

Nafy Flatley's Senegalese Maafè with California Halibut

By Georgia Freedman



Nafy Flatley's maafè is comfort in a bowl. The classic Senegalese stew is traditionally made with peanut butter, potatoes and sweet potatoes, tomatoes, tamarind paste, fish sauce and other flavorings, and it can be made with meat—chicken, lamb and beef are common—or served on its own with rice, couscous or even bread.

"It's the last meal I ate before immigrating to this country," Flatley says. "It always takes me back to that last day, saying my goodbyes to my mom, getting on the airplane and coming to this country for my way of living the American dream."

At Teranga, Flatley's stand in the La Cocina Marketplace, the maafè is served plain or with chicken. It comes sprinkled with peanuts and sumac over jasmine rice. At home, and for catering jobs, Flatley also sometimes makes this classic dish with a variety of seafood. "Senegal is surrounded by ocean—just like San Francisco. So, you get a lot of seafood," says Flatley. "There are different ways you can add seafood into the maafè: you can use shrimps, you can use scallops—you can really use any shellfish that you like. You can also use one fish that we call the capitaine [Atlantic croaker]. In Senegal, we call it thioff."

When cooking the dish in San Francisco, however, Flatley uses local seafood, including sea bass, dourade and even ahi tuna. She also purchases her fish from local vendors like Monterey Fish Market in Berkeley or Royal Hawaiian Seafood in South San Francisco. "I am a small business," says Flatley. "I love supporting other small businesses. That's part of the mission of what Teranga does."

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Maafè with Halibut Serves 6

½ cup organic creamy peanut butter
3 cups vegetable stock, broth or water
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 red onion, medium dice—about .5 cm
1 bell pepper, diced about .5 cm (stem and seeds removed)
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 habanero, whole, stem on
1 heaping tablespoon tomato paste
2 cups diced tomatoes
1 tablespoon tamarind paste
1 teaspoon fish sauce
1 bay leaf

1 cup diced sweet potato and/or butternut squash
1 cup diced turnips or potatoes
1 cup diced carrots
1 cup diced cassava
2 teaspoons sea salt, plus more to taste
1 tablespoon teranga baobab powder, optional
Cracked black pepper, to taste
6 (4-ounce) pieces of halibut
6-10 whole okra pods (optional)
1 tablespoon teranga baobab powder (optional)
Yellow and orange bell pepper, diced, to garnish
Cilantro, to garnish

Combine the peanut butter with 1 cup of warm vegetable stock, broth or water and stir to dissolve to a smooth sauce.

In a large saucepan, heat up the oil over medium heat and add in the onions and bell peppers. Sauté until soft but not browned, about 3 minutes. Add in the minced garlic and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Add in the tomato paste, stirring to evenly coat the vegetables. Allow to cook until the color turns brick red, about 3-4 minutes. Add in the chopped tomatoes with their liquid. Stir and scrape the bottom of the pan to loosen any stuck bits. Allow the sauce to come up to a simmer.

Stir in the peanut butter mixture and the remaining stock, broth or water. Add in the tamarind paste, fish sauce and bay leaf. Let sauce simmer, covered over low heat, till slightly thickened, about 30 minutes. Stir frequently to keep from burning.

While the maafè is cooking, prepare the fish: Season it with salt and pepper, pan-sear it with olive oil on the stove top in

an oven-safe pan, skin side down, until caramelization starts. Transfer the pan to the oven and cook the fish at 450°F for 4-5 minutes.

Add the sweet potatoes, butternut squash, turnips, cassava, habanero and carrots to the maafè. Season sauce with salt and black pepper and nestle the fish into the pot. Cook until vegetables are just tender, about 12-15 minutes.

While the maafè is cooking, sauté the okra (if using), in olive oil until they start to caramelize, then stir in a little apple cider vinegar, lime or lemon juice. (The acid will reduce the slimy character of the okra.)

Sprinkle in the baobab powder, if using, and stir in the okra and spinach. Remove from heat; season with more salt if necessary.

Garnish using yellow and orange bell pepper and cilantro. Serve over rice, couscous fonio or fufú.