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Stewed Collards

Serves 6 to 8

Total Time: 2½ hours

This emblematic Southern recipe is made by braising collard greens with a salty smoked pork product. Over a long cooking time, the pork and greens intermingle and turn the cooking water into a supersavory broth known as potlikker that some consider the best part of the dish. Adding two smoked ham hocks provides deeply smoky pork flavor. Plus, after a long braising time, it is easy to pull savory little chunks of meat off the hocks to add back to the greens. Cooking the greens in the controlled heat of the oven, rather than on the stove, makes for silky, evenly cooked collard greens. We love serving these with a few dashes of our Pepper Vinegar (recipe follows) in addition to or instead of the hot sauce. Whatever you do, don't throw out the potlikker.

Ingredients

2 pounds collard greens
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 onion, chopped
6 cups water
2 (12-ounce) smoked ham hocks
3 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
2¼ teaspoons table salt
2 teaspoons sugar
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
Hot sauce

Directions

- 1 Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Trim collard stems to base of leaves; discard trimmings. Cut leaves into roughly 2-inch pieces. Place collards in large bowl and cover with water. Swish with your hand to remove grit. Repeat with fresh water as needed until grit no longer appears in bottom of bowl. Remove collards from water and set aside (you needn't dry them).
- 2 Melt butter in large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion and cook until lightly browned, 6 to 8 minutes. Add water, ham hocks, garlic, salt, sugar, and pepper flakes and bring to boil over high heat. Add collards (pot may be full) and stir until collards wilt slightly, about 1 minute. Cover, transfer to oven, and cook until collards are very tender, about 1½ hours.
- 3 Transfer ham hocks to cutting board and let cool for 10 minutes. Remove meat from ham hocks, chop, and return to pot; discard skin and bones. Season collards with salt to taste. Serve with hot sauce.

Pepper Vinegar

Makes about 3 cups

Total Time: 15 minutes, plus 20 minutes cooling and 3 weeks infusing

Pepper vinegar is spicy. For a milder vinegar, remove the seeds and ribs from the chiles.

3 cups distilled white vinegar
4 teaspoons sugar
2 teaspoons table salt
1 teaspoon black peppercorns
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
6 ounces Tabasco, red Fresno, red jalapeño, or cayenne chiles, halved lengthwise

1 Combine vinegar, sugar, salt, peppercorns, and pepper flakes in medium saucepan and bring to boil over medium-high heat.

2 Place one 1-quart jar under hot running water until heated through, about 1 minute; shake dry. Pack chiles in jar. Pour hot brine into jar, making sure chiles are fully submerged. Let cool completely. Affix jar lid and refrigerate for at least 3 weeks before serving. (Pepper vinegar can be refrigerated for up to 3 months.)

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