

Sancocho

By Von Diaz

YIELD 8 to 10 servings

TIME 1 1/2 hours

Sancocho, a word often used as slang by Puerto Ricans to mean a big old mix of things, is a rustic stew eaten across the Caribbean and made with every imaginable combination of proteins and vegetables. My father cooked his with beef, corn and noodles; my mom with chicken breasts, lean pork and sweet plantains; my grandmother with beef, pork on the bone and yautia. As such, I've rarely used a recipe, so this one is based largely on observation, taste memory and what I like. Pretty much every ingredient can be swapped out, and it also makes for a sumptuous vegetarian dish without meat. Sancocho epitomizes the resilience of Puerto Rican people (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/dining/puerto-rican-food.html>), as it is often prepared in times of crisis — such as after a hurricane — and made with whatever you have on hand.

INGREDIENTS

1 medium yuca
1 medium white yautia (taro root)
1 green plantain
1 yellow sweet plantain
10 ounces calabaza (pumpkin) or kabocha squash
1 to 2 fresh ears sweet corn
1 pound pork or beef stew meat, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 2-inch pieces
1 pound boneless chicken thighs, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 2-inch pieces
1 ½ tablespoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more as needed
½ cup sofrito
(<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1022007-sofrito>)
10 cups pork or beef stock

PREPARATION

Step 1

Peel and cut the yuca, yautia, green plantain and yellow plantain into 1-inch pieces. Scrape out the seeds, then chop the calabaza, skin on, into 1-inch pieces. Put each ingredient in a separate bowl, adding water to cover vegetables in order to prevent them from turning brown while you prepare the rest of the soup.

Step 2

Husk the corn, then slice it into 2-inch-thick segments. Set aside.

Step 3

Season pork (or beef) and chicken with 1/2 tablespoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper.

Step 4

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large pot over medium-high. Add the pork and brown on all sides for 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a clean, large bowl, then add the chicken to the same pot, and brown on both sides for another 5 minutes, adding oil as needed if the pot gets dry. Transfer with a slotted spoon to the same bowl as the pork.

Step 5

Reduce heat to medium and add sofrito to the pot, scraping up any browned bits of meat and incorporating them into the mix. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until liquid has evaporated and mixture darkens in color.

Step 6

3 dried bay leaves

1 cup thinly sliced Spanish chorizo

Fresh bread or white rice, for serving

Return the pork, chicken and any accumulated juices to the pot. Add the stock, bay leaves and remaining 1 tablespoon salt, and bring to a boil over high heat. Once simmering, reduce heat to medium-low and cook uncovered for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Step 7

To keep the vegetables from falling apart, add each one in order of firmness, cooking each for 5 minutes before adding the next. Begin with the yuca, then yautia, green plantain, yellow plantain, calabaza and corn, cooking the yuca for a total of 30 minutes and the corn for only 5 minutes.

Step 8

Add chorizo and stir well to incorporate. Cook for another 10 to 15 minutes over medium-low heat until meat and vegetables are tender and break easily with a fork. Because of all the starches and meat in this dish, this stew tends to be thick and rich. Some of the vegetables will fall apart, giving it a porridge consistency. This is a good thing.

Step 9

Adjust salt to taste, and serve with fresh bread or white rice on the side.

Tip

Root vegetables such as yuca and yautia can be difficult to find in some supermarkets, though you may be able to find them in the freezer section. Farmers' markets, or Hispanic, Caribbean or Asian supermarkets are your best bet. There's no real substitute for the rich, earthy flavor of these tubers, but potatoes can be used. If using potatoes, reduce the cooking time.

PRIVATE NOTES

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