

Makes 10 servings

*Shrimp Creole was created before the days of refrigeration. Like most great dishes of the world, it was made only during the season when fresh ingredients were available—in this case, whole fresh shrimp and Creole tomatoes. The fat in the shrimp heads is an important taste and color contributor. The fresh Creole tomatoes and fresh shrimp fat give the sauce a natural sweetness and an incredible flavor. Browning the onions until caramelized is also an integral part of the dish, as it brings the sugar in the onions to the surface. The use of butter enriches the sauce further, and the red and white ground peppers are important stimulators of the taste buds. The completed sauce may have white specks of shrimp fat in it and should be an antique red color. (In the old days, whole shrimp—heads, tails, shells and all—would go into the pot; then the shrimp fat really did show in the sauce.)*

*The sauce is best if made a day before serving. Make the shrimp stock first, then the sauce. When ready to serve, skim off the oil from the surface and reheat the sauce to a boil. Lower the heat to very low, add the peeled shrimp tails and cook covered just until the shrimp turn pink, about 5 minutes.*

3½ pounds large shrimp with heads and shells, as fatty as possible (see **NOTE**)

2½ cups, in all, **Basic Shrimp Stock** (page 32)

¼ cup chicken fat, pork lard or beef fat

2½ cups finely chopped onions, in all

1¾ cups finely chopped celery

1½ cups finely chopped green bell peppers

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 teaspoons minced garlic

1 bay leaf

2 teaspoons salt

1½ teaspoons white pepper

1 teaspoon ground red pepper (preferably cayenne)

¾ teaspoon black pepper

1½ teaspoons Tabasco sauce

1 tablespoon dried thyme leaves

1½ teaspoons dried sweet basil leaves

3 cups finely chopped peeled tomatoes (preferably Creole)

1½ cups canned tomato sauce

2 teaspoons sugar

5 cups hot **Basic Cooked Rice** (page 224)

**NOTE:** Shrimp fat is the orange substance in the heads. If shrimp with heads are not available, buy 2 pounds of shrimp without heads (but with shells for making the stock).

Rinse and peel shrimp; refrigerate until needed. Use heads and shells to make the Basic Shrimp Stock.

Heat the chicken or other fat over high heat in a 4-quart saucepan until melted. Add 1 cup of the onions and cook over high heat 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Lower the heat to medium-low and continue cooking, stirring frequently, until onions are a rich brown color but not burned, about 3 to 5 minutes. Add the remaining 1½ cups onions, the celery, bell peppers and butter. Cook over high heat until the bell peppers and celery start to get tender, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the garlic, bay leaf, salt and peppers; stir well. Then add the Tabasco, thyme, basil and ½ cup of the stock. Cook over medium heat about 5 minutes to allow seasonings to marry and vegetables to brown further, stirring occasionally and scraping pan bottom well. Add the tomatoes; turn heat to low and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally and scraping pan bottom. Stir in the tomato sauce and simmer 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the remaining 2 cups stock and the sugar. Continue simmering sauce for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Cool and refrigerate if made the day before. Or, if serving immediately, turn heat off and add the shrimp; cover the pot and let sit just until shrimp are plump and pink, about 5 to 10 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the serving plates in a 250° oven. Serve immediately.

To serve, center ½ cup mounded rice on each heated serving plate; spoon 1 cup Shrimp Creole sauce around the rice and arrange 8 or 9 shrimp on the sauce.