

## Onions, Garlic, Rice, and Beans

At 7:00 A.M. my husband and I begin our tour of the feira, starting with the stand that sells the basic Brazilian diet, the food that has kept the poor alive for centuries and is now a part of Brazilian culture. Today, it is difficult to find any Brazilian meal that doesn't include these four staples, the first two in almost any cooked main or side dish, and rice and/or beans as accompaniment to shrimp, chicken, meat, in a *feijoada*—the national dish—or as a simple supper. Traditionally, only white rice is served in homes and restaurants, but recently whole-grain rice has begun to appear on the tables of more experimental cooks; at this stand, we can find all types and grades of rice along with cornmeal and many varieties of dried beans. By and large, the same beans are found in both the U.S. and Brazil, with the exception of limas, which are unavailable here, and *cordas*, which I think are unobtainable in the States.

Vendors offer heads of garlic arranged in an attractive design and onions sorted according to origin, size, and type at one end of the stand; at the other end, cornmeal and beans are displayed. These dry foodstuffs are bought in









bulk by the stand owners who package them in half-kilo (1.1 pounds) plastic bags for resale to the public. As is the case with all the stands, a clothesline is run from one support to the other and is positioned just above eye level. Prices are marked on pieces of paper and clipped, with clothespins, to the line above each section of food, an arrangement that allows the vendor to quickly mark down prices throughout the day.

As is our custom, we stop first at the stand owned by Armando and his wife, Keiko, both of whom have worked in feiras since the 1980s. Keiko now works just at this Sunday feira while Armando's only day off is Monday, when all feiras are closed. In accordance with customary good manners in Brazil, before doing business we always exchange greetings with the seller, comment on the good or bad weather, and inquire about the vendor's health and family. As Armando artfully arranges a pyramid of garlic heads and the couple's adult daughter sorts onions, we ask Keiko if their two grown children who are living in Japan will be visiting soon. When she sadly replies that the distance and cost of airfare severely limit any visits, I can truly sympathize since we are similarly curbed in our travels to the U.S. Looking around, I realize that their third son, a computer-science student at a local college who usually helps out on Sunday, is missing and Keiko explains that he is studying for an exam. She thanks us for the chocolate-chip cookies we brought last weekend, and I remember some of the gifts she has given us over the years, including a black-lacquered Japanese tray and small Buddha.

Pleasantries over, I get down to serious business and bend over the red onions and garlic.





Feijão  
Feijão Nabo  
Escolhido  
SAFRA  
MINEIRA





## *Baião de Dois* Dance of Two

This is one of those basic rice and bean dishes found everywhere and is often served with fish or chicken. I have found that, with the cheese, it is perfect for lunch or a light supper accompanied only by a salad and crusty bread. In Brazil, it's made with *corda* beans—brown black-eyed peas—but I have successfully substituted pintos. Here, jack cheese has replaced *coalho*, but any mild, white cheese may be used.

2 cups pinto beans, soaked overnight  
2 cups rice  
4 tbsp. butter  
1 hot red pepper, minced  
1 green pepper, chopped  
1 large onion, chopped  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
½ lb. jack cheese  
Chopped parsley  
Chopped cilantro

Cook the beans and rice separately, reserving the cooking liquid from the beans. While they are cooking, melt the butter in a large skillet and sauté the hot red pepper, green pepper, onion, and garlic. Grate a half-cup of the cheese and cut the remainder in thin slices. Add the rice, beans, 1 cup of bean liquid, and the cheese to the frying pan, heat the mixture, and turn into a serving bowl, sprinkling with the parsley and cilantro.

Serves 8.

## *Feijão Preto com Bananas* Black Beans with Bananas

This is the perfect accompaniment to almost any simple chicken, fish, or meat dish. The beans may be prepared ahead of time and reheated while the bananas sauté. Although the recipe calls for plantains, those starchy bananas that retain their shape when cooked, I have successfully used ordinary bananas in this dish when plantains were not available. In such an event, sauté the bananas very lightly and fold them carefully into the beans to avoid dissolving the fruit.

1 cup dry black beans  
1-2 tbsp. olive oil  
¾ cup onion, finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
¾ cup red bell pepper, finely chopped  
½ tsp. dry oregano  
½ tsp. dry cumin  
1 bay leaf  
Salt and pepper to taste  
2-3 plantains cut in thick slices  
1 tsp. wine vinegar

Rinse the beans and soak overnight. Transfer the beans and soaking liquid to a pot and set aside. In a separate pan, heat a minimum of olive oil and sauté the onion, garlic, bell pepper, oregano, and cumin until tender. Add to the beans along with the bay leaf and additional water, if needed. Cover and cook for 1 hour or until done, adding water from time to time if necessary. When the beans are done, salt and pepper to taste. Just before serving, sauté the plantains and add to the bean mixture along with the wine vinegar.

Serves 4.

### *Caldinho do Feijão* Dulce's Bean Soup

On a winter night when the temperature dropped to 8 degrees, this steaming soup was served in small ceramic cups along with wine and glasses of *cachaça* at an event in one of the experimental theaters. Soup, either hot or cold, is frequently served in demitasse cups, without spoons or saucers, at large luncheons, but this was the first time I had experienced soup at an opening. It was absolutely delicious, and when asked for the recipe, Dulce Muniz, actress and director of the Teatro Studio 184 and also creator of the soup, was delighted to oblige.

Traditionally, the problem with Brazilian recipes has been the fact that they are very vague; sometimes no oven temperatures are given, no pan sizes are indicated even for cakes, cooking time is not designated, and there may be no clear idea of how many people the recipe will serve. In this instance, the ingredients had been listed along with only a rough idea of amounts and



it took a few tests before I was able to duplicate the flavor of her creation. The soup should have a bite but not be terribly spicy. If fresh red chili pepper isn't available, any fresh or canned pepper may be substituted.

4 cups cooked beans (pinto or red; no white or black)  
4 cups water (more or less)  
2 tbsp. olive oil  
2 medium onions, chopped  
1 tbsp. minced ginger  
1 cup loosely packed fresh cilantro leaves  
1 fresh red pepper without seeds  
¼ lb. bacon, cooked very crisp  
1 tbsp. olive oil  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
Salt and pepper to taste

Pulse the cooked beans in a blender, gradually adding water until the soup is almost smooth and slightly thinner than you want the finished product to be. In a pan, sauté the onions in 2 tbsp. olive oil until wilted. Add the cooked onions, ginger, cilantro, and red pepper to the soup, blend, and return to the cooking pot. Crumble the bacon and add it to the soup. Set aside. Add 1 tbsp. olive oil to the pan in which the onions were sautéed and sauté the garlic, cooking only until it is a very light tan, as it will turn bitter with browning. Add to the soup, salt and pepper to taste, and cook over low heat for 20 minutes or until it has amalgamated and thickened, stirring from time to time. Add salt and pepper and remove from the fire.

To serve, Brazilians use a black ceramic pot with a lid but any attractive soup pot will do. Accompany it with the following, each in a small dish to be passed around the table.

1. 4-6 large cloves garlic, sautéed
2. Fresh ginger
3. Cilantro leaves, finely chopped
4. 6 fresh red peppers without seeds, minced

Serves 6.



## *Caldo Toscano* Tuscan Soup

Ribollita is an Italian vegetable soup from Tuscany that may contain any combination of vegetables, but it always includes dried white beans and bread. This delicious version speaks to the Italian immigrants who brought the recipe with them and, as Brazilians, then abbreviated it.

1 cup dried white beans  
½ cup chopped onion  
1 medium leek, white part only, finely chopped  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
2 tbsp. olive oil  
¾ lb. cabbage, both red and white  
4 cups vegetable stock (homemade or bouillon cube)  
1 tsp. fresh thyme  
Salt and pepper  
4 slices of Italian bread, toasted

Wash the beans, drain, and soak overnight in water, covering by at least 2 inches. In the morning, cook until done (the length of time depends on the age of the beans, but it will be anywhere from 1 to 2 hours). Meanwhile, sauté the onion, leek, and garlic in oil. Drain the cooked beans and combine with the onion mixture, cabbage, stock, and seasonings. Cook until the cabbage is done, adding



more stock, if necessary, and adjusting the seasonings. Put one slice of toast in the bottom of each soup plate, then pour the soup over the toast. Accompany with more toasted Italian bread. Serve immediately to preserve the beautiful purple and white color contrast. After a few hours, the dish will be completely lavender.

Serves 4.

### *Feijão de Tutu*

#### Bean Tutu

This recipe originated in the neighboring state of Minas Gerais and is one of those recipes with endless variations. Traditionally, it is served with thinly sliced, cooked kale and rice and can also be garnished with chopped, hard-cooked eggs and scallions. Sometimes the beans are mashed, and it often accompanies grilled meat.

3 cups cooked black beans with liquid  
Manioc meal or cornmeal, enough to thicken beans  
2 tbsp. vinegar  
¼ cup bacon, cut in pieces  
½ lb. pork sausage, sliced  
1 bay leaf  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 onion, thinly sliced  
Kale, if desired

Heat beans, mash in their liquid, and add enough manioc or cornmeal to make a mush. Add the vinegar and reserve. In another pan, fry the bacon and sausage and add the bay leaf then the garlic. Mix in the beans and stir well to blend. Fry the onion slices and, if using, separately sauté the kale. Mound the beans on a platter and cover with onion slices. Surround beans with cooked kale, if it is used.

Serves 4.

### *Feijão Tropeiro*

#### Cattle Driver's Beans

This is a dish originating in the south of Brazil, where cowboys tend herds of cattle and where the cuisine relies heavily on pork and beef.

2 cups uncooked kidney beans, soaked overnight  
2 tbsp. corn oil



2 oz. pork rinds, cut in pieces  
 4 oz. smoked bacon  
 5 oz. pork loin, roasted and cut in pieces  
 1½ tbsp. minced garlic  
 2 large eggs  
 2 big leaves of kale, sliced very finely  
 1 medium onion, diced  
 1 cup manioc flour or cornmeal  
 ¼ cup parsley, minced  
 ¼ cup cilantro, minced  
 Salt, pepper, and hot pepper, to taste

Cook the beans without seasonings and set aside. Fry the pork rinds in oil and add the bacon and roasted pork loin. When cooked, add ½ tbsp. of minced garlic. Make a space in the middle of the meat and scramble the eggs, adding more minced garlic to the eggs. Add the kale, the onion, and 1 tbsp. of garlic. Mix. Still cooking, add the beans slowly then add the manioc flour or cornmeal, parsley, cilantro, salt, pepper, and hot pepper. Gently mix. Serve with rice and a salad.

Serves 6.

### *Arroz Integral Temperado* Seasoned Brown Rice

This is a more modern and sophisticated recipe, reflecting both the contemporary Brazilian interest in health and a traditional tendency to combine unlikely ingredients.

1 cup brown rice  
 2 cups water  
 1 medium carrot, cubed  
 ½ cup green beans, chopped  
 1 onion, chopped  
 2 tbsp. oil or butter  
 ½ cup cashew nuts, chopped  
 ½ cup dark grapes, halved  
 Green onions and parsley, chopped  
 1 cup corn, cooked  
 Salt to taste  
 2 tbsp. toasted sesame seeds