

THE ROUX

WHITE ROUX: The white roux is simply butter or margarine and flour. This is the base of white sauces, cream sauces and white, sawmill gravy or béchamel' sauce. It is made by melting butter and adding flour and blending completely. In this case, there is usually more butter than flour. I recommend for every tablespoon of butter, you add 1-1/2 tablespoon of flour.

TIGHT ROUX: The tight (light brown or medium) roux is used primarily to thicken, although it is flavorful as well. This is made with either butter or oil and flour (although I recommend butter). Equal parts of butter and flour are used to achieve this roux. Melt butter (or heat oil) and add flour. Whisk together and continue on medium high heat until mixture thickens and becomes a paper bag brown color.

DARK ROUX: The dark roux is possibly the most used roux in Cajun cooking. There are several opinions about the color of a dark roux. I use a very dark colored roux (about the color of dark chocolate) and have a definite style of preparing it. Most say to mix equal amounts of oil (Do Not use butter, and use an oil that can stand up to high heat, i.e. peanut oil or canola), and flour, but as you become familiar with the process, you can increase the flour-to-oil proportion by about 20%.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE DARK ROUX

It is important that you understand the importance of a successfully completed roux. Since it is an integral part of a lot of Cajun recipes, you must not scorch or burn the roux. When you first begin to make roux, you will experience a very distinctive smell. In fact, the completed roux will have a slightly burned smell. If you follow the instructions to the letter, you will not burn the roux. You must use patience in this process. If you

are not patient, you will surely burn the roux or will not complete the desired color. Once you have mastered the process, this smell will become pleasant to you and all in your household, because the smell means something good is coming from the kitchen.

To begin heat the oil to slightly hot*. Add flour and blend with the utensil of your choice (most people say a wooden spoon; some use a metal spatula; I use a wire whisk). **YOU MUST WHISK OR STIR THE MIXTURE, CONSTANTLY SCRAPING THE BOTTOM AND EDGES, UNTIL ROUX IS COMPLETED!** Keep on high heat until flour begins to brown. When the oil begins to smoke, you must reduce heat to medium or medium high (depending on your skill) and continue to whisk or stir until the roux gets to a dark brown color. At this stage you can do a couple of things. You can remove the roux from heat and stir until the roux is cool enough to stop darkening. If you choose this process, you must remove the roux before you reach the desired color. It will progress to a darker color because of the heat that is retained in the oil. The other option is to remove from heat when the roux is almost the color you want, then add chopped fresh onion to the hot roux and stir until the onions stop steaming. (CAUTION! THE STEAM FROM THE ONIONS WILL BURN YOU IF YOU ARE NOT CAREFUL.) I use the latter method.

*Note: Another method can be used once you realize the control necessary to complete this new process: It will reduce your cooking time by at least half, but you must be careful when doing this new method. Heat peanut or high flash-point oil to 450°F, or when it begins to smoke. Slowly add flour to hot oil whisking into the oil until the texture is thick but not too dry. By the time you complete this the flour will already be dark tan. Proceed as directed above. Remember always be careful when working with oil this hot. Keep kids, pets and anyone who might distract you away.