Cou-Cou with Bajan-Style Fish

Barbados - cornmeal and okra with tomato-thyme fish - serves 4 - about 45 minutes



User photo - prepared with cod.

Ingredients

- **For the cou-cou**
- 750 ml water or light vegetable stock
- 250 g okra, sliced into thin rounds (frozen sliced okra works well)
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 tsp salt, plus more to taste
- 180 g fine cornmeal / polenta (not instant)
- 2 tbsp butter
- Black pepper
- **For the Bajan-style fish**
- 600-700 g firm white fish fillets, such as cod, haddock, pollock, or sea bass
- 1 tbsp oil
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tomatoes, chopped (or 200 g canned chopped tomatoes)
- 1 tsp dried thyme or 1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves
- 1/2 tsp paprika
- 1/4 tsp chilli flakes or hot sauce, optional
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 150 ml water or fish/vegetable stock
- 1 tbsp lime or lemon juice
- Salt and black pepper
- To serve: extra lime/lemon, parsley or coriander, and hot sauce if desired

Steps

1 **Make the fish sauce:** Heat oil in a wide pan. Cook onion for 4-5 minutes until soft. Add garlic, thyme, paprika and chilli; cook for 30 seconds.

2. **Build the gravy:** Add tomatoes, tomato paste, water or stock, salt and pepper. Simmer 8-10 minutes until lightly thickened. Stir in lime juice.
3. **Cook the fish:** Nestle fish fillets into the sauce. Cover and simmer gently for 6-10 minutes, depending on thickness, until the fish flakes easily. Keep warm.
4. **Start the cou-cou:** Bring water or stock, okra, onion and salt to a simmer in a saucepan. Cook 8-10 minutes, until okra is tender and the liquid becomes slightly thickened.
5. **Add cornmeal:** Reduce heat to low. Slowly rain in the cornmeal while whisking constantly, so it does not form lumps.
6. **Finish:** Keep stirring with a wooden spoon or sturdy whisk for 8-12 minutes, until thick, smooth and pulling away slightly from the sides. Stir in butter and black pepper.
7. **Serve:** Spoon or mold the cou-cou onto plates, then add fish and plenty of tomato-thyme gravy. Finish with lime and herbs.

Notes

- Cou-cou and flying fish is Barbados' national dish. This version uses Swedish-friendly white fish in place of flying fish, while keeping the cornmeal-okra cou-cou and tomato-thyme fish sauce central to the dish.
- The texture of cou-cou should be softer and silkier than firm polenta. Add a splash of hot water if it becomes too stiff.
- A bowl or small cup lightly greased with butter can be used to shape the cou-cou before turning it out onto each plate.
- Frozen sliced okra is often easier to find than fresh in Sweden and works very well here.