

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

**SOUTHERN
COOKING**

Gourmet

THE MAGAZINE OF GOOD LIVING

**Fried Chicken with Bacon · Shrimp & Grits
Lemon Meringue Pie · Fresh Coconut Layer Cake
Oyster Stew · Smothered Steak
Caramel Cake · Farm Eggs with Cream & Country Ham
Brandied-Peach Pork Chops
Buttermilk Cookies · Mile-High Chocolate Cake**

**PLUS: ANN PATCHETT'S
LOVE LETTER TO NASHVILLE**



**FOUR STEPS TO
PERFECT BISCUITS**

JANUARY 2008

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GOURMET JANUARY 2008 VOLUME LXVIII NUMBER 1

FEATURES

24 WHAT IS SOUTHERN? A granddaughter of freed slaves, the late Edna Lewis left home when she was just 16 years old and went on to become a renowned chef at Manhattan's star-studded Café Nicholson. Her books have spread the gospel of genuine southern cuisine and inspired a generation of home cooks. In this never before published essay, she shares a lifetime's worth of experience as she answers the question, "What is southern?"

Plus: We have more than a dozen recipes, including buttermilk cookies, fried apple pies, greens with cornmeal dumplings, potato casserole, and smothered steak.

66 GOOD DAY SUNSHINE This country brunch from Atlanta chef Scott Peacock—pimento cheese toasts, braised pork shoulder hash, Lowcountry breakfast shrimp, buttermilk biscuits, spoon-bread muffins, sweet-potato pudding with apples and chestnuts, and more—is a languorous taste of tradition worth clearing your whole day for.

98 NASHVILLE NATIVE Pack your bags, because once you've read this Nashville native's love letter to her hometown, you'll want to head to the airport and catch the next plane. **BY ANN PATCHETT**

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Scott Peacock's spoon-bread muffins (page 81)

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BRANDIED-PEACH PORK CHOPS

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 30 MIN

- 4 (1-inch-thick) loin pork chops
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup thinly sliced shallots
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped thyme
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon brandy, divided
- 1 (10-oz) bag frozen peaches, thawed
- ⅓ cup peach preserves

- ▶ Pat pork chops dry, then sprinkle on both sides with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper (total).
- ▶ Heat oil in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until it shimmers, then cook pork chops, turning once, until browned and just cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes total. Transfer to a platter and keep warm, loosely covered with foil. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet.
- ▶ Heat butter in skillet over medium heat until foam subsides, then cook shallots with thyme, stirring occasionally, until tender and golden-brown, about 5 minutes.
- ▶ Add ¼ cup brandy to skillet and carefully ignite with a kitchen match (use caution; flames will shoot up), then cook over medium heat, scraping bottom of skillet to loosen brown bits. When flames subside, add peaches, preserves, and ¼ teaspoon each of salt and pepper and cook, covered, until peaches are tender and juicy, about 3 minutes. Stir in remaining tablespoon brandy, any meat juices from platter, and salt and pepper to taste, then spoon sauce over chops.



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92 BELLES OF THE BALL It's time to meet some real southern beauties. Allow us to introduce you to: mile-high chocolate cake, pecan fig bourbon cake, caramel cake, citrus pound cake, and more.

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53 CIVIC PRIDE Since 2000, the Atlanta metropolitan area has absorbed nearly 900,000 new residents. Until recently, though, it didn't have many restaurants that exalted true regional food and tradition. Now a new crop of chefs is embracing the past while redefining the future. **RECIPES BEGIN ON PAGE 54**

BY JOHN T. EDGE

64 STAYING ON ALONE Scott Peacock was a talented but directionless chef when he met Edna Lewis. Her wisdom ignited his, and Peacock is now the pride of the culinary South. There were, however, a few bumps along the way. **BY LAURA SHAPIRO**

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58 When it comes to amazing barbecue, North Carolina's Skylight Inn goes whole hog.

BY JANE AND MICHAEL STERN

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ON THE COVER STACKED IN YOUR FAVOR: BUTTERMILK BISCUITS. RECIPE ON PAGE 80. PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN KERNICK. FOOD STYLING BY MAGGIE RUGGIERO.

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RIGHT NOW AT GOURMET.COM

PIONEERING SPIRIT

In the essay on page 24, the late chef and cookbook author Edna Lewis (pictured at left, circa 1980) simply and eloquently answers the question “What is southern?” You’re going to love the homey recipes that accompany her story, so head to the Web, where you’ll find even more of the kinds of dishes she loved to cook—including green peas in cream sauce and blackberry cobbler. Plus, you can watch a short film, “Fried Chicken & Sweet Potato Pie” (produced by documentary filmmaker Bailey Barash; bbarash.com), featuring Lewis, as well as check out a profile of her written for GOURMET in 2001 by novelist Chang-rae Lee.

ROADFOOD FAVORITES

If anyone knows where to find good grub in the South, it’s contributing editors Jane and Michael Stern. In this exclusive slideshow, they reveal the ten best dishes they’ve found in their travels around the region—from “firecracker flounder” on the South Carolina coast to gigantic slices of icebox pie in Greenwood, Mississippi.

SOUTHERN VINTAGE

We’ve got plenty of southern-inspired recipes in this issue—and even more online. Our editors have selected their 12 favorite GOURMET recipes, including lemon Cajun sweet dough pies; gumbo with a multitude of greens (pictured at left); Cheddar rice fritters with chile vinegar dipping sauce; and impossibly tender fried chicken wings.

A HAM FOR ALL SEASONS

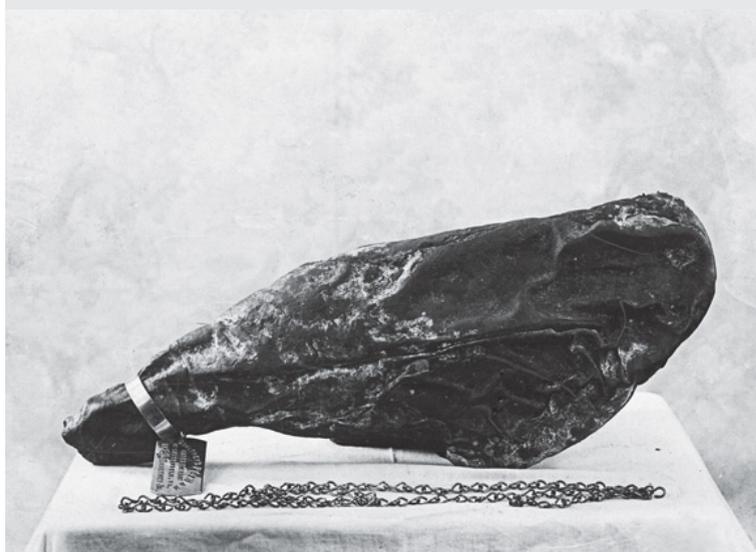
In parts of the South, cured pork is a pantry staple. Contributing editor John T. Edge explores how bacon, sausage, and ham became insurance against hard times—and tells us why some folks keep “pet hams” for upwards of 50 years. (We think that might be one of them in the photo, below left.)

CHOPTALK: THE GOURMET FOOD AND TRAVEL BLOG

Check out Choptalk for weekly installments from many of your favorite GOURMET contributors—including John T. Edge, Robert Sietsema, Francis Lam, Dara Moskowitz Grumdahl, and Julia Langbein—plus the latest news from our global network of correspondents. We’re covering the culinary world like no other blog.

SIGN UP FOR GOURMET WEEKLY

It’s bite-size GOURMET, and it’s GOURMET with a bite. Every Thursday Ruth Reichl and the editors at GOURMET serve up exclusive tips, news and recommendations—and the occasional recipe or two—direct to your inbox. Head to our website and sign up now.



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PRIDE OF THE SOUTH

EDNA LEWIS GOT OFF THE TRAIN clutching a bag of flour. She had carried it clear across the country. Her luggage, when it appeared, was a series of twine-wrapped boxes holding groceries. The South's most celebrated cook had come to California to make lunch, and she was not about to trust the local ingredients.

It was the late '70s, a time when Americans were just beginning to be excited by food. At the Robert Mondavi Winery, two young cooks were hosting The Great Chefs of France, a series of spectacular meals created by what were then the most famous chefs in the world. They invited Alain Chapel to leave his three-star restaurant in Mionnay to cook a series of dinners in the Napa Valley. Edna Lewis was to be responsible for two lunches. The confident French chef and the quiet African-American woman were an odd and interesting pairing.

Chapel arrived empty-handed, which meant that Michael James and Billy Cross, who ran the Great Chefs program, had to send people scurrying across the countryside looking for the products he required. I was covering the event for a magazine, and when it turned out that the chef spoke very little English, I was recruited as a translator. What I remember is that sourcing cocks' combs was a serious problem; they were an ordinary ingredient in France, and Chapel was puzzled by the fact that they were so difficult to find in California. My other memory is of his surprise and pleasure in our chicken livers. "They are so white!" he kept repeating in amazement.

Miss Lewis, on the other hand, was neither puzzled nor surprised. And no minions were required to source her ingredients; wary of what she might find in California, she had brought everything she needed. Her insistence on using her own native ingredients was a revelation to me, my first encounter with the notion that our country had a claim to regional flavors. Like so many young Americans who were enthralled by the cooking of Europe, I was shocked to discover that we had our own version of what the French call *terroir*. And I can still hear Miss Lewis describing the taste of the fruits and vegetables that she ate when she was growing up and her lament over the lost flavor in supermarket produce.

What did the great Alain Chapel cook? I can't remember. But I will never forget Edna Lewis's biscuits, which were so light and delicate that you closed your mouth over them only to discover that they had evaporated, leaving behind nothing but a puff of warm air and a delicious memory.

I was certainly not alone; the people who had paid enormous fees for this weekend of incredible eating went away with a new respect for American cooking. And that is the true legacy of Edna Lewis. She was a pioneer who reminded us, in her four cookbooks, that regional American food has a proud past, one that deserves to be remembered and preserved. She was a living link to a valuable culture.

Like many people, I was deeply saddened when Edna Lewis passed away two years ago. But recently we received some astonishing news: Senior articles editor Jane Daniels Lear got a call from Thomas Head of the Southern Foodways Alliance saying that he and Don W. Goodman, executor of the estate of the renowned food writer Eugene Walter, had uncovered a

handwritten essay by Lewis entitled "What Is Southern?" Apparently Miss Lewis had participated in a seminar on southern cooking in Florida in 1992 with John Edgerton, Scott Peacock, and Walter. The four had been so inspired that they decided to write a book together. Miss Lewis was the only one who actually finished her piece, and I could not wait to read it.

In straightforward, precise language she wrote a tribute not only to the food of her region, but also to the writers, musicians, artists, and cooks who create the character of the country. I instantly knew we had the basis for a wonderful issue on the subject. The essay begins on page 24.

Edna Lewis taught us to treasure what we have here, and never has she been more eloquent or more persuasive. She was an inspiration who will be sorely missed, but with her words she has given us back an entire tradition.

I WILL NEVER FORGET EDNA LEWIS'S BISCUITS, WHICH WERE SO LIGHT AND DELICATE THAT YOU CLOSED YOUR MOUTH OVER THEM ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THEY HAD EVAPORATED.



Ruth Reichl

RUTH REICHL EDITOR IN CHIEF

LETTERS

Depoliticizing September's Latino issue; praise for a delicious (and photogenic) stuffed pumpkin; a call to recognize all of the producers; and a hearty cold-weather soup.

REGARDING YOUR NOVEMBER issue's letters page: Leaving aside the hysterical notion that illegal immigration is the root of our country's myriad evils, I find it horrifying that any reasonable adult could conjure a world where all Hispanic food is prepared or consumed by illegal immigrants. Clearly, logic is not these letter writers' strong suit. But a magazine of GOURMET's stature really should know better than to publish such clearly inflammatory garbage.

ANITA CROTTY
SAN FRANCISCO

I SHOULD ORIGINALLY HAVE written to you about your September issue to thank you for the Peruvian chicken recipe, but I am writing now to respond to the letters section in the November issue. I wish I could speak directly to those who accuse you of celebrating illegal immigrants. The last time I checked, there were many, many legal Hispanic immigrants here. Thank you, GOURMET, for celebrating all that Hispanic and Latin culture have brought to our country.

COLA PARKER
GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS

I HAD TO RESPOND TO THE LETTERS you received taking you to task for your recent issue on Hispanic cuisine. This xenophobic reaction is completely off base: An appreciation for the varied cuisines of Mexico, Central America, and South America has absolutely nothing to do with the political issue of illegal immigration. Should I give up falafel because I'm unhappy with Middle East policy? Boycott my local Chinese restaurant because I have issues with the quality of toys imported from China? How silly. Please continue to focus on interesting cuisines from around the world and to ignore those who see a political agenda under every saucepan lid.

MARY JENNINGS
BURLINGAME, CALIFORNIA

THE VOICES THAT WEIGHED IN on the Latino issue in your November letters section reminded me of what a wide tent GOURMET erects for its readers, and that it

takes grace and guts to publish pieces that could generate controversy. Still, I was surprised by the negative responses to the September issue's celebration of Latino cooking and culture. Even if the simple, inclusive gesture of setting another place around a wider and more expansive table is a social or political act, it's certainly not one that's out of place, even in a lifestyle publication.

BETH WADHAM
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

I MADE THE Pumpkin Stuffed with Vegetable Stew ("The Vegetarian's Dilemma," November 2007) this weekend, and it was fabulous. I'm not an expert chef by any means, but the introductory paragraph noting that if you can carve a jack-o'-lantern, you can do this, prompted me to give it a shot. The pumpkin, once roasted, looked just like the photo in the magazine. Best part: the leftovers!

ALLEN PFENNINGER
CLEVELAND, OHIO

YOU NEGLECTED TO MENTION in "The Producers" (October 2007) that behind every great farmer there is often a team of workers who, in return for extremely low wages, break their backs as much as the farmers do. This is not to assume that the farmers you profiled treat their employees that way; however, such conditions are the norm in this country. From now on, let's be sure to recognize all of the hands involved in growing and making those perfect restaurant meals, from the farmers to the farmworkers, and from the chefs to the dishwashers.

MOIRA BIRSS
SAN FRANCISCO

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF the family farm has been on my mind a lot these days. I want my young son to grow up knowing (and seeing) where his food comes from. Thank you for supporting the chefs and farmers who make food worth eating.

SHEILA HALEY
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

IN THE SPIRIT of Ruth Reichl's October 2007 letter from the editor ("A Nation >

CHOPTALK HIGHLIGHTS

Restaurant reviews, inside our test kitchens, travel tips, and more. Find it all—and post your own feedback—on our blog at gourmet.com. Here, some recent posts:



BARRY ESTABROOK
SCHMEAR TACTICS

Running late for work this morning, I ducked into a deli to pick up a bagel with cream cheese and unwittingly did my bit to increase the rate of deforestation in Southeast Asia. Palm oil, an ingredient in margarine, potato chips, and some cream cheese, is in high demand these days as a healthy alternative to trans fats (its use is expected to double by 2030 and triple by 2050). As a result, millions of acres of rainforest are being clear-cut to make way for oil palm plantations; in Indonesia, for example, according to a recent Greenpeace report, nearly 10 million acres of trees are expected to fall in the next seven years.



ALEXANDER LOBRANO
BUTTERED UP IN PARIS

Parisian chefs, from Michelin-starred Guy Savoy and Joël Robuchon to newcomer Benoît Bordier, have fallen in love with butter made by Jean-Yves Bordier (no relation to Benoît), a St.-Malo-based producer. The secret behind Bordier's small-batch butter? It's made according to old-fashioned methods—cream matures for 36 hours and is then churned and kneaded several times—using organic milk from Holstein and Normandy cows. *Beurre Bordier* comes in several varieties, including unsalted, sea-salted, salted with smoked sea salt, and seaweed-flavored.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Send your letters to feedback@gourmet.com. All letters and recipe submissions become the property of GOURMET and may be edited, published, or otherwise used in any medium.

of Farmers?”), our third grade classes at the Marion Cross School in Norwich, Vermont, are tying local eating into many of our units—we’ve made red clover tea, wild grape soda, custard from our chickens’ eggs, and even locally raised beef jerky. We hope that teaching our students this simplified version of the farm-to-fork philosophy will instill in them a lifelong appreciation for eating locally.

VICKY BIPPART
MARION CROSS SCHOOL
NORWICH, VERMONT

CORRECTION: In “A Movable East” (November 2007), we omitted a credit to de Gournay (212-564-9750; degournay.com) for its hand-painted silk wallpaper from the *Chinoiserie* collection. GOURMET regrets the error.

HERTA GUHL, one of GOURMET’s kitchen assistants, shared her recipe for this delicious goulash soup with us. Served with a basket of good crusty bread, it makes for a warming winter supper.

GLOULASH SOUP

SERVES 6 (MAIN COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 DAY
(INCLUDES CHILLING)

This rustic, satisfying spiced soup—a perfect dish to make ahead and reheat on busy weeknights—will help stave off even the fiercest midwinter chill.

- 2½ lb boneless beef chuck, cut into 1½-inch pieces**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 3 medium onions, chopped**
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped**
- 2 teaspoons caraway seeds, slightly crushed**
- 1 teaspoon dried marjoram**
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour**
- 1 (6-oz) can tomato paste**
- 6 cups boiling-hot water**
- 1 teaspoon paprika, divided**
- ¼ cup ketchup**
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce**
- ¼ teaspoon hot sauce**
- Pinch of cayenne pepper**
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt**

ACCOMPANIMENT: crusty country bread

► Pat beef dry. Heat oil in a large heavy pot over medium-high heat until it shimmers, then cook beef, stirring occasionally, until browned and beginning to exude liquid, 3 to 4 minutes. Add onions, garlic, caraway seeds, and marjoram and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Add flour and cook, stirring frequently, until mixture sticks to bottom of pot and is deep golden, about 10 minutes. Add tomato paste and cook, stirring, 1 minute, then stir in hot water and ½ teaspoon paprika. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally, then simmer, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until meat breaks apart when pressed with a spoon, 1½ to 2 hours. Chill, uncovered, until cool, then covered overnight (at least 8 hours).
► Remove solidified fat if desired, then bring soup to a simmer and remove from heat. Transfer meat with a slotted spoon to a bowl and coarsely shred with 2 forks. Return meat to soup and stir in ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, hot sauce, cayenne, sea salt, and remaining ½ teaspoon paprika and reheat over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Thin soup with water to desired consistency and season with salt and pepper.

YOU ASKED FOR IT

When a thick, luxurious custard and a rich frosting meet light-as-air angel food cake, you get the best of both worlds.

MY HUSBAND AND I drove from Ohio to Florida. We stopped in Savannah for dinner at Elizabeth on 37th and had their signature angel food cake for dessert. I've never tasted anything so good and would absolutely love the recipe.

PAULA RUBINSTEIN
CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO

SAVANNAH CREAM CAKE

Adapted from Elizabeth on 37th

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 40 MIN START TO FINISH: 5½ HR
(INCLUDES CHILLING)

Cubes of airy angel food cake (use store-bought if you're pressed for time) are nestled in a Sherry-scented custard in this light but indulgent dessert.

FOR ANGEL FOOD CAKE

- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon cake flour (not self-rising)
- ¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg
- ¾ cup sugar, divided
- 6 large egg whites
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

FOR SHERRY CUSTARD

- 1½ teaspoons unflavored gelatin (from a ¼-oz envelope)
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons water, divided
- 2 large egg yolks
- ¼ cup cream Sherry
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar, divided
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

FOR FROSTING

- 1 cup chilled heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons sugar

EQUIPMENT: a 10- by 4½-inch (16-cup) tube pan (preferably with a removable bottom); a 9-inch springform pan

GARNISH: fresh berries

MAKE CAKE: Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle.

- ▶ Sift together flour, nutmeg, and ¼ cup sugar 3 times.
- ▶ Beat egg whites in a large bowl with an electric mixer until frothy, then add cream of tartar and salt and continue beating until whites barely hold soft peaks. Beat in

remaining ½ cup sugar, 2 tablespoons at a time. Add vanilla and beat until whites just hold soft peaks.

- ▶ Sift one fourth of flour mixture over whites and fold in gently but thoroughly, then sift and fold in remaining flour mixture, all at once, in same manner. Spoon into ungreased tube pan and smooth top (pan will not be full), then rap pan on counter twice to eliminate any air bubbles. Bake until springy to the touch and a wooden pick comes out clean, about 30 minutes.
- ▶ If pan has feet, invert it on a work surface; otherwise, invert it over a long-necked bottle. Cool cake completely, about 30 minutes.
- ▶ Run a thin knife in a sawing motion around edges of pan and tube to loosen cake. Cut cake with a serrated knife into 1-inch cubes.

MAKE SHERRY CUSTARD:

Butter bottom and sides of springform pan, then line bottom with parchment paper.

- ▶ Sprinkle gelatin over ¼ cup water in a small bowl and let soften, about 1 minute.
- ▶ Beat yolks with an electric mixer until very pale. With mixer at low speed, add Sherry, ¼ cup sugar, and remaining 2 tablespoons water. Cook mixture in a small heavy saucepan over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, until very thick, 3 to 5 minutes. Whisk in gelatin mixture until gelatin has dissolved. Quick-chill by putting saucepan in an ice bath. Cool mixture to room temperature, stirring occasionally, then remove pan from ice bath.

▶ Beat cream, vanilla, and remaining 2 tablespoons sugar in a large bowl with cleaned beaters until mixture just holds soft peaks. Fold in Sherry mixture gently but thoroughly, then fold in cake cubes.

▶ Transfer to springform pan and smooth top. Chill, covered with plastic wrap, until set, at least 4 hours.

▶ Run a thin knife around cake and remove side of pan.

MAKE FROSTING: Beat cream with sugar using an electric mixer until it just holds stiff peaks. Frost cake.

COOKS' NOTES: Angel food cake can be made 1 day ahead and kept in tube pan, covered, at room temperature.

- Sherry custard can be chilled up to 1 day.
- Savannah cake can be frosted 4 hours ahead and chilled. 🍷



What Is Southern? One day we received a remarkable phone call: Two friends had just discovered an unpublished essay by the late Edna Lewis—one of America’s most resonant and evocative food writers—that she had sent to a colleague years ago. We are delighted to be able to share it with you.



Edna Lewis's greens topped with cornmeal dumplings (opposite and page 37) makes you realize why plain home cooking is so profound.

June 9 1992

Dear Friend Eugene Walter,

I hope you are enjoying this summer like weather. After a cold week, being I have just returned from N.Y. I did get to see Street Car & was playing in my street and I was lucky enough to get a ticket. I think Street Car was one of Tennessee's best.

Now about What is Southern?

I felt that since I am working on a cook book, what

I have done ^{here} would not take away from the Book. For me the South is not just food. It is beauty, love, hate, art, poetry and hard work. I love what is good about it. It is what makes us who we are.

If there is something that you feel should ^{not} be free to edit it out.

Best wishes

Sincerely

Edna Lewis



"I am always drawn back to places where I have lived," is how *Breakfast at Tiffany's* begins. Holly Golightly, Capote's favorite character, shared both a bright spirit and the "mean reds" with her creator. The cure for her fears was to jump into a taxi and go to Tiffany's, where nothing bad could ever happen. Perhaps Capote (1924–1984)—who had an eccentric childhood, along with his friend Harper Lee, in Monroeville, Alabama—thought that way about Café Nicholson, on East 58th Street, in Manhattan, where Edna Lewis's broiled oysters, roast chicken with watercress, and chocolate soufflé attracted a glittering crowd of writers, artists, aristocrats, and movie stars.

Southern is Truman Capote. When dining at Café Nicholson, he would request that I make him some biscuits.

How did southern food come into being? The early cooking of southern food was primarily done by blacks, men and women. In the home, in hotels, in boarding-houses, on boats, on trains, and at the White House. Cooking is hard and demanding. It was then, and it still is now. What began as hard work became creative work. There is something about the South that stimulates creativity in people, be they black or white writers, artists, cooks, builders, or primitives that pass away without knowing they were talented. It is also interesting to note that the South developed the only cuisine in this country. Living in a rural setting is inspiring: Birds, the quiet, flowers, trees, gardens, fields, music, love, sunshine, rain, and the smells of the earth all play a part in the world of creativity. It has nothing to do with reading or writing. Many of those cooks could not read or write.

I grew up among people who worked together, traded seed, borrowed setting hens¹ if their own were late setting. Early hatched chickens were like a prize. Neighbors would compete to see who would serve the first spring chickens pan-sautéed. The first spring greens, lettuce, scallions in a vinegar dressing with salt, pepper, and sugar—no oil. They shared favors of all kinds, joined in when it came to planting or harvesting a crop, wheat threshing, hog butchering, and cutting ice on the ponds to store for the summer in the community icehouse.

I grew up noticing the food feasts, picnics, church revival dinners with long white tablecloths. Families put out warm fried chicken, braised leg of mutton, thin slices of boiled Virginia ham. **Green beans cooked in pork stock** (page 42), **beets in a vinaigrette sauce** (see gourmet.com). English **peas in cream** (see gourmet.com). **Baked tomatoes with crusty squares of bread on top** (page 33). Fragrant corn pudding. Potato salad with a boiled dressing. Watermelon and cantaloupe pickles and relishes, preserves and jellies, and iced tea.

Southern is an early spring morning shrouded in a thick mist. The warmth of a bright sunrise reveals shimmering jewel-like dewdrops upon thicket and fence. A large spiderweb glistens, a spider trying desperately to wind its prey into the web. My father set out to prepare for planting corn. The first day, I walked behind him while he was plowing and singing one of his favorite hymns. For me, it was a great moment. Walking

along, pressing my bare feet against the warm plowed earth. All of the chickens were behind me, picking up the earthworms and bugs. He turned up roots of sassafras bushes², which we took to the house for the next morning.

Southern is a spring breakfast of herring with its roe. It is the most delicious of the first-caught of spring. Shad is more advertised. They both are spring fish, then they disappear until the next spring. Herring roe is of a finer quality than the shad and wonderful sautéed in garlic, lemon juice, butter, and herbs.

Southern is a meal of early spring wild greens—poke sallet³ before it is fully uncurled, wild mustard, dandelion, lamb's-quarter, purslane, and wild watercress. These are **greens** that are looked for as the first taste of spring, **boiled in pork stock and served with cornmeal dumplings** (page 37). The next delightful green vegetable is wild **asparagus**, delicious and tender, found around fence posts where birds drop the seed. They are picked at the right time, **steamed and served on toast, with a rich cream sauce spooned over** (see gourmet.com). Southern is a midday dinner of **potted squab** (see gourmet.com), tossed until done in a covered iron pot. Served with those first wild greens, a **casserole of white potatoes**⁴ (page 38) baked in chicken stock, and a delicious strawberry shortcake of biscuit dough.

Southern is an evening of turtle soup. We would find the turtle, having been washed out of the stream in a thunderstorm, crawling toward the house, so we would pick it up, keep it for



At age 23, Carson McCullers (1917–1967) became an overnight sensation with the publication of her first novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. In it and in subsequent works (including *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and *The Member of the Wedding*), she gives voice to the forgotten, the rejected, and the brutalized. A Georgia native, she lived much of her life in Nyack, New York.

¹ A setting (broody) hen is one that is ready to set, or nest, on a clutch of eggs. The hormones causing broodiness are stimulated in the spring. ² Sassafras roots, gathered before the bushes bloom, are boiled to make an age-old beverage and spring tonic. They can be poisonous at other times of the year. ³ Poke sallet is a dish of the cooked young greens from the pokeweed plant (*Phytolacca americana*). The word *sallet* is a dialect remnant of 16th- or 17th-century spelling and pronunciation. ⁴ Many southerners still refer to baking or boiling potatoes as "white" or "Irish" potatoes to distinguish them from sweet potatoes, which aren't reserved for Thanksgiving but are another everyday vegetable.



With a potent, sweeping voice that could convey emotions ranging from bone-deep weariness and sorrow to triumphant joy—many of her songs are about liberated women—Bessie Smith (1894–1937) was the Empress of the Blues. Just as the Swing Era was beginning (Benny Goodman's clarinet is barely audible on “Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer”), Smith died of injuries sustained in a car accident in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and erroneous reports of the racially charged circumstances—that she died after the town's white hospital refused to admit her—are still largely accepted as fact. The myth was spread by Smith's producer, John Hammond (who later withdrew his claim), and Edward Albee's *Death of Bessie Smith*, which premiered in 1960. Smith left a rich legacy of recordings, cut between 1923 and 1933, and her music continues to inspire.

Southern is Bessie Smith. Give me a pig foot and a bottle of beer.

a few days, then clean and cut it up. There would be great excitement if it contained eggs, which we would add to the stew. After cooking the turtle slowly for hours, we would strain the broth, season it well, add good Sherry⁵, chop up some of the meat, and make dumplings to add to the soup with the eggs.

Southern is Truman Capote. When dining at Café Nicholson, he would request that I make him some biscuits. Southern is a **guinea hen**, a bird of African origin. They live in trees around the house and make a big noise if strangers come around. Like any game bird, they have to be aged before cooking. They have a delicious flavor and are best when **cooked in a clay pot with butter, herbs, onions, and mushrooms** (page 36).

Southern is Bessie Smith. Give me a pig foot and a bottle of beer. Southern is a **great yeast roll** (page 40), the dough put down overnight to rise and the next morning shaped into rolls and baked. Served hot from the oven, they are light as a dandelion in a high wind. Southern is a sun dog⁶—something like a rainbow, or the man in the moon—on a late summer afternoon.

Southern is a **mint julep** (page 34). A goblet of crushed ice with a sprig of mint tucked in the side of the glass, a plain sugar syrup the consistency of kerosene poured over the ice, then a jigger of bourbon. Stir and bruise the mint with a silver spoon. Sip and enjoy. Southern is a hot summer day that brings on a violent thunderstorm, cooling the air and bringing up smells of the earth that tempt us to eat the soil. Southern is Tennessee Williams and *Streetcar*. Southern is a springhouse filled with perishables kept cool by a stream running through. And a spring keeper⁷—a salamander—is there, watching over.

Southern is Bourbon Street and Louis Armstrong. Southern is a **seafood gumbo** (page 32) of crab, okra, tomatoes, scallions, onions, green pepper, bacon, garlic, and herbs. Southern is fresh-made corn fritters, light and crisp enough to fly away. Southern is an okra pancake in a cornmeal batter. Southern is a platter of **deviled crabs** (page 32) prepared with soaked slices of white bread torn and mixed with chopped onion, fine-cut scallions, melted butter, fresh-ground black pepper, cayenne, eggs, and the best crabmeat. Baked in the oven, served hot, a morsel to die over. Southern is a pitcher of lemonade, filled with slices of lemon and a big piece of ice from the icehouse, and served with **butter milk cookies** (page 35). Southern is a delicious chicken salad at a bride's luncheon.

Southern is a bowl of shrimp paste, rich in butter, shrimp,

Sherry, spices, and lemon juice. Blended to a soft consistency and served over a plate of grits, a delicious breakfast treat. Southern is a barbecued pig that was cooked for hours and served with a tomato- or vinegar-based sauce, as well as coleslaw, potato salad, baked beans, hush puppies, and iced tea. Southern is a bowl of homemade peach ice cream, served during the peach season. Southern is Richard Wright and his “Bright and Morning Star.” Southern is an oyster roast. Guests are presented with white gloves for shucking and pots of melted butter. Southern is leftover pieces of boiled ham trimmed and added to a saucepan of heavy cream set on the back of the stove to mull and bring out the ham flavor, then served spooned over hot biscuits, with poached eggs on the side.

Southern is hunting season, a time that men take off to hunt rabbits, squirrel, opossum, deer, quail, partridge, plover, and dove. We used to trap snowbirds⁸ and enjoy a pan of them baked. Southern is a **Brunswick stew** (page 37) of squirrel or rabbit, beans, corn, tomatoes, onions, herbs, fresh-ground black pepper, and salt. Long cooking results in a great stew. Southern is a wild pig served with pork liver sauce, peanut sauce, rice for spooning the sauces over, and spicy sauces for the sliced pork.

Southern is Thomas Wolfe and *Of Time and the River*. Southern is Craig Claiborne, for more than 25 years the distinguished food critic of *The New York Times*. Southern is a **country steak smothered with onions** (page 38) on a Sunday morning, with gravy and spoon bread to spoon the gravy over. Southern is she-crab soup, thick with crab eggs and crabmeat, served with



Thomas Wolfe (1900–1938), from Asheville, North Carolina, stormed onto the literary scene with a massive, untidy manuscript about the growth of a creative genius: himself. That novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, and its sequel, *Of Time and the River*, aren't in fashion these days, but it's worth remembering that Wolfe, like Walt Whitman, breathed life into the American experience.

⁵ Miss Lewis strongly felt that if you used cheap Sherry, “you have to add so much you kill the taste of whatever you are cooking.” ⁶ A sun dog is a bright white patch of light that appears when the sun is low on the horizon, shining through thin, high ice (cirrus) clouds. Sometimes it exhibits a spectrum of colors. ⁷ Salamanders are called spring keepers because they're found in clean-running springs. Folk belief holds that if you kill the spring keeper, the spring will run dry. ⁸ Snowbirds are juncos, a type of finch.



The great American playwright Tennessee Williams (1911–1983), whose lyrical, deeply personal writing revolutionized postwar American theater, appreciated the cooking as well as the lively company at Café Nicholson. During the Broadway run of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams and Marlon Brando would walk Edna Lewis home at night, stopping at bars along the way.

benne biscuits. Southern is a lemon-flavored pound cake served with brandied peaches and homemade blackberry wine.

Southern is a moss rose, a camellia, a buttercup, a tea olive tree sending its fragrance through the air and into the kitchen. Southern is the call of the whip-poor-will at midnight.⁹ Southern is Reynolds Price discussing his mother's cooking.¹⁰ Southern is a pot of boiling coffee sending its aroma out to greet you on your way in from the barn. Coffee was always served piping hot, so much so that if someone talked too much, they were told, "Save your breath to cool your coffee."

Southern is a walk along the streams in September to find out if the fox grapes are ripening. The aroma they send out is a sign of where they are. Southern is Scott Peacock (pages 64 and 66), one of the South's most creative young chefs. Southern is weeks of canning, pickling, and preserving—cucumber pickle, artichoke pickle, pear pickle, tomato pickle, watermelon rind pickle, citron preserves, green tomato preserves, fig preserves, cherry preserves, grape conserve, crab apple jelly, wild blackberry jelly, fox grape jelly, quince jelly, guava jelly, wild plum jelly, wild strawberry preserves (the best).

Southern is Christmas, a wonderful time of the winter. In the early history of the South, there was no Christmas tree. Beautiful flowers such as camellias were used in Charleston. And it was a German professor—a refugee—who, while boarding with a family in Williamsburg, brought them stories of Christmas decorations in his native Germany.

Our house was decorated with running cedar branches with juniper berries. Red tissue-paper bells were hung throughout the house, lending a festive air. On the sideboard were the Christmas foods such as fruitcake, homemade candies—divinity, peanut brittle, and ribbon squares—nuts, oranges, and coconut made into confections.

Christmas was ushered in before daylight with the thunderous noise of Roman candles—our father waking the community from its sleep. Southern is a delicious oyster stew (page 42) of sautéed oysters, cream, Sherry, salt, cayenne, fresh-ground black pepper, salsify, a spoon of butter in the bottom of the bowl, and a garnish of chervil. Southern is hoppin' John—black-eyed peas cooked in hog's-head stock (page 34)—served

with a dish of greens on New Year's Day. This is to bring good luck in the new year to come. Southern is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with a dream.

Southern is William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*.¹¹ I met him in Café Nicholson. Upon our meeting, he wanted to know if I had studied cooking in Paris. Southern is a beautiful dish of fried chicken, cooked carefully in home-rendered lard and butter with pieces of country ham added, then served with a brown gravy spooned over spoon bread. Southern is Elizabeth Spencer's writing in *The Light in the Piazza*.¹²

Southern is desserts galore—coconut cake, caramel layer cake, black walnut whiskey cake, groom's wedding cake,¹³ fig pudding, mincemeat pie, lemon meringue pie, fried apple pies (page 43), damson plum pie, rhubarb pie with orange zest, peach cobbler, blackberry cobbler (see gourmet.com), blackberry roly-poly with blackberry sauce.

Southern is Eugene Walter,¹⁴ deep in Alabama, a Renaissance man, a gourmet, always with a brilliant thought. Southern is Marie Rudisill,¹⁵ author of a cookbook that emulates the friends she grew up with, cooked with, and loved. Southern is Carson McCullers in *The Member of the Wedding*.¹⁶ Southern is all the unsung heroes who passed away in obscurity.

So many great souls have passed off the scene. The world has changed. We are now faced with picking up the pieces and trying to put them into shape, document them so the present-day young generation can see what southern food was like. The foundation on which it rested was pure ingredients, open-pollinated seed—planted and replanted for generations—natural fertilizers. We grew the seeds of what we ate, we worked with love and care.

For a selection of Edna Lewis's recipes—and some inspired by her—see pages 32, 66, and 82 and visit gourmet.com.



Hunger—physical, emotional, and metaphorical—lies at the core of the works of Richard Wright (1908–1960). The son of a Mississippi sharecropper, he became famous for *Native Son* and the autobiographical *Black Boy*. ("Bright and Morning Star" is collected in *Uncle Tom's Children*.) Read him with Ellison and Baldwin, of course, but also with Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis.

Southern is Richard Wright and his 'Bright and Morning Star.'

⁹ Folk tradition also holds that the call of a whip-poor-will at midnight is a portent of death. ¹⁰ Southern writer Reynolds Price (born 1933) described pimento cheese "homemade by Mother" as the peanut butter of his childhood. Most of the versions found in southern supermarkets are, says Price, "made apparently from congealed insecticides." ¹¹ Faulkner wrote *Intruder in the Dust* in 1948 as a response to growing racial tensions in the South. ¹² *The Light in the Piazza*, by Mississippi native Elizabeth Spencer (born 1921), explores the ties that bind. ¹³ A traditional groom's wedding cake is a white fruitcake. ¹⁴ For a loving (and hilarious) tribute to the multifaceted Eugene Walter (1921–1998), visit southernfoodways.com. ¹⁵ Marie Rudisill (1911–2006) is best known for *Fruitcake: Memories of Truman Capote & Sook*. ¹⁶ In *The Member of the Wedding*, McCullers writes: "Now hopping-john was F. Jasmine's very favorite food. She had always warned them to wave a plate of rice and peas before her nose when she was in her coffin ... for if a breath of life was left in her, she would sit up and eat, but if she smelled the hopping-john, and did not stir, then they could just nail down the coffin and be certain she was truly dead."



DEVILED CRAB

SERVES 6 (FIRST COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

This dish has a subtle, saltwater complexity that comes from the delicate texture and sweet flavor of the Atlantic blue crab. It's a sumptuous starter to a fancy meal.

- ⅓ cup finely chopped onion
- ¾ stick unsalted butter
- 3 (½-inch-thick) slices good-quality white sandwich bread such as a pullman loaf, crusts discarded
- 1 lb jumbo lump crabmeat, picked over
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon cayenne

EQUIPMENT: 6 (4- to 5-inch-wide) scallop shells or 5-oz shallow ramekins

- ▶ Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. ▶ Cook onion in butter in a small heavy skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes.
- ▶ Tear bread into very small pieces, then spread in 1 layer in a shallow dish or pie plate. Pour onion and butter mixture

over torn bread and let stand 15 minutes.

- ▶ Add crab, egg, cayenne, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and gently toss.
- ▶ Divide mixture among shells and bake until crab is just starting to brown, 20 to 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

SEAFOOD GUMBO

SERVES 8 (MAIN COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 1¼ HR START TO FINISH: 2¼ HR

For most people, the word gumbo immediately conjures the Cajun and Creole cooking of Louisiana. But okra (ngombo in Bantu), for which the soup-stew is named, reached South Carolina with the slave trade some years before Europeans settled in Louisiana, and the Creole world, where African, European, and indigenous cultures meet, actually extends up the southern Atlantic coast. There are many different gumbo recipes, all taking advantage of local ingredients and served with rice. This one is a heady, fragrant slurry thick with seafood. If desired, add filé powder (ground dried sassafras leaves), a Choctaw thickening agent with an almost lemony flavor, just before eating.

- ½ lb bacon, chopped
 - About ½ cup vegetable oil
 - ¾ cup all-purpose flour
 - 2 celery ribs, chopped
 - 1 medium green bell pepper, chopped
 - 1 medium onion, chopped
 - 5 garlic cloves, finely chopped
 - 2½ qt fish or chicken stock (or a combination; store-bought or see recipes at gourmet.com)
 - 1 (14-oz) can whole tomatoes in juice, drained and chopped
 - 1 lb frozen cut okra (not thawed)
 - 1 teaspoon chopped thyme
 - 1 Turkish or ½ California bay leaf
 - 1 rounded teaspoon cayenne
 - ½ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
 - ½ cup chopped scallions
 - 1½ lb medium shrimp in shell, peeled and deveined
 - 2 dozen shucked oysters with their liquor, oysters picked over for shell fragments
 - ½ lb lump crabmeat, picked over
- ACCOMPANIMENTS:** rice; gumbo filé powder (optional; see cooks' note, page 33) ›

Deviled crab is rich but not cloying. Atlantic blue crab—the only crabmeat that will do—gives it a clean, authentic freshness of flavor.

► Cook bacon in a 10-inch heavy skillet (preferably cast-iron) over medium heat until browned but not crisp. Transfer bacon to a bowl with a slotted spoon and transfer rendered fat to a heatproof liquid measure, then add enough oil to fat to bring total to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup.

► Stir together fat and flour in skillet with a wooden spoon, then cook roux over medium-low heat, stirring constantly, until well browned (a shade darker than peanut butter), about 20 minutes.

► Add celery, bell pepper, onion, and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a 6- to 7-quart pot.

► Stir in stock, tomatoes, okra, thyme, bay leaf, cayenne, and 2 teaspoons salt and briskly simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are very tender, about 30 minutes.

► Add parsley, scallions, shrimp, and oysters with their liquor and cook, stirring, until seafood is just cooked through, about 5 minutes.

► Stir in crabmeat and bacon and simmer until heated through, about 1 minute. Season with salt. Discard bay leaf.

COOK'S NOTE: We like Uncle Bill's Creole Filé (225-388-0893). Allow each person to add their own filé (if using) just before eating. If reheating with filé, do not boil or filé will make gumbo stringy.

BAKED TOMATOES WITH CRUSTY BREAD

SERVES 8 (SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 HR

The brown sugar in the ingredients list below is there to mellow the acidity of the tomatoes, not to make this a sweet dish. Use a sturdy bakery loaf of white sandwich bread, not the packaged sliced stuff, for the topping. You will get enormous pleasure from serving people this dish.

3 (28-oz) cans whole tomatoes in juice

$\frac{3}{4}$ stick unsalted butter, divided

2 medium onions, chopped

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground allspice

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground cloves

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar, or to taste

8 ($\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick) slices good-quality white sandwich bread such as a pullman loaf

► Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in middle. Butter a 3-quart baking dish (about 13 by 9 by 2 inches).

► Drain tomatoes, reserving 1 cup juice, then chop.

► Heat 2 tablespoons butter in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot over medium-high heat until foam subsides, then cook onions with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, stirring occasionally, until golden-brown, about 10 minutes.

Add garlic, allspice, and cloves and cook, stirring, 1 minute. ► Stir in tomatoes with reserved juice, thyme, brown sugar, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper and briskly simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 20 minutes. ► Meanwhile, melt remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ stick butter and brush onto both sides of bread. Halve each slice.

► Transfer tomato mixture to baking dish and top with bread, overlapping slightly. Bake until bubbling and bread is crisp and golden-brown, about 20 minutes. ►

For generations, scalloped (baked) tomatoes have appeared on southern tables in high summer, when the tomatoes are abundant and juicy.





MINT JULEP

MAKES 1 DRINK

ACTIVE TIME: 5 MIN START TO FINISH: 5 MIN

Moonlight-and-magnolia myths aside, this is one of the world's great libations.

- 6 mint leaves
- 2 teaspoons sugar syrup (recipe follows)
- 1½ oz (3 tablespoons) bourbon

► Fill an 8- to 10-ounce glass with crushed ice (1 cup). Add mint, syrup, and bourbon and bruise mint with back of a spoon.

SUGAR SYRUP

MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

ACTIVE TIME: 5 MIN START TO FINISH: 5 MIN

This is a time-honored way to sweeten mint juleps, lemonade, and iced tea.

- ½ cup superfine granulated sugar
- ½ cup water

A mint julep is beguilingly simple—nothing more than bourbon, mint, and sugar in equilibrium—rather like Edna Lewis's cooking.

► Stir together sugar and water until sugar has dissolved.

HOPPIN' JOHN

SERVES 6 TO 8

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR

"There is a dish that originated in Charleston called Hoppin' John," Edna Lewis writes in In Pursuit of Flavor, "which we had never heard of in Virginia." This (along with the fact that she found black-eyed peas a little dull) goes a long way toward explaining why she decided to gussy up its scrupulous simplicity—virtually unchanged through the centuries—with tomatoes. Well, nobody's perfect. Here you'll find the real thing, traditionally eaten on New Year's Day for good luck. Serve it with extra black-eyes and their pot liquor on the side to add more moisture, as well as a platter of simmered greens (page 37).

- 1 lb dried black-eyed peas, picked over and rinsed

- 1 meaty ham hock (about 10 oz)
- 1 large onion, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon dried hot red-pepper flakes
- 9 cups water
- 2 cups long-grain white rice

► Bring all ingredients except rice to a boil in a large heavy pot, skimming any foam, then simmer, covered, until peas are barely tender, about 30 minutes. Transfer 4 cups peas and 4 cups cooking liquid to a heavy medium pot. Transfer ham hock to a cutting board, then set aside remaining peas and liquid in larger pot. ► Discard skin from ham hock and chop meat, discarding bone. Stir rice and ham into smaller pot of peas with 1½ teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Bring to a rolling boil. Stir, then simmer, tightly covered, over very low heat until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed, about 30 minutes. Remove from heat and let hoppin' John stand 10 minutes.

► Meanwhile, simmer remaining peas and liquid, covered, until peas are tender, about 10 minutes. Serve with hoppin' John.



BUTTERMILK COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 5 1/2 DOZEN COOKIES

ACTIVE TIME: 35 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 1/2 HR

Miss Lewis mentions buttermilk cookies, which she pairs with ice-cold lemonade, in the essay that begins on page 24, but as far as we know, she never committed a recipe to paper. When we developed one, the big debate was about texture: Soft or crisp? What you see here is the cookie of your dreams, with a tender interior and the slightest bit of crispness around the edge.

FOR COOKIES

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2/3 cup well-shaken buttermilk

FOR GLAZE

- 1 1/2 cups confectioners sugar
- 3 tablespoons well-shaken buttermilk
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

MAKE COOKIES: Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Butter 2 large baking sheets.

▶ Whisk together flour, zest, baking soda, and salt.

▶ Beat together butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer until pale and fluffy. Add eggs 1 at a time, beating well after each addition, then beat in vanilla. Mix in flour mixture and buttermilk alternately in batches at low speed, beginning and ending with flour mixture, until smooth.

▶ Drop level tablespoons of dough about 1 1/2 inches apart onto baking sheets. Bake, 1 sheet at a time, until cookies are puffed and edges are golden, 12 to 15 minutes per batch. Cool cookies on sheets 1 minute, then transfer cookies to racks.

GLAZE COOKIES: Whisk together all glaze ingredients and brush onto tops of warm cookies.

▶ Let stand until cookies are completely cooled and glaze is set.

COOKS' NOTE: Cookies are best the day they're made but can be frozen, wrapped well, up to 1 month. >





CLAY-POT GUINEA HEN

SERVES 2

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 HR

Miss Lewis served guinea hen (which tastes just as wonderful when cooked in a Dutch oven as it does in a clay pot) with fresh currant sauce, but cranberry sauce would be delicious, too.

- 2 small leeks (white and pale green parts only), halved lengthwise
- 1 (2½- to 3-lb) guinea hen (see Kitchen Notebook, page 107), reserving neck and giblets; reserve liver for another use
- ½ stick unsalted butter, softened, divided
- ¾ teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 medium onion, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced (1 cup)
- 1 Turkish or ½ California bay leaf
- 3 oz thinly sliced Virginia country ham (see Kitchen Notebook, page 107)
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- ¼ lb mushrooms, thinly sliced

EQUIPMENT: a 4-qt Römertopf clay baker (see Shopping List, page 112) or Dutch oven

GARNISH: chopped parsley

► Soak clay pot (if using), completely submerged (lid and bottom), in cold water 30 minutes, then drain. ► Meanwhile, wash leeks (see Tips, page 113), then pat dry. ► Rinse hen inside and out; pat dry. Coat inside cavity with 2 tablespoons butter. ► Stir together thyme, 1½ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper, then sprinkle half of salt mixture inside cavity. Rub outside of hen with 1 tablespoon butter, then sprinkle with remaining salt mixture. ► Put leeks, onion, and bay leaf in clay baker or Dutch oven and add hen with neck and giblets, then drape with ham. Cover pot and put on middle rack in cold oven. Turn on oven to 350°F and bake 45 minutes. ► Remove lid and turn hen over, rearranging ham on top, then pour wine over hen and cook, covered, until breast meat is springy and an instant-read thermometer inserted into fleshy part of a thigh (do not touch bone) registers 160°F, 15 to 20 minutes more. ► Meanwhile, cook mushrooms with a pinch each of salt and pepper in remaining tablespoon butter in a small heavy skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened and beginning to brown, about 3 minutes. ► Transfer hen to a deep platter and discard neck and giblets. Stir mushrooms into onion mixture (discard bay leaf), then spoon over hen. ►

BRUNSWICK STEW

SERVES 6 TO 8 (MAIN COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 2 HR

Residents of Brunswick, Georgia, and Brunswick County, Virginia, are both fiercely protective of the provenance of this dish, but let's face it—hunters have lived off this sort of thing forever. Like all stews, this tastes even better the next day.

- 1 (3-lb) rabbit or chicken, cut with a cleaver through bones into 2-inch pieces
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon cayenne
- ¼ cup vegetable oil, divided
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 Turkish or ½ California bay leaf
- 1¾ cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 (28-oz) can whole tomatoes in juice, drained, reserving juice, and chopped
- 1 (10-oz) package frozen corn
- 1 (10-oz) package frozen lima beans

►Pat rabbit dry and sprinkle evenly with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon black pepper. ►Whisk together flour and cayenne

in a shallow bowl, then dredge rabbit in flour, shaking off excess.

►Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a wide 6- to 7-quart heavy pot over medium heat until it shimmers. Brown half of rabbit, turning once, about 10 minutes total. Transfer to a plate. Add 1 tablespoon oil to pot and brown remaining rabbit; transfer to plate.

►Add remaining tablespoon oil to pot along with onion, bell pepper, garlic, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring and scraping up brown bits, until vegetables are softened, about 8 minutes. ►Add bay leaf, broth, tomatoes with juice, and rabbit with any meat juices from plate and bring to a simmer. Simmer, covered, 50 minutes. ►Stir in corn and lima beans, then simmer, uncovered, until stew is slightly thickened and vegetables are tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Discard bay leaf.

SIMMERED GREENS WITH CORNMEAL DUMPLINGS

SERVES 6 (SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

This "assembly of greens," as Miss Lewis would say, has a supple texture that works nicely with cornmeal dumplings.

- 1 (1-lb) piece slab bacon
- 3 qt water
- 3 lb mixed greens such as collard, mustard, and turnip
- ⅔ cup all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup yellow cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- ½ cup whole milk

►Score bacon 2 or 3 times (do not cut all the way through), then simmer in water in a wide 6-quart pot, covered, 1 hour.

►Discard any coarse stems from greens and coarsely chop leaves. ►Add greens, 2½ teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper to bacon and cook, uncovered, stirring occasionally, 25 minutes.

►Meanwhile, whisk together flour, cornmeal, brown sugar, baking powder, and ¼ teaspoon salt, then blend in butter well with your fingertips. Stir in milk until just combined. Let dough stand 5 minutes. ►With wet hands, roll rounded tablespoons of dough into balls.

►Gently place dumplings on top of greens. Cook, covered and undisturbed, over low heat until greens are very tender and silky and dumplings are puffed and cooked through, about 20 minutes. Discard bacon. Season with salt and pepper. ►

The meat in Brunswick stew is usually shredded into long strands, but keeping it chunky contrasts with the tender butter beans and corn.





POTATO CASSEROLE

SERVES 4 TO 6

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

Potatoes aren't a backbone starch in the South, but they're one vegetable, notes Miss Lewis, that is good in all seasons.

2 lb boiling potatoes

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

½ cup reduced-sodium chicken broth

EQUIPMENT: an adjustable-blade slicer

- ▶ Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in middle.
- ▶ Peel potatoes and thinly slice (about ⅛ inch thick), then toss with butter, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Spread evenly in a 2-quart shallow baking dish and add broth. Cover tightly with foil and bake 30 minutes. Uncover and bake until top is well-browned and most of stock is absorbed, 30 to 35 minutes more.

SMOTHERED STEAK

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 HR

"Smothering" means braising a tough cut of meat to tenderize it. Slow simmering also concentrates the flavor of the gravy.

4 bacon slices

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided

1½ lb chuck eye or blade steaks

½ cup all-purpose flour

2 cups thinly sliced onion

1 cup water

- ▶ Cook bacon in 1 tablespoon oil in a large heavy skillet over medium heat until crisp. Drain on paper towels, reserving fat in skillet, then crumble.
- ▶ Meanwhile, pound steaks ¼ inch thick between sheets of plastic wrap using flat side of a meat pounder. Snip through

any gristle with kitchen shears (to prevent curling), then pat steaks dry.

▶ Mix together flour, 1 teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and dredge steaks on all sides, shaking off excess.

▶ Heat reserved bacon fat over medium-high heat until it shimmers, then brown steaks on both sides in batches; transfer to a plate. ▶ Add onion to skillet with remaining tablespoon oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently and scraping up brown bits, until softened and browned, about 10 minutes.

▶ Add steaks with any meat juices and water and bring to a boil. Simmer, tightly covered, over low heat until meat is very tender, about 1¼ hours. If sauce is thin, transfer meat to a platter and boil until reduced to about 1 cup. Season steaks with salt and pepper. Serve with sauce and sprinkled with bacon. ▶

Miss Lewis's potato casserole is a good example of how you can turn humble ingredients into something eloquent: People will eat it in utter silence. It would be wonderful with roast chicken, lamb, or smothered steak, with a side of green beans simmered in pork stock (page 42).





FEATHERLIGHT YEAST ROLLS

MAKES 2 DOZEN

ACTIVE TIME: 35 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 DAY
(INCLUDES RISING)

Like many an accomplished hostess in the South, Miss Lewis was a dab hand at making yeast rolls and always generously anointed them with butter before putting them in the oven. Dinner rolls should be brought to the table hot, so if you make them early in the day, you will want to reheat them gently. (Leftovers are great for breakfast the next morning, split, buttered, and served with homemade strawberry or fig preserves.) Mashed potato is a traditional addition to a yeast dough like this one; it helps the rising and also contributes to its tenderness. These rolls have outstanding flavor and are so light and fluffy they almost levitate.

- 1 russet (baking) potato (½ lb), peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ stick unsalted butter, divided
- ½ cup whole milk
- 1 teaspoon salt

- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 (¼-oz) package active dry yeast
- 2⅔ cups all-purpose flour

- ▶ Generously cover potato with cold water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, until very tender, about 10 minutes. Reserve 1 cup cooking liquid, then drain potato well.
- ▶ Meanwhile, melt 2½ tablespoons butter.
- ▶ Mash hot potato in a large bowl with a fork. Stir in milk, salt, 2 tablespoons sugar, and 2 tablespoons melted butter (mixture will be lumpy).
- ▶ Cool ½ cup cooking liquid to warm (105 to 115°F). Stir in yeast and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. (If mixture doesn't foam, start over with new yeast and remaining cooking liquid.)
- ▶ Stir yeast mixture into potato mixture, then stir in flour with a wooden spoon until a soft dough forms.
- ▶ Turn out dough onto a floured surface and knead, dusting surface and hands with just enough flour to keep dough from sticking, until smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes (dough will be slightly sticky).
- ▶ Brush a large bowl with some of remaining

melted butter, then turn dough in bowl to coat. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and let rise, chilled, 8 to 12 hours.

▶ Punch down dough (do not knead), then halve. Roll each half into a 12-inch-long log on a very lightly floured surface with lightly floured hands. Cut each log into 12 equal pieces and roll each into a ball. Arrange evenly spaced in 6 rows of 4 (less than ½ inch apart) in a buttered 13- by 9- by 2-inch baking pan. Cover pan with a kitchen towel (not terry cloth).

▶ Let rolls rise in a draft-free place at warm room temperature until doubled (they will fill pan), 1 to 1½ hours.

▶ Preheat oven to 375°F with rack in middle.

▶ Melt remaining 1½ tablespoons butter.

▶ Brush top of rolls with melted butter and bake until golden-brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Loosen edges with a sharp knife, then transfer rolls to a rack and cool slightly.

COOKS' NOTE: Rolls are best the day they're baked but can be frozen, wrapped well, up to 1 month. Thaw, then reheat, uncovered, on a baking sheet in a 350°F oven, 5 to 10 minutes. >

OYSTER STEW WITH SALSIFY

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 40 MIN

This stew is rich with succulent oysters that have been panfried first (to deepen their flavor) and with salsify, an aristocratic heirloom vegetable from Colonial America that tastes faintly of oysters. Dish it up as Sunday supper around the kitchen table or use it to kick-start a dinner party. Miss Lewis, by the way, shucked her oysters with an old-fashioned beer-can opener.

- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 cup water
- ½ lb salsify (see Shopping List, page 112)
- 6 dozen shucked East Coast oysters (1½ qt including their liquor), oysters picked over for shell fragments and liquor reserved
- 1 qt half-and-half
- ⅓ cup medium-dry Sherry
- Rounded ¼ teaspoon cayenne
- ½ stick unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped parsley

- ▶ Bring milk and water to a simmer in a small saucepan. Meanwhile, peel salsify, then cut into ½-inch pieces and transfer to simmering milk mixture. Simmer, uncovered, until just tender, 20 to 30 minutes, then drain, discarding liquid.
- ▶ Heat oyster liquor in a large heavy pot over medium heat until hot. Stir in salsify, half-and-half, Sherry, cayenne, and ¾ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring, until heated through (do not let boil).
- ▶ While mixture heats, melt butter in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium-high heat until foam subsides, then cook oysters, stirring occasionally, until edges begin to curl, about 3 minutes. Spoon oysters with juices and butter into stew. Stir in parsley; serve immediately.

GREEN BEANS IN PORK STOCK

SERVES 6 (SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR

Beans have sustained people—black, white, and Native American—in the South for centuries. Miss Lewis first developed

this recipe as a way of jazzing up canned green beans, which she appreciated for their economy. These days, fresh green beans are available and affordable all year long, so we happily adapted the recipe. Don't rush the cooking time and the goodness of these beans will be a revelation: smoky, luxuriant, and vegetal.

- 1 meaty ham hock (about 10 oz)
- 2 qt water
- 2 lb green beans, trimmed

- ▶ Bring ham hock and water to a boil with 2½ teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper in a medium pot. Add green beans and cook, uncovered, until very soft, about 1 hour.
- ▶ Transfer ham hock to a cutting board and discard skin, then finely chop meat, discarding bone.
- ▶ Reserve 1 cup cooking liquid. Drain beans, then toss with ham and reserved cooking liquid. Season with salt and pepper.

COOKS' NOTE: Beans can be cooked 1 day ahead and chilled, covered.

On a cold winter's night, wrap your hands around a bowl of this oyster stew and you will begin to understand what made Miss Lewis who she was.





FRIED APPLE PIES

MAKES 12 INDIVIDUAL PIES

ACTIVE TIME: 1¼ HR START TO FINISH: 3 HR
(INCLUDES MAKING PASTRY)

These handheld, crescent-shaped, fruit-filled pastries, long popular in the mountain South, are found at church picnics, crossroads country stores, and, if you are incredibly blessed, in your favorite aunt's hot cast-iron skillet. The fat half-moons of crisp, chewy dough ooze with spiced stewed dried apples. The other traditional filling is dried peaches.

FOR PASTRY

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons cold vegetable shortening (preferably trans-fat-free), cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 4 to 5 tablespoons ice water

FOR FILLING

- 4½ oz unsulfured dried apples (2 cups; see Shopping List, page 112)
- 2 cups unfiltered apple cider
- 1½ cups water
- 2½ tablespoons packed light brown sugar

- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
 - ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- FOR FRYING AND SERVING**
- About 2 qt vegetable oil
Confectioners sugar for dusting
- EQUIPMENT:** a deep-fat thermometer

MAKE PASTRY: Blend together flour, butter, shortening, baking powder, and salt in a bowl with your fingertips or a pastry blender (or pulse in a food processor) until mixture just resembles coarse meal. Whisk egg with ¼ cup ice water, then drizzle evenly over flour mixture and gently stir with a fork until incorporated.

- ▶ Squeeze a small handful: If it doesn't hold together, add more ice water, ½ tablespoon at a time, stirring (or pulsing) until incorporated.
- ▶ Gather dough and knead just until smooth, 3 or 4 times, on a lightly floured surface (do not overwork, or pastry will be tough). Form dough into 2 (5-inch) disks and chill, wrapped in plastic wrap, until firm, at least 1 hour.

MAKE FILLING: Briskly simmer all filling ingredients and a pinch of salt in a heavy medium saucepan, uncovered, stirring occasionally and mashing apples with a potato masher as they soften, until a thick purée forms, about 20 minutes. Cool completely.

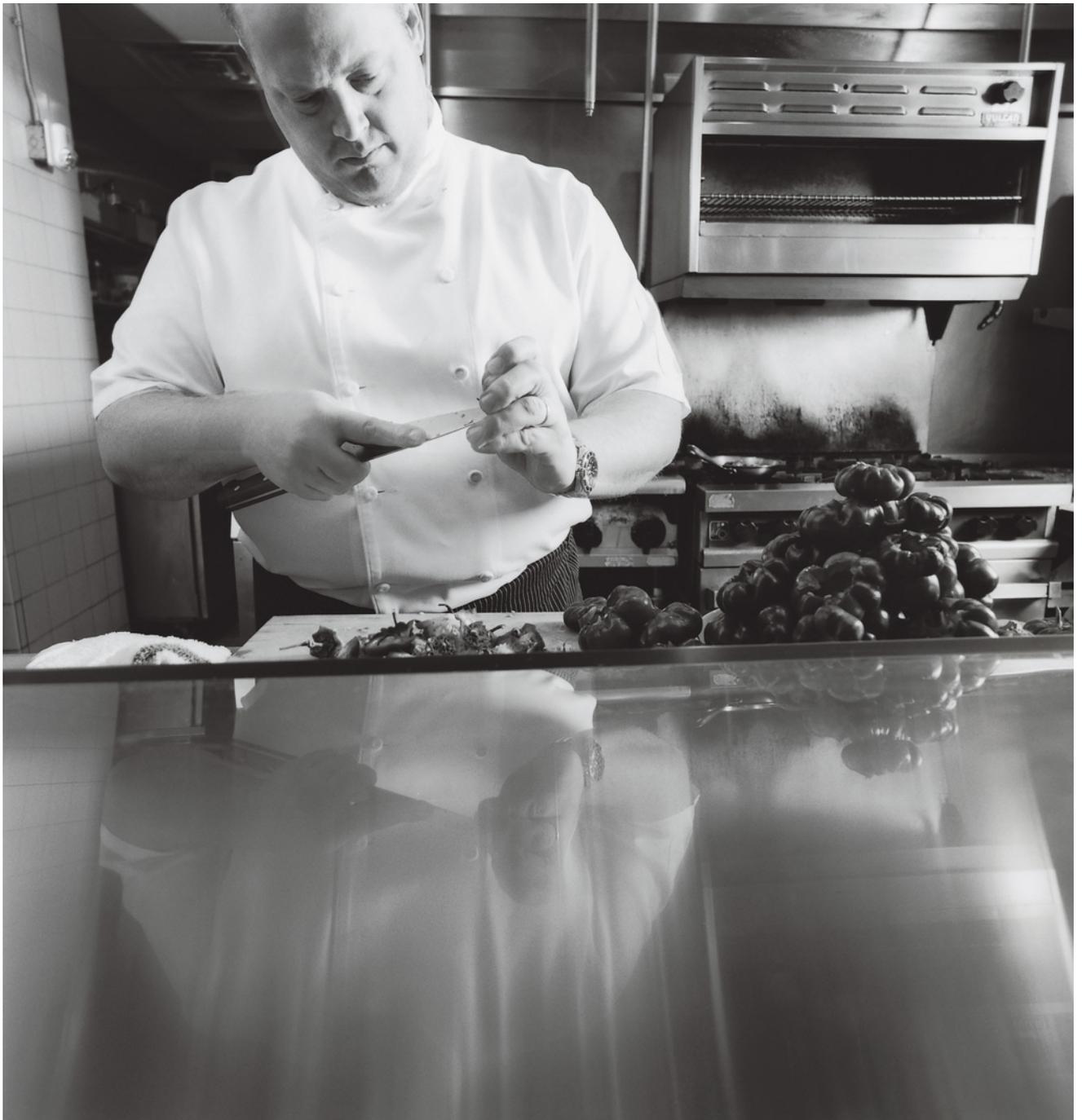
MAKE PIES: Divide 1 disk of dough into 6 equal pieces. Roll out 1 piece on a lightly floured surface with a lightly floured rolling pin into a 6-inch round, then put 2 heaping tablespoons of filling in center. Lightly moisten edge with water and fold dough over to form a half-circle, pressing out air around filling, then pressing edge to seal. Transfer to a large sheet of parchment paper and press floured tines of a fork around edge. Make more pies with remaining dough and filling (you may have some filling left over).

FRY PIES: Set a cooling rack on a large baking sheet or tray. Heat 2 inches of oil in a 4- to 5-quart heavy pot (preferably cast-iron) over medium heat until it registers 360 to 370°F on thermometer. Fry pies, 3 or 4 at a time, turning occasionally, until deep golden-brown, 7 to 8 minutes per batch. Transfer to rack to drain. Return oil to 360 to 370°F between batches.

- ▶ Dust warm pies with confectioners sugar before serving.

COOKS' NOTES: Filling can be made 1 week ahead and chilled, covered. Bring to room temperature before using.

- Pastry dough can be chilled up to 2 days.
- Pies are best the day they're fried but keep, wrapped in foil once completely cooled, at room temperature 1 day.👌



CIVIC PRIDE

Carving out a culinary identity hasn't been easy for Atlanta. But when local boy **Linton Hopkins**, at Restaurant Eugene, hit his stride, there was a paradigm shift: Suddenly, butter beans, creamed greens, and Frogmore stew were nothing to be ashamed of. BY JOHN T. EDGE

WHEN GUENTER SEEGER, the cool, calculated, and supremely talented German native who had been the top toque in Atlanta for more than a decade, announced, in the summer of 2006, that he would close his eponymous restaurant, the city had a collective hissy fit. A hand-wringing, wail-to-the-heavens, his-kind-will-never-pass-this-way-again hissy fit.

Georgia governor Sonny Perdue offered assistance. Atlanta mayor Shirley Franklin sent a mash note, pleading that Seeger's departure would be "a personal detriment to the city." Fellow chefs in the culinary firmament, like Daniel Boulud and Patrick O'Connell, jetted in to show support and rally the

Linton Hopkins possesses a sense of place without being provincial.

gastronomic troops. Investors called, dangling cash-for-cachet deals. No matter. Within three months, wags were swapping stories of glimpsing Seeger in their neighborhood Kroger on a Saturday night, plowing the aisles.

Seeger's restaurant had been the toast of Atlanta's culinary elite. The place where supplicants dined on *bottarga* custard with maple syrup. The place where *loup de mer* with almond mousse was received as sacrament rather than sustenance. The city had celebrated Seeger's achievements with a fervor more often reserved for corporate relocations and college football victories. But the truth, secreted beneath the syrup, had always been this: Atlanta never embraced the chef or his restaurant as one of its own. Atlanta loved to tout Seeger's, but it didn't love to eat there.

The reasons for the disconnect were cultural rather than culinary. Seeger's personality didn't sit well with Atlantans, who style themselves lifelong students of the high art of hospitality. He could be ungracious and unaware. "They cook like housewives," Seeger said of Blackberry Farm, a popular Tennessee restaurant and resort that, at the time of the slight, was serving coconut sweetbreads on foie gras flan.

And, despite his devotion to the area's farmers, Seeger never really seemed to cultivate an appreciation for the bed-rock cookery of the region. "Fried chicken?" he once snorted, referring to the South's de facto signature dish. "I don't get anything out of it."

SEEGER'S DEPARTURE signaled an opportunity for a band of Atlanta chefs who had honed their skills when the scepter was still in Seeger's grasp. Chefs like Anne Quatrano of **Bacchanalia**, Scott Peacock of **Watershed**, and a lesser-known talent, the one without the James Beard awards, Linton Hopkins of **Restaurant Eugene**.

Hopkins, the lone hometown boy of the bunch, is chef and co-owner (with his wife, Gina) of an elegant lacquer box of a restaurant, outfitted with gauzy curtains and high-backed booths. He is, arguably, the anti-Seeger. He's humble. He favors Izod shirts, keeps his nose clean, and respects his elders. Hopkins does not abjure his region's victuals.

He didn't, by way of Restaurant Eugene, angle for top-toque status, either. He merely moved back home in 2002 to open a restaurant in his old neighborhood. And he hit his stride just as the chef who had set the city's standard for fine dining decided to hit the door.

"I didn't start out to be a southern chef," says Hopkins. "Certainly not 'southern' with italics. But I couldn't deny my place and its people. Our foodways aren't simplistic; they're complex. We're far more than a roster of dishes and dressings."

Hopkins broadcasts self-confidence. He carries his weight like a high school wrestler. And he smiles like an in-on-the-joke uncle. He was born to this role, for in a boomtown full of arrivistes, he possesses a past that is firmly rooted in the city where he cooks.



CREAM OF COPE'S CORN SOUP WITH SHRIMP AND WILD MUSHROOMS

Linton Hopkins, Restaurant Eugene

SERVES 8 (FIRST COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 1¼ HR START TO FINISH: 1¾ HR

What gives this thick, voluptuous soup its deep-golden flavor and aroma is toasted dried summer-sweet Cope's corn (see Kitchen Notebook, page 107). Chef Linton Hopkins embellishes the soup with tender, briny shrimp and foresty mushrooms, but it would also be delicious with crabmeat or bacon ... or with nothing at all to distract you from its mysterious, soul-satisfying essence.

FOR CORN SOUP

- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 (7½-oz) box Cope's toasted dried sweet corn
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 6 to 7 cups chicken stock or reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 3 flat-leaf parsley sprigs
- 1 thyme sprig
- 2 Turkish bay leaves or 1 California
- 4 black peppercorns

FOR MUSHROOMS AND SHRIMP

- ¾ lb mixed fresh wild mushrooms
- 3½ tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- ¾ lb medium shrimp in shell, peeled, leaving tail fan attached, and deveined
- ¼ cup finely chopped chives
- About ¾ cup crème fraîche

EQUIPMENT: cheesecloth; kitchen string

COOK CORN AND MAKE SOUP: Cook onion in butter in a 5- to 6-quart heavy pot over medium-low heat, stirring, until softened. Add corn, heavy cream, and 6 cups stock and bring to a boil.

►Wrap parsley, thyme, bay leaves, and peppercorns in cheesecloth and tie with string to make a bouquet garni. Add to pot with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper and simmer, covered, 45 minutes. ►Discard bouquet garni, then purée corn

mixture in batches in a blender until smooth (use caution when blending hot liquids), about 2 minutes per batch. Strain soup as puréed through a fine-mesh sieve into a large heavy saucepan, pressing on and then discarding solids.

►Return soup to a simmer, stirring occasionally, and keep warm over low heat. Thin with additional stock if necessary.

COOK MUSHROOMS AND SHRIMP: Trim mushrooms, discarding any dark gills and tough stems, then slice or tear into bite-size pieces. ►Heat 2 tablespoons butter in a 10-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until foam subsides, then cook mushrooms, stirring, until tender and golden, about 8 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

►Transfer mushrooms to a bowl and melt remaining 1½ tablespoons butter in skillet. Meanwhile, toss shrimp with ¼ teaspoon each of salt and pepper. Cook shrimp in butter, turning occasionally, until barely cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes. Return mushrooms to skillet and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Remove from heat and stir in chives and salt and pepper to taste.

►Mound shrimp and mushrooms in shallow bowls, then add soup and top each serving with a dollop of crème fraîche.

COOKS' NOTE: Corn mixture can be cooked, puréed, and strained 1 day ahead. Chill, uncovered, until cool, then cover. Reheat before proceeding.

He went to grade school here. College, too. His maternal grandfather, namesake of the restaurant, was a chemist who lived on a farm and traveled the area for the FDA. His father, a neurologist, once kept a herd of goats in the backyard.

Those goats roamed free before the Hopkins family's neighborhood became chic. Before Atlanta shed its provincialism and became, in tourism-bureau-speak, "America's next great city." Measured by population growth alone, Atlanta has arrived. (Since 2000, the metropolitan area has absorbed nearly 900,000 new residents, more than any other American city.) With that growth, however, has come no small measure of civic angst. Should Atlanta leverage its traditional past or its cosmopolitan future? No one seems sure.

THERE IS THIS LONG HISTORY of trying to rub the southern off," says Steven Satterfield, executive sous-chef at Watershed, the restaurant in suburban Decatur where chef Scott Peacock pays daily homage to the late African-American grande dame—and longtime Atlanta resident—Edna Lewis (see pages 24, 64, and 66). "It's as if Atlanta has always been trying to wipe its fingers clean of bacon grease."

The national press has hit its licks, comparing Atlanta to Oakland, which Gertrude Stein famously dismissed by saying, "There is no there there." But some of the more bruising comments have come from within the South. "New Orleans would have had more fun," said North Carolina-based cultural critic John Shelton Reed after watching the opening ceremonies of the centennial Olympic games. "Charleston would have had more class, and Nashville would have had better

music, but it wasn't bad for Atlanta." Until recently, a read of Atlanta restaurants might have earned a similar dismissal. With few exceptions—Watershed being the most notable—Atlanta did not boast chef-driven restaurants that exalted southern goods and customs.

Restaurant Eugene was not, at first blush, a contender. When Hopkins opened it, some critics gave almost as much ink to the age of the clientele as they did to the food. The implication was that, in a New South citadel, seemingly sold on continuous reinvention, a Peachtree Street restaurant, set on the ground floor of a brick box of a building and packed with well-oiled Buckhead gentry, was soon to be the province of the gin-and-Geritol set.

Hopkins found his footing slowly, methodically. As critics mused, he kept his head down and cooked. Nearly four years later, his efforts have yielded a modern restaurant, run by a worldly son of the South who draws strength from deep regional roots yet remains unbound by them.

Tonight, most of the tables are claimed by young swells, cocktail-tailing their way through appetizers while arguing the merits of country ham-wrapped sablefish with sweet-potato hash versus pan-roasted Georgia trout with butter-bean succotash.

Here, in a part of the country one generation removed from a vital agrarian past, pig and corn get their due in a grilled Tamworth pork chop with chowchow, creamed greens (recipe below), and house-limed hominy. And a vegetable plate is a lusty casserole, a buttery jumble of turnips, new potatoes, watermelon beets, and asparagus tips. "It's the you've-worked-all-day-and-you're-coming-to-the-table-hungry kind of vegetable



BROWN-BUTTER CREAMED WINTER GREENS

Linton Hopkins, Restaurant Eugene

SERVES 6 (SIDE DISH)

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 1 HR

Almost every culture has an abiding, elemental hunger for greens, and in the American South, it's common to simmer a variety of them (see Kitchen Notebook, page 107) together. Hopkins cooks his relatively quickly in a satiny béchamel. The nutty sweetness of the sauce rounds out the natural bitterness

of the greens, thus lifting them into the realm of the spectacular. Think of this as a rough-around-the-edges version of creamed spinach, one with real backbone.

- 3/4 stick unsalted butter, divided
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- 2 tablespoons minced shallot
- 1 Turkish or 1/2 California bay leaf
- 6 black peppercorns
- 3 1/2 lb mixed winter greens such as collards, mustard greens, and kale
- 6 oz slab bacon, any rind discarded and bacon cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices, then cut crosswise into 1/4-inch sticks (lardons)
- 1 cup finely chopped onion
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried hot red-pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar, or to taste

► Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a heavy medium saucepan over medium heat, then add flour and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add milk in a stream, whisking, then add shallot, bay leaf, and peppercorns and bring to a boil, whisking. Simmer, whisking

occasionally, 5 minutes. Strain béchamel sauce through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl, discarding solids, and cover surface with parchment paper.

- Discard stems and center ribs from greens, then coarsely chop leaves.
- Cook lardons in a wide 6- to 8-quart heavy pot over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until golden-brown but not crisp, about 8 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain, then pour off fat from pot and wipe clean.
- Heat remaining 1/2 stick butter in pot over medium-low heat until browned and fragrant, about 2 minutes, then cook onion, stirring, until softened, about 3 minutes.
- Increase heat to medium-high, then stir in greens, 1 handful at a time, letting each handful wilt before adding next. Add béchamel, cream, garlic, red-pepper flakes, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper and boil, uncovered, stirring, until sauce coats greens and greens are tender, about 10 minutes.
- Stir in lardons, vinegar, and salt and pepper to taste.

COOKS' NOTES: Béchamel sauce can be made 1 day ahead and chilled, its surface covered with parchment. Stir before using. • Greens can be chopped 1 day ahead and chilled in a large sealed bag.

plate,” says Greg Best, the restaurant’s barman and Hopkins’s partner in a gastropub, opening across the breezeway.

Diners who claim Restaurant Eugene as their own are, like Hopkins, proud of their place. But they are not provincial. Even when the restaurant serves its Sunday Supper—a three-course prix fixe might feature shrimp rémoulade, fried chicken cooked in accord with Mary Randolph’s 1824 recipe, and buttermilk chess pie with a cornmeal crust—a quarter of the clientele seems to be ordering pass-around courses of spring peas with butter-poached lobster.

Hopkins’s approach has turned heads. As he began to explore his southern roots, his Atlanta mentors, like Anne Quatrano, did, too. **Quinones**, the boîte tucked beneath her flagship restaurant, Bacchanalia, has emerged as a showcase for local ingredients and regional riffs like deviled farm-egg custard with country-ham chips. And braised greens with house-cured bacon. And Frogmore stew with fennel sausage. And red velvet cake with cream cheese sorbet.

“When I moved here in 1992, Atlanta was fighting hard not to be southern,” says Quatrano. “But a good cook follows good ingredients. The availability of greens—of mustards, collards, turnips—motivates you to braise greens. And braised local greens are terrific. By anyone’s standards.”

Meanwhile, inspired by a Tuesday-night feed at Watershed (and Restaurant Eugene’s Sunday-night answer), fried chicken has become one of Atlanta’s main courses of the moment. Owing to the labor involved—and respecting a time when fried chicken was a special-occasion dish—most of the new-guard chicken

fryers are restricting their repertoire to just one day a week.

But some Atlanta restaurants are less vested in tradition. Take JCT. Kitchen, a bistro-meets-boardinghouse serving fried chicken and collard greens six nights a week. Asked to describe the motivations behind a place that claims the mantle of “Southern Farmstead Cooking,” chef-owner Ford Fry uses the c-word: *concept*. As in, “We were thinking about an urban-barbecue concept, but went with this instead.”

Detractors may say that’s exactly what’s wrong with Atlanta, that it’s a city fixed less on substance than on salesmanship. In years past, that hustle has served the city well; during the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, Atlanta sold itself as “the city too busy to hate.”

It’s likely, however, that such critics can’t see the kudzu for the condos, that they have not taken a seat at Restaurant Eugene and ordered the grilled pork chop with pole beans and mustard jus. Or the fried chicken livers with cider *gastrique*. Or the peach cobbler, dolloped with vanilla-bean ice cream, served on a damask-draped table.

BACCHANALIA AND QUINONES AT BACCHANALIA

1198 Howell Mill Rd., Atlanta (404-365-0410; starprovisions.com)

JCT. KITCHEN 1198 Howell Mill Rd., Suite 18, Atlanta (404-355-2252; jctkitchen.com)

RESTAURANT EUGENE 2277 Peachtree Rd., Atlanta (404-355-0321; restauranteugene.com)

WATERSHED 406 W. Ponce De Leon Ave., Decatur (404-378-4900; watershedrestaurant.com)@



LEAVE IT TO CLEAVER

Ayden, North Carolina, has hosted 33 annual Collard Festivals. As if that weren't enough, it's also got some of the best whole-hog barbecue around. BY JANE AND MICHAEL STERN

THE BARBECUE OF EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA tastes great. But long before you begin eating it, you smell it and hear it. The air surrounding each of the region's top pits is so heavily perfumed with the scent of halved hogs sizzling on a grate, their fat dripping onto white-hot hardwood coals, that your hair, your clothes, and your car will glow with the sweet aroma for hours after you leave. One steady sound sets a cadence, not continuously, but as a punctuating on-and-off rhythm. It is the thump of heavy cleavers hacking up large sections of cooked meat on a hard rock maple butcher block. The beat is ubiquitous wherever whole hogs are cooked, and often it emanates from an out-of-view kitchen.

At the Skylight Inn, the kitchen is not hidden, so the sound is louder, and you see the beautiful sight of barbecue being made.

Enter the building and step up to the counter to place an order. Like an altar in a church, it is front and center, and all congregants come to it first. Here stands James Howell, just behind a large pass-through window, working at the cutting block, a cleaver in each hand. This table is the sanctum sanctorum, where cooked pig becomes North Carolina's signature smoke-house meal. Periodically, Howell puts the blades down and reaches back for a bottle of vinegar or hot sauce to splash onto the pork, and he shakes on salt and pepper straight from the carton. Nothing is measured out, and there are no secret ingredients. When he's got a moist, steaming heap of five or six

Skylight Inn's James Howell chops pork; Jeff Jones adds coal to the pit; a dome has adorned the Barbecue Capital of America since 1984.



THE AIR IS HEAVILY PERFUMED WITH THE SCENT OF HALVED HOGS SIZZLING ON A GRATE, THEIR FAT DRIPPING ONTO WHITE-HOT COALS.

Sam and Jeff Jones; the complete menu: pork, corn bread, coleslaw.



pounds that are the texture of coarse hash, he uses both cleavers to shovel it forward through the window onto an adjoining butcher block in the preparation area toward the counter. Here, servers assemble trays and sandwiches. Sandwiches, which include coleslaw, are wrapped in wax paper. Trays full of meat are topped with a square of corn bread.

SANDWICHES ARE A 20TH-CENTURY ADDITION, but the combination of barbecue and corn bread goes back to 1830, when Skilton M. Dennis, who cooked whole hogs in pits in the ground, brought meat to a nearby Baptist convention. “As far as we know, that was the first time barbecue was served to the public in North Carolina,” says Samuel Jones, Dennis’s seventh-generation descendant. Samuel operates the Skylight Inn along with his cousin Jeff and his father, Bruce, and is the grandson of Pete Jones, the longtime pitmaster who started in the business when he was seven years old. Pete built the current Skylight Inn in 1947, and in 1984 he put a jumbo replica of the Capitol Dome on top of the building after a journalist declared his place the Barbecue Capital of America.

For decades Pete was omnipresent at the Skylight Inn, at the counter from eight-thirty in the morning through dinner hour. “This wasn’t just how he made a living,” Samuel says. “This was his life. He mixed the mortar for the building. He lived across the street when the land was still our family farm.”

Devotees credit Pete, who passed away in 2006, with enshrining the method of barbecue that makes the Skylight Inn one of a handful of places in the nation where smoke-cooking tradition remains unaffected by modernity. The eastern North Carolina style is known to connoisseurs primarily for its disavowal of sauce. “Granddaddy always said, ‘Sauce has absolutely nothing to do with making good barbecue,’” Samuel recalls with a smile.

But saucelessness is only the most apparent distinction. The entire process is a precise ritual that has virtually disappeared as pitmasters have gone to easier ways of cooking and to cuts of meat that are more efficient than a whole hog. It starts late

in the afternoon, when the pitmaster starts burning oak logs until they turn into charcoal. The coals are pushed from the chimney into the adjoining pit, where halved hogs are arrayed on a grate above the heat. At midnight, then again at dawn, more coals are moved to the pit. There are no thermometers at the Skylight Inn. Doneness is checked by feel. At daybreak, the meat is almost done. “But it is still tough at the bone,” Samuel notes. “It has to be that way because we need to flip the hog. If it was too soft, it would fall apart.” By 9 A.M., the meat is completely tender and ready to be chopped.

The union of smoke and pork creates a subtle flavor, not the least bit overwhelmed by the addition of vinegar and hot sauce as the meat is chopped. What’s striking about whole-hog barbecue is its texture. Along with velvet-soft shreds from the interior are chewy strips from the outside, as well as shockingly crunchy nuggets of skin. The cooked skin is insanely succulent, and its firmness gives this meat edible drama that is lacking in barbecue made from upscale hams or shoulders.

As Bruce Jones shows us the cooler where a couple of dozen dressed pigs, about 140 pounds each, are hung up and ready to cook, he notes with some ambivalence that modern swine are raised to be lean. “Pork is now the healthiest meat you can eat,” he says. On the other hand, the dearth of fat means that fewer drippings get collected as the hogs cook, and the drippings therefore need to be supplemented by lard when it comes time to grease the corn-bread pans. The corn bread, like the Skylight Inn’s pork, is basic. Unleavened and about a half-inch thick, it is rugged and leather-edged, a substantial chew that is a stunning complement to the juicy pork. It’s made the same way Skilton M. Dennis made his corn bread 178 years ago.

The Skylight Inn is the benchmark of barbecue in eastern North Carolina, serving a meal that is rudimentary and perfect. If whole-hog, smoke-cooked pork with corn bread and coleslaw is not your idea of heaven on earth, do not go to the Skylight Inn. There is nothing else on the menu.

SKYLIGHT INN 4618 S. Lee St., Ayden, NC (252-746-4113)

Wine advice for this month's menus and beyond. BY GERALD ASHER



GET YOUR DIXIE KICKS
PAGE 82

Agiorgitiko, a Greek variety used to make Nemea, became the focus of a red-wine revival when Greece joined the European Union in 1981. Forced to prepare its wine production for competition, the government made grants that led to new, well-equipped wineries and replanted vineyards. Since then, most Greek wines have broken free of

stereotypes to recapture qualities that, in the ancient world, had made them the standard by which other wines were judged. The best of Agiorgitiko still comes from Nemea, a town in the northern Peloponnese. Round, firm, and alive with character all their own, the wines taste as good with fried chicken and mashed potatoes as they do with moussaka. I selected Haggipavlu's fragrant and supple Nemea '04 as my first choice, but I could just as easily have chosen the Nemea '04 of Megapanos, a youthful wine with a fruity flavor, or the Nemea '05 of Palivou, smooth and seamless but also dark and deep. Or Harlaftis's Argilos Ghi Nemea '04—*argilos*, Greek for "clay," being a reference to the south slope of Nemea, which gives wines of strength and staying power.

The success of these "new" Greek wines has led to such demand for Agiorgitiko in Greece itself that the variety is now increasingly planted throughout the Peloponnese, well beyond Nemea. There, under the regional name, it makes lighter wines for earlier drinking—like the bright Notios Agiorgitiko '06 of Gaia, the cheerful Nasiakos Agiorgitiko '05, and the taut-edged but supple Agiorgitiko '05 of Papagiannakos, a wine with an aroma of freshly picked ripe grapes and an exotic finish.

GOOD DAY SUNSHINE
PAGE 66

Post Scriptum '04, a glossy red wine from Portugal's Douro region, is my choice for Scott Peacock's traditional southern breakfast. There's a comforting warmth about the red wines now reaching us from Portugal that makes them particularly welcome on any January day. But Post Scriptum has all the right qualities for a menu anchored by braised pork shoulder and grits because of its plump texture and fine, mouth-filling flavor. It also sums up what has happened to red wine in Portugal since that country, too, joined the EU, in 1986. As in Greece, winemaking equipment was replaced, vineyards were replanted, and young winemakers were exposed to fresh ideas. Attracted by Portugal's natural advantages, winemakers from elsewhere in the EU came to add their own skills and experience to those of the locals. Post Scriptum, for example, is the result of a collaboration between Bruno Prats, for many years the director of Cos d'Estournel, the Médoc-classed growth, and Charles Symington, of the distinguished Port wine family. In it, the yin of Touriga Nacional, the variety that gives Douro's Port its intense color and depth, and the yang of Touriga Franca, which adds fruit aromas and a suave envelope to wrap around Touriga Nacional's tannins, are supplemented by Tinta Roriz—the local name for the Tempranillo of Rioja—a

grape that brings an added spark of bright acidity. In Symington's Prazo de Roriz '05, made in association with the van Zellers, another old Douro family, Tinta Roriz becomes the lead variety, giving the wine a fresh, berrylike fruit and a graceful structure. Ardosino '03 was developed by three of the most admired winemakers from Germany's Rhineland, who have used Tinta Roriz to add dimension to the deep flavor of Touriga Nacional rather than to lead it. Quinta do Crasto, another Douro estate producing red wines that seem to be influenced by Bordeaux, currently offers some of the best wines of Portugal. Crasto's Old Vines Reserva '05, made from a jumble of old Portuguese varieties planted together almost a century ago, has a complex flavor but a style distinguished from a high-quality Bordeaux only by its more exuberant fruit. In contrast, Quinta da Cortezia's Touriga Nacional '04, a brisk, spicy wine with a rustic edge, confirms by Touriga Franca's absence what that variety brings to Douro blends.

Away from Douro, in Dão or Alentejo, where interest in Touriga Nacional is overtaking experimentation with "foreign" varieties, this singularly Portuguese variety, used alone, gives deep, rich wines. The Dão Touriga Nacional '03 of Quinta de Cabriz shows off the variety's vibrant depth. In Alentejo, both the Touriga Nacional '04 of Herdade do Esporão, as fruity as a bowl of raspberries, and Pontual's blend of Touriga Nacional and Trincadeira, a local variety, are smooth, stylish, and satisfying. @



RECOMMENDED WINES

GET YOUR DIXIE KICKS

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| NEMEA AGIORGITIKOS | |
| Haggipavlu '04..... | \$11 |
| Harlaftis Argilos Ghi '04 | \$12 |
| Megapanos '04 | \$17 |
| Palivou '05 | \$25 |
| PELOPONNESE AGIORGITIKOS | |
| Nasiakos '05 | \$15 |
| Notios '06..... | \$13 |
| Papagiannakos '05 | \$13 |

GOOD DAY SUNSHINE

DOURO REDS

| | |
|---|------|
| Ardosino '03 | \$22 |
| Post Scriptum '04 | \$24 |
| Prazo de Roriz '05 | \$14 |
| Quinta da Cortezia Touriga Nacional '04 | \$14 |
| Quinta do Crasto Reserva Old Vines '05..... | \$40 |

DÃO RED

| | |
|---|------|
| Quinta de Cabriz Touriga Nacional '03 | \$28 |
|---|------|

ALENTEJO REDS

| | |
|--|------|
| Herdade do Esporão Touriga Nacional '04 | \$18 |
| Pontual Touriga Nacional/Trincadeira '04 | \$23 |



STAYING ON ALONE

They were a **startling couple**. But even today, nearly two years after Edna Lewis's death, Scott Peacock says that she still makes him the man—and the chef—that he is. BY LAURA SHAPIRO

SCOTT PEACOCK IS STANDING IN A STABLE at the Vogt Riding Academy in Atlanta, talking lovingly about the horses lined up in their stalls. He has a half dozen apples in a Whole Foods bag, and the horses are peering out with interest. "Johnny is a very difficult horse," he says, holding out an apple to one of them. "He's bitten me, but it wasn't bad, just a little bite on my leg." Johnny snatches the apple, crunching it greedily between his huge teeth. "Isn't he great? Would you like

to feed him?" Thanks, no. "Look how they're so beautiful. And it's so peaceful here." Peacock kisses Johnny on the nose and moves from stall to stall until the apples are gone. I have asked him to show me "his" Atlanta, the places that mean the most to him, and this is where he wanted to start. Peacock is the pride of the culinary South, and he is increasingly known as one of the

Peacock holds a photo of the late Edna Lewis, friend and mentor.

finest chefs in the country. Watershed, the restaurant in suburban Decatur, Georgia, where he created a home-style menu of southern specialties emphasizing local ingredients, has been a popular and critical sensation since it opened nine years ago, and last year Peacock was named “Best Chef in the Southeast” at the James Beard awards. But the most important touchstone in his life is Edna Lewis, the great African-American chef who died in February 2006 at the age of 89. The two had been a devoted, mutually sustaining couple for years, cooking and traveling together and sharing a home. When she began to weaken and decline, he became her chief caregiver. During the last two years of her life, he spent nearly every hour with her when he wasn’t working; and in emergencies he jettisoned work, too. He was with her on the night she quietly reached the end, and a week later he put his name on the waiting list for riding lessons at Vogt.

THE ONLY OTHER TIME HE’D BEEN ON A HORSE, he says, was when he was eight years old. The neighbors kept horses—not unusual in Hartford, Alabama—and he liked imagining himself leaping onto a steed and riding off into a whole different childhood, preferably one designed by Norman Rockwell. “My parents loved me, but I wasn’t that typical child that comes out of a small town in Alabama in the ’60s,” he says, thinking about the Christmas he spent longing for his sister’s new Easy-Bake oven instead of all those tiresome toy trucks.

When his father at last brought home a pony, the little boy eagerly climbed on. A second later he was sprawled on the ground, and so was his dream of a childhood where he magically fit right in. The pony was a lemon, too mean for anyone to ride. Peacock clambered to his feet. “I’m sorry,” he told his father miserably. “It was my fault.”

Now he rides two or three times a week, and his favorite horse is the wary, unyielding Johnny. “There’s nothing easy about it,” he says. “There’s so much to work at, to get to that next level.” I don’t know whether he’s talking about riding or grieving. But when he describes his newfound relationship with these horses, it’s clear that he’s also thinking about the intertwined lives of a gay white man and a deeply reserved African-American woman nearly half a century his senior, whom he always calls “Miss Lewis.” He was talented but directionless when they met; she had a lifetime’s profound understanding of southern food. Her wisdom ignited his, and gradually they grew close in a way that neither of them had experienced before. “It’s about boundaries, about being aware and respectful,” he says. “It’s about being in constant communication back and forth. Those expressive eyes, the independence—I respect that. Miss Lewis was the first person that ever just saw and accepted me. She saw the good and the bad, and maybe she saw someone who could see her, too. This is what I learned from her: The power comes around when you are just being exactly who you are.”

He drives me through some of the lovely, leafy neighborhoods of Atlanta, pointing out the governor’s mansion, where he was the chef when he first met Edna Lewis, and talks about the bouts of depression that he struggled with for many years. “I did tons of therapy, I took tons of antidepressants,” he says. “I can remember turning the clocks to face the wall. I would erase the messages on the answering machine because I couldn’t face knowing they were there, waiting for me to answer. It was like wearing a lead suit. After all the doctors and all the tests and pills, the best it got was that it didn’t feel so bad to be in bed with the covers pulled up in a dark room.”



‘SHE IS PART OF EVERYTHING. IT IS MARVELOUS IN A WEIRD WAY, THE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP YOU HAVE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS DEAD. IT CONTINUES TO GROW.’

Johnny, a difficult horse, brings Peacock peace of mind.

WHAT WRENCHED HIM FREE OF HIS DEMONS was the sudden awareness that Miss Lewis had begun to grow frail. Her memory was wavering; more and more, she needed his help to get through the day. “I knew if I didn’t get up out of that bed, she was going to suffer,” he says. “If I screwed up and stopped working, what was going to happen? It was an amazing thing she gave me. I started showing up for her, and without realizing it I started showing up for me.” He says he hasn’t taken any medications in five years.

We reach the building where she lived before moving in with him. “There it is, 830 Greenwood Avenue,” he says, and shows me her first-floor window in the modest brick apartment house. Nearby, there’s a Thai restaurant where they often went, and we stop in for lunch. She always liked the coconut soup, so he orders that and takes a taste. “It’s not as good as it used to be,” he decides, but finishes it contentedly.

Sometimes Peacock sounds elegiac; often he expresses gratitude for all Lewis gave him. But whatever his mood, his sense of humor has a way of slipping to the forefront. (I won’t go into detail about the theme dinner he created for playwright Eve Ensler before a local performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, but he thoroughly enjoys describing the menu.)

That afternoon, we walk through the grounds and gardens of the Atlanta History Center, where years ago Peacock learned to cook in an open-hearth kitchen—flames and coals, cast-iron pots and pans, traditional recipes and local ingredients. It’s a kind of cooking he finds immensely satisfying, with no shortcuts allowed or even possible. When Miss Lewis turned 80, in 1996, he threw her a huge party (Continued on page 112)



Good Day Sunshine In the rest of the country, brunch falls between eleven and two. But when you're in Scott Peacock's hands, you'll want to clear the whole day for a languorous taste of tradition. Recipes by Scott Peacock
Photographs by Mikkel Vang



Rebirth of a legend: Pimento cheese toasts, hot from the broiler, take an old favorite to a new level—along with a sip of fruity Champagne punch.



MENU SERVES 8

CHAMPAGNE PUNCH
 PIMENTO CHEESE
 TOASTS
 AMBROSIA
 BRAISED-PORK
 HASH
 CREAMY STONE-
 GROUND GRITS

LOWCOUNTRY
 BREAKFAST SHRIMP
 EGGS WITH CREAM,
 SPINACH, AND
 COUNTRY HAM
 SLOW-ROASTED
 TOMATOES
 CRISP WINTER
 LETTUCES WITH
 WARM SWEET-AND-
 SHARP DRESSING

CRUSTY
 BUTTERMILK
 BISCUITS
 SPOON-BREAD
 MUFFINS
 SUGARED
 BLACKBERRIES
 Post Scriptum
 Douro Red '04

WARM SWEET-
 POTATO PUDDING
 WITH APPLES
 AND CHESTNUTS
 BOURBON PECAN
 TARTS
 Quinta de Cabriz
 Dão Touriga
 Nacional '03
 BOILED COFFEE





There's no wrong way to eat a biscuit: with butter and preserves, above, or shrimp and grits, opposite. Baked eggs go well with spoon-bread muffins.







The more, the merrier: What's true for the food is doubly true for the guests. Invite a crowd, and tell them to come early, with hearty appetites.





Eggs, spinach, ham—layered with cream and baked, these quotidian ingredients add up to an unbelievably luxurious and comforting whole.



Bacon brings soul-soothing richness to winter salad; biscuits, boiled coffee, and salty-sweet roasted tomatoes round out the offerings.





An ambrosia this refreshing serves as a palate cleanser; pecan tarts in generously sized individual portions make everyone happy.



CHAMPAGNE PUNCH

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR
(INCLUDES CHILLING)

Eye-opening notes of lemon, lime, and grapefruit keep this festive punch from heading into ultra-sweet territory—and fresh mint seconds the motion. “Once the Champagne has been added,” says Scott Peacock, “serve the drinks as soon as possible to experience the maximum tickle of bubbles.”

- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup water
- 1 cup white grape juice
- 1½ cups fresh grapefruit juice (preferably pink or ruby red)
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup Cognac or other brandy
- ½ cup packed mint leaves
- 1 navel orange, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 lime, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 lemon, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 (750-ml) bottle Champagne or other sparkling white wine, chilled

► Bring sugar and water to a boil in a small saucepan, stirring until sugar has dissolved, then transfer to a bowl and cool syrup completely (or quick-chill by setting bowl in an ice bath and stirring occasionally until cool).

► Stir together juices, wine, Cognac, mint, fruit, and cooled syrup in a large pitcher. Chill, covered, until cold, about 1 hour. Stir in Champagne.

COOKS' NOTES: Syrup can be chilled up to 1 week.

• **Punch, without Champagne, can be made 3 hours ahead and chilled, covered. Add Champagne just before serving.**

PIMENTO CHEESE TOASTS

MAKES ABOUT 36 HORS D'OEUVRES

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

In its usual form, pimento cheese is a blend of mayonnaise, sharp Cheddar cheese, and pimentos that induces nostalgia. Here, made with roasted peppers and spread on tiny toasts, then broiled to transform it into hot melted heaven, it dresses up for a party with a nod and a wink.

- 10 oz extra-sharp Cheddar, coarsely grated (4 cups; see cooks' note, below)
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne
- ¾ cup mayonnaise (preferably homemade; see gourmet.com for recipe)
- ¼ cup finely diced bottled roasted red pepper (rinse and pat dry first)
- 1 baguette

► Preheat broiler.

► Stir together all ingredients, except baguette, plus ⅛ teaspoon pepper and salt to taste.

► Slice baguette crosswise ⅓ inch thick and spread bread thickly with cheese mixture. Broil 5 to 6 inches from heat until cheese is bubbling and browned, about 2 minutes.

COOKS' NOTES: Scott Peacock recommends using half white Cheddar and half orange Cheddar.

• **Cheese spread can be made 3 days ahead and chilled, covered.**

AMBROSIA

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 35 MIN START TO FINISH: 2 HR (INCLUDES CHILLING)

This juicy, fresh-fruit version evokes those described in 19th-century southern cookbooks. Flakes of fresh coconut provide a nice chew, and a little Sherry gives it sophistication and complexity. Ambrosia is often served as part of the transition to dessert, but at a generous meal like this one it fits in well earlier on, providing a bright, refreshing contrast to the main course.

- 1 medium coconut (see cooks' note, below)
- 8 large navel oranges
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Pinch of kosher or sea salt
- 3 tablespoons cream Sherry

► Preheat oven to 400°F with rack in middle.

► Pierce softest eye of coconut with a small screwdriver, then drain liquid and discard. Bake coconut in a shallow baking pan until it cracks, about 20 minutes. When cool, wrap in a towel and break shell with a hammer. Pry flesh from shell with screwdriver and peel off brown membrane with a vegetable peeler. Rinse coconut flesh. Coarsely grate coconut on large holes of a box grater using light pressure in long strokes to produce long, feathery flakes.

► Cut peel and pith from oranges with a sharp paring knife. Working over a large bowl, cut segments free from membranes, letting them drop into bowl; squeeze juice from membranes into bowl.

► Gently toss oranges with coconut, sugar, salt, and Sherry. Chill, covered, at least 1 hour.

COOKS' NOTES: Coconuts can sometimes be rancid. You may want to buy an extra one.

• **Orange can be cut 1 day ahead and chilled, covered.**

• **Ambrosia can be chilled up to 2 hours.**

BRAISED-PORK HASH

SERVES 8 TO 10

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN START TO FINISH: 6½ HR

This braised pork, absolutely falling apart from its lengthy cooking, would be a hit at any time of day. “Spoon it over creamy stone-ground grits or a hot, split spoon-bread muffin,” Peacock suggests.

- 1 (5- to 6-lb) pork shoulder (preferably with bone and skin)
- 1½ teaspoons dried thyme
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced lengthwise
- 8 Turkish bay leaves (or 4 California bay leaves, halved)
- 2 medium onions, halved lengthwise and thickly sliced
- 3 cups dry white wine
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

EQUIPMENT: a 6- to 8-qt heavy nonreactive pot (see Tips, page 113) with a lid

► Preheat oven to 325°F with rack in middle.

► Cut 8 deep slits randomly over top and sides of pork with a paring knife. Sprinkle a little thyme and a little pepper into slits, then insert a slice of garlic and a bay leaf into each.

► Sprinkle any remaining thyme, 1½ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper over pork, then put in pot. Scatter onions and any leftover garlic around meat.

► Add wine and bring to a boil. Cover with a sheet of parchment paper, then lid, and braise in oven until meat is very tender, 4 to 5 hours.

► Cool, partially covered, about 30 minutes, then transfer meat to a platter and cool completely. Strain braising liquid through a sieve into a bowl and reserve onions. Skim off fat from braising liquid. If you have more than 2 cups liquid, simmer gently in pot until reduced. If less, add chicken broth or water.

► Once pork is cool, discard bay leaves. If pork has skin, peel off and reserve (see cooks' note, below). Trim excess fat from pork and remove meat from bone. Cut into ½-inch pieces and return to pot, then add onions.

► Bring braising liquid to a simmer in a small saucepan and keep hot, covered.

► Heat butter in a 12-inch heavy skillet until foaming, then stir in flour and cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until light to medium brown, about 2 minutes.

► Remove from heat and slowly whisk in hot braising liquid, then bring to a simmer, whisking, and simmer, skimming foam, 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Reheat meat and onions in enough sauce to coat (about 1 cup) over low heat (hash should not be soupy). Serve remaining sauce on the side.

COOKS' NOTES: Braised pork and sauce can be made 2 days ahead. Chill meat with 1 cup sauce, uncovered, until cool, then cover. Chill remaining sauce separately.

• To use skin as a garnish, cook it in a nonstick skillet over medium-low heat until crisp, about 10 minutes, then cut into small pieces.

CREAMY STONE-GROUND GRITS

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

"Grits love salt," says Peacock, and his creamy-white, almost milky grits, with yellow and black flecks of coarsely ground corn, demonstrate that it's not saltiness he's after, just perfectly balanced seasoning. Grits usually function as an accompaniment, like polenta or rice, but it's certainly easy to imagine eating a bowl of these on their own, with no more than a pat of butter.

- 4 cups water
- 4 cups whole milk
- 2 cups white stone-ground grits (see cooks' note, below)
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ½ stick unsalted butter (optional), cut into pieces
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt

► Bring water and milk just to a simmer in a 4- to 5-quart heavy saucepan. Meanwhile, cover grits with water in a large bowl and whisk vigorously. Let stand 30 seconds, then skim any chaff that has floated to surface with a fine-mesh sieve. Drain grits well in a fine-mesh sieve and whisk into simmering milk mixture.

► Reduce heat to low and simmer grits, partially covered, stirring often with a heatproof rubber spatula, until grits are tender and thickened to the consistency of loose oatmeal, about 1¼ hours (stir more toward end of cooking to avoid scorching). If grits become too thick before they are tender and creamy, thin with hot water (about ½ cup).

► Stir in cream, butter (if using), and salt. Remove from heat and keep warm, covered, up to 20 minutes.

COOKS' NOTES: If you can't find stone-ground grits, use regular grits (but not quick-cooking). Regular grits will take less than half the time to cook.

• Grits are at their creamiest right after they are made but can be made up to 2 days ahead. Chill, uncovered, until cool, then cover. To reheat, break congealed grits into pieces and whisk in enough boiling water to loosen (up to about 1 cup). Heat over low heat, stirring constantly.

LOWCOUNTRY BREAKFAST SHRIMP

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

This shrimp's gentle preparation yields an utterly soothing broth that tastes just right first thing in the morning. Grab some grits or a warm biscuit to help sop up the juices.

- ¾ stick unsalted butter
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- ½ cup thinly sliced scallion
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 lb medium or large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ½ to 1 cup water

► Heat butter in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until foaming, then cook onions with scallion, garlic, salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper, stirring occasionally, until softened but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add shrimp and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add ½ cup water and simmer gently, stirring, until shrimp are just cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes (shrimp should be saucy; add more water if necessary). Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately. >

WINE ADVICE is on page 62.

For more information about the specialty ingredients in this menu, see KITCHEN NOTEBOOK, page 107, and SHOPPING LIST, page 112.

GAME PLAN

1 WEEK AHEAD

Make syrup for Champagne punch

Make baking powder for biscuits

3 DAYS AHEAD

Make pimento cheese spread

Prepare sugared blackberries

2 DAYS AHEAD

Braise pork

Slow-roast tomatoes

Prepare base for salad dressing

Make bourbon pecan tarts

1 DAY AHEAD

Cut oranges for ambrosia

Prepare flour mixture with lard for biscuits

Soak chestnuts (if using dried) and chop for pudding

Bake and mash sweet potatoes for pudding

3 HOURS AHEAD

Make punch (add Champagne later)

2 HOURS AHEAD

Make ambrosia

1½ HOURS AHEAD

Make sweet-potato pudding

1 HOUR AHEAD

Cook onion mixture for shrimp

JUST BEFORE SERVING

Bake biscuits

Make spoon-bread muffins

Cook grits

Reheat pork and tomatoes

Prepare eggs

Cook shrimp

Cook bacon and make salad

Bake pimento cheese toasts

Add Champagne to punch

Make boiled coffee





Meant to be: Shrimp cooked in butter give off the sweetest juices; creamy grits have a natural affinity for soaking up the seafood flavor.

EGGS WITH CREAM, SPINACH, AND COUNTRY HAM

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN START TO FINISH: 45 MIN

You'll return again and again to this recipe since it can be assembled in advance and delivers serious flavor. The scent of ham gently permeates the eggs, whose yolks can be broken into the rest of the dish or dipped into with biscuits, while the mineral notes of the creamed spinach proclaim its freshness.

- ¼ cup thinly sliced country ham, finely chopped
- Scant ¾ cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- ¾ teaspoon finely chopped garlic
- 10 oz spinach, coarse stems discarded
- 8 large eggs

EQUIPMENT: 8 (6-oz) ramekins or ovenproof teacups

- ▶ Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle.
- ▶ Bring ham and cream to a simmer in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, then remove from heat. Let steep, uncovered, about 10 minutes.
- ▶ Cook onion in 1 tablespoon butter in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium-low heat, stirring, until softened, about 2 minutes. Add garlic and season lightly with salt and pepper, then cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add spinach, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper and cook, turning with tongs, until spinach is wilted.
- ▶ Drain spinach in a colander, pressing to remove excess liquid, then coarsely chop. Divide spinach, then ham, among ramekins, spooning 1 tablespoon cream into each serving. Crack eggs into ramekins and season lightly with salt and pepper. Spoon 1 teaspoon cream over each egg. Cut remaining tablespoon butter into 8 small pieces and dot each egg with butter.
- ▶ Put ramekins in a shallow baking pan and bake, rotating pan halfway through baking, until whites are just set but yolks are still runny, 15 to 20 minutes, removing from oven as cooked.

COOKS' NOTE: The eggs in this recipe will not be fully cooked, which may be of concern if salmonella is a problem in your area.

SLOW-ROASTED TOMATOES

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 10 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR

One of the most popular items on Peacock's menu at his Watershed restaurant, in Decatur, Georgia, these tomatoes are concentrated and soft, and sugar plays up their sweetness, making for a homemade flavor riff on ketchup that you'll want to serve with everything. The tomatoes shrink quite a bit—but a little definitely goes a long way.

- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 (28-oz) can Italian plum tomatoes in juice, drained
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

- ▶ Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Lightly butter an 8-inch shallow baking dish.
- ▶ Stir together sugar, salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in a cup.
- ▶ Put tomatoes in baking dish and sprinkle all over with sugar mixture. Dot tomatoes with butter, then bake until tomatoes are partially collapsed and deeply caramelized in places, 1 to 2 hours. Serve warm or at room temperature.

COOKS' NOTE: Tomatoes can be roasted 2 days ahead and chilled, covered. Reheat in oven just until warm.

CRISP WINTER LETTUCES WITH WARM SWEET-AND-SHARP DRESSING

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN START TO FINISH: 40 MIN

In keeping with the rest of the menu, this is no shy salad. The sweet and acidic vinaigrette unites with the salty bacon and, along with the lettuces, produces fireworks in the mouth.

- 12 cups mixed salad greens such as romaine, watercress, and Bibb and/or Boston
- 1 large bunch arugula (optional), coarse stems discarded
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced diagonally
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped chives
- 9 bacon slices (½ lb)
- 1½ cups cider vinegar
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt

- ▶ Tear greens into large pieces and put in a large salad bowl with arugula, scallions, and chives.
- ▶ Cook bacon in a 12-inch nonreactive skillet (see Tips, page 113) over medium heat until crisp. Transfer bacon to paper towels to drain, then stir vinegar, sugars, salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper into fat in skillet. Boil, stirring occasionally, until reduced to about ¾ cup, 10 to 12 minutes. (Dressing should be syrupy and bubbling.)
- ▶ Crumble bacon over salad, then toss with enough warm dressing to lightly coat. Season with salt and pepper.

COOKS' NOTE: The vinegar, sugars, and seasoning (without bacon fat) can be boiled to reduce (by half) 2 days ahead. Add to hot bacon fat, then bring to a boil just before making salad.

CRUSTY BUTTERMILK BISCUITS

MAKES ABOUT 15 BISCUITS

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 30 MIN

The cliché, in this case, turns out to be true: Biscuits benefit from TLC. Peacock recommends White Lily flour, one of the lightest available, along with lard for a flaky texture so fluffy and airy that the biscuits almost float off the plate. One bite may well move you to tears—either with memories of your southern grandmother, or with regret for not having had a southern grandmother. For more on making biscuits, see Kitchen Notebook, page 106.

- 5 cups sifted White Lily flour or unbleached all-purpose flour (sift before measuring)
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon baking powder (preferably homemade; recipe follows)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- ½ cup cold lard
- 1½ cups well-shaken cold buttermilk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

- ▶ Preheat oven to 500°F with rack in middle.
- ▶ Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt into a large bowl. Add lard, coating it with flour, then rub between your fingertips until coarsely blended with some ½-inch lumps.
- ▶ Make a well in flour mixture, then add buttermilk, stirring just until a dough forms (it will be soft and sticky). Turn dough out onto a floured surface and knead 8 to 10 times. Roll out dough with a floured rolling pin into a 12-inch round (½ inch thick) and, using a fork dipped in flour, prick all the way through about every ½ inch.
- ▶ Cut out as many rounds as possible with a 2½- to 3-inch round cookie/biscuit cutter dipped in flour (do not twist cutter).

► Bake, almost touching, on an ungreased heavy baking sheet, rotating sheet after about 6 minutes if browning unevenly, until crusty and golden-brown, 12 to 15 minutes. Brush tops with melted butter and serve warm or at room temperature.

COOKS' NOTE: Flour mixture with lard can be made 1 day ahead and chilled, covered.

HOMEMADE BAKING POWDER

MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

ACTIVE TIME: 5 MIN START TO FINISH: 5 MIN

Edna Lewis trained Peacock's palate to detect the metallic undertones that commercial baking powders can impart, and he's never looked back. Here's their formula.

- ¼ cup cream of tartar
- 2 tablespoons baking soda

► Sift together cream of tartar and baking soda 3 times, then transfer to a clean dry jar and seal tightly.

COOKS' NOTES: Baking powder keeps in a cool, dark place 6 weeks.

• Homemade baking powder can be used in any recipe calling for commercial baking powder (and in the same quantity).

SPOON-BREAD MUFFINS

MAKES 12 MUFFINS

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 40 MIN

These muffins truly give the flavor of corn its due. They're not sweetened like corn bread (meaning like "Yankee" corn bread, says Peacock), and they have a very fine, almost custardy texture, from the extra-fine grind of the cornmeal (which makes them reminiscent of spoon bread). "Honey and soft butter play to the creamy, tangy flavor of the muffins particularly well," says Peacock.

- 1½ cups extra-fine-grind white cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2¼ cups well-shaken buttermilk
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

EQUIPMENT: a muffin pan with 12 (½-cup) muffin cups

► Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in middle. Butter muffin cups.
► Whisk together cornmeal, baking soda, and salt in a bowl. Whisk buttermilk into eggs, then add to cornmeal mixture and whisk vigorously until smooth. Whisk in butter.
► Divide batter among muffin cups and bake until edges begin to pull away from sides and a wooden pick inserted in center of a muffin comes out clean, 20 to 25 minutes. Turn out onto a rack and serve warm.

COOKS' NOTE: Muffins are best eaten within an hour of baking.

SUGARED BLACKBERRIES

MAKES ABOUT 1½ PINTS

ACTIVE TIME: 5 MIN START TO FINISH: 3 DAYS

(INCLUDES TIME FOR FLAVORS TO DEVELOP)

In the discussion of preserving fruit by canning versus freezing, why doesn't this technique ever come up? Peacock credits the late Edna Lewis for teaching him to mix mashed fruit with sugar for a sort of jam that he says keeps for a year when refrigerated. (We only tested up to one month, but so far, so good.) "It's a very old-fashioned

method," he says. "The flavor is fresh and intense and delicious spooned onto hot buttered buttermilk biscuits or yeast rolls." Try it with raspberries or strawberries, too.

- 3 cups fresh blackberries or ¾ lb frozen blackberries, thawed and drained
- 3 cups granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

► Mash berries with sugar and salt in a bowl with a potato masher until berries are liquefied and sugar has dissolved. Let stand, covered and chilled, 3 days (to allow flavors to develop), stirring once a day.

COOKS' NOTES: Do not purée berries in a food processor or blender, which will pulverize the seeds and impart a bitter taste.

• Sugared berries keep, chilled, 1 month.

WARM SWEET-POTATO PUDDING WITH APPLES AND CHESTNUTS

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 2½ HR

Think of the best sweet-potato pie you've ever eaten and then take away the crust so you can revel solely in its silky goodness. A bite of this pudding is full and round, with hits of chestnut and dried fruit.

- 4 medium sweet potatoes (about 2¼ lb)
- 1 cup bottled cooked chestnuts or dried chestnuts
- ¾ cup dried apple slices, cut into ⅓-inch dice
- ¾ cup unsweetened apple juice
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ¼ cup mild honey
- ½ teaspoon grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon (preferably Ceylon)
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 4 Medjool dates, pitted and cut into ¼-inch pieces

ACCOMPANIMENT: lightly sweetened whipped cream

► Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle.
► Bake sweet potatoes in a shallow baking pan until very soft, about 1½ hours.
► Meanwhile, soak dried chestnuts (if using) in boiling-hot water 1 hour, then drain. Coarsely chop chestnuts (cooked or dried).
► While dried chestnuts soak, bring dried apple and juice to a simmer in a small saucepan, then turn off heat. Let steep, covered, 30 minutes. Drain off and discard apple juice.
► Cool baked potatoes to warm, then peel and mash with a potato masher. Transfer 2 cups mashed sweet potato to a bowl and reserve any remainder for another use.
► Increase oven temperature to 375°F.
► Whisk butter and sugars into warm sweet potato along with honey, nutmeg, cinnamon, and ½ teaspoon salt until smooth. Whisk in eggs, vanilla, cream, and milk, then dates, chestnuts, and apple. Bake in a buttered 1½- to 2-quart baking dish (1½ to 2 inches deep) until just set, 40 to 50 minutes (center will continue to set as it cools).
► Cool to warm on a rack, about 20 minutes.

COOKS' NOTES: Sweet potatoes can be baked and mashed 1 day ahead. Chill, covered.

• Chestnuts can be soaked, drained, and chopped 1 day ahead.

Chill, covered.

(Continued on page 112)



Cayenne-spiked cheese straws are a favorite cocktail nibble. These are gloriously simple to make and always delicious.

GET YOUR DIXIE KICKS

EVEN THOUGH THE EXTRAVAGANCES OF THE SOUTHERN TABLE ARE LEGENDARY, SOMETIMES IT'S SIMPLE FOOD THAT INSPIRES THE MOST AWE. AND NOTHING SAYS 'I LOVE YOU' QUITE LIKE FRIED CHICKEN.

RECIPES BY LILLIAN CHOU PHOTOGRAPHS BY DITTE ISAGER



MENU SERVES 4

CHEESE STRAWS

FRIED CHICKEN WITH
BACON AND PEPPER
CREAM GRAVY

MASHED RED-SKINNED
POTATOES

BUTTERED PEAS WITH
ONION

SWEET CUCUMBER AND
RADISH SALAD

Haggipavlu Nemea '04

LEMON MERINGUE PIE



Sweet, buttered peas are left unadorned—just the way they should be—while crisp, juicy fried chicken gets a boost from smoky bacon.





Lightly dressed cucumbers and radishes add a clean crunch to a plateful of chicken and mashed potatoes. Could you please pass the gravy?





Here comes the lemon's star turn: a satiny custard, rich with egg yolks, sandwiched between a buttery crust and billowy meringue.



CHEESE STRAWS

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN HORS D'OEUVRES

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 1 HR (INCLUDES COOLING)

Don't let the delicate look of these hors d'oeuvres fool you. A touch of cayenne gives them a hint of heat that makes them a tasty accompaniment to a predinner cocktail—or even a cold beer.

¼ **lb coarsely grated extra-sharp Cheddar (1½ cups)**

1 cup all-purpose flour

¾ **stick cold unsalted butter, cut into tablespoons**

½ **teaspoon salt**

Rounded ⅛ teaspoon cayenne

1½ **tablespoons milk**

► Preheat oven to 350°F with racks in upper and lower thirds.

► Pulse cheese, flour, butter, salt, and cayenne in a food processor until mixture resembles coarse meal. Add milk and pulse until dough forms a ball.

► Roll out dough on a lightly floured surface with a lightly floured rolling pin into a 12- by 10-inch rectangle (⅛ inch thick). Cut dough with a lightly floured pizza wheel or lightly floured sharp knife into ⅓-inch-wide strips. Carefully transfer to 2 ungreased baking sheets, arranging strips ¼ inch apart. (If strips tear, pinch back together.)

► Bake, switching position of sheets halfway through baking, until pale golden, 15 to 18 minutes. Cool completely on baking sheets on racks, about 15 minutes.

COOKS' NOTE: Cheese straws can be made 2 days ahead and kept in an airtight container at room temperature.

FRIED CHICKEN WITH BACON AND PEPPER CREAM GRAVY

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 1½ HR (INCLUDES MARINATING)

Fried chicken in the South has many variations. Here, a buttermilk marinade helps keep the meat tender and juicy underneath crisp, golden skin; pepper-speckled gravy and bacon add savor and smoke.

FOR CHICKEN

1 whole chicken (about 3½ lb), cut into 8 pieces

3 cups well-shaken buttermilk

1 large onion, thinly sliced

2 teaspoons hot sauce such as Tabasco

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons paprika

⅛ **teaspoon cayenne**

8 bacon slices (½ lb)

About 3 cups vegetable oil

FOR GRAVY

4 teaspoons all-purpose flour

2 cups whole milk

EQUIPMENT: a deep-fat thermometer

MARINATE CHICKEN: Toss chicken with buttermilk, onion, Tabasco, and 2 teaspoons salt. Marinate chicken, covered and chilled, at least 12 hours.

COAT AND FRY CHICKEN: Put flour, paprika, cayenne, 1½ teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon black pepper in a paper or plastic bag and shake to combine well.

► Drain chicken well in a colander, discarding marinade and onions, then shake chicken in bag, 1 piece at a time, to coat well. Knock off excess flour and transfer to a sheet of wax paper. Let chicken air-dry 30 minutes.

► Preheat oven to 250°F with rack in middle. Set a cooling rack in a large shallow baking pan.

► Meanwhile, cook bacon in 2 batches in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until browned and crisp. Transfer to rack in baking pan and keep warm in oven.

► Scrape up brown bits from bottom of skillet with a spatula and strain bacon fat through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl, reserving bits in sieve. Wipe skillet clean and add strained bacon fat. Add enough oil to measure ½ inch fat in skillet and heat to 350°F over medium-high heat.

► Fry chicken 4 pieces at a time (keep each batch all white meat or all dark meat), skin sides down first, turning occasionally with tongs, until golden-brown and cooked through, 8 to 12 minutes for breasts and wings; 10 to 12 minutes for drumsticks and thighs. Transfer chicken to rack with bacon and keep warm in oven. Return fat to 350°F between batches and reserve after frying.

MAKE GRAVY: Strain frying fat through sieve into a bowl, then return 1 tablespoon fat and all brown bits in sieve to skillet. (Discard remaining frying fat once cool.) Whisk in flour and cook roux over medium heat, whisking, 1 minute. Whisk in milk, 1 teaspoon salt, and ¾ teaspoon pepper and bring to a boil, whisking, then simmer, whisking, until thick, 3 to 5 minutes.

► Serve chicken with gravy and bacon.

COOKS' NOTE: Chicken can be marinated up to 24 hours.

MASHED RED-SKINNED POTATOES

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 30 MIN

Mashed potatoes are at their best when you don't fuss with them too much, and leaving the skins on gives them a rustic, almost rakish air. These harmonize beautifully with a generous splash of the chicken's luxurious gravy, but remember to save room for dessert.

2 lb red potatoes (preferably organic)

1 cup whole milk

½ **stick unsalted butter, softened**

► Cut potatoes (with skin) into 1-inch pieces, then generously cover with cold salted water (1 teaspoon salt for 5 cups water) in a large saucepan and simmer, partially covered, until potatoes are tender, 10 to 15 minutes.

► Meanwhile, heat milk, butter, and ½ teaspoon pepper in a small saucepan over medium heat until butter is melted.

► Drain potatoes well in a colander and return to pan. Mash with a potato masher, and, while hot, stir in milk mixture. Season with salt.

COOKS' NOTE: Mashed potatoes are best served immediately but can be made 1 day ahead and chilled, uncovered, until cool, then covered. Reheat in a heavy saucepan over low heat, stirring in about ¼ cup milk.

BUTTERED PEAS WITH ONION

SERVES 4 TO 6

ACTIVE TIME: 5 MIN START TO FINISH: 20 MIN

There's no trick to this straightforward, old-fashioned side dish—just delicious ingredients simply prepared. Store-bought peas have been picked and frozen at their peak freshness; their delicate sweetness and bright color require little embellishment.

⅔ **cup water**

1 medium onion, chopped

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 lb frozen peas (3½ cups)

- ▶ Bring water, onion, and ½ teaspoon salt to a boil in a heavy medium saucepan, then cook over medium heat, covered, stirring occasionally, until onion is tender, about 5 minutes.
- ▶ Increase heat to medium-high and stir in butter and peas, then cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until peas are tender, about 8 minutes. Season with salt.

SWEET CUCUMBER AND RADISH SALAD

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

Like it or not, cucumbers and radishes have become virtually seasonless. Here, they provide a lively, refreshing counterpoint to the meal's overall richness. What's more, the whole dish can be put together in mere minutes.

- 1 large cucumber (1 lb)
- 1 bunch radishes
- ¼ cup cider vinegar
- 1½ tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

- ▶ Peel cucumber, then halve lengthwise and slice crosswise ¼ inch thick. Cut each radish lengthwise into 8 wedges.
 - ▶ Bring vinegar, sugar, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper to a boil in a small saucepan, stirring until sugar has dissolved, then stir in oil.
 - ▶ Pour hot dressing over cucumbers and radishes in a bowl and stir, then let stand 10 minutes. Stir and season with salt before serving.
- COOKS' NOTE:** Salad can be made 4 hours ahead and chilled, covered.

LEMON MERINGUE PIE

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 50 MIN START TO FINISH: 6½ HR (INCLUDES MAKING AND CHILLING PASTRY AND COOLING PIE)

This grand old American dessert is enormously popular down South for its clear, true sweetness (saved by the edginess of lemon) and its masterful contrast of textures. And somehow it is showstopping (think beauty pageant) and homey (think Aunt Bee) simultaneously.

FOR PIE

Pastry dough (recipe follows)

- 5 large egg yolks
- 1¼ cups sugar
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1¼ cups water
- ¼ cup whole milk
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into tablespoons

FOR MERINGUE

- 5 large egg whites, at room temperature 30 minutes
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup superfine granulated sugar

MAKE PIE SHELL: Preheat oven to 375°F with rack in middle.

- ▶ Roll out dough on a lightly floured surface with a lightly floured rolling pin into a 13-inch round, then fit into a 9-inch pie plate (4-cup capacity). Trim edge, leaving a ½-inch overhang, then crimp decoratively. Lightly prick shell all over with a fork, then chill 30 minutes.

- ▶ Line shell with foil and fill with pie weights or raw rice. Bake until side is set and edge is pale golden, about 20 minutes. Carefully remove weights and foil and bake shell until bottom and side are golden, about 20 minutes more. Remove from oven and reduce temperature to 350°F.

MAKE FILLING: Whisk together yolks in a small bowl.

- ▶ Whisk together sugar, cornstarch, and salt in a heavy medium saucepan. Gradually add water and milk, whisking until smooth. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking frequently as mixture begins to thicken. Remove from heat and gradually whisk about 1 cup milk mixture into yolks, then whisk yolk mixture into remaining milk mixture. Add lemon zest and juice and simmer, whisking constantly, 3 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in butter until incorporated. Cover surface with wax paper to keep hot.

MAKE MERINGUE: Beat whites with cream of tartar and salt using an electric mixer at medium speed until they hold soft peaks.

- Increase speed to high and add superfine sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, beating until meringue just holds stiff, glossy peaks.

ASSEMBLE AND BAKE PIE: Pour hot filling into warm pie shell and gently shake to smooth top. Spread meringue decoratively over hot filling, covering filling completely. ▶ Immediately bake until meringue is golden-brown, about 15 minutes. Cool completely on a rack, 2 to 3 hours. Cut with a serrated knife dipped in cold water.

COOKS' NOTES: It is the nature of meringue pies to “weep” liquid after cooling. If you want to lessen the amount of liquid the meringue weeps, see gourmet.com.

- Pie shell can be baked 1 day ahead and cooled completely, then kept, loosely covered, at room temperature.
- Lemon meringue pie is best the day it is made but keeps, covered and chilled, 2 days.

PASTRY DOUGH

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 1 (9-INCH) SINGLE-CRUST PIE

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MIN START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

There is nothing like a homemade piecrust. It's hard to say exactly why it's so amazing—it just is. This classic recipe calls for butter, for flavor, and shortening, for flakiness. Once you get the hang of it, you'll find that people will walk over hot coals for a piece of your pie.

- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ stick cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons cold vegetable shortening (preferably trans-fat-free)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 4 to 5 tablespoons ice water

- ▶ Blend together flour, butter, shortening, and salt in a bowl with your fingertips or a pastry blender (or pulse in a food processor) just until mixture resembles coarse meal with some roughly pea-size butter lumps. Drizzle 4 tablespoons ice water evenly over mixture (in a bowl) and gently stir with a fork until incorporated.

▶ Squeeze a small handful: If dough doesn't hold together, add more ice water, ½ tablespoon at a time, stirring until incorporated. Do not overwork dough or pastry will be tough.

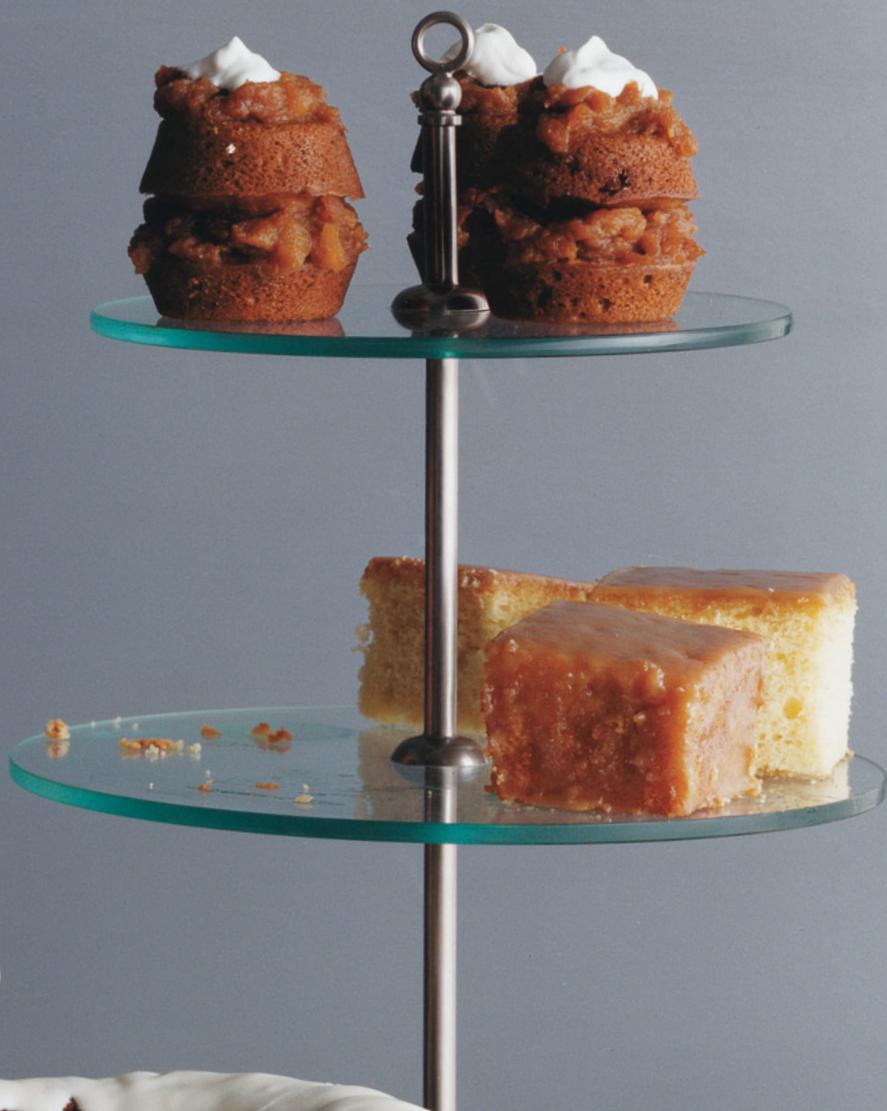
- ▶ Turn out dough onto a work surface and divide into 4 portions. With heel of your hand, smear each portion once or twice in a forward motion to help distribute fat. Gather all dough together, with a pastry scraper if you have one, and press into a 5-inch disk. If dough is sticky, dust lightly with additional flour. Chill, wrapped in plastic wrap, until firm, at least 1 hour.

COOKS' NOTE: Dough can be chilled up to 2 days or frozen, wrapped well, up to 3 months.👍

WINE ADVICE is on page 62.

BELLES OF THE BALL
PRETTY AND LUSH,
RICH AND DELICATE,
THESE CAKES ARE
THE TRUE SOUTHERN
BEAUTIES. RECIPES
BY RUTH COUSINEAU
PHOTOGRAPHS
BY ROMULO YANES





Citrus pound cake, mile-high chocolate cake, pecan fig bourbon cake, apple stack cakes, or caramel cake—which one will steal your heart?

FROM LOFTY ELEGANCE TO RUSTIC SIMPLICITY, MEMORABLE CAKES MAKE A SWEET FINALE FOR ANY OCCASION, NO MATTER HOW YOU STACK 'EM.

FRESH COCONUT LAYER CAKE

SERVES 8 TO 10

ACTIVE TIME: 1½ HR START TO FINISH: 3 HR

Nothing says festive as eloquently as a towering white coconut cake, and this particular one is breathtaking. Better yet, it's delicious—we've brushed each layer with a syrup made from coconut water and sugar to ensure that every bite is succulent. Shreds of delicate fresh coconut far surpass the packaged kind.

FOR COCONUT

- 2 (1½-lb) coconuts (see cooks' note, below)
- ¼ cup sugar

FOR CAKE LAYERS

3⅓ cups sifted cake flour (not self-rising; sift before measuring)

- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups whole milk
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon pure almond extract
- 2½ sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 1¾ cups sugar, divided
- 7 large egg whites, at room temperature 30 minutes

FOR FROSTING

- 3 large egg whites, at room temperature 30 minutes
- 2¼ cups sugar
- ¾ cup water
- 1½ tablespoons light corn syrup
- ½ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

EQUIPMENT: 3 (9- by 2-inch) round cake pans

PREPARE COCONUT: Preheat oven to 350°F with racks in upper and lower thirds. ▶Pierce softest eye of each coconut with a small screwdriver and collect liquid in 2 separate bowls to sample. If either tastes rancid, discard that coconut and liquid and start over with another. Strain liquid from 2 coconuts through a dampened-paper-towel-lined sieve into a 1-cup measure and set coconuts aside. (You should have about ¾ cup liquid. If not, add water.) Bring to a simmer with sugar and a pinch of salt in a small saucepan, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Cool and reserve.

▶Bake coconuts on lower rack 15 minutes. Leave oven on. Break shells with a hammer, then remove flesh with screwdriver, prying it out carefully. Peel brown membrane from flesh with a vegetable peeler. Coarsely grate enough coconut on large holes of a box grater to measure 5 cups.

MAKE CAKE LAYERS: Butter cake pans, then line bottom of each with a round of parchment paper and butter parchment. Flour pans, knocking out excess.

▶Sift together flour (3⅓ cups), baking powder, and salt.

▶Stir together milk and extracts. ▶Beat butter and 1½ cups sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed until pale and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. At low speed, add flour mixture in 3 batches alternately with milk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture and mixing until each addition is just incorporated.

▶Beat egg whites in another large bowl with cleaned beaters at medium speed until they just hold soft peaks. Beat in remaining ¼ cup sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, then beat until whites just hold stiff, glossy peaks. Stir one third of whites into batter, then fold in remaining whites gently but thoroughly.

▶Spread batter evenly in pans and rap pans on counter several times to eliminate air bubbles. ▶Place 2 pans on upper rack and 1 pan on lower rack and bake 20 minutes. Switch position of pans and bake until golden and a wooden pick inserted in center of each cake comes out clean, 10 to 15 minutes more. Cool cakes in pans on racks 5 minutes, then run a knife around edges of pans and invert cakes onto racks. Discard parchment and cool completely, about 1 hour.

MAKE FROSTING AND ASSEMBLE CAKE: Beat together egg whites, sugar, water, corn syrup, cream of tartar, and salt in a large deep bowl with a handheld mixer (clean beaters if necessary) until combined. Set bowl over a pot of simmering water and beat mixture at high speed until it holds stiff, glossy peaks, 5 to 7 minutes. (Humid weather may necessitate additional beating time.) Remove bowl from heat, then add vanilla and beat until frosting is cooled and very thick, 6 to 10 minutes. Transfer 2⅓ cups frosting to another bowl and stir in 2 cups coconut to make filling.

▶Put 1 cake layer on a cake stand or large plate. Brush top with one third of reserved coconut syrup, then spread with half of filling. Repeat with another layer, more syrup, and remaining coconut filling, then top with third layer. Brush top with remaining syrup, then cover cake with remaining frosting and coat with remaining coconut, gently pressing to help it adhere.

COOKS' NOTES: Coconuts can sometimes be rancid. You may want to buy an extra one.

- The egg whites in the frosting might not be fully cooked, which may be of concern if salmonella is a problem in your area.
- Cake layers can be made 3 days ahead and chilled, wrapped separately in plastic wrap.
- Cake can be assembled 4 hours ahead.

CITRUS POUND CAKE

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 3½ HR (INCLUDES COOLING)

Homemade pound cake hits all the right notes—it's buttery, rich, and immensely satisfying. This version is classic, with hints of lemon and orange, perfect with afternoon tea.

- 2 cups sifted cake flour (not self-rising; sift before measuring)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon grated orange zest
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 2 sticks (½ lb) unsalted butter, softened
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature 30 minutes
- 2 teaspoons fresh orange juice
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

GARNISH: confectioners sugar for dusting ›



A vision in white: Vanilla and almond extracts add brightness to the tropical coconut flavor of this southern icon.

- ▶Preheat oven to 325°F with rack in middle. Butter an 8½- by 4½-inch loaf pan.
- ▶Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt.
- ▶Mix together sugar and zests with an electric mixer at low speed until sugar is evenly colored, then add butter and beat at high speed until pale and fluffy, about 5 minutes. ▶Beat in eggs 1 at a time at medium speed, scraping down side of bowl frequently, then beat in juices and vanilla. At low speed, mix in flour mixture until just incorporated.
- ▶Spread batter in loaf pan and rap pan several times on counter to eliminate air bubbles. Bake until golden and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 1 to 1¼ hours. Cool in pan on a rack 30 minutes, then run a knife around edge of pan and invert cake onto rack. Cool completely, top side up.

COOKS' NOTE: Cake improves in flavor if made at least 1 day ahead and can be made 5 days ahead and kept, wrapped tightly, at room temperature.

PECAN FIG BOURBON CAKE

SERVES 12 TO 16

ACTIVE TIME: 40 MIN START TO FINISH: 3½ HR

Bundt cakes are always crowd-pleasers, and this dark, moist one won't disappoint. The combination of time-honored ingredients—sweet dried figs, crunchy pecans, and aromatic bourbon—will have your guests clamoring for the recipe.

FOR CAKE

- 1 lb dried Black Mission figs, hard tips discarded
- 2 cups water
- ½ cup bourbon
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 cups sifted cake flour (not self-rising; sift before measuring)
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon grated nutmeg
- 1¾ cups pecans (7 oz)
- 2 cups packed light brown sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature 30 minutes

FOR ICING

- 1 cup confectioners sugar
- 4½ tablespoons heavy cream
- 2 teaspoons bourbon
- ¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

EQUIPMENT: a 12-cup bundt pan

MAKE CAKE: Simmer figs in water in a heavy medium saucepan, covered, until figs are tender and most of liquid is absorbed, 35 to 40 minutes. Purée in a food processor with bourbon and vanilla. Cool to warm.

- ▶Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Butter and flour bundt pan, knocking out excess flour.
- ▶While oven preheats, sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg.
- ▶Lightly toast pecans in a shallow baking pan in oven, 8 to 10 minutes, then cool and coarsely chop. Leave oven on.
- ▶Beat together brown sugar, oil, and eggs in a large bowl with an electric mixer until thick and creamy, about 3 minutes. Stir in fig mixture. At low speed, mix in flour mixture until just incorporated, then fold in pecans.
- ▶Pour batter into bundt pan and bake until a wooden pick inserted

in center comes out clean, 1 to 1¼ hours. Cool cake completely in pan on a rack, then invert onto a plate.

MAKE ICING: Sift confectioners sugar into a bowl, then whisk in remaining icing ingredients until smooth. Drizzle over cake.

COOKS' NOTE: Cake (before icing) improves in flavor if made at least 1 day ahead and can be made 5 days ahead and kept in an airtight container at room temperature.

MILE-HIGH CHOCOLATE CAKE

SERVES 10 TO 12

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 3½ HR

This four-layer stunner may just render all your other chocolate-cake recipes obsolete. A generous amount of sour cream keeps the cake layers tender, and the frosting is a glossy triumph. It's a natural fit for practically any get-together—from a simple family birthday celebration to an elaborate dinner party.

FOR CAKE

- 5 oz fine-quality unsweetened chocolate, chopped
- 2¼ sticks unsalted butter, softened
- 2¾ cups sifted cake flour (not self-rising; sift before measuring)
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder (not Dutch-process)
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature 30 minutes
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 2 cups sour cream

FOR FROSTING

- 1 cup sugar
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 6 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder (not Dutch-process)
- 1½ cups whole milk
- 4 oz fine-quality unsweetened chocolate, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 6 sticks (1½ lb) unsalted butter, at room temperature

EQUIPMENT: 2 (8- by 2-inch) round cake pans

MAKE CAKE: Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Butter cake pans, then line bottom of each with a round of parchment paper and butter parchment. Flour pans, knocking out excess.

- ▶Melt chocolate with butter (see Tips, page 113), then cool.
- ▶Sift together flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder, and salt.

▶Beat eggs, sugars, and vanilla in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed until pale and thick, 3 to 5 minutes. At low speed, mix in melted chocolate until incorporated, then add flour mixture in 3 batches alternately with sour cream, beginning and ending with flour mixture and mixing until each addition is just incorporated. Spread batter evenly in pans and rap pans several times on counter to eliminate air bubbles.

▶Bake until cakes pull away from sides of pans and a wooden pick inserted in center of each comes out clean, 40 to 50 minutes. Cool in pans on a rack 10 minutes, then run a knife around edges of pans. Invert onto racks and discard parchment, then cool completely, about 1 hour.

MAKE FROSTING AND ASSEMBLE CAKE: Whisk together sugar, flour, cocoa powder, and a pinch of salt in a small heavy saucepan over

medium heat, then add milk and cook, whisking constantly, until mixture boils and is smooth and thick, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in chocolate and vanilla until smooth. Transfer to a bowl to cool to room temperature, covering surface with parchment paper to prevent a skin from forming.

▶ Beat butter with an electric mixer until creamy, then add cooled chocolate mixture a little at a time, beating until frosting is fluffy and spreadable.

▶ Cut each cake horizontally into 2 layers with a long serrated knife. Put 1 layer on a cake stand or large plate and spread top with 1¼ cups frosting. Repeat with 2 more layers, then add remaining layer and spread top and side of cake with remaining frosting.

COOKS' NOTES: Cake layers can be made 2 days ahead (but not split horizontally) and kept, wrapped tightly, at room temperature.

• Frosting can be made 2 days ahead and chilled, covered.

Bring to room temperature (about 1 hour) and beat until fluffy before using.

• Cake can be frosted 1 day ahead and chilled, covered.

CARAMEL CAKE

SERVES 9

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN START TO FINISH: 3 HR

While this little square cake may appear modest, its caramel flavor drew everyone in our test kitchens back for seconds and even thirds. Buttermilk lends a subtle tang and tenderizes the yellow cake, but it's the sweet glaze that really makes this dessert special.

FOR CAKE

- 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons sifted cake flour (not self-rising; sift before measuring)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ³/₄ teaspoon baking soda
- ¹/₂ teaspoon salt
- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature 30 minutes
- 1 cup well-shaken buttermilk

FOR CARAMEL GLAZE

- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¹/₂ cup packed light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

EQUIPMENT: a candy thermometer

MAKE CAKE: Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Butter an 8-inch square cake pan and line with a square of parchment paper, then butter parchment.

▶ Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.

▶ Beat butter and sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed until pale and fluffy, then beat in vanilla. Add eggs 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. At low speed, beat in buttermilk until just combined (mixture may look curdled). Add flour mixture in 3 batches, mixing until each addition is just incorporated.

▶ Spread batter evenly in cake pan, then rap pan on counter several times to eliminate air bubbles. Bake until golden and a wooden pick inserted in center of cake comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes. Cool in pan on a rack 10 minutes, then run a knife around edge of pan. Invert onto rack and discard parchment, then cool completely, about 1 hour.

MAKE GLAZE: Bring cream, brown sugar, corn syrup, and a pinch of salt to a boil in a 1½-quart heavy saucepan over medium heat, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Boil until glaze registers 210 to 212°F on thermometer, 12 to 14 minutes, then stir in vanilla.

▶ Put rack with cake in a shallow baking pan and pour hot glaze over top of cake, allowing it to run down sides. Cool until glaze is set, about 30 minutes.

COOKS' NOTE: Cake (before glazing) can be made 1 day ahead and kept in an airtight container at room temperature.

DRIED-APPLE STACK CAKES

MAKES 12 INDIVIDUAL CAKES

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR START TO FINISH: 2 DAYS (INCLUDES TIME FOR FLAVORS TO DEVELOP)

This winter dessert is based on traditional stack-cake recipes from Appalachia. Small layers (baked in muffin tins) are sandwiched together with a jamlike apple filling to create individual desserts that are unlike any cake you've come across.

FOR FILLING

- 9 oz unsulfured dried apples (4 cups; see Shopping List, page 112)
- 4 cups unfiltered apple cider
- 3 cups water
- ¹/₂ teaspoon ground mace
- 6 tablespoons packed light brown sugar

FOR CAKES

- ¹/₂ cup whole milk
- ¹/₂ tablespoon cider vinegar
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ¹/₂ teaspoon baking soda
- ¹/₂ teaspoon salt
- ¹/₂ teaspoon ground ginger
- Pinch of ground cloves
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 6 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- ¹/₂ cup molasses (not robust or blackstrap)
- 1 large egg

EQUIPMENT: 2 muffin pans with 12 (¹/₃- to ¹/₂-cup) muffin cups each

ACCOMPANIMENT: lightly sweetened whipped cream

MAKE FILLING: Simmer all filling ingredients and a pinch of salt in a 4- to 5-quart heavy pot, uncovered, stirring occasionally and mashing apples with a potato masher as they soften, until a thick purée forms, about 1½ hours. Cool completely.

MAKE CAKES: Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Butter muffin cups.

▶ Stir together milk and vinegar and let stand 10 minutes to curdle.

▶ Sift together flour, baking soda, salt, ginger, and cloves.

▶ Beat butter and brown sugar with an electric mixer at medium speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Beat in molasses and egg. At low speed, add flour mixture in 3 batches alternately with curdled milk, beginning and ending with flour mixture and mixing until each addition is just incorporated. Spread 1 heaping tablespoon batter in each muffin cup and bake just until a wooden pick inserted in center of a cake comes out clean with some crumbs adhering, 11 to 13 minutes. Cool 5 minutes in pans on racks, then invert onto racks to cool completely.

ASSEMBLE CAKES: Spread about 2 tablespoons filling on top of 1 cake and invert another cake over filling, then spread a heaping tablespoon filling on top. Make 11 more stacks (you will have about 2 cups filling left over). Transfer to an airtight container and chill at least 2 days for flavors to develop. Bring to room temperature before serving.

COOKS' NOTES: Cakes can be assembled 3 days ahead and chilled in an airtight container.

• Leftover filling can be used like apple butter. 🍏



NASHVILLE NATIVE

YOU DON'T NEED BBQ TO LEAD A PERFECTLY FINE LIFE IN THE CAPITAL OF COUNTRY MUSIC, JUST A TWANGY GUITAR ON EVERY CORNER AND A WAITRESS WHO CAN CARRY A TUNE.

BY ANN PATCHETT PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDY HARRIS

STOP IT UP!

FROM THE HIP

G

HANK SNOW
AND RAINBOW RANCH BAND

NICK CURLES
AND
MANTA ROBE

THE SEASONS BIGGEST ROCK & ROLL

DANCE

ROY ORBISON

and
THE SLENDER MEN

GRAND OLE OPRY

DOLLY PARTON

and her
TRAVELING BAND

morphine

BASEBALL

BALTIMORE

ELITE GIANTS

VS

EVANSVILLE

COLORED BOYS

BOSSE

THUR JUL

ME TIME

KK

R. ADMISSION

NASHVILLE **NOV. 16 & 17**

MUNICIPAL AUD.

NASHVILLE POLICE BENEFIT ASSOCIATION

MARTHA WHITE MILLS

BEVERLY HILLBILLIES

GRANT JENNER

and ELLY MAY

PLUS MANY GREAT CIRCUS ACTS

The WILBURN BROS. Lester & Earl
FLATT & SCROGGS
with **DON HELMS** & **LORETTA LYNN**

H

It's Better

PURE

Coffee

N

STATE THEATRE

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y.

SUN. AUG. 25

W S M GRAND OLE OPRY

JIM REEVES

and **THE WAGON MASTERS**

TOMMY HILL

Z

Two Corn Dogs

Coming Right Up!

KENTUCKY **AUG. 19-29**

1999

STATE FAIR

FF

W. S. M. GRAND OLE OPRY

PRESENTS IN PERSON

THE DIXIE

UNCLE MAACON

with **KIRK MCGEE**

GG

IN PER

B.B. K

JACK

WORLD CH

INVIT

BAR

SAT

LL

SEE-HEAR PERSON

LESTER EARL

FOGGY MT. BOYS

NEW RIVER RANCH

SUN APR 25

I

ERNEST TUBB SHOW

TEXAS TROUBADOR

HAYS COUNTY CIVIC CENTE

SEP. 17-8 TO

LIBERTY THEATR

WED. JAN. 17

U

BASEBALL

CHICAGO AMERICAN GIANTS

NEW ORLEANS EAGLES

SULPHUR DELL

NASHVILLE-TENN.

SUN SEPT 16

TIME 2:30 P.M.

AA

THE FUNMAKERS

A MUSICAL REVUE

PRETTY GIRLS SWEET SINGERS

NIMBLE DANCERS FUNNY COMEDIANS

LAUGH! - ALL IN FUN!

AA

TEMPERANCE HALL SCHOOL

FRI. DEC. 16-8P.M.

W S M GRAND OLE OPRY

UNCLE MAACON

KIRK MCGEE

GG

JACK

WORLD CH

INVIT

BAR

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LIBRARY

PECO

H O W

R I N T

GRAVES

MARKUS

MAJICIAN

ATC H

HOW

PRINT

THIS IS IT CATS!

THE TWIST ON STAGE

IN PERSON TWIST

REVUE CONTEST

FF

DUKE ELLINGTON

V

Match SHOW

PRINTERS

BB

DASH = 1/4 tsp.

3 tsp. = 1 tbsp.

2 tbsp. = 1 ounce

1 cup = 8 oz.

1 cup = 1/2 pt.

2 cups = 1 pint

4 cups = 1 quart

4 qts. = 1 gal.

8 pps = 1 gallon

HH

WORLD CH

INVIT

BAR

SAT

LL

PATSY CLINE

K

HOLSUM

SLICED TWISTED

NEW! - - BIGGER! MORE SLICES!

American Bread Co.

Nashville

Q

LOUIS ARMSTRONG

W

WORLD SERIES OF WRESTLING

NATIONAL GUARD ARMY

MON. OCT. 17

TOJO YAMAMOTO & GEORGE GULAS

VERSUS GYPSY JOE & THE CUBAN ASSASSIN

ABDULLAH THE BUTCHER

VERSUS BIG RED

CC

THE AIR CUSHION SOLE

MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

DR. MARTENS

UTILITY SHOES

II

WORLD CH

INVIT

BAR

SAT

LL

RODGERS

K

RODGERS

Q

LOUIS ARMSTRONG

W

ALRICO

DARE DEVILS & FUN RIDES

Leaping the Death Gap!

CC

Bigger Kicks Than The

ROCKETTES

II

WORLD CH

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BAR

SAT

LL

N order for me to explain my deep and complicated relationship with Nashville, my city, my home, I must first tell you about my relationship with pork. Truly, I came here loving the stuff. When I moved to Tennessee just before my sixth birthday, I would have said there was nothing in the world that was dearer to me than a bacon and apple-butter sandwich. It was 1969, a year that cared nothing about what might actually be in meat products, and so, like all other southern children, I ate Vienna sausages out of the can.

I ate Little Smokies and Underwood potted-meat products and loved Easter above all other holidays for the thick slab of ham it landed on my plate. Looking back, I'm not sure I subsisted on anything but pork in those early years. I was such a pale and skinny child, such a wisp, that it might be said that pork was the only thing that kept me tethered to the earth. So Tennessee, with its country ham and endless available sources of barbecue, was the perfect place for me to have ended up. At least, it was until I learned to read.

Like many other girls before me and after me, I got ahold of *Charlotte's Web* and studied it like the Bible. How I wanted to be Fern! She blocked her father's ax to save the runt pig, brought that pig into the kitchen and kept him by the stove. It was just about the time my family moved to a farm outside Nashville, and so I began my campaign for a pig of my own, a pig I could love and feed with a bottle, a pig that would follow me across the fields like a dog. My stepfather thought this was a reasonable request, and for my ninth birthday he drove me out to a farm where I stood on a fence while the farmer let 100 piglets rush through. I pointed to the pink one I wanted. He gave me the black one he caught. He knotted it into a burlap sack and put it in the backseat of our Chevy Nova. I was now a real country girl, a pig-owning girl. Back at home, I took my squealing pet out of his bag and scratched his chin and admired his long, curly lashes. I was in love, and in that love I made a vow: From that day forward, I would never eat pork or anything else that wore hooves again.

It is the basic law of country life: Don't name anything you plan on having for dinner. And while we were never going to eat my pig, my heart went out to all his brethren. The very pig that should have made me Tennessee down to my bones would in fact keep me from fitting in forever after. I was now the girl who ate buns smeared with barbecue sauce at the pork roasts. My beloved pig, who quickly shot past 200 pounds and fell in love with a horse and would never have anything to do with any of us again, also kept me from being a food writer of any merit.

In Nashville we are live and let live, so just because I placed my love for pigs above my love for pork, I never faulted others for not doing the same. Anyway, the happiest days of my childhood were spent with my sister's friend Betty Carter, whose family owned the Bellevue Market outside of town. We went to the Carters' after school to wait until my mother got off work. Mr. Carter made his own barbecue in a pit out back, and he was widely acknowledged to be the king of his craft. Mrs. Carter made white beans, corn bread, potato salad, and banana pudding in industrial-size containers to sell along with the barbecue, so it wasn't as if girls who doted on their pigs went hungry. We sat out on the cement steps in front of the store and drank Orange Crush and watched the trains rush by. It was a paradise.

One of the things that make Nashville Nashville is the way the country sits so snug up against the city (though this was truer when I was a girl, when cows grazed within a mile of Cain Sloan's department store). There are green spaces everywhere, with an extravagant blooming of flowering trees in the middle of March, just when a person most needs to see a redbud. The

Acme Farm Supply stayed in the middle of downtown until eight years ago. It's where we went to buy our chicken meal and dog food and sweet grain for the horses, and a bag of rabbit chow in the years we were lucky enough to have a rabbit. The car would smell wonderfully of molasses for days after the sacks were unloaded. Now the Acme building, still wearing its red-and-white Purina checkerboard, is a gift shop for tourists. That's what it means to live most of your life in one place: You spend an awful lot of time saying, "You see that gift shop? We used to buy our pig chow there." "See that art museum? It used to be the post office." But even as Nashville grows with horrifying speed (I have often suspected they hand out building permits in boxes of Cracker Jacks), much of what I loved as a child is still here, only in a slightly different form. In some cases, the old standbys have merely been expanded. The two restaurants I went to with my cousins while growing up are still bedrock: the Pancake Pantry and the Loveless Cafe. The Pancake Pantry is one of the city's greatest mysteries: In blinding rain and scorching heat and snow and wind, there is a line out the door, the pancake pilgrims waiting patiently with their newspapers for the chance to eat pancakes that, to my palate, seem pretty much like every other pancake in the world.

About 12 years ago, the establishment moved next door and tripled in size without seeming to change in any way. The lines stayed just as long despite the increased seating, the waitresses were just as harried and just as likely to call you "darling." Not only didn't the menu change, but I don't even think they wiped them off. It was business as usual. The Loveless went through a similar transformation, although the new wing is bigger and brighter. When I was a girl, the only choices for supper were chicken and country ham, and you had to call in your order two hours ahead and then still had to wait an hour after you arrived, sitting out on the cement steps that were not unlike the ones at the Carters' store. If it still feels like the same place now, it's because the Loveless, at its heart, has always been about the biscuits, and the biscuits haven't changed.

Some changes I really feel. Jones' Pet Shop, my favorite childhood haunt, is now a coffee shop called Fido. The puppies have been replaced by hipsters who sit in the booths all day with their personal computers writing something (novels?). The kind owners had the good sense to leave the Jones' Pet Shop sign out front for those of us who are still trying to find our way in the world. I go there because the eggs are good and I like to remember the pale pink cockatiels whose cage sat exactly where the cappuccino machine is now.

Of course there are plenty of places that haven't changed at all. Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, that legendary watering hole of sad guitarists, held on and is now that rarest thing: both a tourist shrine to the likes of Willie and Merle and Kris and Waylon, who used to get drunk there, and a place where present-day down-on-their-luck musicians still go to get drunk. And the Parthenon—that didn't change. Sure, you thought it was in Athens, but that's the old, crumbly one. Nashville has a full-size replica in a park across the street from Vanderbilt.

Some of the places that changed have been wildly improved, like the Country Music Hall of Fame, which moved to its splendid new digs in 2001. I like to think the Country Music Hall of Fame keeps me out of therapy by providing such an accurate record of the way Nashville used to be. Whenever there's something I'm missing from my past, say those great commercials of Loretta Lynn pitching for Crisco, I can go to the Hall of Fame and watch them again. When I'm missing the rhinestones and enormous bouffant hairdos I remember from my youth, I know exactly where to find them—vital, living pieces of history.

There are also the places that changed only to change back again. The Ryman Auditorium, the original and profoundly



Carol Fay has been making biscuits at the Loveless Cafe for 27 years. Pulled pork for sandwiches comes right from the smoker at Hog Heaven.





Single track: Bridging the Cumberland River from Germantown to East Nashville. Strings attached: Banjos hang together at Gruhn Guitars.



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FOR ANY
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Life
Silsion

historic home of the Grand Ole Opry downtown (think Hank Williams; think the Carter Family; think Patsy Cline and Johnny Cash and everyone else you ever loved in country music), closed its doors in 1974 when the Opry was moved out to a depressingly sterile megahall in the hinterlands. The Ryman sat empty for 20 years but was then brought back to life. Now it is once again the church of music where you go to hear Emmylou Harris and Gillian Welch and Elvis Costello and everyone else you wish was at the Opry anyway.

Not that you need to go to the Ryman to hear music. There is absolutely no formula for finding good music in Nashville. There are no insider clubs, no secret passwords. Turn over a rock in this town and you will find a guy with a guitar singing more sweetly than anything you have ever imagined. They will be singing in the pizza joints out on Nolensville Road, they will be singing in the tourist bars that line lower Broad, they will be singing in the famous Bluebird Cafe, where the six o'clock show on a Tuesday night featuring nobody you've ever heard of will sell out days in advance. Ask your waitress to sing something for you. It doesn't matter where you're eating. She'll break your heart. I once went to hear Odetta sing, and when she commanded the audience to follow her for a round of "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore," this group of random strangers broke into the most perfect three-part harmony imaginable. That's what people do here: They sing. When I go out for music, I like

the Station Inn, but that's because I favor bluegrass over country. Inevitably, half the people in the audience will have a mandolin in their knapsack. Some will be brought up onstage to play. Pizza and popcorn are served. Eat before you go.

Maybe you'll eat barbecue. Like the music, there is absolutely no secret to getting it right. It is ubiquitous, and what is best is only a matter of personal taste. Because I cannot judge in this matter, I asked my friends to help me. The recommendations fell like rain: Pig & Pie, Mary's Pit, Judge Bean's. I took my cutest friend, the 23-year-old Niki Castle, along to help me, and we picked up pork from Whitt's and Hog Heaven and Jim 'N Nick's and Mothership. Barbecue people are friendly, and they flirted with Niki like mad, plying her with free sweet tea and free pickles and, most boldly from a boy who asked to carry our order out to our car, a free order of macaroni and cheese. I invited 30 people over for dinner and set up stations with potato salad and sauce and slaw. I posted comment cards in front of piles of buns. Try each barbecue and each side and rate them one through four, I said. The result was bedlam. No one would leave the kitchen. No one agreed on anything, except that it was all really fabulous. Somebody brought a guitar, and somebody else brought a football. That's the kind of parties we have here in Nashville. Even those of us who don't eat pork and were never that crazy about country music manage to have a good time. It's that kind of town. ☺

THE DETAILS

STAYING THERE

The Hermitage Hotel (615-244-3121; thehermitagehotel.com; from \$299), right downtown, is now Nashville's prettiest, having recently undergone a major renovation. Its in-house restaurant, The Capitol Grille, is also good. **The Union Station Hotel** (615-726-1001; wyndham.com/hotels/BNAUS; from \$179) used to be the train station in town. I wish it still was a train station, but short of that it's a fine hotel. It's also located next door to the Frist art museum, which makes culture convenient. **Loews Vanderbilt Hotel** (615-320-1700; loewshotels.com; from \$269) is smack in the center of things, directly across from Vanderbilt University. It's a more modern choice. There's likely to be a cotillion of some kind going on in the ballroom on Saturday nights.

EATING THERE

My favorite Nashville restaurant is **Margot Café and Bar** (1017 Woodland Street; 615-227-4668), in East Nashville. I think it's pretty much everybody's favorite restaurant. It's where I go for my birthday every year, and I book my table for Valentine's Day in early January. Margot's new place, **Marché** (1000 Main Street; 615-262-1111), is exactly one parking lot away. It serves breakfast and lunch and does a modest take-away business with the same style the original establishment brings to dinner. The place I'm most likely to eat on any night I don't feel like cooking is **Caffe Nonna** (4427 Murphy Road; 615-463-0133). It's a tiny Italian restaurant with an even tinier menu, every item of which is a reliable pleasure. If you go there more than twice, they'll remember you forever. **F. Scott's** (2210 Crestmoor Road; 615-269-5861) is Nashville's venerable fancy restaurant, and while the ambience is somewhat chilly, the menu is a constant source of delight. The chef is a great believer in reinvention, so nothing ever gets tired. **Flyte** (718 Division Street; 615-255-6200) is new and specializes in locally sourced organic ingredients. They're happy to serve you three small glasses of wine or three small portions of soup.

Nashville has strong claims to being the home of the meat-and-three (one meat, three sides), which is really just another way

of saying good southern cooking. If I'm throwing off all notions of health and longevity and giving myself over to fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and cobbler, I'll go first to **Swett's** (2725 Clifton Avenue; 615-329-4418), although such cravings are also well served at **Monell's** (1235 6th Avenue North; 615-248-4747) and at the **Loveless Cafe** (8400 Highway 100; 615-646-9700). If you must stand in line for pancakes, get over to the **Pancake Pantry** (1796 21st Avenue South; 615-383-9333). And while it isn't a restaurant, I would be remiss not to mention **Las Paletas Gourmet Popsicles** (2907 12th Avenue South; 615-386-2101). The beautiful popsicle sisters handcraft both fruit and ice cream *paletas* from an old Mexican recipe. The flavors change hourly. The lines can be long. The popsicles (and the sisters) have cult status.

BEING THERE

Southern women are masters at looking their best, and there are plenty of spas here to help them. My hands-down favorite is **Escape Day Spa & Salon** (6000 Highway 100; 615-352-3545). I would like to have my ashes interred in one of their little lockers when I die. Get a facial from Lily, followed by a massage. You'll thank me. There are very few stores like **Jamie** (4317 Harding Road; 615-292-4188) left anymore. It is upscale women's shopping, about as upscale as it gets, with designer clothes, furs, shoes, jewelry, and cosmetics. There are living room areas in which to deposit one's husband or significant other. Someone will bring you a Coke. You can bring a small dog. Make a day of it. People come to **Gruhn Guitars** (400 Broadway; 615-256-2033) from all over the world. Any guitar can be played. Any amount of money can be spent. Expect to see the pros leaning up against the counters making beautiful music. Speaking of music, don't forget to drop by the **Bluebird Cafe** (4104 Hillsboro Pike; 615-383-1461) and **Tootsie's Orchid Lounge** (422 Broadway; 615-726-0463). Half museum, half shop, **Hatch Show Print** (316 Broadway; 615-256-2805) has done the posters for almost every musical event, state fair, and tent revival in the South. Their bold graphics represent Nashville as much as the Opry ever did. —A.P.



The popsicles at Las Paletas are from an old Mexican recipe. Tootsie's is a haven for struggling musicians, as well as a shrine to those who've made it.



what we learned this month ... behind the scenes

KITCHEN NOTEBOOK

AFTER A TUTORIAL IN BAKING ONE OF THE SOUTH'S ICONIC BREADS, "HOT'NS"—BISCUITS RIGHT OUT OF THE OVEN—CAN BE YOURS ... IT'S ALSO TIME FOR COUNTRY HAM, POT GREENS, GUINEA HEN, NEW-CROP PECANS, DRIED CORN AND CHESTNUTS, AND A SACK OF EXTRA-SPECIAL CORNMEAL.



PERFECT BISCUITS

Think of chef Scott Peacock's light yet substantial biscuits (page 80) as a balancing act between moist and dry: You must get a quick, thorough incorporation of lard and buttermilk into the dry ingredients without activating the gluten in the flour, which happens when you overwork the dough. You can use regular all-purpose flour, made of varying combinations of soft winter wheat and hard summer wheat, but Peacock—or any other southerner, for that matter—will tell you the secret to superlative biscuits is White Lily (see Shopping List, page 112), a flour from Memphis that's milled entirely from soft winter wheat, which is lower in protein (gluten) than hard summer wheat. Lard is key as well; its 100 percent fat content will give you the flakiness you want. It should be very fresh and very cold. (1) Work the lard into the flour, baking powder, and salt until it's coarsely

blended. After you've added the buttermilk, stir briskly with a fork (think of tossing a salad with your hands) until (2) a soft, sticky dough forms. Then knead the dough about ten times to further incorporate the fat. Be gentle, but in a no-nonsense kind of way. (3) Using a rolling pin to flatten the dough ensures an even thickness. Before cutting biscuits, "dock" the dough—that is, pierce it all the way through with a fork at regularly spaced intervals. The holes allow the steam that collects under a dough in the oven to escape during baking, preventing uneven rising. (4) Don't twist the cutter when stamping out biscuits; otherwise, you'll pinch the edges and inhibit the rise. Peacock also snuggles his biscuits close together on the baking sheet. That proximity helps keep the biscuits from searing on their sides, allowing the flaky layers to expand to their fullest. —Jane Daniels Lear

ROMULO YANES FOOD STYLING: MAGGIE RUGGIERO



TASTING THE SOUTH

(1) Dried chestnuts (page 81) no longer figure in southern cooking—except in the hands of imaginative chefs like Scott Peacock—but before chestnut blight destroyed American trees in the early 1900s, the dried nuts were ground into meal and baked into pones and skillet breads. Jean Anderson, the author, most recently, of the superb *A Love Affair with Southern Cooking*, surmises that these techniques were learned from the Cherokee. (2) If you buy pecans (page 112) like the plump, buttery Elliott cultivar shown here, in the autumn and early winter, you'll be getting fresh “new-crop” nuts. They keep in the freezer for months. (3) Cope’s corn (page 54) is parched until the natural sugars caramelize, which is why it’s dark golden and so sweet. It’s thought of as a Pennsylvania Dutch ingredient, but parching was a Native American technique that was used most notably by

the Cherokee. (4) Lean, flavorful guinea hen (page 36), found in southern barnyards, was treated like a prized game bird. (5) An entire shank end of a country ham, dry-cured until firm and intensely salty, is one serious hunk of meat, which is why we swear by prepackaged slices (pages 36 and 80); slivers of this are also delicious when added to a creamy pasta sauce or mac and cheese. Pot greens (pages 37 and 56) each have their own character, and, when cooked together, they are full of nuance. They’re at their best after a frost. (6) Collards are mellow and meaty. (7) Turnip greens are sharp and spicy, and (8) mustard greens have a radishy hotness. (9) J. T. Pollard’s extra-fine-grind white cornmeal absorbs more liquid than a coarse grind, resulting in spoon-bread muffins (page 81) with an ethereal texture. For sources, see Shopping List (page 112). —J.D.L.

STAYING ON ALONE

Continued from page 65

and made everything in an open fireplace. He's still proud that he was able to honor her so abundantly from his heart and hands.

We ended the day at Watershed, a sleek, airy restaurant in a former auto-repair shop, and he beams when the kitchen sends out the BLT salad—cool, immaculate iceberg lettuce, heirloom tomatoes, hefty slivers of a flavorful bacon, and square, toasty croutons, all tossed gently in a homemade mayonnaise.

Peacock is right: This could be the best salad in the world. His mother used to make it in a big Tupperware bowl, and he remembers eating the soggy, delicious leftovers from the refrigerator.

As he hunts down the last bits of lettuce on his plate, he says he's ready now to move ahead. He wants to see Paris this year, he's harboring a "semi-dream" of cooking in New York someday, and most of all he wants to finish writing the memoir he's sweating over, about his relationship with Miss Lewis.

He has found that he writes best in a situation of controlled chaos—with the TV blaring, for instance, or in a busy café. Big chunks of his first book, *The Gift of Southern Cooking*, a virtual hymn to tranquil meals with friends that he co-wrote with Edna Lewis, were composed in Manhattan at a rickety Sbarro restaurant in Times Square.

More food comes out: Pimento cheese, grits with shrimp paste, fried okra, plum buckle—everything bursting with personality and clear, rich flavors. He had eaten these things all his life, but not until he met Miss Lewis did he start to take them seriously. "She is part of everything," he says. "It is marvelous in a weird way, the dynamic relationship you have with someone who is dead. It continues to grow. I have a breathing, living relationship with her at this point." He gazes affectionately at the food on the table, seeing beyond it. "I miss her incredibly. What helps is making biscuits." 🍞

COMING NEXT MONTH

- How the farm bill will affect our country's food—and your daily life
- The ultimate Sunday supper (including the best meatloaf you've ever tasted)
- British superchef Marco Pierre White reinvents himself—in Jamaica
- An easy, exotic Algerian menu
- Step by step: Pastry wizard François Payard's favorite chocolate cake
- Oregon's Willamette Valley

GOOD DAY SUNSHINE

Continued from page 81

BOURBON PECAN TARTS

SERVES 8 (OR 9)

ACTIVE TIME: 35 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR

More nuts than filling and a seriously buttery crust make for a beguilingly sweet finish.

FOR COOKIE CRUST

- 4 sticks unsalted butter, diced
- 4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt

FOR FILLING

- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- ⅓ cup unsalted butter, melted
- ½ cup dark corn syrup
- ½ cup light corn syrup
- 3 tablespoons bourbon
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 3 cups pecan halves

EQUIPMENT: a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment; 9 (4½-inch) fluted tart pans with removable bottoms

MAKE CRUST: Put a baking sheet on middle rack of oven and preheat to 375°F. Mix crust ingredients in mixer at low speed until a dough forms, 5 to 7 minutes. Press ⅓ cup dough onto bottom and up side of each tart pan, making sides slightly thicker. Chill.

MAKE FILLING: Whisk together eggs, sugar, butter, corn syrups, bourbon, vanilla, and salt. ▶ Divide pecans among tarts, then add filling. Bake on hot baking sheet in oven until filling is just set and crust is golden-brown, 30 to 35 minutes. Cool on racks completely before removing sides of pans.

COOKS' NOTE: Tarts can be made 2 days ahead and kept in an airtight container at room temperature.

BOILED COFFEE

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 20 MIN

Boiling this strong coffee with eggshells clarifies it by helping the grounds to settle.

- 10 tablespoons medium-ground full-flavored coffee
- 10 cups cold water (preferably filtered)
- 5 empty eggshells, crushed

▶ Bring all ingredients to a full boil in a large nonreactive saucepan, partially covered, then simmer, tightly covered, 5 to 7 minutes. ▶ Let stand, covered, off heat until grounds settle, about 2 minutes. Carefully strain through a fine-mesh sieve into a pot. 🍵

SHOPPING LIST

FOOD

WHAT IS SOUTHERN? Page 36: Römertopf 4-quart clay baker—romertopfonline.com. Page 42: Salsify—farmers markets and specialty foods shops. Page 43: Unsulfured dried apples—natural foods stores. **GOOD DAY SUNSHINE** Page 80: Country ham—smithfieldhams.com. Page 81: Extra-fine-grind white cornmeal—J. T. Pollard Milling Co. (334-588-3391). **BELLES OF THE BALL** Page 97: Unsulfured dried apples—natural foods stores. **KITCHEN NOTEBOOK** Page 106: White Lily flour—White Lily (800-742-6729). Page 107: Dried chestnuts—Allen Creek Farm (360-887-3669). New-crop pecans—Pearson Farm (888-423-7374) and Ellis Bros. Pecans (800-635-0616). Cope's corn—John Cope's (800-472-8787). Guinea hen—D'Artagnan (800-327-8246). Prepackaged country ham—Benton's Smoky Mountain Country Hams (423-442-5003; ask for hickory-smoked country ham boneless center cuts) and Wallace Edwards and Sons (800-222-4267; ask for uncooked boneless Virginia ham slices; six-pound minimum). Pot greens—Asian markets. Extra-fine-grind cornmeal—J. T. Pollard Milling Co.

OTHER THINGS

TABLE OF CONTENTS Page 14: "Fried Chicken & Sweet Potato Pie" produced by Bailey Barash—bbarash productions, LLC (bailey@bbarash.com). **GOOD DAY SUNSHINE** Pages 66–67: "Bibliothèque" cabinet, Louis XVI dining chairs, and Italian three-drawer chest—ABC Carpet & Home (212-473-3000). Papier-mâché bird—Takashimaya (212-350-0100). Louis XVI chair with yellow upholstery and Blanc de Chine lamp—Paterae, Inc. (212-941-0880). Lucite and pewter candlestick—Newel (212-758-1970). Page 68: Glasses by Deborah Ehrlich—Takashimaya. Shirt—Nicholas K (212-966-0325). Herringbone "Cosby" hat—Still Life (212-575-9704). Pants—www.fredperry.com. Dresses—Nanette Lepore (212-219-8265). Bracelets—Ben-Amun (212-944-6480). Page 71: "Dumile" Panama hat—Still Life. Shirt—Nicholas K. Page 74: Ceramic serving bowls—Takashimaya. Page 75: Pants—Banana Republic (888-277-8953). Dress—Ports 1961 (866-433-7678). Bracelet by Judith Haas and stacking rings by Marcia Moran—Clarabella (212-979-0270). Pages 78–79: Silver flatware and ceramic bowl—Takashimaya. **GET YOUR DIXIE KICKS** Page 82: Dish—Bardith Limited (212-737-3775). Page 85: Square platter—John Derian Co. (212-677-3917). Pages 86, 87, and 88: All plates—Bardith Limited. **BELLES OF THE BALL** Page 92: "San Lorenzo" cake server—Tiffany & Co. (800-843-3269). 🍴

RECIPE INDEX JANUARY

SEE KITCHEN NOTEBOOK, PAGE 106, FOR SPECIALTY INGREDIENTS IN THIS ISSUE.

COOKING TIPS

Measure liquids in glass or clear plastic liquid-measuring cups and **dry ingredients** in nesting dry-measuring cups that can be leveled off with a knife.

Measure flour by spooning (not scooping) it into a dry-measuring cup and leveling off with a knife; do not tap or shake cup.

Do not sift flour unless specified in recipe. If sifted flour is called for, sift before measuring. (Disregard "presifted" on the label.)

Salt: Measurements are for table salt unless otherwise specified.

Black pepper is always freshly ground.

Spices: Store away from heat and light; buy in small quantities.

Toast whole spices in a dry heavy skillet over medium heat, stirring, until fragrant and a shade darker, 3 to 5 minutes. **Toast nuts** in a shallow baking pan in a 350°F oven until golden, 5 to 15 minutes. **Toast seeds** either way.

Melt chocolate in a metal bowl set over barely simmering water, stirring; or microwave at low to medium power for short intervals (30 seconds or less; stir to check consistency).

Baking pans: We prefer light-colored metal. (If you are using dark metal, including nonstick, your baked goods may brown more, and the cooking times may be shorter. Lower oven temperature 25°F to compensate.)

Nonreactive cookware includes stainless steel, glass, and enameled cast iron; avoid pure aluminum and uncoated iron, which can impart an unpleasant taste and color to recipes with acidic ingredients.

Water bath for baking: Put filled pan in a larger pan and place in oven, then add enough boiling-hot water to reach halfway up side of smaller pan.

Produce: Wash and dry before using.

Greens and chopped/sliced leeks: Wash in a large bowl of water, agitating them, then lift out and drain.

Fresh herbs or greens: Use only the leaves and tender stems.

Citrus zest: Remove the colored part of the rind only (avoid the bitter white pith). For strips, use a vegetable peeler. For grating, we prefer a rasplike Microplane zester, which results in fluffier zest, so pack to measure.

Chiles: Wear protective gloves when handling.

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THE LAST TOUCH

Nut Job It's a mixed blessing that pecans make such splendid pies because it's so easy to forget how good they are in everything else. Here are four tasty reminders.

RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY PAUL GRIMES



DEVILED HAM AND PECAN TEA SANDWICHES

MAKES 32 TEA SANDWICHES

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

- ½ lb cooked ham, cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ medium onion, quartered
- 3 large sweet gherkins
- ½ cup pecans, toasted (see Tips, page 113) and cooled
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 16 slices firm white sandwich bread

GARNISH: chopped parsley and pecans

► Pulse all ingredients except bread in a food processor until finely chopped and combined well.

► Spread ham mixture (¼ cup per sandwich) between slices of bread. Discard crusts, then cut sandwiches into triangles.

COOKS' NOTE: Sandwiches can be chilled, covered with dampened paper towels, then plastic wrap, 3 hours.

PECAN CURRANT BREAD

MAKES 1 TEA LOAF

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 2¾ HR

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups pecans, toasted (see Tips, page 113), cooled, and chopped
- ½ cup dried currants
- 1 cup whole milk
- ½ cup vegetable oil

- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

► Preheat oven to 325°F with rack in middle.

► Whisk together dry ingredients, pecans, and currants in a large bowl. In another bowl, whisk together remaining ingredients until combined well. ► Stir wet ingredients into dry ingredients until just combined. Transfer batter to a well-buttered 9- by 5-inch loaf pan, smoothing top, and bake until golden-brown and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 1¼ hours. ► Cool in pan on a rack 10 minutes, then turn out onto rack and cool 1 hour more.

SAUTÉED TROUT WITH PECANS

SERVES 4

ACTIVE TIME: 25 MIN START TO FINISH: 25 MIN

- 4 trout fillets with skin
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1¼ sticks unsalted butter, divided
- ¾ cup pecans, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ⅓ cup chopped parsley

► Pat fillets dry and rub flesh sides with cayenne, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon black pepper (total). Dredge in flour. ► Heat ½ stick butter in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until foam subsides, then cook trout, skin side down, until skin is golden-brown, about 4 minutes. Turn fish over and cook until just cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes more. Transfer to a plate with a slotted spatula

and keep warm, loosely covered with foil.

► Pour off butter from skillet and wipe clean, then cook pecans with remaining ¾ stick butter, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until golden-brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and parsley and spoon over trout.

PECAN SHORTBREAD COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN COOKIES

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MIN START TO FINISH: 1½ HR

- 1⅓ cups pecan halves (6 oz)
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1¾ cups all-purpose flour

► Preheat oven to 350°F with rack in middle. Toast pecans in oven (see Tips, page 113), then cool. Leave oven on.

► Pick out about 36 of the best-looking pecan halves for topping cookies and finely chop remainder.

► Blend together butter, sugars, vanilla, and salt in a bowl with a fork until combined well. Stir in flour and chopped pecans until a soft dough forms (dough will be sticky). ► Form 1-inch balls of dough and arrange 2 inches apart on 2 ungreased baking sheets. Flatten balls to ⅓ inch thick using bottom of a glass (flour it if necessary), then push a pecan half onto center of each cookie. ► Bake, 1 sheet at a time, until edges are golden, about 20 minutes. Cool cookies on sheet 5 minutes, then transfer to a rack to cool. 🍪