

2008 Master Gardener Series

January 31, 2008

Mardi Gras & Fat Tuesday

Sampler Menu



King Cake
Beignets
Fruit Tray
Coffee

Mardi Gras in the Late Eighteenth Century

http://www.eastjeffersonparish.com/culture/MARDI_GRA/HISTORY/history.htm

During the late 1700's, pre-Lenten masked balls and festivals were common in New Orleans while it was under French rule. However when New Orleans came under Spanish rule the custom was banned. In 1803 New Orleans came under the U.S. flag. The prohibition against masked festivals continued until 1823 when the Creole populace convinced the governor to permit masked balls. In 1827 street masking was again legalized.

The Nineteenth Century

During the early 1800's public celebrations of Mardi Gras centered around maskers on foot, in carriages and on horseback. The first documented parade occurred in 1837. Unfortunately, Mardi Gras gained a negative reputation because of violent behavior

attributed to maskers during the 1840's and 50's. The situation became so bad that the press began calling for an end to the celebration.

In 1870 the Twelfth Night Revelers made their appearance. In 1871 they began the custom of presenting a young woman with a golden bean hidden in a cake. This young woman was the first queen of Mardi Gras. This was also the origin of the king cake tradition.

In 1872 Grand Duke Alexis Romanoff of Russia visited New Orleans. This year the krewe of Rex made their debut and began the tradition of the "King of Carnival." Rex also introduced purple, gold and green as the official colors of Mardi Gras.

BEIGNET a la Creole

(French Market Doughnuts)

- 1 package active dry yeast
- 1-1/2 cups warm water (100-115 degrees F)
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 7 cups flour
- 1/4 cup vegetable shortening
- Oil for deep-frying
- Confectioner's sugar for dusting

Put the warm water into a large bowl; sprinkle in the yeast and two teaspoons of the sugar; stir until thoroughly dissolved. Allow to soften for 10 minutes. Add the rest of the sugar, salt, eggs, and evaporated milk. Gradually stir in 4 cups of the flour and beat with a wooden spoon until smooth and thoroughly blended. Beat in the shortening, then add the

remaining flour, about 1/3 cup at a time, beating it in with a spoon until it becomes too stiff to stir, then working in the rest with your hands. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight in a greased bowl.

Roll the dough out onto a floured board or marble pastry surface to a thickness of 1/8 inch. Cut it into rectangles 2-1/2 inches by 3-1/2 inches with a sharp knife. Heat the oil in a deep fryer to 360 degrees F. Fry 3 or 4 beignets at a time until they are puffed out and golden brown on both sides, about 2-3 minutes, turning once or twice to brown evenly. Drain on paper towels. The beignets may be kept warm in a low oven.

Serve 3 beignets per person. Sprinkle heavily with powdered sugar.



Mardi Gras floral table

decorations are typically carnations that have been dyed purple or gold for the occasion.

How to dye a carnation:

Fill a vase with cold water; add several drops of food color – blue and red combine to make purple for Mardi Gras Party Flowers. Watch the flowers through the day to see the color travel up the stems to the flower heads. The dye process should be complete within 24 hours.