

## Recipes for Congolese Food: Bon Appetit!



### Nshima (Luba) or Bedia (Lulua)

A staple throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. 6-8 servings.

1½ cups cornmeal\*  
3-4 cups water  
salt to taste

Dampen cornmeal with 1 cup of cold water. Bring 2½ cups of water to a boil; add salt. Stir in cornmeal and cook over moderately high heat, stirring constantly with wooden spoon until thick. Continue cooking about 5 minutes. Add more boiling water, a little at a time, if needed to achieve desired thickness. Mixture should be quite stiff and hold its shape when turned out of the pan. It may be molded into individual fist-sized balls or dumplings or served as one common loaf. Traditionally, diners tear off walnut-sized pieces with hands and dip them into the stew or sauce. Dips may include fish or groundnut stew, greens, gravy, red beans, pili-pili (fresh ground up hot peppers), chopped roasted peanuts, eels, etc.



\*If manioc flour is available, try this alternative recipe for greater authenticity.

6 cups warm water  
2 cup corn meal  
3 to 5 cups manioc flour  
1 t salt

Cook all except manioc flour together in a large pot, stirring to prevent lumping until thickened. Boil 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally. With mixture boiling hard, remove from heat and slowly stir in manioc flour until it becomes thick and doughy, as described above. Thorough working will likely require use of two hands with a large heavy wooden paddle or spoon and a second person to hold the pot. Once it has achieved the stiff consistency described above, rinse a bowl with cold water and spoon portions of the dough into this one serving at a time, where it can be formed into smooth balls and then transferred to a bowl or dish for serving.

### African Groundnut Stew

1 whole fresh 1.5 kg (3 lb) chicken	1 red chili or hot pepper
3 hardboiled eggs	2 tomatoes blanched and diced
8 oz peanut butter	1 large onion diced
salt & pepper to taste	½ lb (250 g) whole mushrooms
4 oz vegetable or palm oil	13 fl oz water (375 ml)

Cut chicken into 8 pieces. Season with salt & pepper. Fry chicken pieces and onion until evenly browned. Stir in tomatoes and simmer 3 minutes. Add water and simmer 30 minutes. Place peanut butter into a bowl and add enough boiling water to make a smooth, runny paste. Add this and the chili when the chicken is almost cooked. Mix in well and simmer on low heat, stirring frequently. Cook 20 minutes. Serve hot with rice or bedia. Serves 6-8



### **African Fish Stew**

2 T palm, peanut or vegetable oil  
1 medium onion sliced & halved  
1 green pepper  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 14½ oz can stewed tomatoes  
1 bay leaf  
½ t cinnamon  
½ t ginger  
¾ lb ocean perch cut into 1-2" pieces

salt & pepper to taste

Cook onion, green pepper and garlic in palm oil. Add tomatoes, cinnamon, ginger, bay leaf, salt & pepper. Simmer 30 minutes (add water if needed). Add perch and cook only 5 minutes. Serve with rice or bedia. Add Hot Nali or pili-pili if desired. Serves 2-3



### **Pili-Pili**

Find the hottest fresh peppers you can (Jalapeños are mild) and chop them up into a fine salsa-like consistency. A dollop on the side of the plate for judicious dipping of each bite of bedia with whatever greens or other sauces it is being taken with should suffice for the meal...a large dollop for those who like it hot!

### **Fried Plantains**

1-1/2 ripe plantains per person (substitute 2 large green bananas if plantains unavailable)  
Palm or peanut oil  
Salt to taste

Remove skin and slice crosswise, diagonally or lengthwise, thick or thin, as desired. Salt to taste. Fry in hot deep or shallow oil until lightly browned. Serve warm. A popular sweet, they should be soft on the inside.



### **Banana Beef (or Goat) Stew**

1½ lbs beef (or goat), cut in 1½ inch cubes  
1 large onion, chopped  
2 T oil (palm, peanut or vegetable)  
4 small green bananas or 2 plantains  
Lemon juice  
1 large tomato, peeled and sliced  
1 t salt  
½ t pepper  
Water



Sauté meat and onion in oil until browned. Cut bananas or plantains into chunks and brush with lemon juice. If using plantains, add to pan and sauté with meat over low heat. Stir constantly. Add tomato, salt pepper and water to cover. Simmer slowly about 1½ hours. If using bananas, sauté separately in small amount of oil and add to simmering stew in the last 15-20 minutes. Add water if necessary. Serves 4-6.

### **Groundnut-Squash Sauce**

3 lbs squash (try summer or winter for variety)  
½ lb unsalted peanuts, coarsely ground or chopped  
2 T oil (palm, peanut or vegetable)

Cook in salt water, drain and mash squash (peel if winter variety or use frozen packages). Simmer together with peanuts and oil for 5 minutes. Serve thick and hot as dip with bedia. Serves 6-8.

### **Spinach Sauce**

2 onions, chopped  
2 T oil (palm, peanut or vegetable)  
2 tomatoes, sliced and peeled if desired  
1 green pepper, chopped  
2 lbs fresh spinach, chopped or 2 10-oz packages frozen, chopped, thawed  
1 t salt  
1 or 2 chili peppers or ½ to 1 T crushed red pepper  
½ cup peanut butter

Sauté onions in hot oil until tender but not brown. Add tomatoes and green pepper and continue sautéing 1 or 2 minutes. Add spinach, salt and chili peppers. Cover and simmer 5 minutes. Mix peanut butter with a little water into a smooth paste and stir into the spinach. Continue cooking on low heat about 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Add a small amount of water only if necessary to prevent scorching. Serve as a dip with bedia. Serves 4-6.

### **Caterpillars With Groundnut Sauce**

Ingredients:  
2-3 lbs caterpillars  
2-3 tomatoes  
1 onion  
1 chopped red chili pepper  
2-4 Tbs palm oil  
2 Tbs groundnut paste (homemade or bought peanut butter)



First, if caterpillars are dried, soak them in warm water for a few hours, then rinse and drain. Crush and mix together the tomatoes, onions, and pepper. Heat the oil in a deep pot. Fry the tomato/onion/chili pepper mixture. Add the groundnut paste, diluted with water. Stir. Add the caterpillars. Simmer for thirty minutes. Serve with fried plantains, rice and/or bedia.

For variety, try combining the caterpillars in with the Spinach Sauce recipe found elsewhere on this page. If green hornworms are used, this makes for a delightful color combination, as the two recipes otherwise have many similarities.

## Dry Roasted Crickets

Served as a snack for any number of persons.

In the Congo there is a type of field cricket (the dikelele), large, fat and tasty, that digs burrows in the ground -- hundreds of them in a typical open area -- and comes out to the mouth of the burrow to sing at night. They can be approached with a flashlight and caught by the very swift, but more than likely will manage to dodge back into their hole before being apprehended if approached too closely and too slowly. In the hands of an experienced cricket hunter, a blade of grass introduced into the hole can often coax the aggressive cricket back to the surface where the hole can be blocked from behind with a knife blade and the cricket put into the collection jar. For the more sporting, accepted practice is to develop the skill of throwing the knife from a few feet away, before the singing cricket retreats, so that it sticks into the ground and blocks the hole, leaving the stranded cricket to be caught by the hungry hunter.



Ingredients:

25 – 50 live crickets – or however many you wish to cook/serve

Salt or any preferred seasoning that can be shaken or sprinkled onto crickets after roasting

Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Arrange the crickets on a cookie sheet (OK, OK...so you may have to zap them first in a covered container in the microwave in order to get them to sit still on the cookie sheet), making sure none of them overlap. Proceed to bake at low temperature for about 60 minutes or until the crickets are completely dry or dry enough for personal taste.

Open up oven at the 45-minute mark and test a cricket to see if it's dry enough by crushing with a spoon against a hard surface or if you prefer, between your fingers. The crickets should crush somewhat easily. If not place them back inside oven until crisp.

Once roasted and cooled down, place a few crickets between your palms and carefully roll them breaking off legs and antennae in the process. This ensures clean and crisp crickets without legs or antennae getting caught between the teeth (although the large jumping legs can be quite delicious if picked out and eaten on their own).

Season the crickets with salt, Kosher salt, sea salt, smoked salt or whatever sort of seasoning you wish. They are very good and healthy to eat as a roasted snack. Eat them on the spot or place them back into the freezer for future use.