

Chicken Booyah

Chicken booyah is a specialty in the Green Bay and southern Door County area, where the country's largest rural population of Belgian Americans reside. Although the dish as it is known today probably didn't originate in the "old country," it is associated with the Walloon food culture of northeastern Wisconsin. (Walloon immigrants were French-speaking and came from southern Belgium in the mid-nineteenth century).

A version very similar to the following recipe was first published in *Fresh Market Wisconsin* by Terese Allen and was contributed by the author's sister, Judy Ullmer—but under some protest, because she said she makes it a "little different each time." Ullmer added, "I really never think about what I'm doing or how long I'm cooking it, until it's done." The recipe yields three to four gallons, and yes, that is a "small" version. Serve it with oyster crackers and some good Wisconsin beer.

1 pound beef stew meat, in one piece
2 pounds onions, chopped (divided)
Bay leaves
Salt and pepper
1 large stewing chicken (6 pounds), cut up
1 pound cabbage, shredded
1 bunch celery, chopped
1 pound carrots, chopped
1 can (28 ounces) chopped tomatoes (or use fresh, if you've got good ones)
2 pounds red potatoes, chopped
½ pound green beans, chopped
½ pound corn kernels
½ pound green peas
chicken broth (optional)
juice of 2 lemons
2 to 3 teaspoons soy sauce
chicken base to taste
Additional salt and pepper to taste

Place beef in a very large pot with some of the onion, a few bay leaves, and some salt and pepper. Add enough cold water to fill the pot ½ full. Bring to a simmer, skim surface as needed, and cook ½ hour. Add chicken parts, more water (to cover all the meat), and a little more salt. Continue to simmer 1 to 2 hours.

Meanwhile, prepare all the vegetables as described.

When meats are tender, lift them out of the broth. While meat is cooling, add the prepared vegetables (including the remaining onion), one type of vegetable at a time, bringing the broth back to a simmer after each addition.

Remove bones and skin from cooled chicken and beef. Chop the meats and add to the pot after all the veggies have been added. Simmer at least 2 hours—much longer is preferred. Although the mixture should still be souplike, with broth and solids largely distinct from each other, the solids themselves should meld together somewhat, as in a stew. Water or chicken broth may be added during the cooking process if necessary.

Season with lemon juice, soy sauce, bouillon (if desired), and salt and pepper to taste.

Recipe contributed by Judy Ullmer, Green Bay; a similar version first appeared in Fresh Market Wisconsin by Terese Allen, published by Amherst Press, 1993.



Judy Ullmer and Maxine Clevon, both of Green Bay, help prepare a big kettle of chicken booyah, 2000. *Photo by Terese Allen*

Booyah's Base

THE BOOYAH OF THE GREEN BAY AREA is typically made in multi-gallon batches, cooked outdoors in large kettles over a wood or propane fire, and served at gatherings like church suppers and family reunions. Certainly there is argument among booyah cooks about the recipe; indeed, there are as many booyah recipes as there are booyah cooks, and every one is the "right" one. What they all agree on is that booyah is a soup of stewed chicken and many kinds of vegetables, and the longer it simmers and the more the ingredients merge, the better it tastes.

According to Janet Gilmore, folklore professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, booyah is, like the Door County fish boil, a boiled dinner tradition in the Great Lakes region that may be related to the "one-pot" boiled meals that the area's first peoples prepared. They likely shared this fare with missionaries and French fur traders, who used their own terms to describe the souplike concoctions they tried. Indeed, the telltale word, *booyah*, which is spelled in various ways and also is the name for other types of one-pot meal traditions around the region, may have a French connection: it looks and sounds like *bouilli*—a root word in many boiled or souplike French dishes. Perhaps this is part of the reason, then, that the French-speaking Walloons of northeastern Wisconsin claim booyah as their own. •