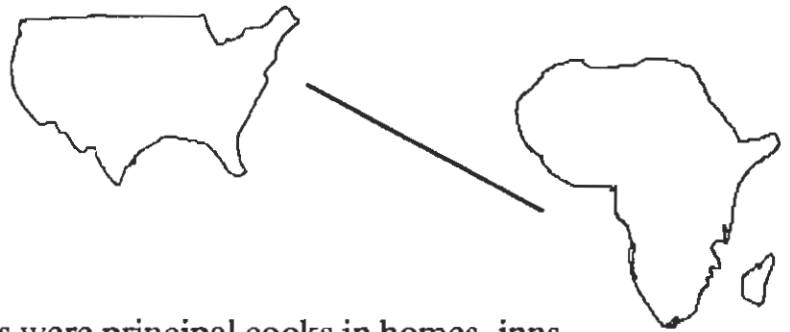
African American FOOD History



AFRICA: First People, First Civilizations

Many foods originated in Africa: by 6000 B.C., Africans in urban farming communities had domesticated: oil-producing plants, rice, millet, sorghum, peanuts, watermelon, others.

Slaves brought to America. Also imported were native foods such as red pepper, okra, rice, etc.



Colonies

African Americans were principal cooks in homes, inns, restaurants: In Washington, D.C., some of the best inns, restaurants, and food stands were owned by ex-slaves who bought their freedom.

In the SOUTH slaves did the cooking for plantations; and creatively supplemented their own meager rations with game, garden goods, and sometimes raised chickens.



New Orleans

Spanish, French, and African cooking converged to form CREOLE cooking: African Americans added foods and introduced techniques native to Africa to Jambalaya, Gumbo, etc.

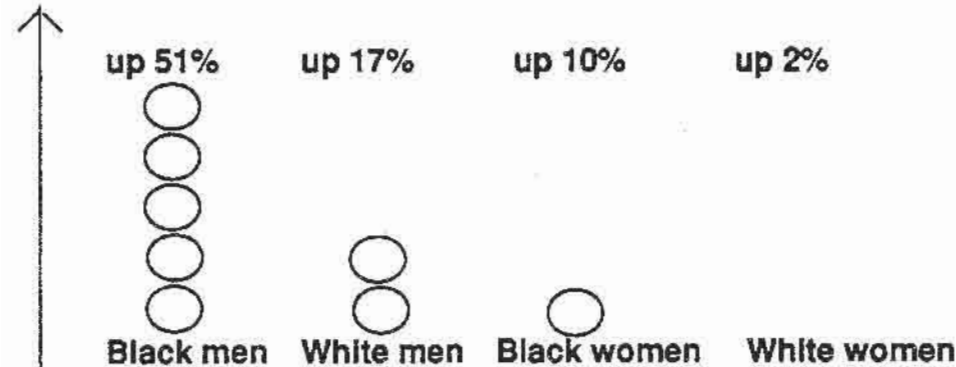


Today: Almost all aspects of American food have been influenced and enriched by African-American traditions.

African American CANCER History

Cancer Rates: How many people have cancer?

1991: Increases in rates:

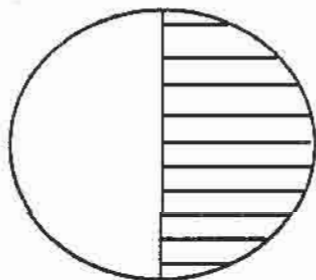


1961: Rates roughly the same for blacks and whites

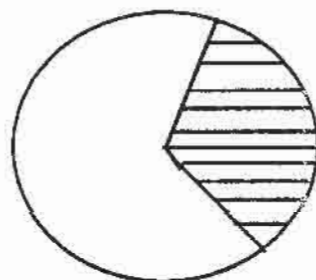
***African-Americans have the highest rate of any population group in the U.S.**

***Rates are RISING**

- 5-year Survival Rates: once people have it, what percent live for 5 or more years?



Whites: 52%



Blacks: 38%

* Statistics from The American Cancer Society: "Cancer Facts & Figures - 1991"

Risky Behaviors for Cancer:

1. Smoking
2. High Fat/ Low Fiber Diet
3. Alcohol

Chicken in the Oven

Vegetable cooking spray
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon paprika
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 1/2 to 3 pound broiler-fryer
chicken, with skin removed
2 tablespoons corn oil
margarine

Coat rectangular pan with cooking spray. Mix flour and seasonings. Coat chicken with flour mixture. Place in pan. Drizzle margarine over chicken. Bake uncovered at 425 degrees for 30 minutes. Turn chicken; bake until thickest pieces are done, about 30 minutes.

Serves 6.

From "The New Soul Food," Ebony Magazine, February 1989.

Chicken: the "Preacher's Bird"

"Chicken was eaten by Blacks both in Africa and during slavery. Among some [people] chicken is referred to as the "Preacher's Bird." This name came about because after Emancipation the church became the center of African-American community life. The most important member of the community was the preacher. In many localities the parishioners took turns inviting him to share their Sunday dinner. The hostess usually killed and cooked a chicken for the occasion. As the honored guest, the preacher had first claim to the meatiest parts of the chicken. Also chicken, or more precisely hens, figured in a number of African religious ceremonies. I can't help but think that this cultural factor played a role in helping Blacks select chicken as the appropriate bird to serve their religious leader."

From The African Heritage Cookbook, by Helen Mendes. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1971.

Smothered Catfish

4 half-pound catfish fillets
freshly ground pepper, to taste
1 lemon
1/4 cup vegetable oil
dash of cayenne pepper
1 medium onion, sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup tomato sauce
1/2 teaspoon thyme
1/2 cup white wine

The Carribean Connection

Many slaves were brought from West Africa to the Carribean islands before being transported to the U.S. After Emancipation, and to the present day, many Black families have immigrated to the U.S. from the Carribean and parts of Central America. Carribean foods and spices have thus become an important part of African American cooking. Many Carribean recipes are characterized by the use of various types of peppers for flavoring.

Wash the fish fillets and pat dry. Sprinkle with pepper and squeeze the lemon over the fish. Heat the oil in a large skillet. Dredge the fillets in a mixture of flour, pepper, and cayenne pepper. Brown quickly on both sides. Remove and set aside. Pour off some of the oil and then saute the onion, peppers, and garlic. When the onion wilts, add the tomato sauce, thyme, and wine. Simmer for 10 minutes, until the fish is done. Adjust the seasonings.

Serves 4.

From Family of the Spirit Cookbook: Recipes and Remembrances from African American Kitchens, by John Pinderhughes. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1990 (slightly altered).

Hoppin' John

2 tablespoons safflower oil
1 cup chopped onions
1 clove garlic, minced
2 cups ripe juicy tomatoes,
chopped, with 1/4 cup water;
or one 14-ounce can tomatoes
with liquid, chopped
1/2 teaspoon dried basil
1/4 teaspoons dried thyme
3 cups cooked brown rice
2 cups cooked black-eyed peas
black pepper

Heat the oil in a very large skillet. Add the onions and saute over low heat until translucent. Add the garlic and continue to saute until onions are golden. Add the tomatoes and herbs and cook until the tomatoes have softened a bit, about five minutes. Add the rice and peas and season to taste with lots of pepper. Stir together well and simmer over low heat for 15 minutes. Add a bit of water or cooking liquid from the peas if the mixture needs more moisture. Serve at once.

Serves 4 to 6.

From Paula Bindie, Durham NC.

Slave Resourcefulness

As slaves on plantations, African Americans creatively added foods from small gardens, fishing and hunting to the meager rations they were given. In this way, they made their diets not only more nutritional, but better tasting.

"In their gardens, Blacks also cultivated several of the peas and beans which they had eaten in Africa. Among them were...blackeyed peas. Because slaves sometimes planted these beans and peas around the borders of corn and cotton fields, they were collectively known as 'field peas.'

"Africans at home and abroad made [bean stews] with herbs, spices, onions, oils and meats. In the West Indies, beans and rice are cooked together. In America and Brazil, they are usually cooked separately but are served together. The one American exception is 'Hoppin' John,' a dish made of rice and black-eyed peas cooked together in a manner very similar to that of the West Indians. In fact, it is quite possible that this dish came to America from the West Indies since slaves were often brought to this country from the islands."

From The African Heritage Cookbook by Helen Mendes. The Macmillan Co., New York, 1971.

Okra Gumbo

2 pounds fresh okra, sliced
1/2 pound crab meat or artificial
crab meat
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 large onion, chopped
1 green pepper, chopped
3 stalks celery, chopped
3 quarts water
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon thyme
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground
pepper
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
3 cloves garlic
1/2 pound shrimp, shelled
1 pound white fish, cut into 1-inch cubes

Place the okra, crab meat, tomato paste, onion, green pepper, and celery in a large heavy pot. Add the water and bring to a boil. Add the bay leaf, thyme, salt, and pepper. Boil for 30-40 minutes over a medium flame, until the okra is done and all the ropiness is cooked out. Add the cayenne pepper, garlic, shrimp and fish. Simmer 15 minutes more. Serve over rice.

From Family of the Spirit Cookbook: Recipes and Remembrances from African-American Kitchens, by John Pinderhughes. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1990 (slightly altered).

Creole Cooking

"Blacks' cooking ability was well noted in the South, particularly in New Orleans. For it was here that French and Spanish cooking, colonial cooking, and African cooking converged and produced a new form called 'Creole cooking.'

"As the principal cooks in New Orleans, blacks imposed a considerable amount of their native foodways upon the local food.

"With foods native to Africa, such as red pepper, rice, okra, etc., blended by slave cooks with the colonial foods at hand, often new preparations were produced, or standard preparations were pleasingly altered."

From Aspects of Afro-American Cookery, by Howard Paige. Aspects Publishing Co., Michigan, 1987.

Collard Greens

- 1 pound smoked turkey parts
- 1 1/2 quarts water
- 1 or 2 hot pepper pods or
1 teaspoon crushed red
pepper
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 pounds fresh collard greens
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 small green pepper, chopped
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- pepper to taste

Place turkey in a large saucepan; add water, pepper pods, and garlic. Cover; bring to boil; reduce heat to low and simmer 30 minutes. Break off and discard stems of collards. Wash leaves thoroughly. Slice leaves into bite-size pieces by rolling several leaves together and slicing in 1/4-inch strips. Add collards, onion, celery, green pepper, sugar, and pepper. Cook 30 to 40 minutes or until greens are done.

Serves 8 to 10.

From "The New Soul Food," Ebony magazine, February 1989.

African Origin: Greens

"Africans were fond of vegetables and so are contemporary African-Americans. Throughout West Africa, women and children gathered 'bush greens.' These greens were several types of spinach. Cooks simmered them with oil, peppers, and seasonings or added them to soups. Other types of 'greens' were favored by West Africans. Among them were those which are so greatly relished by contemporary African-Americans--collard and mustard greens."

From The African Heritage Cookbook,
by Helen Mendes. The Macmillan
Company, New York, 1971.

Cornbread Muffins

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup yellow cornmeal
1 cup skim or 1% milk
1 egg
2 tablespoons margarine

Bread

"Bread is served at every meal. In fact, several kinds of hot breads may be served at the same meal. This love of bread has been with Black people for a long time. In sixteenth through eighteenth century Africa, wheat, sorghum, millet, corn, luco, and cassava were pounded into flours and made into breads, dumplings, wafer-like tidbits, and biscuits. Since cassava, luco and millet aren't grown in North America, Blacks could not continue making these breads. For most of the African-American's history in the United States, his breads have been made of corn meal."

From The African Heritage Cookbook by Helen Mendes. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1971.

Mix together the flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and cornmeal. In a separate bowl, combine the milk, slightly beaten egg, and melted margarine.

Make a well in center of dry ingredients. Pour in liquid ingredients. Stir just until dry ingredients are moistened. Batter will be lumpy. Coat muffin pan with cooking spray. Fill about 3/4 full. Bake 12 to 15 minutes at 350 degrees until lightly browned.

Makes 16 muffins.

From "Recipes from the Heart: A Nutrition Guide For People with High Blood Pressure" by Lucy Williams M.S., R.N.

Sweet Potato Bread

- 1 cup finely mashed sweet potatoes
- 2 tablespoons warm water
- 1/2 package yeast
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 3/4 cups flour, or enough to make a soft dough

George Washington Carver

In 1936, George Washington Carver, a famous African American scientist at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, published "Bulletin #38: How Farmers Can Save Their Sweet Potatoes and Ways of Planting Them." It contained 332 recipes as well as advice about planting, storing, and canning sweet potatoes. The recipe at the left is from this bulletin.

From Aspects of Afro-American Cookery, by Howard Paige. Aspect Publishing Co., Michigan, 1987.

Add the salt to the potatoes, and the yeast. Pour in the water. Add flour enough to make a smooth sponge (about a cupful). Cover and set in a warm place to rise. When light add the remainder of the flour or whatever is needed to make a smooth elastic dough. Cover and let rise until light. Mold; shape into loaves or rolls. Let rise and bake.

Many variations of the above bread can be made by adding different nuts, spices, etc.

Peach Cobbler

2 tablespoons margarine
2/3 cup flour
1/2 cup sugar
1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
2/3 cup skim or 1% milk
2 cups fresh peaches or other fruit such as blueberries

Melt margarine in 1 1/2 quart casserole dish.

Combine flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in small mixing bowl. Slowly stir in milk. Pour batter into casserole.

Sprinkle peaches on top of batter. Bake at 350 degrees about 50 minutes.

Makes 4 cups.

From "Recipes For the Heart: A Nutritional Guide for People with High Blood Pressure" by Lucy M. Williams M.S., R.N.

Desserts in Africa and on Plantations

"Not all West Africans liked sweets. However, those who did became experts at making puddings, cakes, and candies. The forest lands provided many ingredients for making desserts. Cooks preferred the plump fig bananas for making puddings. No sugar was ever needed in cooking these soft and delicate fruits because they were so 'intensely sweet.'

"Although prepared desserts were a rarity for most field slaves, there were some fruits which they could occasionally eat as dessert. In the woods, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, whortleberries,, elderberries, mulberries, cranberries, and strawberries grew in abundance. These fruits were usually eaten fresh or stewed or made into wine. Some slaveholders had fruit orchards from which they allowed slaves to pick peaches, apples, and cherries."

From The African Heritage Cookbook, by Helen Mendes. The Macmillan Co., New York, 1971.

Sweet Potato Pie

4 egg whites
3/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup fresh orange juice
1/2 teaspoon orange rind
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/2 cup skim milk
2 tablespoons margarine,
melted
Dash salt
2 cups cooked mashed sweet
potatoes
1 unbaked 9-inch pie shell

African Origin: Yams & Sweet Potatoes

"Yams were the most universally cultivated crop in West Africa...Yams were particularly esteemed among the tribes of Nigeria (Ibo, Yourba, etc.) For them, yams were not only symbols of fertility, but also represented wealth."

"Yams and sweet potatoes have provided an unbroken link in the Black man's diet from sixteenth century Africa to twentieth century America...In America, yams and sweet potatoes were plentiful and slaveholders regularly supplied slaves with them...Holes were dug in the dirt floor of the slave's hut for the purpose of storing these tubers. The slave most often cooked them as she had done in Africa. She roasted, boiled, fried or made them into puddings. In America, she also made breads, biscuits, pies and cakes with these vegetables..."

From The African American Heritage Cookbook by Helen Mendes. The Macmillan Co., New York, 1971.

Beat egg whites well. Add sugar, orange juice, and salt. Mix thoroughly; add milk and stir. Add mashed sweet potatoes and mix thoroughly. Turn into pie shell and bake in preheated 350 degree oven for one hour or until firm.

Serves 8.

From "The New Soul Food," Ebony Magazine, February 1989.

General Tips

for Serving Lower-Fat, Cancer Risk-Reducing Meals:

Remove skin from chicken and turkey before cooking.

Remove all visible fat from all meats.

Bake, boil, or steam foods instead of frying, when possible.

Use **cooking spray** instead of oil to coat pan when frying or baking.

Use **less oil** when cooking.

Use **low fat cheese** instead of regular cheese.

Use **skim, 1%, or 2% milk** instead of whole milk.

Also, to increase fiber in your diet:

Serve foods which are good sources of fiber such as **whole grain breads, cereals, fruits and vegetables, beans and peas.**

This mini-cookbook was compiled by Carmen Retzlaff, Public Health Educator, with nutritional consultation from Anita Fincher, Dietitian. It is a product of the Health Education and Promotion Unit of the Austin Health and Human Services/ Travis County Health Department.

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