

Southern Cooking Flavors & Favorites

When I think of Southern cooking or flavors, foods such as buttermilk fried chicken, hush puppies, shrimp and grits, cooked greens with bacon, biscuits and gravy, skillet corn bread, oyster po'boys, black-eyed peas, and peach cobbler are just a few that come quickly to mind. You probably have favorite southern-style recipes you bring out from time to time, particularly for picnics and summer gatherings. Cooking Corner this week shares some personal favorites.

Shrimp-Boil Vegetable Bowls

Frozen vegetables and precooked shrimp make this an easy dish for lunch or dinner. Feel free, of course, to substitute home-cooked potatoes and green beans, if preferred. Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients:

- 1-1/2 lb. pkg. microwavable red potatoes (steamables)
- 1 (8 oz.) pkg. microwavable haricots verts (French green beans)
- 1 lb. large peeled, deveined, cooked, well-drained shrimp
- 2 cups frozen corn, thawed and drained (or fresh from cob in season)
- 3 tablespoons capers, chopped
- 2 tablespoons lemon zest
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped

Prepare potatoes according to package directions. Plunge into a bowl of ice water until completely cooled, 1 minute; drain well and set aside. Repeat procedure with green beans. Cut potatoes into quarters; cut green beans in half crosswise. Combine

potatoes, beans, cooked shrimp and corn in large bowl. In a small bowl, combine capers, lemon zest and juice, vinegar, and seasonings. Whisk in olive oil until combined. Pour caper dressing mixture over shrimp mixture; toss to coat. Stir in chopped parsley and serve in bowls with hush puppies or cooked rice.

Cooking Corner

with Nancy Adams



Hush Puppies

Shhhh...these are one of the best-kept secrets perfected by our neighbors to the south. Serve as an appetizer with mustard or hot sauce, and pickles, or as a side dish. Makes about 2 dozen puppies.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons dried onion
- 1/2 teaspoon Tabasco hot sauce
- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 cup self-rising yellow cornmeal
- 1/2 cup self-rising white cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- vegetable oil for frying

Combine the buttermilk, dried onion and hot sauce; whisk together and let sit for 5 minutes. Stir in the flour, cornmeals, baking soda, salt and pepper and refrigerate for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, heat oil to 325 degrees in a deep pot or electric fry pan. Put the hush puppy mix into a sealable plastic freezer bag and cut off a 1/2-inch corner so the bag can serve as a piping bag. Squeeze the mixture through the hole, cutting off the batter with a butter knife, and drop the batter into the hot oil. Cook for 3-4 minutes, until golden brown. Drain on paper towels and serve. Note: if you don't have both varieties of cornmeal, use 1 cup total of just one kind. I suspect the two kinds are suggested in this recipe to settle the age-old argument of which is better, white or yellow cornmeal?

Fried Pork Cutlets with Buttermilk Gravy

Similar to a southern chicken-fried steak, these cutlets have a lovely, crisp coating that stands up well to the herb-buttermilk gravy. Nice served with a side of fried apples and some biscuits. Makes 6 servings.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup stone-ground cornmeal
- 1/4 cup quick-cooking grits
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup whole buttermilk
- 6 boneless pork sirloin cutlets
- 4-6 tablespoons canola oil, divided
- Buttermilk-Thyme Gravy (recipe follows)

In a shallow dish, stir together cornmeal, grits, salts, and pepper. In another shallow dish, place buttermilk. Dip pork in buttermilk, letting excess drip off. Dredge in cornmeal mixture, shaking off excess. In large cast iron skillet, heat 4 tablespoons oil over medium-heat. Working in batches, fry pork, turning occasionally, until browned and crisp, 4-5 minutes per side. (Add remaining oil as needed). Serve with buttermilk gravy and sprinkle with additional pepper. Buttermilk-Thyme Gravy: In a small skillet, heat 1/3 cup canola oil over medium-high heat. Add 2 cloves minced garlic and cook about 30 seconds until fragrant. Add 1/2 cup flour and whisk to combine; cook until browned and bubbly, about 3 minutes. Whisk in 2 cups buttermilk and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme (1 teaspoon dried); cook until thickened, about 3 minutes. Serve with pork.

The Art Of Cooking Pasta

By Matthew Blau

Seems simple, I know, but you'd be surprised how many times people ask me how to cook pasta properly and consistently. First, it is very important that you buy the right pasta, but with so many pasta choices, how to know which to buy? There are so many great boutique brands these days that are fantastic, so if you are at a gourmet grocery store, you'll probably do well no matter what you pick for \$10 a pack or so.

If you're at a regular supermarket there are only two commonly available brands that stand above the others. They are DeCecco, in the light blue box, and DelVerde, in the green box. Both claim that their pasta is so good because of the water they use. I don't know the truth of that, but their pasta does seem to have a lot more body and flavor than others I've tried.

Pasta should be served al dente, which basically means it has some toothiness to it. I would always look at the directions on the box and then set a timer for a minute under the shortest cook time given. Then just keep on it until it's where you like it to be. Cook it in plenty of rapidly boiling, well salted water.

I have heard of people throwing spaghetti against a wall or a refrigerator, which you are more than welcome to do, if you find that it works and you don't mind cleaning squiggly stains off the walls, appliances, and possibly family members. I prefer just to taste it and see if it's ready. Up to you.

Here are two really important parts of the process that are often overlooked. Depending on what pasta dish you are making, try to reserve some of the cooking water from the pasta. It is a great way to moisten preparations that are somewhat dry, and make them saucier. Next, *don't rinse pasta!* If you are not going to use it for a little while, simply spread it out on a pan and add some olive oil. Starch is necessary for good pasta, and rinsing washes it all off and you end up with a far inferior final product.

So now you're ready to use your pasta with your favorite sauces and preparations. I will offer some suggestions and recipes in upcoming articles as well.

Good cooking to you and Buon Appetito!

Matthew Blau is the chef at Fireworks Restaurant.

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