

The Little House of Hope: Recipes from la Casita

Whether you have a big house or a small house or just a house full of hope, you can cook the Cuban food that Terry Catasús Jennings and her extended family cooked in their la casita.

Sofrito

Sofrito is the basis for so much Cuban food. It's an onion, a green pepper, and 2 or 3 cloves of garlic chopped up and then sauteed until soft in olive oil. You use this to begin a dish like picadillo or to enhance a dish like black beans.

Black Beans

Based on Nitza Villapol's recipe.

Best done a day or two before you want to eat them.

Ingredients

- 1 pound of dry beans
- Sofrito
- Black pepper
- Oregano
- Bay leaf
- White sugar
- Vinegar
- Wine
- Olive oil

Directions

1. Soak a pound of dry beans overnight in 10 cups of water.
Tip: If you want to do away with the bad aftereffects of eating beans, consider floating a green pepper in the water. It works wonders!
2. Make a sofrito and set it aside.
3. Bring the water with soaked beans to a boil and then bring the temperature down to medium or medium low. Simmer for an hour.
Tip: Beans have a tendency to burn, so set a timer and stir them every 15 minutes as they are cooking.



“They came home to la casita after work and after school to the scrumptious smells of beans and sofrito and plantains the memories of home bubbling in Mami’s pots.”

—Little House of Hope

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4. Add, 4 tsp of salt, ½ tsp of black pepper, a pinch of oregano, and a crushed bay leaf.
5. Cook until tender (maybe another hour).
6. At the end add 2 TBSP each white sugar, vinegar, wine, and olive oil.
7. Cook for 15 minutes longer at a very low temperature, uncovered.

Tip: If the beans are still too soupy, take a few out and mash them to thicken the liquid.

Note on Reheating: *When you reheat them, my aunt Bertica always said to heat them on high for a few minutes first, and then bring the temperature down, that way they don't stick. Don't forget to STIR!*

Picadillo

This is a great low-cost protein meal.

Ingredients

- ♦ 2 lbs of hamburger meat
- ♦ Sofrito
- ♦ Olives pitted with peppers (pimientos)
- ♦ Raisins (plumped up ahead of time if you want to)
- ♦ Can of diced tomatoes

Directions

1. Make the sofrito
2. As it is getting soft, add the hamburger meat.
3. Drain the grease, if any.
4. Add sliced pitted olives and raisins to taste.
5. Add a can of diced tomatoes.
6. Season with salt, pepper, and oregano.

Arroz con Pollo

This is a quick and easy variation on Arroz con pollo and feeds an army. The recipe comes from Terry Catasús Jennings' cousin Rita, who lived with her as a child in their shared la casita.

Ingredients

- ♦ 4 large chicken breasts
- ♦ 6 cups of water
- ♦ 1 large onion

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- ♦ 2 cloves garlic
- ♦ 1 large pepper
- ♦ Generous amount of oregano
- ♦ 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ♦ 1 teaspoon salt

- ♦ 3 cups rice
- ♦ 2 envelopes of Vigo saffron or yellow coloring
- ♦ 4 cups liquid (see directions)
- ♦ Can of beer
- ♦ 1 can diced tomatoes, drained
- ♦ Mayo
- ♦ Asparagus
- ♦ Pimentos
- ♦ Olives
- ♦ Peas

Directions

1. Boil the first seven ingredients (chicken to salt) for 1/2 hour.
2. Strain and save broth.
3. Put rice, saffron (or yellow coloring), and broth in a pot.
4. Add juice from asparagus, peas, pimentos, and 1 can of beer.
5. Bring to a boil and let boil for 20 minutes or until the rice is cooked.
6. Pull out the chicken, let it cool, and shred it into small pieces.
7. Mix the tomato and peas and olives with the chicken.
8. Spread 1/2 rice and 1/2 chicken in layers in a baking dish.
9. Spread film of mayo.
10. Spread the chicken, then rice, and then add another layer of mayo.
11. Decorate with asparagus and pimentos.