

Puerto Rican Sancocho

Recipe by Olivia S. Polynice

Sancocho is a traditional guisado (stew), quite popular in the Latin American Caribbean countries. Every country has their own spin, but today, I'll be sharing Puerto Rican Sancocho. Although it's good year-round, sancocho is an excellent meal to get you in the mood for the rainy and cold fall and winter months. It's warm, hearty and filling.



Cooking in Latino families is a way for us to bond and pass down little pieces of history from generation to generation. I love cooking. And I love cooking Sancocho. I'm quite far from my extended family on the East Coast, so a way for me to bring parts of my family home with me to the Pacific Northwest is through cooking. Not only is cooking cathartic and relaxing, but I love filling my home with the scents that remind me of my family. It reminds me of home and takes me back to childhood.

If you're in need of a fairly easy recipe (that once you cook it, will fill your home with warmth and last days) and leave you feeling sublime, check out my family's Puerto Rican Sancocho.

For added good vibes, put on a Latin playlist through Spotify or Apple Music that gets your hips moving and into the spirit.

To make Puerto Rican sancocho you'll need good amount of protein, root vegetables, and of course, lots of flavor! A common misconception among many non-Latinos is that if you don't like spicy food, you can't enjoy Latin food. And while we love spice and aren't afraid to use it, don't get me wrong, we also love zest and lots and lots flavor. I would say at least in Puerto Rican recipes, you see many spices, but the meals don't tend to inherently be very spicy. Then again, I may not be the best judge of what's spicy or not. If you only season with salt and pepper, buckle up, because we use a massive amount of flavor. Spicy or not, it's delicious, so don't be afraid to step out of your flavor comfort zone.

Common spices I keep in my pantry include cumin, coriander, cloves, oregano, bouillon cubes, adobo and the famous sofrito. My grandmother taught me how to make homemade sofrito, so I use her recipe. You can find pre-packaged sofrito in grocery stores as well.

Equipment

Stove

10 liter pot (1 liter = 1.57 quarts)

Wooden spoon

Ladle

Tongs

Measuring cups/spoons

Ingredients

- 2-3 lbs of beef stew meat (chuck or round beef cubed)
- 1 lb of bone-in chicken thighs or drumsticks (optional)
 - If you choose to add chicken, make sure to use chicken on the bone to make certain the chicken doesn't dry out.
 - If you want chicken and beef but don't want too much meat, opt for 2 lbs of beef and 1 lb of chicken.
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, or your choice of oil (olive, grape seed, coconut).
- 1/2 cup of sofrito
 - If you use the optional 1 lb of meat, do 3/4 cup to 1 cup.
- 6 cloves of garlic finely minced
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1/2 tablespoon of ground coriander
- 2 teaspoon cumin
- 1 1/2 tablespoon of oregano
- 1 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of pepper
- 1 teaspoon of paprika

- 2 packets of sazón
- 2 teaspoons of adobo
- 1 teaspoon of garlic powder
- 6-8 cups of broth (beef or vegetable)
 - I prefer low sodium broth so that the broth is balanced and doesn't get too salty.
- 2 cups of water
- 1/4 cup of red wine vinegar (optional)
- 2-3 limes
- 5 oz of tomato sauce
 - Pro-tip: Tomato sauce gives a sweet flavor. If you use broth that's too salty or over salt the meat, add more tomato sauce. It helps balance out the flavor.
- 1/2 of a cup to 1 cup of cilantro (finely chopped)
 - Cilantro should be used to season your meat and you can use as a garnish. Use liberally.
- 3 bay leaves
- 4 sprigs or fresh thyme
- 2 green plantains, peeled and cut
 - They must be green plantains, not to be mistaken for green bananas
- 1 yuca, peeled and chopped
 - The outside skin of the yuca is not to be eaten. Be cautious and remove the waxy outside layer with a knife or spoon before cooking.
- 1-2 ears of corn, cut into smaller pieces
- 2 russet medium potatoes , peeled and chopped
- 1 butternut squash chopped
- 3 yautia, peeled and cut into chunks
 - Also known as taro root
- 1/2-1 cup of chopped carrots

This recipe can feed about 6-8. If I have leftovers, I pack up in individual containers and freeze the excess. That way whenever I want sancocho again, I can simply warm it up.



(Vegetables; some items not pictured)

Breaking down the steps

Seasoning meat

Season the beef with salt, pepper, roughly 1 tablespoon of oregano (save the rest), adobo, garlic powder, paprika and coriander. Add cilantro, juice of 1 lime and optional red wine vinegar. Mix and set aside to marinate. For added flavor, marinate 2-24 hours before cooking.



Olivia Polynice, 2020

(Seasoned meat)



(Homemade Puerto Rican Sofrito)

If you're adding chicken, you can season the chicken ahead of time as well.

Sauté

Begin by turning on your stove to medium (4-5) heat. You can use a pan to start, or use the pot or dutch oven you plan to cook the whole soup in. Add oil to the pan or pot. Once the oil begins to heat up, add the sofrito, sazón, the stew meat, chopped onions, minced garlic, and the rest of the dry spices (adobo, cumin, thyme, the rest of the oregano). Then add in the tomato sauce and carrots. Make sure to mix and stir to incorporate all the spices.

This part should take about 5 minutes; no more than 10. You don't want to cook the stew meat all the way through at this point - you only want to brown it. Right before you begin to make the soup, raise to medium high (5-6) heat. If you used a separate pan to cook the meat, transfer into the pot for the soup.

Once it's been about 5 minutes and the meat begins to brown it's time to add in the root veggies, chicken (optional), juice or a lime and broth.

Making the soup

Begin by adding in the rest of your vegetables, plantains, potatoes, yuca, yautia, corn. Add in the seasoned chicken. Add in your broth in portions and continue to stir. Taste for seasoning to gauge whether or not you need to add any seasons or spices. This way, you can see if you need to add any other spices or add water or tomato sauce to balance the flavor. I will sometimes add a pinch or two more cumin and salt to the mix once I've added all the veggies and broth. However, please start with the above measurements.

Make sure you've covered the meat and veggies. When you see the soup boiling, stir for a minute or two more, cover and lower back down to medium (4) for about 10 minutes and then medium low (2-3) heat for the last 45-50 minutes. Occasionally stir and check the root vegetables to make certain their cooked thoroughly. This final part of the process should take about an hour.

If you want something to eat with your sancocho dish, in last 20 minutes of your sancocho cooking, make a small bowl of white rice.

Sancocho should be ready! Turn off the heat, get a bowl or plate and serve.

Plate your sancocho with white rice, avocado, and top with cilantro and a little juice from any remaining lime.



Final product!

¡Buen provecho!

Olivia