

## SHRIMP CREOLE

One of my favorite comfort foods is shrimp Creole--you know, that Louisiana dish of shrimp in a sauce of tomatoes, peppers, celery and onion. I haven't made it in awhile, so I went to look up my recipe for it—and I couldn't find it anywhere. So I got on the internet and looked up shrimp Creole, and I found some of the darndest recipes you can imagine. While a few were similar to my own, some of the recipes I found I wouldn't feed to a goat! One called for onion flakes and loads of MSG, and another even called for BOTH chili powder and curry powder. So as best as I can, here's my own version of shrimp Creole.

First of all, get a pound of raw shrimp. You can use the already-cooked kind, but I generally prefer to use raw shrimp. If I'm feeling energetic, I'll get unpeeled shrimp, and then peel them and save the shrimp peels and simmer them in water to cover for 15 minutes or so, strain, and save the shrimp stock. It's wonderful in this dish, as well as all sorts of other Creole and Cajun dishes, such as gumbos and etouffees.

Some shrimp Creole recipes use a roux, which is a paste of flour and water, others don't. I generally don't myself. I start by peeling and chopping an onion, trimming and chopping a couple of stalks of celery, including the leaves, and trimming, coring, seeding, and chopping a bell pepper. Onion, celery and bell pepper are the "holy trinity" of Creole cooking, just as onion, celery and carrot are the basis of much French cooking. As I'm not that fond of green bell peppers, I'll use a sweet red or yellow pepper instead. And I often peel (more or less) the pepper with a vegetable peeler—it makes the pepper easier to digest. I want about two parts of onion and two parts of pepper to one part of celery, and I like the pieces about the size of man's little fingernail. And I'll peel and finely chop a couple of cloves of garlic.

In a skillet with a cover, heat a couple of tablespoons of olive oil over medium-low heat and add the vegetables. Saute until the onion has softened and turned translucent, about five to seven minutes or so. (I don't really watch the time—I'm paying more attention to how the food looks rather than the clock.) You don't want the vegetables to brown, so turn the heat down if that starts to happen. I add some Cajun spice mix during this process—a teaspoon or so. If you don't have any, add about three pinches of salt, a pinch of paprika, a little onion powder and some garlic powder, a couple of pinches of dried thyme and a pinch of dried oregano.

When the vegetables are soft, add a 15 ounce can of diced tomatoes with their juices. Add liquid pepper seasoning to taste, about a teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce, and a bay leaf. Bring the mixture to the boil, cover, turn the heat down and simmer for about 20 minutes. Uncover, take out and throw away the bay leaf, and add your peeled shrimp. If you're using already cooked shrimp, you simply need to heat up the shrimp in the sauce—otherwise the shrimp will need to cook for another five minutes or so until they turn completely pink. Add a splash of water if the mixture is getting too dry.

At this point, check your seasonings. I often add about half a teaspoon of sugar, to balance the acid in the tomatoes. And I'll add salt if needed, and some freshly ground black pepper. Serve the shrimp Creole over steamed rice, with a sprinkling of chopped green onions or flat-leaf parsley for garnish. Pass the hot sauce at the table for those who indulge. This serves three, or two with leftovers. Sometimes I'll buy some fake crab and add that to the shrimp, for a little extra bulk.

If you want to make a roux, stir in a couple of tablespoons of flour into the two tablespoons of oil at the beginning and stir until the roux is a light tan color, then add your vegetables and cook as directed. If the sauce is too thick and you have some shrimp stock, this is a great time to pour some in.

A dry white wine goes well with shrimp Creole, although I always preferred beer. A green salad makes a nice accompaniment, and for dessert I like something sweet, like pie or some tapioca pudding. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Cook.