

HEAVENLY HASH

SOUTH CAROLINA-BASED REINA GASCON-LOPEZ OF *THE SOFRITO PROJECT* INDULGES IN A CHILDHOOD FAVORITE MADE WITH A SURPRISING INGREDIENT

BY REINA GASCON-LOPEZ



Modern-day Puerto Rican cuisine is based on a combination of three different cultures' ingredients and cooking methods: the indigenous Taíno, West African, and Spanish. I find that Puerto Rican food often showcases humble ingredients with a huge depth of flavor, and since many of our dishes coax this flavor out of a handful of items, this is what makes the cuisine so special to me. Some of our most notable recipes include slow-roasted pork, known as lechón; rice-and-pea dishes, like arroz con gandules; and mofongo, a garlicky fried smashed plantain dish. But a few of my family's favorites fly under the radar when it comes to getting the spotlight on our repertoire of famous dishes.

Being a Puerto Rican raised in the South—Charleston, South Carolina, to be exact—there were many dishes that my mom would make growing up that didn't necessarily fit into the box of typical or traditional Caribbean food. We often made due with what we had available in the States and substituted what was needed for certain items we couldn't find. Caribbean root vegetables like yautia and yuca were nearly impossible to find growing up, and still to this day, my dad ships pigeon peas and coffee to me from Puerto Rico because I can't find them here. But the lack of familiar ingredients has often resulted in some of my favorite lowbrow dishes that always hit the spot and bring back so many memories for me today. We often enjoyed Puerto Rican dishes along with old-school Southern classics, so when I first had hash and rice [a pork and potato mixture served over white rice and known as barbecue hash that's common in South Carolina] at a local barbecue restaurant, I couldn't help but notice the similarities between it and my corned beef hash.

In Puerto Rican cuisine, you wouldn't think that corned beef hash would be a cherished item in the traditional sense of Caribbean staples, but you'd be surprised—potted meats like corned beef, Vienna sausages, and Spam stay in rotation on the island due to the influence of these popular Americanized products. We'd typically take these relatively unpopular ingredients and add our own tropical twist, changing out a few ingredients based on what was available. As an adult, learning more about Puerto Rican cuisine and its shared similarities to the South, including the strong West African influence found in both, makes me reflect on how much we all do have in common and how connected we are, especially through cooking.

This corned beef hash recipe was a childhood staple of mine that comes together pretty quickly in one pan, and my go-to is always a cast-iron skillet. When it comes to ingredients, fresh sofrito is key here. Sofrito is an herby and aromatic seasoning blend used in most Puerto Rican savory dishes like stews, soups, and rice. I highly suggest making a batch to keep in your fridge or freezer for future use, but you can find frozen or jarred sofrito in the Latin foods section of most grocery stores. This recipe doesn't need much prep thanks to this flavorful seasoning blend, so you can rely on pantry staples like the canned corned beef, potatoes, and tomato paste to bring the dish together without much fuss. My favorite way to enjoy my take on corned beef hash is with a simple pot of steamed white rice and fried sweet plantains. I hope you like it as much as I do.

Follow Reina and her cooking adventures on social media at [@thesofritoproject](#) and at [sofritoproject.com](#).



PUERTO RICAN CORNED BEEF HASH

Recipe courtesy of Reina Gascon-Lopez
Makes 4 to 6 servings

A traditional Puerto Rican comfort food, this flavor-packed hash is a long-standing favorite in Reina's family.

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 small to medium Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and diced
- 3 tablespoons sofrito (see Kitchen Tip)
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste

- 1 teaspoon sazón (see Kitchen Tip)
- 1 (12-ounce) can corned beef
- ½ cup water or beef broth
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- Hot cooked rice and fried plantains, for serving

1. In a 12-inch cast iron skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add potatoes; cook, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are crisp around edges and fork-tender, 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Stir in sofrito; cook until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Stir in tomato paste and sazón. Stir in corned beef and ½ cup water or broth, breaking

up beef into small pieces with the back of a spoon. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve with rice and plantains. ●

KITCHEN TIP

Sofrito is a cooked mixture of onions, peppers, garlic, and herbs, and sazón is a blend of dried herbs and spices. Both are used to flavor countless Puerto Rican dishes. Reina's recipe for sofrito and sazón can both be found at [sofritoproject.com](#). Store-bought sofrito can work just as well, but Reina highly recommends making the sofrito from scratch.