

Moqueca (Brazilian Seafood Stew)

By Yewande Komolafe

YIELD 4 to 6 servings

TIME 40 minutes

Moqueca hails from the state of Bahia in northeastern Brazil, the heart of Afro-Brazilian culture and its rich culinary heritage. Built on the freshest seafood you can find, moqueca delivers a creamy, spicy richness with just a few central ingredients. The dish begins with a base of sautéed garlic, onion, tomatoes and sweet peppers. A fresh chile adds heat that will linger gently, and coconut milk gives the stew body. Red palm oil (azeite de dendê in Portuguese) acts as the glue that holds this dish together. There is no substitute for its characteristic floral, smokelike flavor and vibrant orange sheen. Serve moqueca hot, alongside steamed white rice, farofa de pilão (made from manioc flour toasted in dendê oil), pirão (a creamy porridge made from cooking manioc flour in a fish or meat stock) and lime wedges for a bright finish.

INGREDIENTS

6 head-on prawns or large head-on shrimp (about 12 ounces)
12 ounces cod fillet, cut into 1-inch pieces
Kosher salt
2 limes
3 tablespoons dendê oil (red palm oil; see Note)
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 small yellow onion, chopped (1 cup)
8 ounces sweet baby bell peppers or 2 bell peppers, any color, sliced into 1/4-inch strips (2 cups)
1 pound fresh tomatoes, cut in 1-inch-wide wedges (2 1/2 cups)
1 whole hot chile, such as red Scotch bonnet or bird's-eye, pierced all over with the tip of a knife
1 (13.5-ounce) can full-fat coconut milk
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

PREPARATION

Step 1

Use a pair of kitchen scissors to cut along the length of each prawn deep enough to expose and remove the vein. Place the fish chunks in a large bowl and season with 1 teaspoon salt. Squeeze in the juice of 1 lime and toss to coat. Set the prawns and fish aside while preparing the sauce.

Step 2

In a large, shallow Dutch oven or large, deep skillet, melt 2 tablespoons dendê oil over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until softened and fragrant, 1 minute. Add the onion, stir and cook, stirring until translucent, about 2 minutes.

Step 3

Increase the heat to high, add the peppers, tomatoes and chile. Season with salt. Cook, stirring frequently, until the peppers are softened and any liquid from the tomatoes is beginning to evaporate, 4 minutes.

Step 4

Pour in the coconut milk, stir and reduce the heat to medium. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the liquid thickens and reduces to a creamy sauce, about 10 minutes. Taste, adjust the salt, if necessary, and stir in 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro.

Steamed rice, for serving

Step 5

Carefully place the prawns in the sauce in a single layer and cook for 2 minutes. Turn the prawns to cook the other sides and add the cod. (Discard any juices in the bowl.) The fish will be partly submerged. Cook until the fish is tender and just cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes.

Step 6

Remove from heat, drizzle in the remaining 1 tablespoon dendê oil and sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro. Slice the remaining lime into wedges. Serve immediately, with steamed rice and lime wedges for squeezing.

Tip

Dendê oil, also known as red palm oil, is available online or at West African or Caribbean markets.

PRIVATE NOTES

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