

Okra Stew

1 ½ tbsp bacon fat or lard
1 Vidalia or sweet onion, diced
5 cloves garlic, sliced
½ tsp black pepper
¼ tsp each: ground allspice, ground ginger,
ground mace, ground nutmeg, ground
white pepper, red pepper flakes, ground
bay, dried thyme
2 cups diced heirloom tomato (or canned
tomatoes)
4 cups strong chicken or veggie stock
2 cups okra, diced thin
1.5 cups diced Conecuh or other smoked
sausage
¼ cup finely chopped celery leaves (or
parsley leaves)
Salt



Okra can be a controversial ingredient. Some people like it in all forms, some people only like it fried, some people hate it no matter what. Me, I think I'm more of a casual observer in the Great Okra Debate. Although I like fried okra, and personally I think pickled okra is the best Bloody Mary garnish, mostly I don't have that strong an opinion on it.

And then I discovered Michael Twitty. He's a food historian specializing in the African American experience from "arrival to freedom", as he says. I saw a video of his where he made Okra Stew and explained the foodways and historical significance of the dish and its ingredients. Naturally, when the okra started coming out this year, I had to try it. This recipe is the one I arrived at after trying his version a few times. Mine is a little spicier and uses other vegetables that are in season when okra is. And before you ask, no, it's not at all slimy! The slime just kind of dissolves and disappears and all you taste is smoky, tomatoey, spiced goodness.

A good stock is absolutely mandatory, but I'll be honest. I didn't have any homemade stock on hand, nor did I have the ingredients to make any. So, I bought a jar of roasted chicken stock concentrate and used twice as much as the directions on the jar called for. If you go that route, you won't need as much salt.

Melt the fat over medium heat. Once hot, add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent and fragrant, about 7 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for about 2 minutes more.

Add in all the dry spices and herbs and stir to toast the spices for about 30 seconds. Then, add in the tomatoes and stock (or water and stock concentrate). Let simmer for 15 minutes.

Add in the sausage, celery leaves, and okra and let simmer 25 minutes more. Taste and adjust for salt (I used about 2 tsp salt). Serve with hot rice.

I've always thought "okra" was a beautiful word.