

*One of the best things about the Holidays, other than seeing family and friends, and **eating great food**, is reconnecting with certain dishes and recipes you've lost touch with. In my case, there are plenty of foods that fall into that category. How that happens in a culture where everything happens in the kitchen, is beyond me.*

How do you keep up with all the food there is to **eat**, cook, learn to cook, try, and re-incorporate into your "diet?"

I think talking about recipe organization and prioritization is a whole 'nother post in it of itself. So, I'll gather my thoughts and points and work on that one for a later date.

For now, let me introduce you and re-introduce myself to beignets, or **buñuelos**, as we call them. These globally loved doughnuts are something I remember eating as a child, but have no recollection at what point *abuela* or *mami* just stopped making them. In fact, the last time I remember having one, was about 13 years ago during a visit to Miami, where my paternal grandmother's brother was making them from scratch.

I stood in complex amazement of how he made the dough, more so the ingredients he was using to make them, and then how he meticulously shaped them into mini size 8's. I was so giddy and couldn't wait to dig in; acting more like an adolescent at an amusement park, so perhaps it was more than 13 years ago.

Oh yes, it must have been!

During Christmas, *mami* and I got really hyped up about cooking different things. She's been more and more intrigued by the non-Cuban dishes I prepare for my clients, and I've been more and more interested in going back to solid, traditional Cuban food, 3-4 generations back, as I continue the saga of writing my cookbook.

So on a cold afternoon a few weeks ago, while experiencing gut-wrenching cabin fever (because DC got hammered with 23" of snow 2 days before Christmas), we decided to take a stab at making these figure eight Cuban luvies. After 2 hours of table-talk-turned loud debate over which was the right recipe, we finally agreed on one, which was more or less a combination of 4: grandma's brother, my cousin's aunt, some Cuban website and my mother's own creativity and determination to make it our own.

Our Cuban beignets are primarily made of starchy vegetables! Imagine that. **Yuca**, my all-time favorite tuber, **malanga**, plantain, Cuban white sweet potato (**boniato**) and other vegetables can be used and combined to make the dough. Eggs, and **BUTTER** no doubt, are part of the equation for some.

Choose wisely.

We limited ours to 2 main vegetables, though I'm putting plantain in my next batch. We figured too many elements would take a way from the intensity of the intended flavor. Of course, you can play around and get all messy, if you'd like!

*ALERT: This recipe is not for the lazy, the cheater or the one that take short cuts. It's a tedious recipe of ratios. One Michael Ruhlman would love to apply his theory to. In this, it's a must. One too much of a single vegetable, then it becomes either too sticky or gooey. Another thing, these Cuban **buñuelos** are topped with a most juicy **almibar**, or honey sauce made with star anise and cinnamon sticks?two of my favorite spices. The ratio aspect applies here as well. Too much sugar or not enough water will jack up the desired consistency.*

So, proceed with caution and fun!

The most important thing about these *buñuelos* is the light crisp factor: not too crispy like funnel cakes, but not too soft like flan. And, if made right, a few won't even make it to the final stages of adding the syrup! You won't resist. Okay wait, I'm lying. The syrup is really the icing on the cake on these eloquently shaped doughnuts!

This stuff what right here is guaranteed to get you long and over-due accolades, make you a star home baker and a connoisseur of other Cuban desserts; oh yeah and score some serious goodie points with the guy!

How could any of that be bad? Even if it takes you two hours to make?!

And lastly, how could something this sinfully divine have escaped our making for over a decade! Cuban nationalism now re-instated, thank you very much!

Drunken Cuban Buñuelos

Ingredients

dough:

- 1 lb. of yucca (fresh or uncooked frozen)
- 1 lb. of malanga
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp. of ground anise
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 cup of flour
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 cup of canola oil
- 1/2 gallon water

star-anise & cinnamon syrup:

- 2 cups water
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 lime rinds
- 1/4 cup star anise (whole)
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1/4 cup your favorite rum (flavored or not and optional)*

Method

For dough:

Bring water to boil. Peel all vegetables and cook en in boiling water until softened, but not too tender where they fall apart. Drain and let cool. In large bowl, mash up all vegetables using masher or your bare hands. Beat egg and add to vegetable mixture, anise, salt and flour. Mix well until mixture does not stick to your hands and becomes a nice dough. Place dough on wax paper. Take half palm full's amount of dough, roll into a 6" long link. Shape into 4" high number 8 figures. Using a deep fryer or 6 qt non-stick pot, heat oil on high or 350F. Using tongs, place shaped *buñuelos* into either pan and fry until golden brown and bit crsippy. Transfer onto serving plate. Pour rum all over *buñuelos*, then pour syrup (recipe to follow) and drench entire pan of Cuban doughnuts!

For star-anise & cinnamon syrup:

In medium saucepan, bring water and sugar to low boil, stirring constantly. Add star anise, cinnamon sticks and lime rinds. Stir until mixture has reduced to a honey-like consistency. Pour immediately on **buñuelos**.