

Butter My Biscuit

Food musings of a southern ex-pat



Hoppin' John = Black Eyed Peas + Rice

Happy New Year-Part 3

I am living proof that Googling for info can be an addictive sport. In one such foray while researching Low Country vacation options, I stumbled upon the [Geechee Girl Rice Cafe](#) website. For those who might not know, the Gullah (or Geechee) community of the coastal South Carolina and Georgia low country is an Afro-American subculture, descendants of Southern slaves.



What makes the Gullah so interesting is that this group has uniquely preserved its linguistic and cultural heritage for over 150 years ? including crafts, music, folk art, and coastal agrarian traditions ? including their cuisine. This is where Valerie Erwin comes in. She owns a restaurant in the greater Philly area, the [Geechee Girl Rice Cafe](#), where she doles out helpings of Low Country ?fusion' cuisine in tribute to her heritage and family foodways. I don't want to mislead anyone, as I have not eaten at her restaurant ? but let's just say it's on my to-do list. Until that field trip becomes a reality, she's graciously shared a couple of recipes off her menu to the general public via her restaurant website, one being the "Crispy Hoppin' John" which I filed away some time ago for future use. You foodies may want to check out her site and the restaurant menu ...

But back to the program: Hoppin' John is a traditional bowl of black eyed peas simmered with some form of smoked pork, then served over rice with some garnishment such as chopped bacon, scallions, etc. If you want to know why it's called what it is, you'll have to go on a Google safari yourself, as there seem to be several story threads with no concrete answer. At any rate, Valerie's crispy version is a spin-off using Hoppin' John leftovers, the appeal being the crunchy, caramelized chunks that develop in the pan!

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"Crispy Hoppin' John"

Adapted from Valerie Erwin of [Geechee Girl Rice Cafe](#), Philadelphia PA

Ingredients

- 1 cup jasmine rice
- 1½ cup cooked black eyed peas with a little of the cooking liquid (you can cheat and use canned or frozen peas too!)
- 2 cups warm water
- 1 tsp salt or to taste
- 1 tsp pepper
- 2 tsp vegetable oil

Cover the rice with hot tap water and swish it around with your hand. Strain through a fine strainer and let the rice sit in the strainer for about 5 minutes.

Heat the oil in a pot and stir in the rice until it's a little warm and the grains look translucent. Add the black eyed peas, the water and pepper. Taste the water and add some salt if it tastes flat. Cover the pot and set on medium high heat until it comes to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook for about 20 minutes. All the liquid should be absorbed and the rice tender and fluffy. If the liquid has evaporated but the rice is not tender, add a little more water and continue cooking. Adjust the seasoning (then best to cool the mixture; I did it the night before and let it chill in the fridge overnight). Makes 4 cups Hoppin' John, enough for 4-6 servings.

Heat a heavy skillet slowly over moderate heat and add a bit of fat: bacon fat, duck fat or olive oil works. Put in a thick layer of the cooked Hoppin' John and sauté until the bottom is golden. Turn and repeat on other side. Don't worry if it crumbles; it's not supposed to stay in a



Personal Notes: This was my first attempt at this recipe, so I have no idea if what I did came close to what Valerie serves at her restaurant. With that said, I used a large cast iron skillet for this dish which I thought would give me a running start on the crispy-crunchy mission at hand. The recipe isn't specific on how much fat to use in the skillet, but I used about 1½ Tbsp of bacon grease which seemed to be enough without overwhelming the dish. On med-high heat, it took me a good 15-20 minutes to achieve crispy, although perhaps a higher temp would have resulted in a more timely completion. (Note that with

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no binding agent, there really is no 'pancake' form.) Additionally, I garnished this dish with chopped scallions and a few bacon bits too.

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