

Click to prove  
you're human























## Difference between jambalaya and gumbo

Most anyone who's lived in or visited the southeastern part of the United States has experienced Cajun and Creole cuisine in one way or another. That's especially true in Louisiana communities where those specific cuisines evolved over many years of influence, ranging from ancient culinary arts to newcomer perspectives and exotic fusions along the way. Both metropolitan and country-style customs determine what's arguably the top two: gumbo and jambalaya. Even the colorful Louisiana names speak their own foodie languages, with "gumbo" deriving from the West African word "ki ngombo," meaning okra, a primary ingredient in many versions of gumbo. Jambalaya breaks down by syllables into Creole words with reported influence ranging from French, Spanish, Acadian, or African roots: "jamb" meaning ham and "ya" being an African word for rice. There was apparently even a Provencal word "jambalaia" referring to a similar rice-based dish. In other words, both gumbo and jambalaya carry layers of history spanning the globe and that's not even counting some obvious influence from Native American foods long before the arrival of outsiders. Although the intricacies of Cajun and Creole cuisines are many, they constantly intersect and influence one another, particularly when it comes to the gumbo and jambalaya interpretations on countless dining-room tables, restaurant menus, street food carts, and lively cultural celebrations. Here's a look at the difference between these two culinary heavy-hitters from Louisiana. Once you've actually tasted gumbo, regardless of which version you're lucky enough to experience, you'll never again wonder about this curiously named dish. It's one of those foods that leave an indelible impression, almost as though it had a life of its own. It certainly brings stories to the table, digging deep into America's history, from French and European settlers to the West African slave trade and existing Native American foodways. When all is said and done, what we know today as gumbo is a thick, hearty stew filled with seafood or meat, generally shrimp or chicken; a lot of vegetables, specifically okra; and a lively parade of aromatic spices. The essence of what's really in a gumbo comes down to whether it emerges from a Creole or Cajun chef. Both communities proudly produce intricately nuanced gumbo versions while they share the essentials, including the infamous holy trinity of finely diced celery, onions, and bell peppers. Creole gumbo also incorporates tomatoes as well as file powder, an ingredient deriving from the Choctaw practice of drying and grinding sassafras leaves. Both gumbo start with a roux, which is a carefully cultivated thickener comprised of flour and a fat such as vegetable oil or bacon drippings. Either version can include shellfish, typically shrimp, and aromatic herbs and spices such as bay leaves, thyme, parsley, cayenne pepper, oregano, and various regional spice mixtures. Cajun gumbo very likely includes andouille sausage, chicken, and often shrimp or crab. Jambalaya carries a singsong name that's fitting for the glorious sway of ingredients making up this rice-based dish. Like gumbo, cultural influences on jambalaya are diverse, intense, and impactful. But unlike gumbo, there aren't quite as many variations between Cajun and Creole cooking. As its name etymology suggests, jambalaya often features ham but can easily include a mishmash of proteins like the traditional andouille sausage, poultry, or even gamier meats as seasonally available. It's not unusual to find sausage, chicken, shrimp, crawfish, or poultry quite happily coexisting within the same pan of jambalaya. There will always be the holy trinity of celery, bell peppers, and onions involved, as that's the foundational base for most Cajun and Creole cooking. As for the other vegetables, spices, and herbs, they're almost identical to ones often used in gumbo, including okra, garlic, red pepper flakes, Cajun seasoning mix, bay leaves, thyme, and the flavor-defining sassafras file powder. As a tomato-forward one-pot dish, jambalaya recipes can include anything from fresh diced tomatoes to tomato paste, crushed canned tomatoes, or a combination of all those. Then there's the rice and therein lies the primary difference between jambalaya and gumbo. Rice features prominently in both gumbo and jambalaya but in very different ways. In fact, rice is the primary distinguisher between these culinary siblings with almost identical heritages and ingredients. It's not the specific type of rice, although long-grained versions such as Louisiana or basmati are highly preferred for jambalaya to avoid a mushiness in the pan. That said, and how it features in building a tasty jambalaya, is where it takes a divergent path from gumbo. Gumbo, being a stew with varying degrees of thickness based on the chef, is served as a standalone dish with a roughly customary accompaniment of rice. Some chefs serve the rice on the side, but many others mix the rice right in the pot along with all the other ingredients. In this case, the rice is the right in the pot along with all the other ingredients. With jambalaya, there's no debating the rice preparation is the primary difference between gumbo and jambalaya. It's often compared to paella and tied to Spanish ownership of Louisiana in the late 1700s. Spanish settlers reportedly substituted traditional paella ingredients for ones available in their new homeland while retaining the basic structure of rice cooked directly in the dish. This eventually became jambalaya. Although rice preparation is the primary difference between gumbo and jambalaya, there's another smaller, yet often overlooked, component missing in the jambalaya recipe. It's that little mound of flour and fat that magically morphs into a roux, causing more than a few controversies between gumbo aficionados. With jambalaya, there's no debating over how long to cook the roux, how dark to let it become, and how to keep it from scorching and ruining a perfectly planned pot of gumbo. That's because jambalaya bypasses it altogether: A flour-based roux serves as a thickener for stews such as gumbo, but jambalaya does not need that. The rice that's cooking right there in the pan along with its fellow soul mates is all the thickener that's needed. Most jambalaya recipes don't call for flour or any type of thickening agent. Despite their important distinctions, gumbo and jambalaya have so much shared history and so many identical components. The versions we know today evolved over thousands of years along with the culturally distinct Cajun and Creole communities continuing to dole out spicy goodness from pans, bowls, skillets, and one-pot wonders. Gumbo is a stew served with rice, while jambalaya is a rice dish with other ingredients mixed in. Creole and Cajun gumbo have different ingredients, but both begin with a rice and have other thickeners added. Jambalaya has Spanish, French, and West African influences, and is made with rice, protein, vegetables, and spices. Gumbo and jambalaya are classic Louisiana dishes that have become popular across the country. Both dishes have multicultural Creole and Cajun roots, so they are similar all the way up to the point they're quite different. The main difference between the two is the role of the rice, which is integral to both. Gumbo is served with rice that is cooked separately, but rice goes into the jambalaya pot. People who grew up eating gumbo and jambalaya often retain lifetime loyalties to the way it was made in their family, community, or favorite restaurant. For those of us not raised on these dishes, we probably remember the first spoonful that brought us up to speed, the bite that made us say, "Ah, that's the stuff. Now get it." Gumbo is a Louisiana stew (or soup if brothy!) that dates back to the early 18th century. Gumbo is the state dish of Louisiana, and there are a number of gumbo festivals held in the fall, like the World Championship Gumbo Cookoff. The name gumbo is derived from the West African word for okra, *kingombo*. In addition to its West African roots, its ingredients and flavors have French, Spanish, German, West African, and Native American influences. This dish, cooked low-and-slow, is known for feeding a crowd, but it can easily be scaled down for the family dinner table. Gumbo is always served with hot, long-grain, white rice, but the rice never goes into the cooking pot. Most recipes for gumbo contain vegetables and one or more meats, birds, and/or seafood simmered together in thickened stock, although there are meatless gumbos, such as some recipes for Gumbo Z'Herbes, a traditional Louisiana dish. Gumbo can be brothy or a little more like stew, depending on the techniques and preferences of the cook. Roux is the heart and soul of most gumbos. Despite its French name and daunting reputation, roux is nothing more than flour and fat cooked together until they transform into a smooth paste that can thicken a recipe a little—or a lot. Some roux are cooked only until light golden brown. Others, through the combined powers of vigilance, patience, and nonstop stirring over a bubbling, scalding pot, are taken all the way to deep, dark mahogany brown. Dark roux adds deeper flavor and color to gumbo, although the darker the roux, the less thickening power it delivers. Recognizing and achieving the appropriate shade of roux for a given gumbo recipe takes a knowing eye, so a cook's way with roux is a point of pride and a benchmark for their culinary prowess. Gumbo often includes at least one other thickener, like okra, which is simmered until the bulk of the vegetable dissolves and thickens the stew. Culinary historians teach us that the word gumbo derives from a West African word for okra. Others gumbo cooks turn to file, the dried and powdered leaves of the North American sassafras, for thickening any flavor. (The roots and bark of this same plant were the original base for root beer.) Knowledge of how to use file in cooking is a contribution of the Choctaw Native Americans and perhaps other tribes. Gumbo is both a Creole and a Cajun dish, and while there is a lot of overlap, there are few key differences. "Both start with a roux and might incorporate okra or file powder, but Cajun gumbo usually includes chicken or sausage," writes Southern Living associate editor Kaitlyn Yarborough. "While Creole gumbo is often used as a shellfish," But if there's one ingredient that separates the two, it's tomatoes—Creole gumbo uses tomatoes while Cajun gumbo does not. Credit: Jennifer Causey; Food Stylist: Emily Nabors Hall; Prop Stylist: Heather Chadduck Hillegas. Jambalaya is a one-pot rice dish originating in the early 18th century in Southern Louisiana. "The dish has been a part of New Orleans' cuisine since colonial Spanish settlers tried reconstructing their native paella from locally-sourced ingredients," according to NewOrleans.com. Jambalaya's ingredients also draw from a mix of cultures, including the French (mirepoix), West Africans (rice), Germans (sausage), and Native Americans (cayenne). Like gumbo, you'll see crowd-pleasing jambalaya at Mardi Gras and other celebrations. Like gumbo, this dish also has its own festival. Gonzales, Louisiana is affectionately called the jambalaya "capital of the world" and lays claim to the Gonzales Jambalaya Festival, which includes a world championship jambalaya cooking contest. Rice is a key ingredient in jambalaya—not just an accompaniment. This thick rice stew is a distant relative of Spanish paella, but it's made with an assortment of local ingredients. There are countless creative ways to make jambalaya, but there's also decorum and tradition that keep the dish recognizable. A standard jambalaya includes rice, protein, vegetables, and spices. Creole jambalaya, also known as red jambalaya, contains tomatoes, Cajun or brown jambalaya does not. Jambalaya isn't thickened with roux, although some cooks do include a little skillet-brown flour. Smoked pork sausage, such as andouille, is the most common meat, although others rely on diced ham, such as spicy, smoky tasso. Jambalaya also relies on the seasoning from the holy trinity, the nickname for the finely chopped trio of onion, celery, and bell pepper, a descendant of French mirepoix. There's often a pinch of cayenne in jambalaya and a bottle of hot sauce within easy reach on the table. (In contrast, many gumbo cooks take umbrage when people add hot sauce.) If you're getting ready to cook gumbo or jambalaya, there's a few tips and tools to keep in mind. Gumbo and jambalaya are one-pot dishes, preferably cooked in a Dutch oven, which conducts heat nicely for roux, searing proteins, sautéing vegetables, and simmering. Jambalaya can be pulled off an Instant Pot or a sheet pan, however, and even jazzy up from a box mix. To make roux for gumbo, a whisk is essential and there are roux whisks dedicated to the task—at the other extreme, there are instant and pre-prepared roux available, and you can also try this roux microwave hack to speed up the process. For gumbo's key accompaniment, check out these tips for making good rice, most home cooks have burned or overcooked rice at least once in their life! Shrimp is a popular ingredient in Cajun and Creole recipes—this tool helps clean, devein, and de-shell shrimp, according to Southern Living editor Valerie Fraser Luesse. Gumbo and jambalaya recipes have a lot to say and shouldn't be separated from their stories and histories. Much depends on who stirred the pot, then and now. For Southern Living gumbo recipes, check out seafood-based, chicken-based, meatless, or a mix of everything. We also have classic jambalaya recipes or modern ones that use a sheet pan or Instant Pot. Seafood-based Gumbos Crab-And-Shrimp Gumbo Shrimp and Sausage Gumbo Smoked Gumbo and Andouille Gumbo Meatless gumba Leah Chase's Gumbo Z'Herbes Classic Jambalaya Creole Seafood Jambalaya Chicken and Sausage Jambalaya Modern Jambalaya Instant Pot Jambalaya Sheet Pan Jambalaya Aside from gumbo and jambalaya, other classic Cajun and Creole dishes include, red beans and rice, dirty rice, étouffée, seafood boils, po' boys and muffuletta, remoulade sauce, and maque choux. Go big—celebrate the food of Mardi Gras with savory Fat Tuesday dishes and something sweet like king cake or beignets. Or go small—simply add some zip to your meal with Cajun or Creole seasoning (like Zatarain's, Slap Ya Mama, and Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning), or you can always make your own. Louisiana cuisine has something delicious for everyone to eat! Both gumbo and jambalaya are classic Louisiana dishes with Creole and Cajun roots. They're both filled with plenty of protein and have green bell peppers, celery, and onion as their base. While rice is an important part of each dish, the use of this grain is one of the main differences between the two. Roux and consistency are the other points of disparity. Most Louisiana locals grew up with one or both of the dishes and have strong loyalties to their home-cooked version, which varies family by family, although some key ingredients and techniques remain the same. "There are countless variants that you'll find all over Louisiana. It's hard to find two Cajuns outside of a family that cook exactly alike," says Chef Anthony Goldsmith, the owner of Kajun Twist restaurant, with two locations in Louisiana's Cajun Bayou (in Galliano and Lockport). We spoke with Goldsmith to find out what the differences are between gumbo and jambalaya. Credit: Martyna Szczesna Gumbo is a stew filled with chicken, sausage, and salt meat (if it's a seafood gumbo). Gumbo uses some kind of thickener, usually roux (flour and fat cooked together until dark brown), but some people, like Goldsmith, use okra. His recipe comes from his great-grandmother Alzina Toups, a renowned Cajun chef in Galliano whose tiny one-room restaurant is only bookable by phone and has a wait list up to a year long. "The base is what the Cajuns call the 'Holy Trinity' (onion, celery, and bell pepper)," says Goldsmith. "Use chicken stock or seafood stock depending on the type of gumbo. File powder (dried and powdered sassafras leaves used in Native American cuisine) can be added at the end based on preference." Gumbo is served over rice, but the rice is not cooked with the rest of the dish. "Gumbo is more like a soup, but for the Cajun people it's not considered a soup: it's a gumbo," says Goldsmith. "For my family, it is more of a starter dish to the main meal. Everyone has their own way to cook and enjoy it." Gumbo reflects influences from French, Spanish, Native American, African, and Creole traditions. Louisiana Cajuns also adapted gumbo to their tastes. Credit: Martyna Szczesna Jambalaya is a one-pot rice dish with origins tied to Spanish paella and West African jollof, which probably came from Spanish colonists and West African slaves. It also uses the Holy Trinity base, which comes from Louisiana French influence, but Goldsmith says you can also add garlic, green onion, and parsley and season it with cayenne or red pepper flakes. There are two common variants of jambalaya: red and brown. The red, which is Creole, uses tomato paste and tomato sauce while the brown uses butter and onions and is more heavily spiced. "There are mostly smoked sausage, a Boston butt (pork butt) and chicken, but you can really add anything for it, though like crab, shrimp, and duck," says Goldsmith. "Some jambalaya is smoked (as in smoked sausage) and some is not." The main difference between these two dishes is their use of rice. Gumbo is really a soup or stew that's often served over a little rice, while jambalaya is made with the rice cooked into the dish, making the grain an integral part of it. In gumbo, there should be more liquid than rice, while jambalaya should not be liquidy or mushy. "Jambalaya is a way to cook rice. It is usually a staple at get-togethers and is an easy way to feed large groups of people," says Goldsmith. "A gumbo is served over rice, often as a starter." The other main difference is the use of a roux. While Goldsmith, don't use a roux for their gumbo, many gumbos do have a roux or other thickener, but jambalaya does not. "Each of these dishes were born from necessity. Long before our time, our Cajun ancestors lived off of the land. They could only cook with what they trapped, killed, or harvested from the area," says Goldsmith. "Both of these meals are hearty, and very filling. They provided much-needed energy to the hard-working Cajun people." Gumbo and jambalaya rank among Louisiana's most loved dishes. Both contain the Holy Trinity of Cajun cooking, which consists of bell peppers, celery, and onion. Both traditionally contain some combination of meat and seafood, though you can also find vegetarian versions like gumbo z'herbes. Both contain rice. Similar, right? Well, a few notable differences set these dishes apart. Here's an overview of gumbo vs. jambalaya. Depending on the recipe, gumbo resembles a soup or stew in itself. Roux, a mixture of equal parts fat and flour, thickens gumbo. When cooked until brown or dark brown, roux gives gumbo a rich, roast-y base. Many thickener gumbo with file, a powder of ground sassafras that adds an earthy, herb flavor to the pot. Okra also thickens gumbo. We don't know how exactly gumbo came together. Like Creole food in itself, gumbo has its roots in African, French, Spanish, and Native American cooking. The word gumbo likely came from a West African word for okra or a Choctaw word for file. Both roux and the Holy Trinity of vegetables came from French cooking. Okra, file, and tomatoes reflect a Creole influence. Living in rural areas, Cajuns didn't have access to these ingredients, but they did catch on to recipes like gumbo that originated in New Orleans. A one-pot dish, jambalaya resembles Spanish paella with its combination of rice, meat or seafood, and vegetables. It's also similar to West African jollof, a one-pot rice dish flavored with tomatoes, onions, and spices. Spanish colonists and West African slaves both shaped jambalaya as we know it. Slaves, in fact, introduced rice irrigation methods to North America. The name jambalaya likely comes from the Provençal word *jambalaia*, which means mishmash. Also evidence of Louisiana's French influence, the name jambalaya often refers to a mixture of meat and vegetables. Gumbo and jambalaya are both thickened with roux, but the dish needs it. Most of all, the role of rice distinguishes gumbo and jambalaya. You serve rice in gumbo, but the rice cooks in a separate pot. You want to serve gumbo with more liquid than rice; in other words, not as gravy. Jambalaya, on the other hand, is a rice dish. Your average recipe contains about double the amount of liquid to rice, but the liquid cooks down. Jambalaya shouldn't turn out watery or mushy. Recipes with tomato sauce will turn out a little wetter, however, almost as wet as risotto, and that's totally normal. All in all, precision and correctness are not the goal of Creole and Cajun cooking. You want to cook these dishes properly for best results, but that's not to discourage experimenting with ingredients and even consistency. After all, gumbo and jambalaya wouldn't exist today without the cooks who adapted old, familiar dishes to their new environment.