

Flavor comes first with Jamaican cuisine

Jamaican cuisine is popular the world over for its often addictive flavors. Among the more popular Jamaican foods is Jamaican beef patties, which are meat pies similar to Mexican empanadas.

Try the following recipe courtesy of Helen Willinsky's "Jerk from Jamaica" (Ten Speed Press). Jamaican beef patties
Makes 24 patties
Pastry 4 cups all-purpose flour 1/2 teaspoon baking powder 1 teaspoon ground turmeric 1 teaspoon salt 1 cup vegetable shortening or lard, at room temperature (look for non-hydrogenated shortening) About 1 cup very cold water
Filling 2 onions 3 scallions, including green tops 2 Scotch bonnet chilies 1 1/2 pounds ground beef or chuck 2 tablespoons vegetable oil 1 1/2 cups fine bread crumbs 3/4 teaspoon ground thyme 3/4 teaspoon ground turmeric 1 cup water Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
To make the pastry In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, turmeric and salt. Stir with a whisk to blend. Cut in the shortening with a pastry blender or two dinner knives until the dough has the consistency of cornmeal. Gradually add just enough cold water to hold the dough together, mixing it in with a fork. Take care not to overwork your dough; it should just come together. Form the dough into a disk and wrap it in plastic wrap. Refrigerate the dough while you make the filling, or for as long as overnight. If chilled overnight, remove from the refrigerator 15 minutes before rolling out.
To make the filling Mince the onions, scallions and chilies. Add to the beef and mix well. In a Dutch oven or a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat, then cook the meat mixture, stirring frequently, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Stir in the bread crumbs, seasonings and water. Cover and simmer for 20 to 30 minutes, or until thickened; the mixture should be just wet, not runny or dry. Remove from the heat and let cool while you roll out the dough.
Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Divide the dough into 24 even-sized pieces. On a lightly floured surface, roll out each piece of dough to a thickness of about 3/8 inch a little thicker than pie dough and cut into a round using a can, glass or cup (about 4 inches across). Place the rounds on the ungreased baking sheets. Cover the rounds you are not working on with a damp cloth. Spoon filling onto a round to cover half of the pastry, leaving a 1/4-inch border. Fold the other half over and seal the edges by crimping with a fork. Bake the patties for 30 to 35 minutes, or until golden. Serve hot.