

BAMIA MISHMISHEEYE

Pan-Roasted Sweet & Sour Okra & Vermicelli Rice Pilaf

1 lb fresh okra, thin, medium sized, hard stems trimmed
2 tablespoons olive oil
6 cloves garlic, sliced
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1-to-2 teaspoons tamarind pulp, dissolved in a little hot water, strained
3/4-to-1 1/4 cups water
half a lemon juice, about 2 tablespoons
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon allspice
1/2 cup dried whole apricots, unsweetened, unsulphured
1/2 cup dried whole prunes, unsweetened, unsulphured
1 teaspoon white granulated sugar
a dash each of cinnamon and cloves

for vermicelli rice pilaf:

2 tablespoons sunflower oil
1/2 cup vermicelli noodles, broken-up
3 1/2 cups hot water
2 cups rice, medium-grain or short, washed, drained
1-to-1 1/2 teaspoons salt

Prepare okra. Quickly and gently wash okra without pressing against the flesh. Cover with salted water and juice of one lemon. Set aside 30-to-60 minutes.

Heat oil over medium-high heat, add okra and sauté for 2 minutes; do not stir, rather shake pan to turn over okra. Add garlic and cook until lightly browned.

Stir in tomato paste followed by tamarind pulp. Add water, lemon juice, salt and allspice. Cover and simmer on low for 5 minutes.

Add apricots, prunes, sugar, cinnamon and cloves. Simmer, covered, for an additional 20 minutes until okra is crisp tender but not mushy and sauce turns to a glaze - if it starts to stick to the pot add an additional 1 tablespoon hot water.

Prepare rice. Sauté vermicelli noodles in oil, stirring frequently, until lightly browned. Add hot water and salt. Add rice, dropping them slowly into the water as you stir. Bring pot to a gentle boil for 2 minutes, reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer 20-to-25 minutes. Uncover and cook for another 5 minutes as you fluff rice and shake pot to separate kernels. Turn off heat, cover with a towel and set aside for 10 minutes. Fluff once more before serving.