



JUST LIKE MOM'S

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A South Texas native who spent time growing up on her family's Louisiana farm, **Chef Tiffany Derry** had gumbo at least twice a month. "Some people say they only have gumbo a couple times a year or when it's cold out, but we had it all the time," says the nationally acclaimed chef. "My grandmother had 11 children in Baton Rouge and I have 50 first cousins—gumbo feeds a large number of people. I love it so much that if someone asked me what my last meal would be, it would be my mother's gumbo."

To this day, Derry makes gumbo at her Farmers Branch restaurant, **Roots Southern Table**, just like her mom and grandmother did...with a few twists (recipe on page 85).

As she was taught, Derry cooks the okra separately by frying it on the stovetop or roasting it in the oven until browned, both done without a lot of stirring. "We don't do slime," she says, referring to the sometimes off-putting consistency that simmering okra can create.

"Gumbo is a very personal family recipe—everyone makes it slightly different and it depends on the area where you grew up," Derry says. In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for example, you might see chicken sausage, crab, and shrimp all added to the pot. Other recipes call for turkey necks, crawfish, duck, and even boiled eggs. Many serve their gumbo with rice; others serve it with a little potato salad.

Like her mom, Derry prefers to cook the rice separately, placing a little at the bottom of a serving bowl before ladling in the gumbo. "If you cook rice with the gumbo that can create a mushy texture and it causes the rice to swell too much," she says. "You always want more gumbo than rice."

In another spin, Derry simmers reserved duck and chicken parts from her signature duck-fat fried chicken into a rich stock. To save labor, rather than stirring the roux over the stove, Derry and her staff make it in a 400-degree oven—mixing the flour and oil every 30 minutes for an hour and a half until dark brown and nutty. She'll then transfer the roux to large pots over high heat where she fries aromatics and vegetables before adding the stock and crispy okra. She even roasts and dices the chicken to maintain a chunkier consistency.

Derry estimates they go through 25 to 30 gallons of gumbo a week at Roots Southern Table, but she never makes it on the same day, giving time for the flavors to meld. It's one of the more popular items on her menu, sitting beneath the "Down Home Roots" section—simple, classic dishes with flavors that guests can identify with. The "Modern Roots" section has more playful dishes like black-eyed pea hummus with XO chile sauce while the "Supper" section hosts large entrees like jerk lamb chops with hoppin' John and pickled sweet peppers.

"Roots Southern Table is my homage to my mom and my family and reflects the way we ate on the farm," Derry says. "When you walked into the house, you would see cupboards lined with all types of pickles—pickled sweet potatoes and onions and other things grown on the farm—even pickled pigs feet. I loved sitting around a big table with my family, shelling peas and pulling greens and wanted to bring a little of that into the restaurant. If you go way back, our ancestors were mostly vegetarians out of West Africa who, over the years after they came here, worked with what they were given, like the ends and tails of pigs, or whatever else they had access to. When you dine at the restaurant, you'll see a mix of old school and new school dishes as a representation of how Southern food continues to evolve."