

Sum thin' Good from Raleigh, North Carolina

Growing up in the 80's and 90's in Raleigh, N.C. was a very memorable experience for me. There are a few meals that I remember having as a family. We had them as a regular part of our diet. Some of these were prepared based on occasions and then others were prepared sometime during the course of the week

The three dishes that I will speak of are, 1) Neck-bone Rice, 2) Fried Okra and 3) Sweet Potato Jack.

Neck bone rice is a meal by itself or you can have it with baked or fried chicken or with sides of collard, mustard or turnip greens. We usually had it with collards and fried chicken. Sometimes we only had the neck bone rice with all the chicken chopped up into the rice. There wasn't really a special occasion or holiday for this in particular but it goes well as a dish for all occasions.

Fried Okra is another dish. This is a dish that is very versatile as it can be a side for fried chicken and biscuits, or a side along with fried fish, hush puppies and French fries. It can be eaten by itself as a snack.

Sweet Potato Jack is dish that I think is very rare. Growing up, I only saw them made in my family. I didn't see them or anything resembling them around any of my friends' houses. Now, the name to some may be familiar but it is not what you're thinking of. You're thinking of the pancake type or maybe the Potato Jack that every one has come to know as the sweet potato- hash brown type. No, this is not the true Sweet Potato Jack. The real Sweet Potato Jack is homemade dough with sweet potato filling folded and sealed at the edges with a fork. It looks like a Jamaican Beef Patty only it is much larger.

We usually had them on the occasion that we had large amounts of sweet potatoes. We would go to the field and pick buckets and buckets of potatoes. This was a very big family event growing up. We then would load back up and come home and then the process of cleaning and storing them would take place. We would wash them off, pile them up and cover them with a blanket to keep the frost and cold off of them. We would then make all kinds of pies, and other dishes that contained sweet potatoes but the height of it all would be when we made Potato Jacks. This dish is something you can eat and not have anything other than that for the entire day.

Now that I have talked about these dishes, I will now give the methods for preparation below:

Neck Bone Rice

You will need a big pot and some nicely sized chicken necks.

1. Put the neck bones in the pot and fill with just enough water to cover them.
2. Add salt and pepper and boil on high until the water has foam-like skim on top.
3. Pour off skim (about half the pot)
4. Turn down to let simmer.
5. Add onions and seasons of choice and a little vinegar.
6. Let this cook down for a while.
7. Add rice and cover for about 20 minutes.
8. Let it all cook down until rice is done and the meat falls from the bone easily.

Homemade Fried Okra

You can use either fresh okra or bagged okra cuts.

1. Rinse okra off and let sit in bowl.
2. Put some flour in a bag and add seasonings of choice.
3. Put the okra in the bag and shake around until they are fully covered.
4. Get a frying pan or pot or if you have a fryer you can utilize this also.
5. Bring oil of your choice to a nice frying temperature.
6. Slowly place the battered okra in the hot oil (don't splash)
7. Repeat step six until pan is filled with enough okra.
8. Cover and let fry until batter is nicely browned and okra is crunchy.
9. Slowly stir occasionally so okra does not stick.
10. Place in a serving bowl with a few paper towels in it to drain off excess oil.

Sweet Potato Jacks

Sweet potato Prep-

1. You can bake or boil the sweet potatoes to get them prepared for mashing.
2. Peel and mash them in a big bowl using milk to get a smooth but thick texture.
3. Add cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, pepper and just a little salt.
4. Stir until evenly flavored.

Dough Prep-

1. Using a big bowl add flour eggs and milk.
2. Continuously add flour to mixture until very thick, pizza dough like consistency.
3. Flatten out dough using hand or rolling pin into medium thin sheet.

Now that you have everything prepared, it's now time to bring everything together.

1. Split dough in half. This will be your first two jacks. ;-)
2. Put some of the sweet potato mix on half of both halves.
3. Add sweet potato until there is just enough room to...
4. Fold dough over and use fork to press seal the edges.
5. Warm a nice size skillet preferably an iron or flat pancake skillet using medium high heat.
6. Add a little butter or margarine to pan.
7. Brush jacks with butter or margarine.
8. Add to pan and cook until dough is nicely cooked through. Flip over and let cook through.
9. Repeat steps to make dough and use the sweet potato mix until it's gone.

After everything is all cooked up enjoy with preferred beverage. Let me know what you think...