

Crawfish Étouffée with Green-Onion Rice

For 6 servings

Cajun folklore is filled with stories and legends, and many of them involve crawfish. One of the more inventive ones is this:

In the 1750s, when the Acadians first migrated from Nova Scotia to Louisiana, hundreds of North-Atlantic lobsters, sympathetic to the exiles, decided to follow them southward along the Atlantic Coast and through the Gulf of Mexico to the bayous. Along the way, as they swam, the lobsters somehow acquired progressively smaller shells. By the time they reached Louisiana, they had become what we now know as crawfish.

Since then, for generations of Southwest Louisiana's Cajuns, crawfish étouffée has been their quintessential dish.

The reason for the status and longevity of crawfish étouffée is easy to understand once you've tasted a really well made version of it, with its combination of deep earthy and seafood flavors.

The French verb *étouffer* means to smother, and in this case it refers to the cooking method of the traditional version of étouffée, cooked in a lidded pot with seasonings and crawfish "fat," which is actually the shellfish's liver.

Over the years, the dish has evolved to become one that's based with a roux and cooked uncovered. There have been many other variations on the étouffée theme. This one, for example, contains cream and tomatoes, and is served with rice flavored with green onion. Such improvisations are yet more evidence that Creole-Cajun cooking is not a catalog of static, unchangeable dishes, but a living, thriving part of South Louisiana's food culture.

- 4 ounces thick-cut bacon strips, applewood-smoked preferred, sliced crosswise into ¼-inch bits
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh garlic
- 1 cup finely chopped onions
- 1 cup finely chopped green sweet peppers
- ½ cup finely chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons Creole seasoning
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 4 cups crawfish stock
- 1 cup chopped Creole* tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh Italian (flat-leaf) parsley leaves
- 1 teaspoon worcestershire sauce
- ½ cup heavy cream

ADVANCE STEP

Prepare the following recipes:

- Creole seasoning on page 385
- Crawfish stock on page 392


As close to serving time as possible:

- Green-onion rice on page 344

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

- A heavy, nonreactive* 5-quart saucepan or heavy 5-quart Dutch oven
- A wooden spoon

*See Using Nonreactive Cookware, page 419.

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- 2 pounds peeled fresh Louisiana crawfish tails**
 - 1 recipe warm green-onion rice, for serving
 - 1 tablespoon finely sliced green onions (green parts only), for garnish

*South Louisiana's Creole tomatoes are preferred for this recipe, although other good, peak-of-season regional varieties can be used.

**If this ingredient is difficult to find where you live, see Ingredient Sources on page 424.

1. Heat a heavy, nonreactive 5-quart saucepan over high heat until hot, about three minutes. Add the bacon, then the butter, stirring until the butter melts.
2. Reduce the heat to medium-high and cook the bacon until crisp, about three minutes, thoroughly scraping any browned bits off the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon.
3. Reduce the heat to medium, and stir in the garlic, onions, sweet peppers and celery. Sauté for two minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Stir in the Creole seasoning, and cook and stir about 30 seconds. Sprinkle the flour over the vegetables and stir thoroughly so the flour doesn't stick to the pan bottom as you let the mixture cook one minute.
5. Gradually add the stock, stirring constantly until well blended into the bacon mixture. Add the tomatoes, kosher salt, thyme, parsley and worcestershire.
6. Stir in the cream and bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to very low and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the crawfish tails and continue cooking until the étouffée returns to a simmer. Remove from heat and serve immediately.

Serving Suggestion: Measure out 1 cup green-onion rice in a metal measuring cup, and invert the measuring cup in the center of a heated soup bowl, leaving the cup in place. Spoon around the measuring cup a portion (about 1 cup) of the étouffée, then lift away the cup. Repeat to prepare the remaining servings. Garnish each with a light sprinkle of green onions. **S**