

# What is Sadza?

## Sadza ne Nyama: A Shona Staple Dish

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### Introduction

Sadza ne Nyama ("Sadza [and Meat Stew]") or simply Sadza is the staple diet for most of Zimbabwe's indigenous peoples. It is a two part recipe with sadza on one and the accompanying stew or vegetable relish on the other. Sadza is a generic term used to describe thickened porridge made out of any number of pulverized grains. The most common form of sadza is made with white maize (corn) mealie meal.

Despite the fact that maize is actually an imported food crop to Zimbabwe (circa 1890), it has become the chief source of starch and carbohydrate and the most popular meal for indigenous peoples of Zimbabwe. Sadza is to Zimbabweans what rice is to the Chinese or pasta to the Italians.

## **Nyama**

Nyama is the Shona word for meat. Which kind of meat is qualified by naming the animal or beast from which it comes. For example beef is nyama ye mombe where mombe is the Shona word for cattle. Similarly chicken is nyama ye huku where huku is the Shona word for chicken. Nyama ye mbudzi is goat meat.

## **Grains Used to Make Sadza**

The generic Shona term used to describe mealie-meal is upfu. It is further qualified by naming the grain from which it is derived as in "upfu hwe chibage" which literally translates to "mealie of white corn" or white corn meal. Other grains that can be used for sadza include bulrush millet ("mhunga") rapoko a.k.a. finger millet ("njera" or "zviyo") and from these you get "upfu hwe njera" (rapoko meal), "upfu hwe mhunga" (bulrush millet meal) and so on. Sadza made from these various grains will be referred to with the appropriate grain name to fully qualify it. For example "sadza re chibage" (sadza from corn meal), "sadza re mhunga" and "sadza re njera or sadza re zviyo" for bulrush millet meal sadza and rapoko meal sadza respectively.

## **Many Meanings of "Sadza"**

Sadza, a starchy food, is eaten with accompanying dish of either a meat (nyama) based stew or some kind of vegetable. Generally Shona people will refer to a meal simply as sadza, without specifying the accompaniment. In this case the accompanying nyama or vegetable is assumed. In addition, depending on the context, sadza can also be used to mean lunch or dinner. For example, "Sadza re Masikati", lit. 'sadza of the afternoon' simply means lunch just as "Sadza re Manheru",

lit. sadza of the evening simply means dinner. In this recipe and protocol, I describe how to make the stew that accompanies sadza. It generally conforms to the traditional Shona cooking but I have also added a few ingredients as well as adapt the cooking environment to a more modern setting (electric or gas burner assumed, metal pots and pans). Traditionally, sadza is cooked in a clay or cast iron pot on an open fire. This environment presents significant challenges and requires the preparer to be seasoned, dynamic, creative and adaptive. Sadza, being at the epicenter of the Shona diet, mandates discussion of customary procedures, the tools required to prepare it and accepted protocol for its respectful consumption. If you wish to try this recipe, I strongly suggest you read all the instructions before attempting. Allow about 90 minutes from beginning to end, assuming you have all the required ingredients at hand. It should be a fun experience. If you have a chance to witness an experienced sadza cook, do not pass up the opportunity.

### **The Social Politics of Sadza ne Nyama**

Rudyi is the Shona word for right hand. Literally it means the "one used for eating". Rudyi is also used to refer to "right" or "right side" as in the opposite of left. Because the right hand is designated the hand you eat with (rudyi), it is considered impolite to eat sadza with your left hand - even if you are left handed and may feel more comfortable doing so. Thus to be polite, and show respect for your host or hostess, you always use your right hand to eat. Don't forget to wash your hands after you eat!

In Shona society people do not eat meat on a daily basis. It is not unusual for some families to go for two weeks eating sadza with vegetables instead of meat. Thus eating sadza with meat becomes a bit of a treat. Some occasions are deemed important that some kind of meat should be used as an accompaniment for sadza. The kind of meat made available by the host in this context is important

since it signifies the importance of the occasion. In most cases nyama is made available when visitors (Shona: Vaenzi) come. These can be impromptu visits or planned visits. However the beast slaughtered for the occasion signifies the importance of either visit or visitor's status in the eyes of the host/hostess. It is unlikely that a previously unknown visitor who stops by to deliver a message will be accorded the luxury of sadza ne nyama. However, a close relative or child who has been away at boarding school for several months may be accorded a sizable rooster. By the same token a son who has been away from home working in a far away city and returns home after a year or longer may be command goat. Similarly a bull may be the appropriate beast to slaughter for a son or daughter who has been away studying in a foreign country and returns after several years. Thus, nyama takes on various meanings in the eyes of the host/hostess. The more important the occasion is to the host, the larger the beast slaughtered.

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