Winter Shrimp Festival

By Mike Stines, Ph.B.

It’s winter… and time for comfort foods. Although casseroles and slow-cooked food are always a good choice shrimp are very versatile and easy to prepare making them ideal for a somewhat elegant midweek or weekend dinner. With this compilation the globe is covered… from New Orleans Shrimp Creole to Jamaican Jerk Shrimp with a detour to Mexico for Chipotle Shrimp and then off to Asia for Chinese Stir-Fry Shrimp with Asparagus and Chile-Garlic Sauce. The culinary tour ends in Europe with Crevettes à L’ail similar to the dish served at Café Rouge, a French-themed restaurant group in the United Kingdom.

Shrimp Creole With An Attitude

Shrimp Creole is a classic dish from Southern Louisiana. Like most Southern recipes there are a score of different concoctions for this. Basically, it’s shrimp in a rich and piquant tomato-based sauce served over steamed or boiled rice. A key to this recipe is shrimp stock made from the peeled shrimp shells to make a great Creole sauce.

Because making the stock and sauce is time-consuming, I usually make the stock and sauce a day or two ahead and then combine the remaining ingredients the next day. Once the stock and sauce are made, the recipe goes together quickly. (The stock and sauce will keep, covered and refrigerated, for three days. Frozen, they will keep for three months.)

1 pound large (31 - 35 or 26 - 30) shrimp

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 medium yellow onion, chopped (about one cup)

1 small green bell pepper, seeded and diced (about one cup)

1 rib celery, diced (about 1/2 cup)

1 quart Creole sauce (recipe below)

1 teaspoon granulated sugar

1/2 teaspoon smoked kosher salt

1/2 teaspoon ground cayenne

2 cloves garlic, minced (about one teaspoon)

1 bay leaf

1 to 2 tablespoons Cajun or Creole seasoning

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon Louisiana-style hot sauce or to taste

1 scallion, sliced

1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

Cooked rice

Peel, tail and devein the shrimp, rinse well. Pat dry with some paper towels and set aside. (Reserve the shells and tails for stock.) Prepare the shrimp stock (recipe below). When done, make the Creole sauce (recipe below).

In a large skillet heat the olive oil and butter over medium heat. Add the onion, bell pepper and celery; sauté until tender, about five minutes. Add the Creole sauce, sugar, salt, cayenne pepper, garlic and bay leaf; bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce heat to medium low and simmer for about 30 minutes or until reduced and thickened.

Dust the shrimp liberally with the Cajun or Creole seasoning and add to the tomato mixture. Add the Worcestershire sauce and the hot sauce, stir together. Cook for five to six minutes or until the shrimp are opaque. Remove the bay leaf. Stir in the scallion and parsley. Serve over rice.

**Creole Sauce**

2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 medium yellow onion, diced (about one cup)  
2 ribs celery, finely diced (about 1/2 cup)  
1 small bell pepper, seeded and diced (about 2/3 cup)  
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon minced garlic (about three cloves)  
2 cups shrimp stock (recipe below)

1 (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes with jalapeños

2 bay leaves  
2 sprigs fresh thyme (about one teaspoon)

1/2 teaspoon smoked kosher salt

1/2 teaspoon smoked black pepper

Hot sauce to taste (I like Crystal or Frank’s)   
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley  
3 green onions, finely sliced (about two tablespoons)

Heat the oil and butter over medium heat, add the “Trinity” (onion, celery and bell pepper) and sauté until the vegetables are crisp-tender. Dust the vegetables with the flour and cook, forming a blonde roux. Slowly stir in the room temperature stock; add the bay leaves and seasonings. Add the garlic and tomatoes and cook for a couple of minutes. Bring to a boil and lower the heat to a simmer. Simmer about 20 to 30 minutes until the sauce thickens. Add the hot sauce (I start with one teaspoon and adjust accordingly), Worcestershire, parsley and green onions. Simmer until the sauce is the correct consistency… it should be tight. Remove the thyme sprigs and bay leaves.

**Shrimp Stock**

Shells and tails from two pounds of shrimp  
1/2 cup chopped yellow onion  
1/4 cup chopped celery  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 lemon, sliced  
2 bay leaves  
3 sprigs fresh thyme  
1 teaspoon smoked whole black peppercorns

Add all ingredients to a medium-size stock pot. Cover with chicken stock (about four to six cups). Bring to a low boil; reduce the heat to a simmer. Skim off any scum that rises to the surface. Simmer for about 45 minutes. Strain through a fine mesh strainer or chinois.

Stir-Fried Shrimp, Asparagus, Lemon Grass, Onions and Chile-Garlic Sauce

This is almost as close as you can get to authentic Chinese food in North America! This recipe combines marinated shrimp, ginger, garlic, hot chiles, asparagus and lemon grass for a somewhat spicy but extremely flavorful entrée. You could substitute sugar snap peas for the asparagus.

1 pound large (31 - 35 or 26 - 30) shrimp, peeled and deveined

3 tablespoons sake, divided

2 tablespoons cornstarch

Three tablespoons fish sauce (Tra Chang is a good brand), divided

Peanut or sesame oil

2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger (or two teaspoons dried)

2 teaspoons granulated sugar

2 dried Thai chiles

1 tablespoon minced garlic (about three cloves)

2 tablespoons minced lemongrass (about one large stalk)

1/4 cup minced scallions (about three medium scallions)

1/2 pound asparagus, trimmed and bias-sliced into two-inch pieces

Two to four fresh Thai chiles, thinly sliced (depending on desired heat level)

1 tablespoon Chili-Garlic Sauce (Túóng Ót Tói)

3 tablespoons Thai basil, sliced into chiffonade (regular basil, if necessary)

Combine one tablespoon sake, one tablespoon fish sauce and the cornstarch in a small bowl. Mix until smooth. Place the shrimp in a bowl and add the cornstarch slurry. Stir well to coat. Let the shrimp marinate at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Heat a wok or large skillet over medium-high heat. Swirl some oil in the pan. Add the ginger, sugar, dried chiles, garlic, lemongrass and chopped scallions. Stir-fry for one minute. Add the shrimp; cook, stirring, until the shrimp is slightly charred and barely opaque, about four minutes. Add the asparagus and the remaining fish sauce and sake; stir-fry for three minutes. Add the sliced chiles. Chow briefly. And the chili-garlic sauce and toss to combine. Add the basil and serve with steamed rice.

Jamaican Spicy Grilled Jerk Shrimp

This spicy recipe could be prepared on the grill or under the broiler if the weather is not cooperating. Don’t marinate the shrimp for more than an hour or the lemon will begin to “cook” the shrimp. This can be served as an appetizer with two shrimp per skewer or as an entrée with a half dozen shrimp. Traditionally, jerk is cooked over pimento (allspice) wood.

For the Jerk Spice:

2 tablespoons light brown sugar

2 tablespoons smoked paprika

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro

2 scallions, finely sliced

1 teaspoon coarse kosher salt

1 teaspoon granulated garlic

1/2 habanero or Scotch Bonnet chile, seeded and finely minced

Zest and juice of one lemon (two tablespoons juice; one tablespoon zest)

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme or 1 1/2 teaspoons fresh)

1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground allspice

Whisk all of the ingredients for the jerk spice mixture together in a bowl. (This spice mixture also works well for chicken or pork.)

For the Shrimp:

1 pound large (31 - 35) shrimp

Jerk spice mixture

1 lime cut into wedges, for garnish

Peel and devein the shrimp leaving the tails attached. Add the shrimp to the jerk spice and stir to combine. Marinate the shrimp for 15 minutes or up to one hour.

Thread the shrimp onto bamboo skewers that have been soaked in warm water, wine or beer for 30 minutes.

Grill the shrimp skewers over a preheated medium-high grill for about three to four minutes per side or until barely opaque. The shrimp could also be cooked under the broiler or in a stovetop grill pan.

Grilled Chipotle Shrimp

1 pound uncooked large shrimp, peeled and deveined

1/4 cup packed brown sugar

1 (7-ounce) can chipotle peppers in adobo sauce

1/4 cup adobo sauce (homemade or canned)

2 tablespoons minced garlic (about six cloves)

2 tablespoons Tequila (not expensive stuff)

2 tablespoons lime juice (about one medium lime)

1 tablespoon olive oil

1/4 teaspoon coarse kosher salt

In a small saucepan, bring the brown sugar, two canned chipotles (minced), adobo sauce, garlic, water, lime juice, oil and salt to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer; cook, stirring, another three minutes. Remove from the heat; cool completely. (One seven-ounce can of chipotles in adobo yields about 10 chiles and 1 1/2 tablespoons of sauce.)

Place the shrimp in a medium bowl and add the marinade. Stir to coat. Marinate for 15 minutes or up to one hour.

Drain and discard the marinade. Thread the shrimp onto metal or soaked wooden skewers. Preheat the grill for medium-high cooking. Grease the grates with oil. Grill the shrimp, covered, for six to eight minutes or until shrimp turn pink, turning once. These shrimp could also be cook on a grill pan or under the broiler, about four inches from the heat. (They are also great for tacos or tostadas!)

Adobo Sauce

Adobo sauce is a piquant sauce and marinade used in Mexican and Southwestern cuisines. Main ingredients are chile peppers (usually chipotle or ancho), garlic and vinegar although there are numerous regional variations some of which include tomatoes, onions and a variety of herbs and spices. Mexican or Southwestern adobo sauce is not the same as Filipino adobo which is stewed chicken and pork in a vinegary soy sauce.

Eight dried ancho or chipotle chiles

Oil for cooking

One cup diced yellow onion (about one medium onion)

Six cloves garlic, peeled and diced

2 cups chicken stock

1/2 cup white vinegar

12 cups water

3/4 cup orange juice

2 tablespoons tomato paste

1 tablespoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon freshly ground smoked black pepper

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon coarse kosher salt

1/4 cup vinegar

1/4 cup lemon juice

Remove the tops and seeds from the chiles. Heat a skillet over medium heat and coat the pan with oil. Cook the chiles about ten seconds per side or until fragrant. Place the chiles in a stockpot, add the vinegar and water. Soak the chiles for at least eight hours.

After soaking, drain the chiles and discard the soaking solution. Purée the chiles in a small food processor adding some of the chicken stock to form into a paste. In a large skillet or saucepan, sauté the onion and garlic over medium heat until softened; add the chile paste, stock, black pepper, oregano, cumin, cinnamon, salt, vinegar and lemon juice, and orange juice.

Simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 30 minutes or until the sauce has thickened. (The sauce, covered and refrigerated, will keep for two months.)

Crevettes à L’ail (Spicy Sautéed Shrimp with Garlic)

These can be served as an appetizer (with some crusty bread) or as an entrée over linguine or rice. For easy eating, leave the tails on the shrimp if an appetizer but remove the tails if serving as an entrée.

1 pound peeled and deveined large (21 - 25) shrimp

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/2 cup dry white wine (Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Gris)

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Zest from one lemon

2 tablespoons minced fresh flat leaf parsley

1 1/2 tablespoons lemon zest

Lemon wedges

For the marinade:

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice (about two lemons)

3 tablespoons olive oil

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (or more to taste)

2 bay leaves, crumbled

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Prepare the marinade by whisking together all the ingredients in a mixing bowl.

Rinse the shrimp under cold water and place them in a non-reactive container. Add the marinade and marinate the shrimp, refrigerated, for up to one hour. Do not marinate the shrimp for longer than an hour or the acid in the marinade will begin to “cook” the shrimp.

Drain the shrimp. Heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the butter. When the butter stops sizzling add the shrimp and cook until barely done, about three minutes. Add the wine and reduce slightly. Add the lemon juice and cook until the shrimp are opaque. (The shrimp could also be cooked in a 350 degrees F. oven for about 15 minutes.)

Transfer the shrimp to warmed serving bowls and garnish with the parsley and lemon zest. Serve with lemon wedges and crusty bread.

If serving as an entrée, ladle the shrimp over linguine and serve with crusty bread and a side salad.