



Warm up menu with bouillabaisse

I went to dinner at a friend's house and complimented him on the jambalaya he made, but he corrected me and said it wasn't jambalaya but bouillabaisse. What's the difference?

It's easy to see how the two could be confused — the dishes can be similar, and both vary widely depending on the cook.

But, according to the comprehensive reference work "The Food Lover's Companion" by Sharon Tyler Herbst, bouillabaisse is seafood stew (other authorities say it may also be more of a soup than a stew), with roots from the French region of Provence. It is made with assorted fish and shellfish, onions, tomatoes, white wine, olive oil, garlic, saffron and herbs. The dish is served over thick slices of French bread.

On the other hand, the "Companion" says, while jambalaya is often made with shellfish, it may also be made with almost any kind of meat or poultry. With its tomatoes, onion and green peppers, the Creole dish is served with rice, not bread. In fact, the rice is commonly mixed in with the dish rather than served separately.

For those not very familiar with either dish, it's easy to see how they could be confused with each other, or even with a third dish — gumbo. Gumbo is another Creole dish that also contains a variety of vegetables and almost any kind of meat, poultry

or fish, but which always starts (according to "The Food Lover's Companion") with a dark roux which gives the dish a rich flavor, and it also contains okra and filé powder — a Creole seasoning made from ground, dried leaves of the sassafras tree — both of which help thicken the gumbo into a hearty dish.

Interestingly, bouillabaisse has its own unusual thickener: According to Harold McGee's classic "On Food and Cooking," bouillabaisse starts with a stock that includes small bony fish, which provide both flavor and a thickening gelatin. In addition, when the olive oil is added and the dish undergoes a "fierce" boil for 10 minutes, the fat emulsifies into fine droplets, and the dissolved fish gelatin and suspended proteins coat the oil droplets, preventing them from quickly coalescing again. That and the gelatin from the bony fish give the bouillabaisse a thick, rich creamy texture.

Because these dishes vary so widely depending on the recipe and the cook, you need to know the exact ingredients to calculate nutrition information. But they're all generally considered to be healthful dishes because the protein they're made with is usually lean, and they all offer an abundance of vegetables. If you're watching your salt intake, be forewarned that bouillabaisse might have a higher sodium content.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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Dec. 14 is National
Bouillabaisse Day.
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