

Our State eats

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Fish Muddle

Yield: 8 to 12 servings.

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1½ pounds large, wild shrimp, peeled, deveined, shells and heads reserved
- 6 cups water
- 8 ounces thick-cut bacon, chopped
- 2 large celery stalks, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 large carrots, finely chopped (about 1½ cups)
- 2 large onions, finely chopped (about 3 cups)
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 4 bay leaves
- 4 short thyme sprigs
- 2 (28-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes
- 1 pound new potatoes, scrubbed and quartered
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- 2 teaspoons hot pepper sauce, or to taste
- 1½ pounds lean fish fillets (such as snapper or striped bass), cut into 2-inch pieces
- 6 cups freshly cooked rice or stone-ground grits
- 4 hard-cooked eggs, coarsely chopped
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley, coarsely chopped
- Buttered saltines

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the shrimp shells and heads. Cook, stirring constantly, until they turn pink. Add the water and bring to a simmer. Cook gently until the liquid reduces to 4 cups, about 15 minutes. Strain the stock and discard the solids.

Cook the bacon in a large pot over medium-low heat until it is crisp and rendered, about 15 minutes. Transfer with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels.

Increase the heat to medium. When the bacon fat begins to sizzle, stir in the celery, carrots, onions, and a pinch of salt.



Cook, stirring often, until the vegetables are tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in the garlic, bay leaves, and thyme sprigs; cook, stirring, for 2 minutes.

Stir in the tomatoes and cook, stirring often, for 20 minutes.

Add the shrimp stock, potatoes, and the salt. Simmer until the potatoes are almost done, about 15 minutes.

Discard the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Season with pepper and hot sauce. Taste for salt.

Gently stir the fish into the stew. Arrange the shrimp over the top of the stew. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover the pot, and let cook until the fish and shrimp are barely opaque in the center, about 5 minutes.

Spoon hot rice or grits into serving bowls. Ladle muddle over the grits. Sprinkle with the eggs, reserved bacon, and parsley. Serve hot with buttered saltines.

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