

## GOURMET RECIPES

**Spice Up Winter!**

Tired of the miserable weather? So are we, and spring seems a long way off. We're going south with this column, but don't expect fried chicken and sweet potatoes, folks... the multi-cultural American south is bursting with exciting cuisines from all over. Today's south includes Cuban, Mexican, Spanish, South American and a host of Asian, plus fusion dishes combining traditional southern recipes with almost anything that passed through the area. The results are delightful and delicious, and will perk up the coldest grey day! Read on...

We cruised through some of our favourite cookbooks and decided it was time to take another look at *Three Guys from Miami Celebrate Cuban*, which is a delicious take on Cuban food in south Florida. The authors are three brothers-in-law and not really all in Miami all the time, and only two are Cuban born. Glenn Lindgren grew up in Minneapolis and first came to Miami in 1984 – and fell in love the city, its culture and the food! Raúl Musibay is a native Cuban and a full-time resident of Miami, and is known for his love of fishing, his great parties and his mastery of the Cuban pig roast. Jorge Castillo came to the US from Cuba via the Mariel Boatlift in 1980 and – get this – he left Miami after three months to live in Iowa, where he learned to love corn on the cob, root beer and mid-American barbecue. What's not to love with this trio!

We're also revisiting another favourite source, *The Latin American Kitchen* by Elisabeth Luard, who cut her culinary teeth in Montevideo – a great city for food – and



has worked in Mexico City as well. She can pluck and roast a parrot and ferment the juice of the maguey cactus as well as telling us how to cook the most wonderful, and less exotic, dishes at home.

Luard is the winner of many awards for her food writing and BBC shows. She tells us that the earliest colonialists – Spanish and Portuguese – imported the meat and milk animals of the Old World; pigs and chickens were introduced throughout Latin America, cattle became common in the Argentinean pampas and sheep populated Patagonia. The Aztec and Mayan civilizations in Central America and the Inca Empire of Peru used indigenous ingredients such as cassava, maize, chocolate and vanilla plus roots, tubers, fruits and vegetables. The results today are a delicious blending of these cultures and their foods, and we're going to try every one of Luard's more than 200 recipes in this excellent book!

The Spanish influence in Florida dates back to the founding of St. Augustine in 1565, and Tampa has always had a sizable Spanish heritage, including architecture, culture and language and of course food. It's always a pleasure to open *Spanish Country Kitchen: Traditional recipes for the Home Cook* and find old favourites that we once loved and are now enjoying again! The recipes in this book are authentic, yet the author, Linda Tubby, keeps them all fairly simple and manageable. She's a leading food writer and food stylist in the UK who began in fashion, then switched to food and never looked back; her work also appears in *Food and Travel*, *BBC Good Food* and *Waitrose Food Illustrated*.

A personal favourite is *Gulf Coast Kitchens*, by Constance Snow. As we grew up on the Florida Gulf coast, this book takes me back to the wonderful meals from local foods. Snow's cookbook is a loving, long journey from Key West to the Yucatán peninsula, so it covers more than my early menus. Seasoned food writer Snow has been a journalist for more than fifteen years, writing for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and others, including the *Los Angeles Times* and *National Geographic Traveler*. Cuisines you'll find here include Caribbean, Vietnamese, Cajun, Mexican and New Florida cooking! You *can* go home again!

*On today's menu:*

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## **Lulu's L.A. Caviar**

Yes, well, it's not L.A. CA this time, it's Lower Alabama, where singer Jimmy Buffett's sister Lucy Buffett lives, and owns and operates Lulu's Sunset Grill in Point Clear. Her caviar is a tangy combo that has its roots in the Deep South, but a most def Latin soul. Also known as Texas Caviar, Cajun and even Redneck Caviar, it's guaranteed to chase the winter blues and liven up your next party! From Gulf Coast Kitchens.



*Serves 12–16*

- 6 15-oz cans black-eyed peas, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 cup chopped red onion
- 1/3 cup chopped green bell pepper
- 1/3 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 1/3 cup chopped yellow bell pepper
- 1 cup quartered cherry tomatoes
- 1/2 cup chopped parsley
- 1/2 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup sugar
- Salt and pepper

Combine all of the ingredients and season to taste with salt and pepper. Marinate for 24 hours. Serve with tortilla chips or saltines.

**HOT TIP:** Instead of the usual chips, re-create the ubiquitous Mexican street snack— cool slices of jicama and melon sprinkled with lime juice,

salt and ground ancho chiles. Serve them as they would appear on a vendor's cart, mixed bouquets of five or six slender spears standing upright in parchment cones or clear plastic cups.

***Tony's wine recommendation:***

an off-dry Riesling (Kabinett/Spätlese quality) or Alsace Gewurztraminer

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## **Sopa de Frijoles Española**

We love Spanish Bean Soup. It's hot, it's hearty and will sustain you through the winter... Never mind that Tampa's winters were not exactly extreme; this soup is wonderful even on hot days. Perfect with a crisp green salad and crusty bread, it's from *Three Guys from Miami Celebrate Cuban Food*.



*Serves 6*

- 4 slices smoked bacon, chopped
  - 1½ cups chopped onion
  - 1 cup chopped green bell pepper
  - 3 cloves garlic, mashed
  - 2 Tbsp flour
  - 1/2 pound ham, cut in chunks
  - 1/4 tsp ground bay leaf
  - 1 Tbsp ground cumin
  - 1 tsp salt
  - Pinch of Bijol powder \*
  - 4½ cups chicken broth
  - 2 (16-ounce) cans garbanzo beans, drained
  - 2 cups peeled and cubed potatoes
  - 4 Spanish-style chorizos, casings removed and sliced thick
1. Sauté bacon, onion, and green pepper until the vegetables are limp. Add garlic and sauté for 1 additional minute. Stir in flour to thicken.
  2. Place onion mixture in a large stockpot with ham, ground bay leaf,

- cumin, salt, Bijol powder and chicken broth. Bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat and cook for 30 minutes.
3. Add the garbanzo beans to the pot and continue simmering covered, approximately 1 hour. Stir occasionally and add more chicken broth if the soup gets too thick.
  4. Add potatoes and chorizos and cover.
  5. Simmer over low heat until potatoes are fork tender, approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Take a cup of the soup out of the pot and mash the beans with a fork in a small bowl. Add the mashed beans back to the pot to thicken the soup.
  6. As unlikely as it may seem, many people like to add a squirt or two of fresh lime juice to this dish at the table. If this seems like something that might appeal to you, go ahead. Nobody's looking!

\* Bijol or *achiote* or *annatto* powder is a powder used for coloring rice. It is used in place of saffron in many recipes, because saffron is so expensive. The coloring agent in Bijol is annatto. Bijol does not really duplicate the saffron flavour, but it does have a unique flavour all its own that is unmistakable in Cuban dishes. Available in specialty stores.

***Tony's wine recommendation:***

Oloroso or Palo Cortado sherry

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## Orange and Potato Salad

Linda Tubby reminds us that, as in all hot countries, cooling salads are a feature of many Spanish meals. The most common is a simple mixture of lettuce and tomato, but they get more elaborate from there! This salad comes from Valencia, which gave its name to the best "juicing" orange, and is a refreshing yet still hearty dish that complements almost any menu. From *Spanish Country Kitchen: Traditional recipes for the Home Cook*.



*Serves 4*

- 2 oranges

- 2 small red onions, but into slivers
- 6 medium new potatoes
- 1 small roasted red bell pepper, cut into thin strips
- Fine sea salt and freshly ground green peppercorns

### *Dressing*

- 1 tsp sherry vinegar or red wine vinegar
- 3 Tbsp safflower oil
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil

Remove skin and pith from the oranges and slice the flesh into rounds, keeping any juices for the dressing. Put the slices in a serving dish and add the onions.

To make the dressing put the collected juice from the oranges in a bowl, add the vinegar, salt and pepper and gradually whisk in the safflower and olive oils.

Cook the potatoes in a saucepan of boiling salted water. When just soft, drain well, and as soon as they are cool enough, remove the skins and slice the flesh. While still warm, pour over the dressing. When the potatoes are cold, mix into the oranges and onions in the serving dish.

Just before serving, spread the strips of red bell pepper on top, then sprinkle with more crushed green peppercorns.

### ***Tony's wine recommendation:***

Dry Muscat

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## **Filete Azteca**

From the Latin American Kitchen comes this fiery, crowd-pleasing pork dish, dressed up in colourful sides; it's the perfect dish for a winter party and, best, can be done a day or more ahead and reheated.

Serve with the full Mexican complement of



white rice, tortillas, fried peppers, raw onions and black beans. Ole, guys!

- 1 pound cubed pork, dusted with flour
- A little oil for frying
- 2 Tbsp tequila
- 1 Tbsp parsley, finely chopped
- 1–2 chiles, seeded and sliced
- Salt and Pepper

*The sauce*

- 1 pound green tomatoes
- 3–4 scallions, finely copped
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp epazote,\* finely chopped or crushed
- 1 green chile, seeded and chopped
- 2 Tbsp heavy cream

Fry the pork in the oil until lightly browned and perfectly firm. Pour the tequila over the meat and let it boil. Season with the parsley and chile, and keep warm. Blend all of the sauce ingredients except the cream, but not too thoroughly. Tip into the oil frying pan, let it bubble, turn down the heat, cover loosely and simmer gently for 15 to 20 minutes until the sauce is reduced and concentrated. Stir in the cream, let it boil again and pour it over the pork. Serve with all the trimmings.

\*Epazote: available at Mexican and speciality markets. For more information on epazote, take a look at [www.apinchof.com/epazote1089.htm](http://www.apinchof.com/epazote1089.htm).

***Tony's wine recommendation:***  
dry Riesling or Alsace Pinot Gris

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## **Plátano Dulce**

This is a very misunderstood fruit; it's bigger than our grocery store bananas, and really has to be cooked to be enjoyed. Take

it from the Three Guys from Miami, who say, "Ah, the plantain, the miracle fruit of Cuban cuisine... Eat it green and it's a starchy vegetable, like a potato... but wait until it is ripe and very black and it's as sweet as candy!" They finish this paean saying, "For many people, this is a side dish. However, we enjoy this as a delicious dessert with vanilla ice cream."



*Serves 4*

- 4 extremely ripe plantains, peeled
  - 1/4 cup light Bacardi rum
  - 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
  - 1 cup packed brown sugar
  - 1 tsp ground cinnamon
1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
  2. Place the plantains in a covered baking dish that you have thoughtfully greased with butter. Drizzle rum on the plantains. Slice the butter into 12 squares and place on top on the plantains.
  3. Sprinkle brown sugar and cinnamon in a generous layer on top of the plantains.
  4. Cover and bake 20–25 minutes. Turn the plantains over, spoon some of the delicious sugar syrup over the top and continue baking uncovered for about 15 minutes. This will allow the plantains to turn golden brown.
  5. Serve plain or, better yet, throw all dietary cautions to the wind and serve over a dish of rich vanilla ice cream.

**HOT TIP:** If you can get plantains at all, they will probably be hard and green. Place in a paper bag on the kitchen counter, which will make even the most stubborn plantain ripen.

***Tony's wine recommendation:***

Tawny port, Pedro Ximenez sherry

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## Pumpkin Flan

And what's wrong with two desserts? Nothing, and you need the calories in winter weather! A flan is so traditional and so yummy. This one is a beauty: deep golden, draped in a glossy amber syrup with just the right amount of spices, toasty caramel, and a shot of sugarcane rum. Cheers!



From *Gulf Coast Kitchens*.

*Serves 6*

- 3/4 cup plus 1/2 cup sugar
  - 4 eggs, lightly beaten
  - 1½ cups cooked pumpkin\*
  - 1 cup light cream
  - 3 Tbsp dark rum, preferably sugarcane rum such as Mount Gay
  - 1 tsp vanilla extract
  - 1/8 tsp salt
1. Heat the oven to 325°F. Place the 3/4 cup sugar in a large heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Cook, without stirring, until the sugar begins to melt. Reduce the heat to low and cook and stir until it turns a golden brown. Quickly pour the caramel into a 1-quart flan dish or shallow round casserole (or a 10-inch deep-dish pie plate), tipping to coat the bottom and sides. You must work fast, as the caramel will harden immediately, but it will turn into a thick syrup after the flan bakes and chills.
  2. Beat the eggs with the remaining 1/2 cup sugar. Stir in the pumpkin purée, cream, rum, vanilla and salt. Strain the mixture into the caramel-lined flan dish. Place in a large baking pan and add steaming (but not quite boiling) water halfway up the side of the flan dish. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes, or until set in the center when gently shaken. Remove from the hot water, cool, then chill for at least 4 hours or overnight.
  3. To serve, loosen the edges of the custard with the tip of a knife. Place the platter on top and quickly turn over. Hold in place until the caramel flows out.

\*SERIOUS TIP: Constance Snow says please don't use canned pumpkin. Fresh pumpkin or winter squash has a brighter golden color and more delicate taste. Just be sure to bake or steam it, rather than boiling, or the purée will be too watery. If you don't have the time to start fresh, use frozen squash purée rather than canned pumpkin.

Another good tip: Plan ahead: Prepare through step 2, and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

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We wish to thank:

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Raincoast Publishing, Vancouver, and Kyle Cathie Limited, UK, for *The Latin American Kitchen* by Elisabeth Luard. © 2002 Elisabeth Luard. Photographs © 2002 Francine Lawrence.

Happily enjoyed by Helen Hatton and Ron Morris.

