

July Spice Club:

Jerk Seasoning



Suggested Reading

available to request on the Minerva catalog or cloudLibrary app

Caribbean Association of Economics, *An Adventure in Caribbean Cuisine*

John DeMers, *Authentic Recipes from Jamaica* (cloudLibrary)

Carla Hall, *Carla Hall's Soul Food: Everyday and Celebration*

Jessica B. Harris, *Beyond Gumbo: Creole Fusion Food from the Atlantic Rim*

Michelle Rousseau and Suzanne Rousseau, *Provisions: The Roots of Caribbean Cooking*

Nicole A. Taylor, *Watermelon and Red Birds: A Cookbook for Juneteenth and Black Celebrations*

“The [West Indies] region’s culinary history and the life stories of Afro-Caribbean women are intrinsically intertwined. They are parallel journeys that began under the blistering sun of a sugar plantation, meandered through the struggles of a burgeoning society striving for independence and a new identity, and culminate in the gritty urban streets, beautiful homes, and picturesque country markets of today’s Caribbean.”

Michelle and Suzanne Rousseau, *Provisions*

“Jerk” is a style of cooking native to Jamaica and can refer both to the jerk spice and to the process of marinating and cooking a protein. It is thought jerk originated with the Carib-Arawak and Taíno peoples native to Jamaica and the Caribbean at large, who cooked hogs and chickens stuffed with spices in stone-lined pits and covered in a lattice of pimento wood to smoke. After England invaded the Spanish-held colony on Jamaica in 1655, colonists were forced to free their enslaved African servants and fled the country; the freed Jamaican Maroons left behind picked up the diet and cookery practices native to the region and developed the explosively hot and fruity jerk spice rub we know today. Jerk was still cooked traditionally until the 1960s, when entrepreneurs began using oil barrels that could retain jerk’s smoky flavor. The oil drum “jerk pan” quickly took over as the preferred cooking method for jerk and is used universally today. When you’re next in Jamaica and looking for authentic jerk, you need only follow your nose.

There isn’t a plethora of recipes online or in cookbooks that utilize pre-made, store-bought jerk seasoning — perhaps because utilization of the spice rub is pretty straightforward or possibly because fresh ingredients would naturally be used in preparation. After all, jerk spice is made of readily available native Jamaican herbs and spices: mouth-roasting Scotch bonnet pepper, cousin to the habanero; allspice, the dried unripe berry of the pimento tree; as well as nutmeg, black pepper, sugar, and garlic. The enclosed Frontier Co-Op organic jerk seasoning is milder than its Scotch bonnet pepper counterpart and includes onion, tomato powder, cayenne, allspice, black pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cane sugar, garlic, and rice concentrate. Best by March 2025. You can submit feedback or suggest future spices to Meghan at mfogg@freeportmaine.com.

Enjoy authentic jerk at local Caribbean joints:

Brenzels Caribbean Cuisine (Lewiston)

Caribbean Taste (South Portland)

Jeff’s Jamaican Cuisine Food Trailer (Lewiston)

Sir. King Kitchen (Westbrook)

Yardie Ting (Portland)

Jerk Chicken Nachos

Adapted from Pampered Chef
Makes 12 200-calorie servings
(make of that what you will)

6 cups tortilla chips
3 cups diced or shredded cooked chicken
2 cups (8 oz.) shredded cheddar and Monterey Jack cheese blend
2 tablespoons jerk seasoning, divided
1 small yellow or red bell pepper or combination
1 lime
2 tablespoons snipped fresh cilantro
¼ cup sour cream and optional 1 teaspoon additional jerk seasoning

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Arrange tortilla chips in a slightly overlapping layer in a casserole dish. In a large bowl, combine the cooked chicken, cheese/s, and 1 tablespoon of jerk; mix gently. Sprinkle chicken mixture evenly over tortilla chips. Bake 5-7 minutes or until cheese is melted. Meanwhile, dice the bell pepper in a small bowl. Cut lime in half crosswise and juice it into the bowl. Add 2nd 1 tablespoon of jerk seasoning and mix well.

Snip cilantro and cut the remaining half of lime into thin slices.

Spoon bell pepper mixture over nachos; sprinkle evenly with cilantro. If desired, combine sour cream and additional 1 teaspoon jerk seasoning in a resealable plastic bag; trim corner to allow sour cream to flow through. Pipe sour cream mixture over nachos. Garnish with lime slices.

Stir Fried Vegetables with Jerk Tofu

Adapted from Walkerswood Caribbean Foods
Serves 4

- 1 tablespoon jerk seasoning
- 2 tablespoons palm, sesame, or soya oil (for marinade)
- 1 lb. firm tofu, or Quorn, cubed
- 1 onion, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- oil for frying
- 2 lbs. total of any combination of vegetables: carrots, zucchini, cauliflower, green cabbage, bok choy, sweet peppers, broccoli

Mix together jerk seasoning and oil. (Note: Walkerswood jerk is a paste seasoning, unlike the supplied dried jerk seasoning, so you might need to add slightly more oil for an appropriate marinade consistency.) Add to chopped tofu and marinate for at least an hour.

Heat the frying oil in a wok or suitably large skillet. Deep fry the tofu cubes for 3-5 minutes or until suitably fried, then reserve the tofu. Pour out most of the oil and stir fry the onion and garlic, then begin to add the other vegetables, hardest first. Cook very lightly. Add the tofu and stir in gently until hot. Serve immediately.

