

HISTORY & TERMINOLOGY OF NEW ORLEANS CUISINE + CULTURE



The most common misunderstanding of Creole and Cajun cuisine is that these two unique foodways are interchangeable. While there is crossover in ingredients and technique, the two cuisines are distinct. The best way to understand those differences is to know a little bit about the colonial history of Louisiana and the terminology behind it.



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Le Rêve Des Francais

Louisiana started as a dream of the French to dominate the interior of North America. The territory was claimed in 1682 when the French explorer Rene-Robert Cavalier Sieur de La Salle sailed down the Mississippi River with a band of Canadians and Native Americans and named the area at the mouth of the river Louisiane, in honor of King Louis XIV. In 1718 La Nouvelle-Orleans, La Salle's dream city at the mouth of the river, was founded by Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, the governor of French Louisiana.

Native American impact on Colonial French Cookery

Local tribes bartered with colonial French settlers for European trade goods and introduced the French to locally-grown foods and herbs, including corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and melons, as well as shellfish and wild game. The story of how this trade started the evolution of Creole cuisine begins in 1704, when the bishop of Quebec sent 27 young ladies from Paris to Louisiana to be married off to colonists. After living in the Louisiana settlements, these women grew weary of the colony's limited diet and lack of proper French food, particularly French bread. The women staged a "culinary *coup d'etat*," marching on the French governor's house clanging pots and pans, and demanding better food – a protest historians later called the Petticoat Rebellion.

Sieur de Bienville, the governor of French Louisiana at the time, instructed his cook, Madame Langlois, to teach the women how to cook with local ingredients.

(These were the first recorded cooking classes in North American history.) Langlois taught the women how to make cornbread from cornmeal and how to prepare many of the meats and vegetables the Native Americans introduced to colonists.

The German Contribution

Between 1717 and 1722, German farm families were given free land to settle in Louisiana along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. This area became known as *Cotes des Allemands*, or the German Coast. These farmers provided most of the locally-grown produce for colonists to live on when French supply ships didn't make it to port. Germans are also responsible for introducing sausages and dairy farming to the region.

The African Influence

In 1719, the first ships filled with African slaves arrived on the coast of Louisiana, purchased by the French from African tribes. (West Africans were captured during inter-tribal wars and sold by warring tribes to the French in exchange for European goods.) Often, these slaves ran the kitchens and households of French colonists, and naturally, they incorporated African cooking techniques, recipes and ingredients into the colonists' diet. Their foodways had a profound influence on Creole cuisine, starting with the introduction of okra and gumbo, derived from West African "gombo" stew made with okra.



The Spanish Rule

In 1764, Spain formally acquired Louisiana from France, and in 1768, Spanish Governor Antonio de Ulloa ordered the colony to trade exclusively with Spain – a policy French colonists resented and, ultimately, rejected in the Rebellion of 1768. However, during the Spanish rule (1764-1800), New Orleans prospered. Colonists traded with Spain, France and Caribbean countries, which flooded the colony with Spanish and Caribbean foods and influences. It was also during this time that French colonists and Haitians fled the revolution in Saint-Domingue and sought refuge in New Orleans, bringing yet another set of culinary traditions and regional ingredients to the table.

Under the Spanish rule, Louisiana's Creole cuisine moved beyond the rich but bland French cuisine and embraced piquant spices and seasonings that are used to this day. One example of the Spanish influence can be seen in jambalaya, a spicy rice dish made with vegetables, meats, seafood, and sausages – a direct descendant of the Spanish national dish paella.

The Creoles

During Spanish rule, the local population and cooking of the colony came to be known as "Creole" – a French word derived from the Spanish "criollo," the term used to describe a child born in the colonies. A "Creole" could be any nationality or background – French, Spanish, German, African or any mix of nationalities, as long as they were born in the colony.

The Cajuns

The Acadians – Frenchmen who settled in "Acadie," the wilds of Nova Scotia – were forcibly driven out of Canada in 1755 by the British and shipped off to regions as disparate as Massachusetts, the West Indies, and Uruguay. This exile was called *Le Grande Derangement* ("the great trouble").

After returning to France, one of the largest groups of exiles landed on the shores of South Louisiana. Over time, more waves of Acadians reunited with fellow refugees, and they became known as "Cajuns."

Acadians were hunters, farmers, and fishermen well-versed in the art of living off the land. They were given land grants upriver from New Orleans and moved into the swamps, bayous, and prairies of Louisiana to start farms and ranches. Unlike the cosmopolitan Creole cuisine, which is largely thought of as more refined and seafood-centric, Cajun food leans toward the rustic and rural, featuring wild game, pork, beef, and cured and fresh sausages.

The Italian Immigration

During the mid-nineteenth century, waves of immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Italy and Sicily arrived in New Orleans – populations that grew exponentially and had a tremendous impact on the cuisine – but it is the Italian influence that marks the fundamental difference between Creole and Cajun food. Italians flocked to New Orleans in the late 1800s because of the growing business of importing Mediterranean citrus into the port city. Many of these immigrants worked on the docks in the fruit district, and eventually, these workers opened grocery stores and restaurants around the city. Italians made up about 90 percent of the immigrants in New Orleans at the time and dominated the grocery industry. (The building that once housed Ferrara and Sons Italian Grocery, one of many in the neighborhood, is now home to Langlois.)

The Italian contributions to the cuisine include "red gravy," a red sauce thickened with roux that is used in everything from Creole Daube to grillades, and stuffed artichokes and peppers. Today, the Italian influence in shaping Creole cuisine as we know it is unmistakable – Southern Italian and Sicilian ingredients fundamentally transformed the cuisine.



Creole and Cajun Cuisine Today

The boundaries of Louisiana are a collection of landscapes – marshes, wetlands, hills, forests, prairies, the great Atchafalaya Basin and the coastal waters of the Gulf. The history of the people who live within those boundaries is as diverse as the landscape, and all have contributed to the evolution of Creole and Cajun cuisine. The best – and perhaps the only – way to explain either of these unique culinary traditions is to cook it and, as we do at Langlois, share it at the table with family and friends.



Suggested fillings:
Chocolate chips, marmalade, or dry cheeses, such as Parmesan. Do not use runny or oily fillings, such as chocolate syrup, jelly, or soft cheeses like brie.

Crusty Bread

Yield: 8 servings

3 cups	all-purpose flour
1 3/4 tsp	kosher salt
1/2 tsp	yeast
1 1/2 cups	water

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together flour, salt and yeast. Add water and stir until a shaggy mixture forms. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and set aside for 12 to 18 hours, or overnight.

Place a clay pot with lid in the oven and preheat the oven to 450°F. Place the dough on a floured surface and shape into a ball.

When the oven is preheated, remove the clay pot from the oven and place dough on a piece of floured parchment paper set inside the pot. Cover and bake for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, remove the lid, reduce the oven temperature to 350°F and bake for an additional 30 minutes. Remove bread from the oven and place on a cooling rack.

*NOTE: To make stuffed bread, place the dough on a floured surface and pat the dough into a 1-inch thick round. Scatter up to 1/3 cup of filling into the center and spread it evenly over the surface of the dough. Gather the edges of the dough to encase the filling. To cook, bake seam-side down on the floured parchment paper.



Pecan Praline Bites

Yield: 25 servings

1 cup	dark brown sugar
1	egg, beaten
3/4 cup	melted unsalted butter
1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1 cup	chopped pecans
	nonstick spray

Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly coat mini-muffin pan with non-stick spray. In a bowl, combine the egg, brown sugar, flour and pecans, and stir to combine. Drizzle in the butter a little at a time and stir until the batter cannot absorb more butter -- some flour will absorb less butter, depending on the level of humidity. You may not use all of the butter. The batter will be wet, but not runny. It should be thick and dough-like.

Pipe the dough into the pan, filling each muffin cup three-quarters full. Bake 15 to 20 minutes. Turn the muffins onto a parchment-lined sheet pan and allow to cool.

Note:

Recipe cannot be doubled. Cooking times may vary based on altitude and humidity. For a more cake-like pecan bite, blend the sugar, egg and butter first, then stir in the flour and pecans.

Chicken & Sausage Gumbo

Yield: 12 servings

1 cup	flour	2	bay leaves
1 cup	vegetable oil	1 tsp	paprika
1 1/2 cups	diced onions	1 1/2 tsp	file powder
3/4 cup	diced bell pepper	3 qts	chicken stock
1/2 cup	diced celery	1 lb	roasted chicken, chopped
3 cloves	garlic, minced	1 lb	about 2.5 links andouille
1 tbs	kosher salt		sausage, sliced 1/4-inch
1 1/2 tsp	black pepper		thick
1 tsp	cayenne pepper		add Crystal hot sauce to
1/2 tsp	chopped fresh thyme		taste

Combine the flour and oil in a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven pot set over medium-high heat. Gently stir the mixture for 10 minutes and smooth out any lumps of flour. As the roux begins to darken, lower the heat in increments. (If the roux gets too hot too quickly, it will burn.) When the roux reaches a light brown color, reduce the heat to low and continue cooking and stirring until it turns a smooth, deep-brown color and has a toasted, nutty aroma, about 40 minutes.

Carefully pour the trinity (onions, peppers, celery) in to the hot roux, along with the garlic, salt, peppers, thyme, bay leaves, paprika, and file powder. Stir to combine, then slowly stir in the chicken stock. Bring the gumbo to a low boil and stir frequently so that the roux doesn't stick to the bottom. Skim any fat off of the top. Add the chicken and sausage and simmer for about 45 minutes.



Creole Jambalaya

Yield: 8 servings

1 cup	diced onion	2	bay leaves
1/2 cup	diced bell pepper	2 tsp	thyme
1/4 cup	diced celery	2 tsp	Crystal hot sauce
1/2 cup	diced andouille sausage	2 cups	par-boiled rice
1 tbs	minced garlic	2 1/2 cups	chicken stock
8 oz	can tomato sauce	1/4 cup	parsley
16 oz	can diced tomatoes		kosher salt
3 cups	roasted, shredded chicken meat		creole seasoning
			to taste

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a heavy-bottomed pot set over medium heat, sauté the onion, bell pepper, celery, and andouille until the onions are translucent, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and continue to cook. Add the tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, shredded chicken, bay leaves, thyme, hot sauce, rice and chicken stock. Season to taste with salt and Creole seasoning. Cover the pot and bake until the rice is cooked and all of the liquid is absorbed, about 30 minutes or up to 1 hour depending on the efficiency of your oven. Garnish with parsley.





Old Fashioned Bread Pudding

Yield: 10 servings

Bread Pudding		Sauce	
3 cups	heavy cream	9 tbsp	unsalted butter
4	large eggs, lightly beaten	1 1/2 cups	light brown sugar packed and divided
1 cup	sugar	1 tsp	cinnamon
3/4 tsp	cinnamon	1/2 cup	dark rum
1 tsp	vanilla extract	1/2 cup	heavy cream
1 cup	whole milk		
pinch	kosher salt		
15 cups	day old french bread		

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a large, deep muffin tin with non-stick spray. In large mixing bowl, combine the heavy cream, eggs, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla, milk, and salt. Add the French bread cubes and gently fold the bread into egg mixture. With a large spoon, fill the muffin tins three-quarters full the bread pudding mixture. Bake at 350°F 20 to 30 minutes, until the bread pudding is set a lightly browned.

While the bread pudding bakes, prepare the sauce. Melt the butter in a large non-stick skillet set over low heat. Add the brown sugar and cinnamon and stir until the sugar dissolves. Carefully add the rum to the pan and flambé. When the flame extinguishes, stir in the heavy cream. Remove the sauce from heat. When the bread pudding is cooked and cool enough to handle, remove from the muffin tin. To serve, drizzle the bread pudding with sauce.



Andouille: A thick Acadian/Cajun sausage of lean, smoked pork ranging in flavor from bland to spicy.

BBQ shrimp: Despite the name, these shrimp do not come into contact with a grill or the sweet, sticky sauce normally associated with barbecue. New Orleans-style BBQ shrimp are large, unpeeled, head-on shrimp poached in a sinfully rich sauce of butter, Worcestershire sauce, lemon, pepper, garlic, and other herbs and spices. You'll want a bib and plenty of napkins to go along with it: the dish is deliciously messy and served with baskets of French bread for sopping up every bit of the sauce. (The family-run Italian-Creole restaurant Pascal's Manale created the original dish.)

Bananas Foster: Invented at Brennan's restaurant in the French Quarter in 1951, this classic New Orleans dessert was named for Richard Foster, a frequent customer who served with Owen Brennan on the New Orleans Crime Commission.

Beignet: [ben-YAY] A deep-fried French doughnut dusted with powdered sugar, made famous at Café du Monde and Morning Call café in New Orleans.

Boudin: [BOO-dehn, silent "n"] Cajun sausage made with cooked rice, bits of pork, liver and other seasonings.

Boudin has a long history in Cajun culture, and can be traced as far back as the early 1800s. The boudin we know and love today is a result of poor Cajun families finding a use for the leftover scraps of pork and intestines after a boucherie. Boudin slowly evolved over the years, with each family refining and passing secret recipes to future generations. Boudin is a humble food: simple, delicious, inexpensive, and portable. It is sold by the link, wrapped in thick butcher paper, at convenience stores and local meat markets across South Louisiana. Boudin can be eaten two ways: squeeze the filling out of the casing and directly into your mouth, or, if the casing isn't too thick you can eat it like sausage, casing and all.

Café au lait: A hot coffee drink made with equal parts Chicory coffee and warmed milk.

Calas: A deep-fried rice fritter, typically dusted with powdered sugar.

Cochon de lait: The French term for "milking pig", this traditional Cajun dish is roasted suckling ("milking") pig.

Courtbouillon: [COO-bee-yon] Not to be mistaken with the lighter French "court bouillon," a Creole courtbouillon is a roux-based fish stew made with tomatoes, trinity, and other spices.

Cracklins: Rendered pieces of pork fat that are fried until crispy and crackling. Also refers to the crisp, brown skin of roasted pork or cochon de lait.

Debris: The bits and pieces of roast beef that fall off during roasting and slicing, then mixed with pan gravy, typically served on a po-boy. Mother's Restaurant made the Debris Po-Boy famous.

Doberge cake: Multilayered cake credited to Beulah Ledner, who opened a New Orleans bakery in 1933 and adapted it from the Austrian Dobos cake.

Dressed: "You want it dressed?" is the question you'll hear most often in a po-boy shop, and refers to adding lettuce, tomato, mayonnaise and other condiments to a po-boy.

Étouffée: "Smothered" in Cajun French. Étouffée is made with a roux.

File: Dried, ground sassafras leaves used to thicken and add flavor to a gumbo. Introduced to Creole cookery by the Choctaw Indians.

Grillades: [GREE-yahds] Thinly-sliced and slow-cooked meat, traditionally veal or pork, simmered with red wine, broth, a tomato and trinity base, and other seasonings. A staple brunch dish in South Louisiana, grillades are typically served with grits.

Gumbo: West African in origin, gumbos are in a class of their own – neither soup nor stew. Gumbos are made with a roux and the trinity, and can include a range of other ingredients, including seafood, chicken and andouille sausage. Gumbos are thickened with either okra or file (but never both).

Jambalaya: A hearty rice dish, similar to the Spanish paella, in which different types of meat, seafood and vegetables are cooked together in one pot so that the rice takes on the flavor of all of the ingredients in the pot.

King cake: A simple ring-shaped pastry decorated with sugar infused in the traditional Mardi Gras colors – purple, green and gold. The colors represent justice, faith and power, and the cake takes its name from the biblical three kings. King cake "season" starts on the Epiphany (January 6) and lasts through Mardi Gras. A small plastic baby is hidden inside the cake, and tradition states that the person who receives the piece with the baby must buy the next king cake.

Lagniappe: A running together of three French words, pour la niappe, that literally translates "for the other." In Louisiana, the word is used to denote "a little something extra."

Muffuletta: A classic New Orleans sandwich made with multiple layers of Italian meats, cheeses and olive salad. The sandwich is served on the round Sicilian sesame bread also called "muffuletta."

Paneed: Meat or seafood that is pan-fried in a skillet in enough oil to reach the sides of the pan, but not completely covering the food. Paneed foods have a crispy crust.

Pirogue: A long, flat-bottomed boat used on shallow bayous and swamps in South Louisiana. (The flat bottom means the boat does not "draw" water or hit bottom; riders use a long pole to push and navigate the boat.) : "Pirogue" is also used to describe "stuffed" dishes, where food is served inside a hollowed-out eggplant, French bread, or mirliton.

Remoulade: Often served with shrimp and other seafood, this light red to yellow sauce is similar to tartar sauce, but made with mayonnaise, Creole mustard, Worcestershire sauce, hot sauce, ketchup, plus additional herbs and seasonings including onion, parsley and celery. (Like a good gumbo, ingredients vary widely depending on the cook.)

Spice Piquant: A "spicy sauce" typically made with roux, tomato sauce, various herbs, and spices. It is served with fish, chicken or game recipes, and can be used as a sauce or gravy for meat to be stewed in.

Trinity: This refers to onions, bell pepper and celery, the three "holy" vegetables used as a base in nearly every savory Cajun and Creole dish. When garlic is added to a trinity, it is referred to as the Pope. The typical proportion of a trinity is two parts onions, one part bell pepper and ½ part celery.