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*Very Southern*  
recipes and tips

# Southern CAST IRON®



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# A TASTE OF...

# CUBA

## SOUTHERN SPICE MEETS HAVANA SOUL



**T**hough he was born in New Orleans and is known around the nation for his Crescent City cuisine, Washington D.C.-based chef David Guas's family roots stretch to an island nation nearly 700 miles farther south. Both his father and grandfather were born and raised in Cuba, and relocated to the United States after 1950, ultimately settling in the Big Easy. But while they left their country, David's family didn't leave their cuisine behind. From stewed picadillo and hearty black beans and rice to fried yuca and guava-filled pastelitos, David grew up savoring the flavors of his father's homeland alongside New Orleans classics. Now, he continues those culinary traditions on the menus at his restaurants Bayou Bakery and Lil' B, serving up gumbo and muffulettas daily, with every Wednesday at Bayou Bakery being dedicated to his favorite Cuban plates. Whether he's cooking in the restaurant, at home for his kids, or just whipping something up to remind himself of his childhood, David hopes to preserve, share, and pass along his family's culture with each dish.

### HOW HAS YOUR CUBAN HERITAGE INFLUENCED YOUR STYLE OF COOKING HERE IN THE SOUTH?

There are a lot of parallels between Cuban cuisine and New Orleans cuisine, with the main difference being that Cuban food isn't cooked with cayenne pepper, and isn't spicy at all. They're both simple, usually one-pot styles. It's the approach of developing layers of flavor by cooking low and slow. It's braising meats and making stews. In Cuban cuisine, we serve about 90 percent of our dishes over rice, just like in New Orleans and even the Carolinas. You use what grows and is bountiful in your area like seafood, rice, sugar cane, and corn. That concept of using local ingredients and building flavor slowly is very Southern and very Cuban, and I do my best to get the best of the best locally even now at my restaurants in Washington D.C. so I can represent that.



CHEF  
DAVID GUAS

### HOW DID YOUR FAMILY KEEP CUBAN FOOD TRADITIONS GOING?

My father was a veterinarian, so he didn't always have time to cook. He was a bit of a weekend warrior when it came to cooking. He loved to grill, but sometimes he would make us the traditional dishes like ropa vieja, picadillo, or flank steak with mojo sauce. And every Sunday, my grandfather would pick me up and we would go to these Cuban grocery stores—there was actually a large population of Cubans in the city—and get authentic Cuban sandwiches and these little sweets called pastelitos. He always seemed to know the owners or butchers, and I just remember being in awe of him because he could go to these stores and just go to the back and go behind the scenes.





DAVID'S PICADILLO  
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM DICKEY  
RECIPE DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD STYLING  
BY ANNA THEOKTISTO  
PROP STYLING BY SIDNEY BRAGIEL





## WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF COOKING?

During school breaks, I would visit my Aunt Boo. She lived in Abbeville, Louisiana, which is the last bit of Cajun country where the older generations still speak French. That's the kind of place where you see some of the older neighbors cooking outside in these big cast-iron cauldrons, making their jambalaya and gumbos and etouffée. That's always stuck with me, because it was so interactive and communal, which I've come to find is also big in Cuban cooking. Aunt Boo actually gave me my first cast-iron pot when I left for culinary school, and I still use that pot to this day.

## HOW DOES CAST IRON PLAY INTO YOUR CUBAN-MEETS-CAJUN COOKING?

There's not much of my personal cooking that I don't do in cast iron—Cuban or otherwise. There's always a piece of cast iron sitting on the stove. I have about seven cast-iron pans in my kitchen and a big cast-iron cauldron in my backyard. I can do anything and everything in one, if not all, of my pieces. I make all of my roux in cast iron, and I always use my old Dutch oven for jambalaya. It's also perfect for stewing or braising. Plus, my larger skillets are great for searing meats and fish. You can't mimic that with other pans.

## SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

Although Cuban cuisine may sound exotic and intimidating at first, the flavors and ingredients will taste comforting and familiar after just a few bites. Here are some of the popular dishes and common ingredients that make their way onto the Cuban table.

### PLANTAINS: NOT YOUR AVERAGE BANANA

A member of the banana family common in subtropical climates, these fruits are harder than yellow bananas and are often cooked before eating. Green plantains are starchy and similar in flavor to a potato, while yellow-, brown-, and black-peel plantains have much sweeter flesh.

### ROPA VIEJA

Literally meaning "old clothes," this savory Cuban classic stars shreds of beef, peppers, and onions that are braised and served with rice.

### YUCA

A hard root vegetable similar to a potato, often boiled in Cuban cooking.

### GUAVA

A tropical fruit with a green peel and sweet pink or sour white flesh, often pureed with sugar and pectin to form guava paste.

### PICADILLO

A ground beef dish cooked with olives, tomatoes, and raisins, and served with white rice.

### PASTELITOS

Pastries made of flaky puff pastry folded around sweet or savory fillings.



## PICADILLO

Recipe courtesy David Guas, Chef/  
Owner, Bayou Bakery, Coffee Bar & Eatery,  
Arlington, Virginia

Makes 6 servings

*One of David's childhood favorites, this dish is one he now makes for his own children.*

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin seed
- 1 sweet onion, small diced (about 2 cups)
- 1 medium red bell pepper, small diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound ground beef (80/20%)
- ½ cup green olives, roughly chopped
- ⅓ cup raisins
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 cup beef stock
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- Rice, to serve

**FIRST** In a 12-inch cast-iron skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add cumin seed; cook for 30 seconds. Add onion, bell pepper, and garlic; sauté until onions are translucent and peppers are somewhat tender. Add beef; cook, using a wooden spoon to break up meat. Add olives, raisins, and oregano; cook until beef is browned and crumbly. Stir in tomato sauce, stock, and Worcestershire; reduce heat to low. Cover and cook for 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve with rice.

## PICADILLO EMPANADAS

Makes 6

*We added an egg to our quick-and-easy empanada dough to help keep these hand pies sturdy.*

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 10 tablespoons cold butter, cubed
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- ¼ to ⅓ cup ice water
- 1½ cups cold Picadillo (recipe precedes)
- 1 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
- 1 large egg, beaten
- Cilantro-Lime Crema, to serve (recipe follows)



**FIRST** In the work bowl of a food processor, place flour and salt; pulse until combined. Add cold butter, and pulse until mixture is crumbly. Add egg and vinegar, pulsing to combine. With processor running, gradually add enough water until a dough forms. Turn out dough, and shape into a disk. Wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

**NEXT** Preheat oven to 400°. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough to ⅛-inch thickness. Using an inverted bowl, cut 6 (6½-inch) rounds from dough, rerolling scraps as necessary.

**NEXT** Place ¼ cup Picadillo in center of each round. Top with cheese. Lightly brush edges with egg. Fold dough over filling, pressing to seal. Crimp edges, if desired.

**NEXT** Place each pastry on a cast-iron pizza pan; brush with egg. Using a sharp knife, cut 3 slits in top of each pastry.

**LAST** Bake until golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool slightly before serving. Serve with Cilantro-Lime Crema.

## CILANTRO-LIME CREMA

Makes about 1½ cups

*This herbaceous sauce blends up in under a minute and is perfect served with vegetables.*

- 1 cup sour cream
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ jalapeño pepper, chopped
- ½ teaspoon lime zest
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

**FIRST** In the container of a blender, place all ingredients; blend until smooth. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Crema can be made up to 3 days in advance.









## AREPAS WITH MOJO PORK ROAST AND FRIED SWEET PLANTAINS

Makes 12

*Pre-cooked cornmeal, also known as arepa flour, can be found at Latin-American markets and also online.*

- 2 cups pre-cooked white cornmeal\*
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2½ cups warm water
- ¼ cup unsalted butter

**Mojo Pork Roast (recipe follows)**

**Fried Sweet Plantains (recipe follows)**

**Cilantro-Lime Crema (recipe on page 98)**

**Queso fresco, to serve**

**FIRST** In a large bowl, stir together cornmeal, sugar, and salt. Quickly whisk in 2½ cups warm water until mixture is smooth. Let stand for 10 minutes.

**NEXT** Using a ¼-cup measuring cup, scoop mixture into 12 pieces. Roll each piece into a ball, and shape into a ½-inch-thick disk.

**NEXT** Heat a cast-iron griddle over medium heat. Rub butter over griddle. Working in batches, place arepas on griddle; cook until browned and a dry skin has formed over outside, 5 to 6 minutes per side. Let arepas cool slightly.

**LAST** To assemble, split arepas in half crosswise. Fill each arepa with Mojo Pork Roast, Fried Sweet Plantains, Cilantro-Lime Crema, and queso fresco. Serve immediately.

*\*We used P.A.N. Pre-Cooked White Cornmeal.*

## MOJO PORK ROAST

Makes 6 to 8 servings

*Drizzled with reserved marinade, this pork is brimming with garlic and citrus flavor.*

- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- ½ cup fresh orange juice
- 1 teaspoon lime zest
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 12 cloves garlic, minced

- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1½ tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
- 1 (6- to 8-pound) bone-in pork shoulder

**FIRST** In a medium bowl, stir together oil, orange zest and juice, lime zest and juice, lemon juice, garlic, oregano, salt, cumin, and pepper. Reserve ½ cup marinade.

**NEXT** Using a sharp knife, cut 1-inch slits all over pork; place pork in a large resealable plastic bag. Pour remaining marinade over pork. Seal bag, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or up to 24 hours.

**NEXT** Preheat oven to 350°. Remove pork from bag, discarding marinade. Place pork in a large enamel-coated cast-iron Dutch oven.

**LAST** Bake, covered, until pork is tender, about 5 hours. Let cool for 10 minutes. Shred meat, and serve with reserved ½ cup marinade.

## FRIED SWEET PLANTAINS

Makes about 6 servings

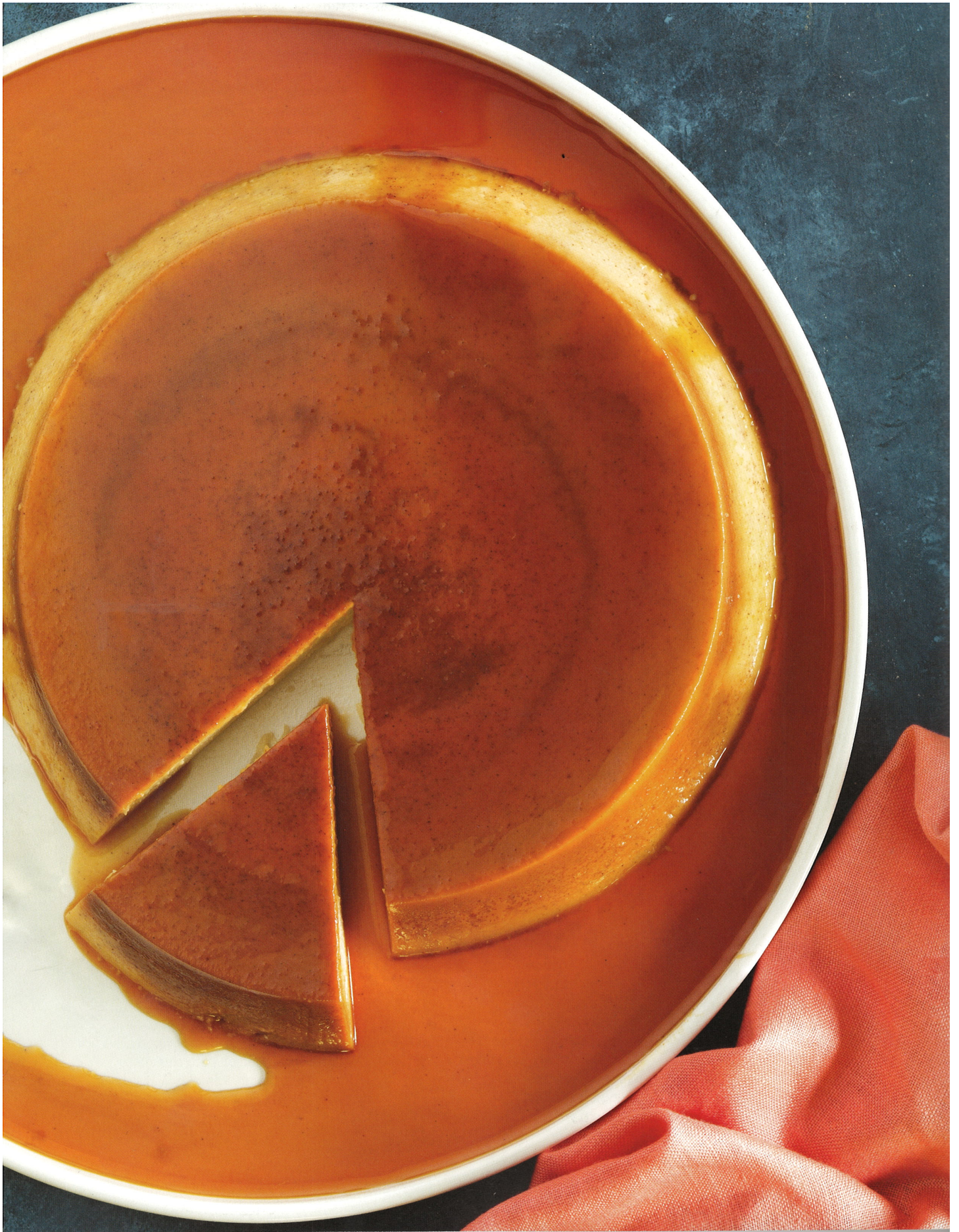
*Frying caramelizes the sugar on the outside of these sweet and simple plantains.*

- 3 ripe plantains, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons firmly packed light brown sugar
- Pinch kosher salt
- Canola oil, for frying

**FIRST** In a medium bowl, stir together plantains, brown sugar, and salt.

**LAST** In a 10-inch cast-iron skillet, pour oil to a depth of 1 inch, and heat over medium heat until a deep-fry thermometer registers 350°. Working in batches, place plantains in a single layer in hot oil. Fry until browned on both sides, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove from oil, and let drain on parchment paper. Serve warm.







## SPICED COCONUT FLAN

Makes about 6 servings

*Letting the flan cool overnight in the refrigerator helps the custard set and become deliciously creamy.*

- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 3 large eggs
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1 (15-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 (12-ounce) can evaporated milk
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt

**FIRST** Preheat oven to 300°.

**NEXT** In a 10-inch enamel-coated cast-iron skillet, cook sugar and ¼ cup water over medium heat, stirring frequently, until sugar is dissolved. Cook, without stirring, until mixture turns amber colored, about 10 minutes. Immediately remove from heat. Tilt skillet, coating sides of pan with caramel. Let cool until hardened, about 10 minutes. Place skillet in a large roasting pan.

**NEXT** In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, egg yolks, coconut milk, condensed milk, evaporated milk, vanilla, cinnamon, and salt until combined. Strain egg mixture through a fine-mesh sieve over caramel in skillet. Carefully place skillet in roasting pan in oven. Fill roasting pan with enough hot water to come halfway up sides of skillet.

**LAST** Bake until a knife inserted in center comes out smooth, 1 hour and 10 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Remove skillet from water, and let cool to room temperature. Refrigerate until custard is cold, at least 3 hours or overnight. Run a knife around edges of skillet. Carefully invert flan onto a serving platter.



## PASTELITOS WITH GUAVA AND GOAT CHEESE

Makes 12

*Goat cheese adds a tangy twist to this classic sweet Cuban pastry.*

- 1 (17.1-ounce) package frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 4 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 4 ounces goat cheese, softened
- ¼ teaspoon lime zest
- 1½ cups guava paste
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons cane sugar

**FIRST** Preheat oven to 400°.

**NEXT** On a lightly floured surface, unfold 1 sheet of dough. Using a sharp

knife or pizza wheel, cut dough into thirds and then in half crosswise, creating 6 rectangles. Repeat with remaining sheet of dough.

**NEXT** In a small bowl, stir together cream cheese, goat cheese, and zest until smooth. Place 1 tablespoon guava paste in center of each rectangle. Top with 1 tablespoon cream cheese mixture. Brush edges of dough with egg. Fold dough over filling. Using a fork, crimp edges to seal. Place each pastry on a cast-iron pizza pan. Brush with egg; sprinkle with cane sugar. Using a sharp knife, cut 3 slits in top of each pastry.

**LAST** Bake until golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Let cool before serving.