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What's the Thick on Roux? Thickening Soups and Sauces

By Richard Massey

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by: **Richard Massey**

Soups and sauces can be thickened in a variety of ways. A sauce must be thick enough to cling to the food, but not so thick it stands up on its own. Starches are by far the most common thickening agent. Cornstarch, arrowroot, waxy maize and the ever popular, roux (roo). But what is a roux and how does it work?

Roux is a cooked mixture of equal parts by weight of fat and flour. If you mix a starch with water, such as cornstarch it is called a slurry

How does it work?

Starches thicken by absorbing water and swelling to many times their original size. This process is called gelatinization. In order for the starch to function at its maximum, each granule of starch must be separated before heating in order to avoid lumps. If granules are not separated the starch on the outside of a lump quickly gelatinizes into a coating that prevents the liquid from reaching the rest of the starch inside. This is accomplished in two ways.

1. By mixing the starch with cold water - This is used with starches such as arrowroot and cornstarch. This method is not recommended for flour because it lacks flavor and has an undesirable texture.

2. By mixing the starch with fat - This is the principle of the roux. A roux must be cooked for a short period of time so the finished sauce or soup does not have the starchy taste of flour. If cooked for just a short period of time, it is called a blond roux. If cooked longer until it takes on a light brown color, it is called a brown roux.

The most preferred roux in cooking is made by mixing melted butter and flour. Many cooks clarify the butter first because the liquid in whole butter tends to gelatinize some of the starch and make the roux hard to work with. A roux made with butter gives a nice rich flavor to sauces and is easy to work with.

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Margarine and oils can be used to make a roux as well, but because of their lack of flavor they are very seldom the top choice.

Fat drippings from animals such as chicken and beef can make superior sauces. Animal fats enhance the flavor of sauce, but again must be clarified to eliminate any liquid that might cause lumping.

Mixing it all together

A roux can be added to the liquid or the liquid may be added to the roux. The general rules are: The liquid can be hot or cool, but not cold. A very cold liquid will solidify the fat in the roux. The roux in the same way can be warm or cold, but not hot. A hot roux could cause spattering and possibly lumps. For medium sauces and soups I use 8 ounces butter and 8 ounces flour per gallon of liquid. For home it comes out to about 1 tablespoon each per cup of liquid. Use less or more depending on how thick you

like your sauce. By following these simple steps you'll have lump free soups and sauces for the rest of your life.

Chef Richard has worked in the top fine dining restaurants in Washington State and is the author of the ebook "Chef's Special". You can find free recipes, informative articles and order the ebook at

Regional Cuisine Of The United States: Louisiana Cajun Cooking

By Kirsten Hawkins

Louisiana Cajun cuisine originated with a group of French residents of Nova Scotia, who were expelled by the British in 1755. They eventually, after years of a nomadic existence, settled in the Southern Louisiana swamplands. There they adapted their native cooking methods to use ingredients that were available in their new land. This cuisine is the food of hardworking country people, used to difficult conditions. It is practical, strong country food, taking advantage of easily available local ingredients, often an entire meal prepared all in one pot. This style of cooking became the hallmark of these people, called Acadians, which was later shortened to Cajuns.

Authentic Cajun recipes can be hard to come by, as they were traditionally passed down verbally from one generation to the next. They also tend to change a little with each generation, each adding their own flair. There are hundreds of recipes for most common dishes, as the independent nature of the Cajun people is reflected in their cuisine, each kitchen adding their own special touches.

Some of the specialties of Cajun cuisine include gumbos, stews, etouffees, and rice dishes, such as jambalayas. Cajun dishes often begin with a roux, which is butter or oil cooked with flour. Roux is used to thicken, and for flavor. There are three types of roux, depending upon how long it is cooked. There is light or blond, medium, and dark roux. The light and medium types are primarily used for thickening gumbos, etouffees, and sauces, while the dark roux is used for flavor.

The common ingredients of this cuisine are easily available and native to the Southern Louisiana

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swamplands. Seafood is very common, such as crawfish, shrimp, oysters, red fish, speckled trout, and crabs. Rice is a staple ingredient. Other ingredients frequently used are pork, homemade sausages, beans, black-eyed peas, tomatoes, yams, okra, figs, pecans and oranges. Game is also used, such as wild turkey, duck, turtles and frog.

There are relatively few spices used in Cajun cuisine. The unique flavor comes primarily from the long simmering of the dishes prepared. One spice that is used liberally in this cuisine is Cayenne pepper. It is a fiery, finely ground spice made from the Cayenne Chile. It is usually used along with white and black pepper. Another seasoning common to Cajun cooking is file powder, also called gumbo powder. This is made from sassafras leaves that are dried and ground. Creole mustard is also used in many dishes. This is a coarse and spicy local mustard. Tabasco and other hot pepper sauces are standard condiments on the Cajun table

Cajun cuisine is unique to Southern Louisiana, making the best of the native resources, but still retaining the French influence brought to it by the migrants many years ago. It is varied and flexible. Whether you are craving a touch of the exotic, or a little down-home comfort food, this cuisine has managed to include both, often in one big pot. There is something for everyone to enjoy when experimenting with this wonderful style of cooking.

Kirsten Hawkins is a food and nutrition expert specializing the Mexican, Chinese, and Italian food. Visit [for more information on cooking delicious and healthy meals.](#)

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