



Welcome to *Noche Buena* at the O'Haver's

Like any Cuban family, most of our gatherings revolve around food. *Noche Buena* is the traditional Christmas Eve celebration. Christmas Eve, or *Noche Buena*--for Cuban/Latin families is often the biggest feast day of the season, when friends and family, of all ages, sit around a table piled up with traditional dishes, telling stories and reminiscing.

The main course at any Cuban *Noche Buena* celebration is lechon (roast pork), black beans (frijoles negros), and rice. Yuca with mojito (yuca covered with mashed garlic, sauteed onions, lemon and oil), was always served. We usually had fried sweet plantains, and salad to finish off the main part of the meal. And of course we always had flan for dessert.

Many families would traditionally get ready to go to church when the church bells started ringing calling everyone to La Misa del Gallo (Midnight Mass). There is a legend that says this is the only time a rooster will crow at midnight, to commemorate the night Jesus was born.

Although we did not follow this tradition, the gifts received Christmas day were usually the ones from parents (Santa Claus) and from family or friends in the United States. Any packages from Cuban grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. would be put under the tree the night before January 6th – Three King's Day, the traditional day Cuban children got their gifts.

Food and family are the foundations of tradition. Food seems to be the glue that keeps people together this time of year and helps create new traditions for future generations.

Of course we make accommodations for some traditions to fit into our busy lives but that does not change the meaning and emotional lift one gets when meeting with family and friends. *Noche Buena* is great on December 24, the traditional day. But it is just as joyful on any day we decide to celebrate.

Feel free to adopt any traditions that you enjoy sharing with your family and friends. Our family borrows traditions from various cultures and we have created some family traditions of our own, morphing into an interesting set of eclectic traditions. As some of you are starting new families of your own, make space for traditions that have been passed on to you from your family and starts some new ones.

Merry Christmas from Tom and Mary O'Haver



Cuban Lechon Asado

Roasted Fresh Ham, Cuban Style

Get a nice fresh ham about 8 -10 pounds

(Fresh means not smoked or processed in any way)

1. The day before you plan to serve this dish, trim the excess fat off the pork leg;
2. Make shallow slits all over the pork, using the tip of a knife, poke pieces of garlic (10 or 15 pieces) into the pork.
3. Pour mojo all over the roast. (You can make your own -recipe follows -or you can purchase Mojo in most grocery stores under several brands.) The amount depends on the size of ham but for a 10 lb. ham I usually use 2 cups or more of mojo)
4. Let it marinate in this for a day.
5. On the next day Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. or you can barbecue it on your grill.
6. If you are using an oven tent the roast with foil, occasionally basting with the pan juices, until almost cooked about 150 degrees F.
7. Uncover and continue cooking until it starts to brown nicely. (Most Cubans like their pork well done, it should be up to 180 degrees--it's safer, also).
8. If you are using a barbecue grill, follow your grilling directions. We prefer using the grill. The lechon has a much better flavor. And it is nice and crisp on the outside.
9. Let the roast stand at least 10 minutes before carving.



Homemade Mojo

2 cups of fresh lime juice or sour orange juice
1 Tbs, of cumin
10 or more cloves of garlic, (I use much more)

1 large onion cut into pieces
salt and pepper to taste

procedure:

1. Combine all ingredients into a blender.
2. Use as a marinade and to baste the pork.

I make some fresh mojo to use as a sauce over the cooked pork for some of the more adventurous eaters.

Cuban Style Black Beans

Serve With White Rice (My mom's recipe)

You can break this down into three days

Day 1 Soak Bean

Day 2 Cook beans with onion and green pepper

Day 3 Make "Sofrito" add to beans and simmer beans until ready to eat



Ingredients for soaking and softening beans

1 lb. dry black beans (since this is a 3 day process, I triple the recipe so I can freeze any leftovers for future use)

1 large green pepper and 1 large onion

1. Day 1...Soak the dry beans in a large pot. **Add** enough water to cover beans about an inch above the beans. Let them soak overnight.

2. Day 2...(Next day), drain beans, **add** fresh water, enough to cover beans about an inch or two.

3. Add onion and green pepper, cut into large pieces

4. Bring to a boil then set on low. **Cook** until beans are tender. Depending on the beans, about 4 to 6 hours. **Add hot** water if the beans appear to be drying out.

5. When the beans are tender, you're ready to add the stuff that really makes them taste wonderful. In Spanish it's called a "*sofrito*".

Late on the evening of Day 2 or early Day 3

6. "*Sofrito*" Seasoning ingredients for the beans

1 large green pepper

1 large onion

1/4 cup olive oil

2 bay leaves

1 tsp. of sugar

1+ tsp. of oregano



1+ tsp. of ground cumin

6+ fresh cloves of garlic

Salt and Pepper to taste

(+ means to add more if you like it)

I like to add Cayenne Pepper but then I like a little bite to it!



Prepare the following before you heat the oil :

*Wash, clean and chop one green pepper into smaller pieces

*Peel and chop one large onion into small pieces

In a large skillet,

*Add 1/4 cup of olive oil and set heat to medium to medium/high.

*Add chopped green pepper and onions and saute until they start to brown.

*Add bay leaves, cumin, salt, pepper and sugar.

*Peel garlic cloves and put them through a garlic press

*At the last minute, add the garlic into the skillet and stir. **Garlic will burn quickly so take it off the heat after a minute.**

7. Pour the entire "*Sofrito*" mixture into the beans.

8. Let it simmer on low for at least 2 hours until the beans and liquid become velvety. The longer they simmer (all day) the better they taste.

I like to add the "*Sofrito*" at the end of day 2 so it can sit in the pot overnight before I simmer them the next day.

9. Just before serving, some people add a splash of vinegar; it seems to bring out the flavors.

Yuca Frita con Mojo

Fried yuca with Mojo



Step 1 Cooking the yuca

2 pounds of yuca (sometimes called cassava) and Salt

*Or use frozen yuca (**See below at ***)

1. **Cut** the yuca into 2-inch pieces and peel the brown covering off.
2. **Cut** any large pieces so that all pieces are about the same size.
3. **Bring** 2 quarts lightly salted water to a boil and add the yuca.
4. **Cook** for 10 minutes, older yuca will take longer
5. **Add** 1 cup cold water.
6. **Return** the yuca to a boil, and cook for 5 minutes, or until the yuca is firm but tender.
(Adding cold water helps tenderize the yuca.)
7. **Drain** the yuca and pull out any thick fibers.
8. **Pat dry** and cut yuca into smaller pieces.

Step 2 Frying the Yuca

1. Use enough oil to cover yuca
2. **Heat** the oil in a frying pan. **I use a deep fryer.**
3. Being careful of hot oil-splattering, **deep fry** pieces until golden.
4. **Drain** excess oil on a paper towel then transfer to a serving platter.

Step 3 Making the Mojo

¼ cup olive oil 4+ cloves of garlic, minced

1 onion sliced thin Salt and pepper to taste

1/3 cup fresh lime juice or sour orange juice

1. **Heat** the oil in a fry pan over medium heat.
2. **Add** the onions and saute till golden brown.
3. At the last minute, **add** garlic and **fry** until just beginning to brown. (Do not let the garlic burn, or the mojo will be bitter.)
4. **Add** the lime juice, salt and pepper.
5. **Pour** the mojo mixture on top of fried yuca and serve warm.

***A side note if you're in a hurry (The frozen yuca is actually easier to handle than the raw yuca . Just follow cooking directions on the package. But you still need to make the Mojo , Step 3.)**





Cuban Style Flan

(My mom's recipe)

Preheat Oven to 350 degrees

Ingredients & directions for Caramel Coating in a soufflé or baking dish , capable of withstanding the heat of molten sugar, about 6 cups capacity

1/3 cup water

1 cup sugar

1. In a heavy duty sauce pan, mix the sugar in the water until dissolved
2. Bring it to a boil until it turns a light golden-brown color. This may take a while but keep an eye on it because it can turn very quickly and burn. Do Not turn the heat down when it starts to boil. This will cause the sugar to clump and not melt. Be very careful. This molten sugar can burn you badly as it sticks to your skin!
3. Remove from heat and pour into the HEATED baking dish.(Heat the baking dish before pouring the caramelized mixture into it to avoid breakage.)
4. Use pot holders to hold the dish and swirl it around so that the caramel covers the bottom and sides of the dish.



Ingredients for Custard

7– 9 eggs(dependent on the size)

½ -1 cup sugar (dependent on your taste)

2 tsp of vanilla

3 cans of evaporated milk

(NOT sweetened condensed milk)

1. Beat custard ingredients together until well mixed.
2. Pour into cooled caramelized baking dish.
3. Bake in a “**Baño María**” (Similar to a double boiler but for the oven)
Placing your custard filled dish into another shallow dish that allows you to place a few cups of water into it. This provides a moist environment in the oven.
4. Bake for about 1 hour or until a knife appears clean after it has been inserted into the center.
5. Cool in frig. When ready to serve, loosen the sides with a knife, place a larger plate inverted over the top and carefully turn the flan over quickly.



Variations:

*My mom has on occasion added 8 ounces of cream cheese to the custard mixture.

*You can also add any other flavoring to the flan like lemon zest, mango, guava, coconut etc.

*Can be served with Whipped Cream



Platanitos Maduro

Sweet Fried Plantains Cuban Style

Ingredients:

- 2 to 3 ripe (almost black) plantains
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar



1. To **peel** the plantains, cut off ends and discard. With a knife, make 3 shallow slits lengthwise along the seams of the skin and peel away.
2. **Slice** the plantains on a diagonal about a half inch thick.
3. **Heat** 4 tablespoons butter in a large skillet and place over medium low heat (plantains have a high sugar content and will burn if the heat is too high.)
4. **Fry** the plantains in a single layer, until golden on the bottom then turn over with a spatula.
5. **Add** sugar and let cook a few more seconds, just to begin caramelizing the sugar.
6. Just before serving, **add** remaining tablespoon of butter to finish the sauce. **Serve immediately.**

I sometimes use honey in place of brown sugar when my dad collects honey from his bee hives.

You can also finish them off in an oven (about 350 degrees) to serve at a later time. Just heat and serve.

A side note if you are in a hurry (**it's a secret shortcut but it taste almost as good as starting from scratch**). You can buy prepared plantains like the ones shown here, ready to heat and serve. Look in the frozen food section. After they are heated, I like to broil them for a minute or two in the oven with a little butter and brown sugar on them.

