

Cooking around the World 5.7.18 -- Nigerian Cold Weather Asaro, with Bisi Chukwudile

Asaro (Yam Porridge) is a Nigerian delicacy. It is made with real yam tubers, not sweet potatoes. Since yams are not easily available in the USA, you may substitute Irish potatoes for it, although the taste is not the same at all. I will use yam tubers for this demonstration.

Typical Nigerian Asaro is made with diced yam pieces cooked tender in tomato sauce. These days, people add pieces of dried smoked fish, boneless chicken, or meat pieces. This adds more taste and nutrition. The Yorubas do not use vegetables in their Asaro, but the Ibos and some other tribes do for the nicer appearance and additional dietary value. I will, too. (I am from the Yoruba tribe but my husband is Ibo!)

Traditionally, palm oil is used for making Asaro, but I am substituting vegetable oil because I find palm oil too strong and heavy. Vegetable oil is also more easily available in America.

Making Asaro for a cold weather meal: This is done by adding more water and more scotch bonnet pepper (habanero). Normally Asaro has just enough water to mash a lot of the yam pieces, but when it is for the cold weather, additional water gives it a soupy consistency, making it like cream of potato soup. The scotch bonnet makes it hot, thereby warming you up! Today, while making it soupy for demonstration purposes, I will not add much "hotness" so we can all enjoy the meal.

ASARO (YAM PORRIDGE)

Ingredients:

1 yam tuber	2 or 3 fresh tomatoes
1 lb. boneless chicken	1 small tin of tomato paste (optional, enhances red color)
1 onion, chopped	2 spoons of vegetable oil
2 teaspoons salt	1 Scotch bonnet (Habanero)
Seasoning of your choice (ex., thyme, curry, bouillon)	Handful of collard green (steamed) or a pack of frozen cut spinach, thinly sliced

Preparation:

Peel, slice, and dice the yam tuber. Place the pieces in water to prevent discoloration. Set aside.

Cut boneless chicken into bite size pieces. Place in a pot with 1-2 cups water.

Add half the onion, salt and seasonings to the chicken and let it boil for about 10 to 15 minutes. The purpose of this is to get the stock from the chicken so as to flavor the porridge. Boiling it a little ahead of time gives enough stock to cook the yam with and gives it a better taste.

While the chicken is boiling, in a separate pot boil the yam pieces in 2 cups water.

Blend the raw tomatoes with the remaining onion.

Cook the blended tomatoes until the water is mostly evaporated, about 10 minutes. (This takes off the tomatoes' acidic, sometimes tangy taste, which you don't want in the yam porridge.)

When tomato water has dried up sufficiently, add the tomato paste. Cook about 5 minutes more.

Add the vegetable oil, and cook for another 5 minutes.

Transfer cooked chicken to tomato mixture, complete with its stock (and deboned fish, if you are using fish). Add more seasoning to taste, and cook about 5 minutes.

Add the boiled yam, plus all its water. Stir and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook for about 10-15 minutes.

Stir well and mash some of the yam pieces.

Add more water and habanero for cold weather. Simmer until you are satisfied with the consistency, adding collards about 3 min. before end.

Serve and enjoy!