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A Creole tradition in Louisiana is red beans-and-rice Mondays. Often made with bits of meat leftover from the Sunday meal, this hearty, filling dish is just right for a weeknight meal, especially with fresh butternut squash beginning to arrive in local stores.

Red Beans & Rice (serves 4)

1 package Bruce Aidell's chicken andouille sausage	1 Tbsp olive oil or rice bran oil
1 (15 oz) can red kidney beans, drained and rinsed *	1 small red bell pepper, chopped
8 oz cubed butternut squash (about 2 cups)	1 small onion, chopped (about 1 c)
1/2 small green bell pepper, chopped	2 stalks celery, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped	3 Tbsp tomato paste
1 bay leaf	1 sprig thyme (or 1/4 tsp dried thyme)
1/4 to 1/2 tsp cayenne pepper, to taste	1/8 tsp ground allspice
1 c chicken stock	3/4 c water
1 to 2 tsp Tabasco or Crystal hot sauce	salt and pepper to taste
2 cups cooked brown rice	

1. Cook rice while prepping your ingredients. Cut sausage in 1/2" slices and then into half-moons. Prepare vegetables as directed.
2. Heat a 12" skillet, large sauté pan or small stockpot over medium high heat. Add the oil, sausage, onion, garlic & celery. Sauté until sausage is browned and vegetables are tender.
3. Stir in the beans, squash, peppers, herbs and spices (reserve salt and pepper and hot sauce to finish the dish). Add the chicken broth, tomato paste and water, stirring to dissolve and distribute spices.
4. Bring mixture to a boil then reduce to a simmer. Cover and cook for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, then remove the lid and cook another 10 minutes until stew is somewhat thickened and squash is tender.
5. Taste and balance flavors in the stew with salt and pepper. Serve with a side of the rice.

* For a creamier stew, start with dried kidney beans. Pressure cooker method: cook (4 c water to 1 c dried beans) 2 mins on high pressure with quick release. Drain and add another 4 c water, 1/4 tsp baking soda and 2 bay leaves. Bring back to pressure for 30 minutes (some dried beans, depending on their freshness, require up to 40 minutes cooking time) then add to stew to finish cooking. Stovetop method: soak dried beans overnight then simmer 1 1/2 to 2 hours until just tender. Add to stew and finish cooking.

Shopping List: chicken andouille sausage, red and green bell peppers, butternut squash

Equipment Needed: Cutting board and knife, large skillet (or sauté pan or stock pot), heat-resistant spoon, measuring cups and spoons

Pantry Staples: garlic, bay leaf, thyme, allspice, cayenne pepper, red kidney beans, celery, onion, hot sauce, oil, tomato paste, chicken stock, brown rice, salt and pepper