

For Northeastern Brazilians Without Farofa There's No Real Meal

Written by Ernest Barteldes
Monday, 29 April 2013 03:36



I have written a lot about traditional Brazilian dishes like moqueca, feijoada or churrasco (Brazilian barbecue), but the fact is that people there don't really eat these dishes on a daily basis. Feijoada and churrasco are party food made for a large number of people who get together for a day's worth of eating and drinking (often to excess), while moqueca is mostly served on special occasions - though in Bahia it is reportedly consumed on a daily basis.

Everyday Brazilian food is basically food that will give you energy to go through the day, and it is usually comprised of rice, beans, vegetables (usually a lettuce and tomato salad) and some kind of roast meat.

In some parts, spaghetti sautéed in garlic and cilantro or an egg is included – and in the Northeast, farofa is a must.

The last time we traveled to Brazil (back in 2011), we traveled a lot around the countryside of the state of Ceará and often bought our meals at "PF" places – mostly homes where people cook simple dishes and sell them to travelers or to people working in the area. "PF" stands for "made plate," but they usually serve you in separate bowls.

Such places offer little comfort except for a Formica table and plastic chairs, but the food is often great and the price is right – and there was always a serving of farofa on the side.

I remember my maternal grandfather saying that a meal would never be complete without the sacred combination of yucca flour and cooking juices that accompanies pretty much any dish (save maybe for pastas) in the Northeast. But farofa is really a northeastern Brazilian thing – go anywhere south of Minas Gerais and it is not such a big deal to have that at the table.

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Sure, it is likely to be present during a barbecue or something like that, but it is definitely not an everyday staple in the southernmost states of Brazil.

I love having farofa when I cook roasted or fried dishes at home, but sadly I never really get to make it because Renata was never too fond of it – she tried it a couple of times but just found it too dry, even though I tried to get her to eat 'moister' versions. Since I don't like to make any dish 'for one,' my yucca flour often lies forgotten in my kitchen shelf.

I often make those more rustic foods as a packed lunch – they are easy to prepare (there is also the convenience of having canned beans here – thanks Goya), and with time Renata has gotten used to them.

I try to vary how I prepare them so it's not repetitive – lately I have been cooking the rice and beans together and using them as a side for a main course – chicken, turkey sausages or fish.

Ceará Rice and Beans (Baião de Dois)

(Serves 2)

One cup uncooked rice

One 14 oz. can black-eyed peas, drained

2 cups vegetable broth or water

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½ tablespoon olive oil

½ cup fresh cheese, cubed (queso fresco, found in the Latin section in supermarkets)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro

2 garlic cloves, chopped

Salt and black pepper to taste

Heat the olive oil and add the garlic, sauté until fragrant. Add the beans and stir-fry for about a minute and add the vegetable broth or water and add the salt and pepper.

Reduce the heat and cook until rice is tender, stirring occasionally as not to allow the rice to burn in the bottom of the pot. Remove from heat and stir in the cheese and cilantro. Serve immediately.

(*) I have often added 1/3 cup of coconut milk to the cooked rice and beans, and let the mixture absorb it. It really complements the flavors.

Basic Farofa

1 cup yucca flour

Leftover juices from cooking meats or one tablespoon olive oil

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1 onion, chopped

Chopped cilantro, salt and black pepper to taste

Heat the juices or olive oil and add the onion, stirring until soft. Remove from heat and slowly stir in the yucca flour, cilantro, and salt and pepper until blended. Serve on the side, using it to dab the juices of meats or sauces.

(**) if you can't find yucca flour, wheat farina yields similar results

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