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Redfish Veracruzana with Shrimp

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Olive oil and/or butter

Dry white wine (I use dry vermouth optional) or a dry sherry

2 medium onions, chopped

3 or 4 fresh peppers, chopped (poblanos and/or sweet bell peppers are recommended)

2 hot peppers, finely diced (remove seeds and internal membranes, one habanero and one jalapeno or serrano are recommended)

3 Tbsp tomato paste

4 to 6 cups very ripe tomatoes, chopped

4 to 6 dried bay leaves

1 or 2 cinnamon sticks or ½-1 tsp ground cinnamon

¼ to ½ tsp ground cloves (or 4 to 6 whole cloves)

1 to 2 tsp (or more) ground cumin

1 Tbsp dried Mexican oregano

1 to 2 tsp (or more) freshly ground black pepper

1 to 2 tsp crushed red pepper

1 to 2 tsp cayenne pepper

Salt to taste

4 to 6 garlic cloves, crushed and minced

Cane syrup, agave syrup, date syrup or brown sugar (to taste, start with 2 to 4 tablespoons)

½ cup large raisins

½ to ¾ cup sliced olives, mix of green and black

¼ cup drained capers

1 12-oz jar marinated artichoke hearts, cut in half



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½ cup sliced or slivered almonds – roasted in oven or toasted in pan on stove, plus extra for garnish

1 to 2 lemons for zest and juice (to taste)

1 cup chopped fresh parsley (reserve roughly ¼ cup for garnish)

Seasoned flour (salt and pepper, optional if you pan fry fish before adding to sauce)

2 to 4 large redfish fillets

1 to 2 lb. deveined shrimp (optional)

¼ to ½ cup each chopped fresh cilantro and green onion tops for garnish (optional)

In a heavy bottomed pot, add oil or butter and stir bay leaves, cinnamon, cloves and cumin over medium high heat until fragrant.

Add onions and peppers and lightly brown. Add tomato paste and a small amount of water if tomato paste starts to stick or is too clumpy to stir/scrape. The color of the tomato paste will not change drastically. After 3 to 5 minutes of constant stirring and scraping the tomato paste should turn slightly rusty in color.

Add garlic and stir until garlic turns golden brown. Add black pepper, crushed red pepper and cayenne. If you are cooking for non- spicy palates, go easy on the red and black peppers and add more at the end, if needed. Also, be cognizant of the heat levels of chopped/diced peppers.

Add salt (maybe a teaspoon) and expect to fully season at the end. Add Mexican oregano.

Cover pot and simmer for 30 minutes to 1 hour, stir frequently. Add dry white wine.

If sauce thickens quickly or sticks to bottom of pot, add more wine or water. Add raisins when you have 15 minutes of simmering remaining. Add sliced olives, capers, artichokes and toasted almonds to sauce and stir. Add zest and juice of one lemon and stir.



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Taste sauce to determine how much cane syrup (or agave syrup, date syrup or brown sugar) should be added to slightly cut the acidity of tomatoes and lemon and to very slightly sweeten sauce. Sauce should be tangy but not sweet.

When sauce has thickened and tomatoes are less chunky, prepare the fish and shrimp. Season fillets and shrimp with salt and black pepper. Browning the fillets can be skipped, especially if fillets are thick. Instead, place fillets directly into sauce and cover with sauce.

If fillets are thinner, roll them in seasoned flour and lightly brown both sides in butter or olive oil in a separate skillet. If including shrimp, add shrimp directly to the sauce (see note below) or roll in flour and brown.

Place browned fish into sauce (fish and shrimp will not be fully cooked, just browned on the outside) and cover with sauce. When sauce returns to a simmer, reduce heat to medium low and simmer for 10 to 20 minutes, depending on thickness of fillets. Add shrimp before fish is fully cooked, cover with sauce and simmer until just cooked, around 5 to 8 minutes depending on the size of the shrimp. Check the middle of a fillet to make sure fish is cooked.

Taste sauce and add any needed seasonings, sauce may need more salt. Add parsley and stir but be careful not to break up fillets.

Serve with rice (jasmine rice is recommended). Garnish with chopped fresh herbs, remaining toasted almonds and several thin slices of lemon.



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Notes:

You can modify the amount of ingredients to fit your pot, taste preference and number of servings.

An enameled cast iron pot is preferred, this allows you to leave leftovers in the same pot.

If you are adding shrimp directly to sauce, be sure to cook sauce to a thick stage before adding shrimp because shrimp will yield a lot of liquid.

Cherry, grape or Roma tomatoes, or a combination, work well. If you can't get ripe tomatoes, use 2 large cans (28 oz.) of tomatoes (one crushed, one diced or chef's cut).

Don't use canned, pre-sliced olives; use olives from olive bar or jarred olives.