

SELECTION 9 TASTE SOME BRAZILIAN FOODS

OBJECTIVE

To acquaint students with some of Brazil's foods and Brazilian meal patterns, and to have them help prepare and taste some Brazilian dishes.

INPUT

In northeast Brazil, most families eat three meals a day, with the main meal at noon. Because many people don't have refrigerators, any leftovers will be eaten at the lighter supper.

Breakfast and supper are often quite similar, with strong coffee a must. Typical foods might include:

- *Cuscuz* (KUS kus)—coarsely ground corn steamed in a special pan called a *cuscuzeira* and eaten with butter.
- One of several tubers. Tubers are starchy "limbs" that grow on some plants' underground roots. Potatoes, for example, are tubers. Some of the tubers people in northeast Brazil eat include *inhame* (ee YAM ee), *macaxeira* (ma ca SHARE ah) and *mandioc*, or cassava. They all have a bland, white flesh, not unlike the potato or turnip. *Inhame* is the largest of these, and *macaxeira* is its smaller cousin.

The most common tuber, however, is *mandioc*. Northeast Brazil is dry, with frequent drought, and *mandioc* is incredibly drought-resistant. *Mandioc* is also convenient because it has no definite harvest time. People can leave *mandioc* in the ground and wait to dig it up until needed.

A disadvantage of the type of *mandioc* found in northeast Brazil is that it contains high levels of cyanide, which is poisonous. Brazilians have devised a way of squeezing out the cyanide, however, which is found in the *mandioc's* moisture. They grind the *mandioc* tuber, then press out the liquid and toast the coarse crumbs that are left. The crumbly flour is sprinkled on other foods such as soups and stews. Many people in northeast Brazil don't think a meal is complete without *mandioc* flour. It is not very nutritious but it does fill people up.

Boiled sweet potato is another tuber people eat for breakfast and/or supper when in season, as well as cooked pumpkin, a vegetable.

If the family has enough money, they will season the starchy tubers with a smoked, salted meat called *charque* (SHAR kee) or a salt-cured cheese called *qualho* (KWOW yo).

The main noon meal is quite elaborate, and families will try to include at least small amounts of meat—such as beef, chicken or fish—with it. Beans are almost always served with rice and *mandioc* flour to sop up the liquid. Vegetables—carrots, pumpkin and/or potatoes—may be cooked with the beans or served separately, either hot or cold with a mayonnaise dressing.

Spaghetti with just a bit of tomato sauce is also often served at the noon meal.

This meal may also feature a cold plate assortment of sliced tomatoes, onions, finely chopped lettuce (or some other green, leafy vegetable such as kale or spinach) and sometimes beets. A dressing of olive oil, salt and lime or lemon juice is sprinkled over the vegetables.

People in northeast Brazil don't regularly eat desserts and sweets; they are reserved for special occasions. For snacks, fruit is a popular choice.

Feijoada (fay zhoe AH dah), Brazil's national dish, is often served on Saturdays. The recipe for this tasty dish of rice and beans is provided. It's not as complicated as it appears. Really!

See the photo (included in box) of Dona Zefa preparing *cochinhas* (ko SHEEN yahs). Dona Zefa served as the cook for MCC Brazil and as a "grandma" to MCC workers for 28 years—from 1969 until her retirement in 1997. *Cochinhas* are a favorite of MCC workers. They are something like large, tear-shaped chicken nuggets.

Sing a Brazilian grace before tasting the dish you prepare. This grace is on the accompanying cassette tape, to provide the melody and pronunciation:

Gracas te damos Pai
 Graças te damos Pai
 Graças te damos Pai
 Graças te damos
 O Pai do Céu. Amém

We give you thanks, Father
 We give you thanks, Father
 We give you thanks, Father
 We give you thanks
 Heavenly Father. Amen.

CONNECTING ACTIVITIES

Make and serve some Brazilian foods:

Mango Freeze

The editor first tasted this refreshing, tasty dessert at the Recife home of Izaete Romão Nofziger and Tim Nofziger. Izaete, a Mennonite pastor in Recife, graciously shared the recipe—it's surprisingly easy.

To make mango freeze:

Peel and dice two large ripe mangoes. (You want about 4 cups of diced mango in all.)

In a blender container, whip together until smooth and airy:

- 2 cups diced mango**
- 1/2 can (14 ounces) sweetened condensed milk**

Repeat the process with the remaining mango and milk.

Pour the whipped puree into a plastic or metal container and freeze. Serve frozen either by cutting in squares or scooping out.

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Brigadeiros (Brig-ah-DARE-ohs)

These sweet little treats are favorites at birthday parties and other special occasions. Placed in bon-bon papers (like tiny cupcake papers), several brigadeiros are served to each guest along with a piece of the cake.

The following recipe may be prepared in two steps. The dough may be made one day and the candies shaped the next. Slow and patient works best with these . . .

Mix together in a medium-size saucepan:

- 1 can (14 to 15 ounces) sweetened condensed milk***
- 2 tablespoons margarine**
- 3 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder**

Cook at medium-low heat about five minutes, stirring constantly, until mixture boils, taking care not to scorch it.

Reduce heat to low and continue cooking, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and no longer clings to the bottom of pan. (This may take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on size and type of pan, etc.) The consistency when done will be similar to pudding that has been chilled.

Place mixture in a shallow greased pan, such as a pie tin, to cool. (If this is done the day ahead, cover the pan; it may be refrigerated but need not be.)

When thoroughly cooled, butter hands and shape dough into small balls, about 2.5 centimeters/1 inch in diameter. (Use about 1/2 measuring tablespoon of dough per ball.) Then roll in chocolate or colored jimmies or sprinkles. Because mixture may be sticky, it works well to have one person shape and another roll in sprinkles. Place in bon-bon size paper cups, if you wish.

If the mixture is overly sticky, try cooking your next batch for a longer period of time. If it's crumbly, reduce cooking time for next batch.

Leftover brigadeiros may be stored in the refrigerator.

Makes 30 sweets. (When made with non-fat condensed milk, each of 30 treats has about 45 calories.)

**Recipe works fine with non-fat sweetened condensed milk as well.*

Feijoada (fay zhoh AH dah), Brazilian Rice and Beans

Recipe is from More-with-Less Cookbook, by Doris Janzen Longacre. Herald Press: Scottdale, Pa., Waterloo, Ont. 1977. Page 103.

"Legend has it that during the time of slavery in Brazil, when large landholders butchered meat for a festive occasion, they would leave the scrap pieces of the animals (pig snouts, feet, ears, tails) for the slaves to cook with beans. At some point the wealthy people caught a whiff of the savory aroma rising from the slaves' cooking pots and wanted a taste. Impressed with the flavor, they began eating this 'scrap' food.

"After slavery was abolished, Brazilians continued to eat feijoada. Many consider it the national dish. Elegant

restaurants that serve it as an expensive entrée add meatier cuts of meat but retain the authentic scrap pieces—'everything but the squeal.' In poor areas of Northeast Brazil, resourceful cooks add less expensive vegetables to stretch the meat and beans."—*From Extending the Table . . . A World Community Cookbook, by Joetta Handrich Schlabach. Herald Press: Scottdale, Pa., Waterloo, Ont., 1991. Page 164.*

Soak by overnight* or quick method**:

- 2 cups pinto or kidney beans**
- 6 cups water**

Cook about 2 hours or until beans are tender.

Choose 2 to 4 of the following vegetables, cut into large pieces, and cook them together, just until tender, in another saucepan:

- potato or sweet potato**
- chayote**
- pumpkin**
- cabbage**
- okra**
- carrot**

Sauté together in a skillet:

- 1/2 pound ground or cubed beef or pork**
- 1/4 pound smoked or cured meat such as bacon, sausage**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 medium onion, chopped**
- 1/2 green pepper, chopped (optional)**
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**
- 1 small (6-ounce) can tomato paste**
- 1 teaspoon cumin**
- 1 bay leaf**
- salt and pepper to taste**

Simmer 30 minutes.

Join beans, vegetables and meat mixture and heat together 2 minutes. Serve with rice and orange slices, as they do in Brazil.

**Overnight Method of soaking beans: Sort beans, removing any foreign matter such as tiny stones, wash and place in large kettle. Measure and cover with the amount of water indicated in the recipe. Cover pan and let beans stand 8 hours or overnight. Use soaking water for cooking.*

***Quick Method: Follow directions for overnight method but instead of soaking, bring water and beans to a boil and cook 2 minutes. Cover, remove from heat and let stand 1 hour. Beans are then ready to cook.*

LEVEL: PRIMARY

SOURCE: Latin America & Caribbean Series

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