New Orleans wouldn't be New Orleans without its Creole Red Beans and Rice. Most restaurants in the Crescent City have a standing Monday menu—red beans and rice. Traditionally, Monday was wash day, and on Sunday night, the red beans were put in a pot to soak. On Monday morning they simmered while Mama spent the day at the washtub scurbbing the clothes with Octagon on the washboard.

With the advent of the washing machine, the need for a dish that cooked itself disappeared, and other dishes were served on Monday at home. Nonetheless, red beans and rice continued to be a Monday meal in the restaurants.

At the mention of beans an old World War I favorite pops into mind, whether one is of World War I vintage or not.

The first Marine, he ate the beans, parlez-vous.
The second Marine, he ate the beans, parlez-vous.
The third Marine, he ate the beans
And blew up all the submarines,
Hinky, dinky, parlez-vous.

Some people add a pinch of soda or a dash of sugar to counteract the consequences of a hearty dish of red beans and rice. I have also been told that bay leaf cuts down on the explosive after-effects. Not having conducted any scientific experiments on the subject, I shall have to pass on that.

Recipes that I have found for red beans and rice range from a simple one—cooking the beans with water, salt pork and peppers—to recipes calling for the addition of spices and seasonings that make the dish "bon à manger." I particularly like to serve Italian sausage with red beans and rice, and from this discovered that a pinch of anise seed enhances the flavor of the red beans.

The dish goes well with pork chops, ham slices, turkey, and any kind of sausage.

Spicy Red Beans and Rice

One pound red beans
2 ½ qts. water
2 onions chopped
Ham hock, ham bone, or diced ham
1 clove garlic, minced
1 lb. Italian sausage
8 whole cloves
¼ tsp. anise seed

1 bay leaf, broken
1 stalk celery, chopped
2 T. parsley, minced
¼ cup bell pepper, chopped (if desired)
Salt and pepper to taste

Rinse the beans, cover with water and let stand overnight. In the morning, add the ham hock or diced ham and cook over low heat. If the beans have soaked up all the water, cover with water again. Cook the Italian sausage in a separate pan. When done, set aside until about one-half hour before beans are done. Pour off some of the sausage drippings (retain for seasoning other dishes), then add onions, garlic, celery, parsley, bay leaf, cloves and anise seed and sauté until onions are limp. Add to the bean pot.

Cook for two hours or longer, adding more water if necessary. Add Italian sausage to beans about a half hour before they are done. Add salt and pepper to taste after beans are done.

To make the bean liquid creamy, mash ½ cup of beans thoroughly and put back in the bean pot.

Serve over fluffy, white rice. Serves six.