

OUT OF *africa*

Tap into the latest trend with these fast, flavorful recipes

Not too long ago, we noticed a growing culinary phenomenon here at VT: African cooking. What started as an occasional peanut-based stew here or spicy side dish there turned into a steady stream of African-inspired offerings from contributors and readers (a recent favorite was the Ugandan G-Nut Special Sauce and Sweet Potatoes, which won honorable mention in last year's Reader Recipe Contest).

As exotic as African cuisine may sound, the dishes themselves are surprisingly easy to re-create in American kitchens. The following menu will walk you through traditional flavor combinations using readily available ingredients. Try them, then watch for more African-inspired dishes in issues to come. After all, this trend is too delicious to be just a flash in the pan.

menu

Spicy Peanut Stew

Cool Cucumber Sauce

Flash-Cooked Greens with Garlic and Lime

Ginger Thins

SPICY PEANUT STEW
with COOL CUCUMBER SAUCE

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SPICY PEANUT STEW

Serves 6 • Vegan

"The basis of all African meals is a soupy stew served with a starch," explains Jessica B. Harris, culinary historian and author of *The Africa Cookbook: Tastes of a Continent*. This West African version gets its distinctive taste from creamy peanut butter and chile-laced chopped tomatoes.

- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- 1 medium onion, diced (about 1 cup)**
- 1 celery stalk, chopped (about ½ cup)**
- 1 Tbs. grated fresh ginger**
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (about 2 tsp.)**
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks (about 2 cups)**
- 1 14.5-oz. can diced tomatoes with chiles**
- 1 lb. butternut or acorn squash, cut into 1-inch chunks (about 3 cups)**
- ½ lb. cauliflower florets (about 4 cups)**
- ¼ cup creamy peanut butter**
- 6 cups cooked brown rice**
- 1 head watercress, stems removed**

1. Heat oil in large pot over medium-low heat. Add onion and celery, and cook 5 minutes, or until onion is translucent, stirring occasionally. Stir in ginger and garlic, and cook 5 minutes more, or until vegetables are soft.
2. Add potato and tomatoes. Increase heat to medium, and cook 5 minutes, or until sauce is thickened, stirring occasionally.
3. Stir in 2 cups water, and season with salt and pepper. Simmer partially covered, 10 minutes. Add squash and cauliflower, and cook 15 minutes more, or until vegetables are tender.
4. Whisk together peanut butter and ½ cup warm water in small bowl. Add to stew, and cook 4 minutes, or until thickened, stirring constantly. Spoon over rice, and top with watercress.

PER SERVING: 204 CAL; 6G PROT; 10.5G TOTAL FAT (2G SAT. FAT); 25G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 768MG SOD; 6G FIBER; 7G SUGARS

COOL CUCUMBER SAUCE

Makes 1½ cups • Vegan
30 minutes or fewer

This salsa-like condiment is the perfect topping for the Spicy Peanut Stew.

- ½ cup chopped roasted peanuts**
- ½ cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced (about ½ cup)**
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, stemmed, seeded and minced, optional**
- 2 Tbs. lime juice**
- 1 Tbs. grated fresh ginger**
- ½ tsp. salt**

Toss together all ingredients in small bowl. Serve with Spicy Peanut Stew.

PER TABLESPOON: 19 CAL; 1G PROT; 1.5G TOTAL FAT (0G SAT. FAT); 1G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 49MG SOD; <1G FIBER; <1G SUGARS

FLASH-COOKED GREENS WITH GARLIC AND LIME

Serves 6 • Vegan • 30 minutes or fewer

This three-minute side dish is great for people who don't like more strongly flavored leafy greens like kale and collards.

- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (about 2 tsp.)**
- ¼ tsp. red pepper flakes**
- 8 cups baby spinach (about 5 oz.)**
- 4 cups arugula leaves (about 2 bunches)**
- 2 tsp. lime juice**
- 1 tsp. red wine vinegar**

Heat oil, garlic and pepper flakes in large skillet over medium heat. Cook 2 minutes, or until garlic is browned. Add spinach and arugula, and cook 1 minute, or until barely wilted and heated through, tossing with tongs. Remove from heat, and stir in lime juice and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper, and serve.

PER SERVING: 58 CAL; 1G PROT; 5G TOTAL FAT (0.5G SAT. FAT); 4G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 138MG SOD; 1G FIBER; <1G SUGARS

GINGER THINS

Makes 25 cookies • Vegan
30 minutes or fewer

Ginger is a flavor that African slaves brought with them to the New World and integrated into typically European desserts like spice cakes and cookies. Crystallized or candied ginger gives these thins an extra kick.

- ½ cup plus 1 Tbs. whole-wheat pastry flour**
- 2 Tbs. arrowroot powder**
- 1 Tbs. ground ginger**
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon**
- ¼ cup brown rice syrup**
- ¼ cup maple syrup**
- 3 Tbs. canola oil**
- 1 Tbs. dark molasses**
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract**
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped crystallized ginger**

1. Set oven rack in top half of oven. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Combine flour, arrowroot, ginger and cinnamon in bowl, and set aside. Whisk together brown rice syrup, maple syrup, oil, molasses, vanilla extract, 2 Tbs. water and pinch of salt in separate bowl.
3. Fold flour mixture into syrup mixture. Stir in crystallized ginger. Let stand 5 minutes to thicken.
4. Line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper. Spoon dollops of batter 2 inches apart on prepared baking sheet. Bake 10 to 11 minutes, or until cookies are browned around edges. Cool 2 minutes, then transfer to wire rack to cool completely. Store in airtight container up to one week.

PER COOKIE: 52 CAL; <1G PROT; 2G TOTAL FAT (0G SAT. FAT); 9G CARB; 0MG CHOL; 7MG SOD; <1G FIBER; 4G SUGARS

New York-based cookbook author Myra Kornfeld loves finding ways to use her pantry and stove to travel to exotic destinations without ever leaving her kitchen. ■