



NEWSLETTER OF THE SAN ANTONIO HERB SOCIETY
DECEMBER, 2020

DECEMBER MEETING : GATHER FOR JOLABOKAFLOD

When : Thursday December 10, 2020

Traditionally our Christmas Banquet is for members only, so a separate email will be sent.

An Icelandic national tradition at Christmans. JolabokafloD is “Christmas Book Flood”

"The culture of giving books as presents is very deeply rooted in how families perceive Christmas as a holiday," says Kristjan B. Jonasson, president of the Iceland Publishers Association.

Everyone brings a gift-wrapped book, and maybe a treat to eat. You open the book on Christmas eve and read. A good thing to do on a dark Icelandic night. So I am asking everyone to bring a good read. Fiction, or non-fiction, funny or serious, new or used. Recycling is just fine. It does not have to be about gardening or food. But choose a book you really enjoyed reading.

Our event will be outdoors in a front and back yard. In theory, ten people in the front and ten in the back. If more come., ten in the other side of the fence in the back, by the garden.

There will be a large pot of soup kept warm on an electric warmer.. Hot tea, coffee, cocoa will be available and paper cups to keep hands warm.

Meet at 4:30 for meal at 5. You may want to get home before dark so we are deliberately set early. Both front and back yards are well lit and there is some seating both places as well as many small tables. Let’s meet and visit and share a meal. Bring your JolabokafloD, place it on the table and collect a tnumber for your gift..

We are meeting outside, so dress warmly in layers. We have a fire pit that will be lit, Smore are on offer., after you eat your soup. If you feel led to bring something to go with soup, feel free to do so. Wear a mask and your name tag Keep mask on unless you are eating. Keep social distances, as usual.

Thursday December 10, 2020 4:30, food at 5, s’mores and gifts then home. hope you can come

**San Antonio Herb Society
December 10, 2020 4:30 pm**

**If you feel timid about joining us
but would like to take part in the
book exchange, drop a book off
before Dec. 10**

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BACK TO THE BASICS

I once took a bus trip with my goddaughter to visit Epcot in Florida. After a long journey with changes in the middle of the night we arrived. Our luggage did not. We felt stranded but it made us think “What is essential here? What do we need to really have fun on this vacation?” We went to Pennys for underwear and swimsuits, bought souvenir t-shirts at Epcot, and had a ball.

Sometimes we get all tied up in holiday “should” and “oughts” and traditions, but this year has brought us back to the basics. We have isolated for many months, then cautiously ventured out.

In my household, we have found a tremendous amount of work to do just around the house: gardening through spring, summer and fall, writing many more letters than we had done before, long walks to the post office, taking time to take pictures of sunsets and sunrises, birds in the yard, and circles round the moon. We’ve taken walks and spoken with the neighbors.. In all this time we have looked at our lives in a completely different way. We have had time to talk to one another. For us, we have gotten really picky about TV shows and have watched a lot less television. It is amazing how much time that frees up for other activities.

Here's my thinking: it is not the gifts that we give, or the amount of money we spent on them that matters. What counts with me is that someone thought about me. That I mattered enough that someone called me , or came to volunteer, or just spent time with me. Herb Society has carried on that thought. We have Zoomed to meetings. We have been to the garden to weed and talk. We have even had a brief sale or two to invite others to join us, and maybe add a little to our funds. We have had time for one another. The garden goes on.

Weed and Gloat: Crisp and cold was the weather. We stood in the sun to warm up, then weeded. Thanks to Cindy, Marsha and Lauren for all the work

**Come weed with us at the Botanical Gardens!
Feel welcome to come to join us next month in the sunshine.**

Next Weed and Gloat is scheduled for Monday December 28, 2020. We will meet early to spread out volunteers beginning at 8 a.m. Late risers and stragglers are welcome

Contact robinmaymar@gmail.com for simple safety measures we need to take . See you then.

Meeting Minutes

MINUTES NOVEMBER 8 HERB SOCIETY MEETING

The meeting was opened by Robin Maymar at 6:30 -pm

Mary Jo reported that the new director of the Botanical Garden, Sabrina Carr, had given a presentation . She is from Atlanta, and has had a rocky start as director. She arrived this time last year, and before she could get her feet on the ground the pandemic hit and we went into lockdown. The Botanical Garden is re opening slowly. The restaurant is now open, except on Monday. Outside seating is available. We understand it is very good. Currently there is an origami exhibit on the grounds of the garden. This is a most excellent place to go, wander around and relax.

We discussed putting name markers on the herbs in the garden. Robin will look into this with Dennis Joy, our supervisor. Laura Eckhart had suggested plastic name labels, and Mary Jo said that these worked very well. We have seen lots of nice marker systems in private gardens. The problem at the Botanical Gardens is that the markers tend to be taken by guests if they look very nice. Also, sometimes, they last very well, marking a long dead plant, or just a hole in the ground where the plant was! We try to keep up, but these things happen.

Weed and Gloat will meet on November 30th

Pam told us that the Leon Valley Café is now open and suggested we meet there for a get-together.

Some suggestions for Thanksgiving/Holiday this year: Zoom meeting, but put it on the TV so the picture is nice and big for visiting; Pogo is an app on your computer for playing Scrabble; do a Walkie-Talkie, put your phone on speaker and take a walk in your neighborhood while talking to loved-ones as they take a walk.

Robin introduced Becca Gallardo, our guest speaker. Becca has her associate degree and is half way to gaining her Bachelor's degree as a nutritionist; currently taking Biology, Anatomy and Health and Wellness. She sells Herbal Life products. She has been vegan on a wholly plant based diet for four years (but readily admits that she has always been skinny).

Some of her suggestions:

Use healthy swaps: sugar → date paste or syrup, coconut syrup?, maple syrup

Butter → coconut oil

Eggs → flax eggs

Buttermilk → 1 cup soy milk, 1 T lemon juice or other kind of plant milk/ apple cider vinegar

Gravy → use mushroom powder (found at Trader Joe's)

Heavy cream → coconut oil

She also gave us a number of recipes, which we will feature on the following page

Our suggestion is to substitute ONE of these swaps. You do not want to overwhelm your guests with new! But consider gradually substituting some healthier swaps as you go along. These are designed to act as a reasonable equivalent as far as mouth feel and taste are concerned. When you are making that New Year's Resolution to lose weight, eat less salt, get more exercise, cut back on sugar then here you go.

Becca addressed each element of our Thanksgiving Dinner: Wild Rice Stuffing, Pumpkin Pie, Hash Brown Green Bean Casserole, Lentil Loaf Turkey, Gravy (See recipes)

Becca closed her talk by telling us about an in-person group that is also on line. It is for women only, they focus on gluten and core exercises. She has since sent me a picture with the times but no internet connection information

We then chatted about our holiday plans. Diana is headed to Wisconsin and returning with her daughter, a long holiday trip. Basil and Mary Jo are cooking for everyone and then doing a Curb-Side pick up. Later they will do a Mexican Bingo on Zoom with prizes!

Becca had to leave, as she was broadcasting from work on her phone. She did a magnificent job of showing us the recipes and giving her talk. We thanked her. Robin FORGOT that she had made Becca the host, so when she left, the meeting abruptly ended! Robin apologizes. IF that ever happens again, you can always just go to Zoom and re-join us. People with poorer connections know this and joined us for a few more minutes of visiting.

Culinary Contributions

Hash Brown Green Bean Casserole

Submitted by Becca Gallardo from highcarbhan-nah.com

Saute 1 medium onion
2 cloves garlic
1 cup mushrooms, chopped

Cashew Cream:
½ cup raw cashews, soaked in
1 cup water
2 tablespoon miso paste
2 tablespoons nutritional yeast

Filling: 2 cups green beans
5-6 cups shredded potatoes or frozen hash browns

1 teaspoon thyme
Pinch of salt and pepper

Saute ingredients in water or vegetable broth.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Blend Cashew cream ingredients until smooth

Spread saute ingredients across bottom of 9 X 9 inch pan

Add green beans and pour over cashew cream

Top with hash browns

Cook uncovered for 45 minutes.



Editor's note: I usually test out a recipe before it is published. I have questions about how to saute without any oil. Maybe do the mushrooms first, as they release water add the onions. Garlic burns so quickly, put it in last but watch it. Becca finally sent the recipes the **day** the Yerba was to go out. She says she has used this recipe and it is very good. I just warn you, it looks like something is missing here.

WILD RICE AND LENTIL STUFFING

Saute 1 yellow onion diced
4 cloves garlic minced
3 stalks celery chopped
2 cups mushrooms chopped
2 tbsp soy sauce

Base Ingredients

6 slices Ezekiel bread cubed
1 medium sweet potato chopped
1 cup cooked wild rice blend
2 cups cooked brown lentils
1 tbsp each, rubbed sage, thyme, garlic powder
1 tsp fennel
2 cups veg stock
flax egg (3 tbsp flax, mixed with 6 tbsp water)

1. In a saucepan over medium heat add in your saute ingredients and cook 5-7 minutes until fragrant.
2. Take the pan off the heat. Add in the rest of your ingredients (except the veg stock and bread) to the pan and mix well.
3. Place mix in a nonstick 9x9 baking pan and top with cubed bread. Pour veg stock over top.
4. Cover with foil and bake at 400 for 30 minutes.
5. Then remove the foil and bake another 20 minutes to crisp the bread on top. Enjoy!



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DECEMBER TO DO IN THE GARDEN

IN OUR HERB GARDEN

First week typically for freezes!!! Keep in mind, when monitoring severe weather conditions, "radiational-cooling" type freezes causes different reactions to plants than a "wind-blown" freeze. And with the chilly nights comes the hot chocolate.

The ritual of taking down the hummingbird feeder is more folklore than science. Leaving them up, in fact, would benefit both native and migratory hummingbirds, according to a state & local birders. Keep your feeder about 1/4 full and change about once a week (inspect on cold mornings to make sure it's not frozen). A red feeder (avoid using red dye in solution) is enough to attract the birds, although red flowering plants such as the shrimp plant close by will help even more.

Now is the time to plant a number of spring-producing herbs, including garlic, dill, cilantro, fennel and parsley (This is a surprise to newcomers to San Antonio, and to newcomers to herb growing, since in other parts of the country these are planted in the spring.) Replenish winter mulch as needed. Should a freeze warning occur, water plants thoroughly (12 to 24, but no more than 48 hours prior to) to protect roots. Cut back tender perennials that freeze and need to be trimmed before reemerging in the spring. Examples are Mexican mint marigold, chives, tarragon, lemon verbena and lovage. Plant seeds of California poppies, nasturtiums and sweet peas.

VEGETABLE GARDEN Be prepared to cover tomato cages with blankets and plastic (never let plastic touch the leaves during a freeze, separate with a sheet or blanket) when the first freeze is predicted. You often can get 2 or 3 weeks of good weather if tomatoes make it through the first freeze.

Great Texas Garden Tips - Cut back fall blooming perennials now (bulbs cut back only as leaves brown). This tidies up the plantings and helps to get them ready for new growth next spring. If scale insects are a problem with any planting, now is the time to apply dormant oil according to label. Dormant oil should always be applied after plants reach dormancy and before new spring growth occurs. While several gardening activities are at a slower pace, plan to build the gazebo, pergola, trellis, or lattice now. Also, they could make terrific holiday gifts for yourself, your spouse, your friends, or other loved ones. All these structures work well for growing some great native Texas vines. If you fertilized your cool/cold season annuals only at planting, it is time to fertilize again according to label directions to help keep them healthy, actively growing, and blooming well. *) December is spring bulb, corm, rhizome, and tuber planting time in Texas to have a show of color from these plant selections next spring. Have the soil tested in your vegetable garden, rose garden, perennial garden, lawn, or any other special area in your landscape this month. The results of the tests will offer recommendations to help you achieve the most results from your gardening activities.

Spinach is available in area nurseries as transplants. It will provide nutritious greens for salads all winter and spring. Fertilize onions, broccoli, cabbage and other cool-weather foliage vegetables with 2 cups of organic fertilizer or 1 cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer per 10 ft. of row. Use half the amount for carrots, beets, turnips and other root crops. Never water frozen leaves. Watering will kill, not thaw them. Pick broccoli, radishes and other winter vegetables when young for highest quality and best production. Leaves of broccoli and cauliflower can be eaten, cook as you would cabbage. Apply manure to your vegetable garden if you didn't plant Elbon (cereal) rye earlier. Continue to plant spinach, English peas, snap peas and snow peas.



FLOWERS Pansies planted now will provide color all winter. Violas, also called Johnny-jump-ups, are perfect border plants for pansy beds. They do best in full sun. Plant sweet peas in a sunny location with a trellis. The fragrant flowers are great for cutting. Use berries from nandina and holly for natural holiday color indoors. Cut back lantana and salvia after the tops freeze. Move plumerias into your garage or storage area for the winter. Remove leaves from stems and either remove the plant from the soil or just move the plant, pot and all. Do not water through winter. Plant tulip and hyacinth bulbs now (after their 6-week chilling). Lay chicken wire over the area until leaves emerge to prevent squirrels from eating the bulbs.

Don't let poinsettias dry out. Place three ice cubes per day on the soil to keep the plants moist. Fertilize indoor plants less from now until March unless growing in a well-lighted area. Keep poinsettias moist, away from drafts (hot and cold), and place them in a bright room for maximum bloom length. Again, do not overwater, but keep evenly moist.

PESTS Apply SNAIL & SLUG bait or beer traps to protect pansies, bluebonnets, chives, day lilies and other plants for which the creatures have a fondness. Use monofilament fish line at shoulder level for deer to create an effective barrier for the plant-eating animals. - Don't murder the good guys! Common garden WASPS are great predators and can help you control garden pests without using toxic sprays. They are capable of making more than two hundred trips from their nest to your garden and will pull caterpillars out of your garden if you let them live. Other beneficial wasps include the ichneumonid wasp which lays eggs in insect pests, including cabbage worms and aphids, and these good wasps don't even sting.

IN OUR ROSE GARDEN If you get freezing weather, this will slow down your bushes (and this is good!) A longer winter rest period will make them just that much more vigorous come next spring. There are some things to do to prepare our roses for the upcoming winter.

Watering- (Supposedly with an "El Nino" winter will provide less than average rainfall.) Remember that even though our bushes might not be growing vigorously above ground, their roots are growing and picking up all kinds of nourishment. So, we need to provide moisture for the roots to absorb and store this spring energy. (If El Nino doesn't come through, please remember that our beloved S.A.W.S. is now determining your next year's sewer charge based on water usage between **Nov. 15th through Mar. 15th**. Water wisely!)

Keep potted roses watered. Roses in beds probably will need no water from the hose until next spring. Contrary to what we sometimes read, moderate dryness in winter will do no harm, and may be good. Most of us can drain the watering system and roll up the hose. In fact, it is a good idea to drain any system now that could be damaged by an unexpected freeze.

Store the pesticides where they will not be frozen. Consider disposing of remnants that have been around a long time. Put leftover fertilizers in plastic bags and tie tightly. Then you will not have to use a hammer to break them up next March.



BIRDS Prepare Your Backyard Now for Winter Feeding! Most birds establish their feeding territories in the early fall. Always have water available for birds in your yard. Here are some steps you can take to make your yard a favorite dining spot for the birds. 1) Clean all feeders. 2) Remove seed hulls from under feeders (use in compost). 3) Check stability of pole (chain or other support) and mounting hardware. 4) Tighten screws in feeders (check shields, under-counted seed trays and other attachments). 5) Add different types of feeders (such as hanging feeders (bowl w/baffle feeder, tube feeder, Audubon feeder, house hopper type feeder, and window feeder); ground or tray type feeder; suet feeder; nectar feeder). 6) Stock up on seed and suet. 7) Be prepared to empty concrete birdbaths during freezing weather and replace with a plastic dish (Add a birdbath heater to nonporous birdbaths to keep an open supply of water for the birds when temperatures drop). 8) Clean out nesting boxes and leave up for roosting. 9) Put up roosting boxes to attract owls, flickers or bluebirds. 10) Add a squirrel feeding station (They're not birds, but they are fun to watch and will help keep them from gorging at the bird feeders!)



In England, the Royal Family puts out bird houses in November so that birds become acclimated to them, In spring birds select their favorite during early nesting season. Postpone cleaning pecans and acorns from your driveway. The doves, grackles and other wildlife love the mast crushed by the cars.

WILD RICE AND LENTIL STUFFING

Saute 1 yellow onion diced
4 cloves garlic minced
3 stalks celery chopped
2 cups mushrooms chopped
2 tbsp soy sauce

Base Ingredients

6 slices Ezekiel bread cubed
1 medium sweet potato chopped
1 cup cooked wild rice blend
2 cups cooked brown lentils
1 tsp each, rubbed sage, thyme, garlic powder
1 tsp fennel
2 cups veg stock
flax egg (3 tbsp flax, mixed with 6 tbsp water)

1. In a saucepan over medium heat add in your saute ingredients and cook 5-7 minutes until fragrant.
2. Take the pan off the heat. Add in the rest of your ingredients (except the veg stock and bread) to the pan and mix well.
3. Place mix in a nonstick 9x9 baking pan and top with cubed bread. Pour veg stock over top. Cover with foil and bake at 400 for 30 minutes. Then remove the foil and bake another 20 minutes to crisp the bread on top. Enjoy!

Gravy (makes 4 servings)

4 tablespoons arrowroot powder
1 tablespoon nutritional yeast
1 tablespoon onion powder
1 tablespoon garlic powder or poultry seasoning.
Add half of the mix to ½ a cup of water and 1 tablespoon of liquid aminos.
Pour mix into pan over medium heat and stir continuously.
Keeping adding water until desired thickness.
Add more liquid aminos or liquid smoke for salty or smoky flavor

Lentil Loaf (Turkey Substitute)

1 cup brown lentils
1/2 cup red lentils
3 cups water
1 flax egg (3 tbsp ground flax seeds, 6 tbsp water)
4 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 onion, diced
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
2 stalks celery, chopped
1 1/2 cup oats
1 tsp fennel
1 tsp thyme
1/2 tsp onion powder
1 tbsp Italian seasoning
1 tsp cayenne (optional)
1/4 cup ketchup

1. Preheat oven to 350F. First, make flax egg and let it set. Combine 3 tbsp ground flax, 6 tbsp water, mix and let it sit for about 10 minutes.
2. Take 1 1/2 cup of oats and gently pulse in blender to make oat flour.
3. Next combine lentils, water, and the rest of the ingredients (except for the oats, seasonings and ketchup) in a large sauce-pan. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce the heat to a simmer and let cook about 30 minutes or until the majority of the water is absorbed.
4. Remove from heat, add in flax egg and seasonings, then slowly add in oats until you get a thick consistency.
5. Transfer mix to a non-stick loaf pan and place in the oven on the middle rack for 30 minutes uncovered.
Remove from the oven, spread a thin layer of ketchup over the top of the loaf and place back in oven uncovered for 15 minutes or until the ketchup caramelizes. Let rest for 30 minutes before serving. Slice and enjoy.

Becca recommended this as a turkey substitute. I suggested that instead of a loaf shape you mold it into a turkey shape.

Herb of the Month: Bay

HERB OF THE MONTH: BAY

Contribution by Kerrie Weems from a Facebook post, posted by Yvonne Baca with cynical comments from Robin Maymar

These are called "Bay leaves" *the Facebook post says. (I am posting a picture here of my tree, periodically it does this. You can plant a new tree from them)*

Many people add bay leaves to foods especially jollof rice (Nigerian) (*see p 11 for recipe*), red meat and poultry but do you know why bay leaves are added to food? When asked why, some reply: to add flavor to the food

Do you know that If you boil some bay leaves in a glass of water and taste it, it will have no flavor? (*other sources say they have a pleasant scent and taste. If brewed too strongly they get bitter, add milk and or sugar*)(*We pause now to head to the back yard for three bay leaves, brew up a cup...*)

Now why do you put bay leaves in the meat?

The addition of bay leaves to meat converts triglycerides to monounsaturated fats, and for experimentation and confirmation: Cut the chicken in half and cook each half in a pan and place on one bay leaf, and the other without bay leaf and observe the amount of fat in both pans. (*OK, I do not believe this about tryglycerides at all. Tried to track down this claim, it looks like someone made this up, published it in an article without putting their name to it, this raises suspicions*)

(*Tea report: This bay leaf tea has a lovely aroma and definitely a taste, a good taste. Does not need sugar or milk*)

If you have bay leaves, there is no need for a pharmacy. Recent scientific studies have shown that bay leaves have many benefits & helps to get rid of many serious health problems and illnesses. (*You notice, they do not tell you who did the study or how to access the information*)

The benefits of bay leaf are: -

*Bay leaf treats digestive disorders and helps eliminate lumps, Heartburn, Acidity & Constipation. (*Not that I could find*)

*It helps regulate bowel movement by drinking hot bay tea. (*May just be the warm water*)

*It lowers blood sugar and bay leaf is also an antioxidant (*This I found to be true- an NIH study confirms See below.*)

*It allows the body to produce insulin by eating it or drinking bay tea for a month. (*Nope, not in any research I could find from a reputable scientific source.*)

*IT eliminates (*some*) bad cholesterol and relieves the body of triglycerides.(*see the * below, in the NIH summary*)(*I am leaving the post as I found it, the IT is a typo. No reputable author would leave that in*)

*It's very useful in treating colds, flu and severe cough as it is a rich source of vitamin "C", you can boil the leaves and inhale steam to get rid of phlegm and reduce the severity of cough.(*One tablespoon full of bay leaves has 1% of the vitamin C you need for a day. I would not depend on this for a source, go for broccoli instead, it has higher vitamin C values than orange juice. One serving of broccoli has 220% of RDA. A teaming cup of tea does help loosen up chest, and add moisture, so good to do*)

*Bay leaf protects the heart from seizures and strokes as it contains cardiovascular protective compounds.(*Not that I could find*)

*It's rich in acids such as caffeic acid, quercetin, eigonol and bartolinide, substances that prevent the formation of cancer cells in the body.(*They forgot linalool, which adds that lovely fragrance and is used for its calming ef-*



fects. See below also for what it actually has in it.)

*It eliminates insomnia and anxiety, if taken before bed, helps you relax and sleep peacefully. (This we could confirm)

Drinking a cup of boiled bay leaves twice a day breaks kidney stones and cures infections ... (no evidence of this either but that tea sure was good))

Just like garlic and ginger are a must find amongst my collection of spices, Bay leaves are a must as well.

A NIH (National Institute of) study summary says: “Bay leaves (*Laurus nobilis*) have been shown to improve insulin function *in vitro* but the effects on people have not been determined. The objective of this study was to determine if bay leaves may be important in the prevention and/or alleviation of type 2 diabetes. Forty people with type 2 diabetes were divided into 4 groups and given capsules containing 1, 2 or 3 g of ground bay leaves per day for 30 days or a placebo followed by a 10 day washout period. All three levels of bay leaves reduced serum glucose with significant decreases ranging from 21 to 26% after 30 d. Total cholesterol decreased, 20 to 24%, after 30 days with larger decreases in low density lipoprotein (LDL) (That’s the “lethal” type you don’t want) cholesterol of 32 to 40%. High density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol increased 29 and 20% in the groups receiving 1 and 2 g of bay leaves, respectively.

*Triglycerides also decreased 34 and 25% in groups consuming 1 and 2 g of bay leaves, respectively, after 30 d. There were no significant changes in the placebo group. In summary, this study demonstrates that consumption of bay leaves, 1 to 3 g/d for 30 days, decreases risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases and suggests that bay leaves may be beneficial for people with type 2 diabetes.”

(Not from NIH) Some of the benefits of the burning the bay leaf in your house are : Anxiety relief : A chemical in the leaves when burnt gives rise to smoke, which when inhaled calms the body and mind. This is probably due to the fact that bay leaf smoke contains linalool, a compound found in a number of other plants, including mint and lavender. (We tried this, too. Could not get smoke. Dry bay burned rapidly and fresh bay burned slowly. It had enough oil in it to burn, so there was very little smoke. There is probably a special technique to making an incense of this by mixing it with ingredients that help it smoke) Lavender is another plant commonly used for treating anxiety.

Side effects: may cause sleepiness or drowsiness. (internet says)

The leaves contain about 1.3% **essential oils** (ol. lauri folii), consisting of 45% eucalyptol, 12% other terpenes, 8-12% terpinyl acetate, 3-4% sesquiterpenes, 3% methyleugenol, and other α - and β -pinenes, phellandrene, **linalool**, geraniol, **terpineol**, and also contain lauric acid. (Wikipedia)

(Robin adds) Don’t grow a bay tree, unless you want to. I am skipping all that part about how much sun and type of soil. Just get to know someone who will share the leaves from their tree. One hack wrote “Bay leaves are the dryer sheets of the herb shelf” I think he meant that they go stale as soon as you buy them. Well, that is true. They go from deep green to a pale crispy thing pretty quickly. But, if you have a source, you can freeze them. Us herb people are always willing to share; just ask. Better yet, join Herb Society

What about bayberries? Do they come from the Bay tree? No. Bayberries are a completely different plant. They do not grow well in South Texas, so ask your northern friends to send you bayberry candles as I have no clue as how to make them.

Have a happy holiday, drink some bay tea and relax.

Nigerian Jollof Rice or **Jellof rice** is a rich and incredibly tasty west African one-pot Meal. It is a very versatile dish, and it is usually made from scratch using Rice, Tomatoes, Pimento peppers, Tomato paste, Scotch bonnet, Onions, Salt, and other spices. **Jollof rice** is one of the most common West African dishes eaten in the regions of Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, and Liberia. However, each of these West African countries has their own variation of this meal. It is inexpensive and easy to make yet, delicious.

Prep time 30 minutes Cook time 1 hour 30 minutes
Makes a family-sized pot

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup oil (vegetable/canola/coconut, not olive oil)
6 medium-sized fresh plum/Roma tomatoes, chopped, OR a 400-gram tin of tomatoes
6 fresh, red poblano peppers (or 4 large red bell peppers), seeds discarded
3 medium-sized red onions (1 sliced thinly, 2 roughly chopped), divided
 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 hot pepper, or to taste (yellow Scotch bonnets are my favourite)
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 teaspoons (Caribbean/Jamaican-style) curry powder
1 teaspoon dried thyme
2 dried bay leaves
5 to 6 cups stock (vegetable, chicken, or beef) or water, divided
2 teaspoons unsalted butter (optional), divided
4 cups uncooked converted long-grain rice or golden sella basmati, rinsed Salt, to taste Black and white pepper, to taste
Extra: sliced onions, tomatoes



In a blender, combine tomatoes, red poblano (or bell) peppers, chopped onions, and Scotch bonnets with 2 cups of stock, blend till smooth, about a minute or two. You should have roughly 6 cups of blended mix. Pour into a large pot/ pan and bring to the boil then turn down and let simmer, covered for 10 - 12 minutes

In a large pan, heat oil and add the sliced onions. Season with a pinch of salt, stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes, then add the bay leaves, curry powder and dried thyme and a pinch of black pepper for 3 - 4 minutes on medium heat. Then add the tomato paste - stir for another 2 minutes. Add the reduced tomato-pepper-Scotch bonnet mixture, stir, and set on medium heat for 10 to 12 minutes till reduced by half, with the lid on. This is the stew that will define the pot.

Add 4 cups of the stock to the cooked tomato sauce and bring it to boil for 1 - 2 minutes.

Add the rinsed rice and butter, stir, cover with a double piece of foil/baking or parchment paper and put a lid on the pan—this will seal in the steam and lock in the flavour. Turn down the heat and cook on low for 30 minutes.

Stir rice—taste and adjust as required.

If you like, add sliced onions, fresh tomatoes and the 2nd teaspoon of butter and stir through.

To make Party Rice, you'll need one more step. Now Party Rice is essentially Smoky Jollof Rice, traditionally cooked over an open fire. However, you can achieve the same results on the stove top. Here's how: Once the rice is cooked, turn up the heat with the lid on and leave to "burn" for 3 to 5 minutes. You'll hear the rice crackle and snap and it will smell toasted. Turn off the heat and leave with the lid on to "rest" till ready to serve. The longer the lid stays on, the smokier. Let the party begin!

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