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Striking Plant-Forward Recipes from a Bronx-Based Culinary Collective

Written by: [Margaret Willes](#) | Published on: December 7, 2023

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Photo courtesy of Nayquan Shuler

Chef Pierre Serrao, entrepreneur Jon Gray, and chef Lester Walker are cofounders of [Ghetto Gastro](#): a Bronx-based culinary collective that, for over a decade, has shed light on how food can be a source of empowerment and a means for social change.

"For us, I mean, especially people of color and Black people in America, food has been weaponized against our community in a number of ways," says Serrao. He mentions how many in the Bronx lack access to nutritious foods, even though the borough is home to one of the largest food distribution centers in the world. "We understand that all these things are really systemically created," he says. "And we want to help be a voice to not only address those problems but also be a solution—by providing people healthier ways of eating and also different ways of thinking about approaching food in general."

Through both community engagement (Ghetto Gastro has partnered with the nonprofit [Rethink Food](#) and [La Morada](#), an Oaxacan restaurant in the Bronx, to fight food insecurity) and various brand collaborations (including a [new line of breakfast](#)



GHETTO GASTRO



[essentials at Target](#)), the collective is helping people nourish themselves and the ones they love. They've also captured their vision in [Black Power Kitchen](#), a celebration of the borough they call home and a collection of mostly plant-based recipes. Find three of them below.

Ghetto Gastro Presents Black Power Kitchen
Bookshop, \$37.20
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3 RECIPES FROM BLACK POWER KITCHEN



Garden Greens

Made from coconut vinegar and nectar, this salad’s dressing uses ingredients rooted in the African diaspora. “We like to use products that are low-glycemic to counteract all of the sort of underlying health conditions that our community tends to face, and also to bring it back to the Indigenous aspect of how our people were eating before we were enslaved,” Serrao says.

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Strong Back Stew

Serrao’s grandmother used to make this stew—she called her version “strong man soup”—every Wednesday for her family in Barbados. “It’s a really hearty, stick-to-your-ribs, gut-warming soup,” Serrao says. If you want to take the heat down a notch but achieve the same flavorful result, throw the Scotch bonnet pepper in whole instead of cutting it open.

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Purple Haze Pie

Gray’s grandfather was known for his sweet potato pies, made with coconut flakes for texture. This recipe is inspired by him—with an eye-catching Ghetto Gastro twist. “We use purple sweet potatoes because the ube is an essential ground provision in West Africa and also in other parts of the world,” Serrao says, specifically noting the purple sweet potatoes in Southeast Asia and the vibrant Okinawan sweet potato in Japan. “For us, it’s just about playing with and also helping to re-create and rewrite some new traditions,” he adds.

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