



Photographs: Carole Topalian

pepper satisfies the daily requirement of this vitamin. Chilies are also a good source of most B vitamins, potassium, magnesium and iron.

When the heat becomes too much to handle, traditional cuisines have often paired cooling products, often dairy-based, with the fiery dishes: sour cream and avocados with Mexican food, yogurt raita with Indian curries, and coconut milk with Thai dishes all provide fats that prevent the capsaicin from attaching to pain receptors in the mouth.

Chili peppers are at their peak in August and September so load up when you find them. Pop them whole into the freezer and make spicy food a part of your healthy, flavourful cuisine all year long.

Carmen Everest Wahl is a board member of Foodlink, and a regular contributor to its newsletter, "Local Harvest." Based on her belief that Canadians need to reunite with the real flavours of food, Carmen is currently writing a book that explores the history and significance of local foods that grow in fields and gardens across this country.

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PEPPERY PORTUGUESE FISH STEW (CALDEIRADA)

By Anita Stewart

This dish is almost a direct transposition of the Portuguese national fish stew that Margaret Timmins' (a.k.a. Margarida Ferreira) mother, Maria, made in her Mississauga, Ontario, home and later her Cambridge, Ontario, home for years after her family immigrated in the 1950s. Rather than ocean fish, which once arrived daily in Maria's island kitchen on Sao Miguel, she substituted pickerel and a bit of extra salt. Last year, this identical recipe, which is really more of a method than a set of hard and fast rules, was cooked for me by Margaret's niece, Rosa Maria Mauricio, on the north coast of that same island near the village where Margaret's mother was born.

The goal is to make a flavourful bed for the fish, which is added toward the end of the cooking and steamed to spicy perfection. Like any classic homestyle recipe, this one lends itself to many variations. Don't be afraid to modify it. If you don't have ripe tomatoes, add 1/2 cup tomato sauce or crushed tomatoes. If banana peppers aren't available, add a sweet red pepper and ramp up the amount of pimento sauce. It's wonderful served with crusty fresh bread and a good salad. 6 to 8 servings

- 2 large cooking onions, sliced
- 3 or 4 ripe tomatoes, sliced
- 3 or 4 banana peppers, seeded and diced (see note, below)
- 6 cups sliced peeled potatoes
- 3 large cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup minced fresh mint
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup pimento sauce*
- 1 tbs coarse salt
- 1 1/2 tsp ground white pepper
- 2 or 3 large bay leaves
- 1 cup water
- 2 lb whole fish fillets, such as pickerel or whitefish

In a large heavy pot or Dutch oven, layer the onions, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and garlic. Sprinkle each layer with some of the parsley, mint, olive oil, pimento sauce, salt and white pepper, retaining a bit of each for the fish. Embed the bay leaves at random. Add water, cover and cook over medium heat or until the potatoes are nearly tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Top with the fish and reserved seasonings. Cover and continue to steam until the fish begins to flake, about 10 minutes, adding additional water if necessary to prevent burning. Ladle into warmed soup bowls.

*Available at Portuguese grocery stores.

Editor's Note: *To make this dish, I used Ferma brand Hot Pimento Sauce (a mild version is also available, but I find the hot sauce to be more flavourful), which is readily available in supermarkets. When preparing the ingredients, I realized that the combination of three or four hot banana peppers together with the hot pimento sauce would result in a dish that would be too fiery for our taste, so I used two banana peppers instead. The stew was wonderful and packed quite a punch, just about the upper limit of our heat tolerance.*