

African Cuisine Offers Nutrient-Rich Dishes

w/Soul

By Dionne Ross

Taking time to celebrate and appreciate Africa's heritage and contributions to America and the rest of the world also means acknowledging its culinary traditions. African influences are prevalent in food worldwide, specifically in the United States and the Caribbean.

As a fitness professional, I'm always on the lookout for delicious foods that will help take my clients to the next level. It's not always easy to find ethnic foods high in nutrients and low in fat. However, I have found recipes that use rich flavors and spices to substitute for large amounts of fat and sodium. Here are a few of my personal favorites.



Photos by Tina Rupp; provided courtesy of Lake Isle Press, New York.

Grilled Tilapia

(www.congocookbook.com)

Tilapia is one of my favorite meats because it's relatively inexpensive, rich in protein and low in fat. It's an excellent source of vitamin B12 and phosphorus. Eat tilapia in moderation, however, because it contains relatively high levels of cholesterol.

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- salt
- red pepper flakes, cayenne pepper or African hot sauce (to taste)
- juice from 1 lemon
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 sweet green pepper (or bell pepper), finely chopped
- 1 spoonful of vinegar
- whole tilapia (one per person), 1 to 2 pounds each; cleaned (or tilapia fillets)

In a glass bowl or baking dish, combine all the ingredients except the fish. (For the simplest recipe, use only the oil, salt, red pepper and lemon juice.) Stir until everything is well mixed. Cut three slits across each fish on both sides, rub the oil and spice mixture onto and into the fish. The fish can be allowed to marinate in the bowl if desired (20 minutes to an hour should be enough). Cook the fish over a charcoal fire in an outdoor grill (a grill basket made to hold fish while grilling is very helpful) turning once or twice. Serve with an African hot sauce.

Tilapia grilling over a charcoal fire is a common sight in African kitchens and on African streets. Use a charcoal grill if possible, if not, resort to the oven broiler.



Easy Vegan Spicy Peanut Soup w/ Fresh Mung Bean Sprouts

(www.vegalicious.org)

This simplified vegan adaptation is from a popular African recipe. For a nice crunchy twist, add fresh mung bean sprouts just before serving.

- 1 cup peanut butter
- 2 tbs. oil
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tbs. fresh ginger, grated
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 liter vegetable bouillon
- 1 tbs. tomato paste
- splash Tabasco sauce
- pinch salt
- 1 tbs. sugar
- 100 grams fresh mung bean sprouts

Heat the oil in a sauce pan. Add the chopped onions and sauté until glassy. Add the garlic and lightly brown. Add the vegetable bouillon and the peanut butter; stir well to mix. Add tomato paste and spices; simmer until warm and well blended. Season to taste with salt, Tabasco sauce and a pinch of sugar. Just before serving add the fresh mung bean sprouts. Do not cook the bean sprouts, as their crunchiness adds a nice contrast to the smooth spiciness of the soup.



North African Orange Salad

(From "The New African American Kitchen" by Angela Shelf Medearis, an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and author of five cookbooks.)

This refreshing salad, common to North Africa, presents beautifully and is simple to prepare.

- 2 cups iceberg lettuce, shredded
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 8 Greek olives, pitted and chopped
- 2 large oranges, peeled and thinly sliced

Dressing

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Toss the lettuce, onions and olives in a salad bowl. Arrange the oranges on top. Whisk together the oil, lemon juice and cayenne pepper over the salad. Refrigerate until ready to serve. **UIM**

Dionne Ross is a personal fitness coach, motivational speaker and television personality. For more information, visit www.dionneross.net.



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Photo by Dale Rempert