

## Cajun and Creole Cuisines

Many sources refer to Creole cuisine as New Orleans city food and Cajun cuisine as country food from the surrounding bayous, swamps and prairies. This is an oversimplification and we would like to give you a few more specifics, in addition to similarities and differences between the two styles.

As many of you know, Cajuns are descended from the original Acadian settlers, French-Canadians who migrated down to Louisiana from Nova Scotia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century following the Seven Years War.

The early Cajuns adapted their cooking to include the local meat, game, fish, produce, and grains. Due to the isolation of the bayous and swamplands, most of the ingredients for the dishes they prepared needed to be caught or grown themselves. This resulted in numerous one-pot dishes and slow-braised meats and stews.

Cajun cuisine is comfort food and reflects influences from Africa, France, and the Native American Indigenous Peoples.

**Cajun food does not use tomatoes.** This remains a key factor that distinguishes Cajun types of gumbo, jambalaya, and étouffée from Creole versions. Some preparations may use cayenne pepper, but not all Cajun food is spicy.

Creoles, on the other hand, were the first settlers born of European descent in the French colonies, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Creole literally meant “born in the colony”, and is drawn from the Spanish or Portuguese word Criollo.

Their descendants often have French, Spanish, African or Caribbean backgrounds and there are strong influences from both French and African cultures.

Creole cuisine is the gentrified cuisine of the city of New Orleans and encompasses influences of early Native American, African, French, German, Italian and most recently Vietnamese settlers and immigrants.

Some traditional Creole dishes include red beans and rice, jambalaya, gumbo, and creole sauce dishes.

Creole cuisine incorporates roux (flour and fat), the trinity (onion, celery, green bell pepper), pepper, cream, butter, and thanks to the city's Italian immigrants, the tomato.

## Similarities

The trinity (onion, celery, green bell pepper),

Use of rice (short and long grain)

Similar local ingredients and flavors such as filé, a native herb made from sassafras; corn and hominy used for making grits; local or farmed wild game, seafood, and fowl.

Many of the same flavors can be found in both styles, with complexity and presentation being a major difference.

## Major differences between the two cuisines

The difference between the roux's is the first major difference between the two styles. Roux is a fat and flour mixture which is cooked and then used as a thickening agent.

The Creoles had more dairy products at their disposal and that is why their roux is made in a traditional manner with butter and flour. Cajuns would use animal fats or oils to create their roux.

One dish where the difference in roux's is obvious is gumbo. Creole variations use **tomatoes** and Cajun Gumbo looking more like goulash or stew.

The Creoles from the city were wealthier than the Cajuns and were able to purchase local seafood as well as poultry. As a result, Creole cuisine features more oysters, crab and shrimp while Cajun cuisine uses more pork and crawfish.

Cajun cuisine is more heavily seasoned, often using cayenne pepper or hot sauce.

Cajun cuisine could be considered to be more rustic while Creole cuisine is more refined.

Our jambalaya recipe is Creole-based due to the tomatoes, chicken, vegetables and seafood, but we have included andouille, which is more commonly found in Cajun cuisine as well as file' powder made from sassafras leaves.

Cajun-inspired jambalaya would not include tomatoes and might add a boudin blanc or spicy pork sausage.