

A taste of Nigeria

Meet Stella*, who teaches the cuisine of her homeland with the support of charity Migrateful. By **Caroline Roberts**



I love food. I love the cooking, the sharing of food with others and the way it brings people together,' says Stella.

It's a passion that stems from her childhood in Nigeria. She didn't have the opportunity to go to school but she learnt a lot working in her mother's street-food restaurant. They'd start the day early, rustling up traditional Nigerian dishes such as akara, a crispy bean fritter; jollof rice, a rich stew with meat and vegetables; and fried yam and plantain. Later, they'd return home to make the evening menu of savoury melon soup, for which Stella would grind the melon seeds by hand.

'My mum's food was very popular as it was so yummy, and she made sure it wasn't expensive so everyone could eat. Customers would sit outside on benches while she cooked over a smoky wood fire, and they all called her "Mama", even the ones that were older than her. At the end of the day, we'd both go home smelling of smoke. We also had a small farm where we would grow our own aubergines, okra, mango, palm, beans, yam and other delicious vegetables. Everything was organic and tasted so much better than the ingredients you get in the supermarkets here.'

When Stella arrived in the UK 10 years ago, she faced some very difficult situations, but, she says, 'I always had the voices of my mother and father with me, encouraging me and giving me belief of a better future.'

Chef Stella from Nigeria



Fried plantain

Luckily, the Helen Bamber Foundation, a human rights organisation, came to the rescue and with their support she joined a church choir, a photography group and a hiking club. And the home cooking she brought to gatherings went down so well that they introduced her to Migrateful so she could develop her cooking skills.

Now, she's sharing her expertise and passion with students at the cookery classes she runs with the support of the charity. 'People in the classes meet as strangers but soon become friends, laughing and developing a bond,' she says. 'I love it when I see everyone sitting down and eating together afterwards. People often say to me, "You were born to teach,"

and they love to hear my stories about where I've come from and where I am now. I feel proud of myself and it really makes me want to do more with my life.

'My dream is very big! My aim in life is to be a chef, writing recipes and sharing my creations with the world. I want to teach people about Nigerian cuisine and all the delicious foods we prepare there. But first of all, I'm working hard to perfect my reading and writing as I want to be able to handle my own business. I would also love to have a garden or an allotment, or even a farm, to grow my own vegetables so that I'm able to make the best food, caring for the ingredients from seed to plate just like we did in Nigeria.'

NIGERIAN FRIED RICE

This easy-to-cook dish is often served at special occasions, such as weddings and parties.

Serves: 2

INGREDIENTS

- 150g long grain white rice
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp curry powder (hot or mild)
- 1 tbsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp dried rosemary
- 1 vegetable stock cube
- 4 tbsp butter, divided
- 150g frozen mixed vegetables, eg carrot, green beans, peas, sweetcorn
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 medium onion, ½ finely sliced, ½ diced
- 150g raw tiger prawns (or tinned chickpeas for a vegetarian version)
- 1 red and 1 green bell pepper, diced into 1cm pieces
- 1 scotch bonnet, finely chopped
- 3 spring onions, thinly sliced

METHOD

1. Rinse the rice in water. Mix in 1 tsp of salt and set aside.
2. Bring 400ml water to the boil in a saucepan.

3. Add the curry powder, garlic powder, dried rosemary, vegetable stock cube, 2 tbsp butter and 1 tsp salt to the water.
4. Rinse the rice again with warm water to remove the salt. Once the water has started boiling, add the rice to the saucepan. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.
5. Take the frozen vegetables from the freezer and place in a bowl to begin defrosting.

6. Add the sunflower oil and 2 tbsp butter to a large frying pan or saucepan and place onto a high heat.
7. Add the sliced onion to the pan and fry for 2 minutes before adding the prawns and frying for a further 5 minutes.
8. Add the frozen vegetables, diced onion,

- bell peppers and scotch bonnet to the saucepan and cook for 5 minutes.
9. Add the rice to the pan and mix with the vegetables. Fry for 2-3 minutes.
10. Season to taste and garnish with the sliced spring onions.



The finished dish



MIGRATEFUL

MIGRATEFUL

Legal, language and social barriers can often make it hard for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to feel at home and find work in the UK. Migrateful aims to empower them and celebrate the diverse cultural heritages they bring with them. It now has more than 30 chefs who share delicious and authentic recipes from all over the world in their cookery classes.

Lessons are open to anyone over 18, and children over 14 if accompanied by an adult. They are held in London, Bristol and Brighton, as well as on Zoom. Private classes can also be arranged for groups. The charity also welcomes volunteers to help run classes and act as mentors to Migrateful chefs in the making. Find out more at www.migrateful.org.

