

Cook

Jamaican

in America



Recipes with love from

**The Robot Book
Club**

Cook Jamaican in America

Authentic Island Flavors for the Everyday Kitchen

The Robot Book Club

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Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Jamaican Home Cooking.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

Five p.m. in an Ohio Kroger, a cart rattles past frozen dinners, carrying a bottle of Grace browning and three tins of mackerel in tomato sauce. For first-generation Jamaicans in America, the yearning for home begins here. Not with the salt-laced breeze of Kingston, but with the sting of grated ginger in the pan, the crackle of whole allspice berries, the precise flavors that recreate the noise of a crowded family kitchen.

This is a working manual for feeding cousins after a long shift, for scraping caramelized plantain from the skillet, for making everyday staples work. It's for those who recall a grandmother's steady hand measuring brown sugar by eye, a pot of salted cod boiling on the back burner, the defiant crunch of a beef patty snatched from a school gate vendor. It's for the diaspora, stretched thin by rigid workweeks and grocery aisles that feel a world away from the familiar.

The truth lies not in chasing obscure provisions or sacrificing Sundays to the stove. It lives in ingenuity. In understanding how to conjure fall-off-the-bone oxtail with an Instant Pot, how "tin boom" mackerel transforms from a "struggle meal" into a weeknight revelation, how Red Pea Soup translates from a grandmother's hearth to a modest Sacramento stovetop. This is about making the deeply rooted work in the here and now.

No compromise on flavor, no apology for the vernacular. The secrets were never secrets—just wisdom. The wisdom of seasoning, of patience, of knowing when to reach for that specific canned good, or



Saturday Morning Yard Breakfast

A celebration of the hearty, unapologetic weekend feasts that anchor the family to its heritage.

Saturday morning brings a heavy Dutch pot to the stove, the sharp, waking aroma of thyme and a whole uncut Scotch bonnet hitting the hot oil before the sun is fully committed, the rhythm of managing the frying pan, and the slow, deliberate process of cooking down saltfish—smartly soaked the night before—anchoring the family to the yard, no matter what American city they woke up in. This is the heavy, foundational breakfast of people who know exactly who they are. Here are the plates that matter: the national pride of ackee and saltfish, crisp golden fried dumplings, the hiss of sweet plantains hitting hot oil, and the sweet, slow simmer of cornmeal porridge bubbling thick on the back burner as the weekend begins.





Old-Time Salt Mackerel Run-Dung

Drop salted mackerel into the heaviest pot, letting it hiss, bubble, and roll. This isn't a careful emulsion; the explicit goal is to boil thick coconut milk hard until it completely splits and breaks, separating pure coconut oil from thick, sweet curds. The fish cuts right through that luxurious fat, spiked with fresh thyme, allspice, and the fruity warmth of a whole, un-burst Scotch bonnet pepper. They call it "Dip an' Fall Back"—a name earned from the way you'd lean away from the communal bowl to keep the rich, oily custard off your shirt. Tear off a thick hunk of hard-dough bread, drag it directly through the spiced oil, and eat.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	pickled or salted mackerel <i>rinsed</i>	1 med	ripe tomato <i>diced</i>
28 oz	full-fat canned coconut milk <i>unstabilized without guar gum if possible</i>	4 sprig	fresh thyme
3 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>	1/2 tsp	whole allspice berries <i>lightly crushed</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole, unpunctured</i>
3 med	garlic	1 tbsp	white vinegar or lime juice
clove	<i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

PREPARATION

- **Desalt the mackerel.**

Place the mackerel in a pot of cold water, bring it to a boil, and let simmer for 15 minutes. Drain the water and taste a small piece of the fish. It should still be salty, but not overwhelmingly so. If it's too aggressive, boil it a second time in fresh water.

- **Flake the fish.**

Let the boiled mackerel cool, then discard the head and peel away the skin. Use your hands or a fork to flake the meat into 2-inch chunks, meticulously removing the large center bone and any pin bones you find.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Aromatize the base.**

In a wide skillet over medium heat, add a tiny splash of oil and sauté the scallions, onion, garlic, and tomato until softened, about 3 minutes.

- 2. Boil the coconut milk.**

Pour in the full-fat coconut milk and drop in the fresh thyme, lightly crushed allspice berries, and the whole Scotch bonnet pepper.

1. Run it down until it breaks.

Bring the mixture to a vigorous simmer over medium-high heat and leave it uncovered. Have patience. After about 15 minutes, the water will evaporate and the coconut milk will 'break' into thick curds frying in clear coconut oil. This separated custard is exactly what you want.

2. Fold in the mackerel.

Gently fold the flaked, desalted mackerel into the broken custard, being careful not to turn it into mush. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pan with the lid slightly ajar, and let it simmer for 5 to 10 minutes so the briny fish permeates the sweet coconut oil.

3. Finish and serve.

Remove the whole Scotch bonnet and thyme stems. Stir in the vinegar and freshly cracked black pepper to cut the richness. Serve immediately with boiled green bananas, dumplings, or hard yam.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The curdle is correct.**

In classic French technique, a broken sauce is a failure. In Jamaican Run-Dung, it is the goal. Do not try to whisk it back together; the oil separation is the hallmark of authenticity.

● **Handle the Scotch bonnet with care.**

Dropping the pepper in whole imparts the chili's incredible tropical fruitiness without making the dish unbearably spicy. Do not burst or cut it during cooking unless you want extreme heat.

● **Neutralize the kitchen.**

Boiling salt mackerel has a notoriously strong oceanic aroma. Add a splash of vinegar or a squeeze of lime to the boiling water during the desalting process to help neutralize the smell.



Stamp and Go

Saturday morning in the yard, waking up to the smell of salted cod and minced Scotch bonnet sizzling in a cast-iron skillet, the hot oil hisses as the first spoonful of batter drops. Skip the eggs and milk; a proper yard-style fritter relies on a frugal flour-and-water batter, beaten vigorously to develop the gluten. That intentional overworking is the secret to a flitta that is crisp on the outside and chewy on the inside. Drain them on a paper towel and eat them while they still burn your fingers.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 lb dried salted cod
rinsed under cold water

1 1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1 tsp baking powder

1 1/4 cup water
cold

3 med	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	1 med	Roma tomato <i>seeded and finely diced</i>
1 small	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/4 cup	red bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>
1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>stemmed seeded and finely minced</i>	1 tsp	fresh thyme <i>leaves stripped from stems</i>
2 small clove	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		1 1/2 cup	vegetable oil

PREPARATION

- **Wash your hands thoroughly after handling the Scotch bonnet.**

The oils from the pepper will linger on your skin and burn if you touch your eyes.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the saltfish twice to draw out the heavy cure.**

Place the rinsed cod in a medium pot, cover with two inches of cold water, and bring to a rolling boil for 15 minutes. Drain, cover with fresh cold water, and boil for another 10 minutes. Taste a tiny shred—it should taste pleasantly salty, like bacon, but not overpowering.

- 2. Meticulously shred the cooled fish into fine flakes.**

Rinse the drained fish under cold running water until cool enough to handle.

Using your fingers, flake the flesh, discarding any hidden pin bones or tough skin.

- 3. Toss the flaked fish and aromatics with the dry ingredients.**

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and black pepper. Add the flaked saltfish, scallions, onion, Scotch bonnet, garlic, tomato, bell pepper, and thyme, tossing to coat everything in flour and prevent clumping.

1. Hydrate the batter and beat it vigorously to develop the gluten.

Gradually pour in 1 cup of the cold water, stirring with a wooden spoon. Add the remaining water if it's too dry; it should resemble a thick, chunky pancake batter. Do not be gentle—beat the batter hard for about a minute to guarantee that authentic, satisfyingly chewy interior.

2. Shallow-fry the fritters in hot oil until deeply golden.

Heat the oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Drop tablespoon-sized dollops into the pan, using the back of the spoon to slightly flatten each mound. Fry in uncrowded batches for 3 to 4 minutes per side, then drain on paper towels and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Finding the right fish and heat.**

If you cannot find salted cod at the fish counter or international aisle, salted pollock is a perfect authentic substitute. If Scotch bonnets are unavailable, a habanero pepper provides the exact same fruity, floral heat.



Yard-Style Sautéed Liver and Onions

Liver usually gets a bad rap in America—often cooked to a gray, rubbery death—but Saturday morning in Kingston doesn't start with pancakes. The trick to keeping the meat tender is a sequence of non-negotiable operations: peel away the membrane, wash the metallic funk off with a hit of vinegar, and sear it fast and hard in a cast-iron skillet; folded into a bubbling pan of caramelized onions, allspice, thyme, and the gentle, fruity heat of a Scotch bonnet pepper, the dish finishes as the onions collapse. Have a slice of hardy bread ready for the pan drippings.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	calf or beef liver <i>partially frozen for easier slicing</i>	3 med	scallions <i>crushed with the side of a knife and chopped</i>
2 tbsp	distilled white vinegar	4 small	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
1 tsp	all-purpose seasoning	1/2 cup	mixed bell peppers <i>sliced into thin strips</i>
1 tsp	garlic powder	4 small	fresh thyme sprigs
1/2 tsp	black pepper	5 small	whole allspice berries <i>lightly crushed</i>
1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole for mild flavor, or finely minced with seeds removed for heat</i>
1 tbsp	browning sauce	2 tbsp	ketchup
1 tbsp	soy sauce	1/2 cup	warm water
1 tsp	Worcestershire sauce		
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil		
1 large	yellow onion <i>halved and thickly sliced into half-moons</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Remove the membrane.**

Lay the partially frozen liver flat on your cutting board. Slide a paring knife under the sheer, silvery membrane on the outer surface to loosen an edge, gently peel it away entirely, and discard it to prevent the meat from curling and toughening.

- **Slice the liver.**

Cut the cleaned liver into thin, uniform strips about a quarter-inch thick.

- **Administer the vinegar wash.**

Place the sliced liver in a bowl, cover with cold water, and add the white vinegar. Agitate gently with your hands for 30 seconds to draw out the blood and neutralize the gamey odor, then drain immediately and pat thoroughly dry with paper towels.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Marinate the liver.**

In a bowl, toss the dried liver with the all-purpose seasoning, garlic powder, black pepper, salt, browning, soy sauce, and Worcestershire sauce until every piece is coated in a dark, rich gloss. Let it sit at room temperature for exactly 15 minutes—any longer and the salt will draw out too much moisture.

2. **Execute a high-heat sear.**

Place a large, heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat and add the oil.

When it begins to lightly smoke, add the liver strips in batches to avoid crowding the pan. Sear undisturbed for 1.5 to 2 minutes to develop a crust, flip, and sear for 1 minute on the other side. The liver should be browned but slightly pink in the center. Remove to a plate.

3. **Build the aromatics.**

Reduce the heat to medium. Into the same skillet, add the yellow onion, scallions, garlic, bell peppers, thyme, allspice, and the Scotch bonnet. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until the onions soften, caramelize, and scrape up the savory browned bits from the pan.

4. **Form the yard-style gravy.**

Stir the ketchup into the softened vegetables, then pour in the warm water. Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer and let it thicken slightly into a rich, mahogany-colored gravy, about 3 minutes.

5. **Combine and gently steam.**

Return the liver and any resting juices to the skillet, folding everything together to coat the meat in the sauce. Cover the pan, turn the heat to low, and let it steam for no more than 2 minutes. Discard the thyme stems and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Browning sauce alternative.**

If you can't find commercial browning sauce, substitute by heavily caramelizing 1 tablespoon of brown sugar in the hot oil before adding the liver, or mix 1 tablespoon of dark soy sauce with a half teaspoon of molasses.

- **Managing the heat.**

If Scotch bonnet peppers are unavailable, a habanero is a perfect genetic substitute. If you are cooking for a crowd that fears the fire, leave the pepper completely whole during the simmer; you'll get the floral flavor without the capsaicin bomb.



Hurricane-Season Bully Beef

The trapezoidal tin with the metal twist-key is the rainy day fallback, the hurricane bunker ration, and the undisputed king of the lazy Jamaican Saturday morning. Canned corned beef, liberated from its tin and resurrected with a fiery blast of Scotch bonnet, fresh thyme, and the sweet, pragmatic genius of tomato ketchup. Peel back the lid, get a cast-iron skillet smoking, and wait until the fat hisses.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	coconut oil	1/2 med	green bell pepper <i>cored and diced</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	2 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>
2 med	scallions <i>chopped, white and green parts</i>	1/2 small	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>seeds and white membrane removed, finely minced</i>

1 med Roma tomato
diced

3 sprig fresh thyme
left whole on the stem

1/4 tsp black pepper
freshly ground

12 oz canned minced corned beef
*removed from tin and lightly broken
apart with a fork*

1 1/2 tbsp tomato ketchup

PREPARATION

- **Respect the tin.**

Make sure you are buying canned minced corned beef (like Grace or Libby's), not deli-sliced meat or corned beef hash. Open it carefully using the attached metal key. Because the meat is fully cooked and heavily cured, do not add any extra salt to this dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the aromatic base.**

Heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the diced onion, scallions, green bell pepper, and minced Scotch bonnet pepper. Sauté for about 3 to 4 minutes, until the onions are translucent and the kitchen smells incredible.

- 2. Build the second layer of flavor.**

Stir in the minced garlic, diced tomato, fresh thyme sprigs, and black pepper. Cook for another 2 to 3 minutes until the tomatoes begin to soften and break down, releasing their juices into the pan.

- 3. Introduce the beef.**

Add the broken-up corned beef to the skillet. Use a wooden spoon to gently fold it into the vegetable mixture. Break up any excessively large chunks, but take care not to mash it into a paste—you want some texture.

1. Bind it with the grandmother's secret.

Stir in the ketchup. Reduce the heat to medium-low and let the mixture simmer for just 3 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. You only want to heat the beef through so it absorbs the thyme and pepper. Do not overcook, or the beef's fat will melt out completely and turn the meat stringy and tough.

2. Discard the thyme stems and serve immediately.

Remove from heat, pick out and discard the bare thyme stems. Serve hot alongside boiled green bananas, fried dumplings, or a thick slice of hard dough bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Stretch the pot.**

If extra cousins show up unannounced, do what the grandmothers did and stretch the meat. Stir in a half cup of frozen sweet corn or green peas when you add the tomatoes, or sauté shredded green cabbage with the onions before adding the beef.

● **Controlling the heat.**

Scotch bonnets pack a profound punch. If your family prefers a milder dish, do not chop the pepper. Drop the whole, uncut pepper into the pan while cooking, and remove it before serving to extract the fruity aroma without the fire.

● **The browning debate.**

Some older Jamaican cooks swear by adding a half teaspoon of Caribbean browning sauce alongside the ketchup to deepen the color to a rich mahogany. It is optional, but worth a try if you keep a bottle in the pantry.



Steamed Cabbage and Saltfish

Saturday morning, before the cartoons even finish, the pungent, sweet aroma of scotch bonnet pepper, fresh thyme, and onions hits hot oil in a standard 12-inch skillet, the flaked saltfish hisses. For a wedge of supermarket cabbage, the secret is in the steaming. Cabbage is mostly water; resist the urge to add liquid to the pot. Let it steam in its own juices for a vibrant, sweet, perfectly tender crunch, push it onto a plate next to a thick slice of hard bread, and eat it before the coffee cools.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 lb salted cod
boneless

3 tbsp vegetable oil

1 med yellow onion
finely chopped

3 small garlic
clove
minced

2 large	scallions <i>chopped</i>	5	whole allspice berries <i>lightly crushed</i>
1/2 large	bell pepper <i>julienned</i>	1/2 large	green cabbage <i>cored and thinly sliced</i>
1 med	roma tomato <i>diced</i>	1 large	carrot <i>julienned</i>
3 sprig	fresh thyme	1 tsp	all-purpose seasoning
1/2 med	scotch bonnet pepper <i>seeds removed and minced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>coarsely ground</i>
		2 tbsp	unsalted butter

PREPARATION

- **Soak the saltfish overnight.**

The night before you plan to cook, place the salted cod in a large bowl, cover it completely with cold water, and leave it in the refrigerator overnight to draw out the cure. If you forget this step, you can rapid-boil the fish for 15 minutes, drain, and repeat with fresh water.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the saltfish to remove excess salt and rehydrate the meat.**

Place the soaked fish in a saucepan with fresh water and boil over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes until tender. Drain, let cool slightly, and flake the fish into bite-sized pieces with a fork, discarding any stray bones. Taste a piece—it should have a pleasant, savory saltiness like a potato chip, but if overwhelmingly salty, boil for 10 more minutes in fresh water.

- 2. Build the aromatic flavor base.**

In a large skillet or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, scallions, bell pepper, tomato, fresh thyme, minced scotch bonnet, and crushed allspice berries. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until the onions are translucent and the oil is deeply fragrant.

1. Fry the flaked saltfish to firm up the texture.

Add the flaked saltfish to the skillet. Stir well to combine with the aromatics and cook for another 3 minutes. This slight dehydration allows the fish to firm up and absorb the flavors of the garlic and pepper.

2. Dry-steam the cabbage in its own natural juices.

Pile the thinly sliced cabbage and grated carrots directly on top of the saltfish mixture. Sprinkle the all-purpose seasoning and black pepper over the cabbage, and place the butter on top. Do not add water. Immediately turn the heat down to medium-low and cover the skillet tightly with a lid.

3. Wilt, toss, and finish cooking.

Let the cabbage steam undisturbed for 5 minutes. Remove the lid—the cabbage will have shrunk and released its own moisture. Use tongs to thoroughly toss the cabbage with the saltfish and aromatics from the bottom of the pan. Cover again and cook for 3 to 5 minutes until tender but still retaining a slight crunch. Discard the thyme stems and serve hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Navigating the heat of a scotch bonnet pepper.**

The Scotch Bonnet is the soul of Jamaican heat. If you want the fruity flavor without the intense fire, drop a whole, uncut pepper into the pot to simmer, and remove it before serving, taking absolute care not to burst it.

● **Do not add water to the cabbage.**

Cabbage is over 90 percent water. Resist the urge to add liquid to the pot, which results in a soggy, grey mass. Letting it steam in its own moisture is the ultimate grandmother's secret.

● **Scotch bonnet substitutions.**

If you cannot find a scotch bonnet pepper in your local market, a habanero pepper is a botanically identical cousin that provides the exact same fruity, floral heat profile.



Sautéed Canned Sardines and Tomatoes

Pop a pull-tab tin of sardines and drain it into a hot Saturday morning skillet, using the oil straight from the tin to fry the aromatics, building a fragrant base of half a Scotch bonnet, scallion, and thyme as the oil hisses. Crucially, a final splash of vinegar is used to 'cut the rawness,' neutralizing any overly fishy notes and brightening the pan. Scoop it piping hot over hard dough bread or heavy water crackers.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz canned sardines in oil

1/2 med yellow onion
finely chopped

2 small garlic cloves
minced

1 med Roma tomato
diced

1 med	scallion <i>finely chopped</i>	2 small	fresh thyme sprigs
1/2 small	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>seeds removed and finely minced</i>	1/4 tsp	black pepper
		1 tsp	white vinegar

PREPARATION

- **Drain the tin oil into the skillet.**

Open the tins of sardines and carefully pour the packing oil directly into a medium frying pan to serve as the highly flavorful fat base for the dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the aromatic vegetables.**

Place the skillet with the sardine oil over medium heat, and once shimmering, add the chopped onion, minced garlic, scallion, diced tomato, Scotch bonnet pepper, and fresh thyme sprigs.

- 2. Build the flavor base.**

Cook the vegetable mixture for about 3 to 4 minutes until the onions soften and the tomatoes break down slightly to create a fragrant, chunky base, then stir in the black pepper.

- 3. Gently incorporate the sardines.**

Transfer the sardines into the skillet and use a fork to break the fish apart into large pieces, being careful not to over-stir so the delicate fish doesn't turn to mush.

- 4. Cut the rawness.**

After the fish has heated for about 2 minutes, sprinkle the white vinegar evenly over the mixture to neutralize the fishy flavor, simmer for one final minute, and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Leave the bones intact.**

Authentic Jamaican preparations leave the soft bones in the fish, which are completely edible and packed with calcium, though you can gently lift out the central spine if preferred.

- **Adjusting the heat.**

If you are sensitive to spice, drop a whole piece of the Scotch bonnet into the pan without cutting it to infuse the oil with its fruity flavor, removing it before eating.



Jamaican "Hard Food"

You don't eat a light breakfast on a Saturday; you cook 'hard food'—a steaming, heavy-duty pot of ground provisions built to fuel a long day. Fill a standard American stockpot with yellow yam and skin-on green bananas, respecting the starch, mastering the rolling boil, and knowing exactly when to drop the tightly pinched flour dumplings and dense cornmeal dumplings so they don't turn to rubber. Pair this canvas with a pan of ackee and saltfish, and get it on the table hot.

INGREDIENTS

10 cup water

1 tbsp sea salt

1 tbsp vegetable oil

2 cup all-purpose flour

1/3 cup fine yellow cornmeal

1/2 tsp salt

3/4 cup cold water

5 med completely green bananas
washed, hard top stems and bottom tips trimmed off

1 lb yellow yam
peeled and cut into 3-inch chunks

1 large white sweet potato
peeled and cut into 3-inch chunks

1/2 lb kabocha squash
peeled, seeded, and cut into 3-inch chunks

PREPARATION

- **Prevent the yellow yam from oxidizing while you work.**

Yellow yam turns brown rapidly when exposed to air. Once peeled and cut, submerge the chunks in a bowl of cold water mixed with a splash of fresh lemon juice or white vinegar until it's their turn to enter the pot.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring the water, sea salt, and vegetable oil to a vigorous, rolling boil in a large, heavy-bottomed stockpot.**

The oil is a classic grandmother's trick—it coats the water and prevents the sticky sap from the green bananas from leaving a stubborn black ring around the inside of your pot.

- 2. Whisk the flour, cornmeal, and salt together in a large bowl, then gradually mix in the cold water until a shaggy dough forms.**

Use your hands. You may not need all the water, so add it gradually and let tactile feel guide you. The cornmeal must be fine, not coarse polenta, to ensure the right rustic texture.

- 3. Gently knead the dough in the bowl for just three to four minutes until it forms a firm, smooth ball, then cover with a damp towel and let rest for ten minutes.**

Do not over-knead this. American all-purpose flour develops gluten quickly, and overworking the dough will leave you with unpleasantly rubbery, tough dumplings. The resting period allows the gluten strands to relax.

- 1. Pinch off golf-ball-sized pieces of dough, roll them into smooth spheres, flatten slightly into discs with a thumbprint in the center, and drop them into the boiling water.**

Give the pot a gentle stir so they don't stick to the bottom, and set a timer for 30 minutes. The dense dumplings require the longest cook time and must always go into the pot first.

- 2. When the dumpling timer reaches the fifteen-minute mark, carefully add the chunks of yellow yam and sweet potato to the boiling pot.**

If you prepped your yellow yam early, it should have been resting in acidulated water to prevent browning; drain it before adding it to the boil.

- 3. Score a single shallow line down the length of each unpeeled green banana and drop them, along with the squash, into the pot when ten minutes remain on the timer.**

Never peel a raw green banana unless you want sticky, oxidized sap ruining your hands. Boiling them in their scored skins allows the peel to slip off effortlessly later. Skim away any starchy white foam that rises to the surface.

- 4. At the end of the thirty minutes, ensure the dumplings are floating and the root vegetables slide off a pierced fork with no resistance, then remove everything to a platter.**

Let the darkened green bananas cool just enough to handle, then simply slip off and discard their skins. Serve the steaming hard food immediately alongside rich, saucy Jamaican proteins, using the dumplings to soak up the savory gravy.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The timing is a strict chronological sequence.**

The ingredients have vastly different structural densities. If placed in the pot simultaneously, the delicate squash will disintegrate into mush long before the flour dumplings are cooked through. Stick to the staggered timer.

- **Source the right ground provisions.**

Green bananas must be completely green with absolutely zero yellowing, or unwanted sugars will ruin the savory profile. Yellow yam can usually be found at local Latin or Asian markets, often labeled under its Spanish nomenclature, ñame.



The School Gate & Corner Shop

Handheld street foods, bakery items, and snacks capturing the nostalgia of a Jamaican childhood.

At the three-fifteen dismissal bell, a craving hits that drives kids onto the hot asphalt and straight to the corner shop, pockets jingling with just enough change for survival. A grease-stained paper bag holds molten beef laced with scotch bonnet, tucked into turmeric-tinted puff pastry, shoved directly into the yeasty embrace of coco bread. Then comes the burnt-sugar snap of coconut drops, the sharp bite of tin cheese against a spiced Easter bun, the snacks of a Jamaican childhood recreated here with clever shortcuts for any kitchen. The crust shatters on the pavement, the spice hits the back of the throat, and the walk home is perfect.





Jamaican Rock Buns

In Jamaica, nothing goes to waste. When families squeeze freshly grated coconut to make milk for Sunday's rice and peas, the fibrous leftover pulp—affectionately known as "coconut trash"—finds its way into these spiced, craggy buns. Despite the name, a proper rock bun isn't hard; it's rugged on the outside, with jagged, buttery edges that give way to a tender, steaming center laced with nutmeg and almond. It is an ingenious, zero-waste corner shop staple, cleverly adapted here for the American pantry with rehydrated shredded coconut to ensure that unmistakable, authentic texture.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	raisins or chopped glacé cherries	1/2 cup	unsalted butter <i>cold and cut into small cubes</i>
1 tbsp	warm water or Jamaican white rum	1/2 cup	dark brown sugar
2 cup	all-purpose flour	1 cup	unsweetened shredded coconut <i>tossed with 2 tbsp warm water to plump</i>
1 1/2 tsp	baking powder	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
1/2 tsp	ground nutmeg <i>freshly grated if possible</i>	1 tsp	vanilla extract
1/2 tsp	ground cinnamon	1/2 tsp	almond extract
1/4 tsp	salt	2 tbsp	whole milk or canned coconut milk

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Soak the raisins in the warm water or rum while you prepare the dough.**
This prevents the dried fruit from stealing moisture from the bake, ensuring the center of the bun stays tender.
- 2. Preheat the oven to 375°F and line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.**
- 3. Whisk the flour, baking powder, nutmeg, cinnamon, and salt together in a large bowl.**
- 4. Rub the cold butter cubes into the flour mixture using just the tips of your fingers until it resembles coarse, wet sand.**
Work quickly so the butter doesn't melt from the heat of your hands. Coating the flour in fat before adding any liquid is the absolute secret to a short, crumbly texture.
- 5. Stir the brown sugar, rehydrated coconut, and the drained raisins into the flour and butter mixture.**

1. **Whisk the beaten egg, vanilla, almond extract, and two tablespoons of milk in a small cup, then pour into the center of the dry ingredients.**
2. **Fold the wet ingredients into the dry with a fork, stopping the exact moment the flour disappears.**

The dough should be sticky, stiff, and somewhat heavy. If it feels too dry to hold together, add another tablespoon or two of milk. Do not knead it, or your buns will become actual rocks.
3. **Use two spoons to roughly push golf-ball-sized portions of dough onto the baking sheet, leaving a couple of inches between each.**

Do not roll them smooth. The dough must look craggy and jagged so the peaks can toast and crisp in the ambient heat of the oven.
4. **Bake in the center of the oven for 15 to 20 minutes.**

Pull them when the craggy tops are golden brown and the edges look delightfully toasted.
5. **Cool on the baking sheet for five minutes before transferring to a wire rack.**

Serve slightly warm, preferably with a cup of hot tea or a thick slice of sharp cheddar cheese.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Store leftover buns in an airtight container at room temperature for up to three days.**

You can quickly revive their fresh-from-the-oven texture with a ten-second zap in the microwave.



Old-School Spiced Tamarind Balls

Sold in brown paper bags at school gates and roadside parlors across the island after the three-thirty school bell, these treats rely on raw pods, granulated sugar, and the friction of your own hands. You suck the spiced fruit, the sour pulp sticks to your teeth, and you spit out the seeds like a seeded grape. We aren't boiling anything down, and we definitely aren't removing the seeds. Roll them tight, coat them twice, do not wipe your hands, and let a splash of overproof rum bite through the sugar as a pinch of salt sharpens the acid.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb fresh sour tamarind pods
shells and fibrous veins removed

1 1/2 cup Jamaican brown sugar
divided

1/2 cup granulated white sugar

1 small Scotch bonnet pepper
finely minced, seeds and membranes removed

1/2 tsp kosher salt

1 tsp Jamaican white overproof rum

PREPARATION

- **Procure food-safe disposable gloves.**

You are going to aggressively hand-knead raw Scotch bonnet pepper and incredibly sticky fruit pulp; bare hands are asking for trouble.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the tamarind pulp.**

Working over a large bowl, crack the brittle brown shells of the pods and peel them away, taking care to pull off and discard the stringy, fibrous veins running along the sides of the sticky fruit. Drop the peeled fruit directly into the bowl, leaving the hard seeds completely intact, and ensure no tiny fragments of shell remain.

- 2. Add the spice and spirit.**

Toss the minced Scotch bonnet pepper, kosher salt, and overproof rum into the bowl with the tamarind pulp.

- 3. Knead the sugar into the pulp by hand.**

Put on a pair of food-safe disposable gloves to protect your hands from the hot pepper and extreme stickiness. Add a half cup of the brown sugar and aggressively massage it directly into the fruit; as you work it, the sugar will dissolve into the acidic moisture of the tamarind to form a cohesive mass.

1. Form the dough.

Continue adding the remaining brown sugar in half-cup increments, kneading continuously until the mixture feels like a thick, moldable, slightly sticky dough. If a few seeds naturally fall out during this violent kneading process, simply discard them.

2. Roll and coat the candies.

Pour the granulated white sugar onto a wide, shallow plate. Pinch off a small piece of the tamarind dough—roughly the size of a large marble containing two or three seeds—and roll it firmly between your palms to form a neat ball, then drop it into the white sugar and roll until evenly coated.

3. Let the crust set.

Place the coated balls on a parchment-lined tray and let them sit at room temperature for an hour or two so the exterior sugar can crystallize into a dry crust. Store in an airtight container at room temperature.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Mind your teeth.**

The traditional way to eat these is to place the whole ball in your mouth, suck away the sweet and sour pulp, and discreetly spit out the clean seeds. Do not bite down hard.

● **Sourcing the tamarind.**

Look for fresh sour tamarind pods (often labeled "tamarindo") in the produce section of Mexican, Asian, or Caribbean markets. Do not substitute with jarred tamarind paste or sweet Thai tamarind.

● **Swapping the spice.**

If you can't find a fresh Scotch bonnet, substitute half of a habanero pepper, or a teaspoon of high-quality Caribbean pepper sauce.



Jamaican Peanut Drops

Outside the school gates of Jamaica, the Candy Lady held court with a glass-covered wooden box of neon sweets. But at the three o'clock school bell, the undisputed king was the peanut drop, or "pinda cake"—a rustic, chewy, crunchy mound of roasted nuts bound by caramelized sugar. Forget flat, glassy commercial brittles—this relies on molten dark brown sugar, warm cinnamon, and a massive hit of minced ginger root, the sticky mass scooped hot onto crumpled greaseproof paper. The sugar hardens to a glassy snap, the ginger hits the back of the throat, and the batch disappears before anyone even thinks about dinner.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	roasted unsalted peanuts	1 med	cinnamon stick
1 1/2 cup	dark brown sugar	1 tsp	pure vanilla extract
1 1/2 cup	water	1/4 tsp	ground nutmeg
2 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely grated</i>	1/4 tsp	kosher salt
		1 tbsp	neutral oil

PREPARATION

- **Grate the fresh ginger.**

A microplane or fine grater works best to extract maximum flavor and juice without leaving large fibrous chunks.

- **Pre-measure all ingredients.**

Once the sugar hits the danger zone of caramelization, you will not have time to look for the vanilla extract.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Prepare your landing zone before the sugar begins to boil.**

Sugar waits for no one. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper and lightly grease it with the neutral oil to prevent sticking.

- 2. Brew a highly concentrated, spicy ginger tea to form the aromatic base.**

In a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, combine the water, grated fresh ginger, cinnamon stick, and salt, bringing it to a rolling boil over medium-high heat for about three minutes.

- 3. Incorporate the roasted peanuts and dark brown sugar into the infused water.**

Remove and discard the cinnamon stick, then pour in the dark brown sugar, nutmeg, and roasted peanuts, stirring well until the sugar dissolves completely.

- 1. Boil the mixture continuously over medium heat to reduce the liquid.**
Leave it boiling for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring only occasionally as the water evaporates and the rapid, watery bubbles become larger and slower.
- 2. Lower the heat and stir constantly once the mixture thickens into a dark, bubbling syrup.**
Add the vanilla extract now. Do not walk away; as the liquid reduces to a bubbling, lava-like consistency, the sugar will easily burn at the bottom of the pot if left unattended.
- 3. Remove the pot from the heat immediately when the syrup becomes highly viscous and stretches like taffy.**
When almost no watery liquid remains and the dark syrup heavily coats the nuts, it's time to pull it.
- 4. Working rapidly, drop two-inch clusters of the sticky peanuts onto the greased parchment.**
Use a large spoon to scoop the mounds. Melted sugar hardens quickly, so move fast.
- 5. Allow the drops to sit undisturbed at room temperature for thirty minutes to crystallize and harden.**
As they cool, the caramelized sugar binds the peanuts into perfect, crunchy clusters. Peel them off the parchment once completely cooled.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace the imperfection.**
The aesthetic of Jamaican street food is inherently rustic. Don't stress over uniformity; the charm of the drop lies in its jagged, mountainous shape.
- **Respect the fresh ginger.**
Powdered ginger lacks the enzymatic sharpness required to offset the heavy syrup. The raw, spicy zing of fresh grated root is the non-negotiable soul of the dish.

- **Mind the viscosity.**

Dropping the mixture too early yields a puddle that won't set; cooking it too long results in bitter, burnt sugar. Rely on the physical resistance of the spoon and the heavy, slow bubbling to know exactly when to pull it.



"Pink on Top" Jamaican Grater Cake

At the three-thirty school bell, the Jamaican school gate floods with crumpled Jamaican dollars, women selling brilliant, sugar-bound treats designed to survive the Caribbean heat. Before supermarkets sanitized our snacks, Pink Pon Top set the standard, a chewy confection demanding fresh coconut run across a box grater, tumbling into a heavy pot. By boiling a smashed knob of ginger directly in the syrup and extracting it before adding the coconut, grandmothers impart a bright, spicy warmth. Grate the meat fine, wait until the sugar blisters, and do not skip the red food coloring, yielding a finish that tastes of scorched cane sugar and hot asphalt.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	unsweetened desiccated coconut	1/4 tsp	kosher salt
2 cup	granulated white sugar	1/2 tsp	almond essence or clear vanilla extract
1/2 cup	water	3 drop	red food coloring
1 small	fresh ginger root <i>peeled and smashed with the side of a knife</i>	1 tsp	neutral oil <i>for greasing the pan</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Grease an 8x8-inch baking dish lightly with neutral oil, or line it with parchment paper.**
This candy sets up quickly, so you need your pan ready to go before the sugar begins to crystallize.
- 2. Combine the sugar, water, and smashed ginger in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, stirring constantly until the sugar dissolves.**
Allow the mixture to come to a bubbling simmer and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, watching closely to ensure the sugar stays clear and does not brown.
- 3. Once the syrup forms large, thick, lazy bubbles and smells deeply of ginger, fish out the smashed root and discard it.**
You have captured its soul; you no longer need the body.
- 4. Reduce the heat to medium-low, add the desiccated coconut and salt, and stir vigorously.**
Cook for 3 to 5 minutes until all excess liquid evaporates, the mixture becomes highly sticky, and the coconut pulls away from the sides of the pot in a unified mass.

- 1. Remove the pot from the heat immediately, stir in the almond essence, and press two-thirds of the white mixture into an even layer in your prepared baking dish.**

Work quickly with the back of a spoon or spatula before the sugar matrix cools and hardens.

- 2. Add the red food coloring to the remaining one-third of the mixture in the pot, stirring vigorously until it takes on a uniform, vibrant pink hue.**

If the mixture has cooled too much to spread easily, add a teaspoon of hot water and place it over low heat for 30 seconds to loosen it up, then spread this pink layer evenly over the white base.

- 3. Let the pan sit at room temperature for 25 to 30 minutes to cool and harden.**

While it is still slightly warm and pliable, cut it into squares, then leave it to cool entirely until it is crusty on the outside and wonderfully chewy on the inside.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Seek out unsweetened desiccated coconut to avoid a cloying, sickly-sweet candy.** If you are forced to use standard sweetened American baking flakes, you must reduce the granulated sugar to 1 1/4 cups or the candy will fail to set. Pulse large flakes in a food processor a few times to mimic the fine texture of a traditional Jamaican box grater.
- **A pinch of natural beetroot powder is an excellent substitute for artificial dye.** Stir it into the final third of the coconut mixture to achieve the identical, earthy pink hue of the corner shop classic without altering the final flavor.



Flaky Plantain Tarts

Past the three-thirty school bell, heat pressing against the corner shop glass case, kids trade coins for warm half-moons of a sturdy, undeniably British-style shortcrust hiding a spiced, violently pink center. Don't fight the food coloring; it's a mandatory trigger for the memory. The real trick isn't the pastry—cold supermarket dough works fine—it's waiting until the plantain looks like a rotting compost casualty before you even think about boiling it. That mushy, black-skinned fruit delivers a jammy, complex sweetness instead of a dry, mouth-puckering mistake, ensuring the pastry shatters on the walk home, leaving flakes down a school uniform and sweet mash on the fingers.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	all-purpose flour	1 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 tbsp	granulated sugar	1 tsp	vanilla extract
1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 tsp	ground cinnamon
1/2 cup	unsalted butter <i>cubed and kept ice-cold</i>	1/4 tsp	freshly grated nutmeg
1/4 cup	vegetable shortening <i>cubed and kept ice-cold</i>	1 pinch	kosher salt
5 tbsp	ice-cold water	3 drops	red food coloring
2 large	very ripe plantains <i>tips removed and cut in half crosswise</i>	1/4 tsp	almond extract
1/3 cup	dark brown sugar	1 large	large egg <i>beaten with 1 tsp water</i>
		2 tbsp	granulated white sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Rub the cold butter and shortening into the flour, sugar, and salt until the mixture resembles coarse sand.**

Work quickly using your fingertips or a pastry cutter so the fats don't melt.

Leaving a few pea-sized pieces ensures a flaky crust.

- 2. Drizzle in the ice water one tablespoon at a time, tossing gently until the dough just holds together.**

Do not overwork it. Pat the dough into a thick disc, wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to relax the gluten.

- 3. Boil the halved plantains in their skins for about 10 minutes.**

They should be incredibly tender and starting to burst. Peel them as soon as they are cool enough to handle.

- 4. Mash the plantains while they are still steaming hot.**

Stir in the brown sugar, 1 tablespoon butter, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt, almond extract, and food coloring until it forms a lush, bright pink paste.

1. Let the filling cool completely to room temperature.

This is non-negotiable. If you place a hot plantain mash onto raw dough, the butter will melt and ruin the pastry's structure.

2. Roll out the chilled dough to an eighth-inch thickness and cut into four-inch circles.

Re-roll the scraps until all the dough is used. Preheat the oven to 375°F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

3. Spoon the cooled filling into the center of each circle, fold into a half-moon, and crimp the edges tightly with a fork.

Poke two small holes in the top of each tart with a knife to let steam escape during baking.

4. Brush the tarts with egg wash and sprinkle generously with granulated sugar.

This provides that iconic, shatteringly crisp bakery finish. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until golden brown, then cool on a wire rack.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Wait for the black skins.**

A yellow or green plantain retains tannins that leave an astringent, 'stainy' taste. The skins must be completely black and the fruit soft to the touch before you cook them.

● **The mandatory food coloring.**

Natural plantains oxidize to a dull grey-brown. The red food coloring adds no flavor, but it provides the essential visual nostalgia of a Jamaican bakery.



The "After School" Spiced Beef Patty

If you grew up anywhere near a Jamaican bakery, you know the unmatched joy of an after-school patty handed over in a greasy brown paper bag. For years, diaspora cooks have struggled to replicate that magic, churning out tough empanada dough and crumbly taco meat. But the old-school bakers knew the secrets: turmeric and curry in the crust, a splash of acid to keep the dough tender, and the ultimate grandmother's trick—a handful of breadcrumbs simmered into the beef to bind it into that signature, molten, fiercely savory core. This is how you bring the authentic taste of the corner shop home, without tearing your hair out on a Tuesday.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	ground beef	1 tbsp	browning sauce
2 tbsp	vegetable oil	1 tbsp	soy sauce
1 med	yellow onion <i>very finely minced</i>	1/2 cup	beef broth
4 med stalk	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 cup	plain fine breadcrumbs
3 med clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	3 1/2 cup	all purpose flour
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>	1 tbsp	granulated sugar
1 med	Scotch Bonnet pepper <i>seeds removed and finely minced</i>	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	fresh thyme leaves	1 tbsp	ground turmeric
1 tsp	ground pimento	1 tbsp	Jamaican curry powder
1 tsp	Jamaican curry powder	1/2 cup	unsalted butter <i>frozen solid and grated</i>
1 tsp	paprika	1/2 cup	vegetable shortening <i>frozen solid and cut into chunks</i>
1 tsp	garlic powder	3/4 cup	ice water
1 tsp	onion powder	1 tbsp	white vinegar
		1 large	egg <i>beaten with 1 tbsp water</i>

PREPARATION

- **Prep the filling ahead of time.**

The filling must be entirely cold before it touches the pastry dough, making it the perfect component to cook the night before. Hot meat will melt the cold fats in the dough and destroy your flaky crust.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Sauté the aromatics.**

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the minced onion, scallions, garlic, ginger, and the minced Scotch Bonnet. Sauté until the onions are soft and deeply fragrant, about 4 to 5 minutes.

2. **Spice and brown the beef.**

Increase the heat to medium-high and add the ground beef. Using a wooden spoon, break the beef down into the smallest crumbles possible. Stir in the fresh thyme, pimento, curry powder, paprika, garlic powder, and onion powder, cooking until the meat is fully browned and no pink remains.

3. **Build the color and umami.**

Stir in the browning sauce and soy sauce. Watch as the meat transforms into a rich, dark, appetizing brown, and let it cook for another 2 minutes to meld the flavors.

4. **Bind the filling with the corner shop texture trick.**

Sprinkle the breadcrumbs evenly over the meat mixture and pour in the beef broth. Stir constantly over medium-low heat. The breadcrumbs will absorb the broth and the seasoned beef fat, binding the loose meat crumbles into a cohesive, juicy, thick paste. Simmer for 3 to 5 minutes until the liquid is absorbed, then transfer to a container to cool completely.

5. **Process the dry pastry ingredients.**

In the bowl of a large food processor, combine the flour, sugar, salt, turmeric, and curry powder. Pulse a few times until the spices turn the flour a pale, even yellow.

6. **Cut in the freezing cold fat.**

Add the frozen, grated butter and the cold chunks of vegetable shortening. Pulse 6 to 8 times until the mixture looks like coarse sand with a few pea-sized chunks of fat remaining. These stubborn little chunks are what will melt in the oven and create the flaky layers.

1. Hydrate and chill the dough.

Mix the white vinegar into your ice-cold water. While pulsing the food processor, slowly drizzle the cold liquid down the feed tube. Stop pulsing the second the dough begins to clump together. Turn it out onto plastic wrap, knead gently 2 or 3 times to form a disc, wrap tightly, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

2. Roll and cut the pastry.

Preheat your oven to 375°F and line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Cut the chilled dough in half. On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out to about 1/8-inch thickness. Use a small bowl, about 6 inches wide, to cut out circles.

3. Fill and seal the patties.

Spoon about 2 to 3 tablespoons of the completely cooled beef filling onto one half of each dough circle. Dip your finger in water and run it lightly along the edge. Fold the dough over the meat to create a half-moon shape, then use the tines of a fork to crimp and seal the edges tightly, locking in the juices.

4. Bake to a golden shatter.

Place the sealed patties on the baking sheet and brush the tops lightly with the egg wash for a beautiful bakery sheen. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the pastry is puffed, golden brown, and you can see the flaky layers at the edges. Let them cool for at least 10 minutes before tearing in.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the fat content.**

You must use an 80/20 ground beef blend. Leaner meats will yield a dry, sad filling that entirely misses the mark of a proper corner shop patty.

● **The Habanero workaround.**

If your local market does not stock Scotch Bonnet peppers, a Habanero is its closest botanical cousin and the only acceptable substitute. Do not ruin the flavor profile with a jalapeño or serrano.

- **The absolute necessity of browning sauce.**

Browning sauce, usually found in the international aisle, is a burnt sugar reduction that provides the crucial dark color and slightly bitter molasses depth to the filling. Do not skip it, and do not substitute standard brown gravy.



Tin Boom & Pantry Suppers

Fast, highly seasoned weeknight meals leaning into the robust Jamaican pantry.

A tin of Grace mackerel waits for the weeknight hustle to grind you down. A bent can key twists the metal, the hot oil hisses, and a cook sizzles the fish with onions, thyme, and enough scotch bonnet to wake the dead, revealing the absolute miracles they can coax from a tin of mackerel or corned beef on a bleak Tuesday night. Twenty minutes changes everything.

Forget curated tasting menus; this is how real people eat when time is short but the demand for sharp scotch bonnet and rich coconut oil remains non-negotiable. From a blazing-quick saltfish cook-up to the legendary 'Tin Boom' hitting the pan with a garlic crackle, these meals are thrown together in a sputtering skillet. Here are the blueprints for turning a bare shelf into a fast weeknight dinner.





Tin Boom

Pop a tin of mackerel exactly fifteen minutes before dinner, letting the fish hit a heavy Dutch pot with a loud hiss as the onions blister. "Tin Boom" was the ultimate Jamaican struggle meal, and the secret is the oil: taking five minutes to sauté fresh thyme, a fiery Scotch bonnet, and alliums until they surrender their essential oils creates a flavor base so potent it transforms ordinary pantry fish into a deeply comforting stew that asks for nothing but a hot bowl of white rice. Put the rice on before you touch the tin.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp vegetable oil

1 med yellow onion
finely chopped

2 med scallions
chopped

3 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	15 oz	canned Jack Mackerel in tomato sauce
1/2 med	red bell pepper <i>chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
1/2 med	green bell pepper <i>chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	all-purpose seasoning
3 sprigs	fresh thyme	1/4 tsp	ground allspice
1/2 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>seeds removed and finely minced</i>	1 tsp	white vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Build the aromatic oil base.

Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat, then add the onion, scallions, garlic, bell peppers, thyme, and Scotch bonnet. Sauté for 3 to 5 minutes until the onions are translucent and the oil is highly fragrant—this is the crucial step that dictates the soul of the dish.

2. Flash out the tin.

Pour the mackerel and its tomato sauce directly into the skillet. Splash a couple tablespoons of water into the empty can, swirl it around to catch every last drop of the leftover sauce, and pour that into the pan as well.

3. Gently break down the fish.

Using a wooden spoon, gently split the large blocks of mackerel down the middle. Break them into bite-sized chunks, but do not stir aggressively; you want distinct pieces of fish, not a mashed soup.

4. Season and simmer down.

Fold in the black pepper, all-purpose seasoning, allspice, and vinegar. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and let it simmer for 5 minutes until the watery tomato sauce reduces into a rich, slightly thickened gravy.

5. Serve immediately.

Discard the thyme sprigs and serve hot, ideally spooned over plain white rice to catch all the deeply seasoned oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Managing the heat.**

If you want the signature flavor of the Scotch bonnet without the intense fire, drop the pepper into the oil whole instead of mincing it, and carefully remove it before serving.

- **Dealing with the bones.**

The soft, calcium-rich spine in the center of canned mackerel is entirely edible and traditionally left in the pot, but you can easily slide it out when splitting the fish if you prefer a smoother texture.



Jamaican Seasoned Rice

A heavy-bottomed Dutch pot hits the stove, needing just twenty minutes on a Tuesday to anchor the communal tradition of running a boat—where neighbors pool pantry scraps into a single, magnificent pot. Seasoned Rice runs on whatever protein survived the week, built around a tin of Grace corned beef or a tin of mackerel in tomato sauce, known fondly on the streets of Kingston as Tin Boom. Pop the tin, wait until the scotch bonnet blisters, and eat straight from the pot.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp coconut oil

1 med yellow onion
finely chopped

3 med scallions
chopped, white and green parts

4 med garlic
minced
clove

4 sprig	fresh thyme	19 oz	canned ackee <i>gently drained</i>
1 tsp	whole pimento berries <i>lightly crushed</i>	13.5 oz	full-fat coconut milk
1 whole	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole and unbruised</i>	1 1/2 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
1 1/2 cup	kabocha squash <i>peeled and diced into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	1 tsp	all-purpose seasoning
1/2 med	bell pepper <i>diced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
15 oz	canned mackerel in tomato sauce	2 cup	long-grain white rice <i>washed 4 to 5 times until water runs completely clear</i>
		1 tbsp	unsalted butter

PREPARATION

- **Wash the rice obsessively.**

Rinsing the rice four to five times until the water runs crystal clear removes the surface starch; this is the non-negotiable grandmother's secret to preventing clumpy, mushy rice.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the coconut oil over medium heat in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven.**
Add the chopped onion, scallions, garlic, crushed pimento berries, and thyme sprigs, sautéing for about 3 minutes until the onions are translucent and the aromatics release their essential oils.
- 2. Fold in the diced squash, bell pepper, and the entire can of mackerel along with its tomato sauce.**
Gently break the fish into large, bite-sized chunks with a wooden spoon, embracing the soft, completely edible bones.
- 3. Pour in the coconut milk and broth, then season the liquid.**
Add the all-purpose seasoning, black pepper, and carefully drop in the whole Scotch bonnet pepper, bringing the entire pot to a rolling simmer.

1. Taste the boiling broth to ensure it is aggressively seasoned.

This is a crucial rule of Jamaican cooking—the broth must taste exactly how you want the finished rice to taste, so add a pinch of salt or bouillon now if it needs more depth.

2. Add the thoroughly washed rice and butter, gently layering the ackee on top if using.

Ensure the liquid sits about an inch above the rice, then immediately drop the heat to your stove's lowest possible setting and press a tight-fitting lid covered in foil over the pot to trap the steam.

3. Leave the pot entirely undisturbed for 25 to 30 minutes.

Do not lift the lid and absolutely do not stir the rice, as doing so will break the grains, release the starch, and ruin the required fluffy, shelly texture.

4. Remove from heat and allow the pot to rest covered for 10 minutes.

Take off the lid, pluck out the thyme twigs and the whole Scotch bonnet, and gently fluff the rice with a fork before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Substitute pumpkin carefully.**

American carving pumpkins are too watery and lack flavor. Kabocha squash is the perfect geographical hack for authentic Jamaican Calabaza pumpkin, matching its dense, sweet, starchy texture exactly.

● **Manage the heat by keeping the pepper intact.**

Keeping the Scotch bonnet pepper whole and unbruised is a brilliant culinary trick that infuses the rice with a tropical, fruity aroma without leaking punishing capsaicin into the dish—just be careful not to pop it while fluffing.



Red Peas" & Rice

This is the undisputed king of the Jamaican Sunday table, adapted for a Tuesday night in Ohio. Yard-style cooking is inherently pragmatic, and native cooks have long embraced the 'tin boom'—using canned kidney beans and their starchy liquid to build a lightning-fast, deeply savory coconut broth. The secret here is respecting the architecture of the pot. Let the aromatics simmer in the fat of the coconut milk before the rice goes in, and let the Scotch bonnet pepper swim whole. It's there for a fragrant, tropical aroma, not a fiery ambush. Build the flavor, seal the pot, and absolutely do not peek.

INGREDIENTS

15 1/2 oz	dark red kidney beans with liquid	5 sprigs	fresh thyme
13 1/2 oz	full-fat coconut milk	3 med	garlic <i>crushed</i>
2 cup	long-grain white rice	1 tsp	whole pimento berries
1 1/2 cup	water or low-sodium chicken broth	1 whole	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>meticulously inspected for any tears or cracks</i>
3 med	scallions <i>trimmed and smashed with the side of a knife</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
		1 tbsp	butter or coconut oil

PREPARATION

- **Place the rice in a fine-mesh strainer and rinse it under cold water until the water runs completely clear.**

This strips away the surface starches and is your absolute best defense against a gummy, sticky pot.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. In a heavy-bottomed pot, combine the kidney beans and their liquid, coconut milk, water, scallions, garlic, thyme, pimento berries, salt, and butter.**

Do not drain those beans; that starchy canning liquid is absolute gold, providing both the necessary color and a depth of authentic flavor.

- 2. Carefully drop the whole Scotch bonnet pepper into the pot, bring to a rolling boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 15 minutes.**

This pre-simmer is the grandmother's secret, forcing the herbs and spices to release their essential oils directly into the coconut fat before the rice is introduced.

- 1. Stir the washed rice into the simmering broth and bring the heat back up to medium.**

Gently stir just once to ensure the rice is evenly distributed, and wait until you see the liquid bubbling enthusiastically around the edges.

- 2. Place a sheet of aluminum foil tightly over the rim of the pot and press the heavy lid down firmly on top of it to create a seal.**

The foil creates an impermeable gasket, trapping the pressurized steam generated by the coconut milk to cook the rice perfectly and evenly.

- 3. Reduce the heat to its absolute lowest setting and leave the pot completely undisturbed for 30 minutes.**

Do not peek; releasing the steam will instantly ruin the thermodynamics of the cooking process.

- 4. Turn off the heat and let the pot sit on the warm stove for another 10 minutes to allow the starches to set.**

- 5. Remove the lid and foil, carefully extract the Scotch bonnet pepper immediately, and fluff the rice gently with a fork.**

Discard the pepper before it can accidentally burst, pick out the woody thyme stems, and serve the perfectly separated, earthy pink grains.



Jamaican-Style Tuna and Macaroni

Nobody is slow-braising an oxtail at six o'clock on a Tuesday; weeknight survival demands a metal can opener piercing a five-ounce tin of tuna. This is pure resourcefulness—taking humble canned tuna and elbows and frying them down into a fiercely aromatic supper, built by sweating a sharp aromatic base of scallions, fresh thyme, and garlic, then caramelizing a hit of tomato paste to banish any lingering metallic notes from the fish. Boil a box of elbow macaroni, fold in a chopped Scotch bonnet, and feed the house.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz elbow macaroni **1 tbsp** salt

2 tbsp	vegetable oil	1/2 cup	mixed bell peppers <i>diced</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tbsp	tomato paste
3 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	10 oz	chunk light tuna in water <i>lightly drained, reserving 2 tablespoons of the liquid</i>
2 stalks	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
4 sprigs	fresh thyme <i>left whole on the stem</i>	1/4 tsp	seasoned salt
1/4 small	scotch bonnet or habanero pepper <i>minced</i>	1 tbsp	butter

PREPARATION

- **Gather and chop all aromatics before starting the stove.**

This is a fast, 20-minute weeknight cook-up. Having your onions, scallions, garlic, and peppers fully prepped before you drop the pasta into boiling water ensures everything hits the hot skillet at the correct time.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the macaroni until just al dente.**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add the elbow macaroni and cook according to package directions, taking care not to overcook it since it will finish in the hot skillet. Drain and set aside.

- 2. Build the aromatic base by sweating the natural seasonings.**

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm the vegetable oil. Add the diced onion, minced garlic, scallions, fresh thyme sprigs, and bell peppers. Sauté gently for 3 to 4 minutes until the onions are translucent. This profoundly fragrant base is the backbone of the dish—do not rush it.

1. Caramelize the tomato paste to counteract the canned flavor of the fish.

Push the vegetables to the edges of the pan. Drop the tomato paste directly into the center of the hot skillet. Let it sizzle, pressing it firmly into the pan for about 45 seconds until it darkens slightly and releases its natural sugars, then stir it into the vegetables.

2. Fry down the tuna in the seasoned oil.

Add the tuna to the skillet along with the reserved liquid from the can. Use a fork or spatula to break the tuna into chunky flakes, avoiding mashing it into a paste. Sprinkle in the black pepper, seasoned salt, and the minced pepper.

3. Simmer until the moisture evaporates and the flavors marry.

Stir everything gently, reduce the heat to medium-low, and let the tuna simmer for 4 to 5 minutes. This fry-down phase forces the tuna to absorb the aromatics and shed its metallic, canned flavor.

4. Toss the tuna with the macaroni and finish with butter.

Add the drained macaroni directly into the skillet. Toss thoroughly until the pasta is deeply coated in the savory, spiced oil and evenly distributed with the fish. Stir in the butter for a rich, glossy finish, remove the bare thyme stems, and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Control the heat without losing the floral flavor of the pepper.**

Scotch bonnets deliver exceptional, fruity notes alongside their intense heat. If cooking for a household sensitive to spice, omit the minced pepper. Instead, drop a whole, uncut pepper into the skillet while the tuna simmers. The essential oils will beautifully perfume the dish without releasing the fiery capsaicin. Just remember to remove it before serving.



Canned Ackee & Jerk Sausage

"Tin boom" is the Jamaican art of survival and swagger—taking canned goods and aggressive aromatics and transforming them into a Sunday-worthy feast on a random Tuesday night. While canned mackerel is the original template, pairing delicate, creamy canned ackee with spicy jerk sausage is a beloved, nostalgic weeknight staple for the diaspora. The only secret your grandmother would impart here is respect: once that delicate fruit hits the pan, put down the spoon and fold it gently, or you'll turn a masterpiece into mush.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp vegetable oil

14 oz jerk sausage
sliced into 1/2-inch rounds

19 oz canned ackee
drained and gently rinsed with hot water

1 med yellow onion
finely chopped

2 med scallions
chopped

1/2 med red bell pepper
diced

1/2 med green bell pepper
diced

3 med garlic cloves
minced

1 med scotch bonnet pepper
left whole

1 tsp fresh thyme
leaves stripped from stems

1/4 tsp allspice berries
crushed

1/2 tsp black pepper

PREPARATION

- **Treat the canned ackee with extreme care.**

Drain the can gently in a colander and rinse it with hot water to remove the excess sodium and canning liquid. Handle it like fragile glass so it retains its beautiful shape.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown the sausage over medium-high heat until the spicy oils release into the pan.

Place a large, wide skillet over medium-high heat with the oil. Toss in the sliced sausage and cook for about 5 to 7 minutes. Let the fat render out—this spicy, seasoned oil is the foundation that will coat and flavor your aromatics.

2. Bloom the onions and peppers in the rendered fat.

Drop the heat to medium and add the chopped onion, scallions, and bell peppers to the skillet. Sauté for about 3 minutes until the onions soften and begin to turn translucent.

3. Add the high-note aromatics and sauté for exactly one minute.

Stir in the minced garlic, fresh thyme, crushed allspice, and the whole scotch bonnet pepper. You want to smell the garlic blooming immediately, but do not let it brown or turn bitter.

1. Add the ackee and fold it gently just once or twice.

Reduce the heat to medium-low, add the drained ackee, and sprinkle evenly with black pepper. Using a wide spatula, gently scoop from the bottom and fold the mixture over itself. Do not stir, or the delicate arils will disintegrate.

2. Cover and simmer to let the flavors marry.

Put a lid on the skillet and let it simmer for 3 to 5 minutes to warm the fully-cooked ackee through and let the jerk, thyme, and allium vapors permeate the fruit. Remove the scotch bonnet before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Navigating the jerk sausage.**

If you can't find pre-made jerk sausage at your local market, a brilliant weeknight hack is to buy raw Italian sausages, remove them from their casings or slice them, and toss with a tablespoon of wet Jamaican jerk paste before frying.

● **Controlling the scotch bonnet heat.**

Tossing the pepper in whole imparts its unmistakable, fruity-floral aroma into the oil without blowing your head off. If you want the aggressive heat, mince half of it and discard the seeds, but remember to fish the whole pepper out if you left it intact so nobody gets an unwelcome surprise.

● **The mandatory cooked food.**

In Jamaica, ackee requires a starchy vehicle to sop up that magnificent seasoned oil. If you can't source traditional yellow yam or boil green bananas, thick slices of crusty Italian loaf, boiled white rice, or simple boiled flour dumplings work perfectly.



Saltfish and Butter Beans Cook-Up

Boil the salted cod twice to strip the brine, working the stiff fish into flakes with a wooden spoon before cracking a tin of butter beans against the counter. To build this fast pantry cook-up, the secret is simple: don't drown the fish in water to make a gravy—use a generous hand with the oil, let the fresh tomatoes break down, and allow the creamy beans to soak up that rich, spiced slick. Spoon the whole heavy mess over steaming white rice.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	boneless and skinless salted cod <i>rinsed of surface salt</i>	1/2 med	red bell pepper <i>cut into thin strips</i>
1/4 cup	vegetable or coconut oil	1 med	ripe tomato <i>diced</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	1 med	Scotch Bonnet or Habanero pepper <i>left whole</i>
3 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	4 sprig	fresh thyme
3 med	scallions <i>chopped</i>	30 oz	canned large lima beans <i>drained and gently rinsed</i>
1/2 med	green bell pepper <i>cut into thin strips</i>	2 tbsp	tomato ketchup
		1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

PREPARATION

- **Source the diaspora pantry staples.**

Check the international aisle, the Hispanic aisle (where it will be labeled Bacalao), or the seafood counter of any standard supermarket for the salted cod.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the salted cod to remove excess sodium.**

Place the rinsed fish in a pot, cover with cold water, and bring to a rolling boil over high heat. Reduce to a simmer for 15 minutes, drain, and taste a small flake. It should taste well-seasoned but not painfully salty; if it makes you pucker, boil it again in fresh cold water for 10 more minutes.

- 2. Flake the cooled fish, feeling carefully for hidden bones.**

Even so-called boneless saltfish hides sharp pinbones. Use your fingers to shred the fish into bite-sized chunks, discarding any bones or tough bits of skin.

1. Build the aromatic base in a wide skillet.

Heat the oil over medium heat. Add the sliced onion, minced garlic, scallions, and bell peppers, sautéing for about 4 minutes until soft. Stir in the diced tomato, whole Scotch Bonnet, and fresh thyme sprigs, cooking until the tomatoes break down and release their juices.

2. Fry the flaked saltfish in the seasoned oil.

Add the fish to the skillet, turn the heat up slightly to medium-high, and fry for 3 to 5 minutes. The fish should absorb the aromatic oil and take on a slightly golden hue to firm up its texture.

3. Gently fold in the beans and simmer to form a glaze.

Reduce heat to medium-low. Add the drained beans, ketchup, and black pepper, folding carefully so the delicate beans don't turn to mush. Cover and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes. Do not add water; the oil, tomato juice, and ketchup will naturally create a rich, clinging gravy. Discard the thyme stems and whole pepper before serving hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Buy large lima beans.**

In American supermarkets, the exact botanical equivalent to Jamaican canned butter beans is labeled as large lima beans. Do not stress trying to find a can that says 'butter beans'.

● **Respect the Scotch Bonnet.**

Dropping the pepper in whole gives the dish its signature fruity, floral aroma without blowing out your palate. Just be incredibly careful not to pierce the skin with your spoon while stirring.



Brown Stew Chicken

Cheap bone-in cuts meet the smoke and caramel of burning brown sugar in a heavy Dutch oven. Drag the hacked chicken thighs through the blistering syrup with a wooden spoon, hitting the pan with a heavy pour from a bottle of browning sauce before tossing in fresh thyme sprigs, scallion, and the native bite of pimento. This post-colonial pantry supper extracts profound, fall-off-the-bone depth from exactly what you already have, so spoon that dark gravy over a mound of rice and let it soak.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	bone-in chicken thighs and drumsticks <i>skin removed</i>	1 med	lime <i>halved</i>
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1 med	yellow onion <i>chopped</i>	1 tsp	smoked paprika
4 med	scallions <i>chopped</i>	1 tbsp	Jamaican browning sauce <i>optional, if skipping brown sugar</i>
4 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	2 tbsp	neutral oil
1 small	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	dark brown sugar <i>optional, if skipping browning sauce</i>
1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole</i>	1 med	carrot <i>sliced into rounds</i>
6 med	fresh thyme sprigs <i>left whole</i>	1/2 med	red bell pepper <i>chopped</i>
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 med	green bell pepper <i>chopped</i>
1 tsp	black pepper	1 1/2 cup	chicken broth
1 tsp	ground allspice	2 tbsp	tomato ketchup

PREPARATION

- **Wash the poultry with lime.**

Place the chicken pieces in a large bowl, squeeze the lime juice over the meat, and rub the rinds against the pieces to remove the raw scent. Rinse briefly with cool water and pat dry with paper towels.

- **Massage the aromatic marinade into the meat.**

Add the onion, scallions, garlic, ginger, thyme, whole Scotch bonnet, salt, pepper, allspice, and paprika to the chicken. (Add commercial browning sauce now if skipping the burnt sugar). Rub aggressively, then cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or ideally overnight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Separate the chicken from its marinade.**

Remove the chicken from the fridge 20 minutes before cooking. Scrape the chunky bits of marinade off the meat and reserve them in the bowl; if they hit the hot oil now, they will burn.

1. Burn the sugar to create the caramel base.

Heat the oil in a heavy Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Sprinkle in the brown sugar without stirring. Watch closely until it bubbles and turns a dark, frothy amber-black. (Skip this if you used bottled browning sauce and simply add the chicken to hot oil).

2. Sear the chicken in the molten sugar.

The moment the sugar looks like dark caramel and smokes slightly, carefully add the chicken pieces. Brown undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes per side to form a deep crust, then remove to a plate.

3. Sauté the reserved aromatics and vegetables.

Reduce heat to medium. Add the reserved chunky marinade, carrots, and bell peppers to the pot. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until softened, lifting the browned bits from the bottom.

4. Braise low and slow.

Return the chicken and any resting juices to the pot. Pour in the chicken broth and ketchup, stirring gently. Bring to a boil, then immediately reduce the heat to low, cover tightly, and simmer for 35 to 45 minutes until the chicken falls off the bone.

5. Reduce the gravy.

Remove the lid, discard the thyme stems, and carefully remove the whole Scotch bonnet pepper. Simmer uncovered for 5 to 10 minutes until the glossy gravy naturally reduces and coats the back of a spoon.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Embrace the browning sauce shortcut.**

Burning sugar is the traditional grandmother's secret, but keeping a bottle of commercial browning sauce in the pantry is universally authentic for busy weeknights.

● **Leave the pepper whole.**

Dropping a whole Scotch bonnet (or habanero) into the pot extracts its incredible floral flavor without unleashing brutal heat, keeping the dish family-friendly.

- **Trust the reduction over flour.**

Never use flour to thicken a brown stew. It clouds the deep color. Patience and a splash of ketchup will naturally yield a perfectly glossy, rich sauce.



"Flash-Out" Curry Canned Salmon

A tin of pink salmon isn't a desperate compromise for a six o'clock dinner; in Jamaica, the working-class mantra 'tun han' an' mek fashion' historically meant flashing out a cheap tin of mackerel. In the diaspora, the salmon gets the treatment. The non-negotiable secret here isn't a rare ingredient; it is a technique known as 'burning the curry.' Blooming the heavy-duty spice blend in hot oil strips away its raw edge, leaving a darkened, toasted earthiness as the curry powder blisters. Drop the fish into a hot skillet, and get it over rice.

INGREDIENTS

29 1/2 oz	canned pink or red salmon <i>drained and gently broken into large chunks</i>	2 med	scallions <i>chopped</i>
1 tsp	white vinegar	3 small	fresh thyme
3 tbsp	vegetable oil	1/2 med	habanero pepper <i>seeded and minced</i>
2 tbsp	Jamaican curry powder	1 med	plum tomato <i>diced</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	1/4 cup	water
3 med	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
		1 pinch	salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the freshness.

Place the chunks of drained salmon on a plate and sprinkle with the vinegar to neutralize the overly fishy scent.

2. Sauté the aromatics.

Heat the oil in a wide skillet over medium heat, then add the onion, garlic, scallions, and habanero, cooking for 2 to 3 minutes until softened.

3. Burn the curry.

Push the vegetables to the edge of the pan and sprinkle the curry powder directly into the hot oil in the center, stirring constantly for 2 minutes until the color deepens to a rich golden-brown.

4. Deglaze and build the gravy.

Stir in the diced tomato, fresh thyme, and black pepper, then pour in the water and let the mixture simmer gently for 3 minutes.

5. Flash out the salmon.

Gently fold the salmon chunks into the skillet, spooning the curry gravy over the top of the fish, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 5 minutes.

1. Serve immediately.

Remove the thyme twigs and spoon the curried fish and rich gravy generously over hot white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use the right curry.**

Authentic Jamaican curry powder is heavily reliant on turmeric, fenugreek, and allspice. Betapac brand is the gold standard if you can find it in the international aisle.

- **The cart-wheel dumpling.**

The ultimate nostalgic side dish is a boiled dumpling. Knead all-purpose flour, a pinch of salt, and cold water until firm, roll into flattened discs with a thumb indent, and boil them to soak up the gravy.



The Healing Pot

Dense, restorative soups and traditional bush teas rooted in Jamaican heritage.

A heavy Dutch pot sits on the back burner. The broth simmers into a visceral, bone-deep restoration. When you're sick, broken down, or simply exhausted by the world, you don't need a cold-pressed juice. You need the starchy, rib-sticking density of a scalding red pea soup, or the sharp bitterness of steeped cerasee vines.

These are the cures my Aunt Evie steeped in a tin cup, adapted here for the fluorescent aisles of the local American supermarket. The substitutions are practical. With a knot of supermarket thyme, the ginger still bites, and the fish tea still revives the dead. Drink it while it is scalding, and let the flour rubbed into tight spinners sink straight to the bottom of the bowl.





Chicken Soup with Quick Spinners

Pinch the dough, roll flour and water between the palms, and drop the spinners into a heavy stockpot simmering with fresh thyme sprigs. In Jamaica, this is Saturday Soup—the working-class workhorse that stretches the week's leftover ground provisions into a communal feast. The secret isn't hours of toiling over a delicate stock. It is mashing the softened squash directly into the broth, boiling a whole Scotch bonnet pepper for fragrance, and tearing open a packet of Grace Cock Flavored Soup Mix. Keep the heat low, wait for the dumplings to float, and ladle it steaming.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	bone-in skinless chicken thighs	4 med	scallions <i>smashed with the back of a knife</i>
2 tbsp	white vinegar	8 sprig	fresh thyme
10 cup	water	8 med	whole allspice berries
1 lb	butternut squash <i>peeled and cubed</i>	3 small clove	garlic <i>crushed</i>
1 med	yellow yam or sweet potato <i>peeled and cubed</i>	1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole and unburst</i>
1 med	chayote <i>peeled, cored, and cubed</i>	1 small	Grace Cock Flavored Soup Mix packet
2 med	carrots <i>chopped</i>	1 cup	all-purpose flour
1 large	russet potato <i>peeled and cubed</i>	1/4 tsp	salt
1 large	fresh corn on the cob <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch rounds</i>	1/3 cup	cold water

PREPARATION

- **Wash the chicken.**

Traditional Jamaican cooking demands washing poultry. Rinse the chicken thighs in cold water and the white vinegar, then rinse clean again with cold water before they ever see the pot.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Start the foundation of the broth.**

Place the washed chicken in a large, heavy-bottomed pot with the 10 cups of water, garlic, allspice berries, and the cubed squash, then bring to a boil over medium-high heat for 20 minutes.

1. Perform the grandmother's pumpkin trick.

Scoop out about half of the softened squash chunks, mash them completely smooth with a fork, and return them to the boiling pot to give the soup its signature rich, golden body.

2. Drop in the ground provisions.

Add the yellow yam, chayote, carrots, potato, and corn rounds, allowing the pot to return to a rolling simmer as the starchy vegetables begin their slow surrender.

3. Roll the spinners.

Mix the flour and salt in a bowl, slowly adding the cold water while kneading lightly until you have a firm, non-sticky dough, then pinch off tablespoon-sized pieces and roll them rapidly back and forth between your palms to form long, tapered dumplings.

4. Build the final flavor profile.

Drop the spinners into the bubbling soup, add the smashed scallions, thyme sprigs, and the whole Scotch bonnet pepper, then carefully whisk in the soup mix.

5. Simmer and serve.

Cover and simmer on medium-low for 15 to 20 minutes until the spinners puff up slightly and float, then carefully fish out and discard the whole pepper and bare thyme stems before ladling heavily into deep bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Authentic Shortcut.**

Don't let modern culinary purism rob you of the real flavor; the Grace Cock Soup Mix packet provides the ultra-fine noodles, turmeric hue, and umami-driven nostalgia that makes this soup taste exactly like home.

● **The Scotch Bonnet Rule.**

Boiling the pepper whole extracts the incredibly fragrant, fruity oils of the Caribbean without the blinding capsaicin heat, but if you puncture it, the heat will be unrelenting.

- **Ground Provisions Reality Check.**

If you can't find yellow yam at a local international market, a standard sweet potato or extra russet potato will alter the starch profile slightly but still yield a phenomenally comforting bowl.



Fisherman's Fast Fish Tea

Growing up, whenever a cold crept into the house or the winter winds battered the Ohio windows, this pot went on the stove. Back on the island, fishermen made this restorative, thin broth right on the beach using their fresh catch, meant to be sipped from a mug to clear the chest and warm the bones. The grandmother's secret to doing this on a Tuesday night in America? We swap bony whole fish for easy-to-find red snapper fillets, dice the root vegetables small so they cook in minutes, and lean on the ultimate pantry staple—Grace Fish Tea mix. We just sift out the dehydrated noodles to keep the broth crystal clear. Don't skip washing the fish with lime and vinegar; it's the mandatory island rule for a broth that tastes purely like the ocean.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	Red Snapper fillets	1 cup	kabocha squash <i>peeled and diced into 1-inch pieces</i>
1 large	lime <i>juiced</i>	1 med	carrot <i>peeled and diced into 1-inch pieces</i>
1 tbsp	white vinegar	1 large	Yukon Gold potato <i>peeled and diced into 1-inch pieces</i>
1/4 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 cup	fresh okra <i>sliced into rounds</i>
8 cup	water	1/2 cup	sweet corn kernels
3 med	scallions <i>smashed gently with the back of a knife</i>	1 small	packet Grace Fish Tea Soup Mix <i>sifted through a mesh strainer, noodles discarded</i>
4 small clove	garlic <i>smashed</i>	1 tsp	black pepper
1 small bunch	fresh thyme <i>tied in a bundle</i>	1 tsp	sea salt
10 med	whole pimento berries	1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole and uncut</i>	3 tbsp	water
1 med	chayote <i>peeled, cored, and diced into 1-inch pieces</i>	1/4 tsp	kosher salt

PREPARATION

- **Wash the freshness from the fish.**

Place your fish fillets in a bowl. Squeeze the lime juice over them, add the vinegar and a pinch of kosher salt. Gently rub the fillets for about a minute. Rinse them thoroughly under cold running water and pat them dry with paper towels. This is a mandatory island rule—it neutralizes any fishy odors and guarantees a clean-tasting broth.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Build the aromatic flavor base.**

In a large soup pot or Dutch oven, bring the 8 cups of water to a rolling boil over medium-high heat. Drop in the smashed scallions, garlic, thyme bundle, and pimento berries.

2. **Extract the fish flavor.**

Gently slide the washed fish fillets into the boiling water. Let it boil gently for about 10 minutes, just until the fish is opaque and begins to flake.

3. **Remove and flake the fish.**

Using a slotted spoon, carefully remove the fish fillets from the pot and transfer them to a plate. Once they are cool enough to handle, use a fork to flake the fish into large, bite-sized chunks and set aside.

4. **Simmer the ground provisions.**

To the boiling, fish-infused water, add the diced chayote, squash, carrot, and potato. Pour the sifted fish tea powder directly into the pot, stirring well to combine.

5. **Float the pepper to extract the aroma.**

Gently drop the whole Scotch bonnet pepper into the pot. Do not poke, slice, or burst this pepper—let it bob at the surface to release its floral oils without the fiery heat. Cover the pot, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer for 15 minutes until the vegetables are fork-tender.

6. **Form the spinners.**

While the soup simmers, mix the flour and salt in a small bowl. Add the 3 tablespoons of water one at a time, kneading until you have a firm, slightly sticky dough. Pinch off marble-sized pieces and roll them between your palms to create little cigar shapes.

1. Assemble the final tea.

Uncover the pot and drop the spinners, sliced okra, and sweet corn into the bubbling broth. Let it cook for 5 minutes. Finally, return your flaked fish to the pot and simmer for just 2 to 3 more minutes to heat the fish through.

2. Serve piping hot.

Turn off the heat. Carefully fish out and discard the whole Scotch bonnet pepper and the thyme stems. Taste the broth, adding black pepper and sea salt if needed, and serve immediately in mugs or small bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the Scotch bonnet.**

Keeping the stem intact and floating the pepper whole provides an incredible, sweet-floral aroma without the agonizing heat. If it accidentally bursts, a squeeze of fresh lime juice in the bowl can help tame the acidity and spice.

● **The ground provisions are flexible.**

Yellow Yam is the holy grail for this dish, but Yukon Gold potatoes hold their shape perfectly in a weeknight pinch. Chayote (often called Cho-cho in Jamaica) is now ubiquitous in standard American supermarkets, typically found near the tomatillos.



Weeknight Red Pea Soup

Miss Pearl peeled hard yams and scraped a charred aluminum pot to build her Saturday soup. On a Tuesday night, that all-day simmer requires forty-five minutes in a pressure cooker. The short timeline yields a dense, deeply extracted liquid, grounded by a can of coconut milk, the quiet hum of pimento, and the gelatinous breakdown of a smoked ham hock. The secret remains the vital, whole, un-burst Scotch bonnet pepper floating on top, yielding all of its floral aroma and none of its fiery wrath. The starch breaks down, the broth thickens, and the bowls fill up.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup dried dark red kidney beans
rinsed and sorted

6 cup low-sodium beef broth

1 lb	smoked ham hock	4 med	fresh thyme
1 lb	beef chuck roast <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	sprig	
4 small	garlic	1/2 lb	yellow yam <i>peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks</i>
clove	<i>smashed</i>	1 med	white-fleshed sweet potato <i>peeled and cubed</i>
10 small	whole pimento berries	2 med	carrots <i>peeled and sliced</i>
13 1/2 oz	full-fat coconut milk	1 whole	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>unblemished, stem intact</i>
1 small	beef bouillon cube	1 cup	all-purpose flour
1 small	yellow onion <i>chopped</i>	1/4 tsp	kosher salt
4 med	scallions <i>crushed with the side of a knife</i>	1/4 cup	water

PREPARATION

- **Inspect the beans.**

While the pressure cooker eliminates the need for an overnight soak, rinsing and sorting the dried kidney beans ensures no stones or debris make it into the final soup.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Tenderize the base in an electric pressure cooker.**

Combine the dried kidney beans, ham hock, beef chuck, smashed garlic, pimento berries, and beef broth in the pot, securing the lid and cooking on high pressure for 40 minutes before allowing a 10-minute natural pressure release.

- 2. Mix the spinner dough.**

While the meats tenderize, mix the flour and salt in a mixing bowl, gradually streaming in the water and kneading until a stiff, slightly tacky dough forms.

1. Shape the spinners.

Pinch off a tablespoon of dough and roll it vigorously back and forth between your palms to form a tapered, finger-length dumpling, covering the finished pieces with a damp towel so they do not dry out.

2. Shred the meat and switch to a simmer.

Once depressurized, open the lid, remove the ham hock bone, shred the meat back into the pot, and switch the cooker to its sauté function to bring the liquid to a bubble.

3. Build the authentic flavor profile.

Stir in the coconut milk, bouillon, onion, scallions, thyme, and ground provisions, then gently lay the whole Scotch bonnet pepper on top of the liquid without piercing the skin.

4. Cook the dumplings and thicken the stew.

Drop the spinners into the pot one by one, simmering uncovered for 15 to 20 minutes until the yam is tender and the broth transforms into a rich, deep-purple stew.

5. Remove the pepper and serve immediately.

Taste for seasoning, then carefully fish out and discard the whole Scotch bonnet pepper and thyme sprigs before ladling generous portions into deep bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the Scotch bonnet pepper.**

Dropping the pepper in whole is non-negotiable; it infuses the broth with the distinct floral and fruity oils of the Caribbean without turning your weeknight dinner into an intolerable fire hazard.

● **Substitute the yam correctly.**

If you cannot find dense, dry Jamaican yellow yam at an international market, use a standard Russet potato rather than an American orange yam to best replicate the starchy, spongy texture.

- **Make it Ital.**

For a traditional meatless variation, omit the meats, swap the beef broth for vegetable broth, double the coconut milk, and mash a cup of the cooked beans against the side of the pot to replicate the stew's hearty thickness.



Pepperpot Soup

A heavy Dutch oven sits on the burner. The beef hisses. A can of full-fat coconut milk stands open. This yard-style healing pot builds on cured meats, earthy dark greens, and the sweet, fruity menace of a whole floating Scotch bonnet pepper. It takes patience to coax out the collagen and let the pumpkin melt. But when those chewy, hand-rolled spinners hit the bowl, you pull that same Dutch oven off the heat, and the healing begins as the dense dough soaks up the velvety, golden-green broth.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb salted pig tails or smoked turkey wings
rinsed

1 lb fresh beef soup bones or beef chuck
cut into 1-inch cubes

10 cup	cold water	1 cup	pumpkin or butternut squash <i>peeled and diced small</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>chopped</i>	1 cup	yellow yam or russet potato <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks</i>
4 med	garlic cloves <i>crushed</i>	1 med	cho cho or chayote <i>peeled, cored, and diced</i>
3 med	scallions <i>bruised and chopped</i>	13.5 oz	full-fat coconut milk
6 small	fresh thyme sprigs	1 cup	all-purpose flour
1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper or habanero <i>left whole and unpunctured</i>	1/4 tsp	salt
10 small	whole pimento berries	1/3 cup	cold water
19 oz	canned Jamaican callaloo or frozen spinach <i>drained or roughly chopped</i>	1 cup	okra <i>ends trimmed and sliced into rounds</i>

PREPARATION

- **Desalt the cured meat.**

If using authentic salted pig tails or salt beef, rinse under cold water, boil in a large pot of water for 15 minutes, then drain and discard the liquid to remove the harsh curing salt. Skip this step entirely if using smoked turkey wings.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the foundational broth.**

Return the desalted meat or smoked turkey to a large stockpot along with the beef chuck and the 10 cups of fresh cold water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, cover, and let cook for 1 to 1 1/2 hours until the meats are fork-tender and the collagen has fortified the liquid.

- 2. Incorporate the heavy provisions.**

Add the diced pumpkin, yellow yam, and cho cho. As the soup boils, the pumpkin will begin to melt, acting as a natural thickener and giving the broth a velvety, golden body.

1. Layer the yard-style aromatics.

Stir in the chopped onion, crushed garlic, scallions, fresh thyme, and pimento berries. Gently drop the whole Scotch bonnet pepper into the pot to float, treating it with extreme respect—if punctured, the soup will become fiercely spicy instead of just fragrant.

2. Emulsify the greens.

Pour in the coconut milk and add the callaloo or spinach. Use an immersion blender to quickly pulse the soup three or four times; you want to break down about half of the greens to dye the broth a deep, earthy green while leaving the rest intact for texture. Simmer for 15 minutes.

3. Roll the spinners.

In a small bowl, mix the flour and salt, then slowly add the 1/3 cup cold water. Knead into a firm, tacky dough. Pinch off marble-sized pieces and rub them vigorously between your palms to form tapered, two-inch cigar shapes, dropping them one by one into the bubbling soup.

4. Thicken and finish the pot.

Stir in the sliced okra, which, along with the starch from the spinners, will provide the final luxurious thickness. Simmer for a final 15 minutes until the dumplings float, then carefully remove the whole Scotch bonnet and thyme sprigs before ladling into deep bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Weeknight Accelerated Method.**

To cut a two-and-a-half-hour process down to under an hour, pressure cook the fresh beef and desalted meats in the water for 35 minutes. Release the pressure, switch to the sauté function, and proceed with adding the vegetables, aromatics, coconut milk, and spinners.

- **The Ital Variation.**

For an authentic Rastafarian vegan version, omit all meats. Sauté the aromatics in coconut oil, swap the water for a high-quality vegetable broth, and add kidney beans or black-eyed peas for protein and body.



The Morning Healer

Sunday at nine a.m., Auntie Fay pulls a scratched enamel pot from the cabinet, drops in the bruised scallions, and turns the dial to low. The remedy comes in two parts: a fierce, bruised-ginger and boiled-lime morning tonic to cut through the fog, and a rapid-fire evening Fish Tea that distills the holy trinity of thyme, scallion, and pimento into a deeply restorative broth. The broth demands nothing more than forty minutes, a few humble roots, and a whole, unbroken Scotch Bonnet pepper hovering dangerously, beautifully, in the simmering stock. Ladle it into a bowl, breathe the steam, and let the morning finally start.

INGREDIENTS

2 large	limes <i>scrubbed clean and halved</i>	12 small	whole allspice berries
1 med	fresh ginger <i>left unpeeled and forcefully smashed</i>	3 med clove	garlic <i>peeled and smashed</i>
12 cup	water <i>divided between the tonic and the broth</i>	1 whole	Scotch Bonnet pepper <i>left completely whole and unbroken</i>
2 tbsp	honey	1 small	Jamaican fish tea soup mix
1 tbsp	white overproof rum	1 med	chayote squash <i>peeled, cored, and diced</i>
1 1/2 lb	whole red snapper <i>cleaned, scaled, and cut into 3 pieces including the head</i>	1 large	Russet potato <i>peeled and diced</i>
2 med	scallions <i>root removed and smashed with the side of a knife</i>	2 large	carrots <i>peeled and cut into thick rounds</i>
6 med	fresh thyme	1 med	green banana <i>scored, peeled, and cut into 1-inch chunks</i>

PREPARATION

- **Bruise the aromatics.**

The secret to a fast weeknight broth is extracting the essential oils quickly. Use the flat side of a wide knife to firmly smash the ginger, garlic, and scallions before they ever hit the water.

- **Respect the Scotch Bonnet.**

Drop the pepper in whole and under no circumstances let it burst in the pot, or your soothing, restorative broth will become punishingly hot.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the morning tonic.**

Toss the whole unpeeled lime halves and smashed ginger into a small pot with four cups of water, bring to a rolling boil, then simmer covered for ten minutes to extract the bitter, healing oils from the rind.

1. Fortify the tonic.

Strain the hot liquid into a mug, stir in the honey until dissolved, and add a splash of overproof rum if you are an adult fighting off a cold.

2. Build the broth's aromatic foundation.

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, bring the remaining eight cups of water to a rolling boil and drop in the smashed garlic, bruised scallions, thyme, allspice berries, and the entire, unbroken Scotch Bonnet pepper.

3. Simmer the ground provisions.

Add the diced carrots, potato, chayote, and green banana to the pot, letting them boil vigorously for fifteen minutes until they just begin to yield to a fork.

4. Introduce the fish and finish the tea.

Gently lower the snapper pieces—head and all—into the pot along with the soup mix packet, reducing the heat to a steady simmer for fifteen minutes until the fish turns opaque and the broth gains rich body.

5. Remove the pepper and serve.

Carefully fish out the whole Scotch Bonnet to prevent it from bursting, then ladle the steaming broth, tender fish, and soft root vegetables into deep bowls.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Navigating ground provisions.**

Standard Russet potatoes and readily available chayote squash (often sold near Mexican produce) are perfect, authentic structural substitutes for Jamaican yellow yam and cho cho.

● **The fish head is mandatory.**

Do not throw away the head; it contains the gelatin and fat necessary to give this quick-cooking broth the rich, lip-smacking texture of a slow-simmered stock.



The Yard Apothecary

Wild cerasee vines climb the fence. A bruised thumb of ginger goes under the knife. Cracked allspice berries hit a rolling boil. The brew demands smashed ginger, raw garlic, sharp lime, and a heavy-handed splash of high-proof rum. It clears the sinuses and warms the chest. This isn't a polite herbal infusion softened for a modern wellness audience. The water darkens in a heavy ceramic mug, the kitchen smells of wet roots, and the cure begins.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup water

1 med fresh ginger root
unpeeled, about 2 inches long

2 large garlic cloves
peeled

1 large lime
halved

2 tbsp raw honey

1 tbsp Wray & Nephew White
Overproof Rum

PREPARATION

- **Bruk the aromatics.**

Do not bother meticulously peeling or grating the ginger. Wash it, then use the flat side of a heavy chef's knife to aggressively smash both the unpeeled ginger and the garlic cloves until bruised and flattened.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the base.**

In a small saucepan, combine the water, smashed ginger, and crushed garlic, bringing the mixture to a rolling boil over medium-high heat.

- 2. Simmer to extract.**

Once boiling, reduce the heat to low, cover the pot tightly, and let it simmer for 5 to 7 minutes to create a cloudy, highly potent extraction.

- 3. Infuse the citrus.**

Turn off the heat and squeeze the lime juice directly into the pot. Drop the squeezed lime rinds into the hot water to steep for an additional 3 minutes; the essential oils in the skin add a pleasant, medicinal bitterness.

- 4. Strain and fortify.**

Strain the hot liquid through a fine-mesh sieve into a large mug, discarding the solids. Stir in the honey until completely dissolved, then add the overproof rum.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sweat out the fever.**

Drink this brew while it is as hot as you can comfortably tolerate, then immediately wrap yourself in a heavy blanket. Tradition dictates sweating out the cold to ensure a deep, restorative sleep.

- **The ritual of "whites".**

Wray & Nephew White Overproof Rum (locally known simply as "whites") is the cultural signature of this remedy. Omit it entirely if serving children, but for adults, do not substitute it with a standard, low-proof spirit.



The Sacred Sunday Dinner

The slow-simmered, ritualistic anchor of the Jamaican family week, featuring the crown jewels of the cuisine adapted for the modern kitchen.

The oxtail sears. Sunday at two in the afternoon is the loud, slow-simmered anchor of the week, where the heavy Dutch pots come out. The air hangs thick with the earthy funk of curry goat and the deep savor of oxtail braised until it simply surrenders to the bone. This is grandmother's food—measured by eye and stirred with a wooden spoon worn flat on one side.

But cooking the traditional way doesn't require a six-hour shift at the stove while life passes by outside. These adaptations—pressure-cooked oxtails that sacrifice none of their gelatinous glory, a blistered air-fryer jerk, the essential macaroni pie—honor the crushed pimento berries and coconut milk of the original recipes. The time you save leaves more room for the rum and the company. The Instant Pot seals, the kitchen smells like thyme, and the week's anchor holds fast.





Oxtail Stew

" If I do "the meat gives way" for the closer? No, advisor explicitly listed "the meat yields" as a concrete anchor to include. So I'll change the S2 wording to avoid double yield. S2: "Cheap, tough cuts break down under heat and time in a grandmother's all-day weekend braise: meat washed in acid to banish the funk, slow-marinated in whole allspice berries and thyme, and seared hard in dangerously dark, bubbling burnt sugar." This perfectly honors the physical reality (breaks down under heat and time) without duplicating "yield". Let's re-verify the full text so far: "Three hours in a heavy Dutch oven." (7) "Cheap, tough cuts break down under heat and time in a grandmother's all-day weekend braise: meat washed in acid to banish the funk, slow-marinated in whole allspice berries and thyme, and seared hard in

dangerously dark, bubbling burnt sugar." (39) "Seamlessly adapted for the modern pressure cooker, giving you fall-off-the-bone yard-style glory on a random Tuesday night, the rest is hands-off: drop in the butter beans and let the covered pot do the heavy lifting until the meat yields." (39) Total word count: 85 words. Target: 89 words $\pm 15\%$ (76 - 102 words). 85 is perfect.

INGREDIENTS

3 1/2 lb	beef oxtail <i>cut into 2-inch pieces and trimmed of excess hard fat</i>	1 tbsp	whole allspice berries <i>lightly crushed</i>
1/2 cup	white vinegar	1 tbsp	Maggi seasoning powder
1 large	yellow onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 tbsp	dark soy sauce
4 med	scallions <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce
4 med cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 inch	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left whole and unpunctured</i>	2 tbsp	neutral oil
6 sprigs	fresh thyme	2 tbsp	dark brown sugar
		2 tbsp	tomato paste
		3 cup	low-sodium beef broth
		15 oz	canned butter beans <i>drained and rinsed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Trim the heavy, hard fat caps from the oxtails.**

Oxtail renders a significant amount of grease as it cooks, so aggressively trimming the solid white fat beforehand saves you from skimming an oil slick off your final gravy.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash the oxtails with vinegar and cold water to cleanse the meat.

Place the trimmed meat in a large bowl, pour in the vinegar and a splash of water, and vigorously massage the oxtails to strip away raw odors. Drain completely, rinse once with fresh cold water, and pat thoroughly dry with paper towels.

2. Massage the aromatics and seasonings aggressively into the dry meat.

Combine the oxtails with the onion, scallions, garlic, ginger, whole Scotch bonnet, thyme, allspice, seasoning powder, soy sauce, Worcestershire, salt, and pepper. Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least four hours, but ideally overnight, to let the flavors penetrate the dense muscle.

3. Caramelize the brown sugar in hot oil until deeply dark and frothy.

Scrape the chunky marinade bits off the meat and reserve them. Set an electric pressure cooker to sauté on high, heat the oil, and sprinkle in the brown sugar. Watch it like a hawk until it melts and turns a dark, frothy chocolate brown—do not let it turn black.

4. Sear the oxtails in the bubbling caramelized sugar to build a dark mahogany crust.

Carefully drop the meat into the hot sugar oil in a single layer. Sear for two to three minutes per side, then remove the browned oxtails to a plate.

5. Sauté the reserved aromatics and deglaze the pot with a splash of broth.

Toss the reserved marinade onions, herbs, and the whole pepper into the pot along with the tomato paste. Cook until softened, then pour in a half cup of broth, aggressively scraping up every caramelized bit from the bottom to build the gravy and prevent a burn warning.

6. Pressure cook the stew on high for forty-five minutes.

Return the oxtails to the pot and pour in the remaining broth so the meat is half-submerged. Seal the cooker, cook on high pressure, and let the pressure release naturally for fifteen minutes before opening the valve.

1. Reduce the liquid into a glossy gravy and fold in the butter beans.

Skim any excess fat from the surface and discard the thyme stems and intact Scotch bonnet. Switch the cooker back to sauté, let the liquid vigorously bubble and thicken for ten minutes, then gently fold in the butter beans to warm through before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Leave the Scotch bonnet whole if you want the fragrance without the fire.**

Dropping the pepper in uncut perfumes the stew with a distinct, floral Caribbean essence without nuking your palate; if you crave the heat, slice it open.

● **Bottled browning sauce works in a pinch if burning sugar feels too risky.**

The old-school sugar method is the undisputed soul of the dish, but if you are intimidated, skip the burnt sugar, sear the meat normally, and stir two tablespoons of commercial browning sauce into the marinade instead.



Yard-Style Curry Goat

Rub the bone-in goat shoulder with sliced Scotch bonnet. The meat is washed with acid to strip away the gaminess, using sour orange to anchor a Sunday dinner stripped of shortcuts and sanitized food-blog revisions. Begin by burning the curry in hot oil, stirring the yellow Jamaican curry powder with a wooden spoon until dark, then keep the flame low, leave the heavy lid alone, and let the pot do the heavy lifting.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb bone-in goat meat
chopped into 1 1/2 to 2-inch chunks

1/4 cup white vinegar

3 tbsp Jamaican curry powder
divided

1 large yellow onion
roughly chopped

4 med	scallions <i>chopped</i>	1 tsp	ground allspice
6 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	2 tbsp	vegetable oil
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>peeled and minced</i>	6 small	fresh thyme sprigs <i>left whole</i>
1 tbsp	all-purpose seasoning	1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>left intact</i>
1 tsp	salt	2 cup	low-sodium beef broth <i>heated</i>
1 tsp	black pepper	2 med	Russet potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>

PREPARATION

- **Wash the meat to remove the gaminess.**

Place the goat meat in a large bowl, pour in the vinegar, and cover with cool water. Agitate the meat with your hands to clean away bone fragments, then rinse thoroughly with fresh water and pat completely dry.

- **Massage the marinade deeply into the meat.**

Add 2 tablespoons of the curry powder, the chopped onion, scallions, garlic, ginger, seasoning, salt, pepper, and allspice to the dry meat. Use your hands to massage the aromatics straight to the bone, then cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or ideally overnight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Burn the curry to bloom the spices.**

Remove the meat from the fridge 20 minutes before cooking. Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat, then stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon of curry powder for 20 to 30 seconds until deep golden-brown and intensely fragrant, being careful not to let it blacken.

1. Sear the meat and let it spring its own water.

Working in batches, add the marinated goat to the pot, leaving the bulky onions and scallions in the bowl. Sear to coat in the bloomed oil, then return all meat and the remaining aromatics to the pot, turn the heat to medium-low, cover, and let it stew in its own juices for 15 minutes.

2. Begin the low and slow braise.

Uncover and pour in just enough hot broth to barely cover the meat. Toss in the thyme sprigs and gently rest the intact Scotch bonnet pepper on top, then bring to a gentle boil, reduce heat to low, cover tightly, and simmer for 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

3. Add the potatoes to thicken the gravy.

When the goat is tender and easily pierced with a fork, stir in the cubed potatoes. Simmer uncovered for another 20 to 30 minutes until the potatoes soften and the liquid reduces into a rich, clinging gravy, then carefully remove the thyme stems and the Scotch bonnet pepper before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use the weeknight pressure cooker shortcut if you are short on time.**

Prep and marinate the meat the night before. Set your Instant Pot to Sauté to burn the curry and brown the meat. Add only 1 cup of broth, the thyme, and lock the lid to cook on High Pressure for 40 minutes with a 10-minute natural release. Switch back to Sauté, add the potatoes and Scotch bonnet, and simmer uncovered for 15 minutes to thicken the gravy.

● **Source the right curry powder and meat.**

Don't compromise on the curry powder; seek out Betapac brand at a Caribbean market or online for the authentic bright, pimento-heavy flavor. Bone-in goat can easily be found at local Halal butchers or Mexican carnicerías.



"Pan-Jerk" Chicken

When the parents left the island, they couldn't pack the pimento wood or the roadside oil drums, but they brought their heavy cast-iron Dutchies and an uncompromising demand for flavor. This is the ultimate diaspora adaptation, taking the fiery, herbaceous soul of a Kingston street vendor's marinade and adapting it for a standard American stovetop. The secret is in the unwritten rules: washing the chicken, aggressively massaging the paste down to the bone, and steam-roasting it in its own spicy glaze.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken pieces <i>excess fat trimmed and tail removed</i>	1/2 cup	white vinegar
		1 bunch	scallions <i>roughly chopped</i>

3 med	Scotch Bonnet peppers <i>stems removed</i>	1 tbsp	browning sauce
6 large	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	1 tbsp	fresh lime juice
1 med piece	fresh ginger <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>	1 tsp	ground cinnamon
10 sprig	fresh thyme <i>leaves stripped</i>	1/2 tsp	ground nutmeg
10 sprig	fresh thyme <i>leaves stripped</i>	1 tbsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	whole allspice berries	1 tsp	black pepper
1 tbsp	dark brown sugar	4 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
2 tbsp	soy sauce	1/2 cup	chicken stock

PREPARATION

- **Wash the chicken with acid.**

Place the chicken in a large bowl, pour the half cup of vinegar over it, and vigorously scrub the meat to remove the raw odor before rinsing thoroughly under cold water and patting completely dry.

- **Blend the green seasoning into a thick paste.**

In a food processor, combine the scallions, Scotch bonnets, garlic, ginger, thyme, allspice, brown sugar, soy sauce, browning, lime juice, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt, pepper, and two tablespoons of oil.

- **Slash the meat and massage the marinade deep into the bone.**

Cut deep slashes into each piece of chicken, put on disposable gloves, and aggressively work the paste into the cuts and under the skin, then cover and refrigerate for at least four hours.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the chicken undisturbed in a heavy skillet.**

Heat two tablespoons of oil in a Dutch pot or cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat, scrape excess marinade off the chicken while reserving it, and sear skin-side down for five minutes until deeply caramelized before flipping.

1. Braise the chicken covered in its spiced pan juices.

Reduce the heat to medium-low, whisk the chicken stock into the reserved marinade, pour it into the pan, and cover tightly to steam-roast for twenty-five minutes.

2. Reduce the gravy and char the skin.

Remove the lid and let the liquid boil down into a sticky glaze, roll the chicken in it, then slide the pan under a broiler for a few minutes to mimic that street-side char.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Dry chicken is the secret to a proper sear.**

Water is the enemy of crisp skin; take the time to pat the washed chicken completely dry with paper towels so it browns rather than steams.

● **Respect the Scotch Bonnet.**

Always wear gloves when massaging the marinade, and if you must substitute with habaneros, do not omit them entirely—the fruity heat is essential to the dish.

● **Do not skip the browning sauce.**

It provides the deep mahogany color and subtle bitter molasses note that mimics the oil drum; if you can't find it, substitute an extra tablespoon of dark soy sauce mixed with a teaspoon of molasses.



Sunday Gungo Peas & Coconut Rice

The smell of coconut milk, thyme, and bruised scallion simmering on the stove is a permanent sensory tattoo for anyone who grew up in a Jamaican household. While an everyday dinner leans on red kidney beans, the earthy, nutty gungo pea signals a special Sunday. Back home, grandmothers spent hours grating dry coconuts and boiling fresh-picked peas over an open fire. On a weeknight, you don't have eight hours. By using canned green gungo peas and full-fat coconut milk—and rigorously respecting the canonical methods of aromatic infusion and undisturbed steaming—you get the exact, unadulterated flavor of home without the grueling labor.

INGREDIENTS

15 oz	green gungo peas <i>rinsed and drained</i>	5 small	fresh thyme
2 cup	parboiled white rice	5 small	whole pimento berries
13 1/2 oz	full-fat unsweetened coconut milk	1 med	Scotch bonnet pepper <i>washed and strictly unburst</i>
1 1/2 cup	water or low-sodium chicken stock	1 small piece	fresh ginger <i>smashed</i>
2 med	scallions <i>whole, lightly smashed</i>	1 tbsp	salted butter
4 med	garlic	1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 clove	<i>peeled and smashed flat</i>	1 tsp	brown sugar
		1/2 tsp	black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Wash the rice until the water runs crystal clear.**
Skipping this leaves the surface starch intact, transforming what should be individual, fluffy grains into a gummy, sad porridge.
- 2. Combine the peas, coconut milk, stock, and all aromatics in a heavy-bottomed pot.**
Drop in the smashed scallions, garlic, thyme, pimento, ginger, butter, salt, pepper, sugar, and the unblemished Scotch bonnet pepper.
- 3. Bring to a boil, then drop to a simmer for 10 minutes to build the broth.**
This extracts the essential oils and forces the flavor into the liquid. Taste it now—it should be highly seasoned and slightly salty, because your rice will taste exactly like this broth.
- 4. Stir the washed rice into the simmering broth exactly once.**
Ensure the liquid sits exactly one inch above the top of the rice, adding a splash of water if it looks too low.

- 1. Leave the pot uncovered on medium heat until the liquid boils down to the level of the rice.**

You will know it is ready for the next phase when small, bubbling craters and steam holes begin to form on the surface.

- 2. Drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting, cover tightly, and step away.**

This is the cardinal rule of Jamaican cooking: do not lift the lid, and under no circumstances should you stir the rice, or you will break the grains. Let it steam undisturbed for 20 minutes.

- 3. Turn off the heat and let the pot sit covered for 5 minutes before fluffing.**

Open the lid and carefully fish out the spent thyme, scallions, pimento, and the dangerously intact Scotch bonnet. Fluff gently from the bottom up with a fork, never a spoon.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Treat the Scotch bonnet with respect.**

Wash it carefully and ensure there are no tears. You want its floral, fruity aroma to steam into the rice, not the capsaicin fire that will overwhelm the dish.

- **Sourcing true pimento is non-negotiable.**

Ground allspice is a poor substitute that will muddy the color and texture of your rice; use whole berries and let them slowly release their complex oils.



Ultimate Yard Baked Macaroni Pie

A hot 9x13 glass baking dish hits the table, its corner crust already blistering. In a Jamaican household, macaroni and cheese is a pie, built to hold its ground on a plate crowded with rich oxtail gravy and sweet plantains. While purists back in Kingston might reach for a tin of processed cheese, this adaptation relies on a block of sharp cheddar and a binder that isn't a fussy French roux, but a simple, fearless custard of evaporated milk, eggs, and a heavy hit of grated onion and Scotch bonnet. Give the pan fifteen minutes to set before slicing, or watch the whole pie collapse into the gravy.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	elbow macaroni	2 med	garlic
1 tbsp	chicken bouillon powder	cloves	<i>finely minced</i>
4 cup	sharp cheddar cheese	1 tbsp	Dijon mustard
	<i>grated from the block</i>	1 tsp	fresh thyme leaves
2 cup	mozzarella cheese		<i>finely chopped</i>
	<i>grated from the block</i>	1 tsp	smoked paprika
12 oz	evaporated milk		<i>plus extra for dusting</i>
1/2 cup	whole milk	1/2 tsp	black pepper
2 large	eggs	1/4 tsp	nutmeg
	<i>at room temperature</i>		<i>freshly grated</i>
4 tbsp	unsalted butter	1/2 med	Scotch bonnet or Habanero
	<i>melted</i>		pepper
1/2 med	yellow onion		<i>seeds removed and very finely minced</i>
	<i>grated on a box grater, all juices reserved</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Grate the cheese from the block.**

Pre-shredded cheese is coated in starches that prevent proper melting; take the time to grate your own for the right texture.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and generously butter a 9x13-inch baking dish.**

Toss the grated cheddar and mozzarella together in a large bowl, setting aside two cups of the blend for the crust. Never use pre-shredded cheese; the anti-caking agents will ruin the pie's creamy texture.

- 1. Boil the macaroni in water seasoned heavily with the chicken bouillon until just shy of al dente.**

Adding bouillon to the boiling water is the grandma secret that infuses the noodles with deep, savory flavor from the inside out. Drain the pasta thoroughly after about 6 minutes, but do not rinse it, returning it hot to the pot.

- 2. Whisk together the cold custard base while the pasta is boiling.**

In a medium bowl, aggressively whisk the evaporated milk, whole milk, eggs, melted butter, grated onion and its juice, garlic, mustard, thyme, paprika, black pepper, nutmeg, and minced pepper until the eggs are completely broken down.

- 3. Pour the cold custard and four cups of the cheese blend directly over the hot, drained macaroni.**

Fold everything together with a large spatula; the residual heat from the pasta will begin to melt the cheese into a thick, cohesive web.

- 4. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish and firmly compress it into an even layer.**

Pressing the pasta down is key to achieving that tight pie structure. Top evenly with the reserved two cups of cheese, dust lightly with more smoked paprika, and bake uncovered on the middle rack for 35 to 40 minutes until the edges are bubbling furiously and the top is a deep, golden-brown crust.

- 5. Allow the baked pie to rest at room temperature for at least 15 to 20 minutes before serving.**

This is the hardest but most critical step. Skipping the rest period will leave you with a liquid mess, but waiting allows the egg custard to set and the molten cheese to stabilize so you can slice it into perfect, structurally sound squares.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The secret is in the onion juice.**

Grating the onion on a box grater ensures the intense allium flavor permeates the custard without leaving unpleasant, raw crunchy bits in the final dish.

- **A substitution for Tastee Cheese.**

If you can't find the traditional Jamaican processed cheese in a tin, don't worry. A blend of high-quality sharp cheddar and mozzarella actually melts better in a standard American oven while perfectly mimicking the sharp, salty tang of home.



Quick-Pickled Escovitch Snapper

Tuesday at six, the cast-iron skillet smokes, the oil snaps, and the kitchen air turns sharp with cane vinegar and sliced Scotch bonnet. While grandmothers fried whole snappers on a Sunday to be eaten cold the next morning, this weeknight adaptation relies on quick-frying fillets. They build a golden crust that acts like a sponge for the hot, sweet-and-sour brine. Delivering yard-style flavor to a Midwestern suburb, the sharp vinegar seeps into the crust, the heat builds on the plate, and nobody waits for a fork.

INGREDIENTS

4 med red snapper fillets

1 med	fresh lime <i>halved</i>	1 med	bell pepper <i>thinly sliced</i>
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 med	chayote squash <i>peeled, cored, and julienned</i>
1 tsp	black pepper	1 med	habanero pepper <i>kept whole, or sliced with seeds removed for less heat</i>
1 tsp	garlic powder	10 med	whole allspice berries
1 tsp	all-purpose seafood seasoning	4 sprigs	fresh thyme
1/4 cup	all-purpose flour	2 small	garlic <i>smashed</i>
1/4 cup	neutral cooking oil	1 cup	white distilled vinegar
1 large	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced into rings</i>	1 tbsp	granulated sugar
1 large	carrot <i>peeled and julienned</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Rinse the snapper fillets under cold water, squeeze the lime halves over them, and rub the rinds directly onto the flesh.**
Never skip the wash. This isn't just hygiene; the citric acid neutralizes fishy odors and firms up the meat for frying.
- **Briefly rinse the fillets again, then pat them completely dry with paper towels.**
Moisture is the enemy of a crispy crust.
- **Score the skin side of the fillets with two shallow diagonal cuts.**
This prevents the fish from curling when it hits the hot oil and allows the seasoning to penetrate deeply.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Rub the fillets with 1 teaspoon of the salt, black pepper, garlic powder, and seafood seasoning, then lightly dust with flour.**
Shake off the excess. You want a whisper of flour to create a protective, golden crust that will soak up the vinegar later.

- 1. Heat the neutral oil in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat and fry the fillets skin-side down for 3 to 4 minutes per side.**

Cook until deeply golden brown and crispy. Transfer the fish to a paper-towel-lined platter to drain, then arrange them on a serving dish.

- 2. Pour off all but two tablespoons of the oil, reduce heat to medium, and sauté the onion, carrot, bell pepper, chayote, garlic, and habanero.**

Cook for just 2 to 3 minutes. The vegetables must release their oils but retain a sharp, aggressive crunch—do not let them go soft.

- 3. Pour the vinegar directly into the skillet, adding the allspice berries, thyme, sugar, and the remaining half teaspoon of salt, and bring to a rapid boil for 2 minutes.**

The sugar doesn't make the dish sweet; it simply tames the harsh bite of the vinegar and the fire of the pepper.

- 4. Immediately arrange the hot vegetables over the fried fish and drench everything in the boiling spiced vinegar.**

The crispy crust acts like a sponge. Serve immediately, or let it sit on the counter for 30 minutes so the flavors can get to know each other.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the pepper.**

Authentic Jamaican cooking relies on the fruity fire of the Scotch bonnet. If you can't find one, a habanero is the only botanically and sensorially acceptable supermarket substitute. Do not use a jalapeño.

- **Leave the ground spices in the pantry.**

Ground allspice will over-extract in the hot vinegar, turning your bright brine muddy. Whole pimento (allspice) berries provide a slow, controlled infusion of warm, woody flavor.



Fried Sweet Plantains

A proper sweet plantain is stubbornly useless until it develops a mottled black peel. A Jamaican Sunday dinner is an overcrowded plate of fiery meats and heavy stews that demands a quiet, sweet counterpunch, so you wait until the fruit looks damn near ruined, its yellow skin bruised black and the dense starches yielding to natural sugars, then fry it low and slow. Picture an elder at the stove carving each quarter-inch bias slice, then drop the fruit into hissing vegetable oil and pull the pieces the second those edges blister deep bronze.

INGREDIENTS

2 large plantains
peeled and ends trimmed

3 tbsp neutral oil or coconut oil

1 pinch sea salt

PREPARATION

- **Buy the plantains a week in advance.**

You can find plantains in almost any American supermarket, but they are invariably sold green or stark yellow. A yellow plantain will fry up dry and starchy. Leave them in a warm spot in your kitchen for seven to ten days until the skin is almost entirely covered in large black spots and slightly soft to the touch.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Slice the plantains on the diagonal.**

Use the tip of your knife to lightly score the skin lengthwise and peel it back, then cut the flesh slant-ways into oval slices about 1/2-inch thick. This geometry isn't just for looks; it maximizes the surface area that hits the hot oil, ensuring deeply caramelized edges.

2. **Heat a shallow pool of oil over medium-low heat.**

Add just enough oil to coat the bottom of a wide skillet, about a quarter-inch deep. Let it get warm and shimmering but not smoking; high heat is the enemy here, as the dense natural sugars will burn long before the starchy interior has a chance to soften.

3. **Fry the plantains low and slow in a single layer.**

Carefully lay the slices into the oil without overcrowding the pan. For the first two minutes, you can loosely cover the skillet to trap steam and coax the center into a perfect custard-like texture, then uncover.

4. **Flip when the edges turn a deep, crispy golden brown.**

After about three minutes, check the underside. Once richly caramelized, flip each piece gently with a fork and fry for another two to three minutes until perfectly golden on both sides.

1. Drain and serve immediately.

Transfer the hot slices to a paper towel-lined plate to drain the excess oil. Hit them with a microscopic pinch of sea salt to make the natural sweetness pop, and serve hot alongside rice and peas to balance a heavy Sunday meat.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Don't mess with perfection.**

Resist the urge to sprinkle with sugar or spices. A properly ripened plantain is aggressively sweet on its own, and adding sugar will only cause the exterior to burn in the pan.