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# *my* ROUSES everyday

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

**BIRDS & the Bs:  
BRINING, BAKING  
& BASTING**

**GUMBO ON THE  
GULF COAST**  
by PABLEAUX JOHNSON

**FIFTY SHADES  
OF GRAVY**

**THE NUTCRACKER SWEET**  
by MARCELLE BIENVENU

**THE HOLIDAY ISSUE**

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## The More the Merrier



▲ Donny and Donald Rouse — photo by Ryan Hodgson-Rigsbee

**L**eBlanc's Food Stores has been a mainstay in Gonzales since 1961. L.C. LeBlanc opened the first LeBlanc's Food Stores in 1961 just one year after my grandfather opened his first store in Houma. A second, third and fourth generation of LeBlancs helped grow the company into one of the largest independents in Louisiana.

We have always eyed expansion in Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas. Blending a great food tradition like LeBlanc's Food Stores into our company made perfect sense. Our families are longtime friends. We have both built our businesses on quality, selection, service and low prices. We share a common philosophy, history and commitment to community. This really is a perfect fit.

I want to personally welcome LeBlanc's dedicated customers, team members and vendor partners to our Rouses family. We will be keeping everything you love about LeBlanc's — the strawberry shortcakes and four-layer cakes, the hand-cut USDA Choice Angus Beef steaks, the delicious prepared food, and especially the people. The cashier who checked you out at LeBlanc's will be the same cashier who checks you out at Rouses.

Merry Christmas, happy holidays, and thank you for shopping at Rouses. We truly appreciate your business.

*Danny Rouse*  
3<sup>rd</sup> Generation

### ➤ On the Cover

*Seafood Stuffed Mirliton*

cover photo by **Romney Caruso**

## EAT | DRINK | BE MERRY

### WHAT I'M EATING

Talking about holiday foods can be as fun as the meals themselves. In my family, cooking is an all-hands-on-deck effort when we gather Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. Everyone brings a dish, but my grandfather's famous oyster dressing has always been my favorite. Since he passed in 2009, the dressing has fallen under my father's domain. *Find Mr. Anthony's Downhome Oyster Dressing recipe on page 25.*

### WHAT I'M DRINKING

Now that the colder weather has finally arrived, it's time to break out the bourbon. Buffalo Trace on the rocks is my cold weather drink.

### BE MERRY

As Christmas approaches, my wife Kara and I look forward to our favorite Gulf Coast tradition — holiday boat parades. We take our kids to see the shrimp boats decorated with Christmas lights. It's a perfect way to experience and celebrate our ties to the coastal waterways we call home. *For more on Christmas boat parades see Jyl Benson's story on page 52.*

### BE GENEROUS

As we're looking forward to the New Year, it's important to remember how much we have to be grateful for and how many communities are still suffering the lingering effects of last August's unprecedented and severe floods.

People from all over the Gulf Coast generously donated more than \$200,000 in cash and non-perishable food to help us feed and support these communities, but there is more to be done. Too many families on the Gulf Coast miss meals and go hungry during the holidays.

We encourage you to join us and help fight hunger by supporting Feeding America with a donation of non-perishable food or money at any Rouses Markets. We make it easy to give — just scan a coupon at the Rouses register to add to your bill, or purchase a pre-packed \$10 bags of canned goods and drop it in our donation barrel.

# table of contents

NOVEMBER | DECEMBER 2016



## HUNTING

- 8 Good Chefs Hunting  
by Mary Beth Romig
- 11 A Quail of Two Cities
- 12 Duck. Buck. Goose.

## GUMBO

- 16 Gumbo on the Gulf Coast  
by Pableaux Johnson
- 18 If the Roux Fits  
by Kit Wohl
- 20 Brew Up A Pot of Gumbo
- 20 You Say Potato Salad,  
I Say Rice

## PROFILES

- 21 New Roads, Old Recipes
- 24 Catching Up with  
Tommy's Seafood  
by Mary Beth Romig
- 49 Farm-to-Fork

## HOLIDAYS

- 30 Gathered Together  
by Kit Wohl

- 34 The Birds & The Bs  
by Mary Beth Romig
- 40 The Proof Is in the  
Bread Pudding  
by Poppy Tooker
- 42 Wild Turkey  
by Bobby Childs
- 43 The Hunger Games  
by Kit Wohl
- 46 The Nutcracker Sweet  
by Marcelle Bienvenu
- 52 Christmas on the Water  
by Jyl Benson
- 54 Holiday History  
by Jyl Benson
- 55 Born & Braised

## RECIPES

- 11 John Besh's  
Duck & Oyster Gumbo
- 25 Mr. Anthony Rouse's  
Down Home Oyster  
Dressing
- 31 Duck Soup & Quacklings
- 41 Poppy Tooker's  
Savory Piggy

- 41 Mediterranean Bread  
Pudding
- 42 Bourbon Maple Glazed  
Turkey
- 47 Marcelle Bienvenu's  
Roasted Pecans
- 47 Cheesy Pecan Wafers
- 47 Super-Duper Yams
- 48 Rum-Glazed  
Sweet Potatoes

- 48 Sweet Potato Pudding
- 48 Sweet Potato Pie
- 55 Braised Cabbage

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- 1 Family Letter
- 4 In the Community



## On the Cover

Mirliton, pronounced mel-a-ton or merle-a-ton, is a Gulf Coast holiday favorite. Stuffed shells make a beautiful holiday presentation while large casseroles make for easy entertaining and less work. Just boil, peel and cube the pulp.

Get our cover recipe at [www.rouses.com](http://www.rouses.com).

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## May All Your Christmases Be Bright!

"I love our local holiday traditions, especially the bonfires set to help guide Papa Noel. Bonfire building is just such a community come together. It's a building experience, and a viewing experience you won't find anywhere else, whether it's the single neighborhood bonfire that burns in New Orleans' Mid City, or the 125 bonfires that line the river in St. James Parish."

—Ali Rouse Royster, 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation

### Gulfport Harbor Lights Winter Festival, Gulfport, MS

Enjoy the magical sights and sounds of the Gulfport Harbor Lights Winter Festival kicking off Thanksgiving weekend. Lots of fun to come with the Elfie Selfie stations, Santa's BIG Wheel (a 65' observation wheel), Santa and Mrs. Claus and so much more.

### Snowflakes in the Bay, Bay St. Louis, MS

Beautiful, century-old live oaks gloriously lit with snowflakes make the area a magical coastal wonderland! Bring the camera as you walk the Depot District landscaped with a quaint duck pond surrounded by walking paths and art sculptures created by local artists.

### Christmas in the Pass, Pass Christian, MS

Enjoy the lighting of the Christmas tree, a holiday parade and a special visit from Santa.

### Magic Christmas in Lights, Mobile, AL

Bellingrath Gardens and Home's holiday tradition lets guests stroll through a dazzling display which features more than 1,000 set pieces, 3 million lights and 15 scenes throughout the 65-acre Garden estate. In addition, the Bellingrath Home is decorated in its holiday finery and enhanced with beautiful poinsettias. The holiday event includes nightly choral performances on the South Terrace of the home.

### Festival of Lights, Baton Rouge, LA

The capital city's oldest holiday celebration includes the lighting of the Christmas tree and fireworks downtown.

### Zoo Lights, Baton Rouge, LA

This annual zoo event features a mile-long trail of 50 illuminated displays of animals.

### Noel Acadien au Village, Lafayette, LA

This 23-night Christmas festival fundraiser features half a million lights, including the fully lit chapel, animated displays and carnival rides. LARC's Acadian Village is Lafayette's oldest authentic vision of life in 19th century Southwest Louisiana.

### Festival of Lights, Natchitoches, LA

The "City of Lights" hosts a six-week-long Festival of Lights on Front Street. The tradition goes back to 1926. There's also a Christmas boat parade of lighted barges and fireworks over Cane River.

### Christmasfest, Thibodaux, LA

Enjoy Downtown Thibodaux events followed by a parade through the streets of Thibodaux starting at 4:00pm and ending at the Dansereau House for the lighting of the house, music, food, and photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

### Downtown Christmas Festival and Parade, Houma, LA

Papa Noel arrives in a twenty float Christmas Parade through downtown Houma. The day also includes Santa's Workshop for kids, caroling, craft vendors, music, delicious food, 5K Ugly Sweater Run, Christmas shopping, story telling, and more.

### Tammany Trace Holiday of Lights, Mandeville, LA

Visitors can stroll amid the wonderland of sparkling Christmas trees, lights and displays at the Trailhead on Koop Drive while singing along with Christmas carolers and other local entertainers over four nights of entertainment. Plus, visit with Santa and ride the kiddie rides.

### Bayou Christmas, Slidell, LA

This holiday celebration in Heritage Park on Bayou Bonfouca includes more than 60,000 lights set to music in 25 displays.

### Christmas Under the Stars, Slidell, LA

The city's annual celebration of twinkling lights, festive decorations, visits from Santa and Mrs. Claus, the Parade of Trees, the life-size Christmas Cottages, Slidell's Nativity, Christmas songs, and much more.

### Christmas in the Park, Metairie, LA

Lafreniere Park comes alive for the holidays with thousands of twinkling lights and displays.

### Celebration in the Oaks, New Orleans, LA

This special, month-long light show in City Park hosts hundreds of thousands of colorful lights and illuminated outdoor displays to showcase the holiday season in New Orleans. Celebration in the Oaks opens every year on the Friday after Thanksgiving and closes January 3rd.

### Caroling in the Square, New Orleans, LA

A holiday tradition that has been going on since 1946, Christmas Caroling in Jackson Square is a joyful, fun experience that thousands of people participate in every year.

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*Premium Turkey Dinner Pictured*

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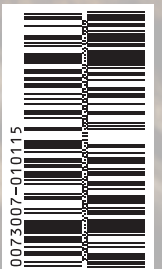
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### PUMPKIN PANCAKES

Prep Time: 10 minutes  
Cook Time: 12 minutes

- 1 egg
- 1 2/3 cups milk
- 1/2 cup canned pumpkin
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 teaspoon **McCormick® Pure Vanilla Extract**
- 2 cups flour
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon **McCormick® Pumpkin Pie Spice**
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

**BEAT** egg in medium bowl. Add milk, pumpkin, butter and vanilla; mix well. Mix remaining ingredients in large bowl until well blended. Add pumpkin mixture; stir just until blended. Let stand 5 minutes.

**POUR** 1/4 cup of batter per pancake onto preheated lightly greased griddle or skillet. Cook 1 to 2 minutes per side or until golden brown, turning when pancakes begin to bubble. Serve with walnuts and maple syrup, if desired.

Makes 10 pancakes.

\*Applies to McCormick® Ingredients Only

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# Good Chefs Hunting

by Mary Beth Romig

**H**unting is quite often a matter of DNA, a deeply ingrained practice in families far and wide. Such is the case with noted chef and restaurateur John Besh.

In the first chapter of his book *Cooking From the Heart*, Besh celebrates what he calls “Lessons of the Hunt.” He begins by describing a magical, cold, beautiful gray day on steep inclines of the Belchen, the fourth highest mountain in the German Black Forest. On this particular day, he was

hunting with fellow chef and friend Karl-Josef Fuchs. Besh writes:

“I feel just as I did at seven or eight-year-old, following my father and grandfather through Louisiana’s low-lying cypress swamps and the jagged red clay hills planted in pine, chasing after an elusive white tail deer. I was reared to pursue the art of hunting with bows, arrows, shotguns and rifles. The meat my family ate during hunting season was wild.”

Today, the art of the hunt continues for Besh across the familiar landscape of his native Louisiana, and extending to a hunting lodge he owns nestled in the rolling hills of northern Alabama country, which has become the site of many a memorable gathering of fellow chefs, a busman’s holiday of sorts. On these occasions they hunt, cook, swap stories and share the convivial fellowship of their craft and the bounty of the land and sea.

Not sure if one exists, but if there were a guest



executive chef and co-creator of Johnny Sánchez in New Orleans' Central Business District; and the list continues.

Other guests included sous chefs from the restaurants that comprise the Besh Restaurant Group where as Chef Landrem says, "They do a lot of work and earn their stripes." Besh also includes personal friends and business associates, as well as his four sons, as he raises them in the tradition so deeply entrenched in his family's culture.

*"I've got to expose my boys to this madness — the glory of road food, the duck blind camaraderie, the thrill of the hunt, and the deep satisfaction of cooking gumbo. These experiences will shape their palettes and teach them to appreciate what comes from the land; how to care for it, how to harvest it, how to cook it, and how to love it." (John Besh, My New Orleans: The Cookbook)*

The crowd that gathers can be large or small. The camp includes one big bunkroom and a few couches, sleeping up to 14 people comfortably. There are a few rules guests are asked to follow. Whoever goes to sleep first gets a bed in a room. Those who linger well into the night are asked to find a place to sleep among whatever is left vacant. The other rule: Besh is the sole chef presiding over breakfast, no questions asked.

"He is always the first to wake up, beating everyone else," says Landrem. "There is lots of bacon, sausage, fried eggs and homemade biscuits served all morning, and John gets mad when don't eat all of it. He is constantly frying more eggs, making cheese grits, the classic Southern breakfast. He will not let anyone else do it."

As for meals, guests split duties for lunch and dinner. They always cook whatever is the result of the day's hunt, the process of prepping the catch beginning immediately, with grilling occurring on a giant outdoor fireplace or in an indoor oven.

Most of the chefs come to the camp having been raised in the sport of hunting, and the type of hunting is generally dictated by the season, whether bow or rifle season.

Landrem grew up fishing and hunting duck and alligator in Louisiana's Plaquemines Parish, near the mouth of the Mississippi River. He would also rabbit hunt in Belle Chasse, Louisiana, in his grandfather's fields. He describes his time spent at Besh's camp in Alabama as life changing.

"It's an opportunity for us to get up there and take a break and spend time together, and we iron chef and try and cook for each other," says Landrem. "It's gorgeous land with Indian mounds and creeks, deer and pigs and coyotes, and a sense of place and a feeling of peace."

Chef Loos recalls a few years back when wild hogs were everywhere, "tearing everything up," as he describes. "I shot my first pig there and we slow cooked him and made enchiladas with these great ingredients that chef Aron Sánchez brought with him. That is when the Johnny Sánchez story materialized."

Chef Leonards, a native of Eunice, Louisiana, is another frequent guest who grew up hunting, mainly ducks and doves. He describes his days spent at the camp as an honor.

"For me, it is about spending time with guys who enjoy the outdoors, being away from the restaurants doing things we all enjoy doing," says Leonards. "The hunt is one thing, but the camaraderie is the most important thing. Most of us grew up in the hunting tradition, so we experienced going to different camps in different parts of the South or wherever, so bringing together all our personal histories to a shared experience is what it's all about. Food shared. Stories told. Time spent just being away from the restaurant and getting to know people away from work on a different playing field."

A few guests are new to the sport, once such being Chef Pulsinelli. Born in Germany and raised in Ohio, he did not get a taste of hunting until moving to Louisiana to join Besh's team in 2004. His introduction to hunting was at the Alabama camp.

"I have only shot one wild boar, but that is okay with me," he says. "For me, it is more about enjoying the relaxing nature up there and being able to cut loose a bit. And then there are the times when you are just out in the duck blind, and it is just complete quiet." It is such a change from the busy kitchen and a chance to enjoy nature and peace."

The guests usually go to the camp after the busy weekend rush, so they are not away from their respective kitchens at the busiest times for patrons.

"All you need is a few days out there in nature," adds Pulsinelli. "It is such a change from the busy kitchen and a chance to enjoy nature and peace."

book near the camp's entrance, the signatures would read like a culinary who's who: Chef Neal Fraser, a 20-year veteran of the L.A. food scene; Drake Leonards, executive chef at Luke's; Erick Loos, executive chef at the legendary Northshore restaurant La Provence; Todd Pulsinelli, executive chef of John Besh's flagship, Restaurant August; Brian Landry, executive chef at the helm of Borgne; James Beard Award-winning chef Paul Kahan from Chicago; Miles Landrem,

*“To us, Gumbo is our Jesse Tree the footprint of who we are and where we come from — a cultural stew ... I don't remember a time in my life when I didn't hunt or fish. Other than a brief period after combat in the first gulf war ... I love the camaraderie of going to the hunting camp, I love training my dog Schatzi to hunt and retrieve, and I love rebrushing the duck blinds. But mostly it's about the gumbo.”* (John Besh, *My New Orleans: The Cookbook*)

Given the guest list, hunting at the camp is, of course, about the food, and drink.

Guests bring food with them, some already prepared, some just needing a bit of tweaking. Pulsinelli often brings house made charcuterie and country style pates, steaks and other “Cajun favorites,” as he describes. A chef may bring in a sack of oysters, king crabs or fresh lobster, jambalaya and other one-pot meals.

And there is always gumbo, mostly prepped and finished in the camp's kitchen. That is when the debate may arise about serving gumbo with potato salad or rice, or possibly both.

“I prefer potato salad,” says Landrem. “I may do rice for a group, but always a cold potato salad for a hot gumbo.”



We all get to bring a part of ourselves, cook for each other, colleagues and friends,” says Chef Leonards. “Besh cooks the way he did growing up, and I do the same. We each bring a little of that to the shared table. And we also cook some of the game we harvested in our own way.”

Little if anything is wasted from the day's kill, an important lesson Besh learned growing up and from his German mentor, Chef Fuchs. Deer successfully hunted is processed nearby, resulting in tenderloins, sausage, and backstrap that may be served medium rare with adobe rum, butternut squash and black beans. Wild boar could be slow roasted with chile, hominy and garlic to stew it down. Other menu items may include duck poppers, ducks whole roasted or thrown in gumbo, roasted quail or stewed venison. The varied menu continues depending on the hunt, and there is always a fair amount of accompanying beverages.

But perhaps the most important item on the menu, according to Leonards, is the sense of hospitality Besh imbues in every visit.

“Naturally what he gives and does for everybody who goes to the camp is a natural progression of what was taught to him, the natural things he does and puts into his business,” says Leonards. “Mealtimes are important gatherings, and what John does is taking his sense of southern hospitality and extending it to these getaways ... The values of the camp and the way we grew up are held in his company, the John Besh Group, and in his company as a person. It is a spirit we all share, to make sure people have a great experience, a great time, whether in one of the restaurants or at the camp.”

*“As I inhale my portion, I reflect upon the day afield, keenly aware that I was in the right place, not just among enthusiastic hunters and cooks, but with a chef/teacher who inspires me to handle food with a reverence that is spiritual.”* (John Besh, *Cooking from the Heart: My Lessons Learned Along the Way*) ■

## John Besh's Duck & Oyster Gumbo

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 2 ducks (2½ to 3 pounds each), quartered
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons Herbes de Provence
- 1 cup rendered duck fat or lard (or vegetable oil if you must)
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 onions, diced
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 pound andouille sausage, diced
- ½ pound smoked pork sausage, chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3 quarts chicken or duck stock
- 2 cups oyster liquor
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons Creole seasoning
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cups okra, diced (frozen works fine)
- 3 cups oysters
- Tabasco sauce
- 1 quart cooked Louisiana rice
- ½ cup chopped green onions

### HOW TO PREP

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Liberally season the ducks with salt, pepper, and Herbes de Provence. Slowly roast in preheated oven until most of the fat has rendered out and the skin is nice and crispy, about 2 hours. Remove the ducks from the oven, and reserve the fat. Once cool, pick all the meat and skin from the ducks, and cut into roughly 1½-inch pieces. Reserve.

To make the roux, heat 1 cup of reserved duck fat (or lard) in a pot over medium heat, add the flour, and allow it to slowly cook to a light golden brown. This should take about ½ hour. Adjust heat if necessary (if cooking too fast) and allow the roux to further brown, stirring often, until it resembles the color of milk chocolate. This should take approximately another 5 minutes. Stir in the onions, and cook until the roux takes on a deep dark chocolate color. This should take another 5 to 10 minutes. Add the duck, celery, sausages, and garlic, and cook to combine for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Add stock, oyster liquor, Worcestershire, Creole seasoning, bay leaves, and okra, and bring mixture to a boil. Lower heat and simmer until flavors marry, occasionally skimming the fat that rises to the top, about 1½ hours. Add the oysters, and continue to simmer for another 5 minutes.

Season the gumbo to taste with salt, pepper, and Tabasco sauce. Serve over rice in a large flat soup bowl, and garnish with chopped green onions. (Serves 8-10)



## A Quail of Two Cities

by Marcy, Rouses Creative Director

It's not uncommon to see little quail families trotting along the side of the road in Tylertown, Mississippi, mom in the front, a row of babies following behind. Chef Slade Rushing recalls one such Sunday encounter. "We were driving home from church when my dad spotted a covey of adult quail walking next to the road. He got out of the car in his Sunday suit and cowboy boots, popped the trunk, grabbed his 12-gauge, and boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom, he took out six quail. We had them that day for supper."

Mississippi quail is a popular selection in Rouses Butcher Shop, especially around the holidays. It's available semi-boneless and deboned. "People expect quail to have a liver-y flavor like dove or wild duck," says Rushing, "but it has more of a red meat flavor."

Tylertown is near the city of McComb, where Rushing was born. The area has the perfect climate and environment for bobwhite quail, with its hills and hollows (or "hollers" as Rushing calls them), trees (timberland, pine and oakwood), and fields of hay. "The quails like to nestle in the hay fields. You roam the hollows and when you hear them, you can send a bird dog in to wrestle them out of the grass."

Rushing's father Doug, owned a real estate company with offices in Tylertown and McComb. "He knew everyone in the state of Mississippi and most of Louisiana, too. He did some business with Donald Rouse and was very proud of the grocery's success."

Doug Rushing taught Slade and his two older sisters and older brother how to fish and hunt. "Every time dad got a property listing, he'd finagle the hunting rights with it, or the fishing rights if they had a pond." Quail hunting lessons started at a young age. "I probably went quail hunting for the first time when I was eight. I had a 4-10 single shot — it's pretty hard to kill a bird with a 4-10. Eight-year-olds are pretty fidgety and quails are very skittish — they have good survival instincts. I didn't kill anything. Over the years I've learned you have to be very stealthy when you hunt. And that you need a 12-gauge."

Doug Rushing passed away in February this year. "My dad really instilled in us a love of the outdoors. He took us fishing in Venice and Grand Isle. We'd run trout lines on the Bogue Chitto River. He took us elk hunting in Colorado. One November when I was cooking in New York, he flew my brother and me up to Saskatchewan to hunt whitetail deer. I shot an 8-point buck, and I couldn't stop smiling because I

knew I still had it. You can take the chef out of Mississippi, but you can't take the Mississippi out of the chef."

It was in New York where Rushing met his wife Allison Vines-Rushing. The two cooked together at Jack's Luxury Oyster Bar, a New Orleans themed restaurant in New York where Vines-Rushing was executive chef and won a 2004 James Beard Award for her work. They opened Longbranch in Abita Springs in 2005. In 2007, they followed with MiLa in the New Orleans' Central Business District. They also wrote a cookbook, *Southern Comfort: A New Take on the Recipes We Grew Up With*, which was a 2013 James Beard Award finalist. The book is available online and at area bookstores.

The couple shuttered MiLa in 2014 shortly after Rushing left to become executive chef at Brennan's Restaurant in the French Quarter. Vines-Rushing wanted to be home for their two young children, Ida Lou and Rosco. But with the kids now in school, she's back in the commercial kitchen, teaching private classes and doing monthly pop-ups at Jacques-Imo's Café.

The couple still cooks together at home in New Orleans, and quail is often on the menu. Rushing uses a variety of recipes. "I'll make a simple marinade of olive oil and balsamic vinegar, then grill it. You get a great lacquer to skin. I also make a Vietnamese marinade with palm sugar or coconut sugar, garlic, lime juice, sliced jalapeños and fish sauce. I'd put that version up against any quail I've ever eaten." ■

*Rushing was a James Beard Award finalist in 2015 and 2016.*



▲ Slade Rushing  
photo courtesy Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group



# DUCK. BUCK. GOOSE.

## MEET THE WINEMAKER: *Duckhorn*

The Duckhorn Wine Company has been making wine for over four decades. We spoke to winemaker Renee Ary about the vineyard and pairing their classic California wines.

**Q: Dan and Margaret Duckhorn launched Duckhorn Vineyards in Napa Valley launched in 1976. How has the winery changed since then?**

A: We have grown to include seven estate winegrowing sites, including the legendary Three Palms Vineyard. We really pioneered and *perfected* Merlot as a premium varietal in North America. Now we are also recognized for the remarkable quality of our Cabernet Sauvignons, Sauvignon Blancs, Chardonnays, and The Discussion, the Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend that represents the pinnacle of our portfolio.

In 1994, we established Paraduxx, which has earned acclaim as the only California winery solely devoted to Napa Valley blends. Paraduxx creates wines that capture the essence of their Napa Valley terroir. In 1996 we introduced Goldeneye, which is produced in cool, coastal Anderson Valley, North America's most exciting Pinot Noir region.

Migration is dedicated to making vibrant and impeccably balanced cool-climate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. While this focus has led us to establish our Migration estate home in the heart of the Russian River Valley, we also make small-lot wines from the most exciting vineyards in Santa Maria Valley, Sta. Rita Hills, and beyond.

We started making our Canvasback Red Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon in 2012. With ideal soils, a perfect sloping southwestern exposure, and a dry desert climate, Washington State's Red Mountain has rapidly earned a reputation for producing some of the most complex and captivating Cabernet Sauvignons in the world.

Decoy is produced in Sonoma County. The lineup includes a Red Blend, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc — all of which are appellation-designated and highlight Decoy's commitment to producing attractively priced wines from exceptional vineyard sources. Though Decoy has its own dedicated winemaker, because of our company's unique structure, Decoy benefits from the talent and experience of all of our winemakers — each of whom has a unique area of specialization. As an example, I collaborate with Decoy's winemaker, Tyson Wolf, on the Decoy Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

### **What characteristics define each brand?**

While many other wineries have consolidated production over the past decade, our wineries have followed a very different path. Each one has its own dedicated winemaker and its own estate vineyards. Each winery also has its own specific focus, both in terms of regions and grape varieties. As a result, people who love our Duckhorn Vineyards wines will often go on to discover our Paraduxx blends, or Goldeneye's Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs. Or people will discover us through Decoy and then branch out to explore our other wineries.

### **What are the general rules for matching up wine and poultry (and wine and game)?**

I follow a few different guidelines for pairing wine and food, including taking into consideration the cooking techniques being used and the kind of sauces with the dish. As very general rules of thumb, because the flavors from grilling can bring out a little more bitterness in a wine, I recommend pairing big, younger wines with bold tannins. When sautéing and braising, I often start by considering a medium-bodied red. With poaching, because it is so delicate, I look at lighter reds, like Pinot Noir.

Pairing your wine with the sauce is also important. If there is fruit in the sauce (or the dish), I like to pair a wine with similar fruit. For instance, if a dish includes a fig and cherry compote, that would work well with our Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir. If the dish has caramelized onions, or a balsamic or port reduction, I would pair it with a big wine with earthier notes. Our Duckhorn Vineyards Merlots go particularly well with duck and lamb, or even gamier meats, especially if fried or fresh herbs are a part of the recipe. Here are some other pairing suggestions:

- *Roasted duck*: This is a classic dish and should be paired with a classic wine to match up to it. Try our Duckhorn Vineyards Three Palms Merlot, or for a white wine, our Migration Russian River Valley Chardonnay.
- *Turducken*: There's a lot going on in this dish. To keep things harmonious, try a beautifully layered wine like our Duckhorn Vineyards Napa Valley Merlot, or our Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir.
- *Duckpoppers (cream cheese, pepper jelly, duck)*: Definitely our Duckhorn Vineyards Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc!
- *Duck and sausage gumbo*: Gumbo has a power-punch of spicy notes. Go with the Paraduxx Napa Valley Red Wine or our Duckhorn Vineyards Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

## MEET THE WINEMAKER: *Stag's Leap*

We asked winemaker Marcus Notaro to share his winemaking philosophy and recommendations for pairing Stag's Leap Wine Cellars selections with venison.

**Q: In the early 1960s the Napa Valley was being reborn as a fine wine region. A fresh wave of pioneers came to the valley to realize their dream of making world-class wines. The Stag's Leap Wine Cellars founding family was among them. Tell me about the winery's early success.**

A: The estate was founded in 1970 with the purchase of Stag's Leap Vineyard. The Stag's Leap Wine Cellars winery was built in 1972, the same year the winery released its first vintage of S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine world was shocked in 1976 when the 1973 S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon beat the best of Bordeaux in the famous Paris Tasting. This built a lasting legacy for Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, Napa Valley and California wine as a whole. For me, it's a great honor to be the winemaker for Stag's Leap Wine Cellars as it has such a great history and fantastic vineyards.

**What characteristics define the brand and the varietals?**

My winemaking philosophy is simple. I want to express the terroir of the vineyard (and in this case the incredible terroir of the FAY and S.L.V. estate vineyards) and the true varietal character of the grape. The 2016 harvest is my third with the winery, and quality is at an all-time high. The wine style at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars favors balance and complexity, richness and elegance while capturing the unique characteristics of the vineyard.

The style of the Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Estate wines has always been about expressing the place. S.L.V. and FAY both have what I like to call "soft power," which is a characteristic of Cabernet grown in our area. Both are rich in flavors, have supple tannins, and lend themselves to be made as balanced wines that can age in the cellar. Both have distinct personalities due to the different soil types in which they are grown. For me, it is also my goal to make the wines in this style and express the unique differences between them. The winery has a great history and a legacy I want to preserve. When I meet customers who have a story about when they opened an older bottle of our wine or had a bottle on an important event in their life, it's very inspiring to me to focus on delivering outstanding quality wines that age well for them.

**What are the general rules of pairing wine and game?**

Typically, game pairs perfectly with wines that have either ripe fruit characteristics or an earthy component. The main thing is that the wine and wild game complement each other, rather than overpowering either. The rich fruit, earthy notes from the vineyard, and tannin structure of Cabernets make them easy to pair with wild game.

**Can you share some suggested pairings?**

- *Roasted venison with a fruity sauce:*  
FAY Estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
- *Herb-crusted roasted venison:*  
CASK 23 Estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
- *Smothered venison with rice and brown gravy:*  
S.L.V. Estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
- *Venison meatballs and spaghetti:*  
ARTEMIS Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley
- *Spicy venison sausage:*  
S.L.V. Estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley



## Get Your Goose

by Nora D. McGunnigle

This time of year is marked by heartier and richer food on the table, and it's the same for beer. While Goose Island 312 Urban Wheat beer is a good sipper all year round for wheat beer fans, it can't hold up next to the flavors of roasted fowl, lamb, beef, or game meat. Instead, Goose Island's Megan Lagesse recommends Goose Island's Winter Ale and Matilda as beers that have different flavor profiles but complement game beautifully.

Goose Island Winter Ale is a great match with the earthy flavors of duck and venison. It's seasonally appropriate, and the dark malts in the grain bill work well with strongly flavored game dishes and other strong ingredients supporting them, like dark dried fruits, bacon, and citrus. Goose Island Winter Ale is actually a brown ale, not a darker or heavier porter or stout. That means it stands up to strong flavors without overwhelming them, and it's more refreshing — important when eating something rich and heavy like venison stew or duck confit cassoulet.

A barrel aged beer like Matilda Belgian pale ale will highlight the wild earthiness of game meat. That's due to the inclusion of wild yeast *Brettanomyces* in the fermentation process, which lends a unique, funky, farmhouse flavor to the beer. Matilda has spicy and almost savory characteristics as well as its funky, Brett-y yeast character. There are also hints of dried fruit and clove, which pairs perfectly with venison and duck, as those are also well-known complementary flavors used in preparing game meats.



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## Easy Smoked Sausage Skillet

Serving Size: 4-6 Total Time: 20 minutes

### Ingredients :

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 pkg. Hillshire Farm® smoked sausage, diagonally sliced thin | 1 pkg. frozen broccoli, thawed   |
| 2 cloves garlic, crushed                                      | ½ cup chicken broth (or water)   |
| ¼ cup olive oil   | ½ cup tomato sauce               |
| 1 large red bell pepper, sliced thin                          | 2 cups instant rice              |
| 1 small yellow onion, sliced thin                             | ½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese |

### Instructions :

Heat olive oil and garlic in skillet, stir in smoked sausage slices and cook until browned. Add pepper, onion, broccoli, broth and tomato sauce and simmer for 10 minutes or until the vegetables are tender and the liquid is absorbed. In the meantime, prepare rice according to package instructions. Stir rice into the skillet, sprinkle with cheese and serve.

Visit [HillshireFarm.com/recipes](http://HillshireFarm.com/recipes) for delicious recipes perfect for any night of the week.

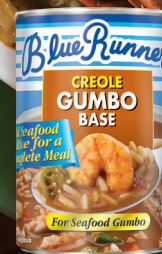
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# Gumbo on the GULF COAST

by Pableaux Johnson

In mid-September this year, Disney Family posted a short cooking video featuring a healthy, vegetable-centric dish featuring shrimp, okra, kale and quinoa (a trendy Peruvian grain) instead of rice. The “how to cook it” movie for “Tiana’s Healthy Gumbo” ran just under two minutes and featured a peppy Dixieland soundtrack from the studio’s 2009 movie *The Princess and the Frog*, a fairy tale adaptation set in south Louisiana wetlands.

The whole thing seemed innocent enough,

except for one critical misstep: They called the dish “gumbo.”

Within minutes of the video’s Facebook debut, Louisiana cooks at home and abroad were heaping scorn on the dish, screaming about many aspects of the recipe that violated their version from the Sacred Gumbo Code. The transgressions ranged from ingredient choice (kale? *Crushed* bay leaf? Chili powder?) to thickening it with a little bit of un-browned wheat flour. A floodtide of humorous/furious comments

made their way onto social media, accusing Disney of sin, sacrilege and downright desecration of a Gulf Coast classic. Self-identified Cajuns the world over registered their displeasure with parody memes, handwringing and invocation of long-passed ancestors.

As modern Internet outrages go, it was quick and relatively painless. Media outlets picked up on the joke and wrote fluffy trend pieces on the Facebook fury with all its mockery, humor and snark. Within a couple of days, Disney pulled the recipe and video, handing a victory to the commenters and parodists. From their perspective, the barbarians had been beaten and our culinary culture preserved.

Gumbogate brings up some important questions when it comes to one of our culinary cornerstones: What is the essence of gumbo? What does our gumbo say about Gulf Coast food culture? And who gets to enforce the traditional culinary boundaries?

In short: What do we talk about when we talk about gumbo?

## A Working Definition

Along the food-crazy Gulf Coast, gumbo isn’t so much a dish as it is a culinary genre like *stew* or *soup* — a broad category that can include a wide range of core ingredients and cooking techniques. In the broadest sense, gumbo is a savory, thick-bodied middle ground between stew and soup — a hearty concoction, chunky with the bounty of barnyard, water and sky. We crave a steaming bowl when cool winds sweep down from the north, but there are summertime versions that contain the summer-peak crops as well (shrimp and okra to be precise). Our region’s gift to the global soup course, it’s usually served with a scoop or two of fluffy white rice and, in some Cajun households, a scoop of creamy potato salad or the occasional roasted sweet potato.

It’s common knowledge that every local cook has their own foolproof gumbo formula, or a handful of special occasion gumbos for holidays, hunting season or the time when Uncle Raymond takes out the trawling nets.

In the kitchen, gumbo can be a big-batch, freezer-friendly best friend that contains tasty, tasty multitudes. It can be a “make a pot of rice” last-minute meal or a self-

contained holiday celebration. It can be a thin-bodied *filé* gumbo packed with shrimp and quartered crabs, or a complex roux-thickened duck gumbo with chunks of smoky andouille sausage in every spoonful.

But one thing it's *not* (ironically) is “one thing.”

### The Three Thickeners

Part of gumbo's wide range is its flexible structure, which allows the use of three thickeners (alone or in combination, depending on taste and tradition).

**Okra:** Foodies with a linguistic bent and time to argue will insist that a gumbo isn't gumbo without okra (stemming from the plant's Old World Bantu root word *quingombo*). Most people have pronounced opinions about the often-goosey texture of this curvy green podlike vegetable. (Technically, it's called “mucilage,” but detractors and fans alike call it “slime.”) Love it or hate it, this African-born, Deep South-bred vegetable is the secret of many gumbos across the land-and-sea spectrum.

**Roux:** Many dishes, especially from South Louisiana's Cajun tradition, start with this napalm-like paste of oil and toasted flour. This staple couldn't get any simpler — equal parts wheat flour and vegetable oil cooked gradually until the flour turns brown. A slow, low flame toasts the flour particles as the mixture develops a deep, nutty flavor. Adapted from classical French technique, the Louisiana roux process often heads straight for the dark side of the spectrum — with tones described as peanut butter, medium brown, brick, chocolate, and “almost black.”

And despite what you may have heard, roux preparation doesn't require magic, intricate rituals, or incantations to long-ignored kitchen gods. Just a cast iron pot, a single stovetop burner and ample, spoon-turning patience.

**Filé (or Filé Powder):** Away from the Gulf, *filé* can be a culinary mystery. Most folks, they've heard Hank Williams Sr. sing about it, and they know it's never too far from gumbo, but it's not one of those products you routinely find on spice racks outside the region.

*Filé* is the dried leaf of the native sassafras tree, pounded into a fine powder. Native Americans used the pulverized leaves to

thicken stews, a trick picked up by French and African cooks during the colonial era. The dusty green powder gives gumbo a distinctive, herbal flavor and is usually stirred into the pot directly before serving or as a “sprinkle your own” table spice.

### Making It Our Own

Combine the three thickeners with a tradition of natural bounty and you've got the possibilities of a *million* different gumbos — maybe more. Cooks along the Gulf Coast might hold tight to the way they were taught by their grandmother (shrimp and okra made during summer vacation) or pre-game chicken and sausage version their aunts used to make during college football season.

Our gumbos can reflect a wide variety of cultural influences and regional variations that we recreate at our stovetops. Some folks have fond memories of shrimp/ sausage gumbo served in Iberia parish grade-school cafeterias, crawfish-spiked gumbos from the Cajun Prairie and Atchafalaya Basin towns or the fish-spiked seafood versions served around Mobile and Biloxi. Others yearn for Thanksgiving's turkey-bone gumbo, made from post-feast leftovers or the comfort of an intricate New Orleans Creole gumbo

that appears for formal holiday gatherings for families in the city's Seventh Ward. (This special-occasion variation contains shrimp, crab, oyster, chicken wing, veal stew meat and two kinds of sausage — cooked low and slow with a roux/*filé* combination.)

A dedicated cook's gumbo — even when it's as unique as their thumbprint — tells a story with every pot, every bowl and every bite.

### Look for the Story

Which brings us back to the Disney debacle. The online backlash showed us an important truth about the cultural importance of the dish, the story and the interaction of the two. “Tiana's Healthy Gumbo” (shudder) should be recognized for what it was — the work of some well-meaning nutritionist with decent intentions — rather than an aggressive act of cultural imperialism bent on undermining our culinary traditions.

The whole affair showed us how our regional cooks connect food and identity. And most importantly — how every bowl of gumbo is a chance to learn a different story, which keeps our vibrant food culture intact and thriving one pot at a time. ■

**“A serious cook's signature gumbo can be as unique as their thumbprint.”**





# If the Roux Fits

by Kit Wohl

**M**aking roux is not nearly as difficult as it may sound and can be a serene experience. Depending on skill and speed, creating a light “blonde” roux (also the beginning of a béchamel sauce) can take a few minutes, although it can require at least half an hour of diligent stirring over a very low heat to completely cook the raw flour flavor out, and a dark roux can require up to 45 minutes to an hour. Some experienced chefs can do it quickly over a higher heat, but I wouldn’t recommend it. When they say don’t try this at home, no one is kidding.

The great news is that roux freezes beautifully. So make a large batch, cool it,

then portion it into small containers and freeze it for future use.

A roux is nothing more than flour browned in oil or fat, and it delivers much more flavor than that would suggest. The raw-flour taste is eliminated in the final product, and the chemical reaction created by the flour browning in the hot oil imparts a nutty, smoky flavor that deepens as the roux becomes darker.

Some cooks prefer a thicker roux, using more flour than oil. The language of roux pertains to its different hues, which can range from a barely colored tan to the color of peanut butter and through café au lait to dark mahogany. Before choosing the

oil or fat, decide on the flavor and color of roux you’re seeking. For example, a blonde roux’s flavor is more subtle but has more thickening power than a dark roux.

The appropriate oil is anything from vegetable oil, olive oil, or canola oil to bacon grease, Crisco, or lard. Butter burns easily at low temperatures, so unless it is clarified and the solids skimmed off, it will not work easily for a darker roux.

While white all-purpose flour is the norm, whole-wheat flour imparts a lovely nutty flavor. The one-to-one ratio of oil and flour is standard, although some cooks prefer a bit more flour than oil, as much as half a cup of flour on a one-cup-to-one-cup measurement.



**“Sooner or later Southerners all come home,  
not to die, but to eat gumbo.”**

*—Eugene Walter, bard of Mobile, Alabama*

raised or lowered. But this calls for attention. The color stays deceptively the same for some minutes and then changes rapidly. Just don't leave the stove. Don't answer the phone. The flour can scorch before you're able to react. (There is no saving a scorched roux. It is over, it is finished, and it must be trashed.) Don't feel bad, it happens to us all.

Once the roux starts to approach the desired color level, remove it from the heat a shade or two lighter than you want to end up with and continue whisking, as the flour will continue to cook quickly and darken further. Stop before it reaches the darkest color.

The already-dark roux will continue to darken when the trinity is added and cooked, a delicate balancing act.

### **The Trinity**

If you intend to use the roux for gumbo, you'll want to add the “trinity” of Creole-Cajun cooking — chopped onion, celery, and bell pepper. While the addition of these vegetables will cause the roux to darken, it also begins cooling the roux as the vegetables cook and release their liquids. Once the vegetables have softened and become translucent, gradually begin stirring in the warm stock or other liquid. Some chefs reverse the process, cooking the vegetables in the oil then adding the roux and stock or other liquid. The proportions among the trinity's components can vary according to the cook's fancy and what happens to be in the refrigerator at a given moment.

The trinity is:

2 parts onion, chopped  
1 part celery, chopped  
½ part green bell pepper, chopped

Many recipes call for bell peppers. Their confetti colors of green, yellow, red, and orange are bright, so use whichever one, or combination of them, you prefer.

Once the vegetables are chopped, combined, and set aside, prepare the roux. When the roux has been cooked to a shade or two under what you're seeking, carefully begin

stirring in the trinity. When the vegetables hit the hot roux they will splatter, so add them slowly and stand back from the pot or skillet. When the vegetables have been completely incorporated into the roux, the flour will darken even more. Allow the mixture to simmer until the vegetables release their liquids and the onions are translucent.

At this point, slowly stir in the stock or water until well blended. Louisiana cookbook author Marcelle Bienvenu, whose vast experience makes her an expert in these matters, prefers to heat the liquid before adding it.

From the very beginning of the cooking process, the quality of the roux, trinity, and stock is most important for a gumbo's full-bodied flavor. A word of caution about seafood gumbo: reserve the delicately flavored raw oysters, shrimp, fish, or crawfish until the gumbo is just a few minutes from being removed from the heat. Otherwise, the seafood will overcook, becoming tough and tasteless. The same applies to other proteins such as sausage, chicken, and duck. Give them enough time to heat through at the end, but take care not to leech out their flavor by overcooking. ■

### **➤ Dark Roux**

*George Graham, author of the new cookbook Acadiana Table, leans toward the dark, dense roux popular in Acadiana when he makes gumbo. “This time of year there isn't a Cajun household in all of South Louisiana that doesn't have the unmistakably intense aroma of a dark roux — pungent and nutty, like roasting coffee beans — wafting through the kitchen,” writes Graham. “In fact, my wife Roxanne makes a roux as deep and dark as blackstrap molasses, and just as rich. For her and Acadiana cooks like her, a dark roux is the foundation upon which a gumbo and other Cajun black pot recipes are based. It is one of the defining ingredients of the Acadiana region of South Louisiana.”*

Begin the process by turning on some music (for entertainment while you're stirring) and assembling the necessary equipment. An adult beverage might be a fine idea. The ideal basic tools are a comfortable wire whisk, wooden spoon, and a cast-iron skillet or Dutch oven. Thin metal pots significantly increase the risk of scorching.

Start the roux by heating the oil over medium-low heat. Add the flour slowly, stirring continuously with a whisk or a wooden spoon. Some cooks, such as Poppy Tooker, have a special wooden roux spoon they treasure.

Once the oil and flour begin to come together and bubble, the heat level can be



## Brew Up A POT OF GUMBO

by Kit Wohl

**B**eer is a noble addition to stock, along with wine or water in a recipe. Food is all about flavor, so a reduction of a compatible liquid is an enhancer.

It has versatility based on the type, lager, ale, stout, popular brands or home brew. Lower in alcohol and lighter in flavor, it has ingredients that can give the recipe a boost.

Just like white and red wine, light and dark beers have distinct flavors and aromas, and you need to consider the right type with the right dish. Unless you have a really good reason, avoid the novelty flavored beers for cooking unless, of course, it is for your pleasure as you cook.

This range of flavor makes beer extremely fun to play with in the kitchen. As with wine, a poor beer will not improve your recipe either. If you wouldn't drink it, don't use it in a recipe.

Family gumbo was the first time I saw beer used as part of the stock, and it made perfect sense. Like wine or spirits in cooking, the alcohol cooks off, leaving the subtle benefits of the beer's flavor profile.

Stews and soups are recipes that beer can enhance. It can also be used as a braising liquid in pot roasts. Unfortunately, using it in a slow cooker doesn't allow the alcohol to burn off, leaving a bitter taste.

Beer can chicken is a popular excuse to use the barbecue grill. The first half of the beer is for the cook, and then the chicken is inverted with the cavity shoved down over the open end of the can, which acts as the stand. The grill is covered, which heats the beer, and the resulting steam helps cook the chicken.

Try cooking with beer by adding half a can of a light lager to a skillet of pre-browned Italian sausage. Add onion and sliced apples. When the apples are tender and the onion is translucent, incorporate the rest of the beer, cover the skillet and allow it to simmer another few minutes until the sausage is cooked through and the liquid has been reduced to a nice sauce.

There's not a lot that can go wrong, so feel free to experiment. If a recipe asks for wine or another spirit, consider beer. There is just not enough alcohol in beer to flambé, so Beer Bananas Foster just isn't going to happen. ■

## YOU SAY POTATO SALAD, I SAY RICE

by Mary Beth Romig

**J**ust as the culinary debate with regard to gumbo continues — seafood vs. meat vs. poultry, lighter roux vs. darker roux, tomato vs. no tomato — another debate has surfaced: gumbo served with rice or potato salad, or possibly both? Chef Johnny Blancher of Ye Olde College Inn serves his award-winning turkey and andouille sausage gumbo with rice. Potato salad either as a side or a base is not even in consideration. The restaurant and neighboring legendary bowling alley/music space, Rock 'N Bowl, owned by the Blancher family, serves his mother's recipe. Deborah Couvillon Blancher hails from Vermillion Parish in the heart of Louisiana's Cajun Country, where it is said the tradition of serving potato salad with gumbo was born.

"It was always and only rice for my family, but then again we were rice farmers," says Deborah. "In fact, we had some form of a rice dish with every meal, boiled rice, dirty rice, jambalaya, rice and gravy. Maybe if we grew potatoes it would have been different. But then as an adult, I heard one of my aunts say she served her gumbo with dirty rice. And that is the beauty of gumbo in general. Everyone has a preference and can serve it how they like it, and that is just great."

If you're dining at Prejean's restaurant in Lafayette and you order gumbo, the wait staff will likely ask, "Would you like potato salad with that?" There it is common for diners not only to ask for a side of potato salad, but to stir the salad directly into the gumbo. Their recipe calls for not only mayonnaise, but a bit of mustard as well, and hard-boiled eggs — another source of debate. Prejean's serves the potato salad cold; hence, when adding it to the gumbo, it adds a cooling creaminess. ■



# New Roads OLD RECIPES

by Marcy, Rouses Creative Director



“Cooking is all about timing,” explains chef Cody Carroll. So is life.

Cody and his wife Sam met in the same way that many chef couples do: in culinary school. “I noticed her right away,” says Cody, “but we were both pretty focused on our studies, so it took a while for us to actually go out on our first date.” Focused-shmocused, says Sam. “I played hard to get.”

Most young culinary students dream of a restaurant to call their own. They set their sights on an old convenience store in New Roads near Cody’s parents’ farm in Batchelor, about 20 minutes west of H. J. Bergeron Pecan Shelling Plant. They opened Hot Tails in 2010 just three months after graduating from the Louisiana Culinary Institute. Their restaurant serves “hardcore South Louisiana cuisine” like crispy duck drumettes with pepper jelly and remoulade sauce, an oysters Rockefeller burger, and a seafood muffaletta with shrimp and crawfish. The crawfish come from the ponds on the Carroll family farm. So do the pecans they use in their cobbler.

The chefs also dreamed of having a restaurant in New Orleans. “It’s an extraordinary food community. There’s so much talent there,”

says Cody. “Working around other great chefs makes you a better chef and we want to be the best chefs we can be.” Two years after opening Hot Tails, Cody and Sam got married. Two years after that they opened Sac-A-Lait on Annunciation Street in New Orleans’ burgeoning Warehouse District.

The husband-and-wife chef team creates all of the recipes for both restaurants. “We feed off of each other,” says Sam. Sac-A-Lait’s menu is very fish-and-game-oriented with a slate-blackened redfish, and gulf tuna with venison sweet breads, alligator and milirton. “Sac-A-Lait lets us showcase what we hunt and grow on the farm,” says Cody. “And what we hunt for at Rouses,” adds Sam. “There’s a Rouses just a few blocks from the restaurant.”

The couple both grew up on gumbo, so naturally it’s on the menu at their restaurants — a seafood version at Hot Tails, a seasonal selection at Sac-A-Lait. (In October, that meant frog legs and alligator.) “My mom made the gumbo,” says Sam, who was raised in Gonzales. “It was mostly chicken and sausage. For me the smell of gumbo brings back memories of her kitchen. I wish someone would come up with a roux candle.

That smell, it just smells like home.”

Cody usually makes the gumbo, Sam the potato salad. “In New Orleans, they like a thicker base, but in Pointe Coupee Parish, where I’m from, the gumbo is usually thinner. Not watery, but thinner. The flavor is still there. It’s just that the meat and the stock talk more,” says Cody. What goes in the gumbo depends on the time of year, and where the chefs — both avid fishermen and hunters — are. “When I’m in Grande Isle, I want seafood gumbo,” says Cody. “After a hunt, I want duck or smoked rabbit. My dad cooks a great squirrel gumbo. It’s one of the first things I ever learned how to cook. Cleaning squirrel is similar to cleaning rabbit — it just takes longer.”

Whether it’s shrimp and oyster, crabmeat and fish, duck or rabbit, no bowl of the Carrolls’ gumbo is served without Sam’s tangy potato salad, which is made with relish and wet and dry mustard. “Some people think you should only eat potato salad with a sausage gumbo. But you boil and eat potatoes with crawfish. Seafood and potatoes just make sense.”

And so do Cody and Sam. ■



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# Catching Up

*with* **TOMMY'S SEAFOOD**

*by* Mary Beth Romig + *photo by* Denny Culbert

**C**halin Delaune is not the run-of-the-mill 27-year-old. In fact, he is rather extraordinary in life and in work. Everything about the young man who serves as vice president of his family's business, Tommy's Seafood, speaks to hard work, family and faith. Those are his words spoken with quiet humility, nothing false or forced as he speaks.

Ask him what is the best part of his day, and he is quick to respond, "The ride into work is my favorite, as coming into work each day it doesn't feel like going to work. And I take that time to pray for my family, our employees, our customers and the quality of our work," he says. "I also pray for issues and problems way beyond me, like the people caught in the terrible floods in recent weeks in nearby parishes in Louisiana. I try to prepare myself mentally and spiritually, and that's what gives me the energy I need for the day ahead."

The day ahead includes running the family business, alongside his father Tommy, his mother Maria, three brothers, and members of his extended family, close friends and loyal employees.

Tommy's Seafood, founded in 1982, is a gulf seafood processor located in Chalmette, Louisiana, near the Industrial Canal and the Shushan Lakefront Airport. The factory is approximately 30,000 square-foot and is divided into multiple workshops including but not limited to wild-caught head-on and head-off shrimp, live and cleaned frozen blue crab, shucked oysters, and fish fillets. As far as shrimp are concerned, there are no peeling machines on-site because Tommy's Seafood prides itself on being a hands on processor.

Chalin's office is decorated with two spiritually-inspired tapestries, a reflection of the deep-seated spirituality that permeates every level of operations. Faith has always been at the heart of the family business. Chalin's father was a traveling missionary when he was introduced to his mother in Ecuador.

The couple moved to New Orleans where Tommy took a job as a bartender at the famed Pat O'Briens, and Maria began a pursuit of a degree in accounting. When he was 32, Tommy was hired as a manager of the Fish House in New Orleans, a retail and wholesale seafood business that specialized in a diverse product line of shrimp, crabs, oysters, crawfish and fish. With no background in seafood, Tommy learned everything he could as fast as he could.

After seven months as sales manager, Tommy watched as the successful business suddenly shut down, forcing him to make a leap of faith. Having experienced first-hand what it was like to run a seafood supplier business, knowing where to source seafood, and with strong connection to an established customer base, Tommy went to a bank and got a personal line of credit, bought a '79 Dodge pickup truck, and went into business for himself.

And that is how Tommy's Seafood began. Knowing a good reputation goes a long way, he always kept his promise to customers, and the business began to grow substantially.

"My father always taught us that a man is only as good as his word," says Chalin. "He relied on his faith, his honor and a spirit of trust, all the while my mother serving as his spiritual backbone."

Another leap of faith came in 1989, when the couple began looking for ways to expand, just as their own family began to grow. In 1991, they bought a marina with a dock in Chalmette and lived in a one-bedroom / one-bathroom apartment above the marina office until their new home could be built. For a growing family, those were tight quarters, but Chalin says that didn't matter at all because as a young adventuresome boy, living on the bayou gave him some of the best memories of his life.

"The bayou was like our salt water pool," Chalin says. "There was never a dull moment, whether that was fishing or taking a pirogue and exploring the marsh to see all the wildlife. This type of culture was engrained in me from a young age and it set the course for my life. I knew from the get-go I was going to stay in the family business."

The seafood industry has a strong reputation for generational blessings where a trade is passed down from father to son. In the case of the Delaunes, father Tommy is at the helm. Mom, Maria, serves as secretary and treasurer. Their oldest son, Ryan, works in

## Mr. Anthony Rouse's Down Home Oyster Dressing

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1½ quarts Louisiana Oysters (reserve liquid)
- 1 pound ground beef lean
- ½ pound ground pork
- 1 16 ounces Guidry's fresh cut seasoning blend (bell pepper and onion) or 1 large onion and 2 large green bell peppers
- 1 bundle of green onions sliced fine
- 2 cups rice to be cooked
- 2 tablespoons of your favorite Cajun seasoning
- 2 tablespoons fresh basil or 1 tablespoon dried
- 1 tablespoon Kitchen Bouquet
- 1 tablespoon granulated garlic
- ½ tablespoon old bay seasoning

### HOW TO PREP

Cook rice and set aside. Brown beef and pork. Add onions and bell peppers, mix well and cook until onions are clear. Add dry seasonings and mix well. Add oysters and mix well (some may want to chop oysters in ½). Mix in green onions and Kitchen Bouquet. Remove from heat and mix in rice. (Serves 6-8)

**"It's a debate almost as old as Thanksgiving itself: dressing or stuffing? In the Rouse family, we call it dressing. There are three casserole dishes on our Thanksgiving table — cornbread dressing, rice dressing, and my grandfather's oyster dressing, which is so good, chef John Folse featured it in one of his cookbooks. Chef Susan Spicer says the casserole dish itself is what settles the dressing vs. stuffing debate once and for all: If it's served on the side, it's dressing; if it goes in the bird, it's stuffing."**

—Donny Rouse, 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation





photo by Denny Culbert

public relations, while two others sons, Sean and Christian, work in operations. A cousin and his daughter are in the customer relations department. Chalin's oldest friend works with the Delaunes, as do drivers and employees who Chalin says have been with the company since he was in diapers.

A company chef known as "Chef Willie" prepares a family style lunch every day, cooking good "soul food," as Chalin describes.

The word soul is not used lightly. There's a lot of joy in this family that's undergirded by a strong faith, which has served them well in the good times and the bad. To say this is a resilient bunch is the very definition of understatement.

In 2004, the Delaune family bought their current processing plant and completed major renovations to change it over from a produce plant to a seafood plant, but the next year Hurricane Katrina ravaged the 20,000-square-foot facility located right off the Jordan levee on the Industrial Canal.

They managed to save some wet documents and personal things like birth certificates, passports, any kind of I.D., and insurance papers. "We got the stuff out and had to carry it over our heads, through the water, up the levee, and when we got home, we spread all the papers out on a driveway and used a hair dryer to dry everything," recalls Tommy.

Product loss and accounts receivable loss cost the company \$2.5 million. And then came another leap of faith: close or keep going.

"We only had a decision to keep going," he says. "There wasn't any other decision. Closing our doors for good wasn't an option."

Resilience and their deep faith led the family through Hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and Isaac. When hit hard in 2010 with the BP oil

spill, it was the family's faith that yet again carried them through.

Chalin knows the business inside and out. His knowledge of the industry is impressively extensive, evidence that he has paid attention to Tommy's guidance over the years and has gleaned from his father's passion for an industry whose voice matters significantly when it comes to standards and regulations that affect the seafood business on a daily basis.

"Our workforce is our best equipment," Chalin says. "We have employees who are dedicated day in and day out to make sure they are doing the best possible job to provide the best possible product from a reliable source. Quality and consistency are our strengths."

Chalin considers his family and the business as not only a source of product and income, but of strength and energy. "We have to make sure we are good examples to our employees, which in turn creates a healthy work environment with people giving 100 percent."

And while he is hesitant to talk about it, the family believes heavily in the spirit of paying it forward. After the recent Louisiana floods,

Tommy's Seafood donated more than 50,000 pounds of fish and shrimp — enough to feed over 100,000 people — who had to seek shelter. They are heavily invested in their home state, and to fishermen far and wide. "We are resilient when we are united," says Chalin.

Tommy's Seafood distributes nationwide, and their network is vast, both in terms of sourcing and distributing. "We sell more local shrimp, crab, oysters, fish and crawfish than anyone on the Gulf Coast," says James, Rouses Seafood & Meat Director. "Tommy's helps makes that possible."

"We have such deep respect for Rouses' commitment to family and community," says Tommy. "Their support and partnership has given us the experience we needed to grow our company, and the seafood industry the support it needed, especially in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast."

Tommy firmly believes quality begins at the source, a belief he says the Rouse family shares. "By only accepting the best and freshest seafood, we not only provide a superior product to our customers, but also do our part to support the local economy, just as Rouses does. Like us, they have weathered many storms and stuck with us in good times and in bad."

Tommy's Seafood trucks showcase the Rouses logo, a display of gratitude for the relationship rooted in promoting local products in communities. "When we pull up to a dock, we are happy to show the fishermen that we are there to pick up the fruits of their hard labor on behalf of Rouse's, products that are high-quality always."

This holiday season, Tommy's Seafood will once again supply the delicious seafood — crabmeat, shrimp, and oysters — that are staples in many holiday dishes.

## The Raw Materials

Tommy's Seafood shucks and packs Rouses' private label oysters. It is a particularly good time of year for their oyster supply, which accounts for approximately one-third of their business. They source the majority of oyster from friends Chalin has known since childhood, another legacy of fathers and sons working together.

"It's another story of strong networking with oyster fishermen we have sourced from for years from St. Bernard, Barataria and Grand Isle," says Chalin. "It is friends of mine who learned the business from their fathers, just as my brothers and I have. And it is the personal combined with the business relationships we have that allows us to emphasize offering the best product possible."

He describes the difference in the oysters they bring to market being the result of the way the fishermen raise them.

"They make sure the oysters are growing in the best possible environment, not too salty, not too fresh," he says. "And they will move the oysters to different waters in order to make the oysters grow better, yield better."

Once the team at Tommy's Seafood shucks the oysters, they send the shells back to the fishermen so they can place them back in the water for new oysters to grow. "This ensures that we always have a steady supply of plump, delicious Louisiana oysters, and now with the fall season back, oysters will once again reach their best potential."

## The Reel Deal

The workdays can be long, but Chalin does not mind. He will often end the day with a meal made in the warehouse kitchen, featuring fresh oysters or shrimp, fresh off the docks from earlier in the day. He describes it as quality control.

"I especially like it when we can send our employees home with a little bit of something to show how much we appreciate them," Chalin says.

"It is all about a good attitude and good outlook in life, and taking care of our responsibilities to our communities and our industry," says Tommy. "On the Gulf Coast, seafood is second nature to us. It's not just another job and it's so much more than a career: being in the seafood industry is a way of life."

The company's old box tops were emblazoned with a psalm that read, "Those that go down to the sea in ships, they do business in great waters. These behold the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."

"That was our insignia, our emblem for years and years, a simple acknowledgement of God's abundant blessings," says the elder Delaune. "That's important to me. I feel our lifetime here is a tenure of stewardship or responsibility for something that's been entrusted and put in our hands. In this case, we are stewards of natural resources. It's not just a trade or skill that's handed down from father to son; it's a legacy of our culture and heritage." ■

# Holiday on the HALF SHELL

by Kit Wohl

**W**e love oysters. They're so precious that Mother Nature hid them in clunky shells, but there's a way around that.

Why in the world would someone pry open oysters if they didn't have to? Getting ready for the holidays is a joy, and we want to make it as simple as possible. That is, unless the gang gets a kick out of fighting a sack of oysters out in the backyard.

No kidding, some really nice person at Rouses has already shucked them for you and packed in little containers. Refrigerate them immediately at home.

Drain them, reserving the oyster liquor for use as a flavor-enhancing liquid in stuffing and other recipes. It's pure culinary gold. Strain out any bits of shell, and freeze it for future use if you don't need it immediately.

We keep some deep oyster shells at the house. Run them through the dishwasher a few times and they're ready for the oven or grill. Simply ask at the oyster bar next time you order a dozen. Or Rouses has snappy metal oyster shells, premade for just that purpose.

Other ways to use those magnificent oysters, unless you simply prepare a cocktail sauce setup and turn your guests loose:

**Oyster shooters:** Prepare your normal Bloody Mary recipe, use a small shot glass for serving and add a raw oyster. Put on the dog and place one in a glass of champagne.

While you cook, assign someone to stage a grilled oyster feast for the crowd. Set out a variety of grated cheeses, Louisiana hot sauce, olive oil, butter, minced garlic, and chopped green onions, shallots, and jalapeño peppers — anything that tickles your taste buds. Take oyster shells, the drained oysters, and fire up the grill. Turn it into a do-it-yourself banquet. The oven broiler will work, but that defeats the purpose.

Fun will ensue. It will get everyone out of your kitchen so you can get on with it.

Of course, it's whimsical and ambitious to get fancy and serve oysters Rockefeller, oysters Bienville, or any number of baked oyster recipes, but this holiday season it's all about peace and serenity. Take it easy. Serve good food. Laugh. Enjoy your guests. That's why you're all together. ■

## > Siches, Viches & Oyster Dishes

by Pableaux Johnson, *My Rouses Everyday*, May-June 2015

*The "names ending in -ich" trick is the easiest way to see the influence of the Croatian communities that developed along the Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama coasts since the 1800s. ("Ich" is the Americanization of a common Slavic suffix meaning "son of.") With origins in the Mediterranean coastal region of the former Yugoslavia, many of the Croatian immigrants were fishermen who worked the sea along the Adriatic coast of Dalmatia (a historic region of modern-day Croatia). After relocating to the Gulf Coast, they settled in places like Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, and Biloxi, Mississippi. And it was in these coastal areas that the Croatians plied a critical trade in the development of local seafood culture, as they worked and built the reefs where gulf oysters grow and thrive. Along the brackish zone where fresh water meets the salty sea, the Croatians developed a thriving commercial oyster industry starting in the latter half of the 19th century. Originally working with shovels (for seeding the beds) and tongs (for harvesting), the Croatians and often their descendants tended the reefs and shrimp boats that shaped the region's seafood culture.*

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# GATHERED TOGETHER

by Kit Wohl

**B**eing part of a big family made being alone on a holiday miserable. One season long ago when I was single, it wasn't possible to get home. I felt downright pitiful.

The next year I invited just about everyone I knew for Thanksgiving. We were all young and pretty naïve about this entertaining thing. There wasn't much planning. Everyone would bring something, and I'd do the turkey. Easy. After all, for years I'd watched my mother cook the bird.

Thanksgiving morning I went to the grocery to get a fresh turkey. Of course all they had was frozen.

A hotel chef, a friend, bailed me out. His boss, a savvy guy, had warned him that not only I, but also some of his colleagues, would fail to get it together. Grinning, the chef handed over turkeys and fixings. He joined us later for his share. Thus began a lifelong appreciation of cooks and chefs.

The guests brought a few edible things. The ones who couldn't cook (almost everyone) brought wine and other adult beverages. One friend found some gorgeous, colorful gourds and attempted to bake them. They made a lovely centerpiece. We created a makeshift buffet and bar and perched wherever we could, balancing plates and glasses on the floor. There was plenty to eat and drink, friends, music, laughter, and best of all, we weren't alone.

Over the years holiday gatherings at my house became a tradition.

As the size of my house grew, so did the guest list. Usually, there were anywhere from 40 to 50 or so. Our record stands at 80. Food writers, media pals, friends and friends of friends passed through.

Apprentice cooks and chefs, fledgling or famous, joined the crowd. Jeremiah Tower, Donald Link, Zack Engel (now chef de cuisine at Shaya) and Kevin Davis (Arnaud's former chef, now with his own restaurants in Seattle) all took their turns here. Food writer Tom Fitzmorris cleaned vegetables when he was a bachelor, while restaurant reviewer Gene Bourg simply charmed everyone and asked for our biscuit recipe. Greg Reggio from Zea and Semolina offered feathered ducks after a hunting trip, first asking if I knew what to do with them. I did. They went straight to Kevin. Duck soup became another tradition.

We always enjoyed discovering friends' food memories and make an effort to satisfy that longing when we write the menu. There was the guest one year who thanked me for remembering he was vegetarian and providing a lavish vegetarian spread for his enjoyment. It was a misplaced compliment, however welcome — we simply had a variety of dishes.

Memories included fresh corn scraped from the cob and sautéed in butter. Corn pudding, another favorite, took a couple of years to get just right. It was never wrong, just didn't meet that particular taste memory. Another memory was buttered peas topped with chopped fresh mint. Brussels sprouts were halved and oven roasted with bacon.





◀ [FAR LEFT]  
Rice Dressing  
photo by Romney Caruso  
[LEFT] Duck Soup with  
Quacklings

There's always a debate about dressing — some are all about oyster dressing, others insist on cornbread stuffing. A Midwestern friend who didn't know any better, bless her elsewhere heart, longed for Stove Top Stuffing. That was easy.

The best thing about dressing and stuffing is that they require just about the same ingredients. We have, at times, four pans of different bread groups lined up awaiting additions of pecans, sausage, or seafood such as crabmeat, oysters or shrimp.

Creamed spinach commands a must-have category, and after washing and chopping for years we discovered that there was no taste difference between fresh or frozen. The biggest issue was thawing and draining the little boxes. Yes, please plan to do that in advance. You can actually assemble the entire dish in advance. Covered, it holds refrigerated for at least three days.

The main reason we never tried to fry a turkey was small children. First for safety, then we had no idea of how to properly dispose of all that oil. If anyone has an ecologically appropriate way to do that, let me know, I've always wondered.

A friend, who also hosts a large friends and family feast, believes in culinary democracy. The crowd gets to vote one dish off the island following the meal. The next year the banished dish is replaced by a hopeful entry, subject to another vote. Jell-O mold was voted off, jiggling in despair. The hostess retains veto power. She loves the old green bean casserole recipe with French's fried onion rings, so that's not going anywhere. Banished dishes included beets, carrots, and anything to be cooked at last minute and jam the kitchen. A simple survey of the plates at the end of the meal weighs heavily on the decisions.

Food has a way of bringing people together, especially during the holidays, especially at my house. There's always plenty to eat and drink, family, friends, music, laughter, and thankfully, we aren't alone. ■

## Duck Soup with Quacklings

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 2 ducks, each about 2½ pounds, smoked or roasted
  - 2 quarts water
  - 1 gallon chicken stock
  - 2 cans of beer
  - 2 large white onions, roughly chopped
  - 1 green bell pepper, roughly chopped
  - 3 celery stalks, roughly chopped
  - 4 fresh garlic cloves, chopped
  - ½ cup chopped parsley
  - 1 carrot, roughly chopped
  - 2 fresh rosemary sprigs
  - 1 pint fresh mushrooms, sliced
  - 6 ounces wild rice
  - 1 bunch green onions, finely chopped for garnish
- Duck Skin Quacklings (recipe follows)

### HOW TO PREP

Remove skin and pick meat from 2 ducks. Set skin aside. Cut duck meat into bite-size pieces. Cover and refrigerate.

Split duck carcasses in half. Using a 3-gallon stockpot over medium heat, add water and chicken stock. Add duck carcasses and onion, green bell pepper, celery, garlic, parsley, carrot, and rosemary.

Bring liquid to a boil. Then reduce heat to medium-low and allow it to simmer until reduced by half, 1 to 2 hours. Periodically skim off foam and impurities that float to top.

Strain stock and discard carcasses and vegetables. Return strained stock to stockpot. Add rice and simmer until it is fully cooked, approximately 1 hour. Add mushrooms and duck meat, then continue simmering until heated, about 15 minutes. Garnish with green onions. Serve Duck Skin Quacklings either atop or alongside soup.

### Duck Skin Quacklings

Cut duck skin into bite-sized pieces. Pour ½ cup of water into a medium saucepan (you need very little water if duck skin is already cooked). Bring to a boil and simmer until no water is left and fat is rendered from duck skin. Carefully pour off and reserve any duck fat that remains — you'll need it. To make quacklings, using a medium-sized skillet, add the remaining duck fat over medium-high heat. Fry the duck skin in the duck fat until browned and crisp. Carefully remove using tongs or a slotted spoon.  
(Serves 10 to 12)



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## CREOLE AVOCADO PASTA

- 8 ounces dry pasta
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- 1 green onion, finely sliced
- 1 large ripe avocado
- 1/4 teaspoon finely grated garlic
- Juice from 1/4 of a lemon
- Salt, Pine nuts and freshly ground pepper, to taste

### Cook Pasta

Bring a pot of salted water to the boil and cook pasta according to package directions. Once cooked, reserve 1/2 cup of hot pasta water then drain pasta.

### Prepare Avocado Sauce

Mash avocado in a large bowl. Stir in the garlic and lemon juice then season with salt and pepper, to taste. Stir in a 1/4-cup of the reserved pasta water. Add pasta, tomatoes, and green onion then toss until the pasta is completely coated by the sauce. If the sauce is too thick, add a little more pasta water.

For more recipes go to: [avorecipes.com](http://avorecipes.com)

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## Sweet-n-Savory Green Beans

MAKES 6 SERVINGS



### INGREDIENTS:

1/4 cup sherry  
1/4 cup Ocean Spray® Cranberry Juice Cocktail  
Freshly ground black pepper to taste  
1/2 cup blanched almonds, toasted\*\*  
10 ounces fresh or frozen green beans  
1 small onion, sliced  
2 tablespoons water  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
2 cloves garlic, sliced  
2 tablespoons butter  
1 teaspoon cumin seed\*  
1 teaspoon curry powder  
4 ounces Ocean Spray® Craisins® Original Dried Cranberries

### DIRECTIONS:

If using fresh green beans, cook in salted boiling water for 3 to 4 minutes or until just tender. Drain; rinse in cold water.  
Combine onion, water and salt in large skillet. Cook over medium-high heat until water evaporates. Add beans, garlic, butter, cumin and curry powder; stir to coat beans. Stir in dried cranberries, sherry, juice cocktail and pepper. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook for 5 to 10 minutes or until liquid evaporates and mixture is heated through. Sprinkle with almonds.  
\*If desired, lightly toast cumin seed in small skillet and pound with mortar and pestle to bring out flavor.  
\*\*To toast almonds, cook in small nonstick skillet over medium heat, stirring constantly, for 5 to 6 minutes or until golden brown and fragrant. Toasted salted Marcona almonds can be substituted.

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*The Birds & The Bs:*  
**BRINING, BAKING  
& BASTING**

*by* Mary Beth Romig



**A**mong my many wonderful food memories from the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays growing up was watching my father's pleasure in preparing the turkey, as he took great pride in being in charge of the process, while my mother handled the side dishes. His excitement deepened the year he decided to try cooking the bird on the outdoor grill.

Dad loved that grill, tucked away in the courtyard in the back corner of the yard, partly because he enjoyed anything he prepared on it food-wise, partly because it was his domain, and partly because it offered him the opportunity to savor a good cocktail, cigar and the newspaper while he lauded over whatever he was grilling that particular afternoon.

Back to the turkey ... Dad purchased some special hickory wood chips for the pit and dug a bowl-shaped opening in the pit. After prepping the defrosted turkey, he would encase it in a foil cradle and place the turkey in the grill's bowl. It would slowly cook for hours, Dad regularly basting the bird, and the result was always juicy and delicious, the skin taking on a unique woody flavor.

Then came the year of the Christmas Coastal Snowstorm. It was 1989, and New Orleans recorded a record-low temperature of 11 degrees, pipes bursting across the region. Dad was determined to grill the turkey yet again despite the frigid temperature, and I can remember watching him bundled up in his heaviest coat, gloves and hat, standing over the pit. That was the year the turkey RE-froze right there over the open flame. Needless to say, Christmas dinner was served later than usual that year, heavy on the sides.

People far and wide are getting more creative with the turkey over the years, and today there are other methods of preparation one can consider beyond the traditional method of oven-baking and basting when taking on the honors of being responsible for the culinary star of the holiday food show.

## ALL ABOUT THAT BASTE

Dribbling hot pan juices over a roasting bird has always been one of the quintessential images of Thanksgiving. But in recent years, I've noticed some recipes for roast turkey are leaving this step out. That makes me wonder how necessary basting really is. What do you think?

The main theory behind basting is to ensure moist and tender meat — usually by spooning pan juices over the roasting turkey, or using one of those basters that allow you to extract the natural juices into the baster, then squeezing the other ends, releasing those same juices over the exposed breasts. The fat in the drippings melts into the skin and the meat closest to the surface, preventing it from drying out in the oven's dry heat while also adding flavor. At the same time, the liquid in the basting mixture evaporates and keeps the surface slightly cooler, helping the meat cook evenly.

If you're cooking a smaller turkey that doesn't need as much time in the oven, you can also simply rub the outside with butter or lay a few pieces of bacon over the quick-cooking breast

meat. (Bacon!) But if basting is going to be a part of the regimen, there are a few suggestions you may wish to consider. It is often recommended that you remove the turkey from the oven to baste, closing the door immediately to ensure heat is not lost from the oven, which could add to the roasting time.

A few recipes I have reviewed also suggest laying a bed of herbs and vegetables under a rack on which the turkey is roasted. This ensures an already turkey juice-soaked base for the gravy. Noted chef, restaurateur and cookbook author John Besh describes his mother-in-law's practice of chopping carrots, onions, celery and garlic, and placing them and 3 cups of water in the bottom of a sturdy roasting pan to catch the drippings. After the bird is roasted, she strains the pan drippings into a bowl, using them as her gravy base.

Turning the turkey during cooking or tenting it with foil partway through cooking also helps to prevent it from drying out. These techniques protect the meat from direct oven heat and regulate cooking speed.

Perhaps the most unique method involving basting calls for melting butter and wine, the amount depending on the size of the bird. You then let cheesecloth soak in the butter and wine mixture while the turkey is prepped for roasting. When the turkey is almost ready for roasting, whatever your recipe calls for, brush some of the butter and wine into the cavity. When the bird is completely ready to go, directions call for wrapping it in the soaked cheesecloth, which is eventually removed for the final hour of cooking, and continuing to baste the turkey until roasting is complete.

## BRINE & DINE

Many foodies recommend brining the bird, akin to marinating, believing it to be the ticket to a juicy, full-flavored turkey. While the practice does have its detractors, brining is steadily gaining popularity.

Turkey is a relatively lean bird, particularly the breast meat, meaning that it doesn't have a lot of fat to help keep the meat from becoming dry and tough. This is where brining comes in. A brine is a very basic solution of water and salt, and by giving a turkey a long and luxurious dunk in this solution, you can actually coax a bit more moisture and flavor into the meal, hopefully making the turkey super juicy and extra flavorful.

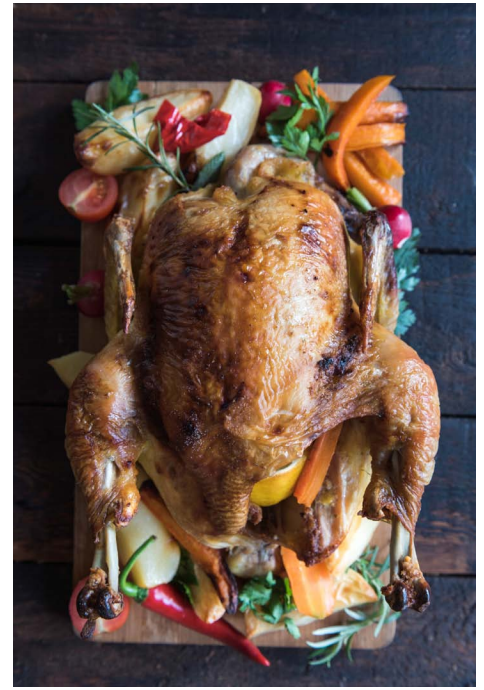
During brining, the turkey absorbs extra moisture, which in turn helps it stay more moist and juicy both during and after cooking. Since the turkey absorbs salt along with the water, it also gets nicely seasoned from the inside out. Even better, the salt breaks down some of the turkey's muscle proteins, which helps with the overall moisture absorption and also prevents the meat from toughening up quite so much during cooking.

*The pros:* Brining is a simple way to add flavor and smells delicious.

*The cons:* The process takes up a lot of space and can be time-intensive, as it requires advanced planning and action.

To brine, begin with a completely thawed turkey. The night before roasting, remove the





giblets and rinse the bird inside and out. Prepare your brine recipe, making sure all of the salt the recipe your recipe calls for is dissolved. If the instructions call for heating the brine, let it cool to room temperature before beginning the bird's bath. Once you have determined where the brining process will take place — a brining bag, large container, refrigerator drawer, or other recommended vessel — place the turkey breast down and completely submerge the bird.

Most recommendations call for brining one hour for every pound the turkey weighs. Remove the turkey from the brine after the allotted time, rinse and pat it dry with paper towels. Cook the turkey as desired.

The brine mixture can be a simple combination of water, salt, and possibly sugar, while other recipes might call for additional ingredients and spices.

Some people choose to dry brine their turkey — rub it with salt, basically. In that situation, salt draws the meat's juices to the surface of the bird. The juices then mix with the salt, forming a brine that is then reabsorbed by the meat.

If you're nervous about overcooking your turkey and winding up with a platter of dry turkey meat on your table, think of brining as your insurance. A brined bird will stay juicy and taste good even if you overshoot the cooking time a little, and that's one less thing you need to worry about during your holiday meal.

## SPLIT DECISION

Research "spatchcock," and you will find more information on the origin of the word than actual directions for this cooking method, which has been described as a "Thanksgiving game-changer."

According to the 1999 version of the Oxford Companion to Food, the culinary term "spatchcock" has its roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, revived towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and said to be of Irish origin. The phrase is used to indicate a summary way of grilling a bird after splitting it open down the back and spreading the two halves out flat, akin to "butterflying."

Unlike a traditional recipe, most directions for spatchcocking include illustrations for prepping. Besides making an intriguing presentation and being simple to carve, a spatchcocked turkey requires less time in the oven or on the grill. In most cases, this process reduces the roasting time from on average three hours to anywhere from 45-90 minutes. It is also easy to make a pocket between the skin and breast meat to stuff the bird with a layer of vegetables and seasonings. The variations in flavor would come from whichever method of preparation is chosen, from simply sprinkling the bird with salt and pepper and brushing with olive oil, to more creative herb and spice applications.

There are a number of helpful websites to walk any cook through the process, among them Serious Eats, which points out one more advantage to spatchcocking a turkey: the gravy is so much better when there are real bones and meat to add to the mix, resulting in a more flavorful broth with which to prepare the gravy. Serious Eats also recommends preparing a bed of vegetables, if spatchcocking in the oven, to capture the turkey drippings as the bird roasts.

A spatchcocked turkey also requires a slightly different carving technique, so while the dining table may lose the drama of a fully cooked bird taking center stage, standing ready for the carving knife, the gains may include more free time for the chef, and certainly a lively topic for dinner conversation.

And here is a handy note: a Rouses butcher will spatchcock a turkey for any customer who asks. Just to be sure to say "split and dressed" and it is always good to add the word "please!"

## GLAZED & CONFUSED

Brown-sugar glaze ... bourbon glaze ... maple cranberry glaze ... cider glaze ... root beer glaze ... orange honey glaze ... it is enough to make one's eyes glaze over when considering the variations.

Glazing a turkey adds to a traditional oven-baked bird a layer of flavoring that in most cases is applied in the last hour of cooking. The recipes can be sweet or spicy, but the results are usually the

same, a delicious addition of color and flavor to the holiday bird. Recipes for glazes abound, it is simply a matter of taste — literally.

And if you want more flavor not just on the outside, but inside as well, try injecting the turkey with a favorite marinade, practically guaranteeing delicious juiciness throughout the meat. The process calls for filling the needle injector with the marinade of choice and inserting it into the breasts and thighs with the recommended amount of .5 ounces of marinade for every five pounds of turkey.

## FRIED & TRUE

Today frying a turkey for the holiday meal is as much a part of the fabric of the season as canned cranberries and football. But how did the deep-fried turkey get its start? The Cajun chef and culinary personality Justin Wilson — noted as much for his accent and quintessential sayings as his cooking show — was the first person to publicly declare that he once saw someone deep-fry a turkey back in the 1930s.

The process basically involves lowering a turkey with a hanger-type apparatus into a sizeable vat of oil heated with propane gas for, according to most recipes, four to five minutes per pound. In Wilson's heyday in the 1970s, he was one of the only chefs to make this crispy version, and did so in something similar to the crawfish boiler most people use today.

Deep-frying a turkey has become more and more popular in recent years. This method turns out an irresistibly tender and delicious turkey, and is a great alternative to traditional cooking methods. It is especially important, however, to follow instructions carefully and take precautions. While the oil is heating, the turkey is prepared with any seasonings, marinades, or the now-popular injected (more on this later) flavor of choice.

Most recipes call for using peanut, canola or cottonseed oil, and nearly every set of cooking instructions or YouTube videos — some appropriately titled “How to Deep Fry a Turkey Without Burning the House Down” — include safety tips for successful frying. Nearly all recommend heating the oil to 350-400 degrees, then turning the burner off before *slowly* lowering the turkey into the boiling oil until the bird is totally submerged.

A fun party tip for the holidays: invite over some friends, each bringing a turkey prepared for frying. Once the initial turkey is fried, the assembled guests share in enjoying the delicious results, along with other small bites, appetizers and beverages of choice, all the while the other turkeys are frying in turn. At the end of the frying and dining, guests then go home with their own fried turkey in tow and memories of a great afternoon shared with friends during the holiday season.

For some groups, such as the Dawn Busters Kiwanis Club in Metairie, Louisiana, deep-frying turkeys is serious business. Every year in the days prior to Thanksgiving, a team of volunteers preps and fries turkeys for the self-described “World's Largest Turkey Fry,” cooking as many as 800-900 turkeys annually, with 100 percent of the profits funding year-round service projects. The Dawn Busters are not alone, as similar events are growing in popularity across the nation.

And if the size of the holiday crowd warrants, a fun option is to serve a fried turkey alongside a more traditional oven-baked version, offering friends and family a choice and a healthy debate on which tastes better. ■

# 50 SHADES OF Gravy

by Suzette Norria

Gravy's got a brand new gig. It's a cornbread layer cake filled with stuffing, frosted with mashed potatoes and iced with dripping ribbons of brown, rich gravy. Just think of it, one slice and you've downed most of the holiday meal — no gravy boat required.

A fad? Probably, but photos abound on Pinterest and Twitter. Check it out. Like most people, I'm partial to a more traditional approach to gravy for the holidays (and I also like pulling out the old gravy boat). But that doesn't mean there aren't options. Below are a few superstars in the gravy world:

**Pan Gravy:** Make this right in the roasting pan once the turkey is done. Flour cooked in the turkey drippings makes the gravy thick.

**Giblet Gravy:** Adding giblets along with roasted carrots, onion and celery creates the flavor base. White wine pulls it all together, and flour thickens it up.

**Creole Daube:** A roux-based red gravy often served with beef.

“The essence of gravy is the simple combination of roasted meat drippings with flour. Get that combination right, and then get creative,” said Chef Stephen Huth, my brother-in-law and owner of Restaurant Cypress in Metairie. “You can throw in some bourbon, wine, cider — anything you want after that — and it's still considered a gravy.”

While giblets are somewhat controversial, they can add both flavor and texture to turkey gravy. If you've got the pluck to handle them, keep these tips in mind:

- Take the giblet bag out of the turkey's innards the night before, rinse and store giblets in a plastic bag. That way you won't forget to remove them before roasting the bird.
- Cut the turkey neck into small (one-inch) pieces with a heavy knife.
- In a medium saucepan, cover the neck and other organs with water, boil and then simmer for an hour or so.
- Chop up the giblets and remove meat from neck (remember, you have to have some pluck). Set aside until you're ready to make the gravy.

For those who prefer a velvety gravy (sans giblets), I asked Stephen to share his number one tip for making gravy that's silky smooth. All gravy, he said, should be made with a lightweight flour like Wondra, which dissolves quickly and mixes more easily than normal, all-purpose flour.

Sounds simple enough, but if gravy makes you nervous, try a store-bought version. Rouses selection includes dry mix packets, Heinz Home Style Gravy jars, and gravy seasoning mixes like Tony Chachere's Creole Brown Gravy. I remember a friend of mine (who shall remain anonymous) claimed to “make her own gravy” by purchasing three different types of store-bought gravy, mixing them up, and pouring them into her vintage porcelain gravy boat. She destroyed all the evidence before her family and friends arrived, and no one ever knew the difference. ■

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### Beef Fajitas

- 8 oz John Soules Foods Beef Fajitas, thawed
- 1 Sliced Pepper (green, red, yellow or combination)
- 1 Sliced Onion
- 1 Shredded Cheese
- 1 cup Topping (salsa, guacamole, sour cream or combination)
- 4-6 Tortillas (flour or corn)
- 1 tbsp Olive Oil

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add the John Soules Foods Beef Fajitas and cook until 160°F. Add peppers and onions and cook for an additional 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

Take the remaining ingredients and place on serving platter. Place cooked meat, peppers and onions on serving platter. Fill tortillas with desired ingredients. Serve.

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# Reese

## Artichoke & Red Pepper Dip

The dip of all dips! This creamy, decadent dip is perfect for any occasion!

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tbsp. butter
- ½ – 10 oz. jar Roasted Red Peppers, drained
- 1 – 4 oz. goat cheese log
- 1 tsp. onion powder
- ¾ cup half & half
- 1 – 14 oz. can Reese Quartered Artichoke Hearts, drained
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper, to taste



### DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the broiler on low.
2. Lightly butter the bottom and sides of a casserole dish.
3. In a food processor, puree red peppers, goat cheese, onion powder, and half & half until smooth.
4. Add the artichokes and pulse 5–10 times until roughly chopped. Season with the cayenne, pepper, and salt. Stir to combine.
5. Spoon the artichoke mixture into the casserole dish and microwave for 2–3 minutes.
6. Remove from microwave and place in the oven to broil until the top is bubbly.
7. Serve warm with crackers, pita bread, or tortilla chips.

*The Proof is in the*

# BREAD PUDDING

by Poppy Tooker



Every country that counts bread as a staple of life has found a way to utilize it when it becomes stale, as every culture believed that bread was too valuable a commodity to waste.

Chef Paul Prudhomme demystified bread pudding by describing it as “an egg and milk custard added to stale bread,” pointing out that stale bread was essential to the preparation. I prefer to cube fresh French bread and toast it in the oven. By slightly browning the bread, the sugars are lightly caramelized, deepening the flavors.

Bread pudding was commonplace in England by the 13th century where it was often referred to as “poor man’s pudding.” Most people today think of bread pudding as a sweet dessert, but surprisingly, the earliest bread puddings were savory.

Egg and milk custard combined with bread provides a blank canvas for creating an endless variety of satisfying, savory meals.

Savory bread pudding can be meat laden or vegetarian. It’s a great way to utilize various leftover bits from the fridge, transforming those odds and ends into a delicious and frugal dinner.

Sweet bread puddings are served sauced. A favorite dessert at my great grandmother’s table, Mamman finished her raisin pecan laden version with a hard sauce, made simply by creaming together butter, powdered sugar and “hard” liquor — whiskey.

When I began experimenting with main dish bread puddings, I transformed Mamman’s simple sauce into a compound butter. Flavors that compliment your savory dish are quickly whipped together in the food processor. The buttery sauce melts into the hot bread pudding, adding a delectable richness. ■

### > **Louisiana Eats!**

*Rouses is a longtime sponsor of Poppy Tooker’s Louisiana Eats! Each episode of the NPR-affiliated show takes listeners to the fields and farms, restaurant and home kitchens where the food action is really happening. It can be heard on WRKF 89.3 FM in Baton Rouge, KRVS 88.7 FM in Lafayette and Lake Charles, and WWNO 89.9 FM in New Orleans.*

## Savory Mediterranean Bread Pudding

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

#### BREAD PUDDING

- ½ loaf (6 cups) French bread, cubed
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups cream
- 8 eggs
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 8 ounces bag fresh spinach
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese
- ½ cup chopped Kalamata olives
- 2 tablespoons butter

#### TOMATO COMPOUND BUTTER

- 8 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup DeLallo sundried tomato bruschetta spread
- 1 bunch green onions, cut into one inch sections

### HOW TO PREP

If French bread isn’t stale, toast in a 350 degree oven for 15 or 20 minutes.

Remove from oven and cool. In a large mixing bowl, combine milk, eggs and cream, whisking together till smooth. Add the cubed bread to the milk mixture and allow to soak for 10 or 15 minutes until soft.

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until translucent. Add the spinach and garlic and sauté until spinach is wilted. (About 2 minutes.) Remove from the heat and stir in the feta cheese and kalamata olives. Add spinach mixture to soaked bread.

Grease a 10-inch by 15 inch baking pan with 2 tablespoons of butter.

Pour the sausage bread pudding mixture into the baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Chop the green onions in the food processor. Add the sundried tomato bruschetta spread and 8 tablespoons of butter to the food processor and process until smooth. Spread the compound butter mixture on top of the hot bread pudding. Cut into squares and serve. (Serves 8 to 10)

## Savory Piggy Pudding

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

#### BREAD PUDDING

- ½ loaf (6 cups) French bread, cubed
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups cream
- 8 eggs
- 1½ pounds Rouses spicy pork sausage
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons butter

#### TOMATO COMPOUND BUTTER

- 8 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup DeLallo sundried tomato bruschetta spread
- 1 bunch green onions, cut into one-inch sections

### HOW TO PREP

If French bread isn’t stale, toast in a 350 degree oven for 15 or 20 minutes. Remove from oven and cool. In a large mixing bowl, combine milk, eggs and cream, whisking together till smooth. Add the cubed bread to the milk mixture and allow to soak for 10 or 15 minutes until soft.

Remove skin from sausage and brown in a skillet over medium high heat, breaking the sausage up as it cooks into the consistency of ground meat. Add the onion, celery, red bell pepper and garlic to the skillet and continue to sauté until seasoning vegetables are translucent. Add the sausage mixture to the soaked bread, stirring thoroughly until evenly mixed.

Grease a 10-inch by 15-inch baking pan with 2 tablespoons of butter.

Pour the sausage bread pudding mixture into the baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Chop the green onions in the food processor. Add the sundried tomato bruschetta spread and 8 tablespoons of butter to the food processor and process until smooth. Spread the compound butter mixture on top of the hot bread pudding. Cut into squares and serve. (Serves 8 to 10)

### > **Rouses Smoked Sausage**

*Our naturally smoked sausage is made with premium pork butts and a Rouse family blend of garlic, onions, Cayenne pepper, salt and spices. It has a meaty, smoky taste, a snappy outside and a smooth texture inside. We’ve been making it since 1960 (our founder, Mr. Anthony, produced it himself in his backyard).*

**“Both of my great grandmothers were great cooks, which was a lucky thing for me as my mother equated cooking with the worst sort of housework.” —Poppy Tooker**



by Bobby Childs

**W**ild Turkey Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey really is a perfect match for Thanksgiving dinner. For starters, it's a uniquely American whiskey.

The bourbon itself is complex, spicy and a touch herbal. One reason is because its average age is about eight years old. The minimum age for bourbon is two years, and to a point, every year the whisky ages in a barrel, it picks up some nice complexity. (Charred-barrel aging, the process that gives bourbon its rich amber coloring, is an American innovation). Wild Turkey has those bourbon flavors we all love — caramel, vanilla and oak — but it's also a bit spicy. The spice comes from the high percentage of rye in Wild Turkey's mash bill, or recipe. Traditionally, bourbon is made from corn, rye and malted barley. When I say spicy, I don't mean hot sauce spicy. Think more along the lines of the spiciness of rye bread.

Thanksgiving dinner is one of the most diverse meals you'll have all year. Wild Turkey will compliment all of the different flavors of your meal. With its rich caramel and vanilla notes, it's the perfect match for sweet potato casserole. Its spicy characteristic, along with a high proof, will cut right through grandma's oyster dressing

without overpowering the dish. And the whiskey's slight herbal quality also pairs nicely with the turkey itself.

Wild Turkey bourbon is bottled in two different ways. There's the standard 101 proof (50.5% alcohol by volume), which is the one I'd recommend picking up. You can proof it down to your tastes by adding a splash of water or some ice. If that's still too strong for you, Wild Turkey also makes lower 81-proof bourbon. Remember, alcohol acts as a flavor carrier, so in this case the 101 is more flavorful than the 81.

The story behind Wild Turkey is one of American entrepreneurship. Back in 1940, grocery wholesaler Austin, Nichols & Company owned a distillery. One of their executives, Thomas McCarthy, met with some of his friends each year for a turkey hunt in South Carolina. McCarthy was asked to bring some whiskey, so he bottled some 101 proof bourbon from one of the warehouses. The group loved the whiskey so much that the next year they asked for more of that "wild turkey bourbon." McCarthy, a businessman with a background in marketing, knew he had a hit. The company soon changed the name of their bourbon to Wild Turkey, and the rest, as they say, is history. ■

## Wild Turkey Maple Glazed Turkey

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 18 to 20 pound turkey, giblets removed
- 1½ cups Wild Turkey bourbon
- ½ cup orange juice
- ⅓ cup Steen's syrup
- 1 tablespoon chopped thyme
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, softened

### HOW TO PREP

Gently loosen the skin over the turkey breast and thighs (try not to tear it). Place a large oven-roasting bag in a very large bowl. Set the turkey in the bag, cavity-end up.

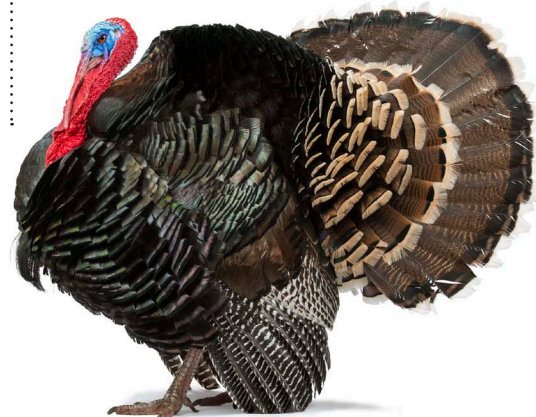
In a large measuring cup, mix the bourbon, orange juice, Steen's syrup, thyme and 1½ teaspoons each of salt and pepper. Pour some of the mixture over the turkey — use a silicon brush or your hands to completely coat. Gradually pour additional bourbon mixture under the turkey skin. Press to distribute it over the breast and thighs. Close and tightly wrap the bag and seal with a twist tie. Refrigerate overnight.

Bring the turkey to room temperature.

Preheat the oven to 325°. Take the turkey out of the bag and place it breast side up in a large roasting pan. Rub 6 tablespoons of the butter under the breast skin and rub the remaining 2 tablespoons over the skin. Use twine to tie the turkey legs together.

Pour ½ cup of the marinade into the roasting pan and roast the turkey for 30 minutes. Baste the turkey with the pan juices and add 1 cup of water to the pan. Roast the turkey for 1 hour longer, basting it every half hour. Add the remaining marinade to the pan. Loosely cover the turkey with aluminum foil and roast for an additional 2 hours, or until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the thigh reads 165°.

Carefully transfer the turkey to a carving board. Cover loosely with foil and let rest for 30 minutes before carving.



# THE *Hunger* GAMES

by Kit Wohl

**T**hose of you who get a little overwhelmed by planning Thanksgiving or Christmas for a very large group, let Rouses chefs do the cooking ... or make reservations. Those of you who love a challenge, stick with me.

## A Week Before: Prep

Clean out the refrigerator and freezer. If there's an old backup refrigerator in the garage, more space the better for storage. Collect ice chests from friends and family and clean them thoroughly — the better to chill soft drinks, beer and wine. Stay insanely protective about refrigerator space.

Begin preparing as many dishes that can be frozen or held safely in the refrigerator. We know that family gumbo is on the post-dinner menu, so we try to cook a whole turkey weeks in advance, strip the meat, freeze it, and then make stock with the carcass and freeze that.

Take stock of your supplies. If you don't already have it, rent it. It is surprisingly inexpensive. Believe me. Call now. Order an extra table to use as a bar/buffet, plus extra dinnerware for last minute guests. The rental companies will deliver a day or two early, so be prepared to stow the items out of the way. Count the items in when they are delivered, then count them out when they are collected. I'm still looking for that white chair and the chafing dish I was compelled to purchase.

For sure rent or buy a hot box for keeping the food warm as the oven does its job. We would crumble without it — and we have two ovens and a microwave. They are not enough. One year we attempted a suckling pig, but it was too large for one oven. We cut the poor thing in half and used both ovens, assembling it for service wearing a tutu of fluted mashed potatoes.

After that, we made a Cajun microwave, which worked just fine to cook the birds and pig, but we missed the smoky flavor it didn't seem to impart. And it required someone to get up every two hours to keep it going. Clearly, we were doing something wrong. The solution was a smoker, about the size of a refrigerator. We could smoke several turkeys, fresh ham (no more suckling pig), and ducks. Tending was an all day guy thing, beginning early, luring them with a Rouses ice chest of beer placed next to the smoker. Any barbecue/smoker setup will ease the inevitable oven crisis.

## A Few Days Before: Delegate

Recruit family and friends for specific tasks. Table setters: we like to get this done the night before and set up the chairs the day of so there's room in which to maneuver. Bartenders: have a jug of Bloody Marys ready with the trimmings and vodka next to the glasses, wine and beer. Greeters: to answer the door and stow coats and purses. Food runners: to ferry the food and desserts

to the table. Someone to bring ice. Someone else to bring propane if you're using a smoker or grill.

Only recruit those in your family or close friends who know what they're doing to cook the day of. Otherwise, the kitchen will be a zoo. Post the menu on the refrigerator and make certain that anyone cooking has an assignment. One nephew trained as the family potato peeler, which led him to Delgado's Culinary Arts program.

Guests will ask to bring something. Suggest dessert. The array of different pies, cakes and cookies at Rouses are stunning. Discourage anything that requires refrigeration or heating.

## The Day Of: Everyone Has A Job

If it is at all possible, look at your kitchen as if it were a restaurant — a line where cooking occurs, divide the room with a table and use the other side of the kitchen for those who want to visit.

Set up a "job jar." Anyone not scheduled to cook who enters the kitchen, does so at his or her own risk. Draw a slip from the job jar: Load dishwasher, empty dishwasher, scrub pots, takeout the garbage. Mop. Sweep. Chop. Fetch.

Finally, if you're cooking, make sure to take an occasional break, leave the kitchen and visit with your guests. It's your job to entertain. ■



photo by Romney Caruso



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## THE AUTHENTIC MICHELADA

### Mix:

- 4-5 oz. Clamato® Tomato Cocktail
- 2 oz. ReaLime® or ReaLemon® juice
- 1 dash Worcestershire sauce
- 2 dashes of hot sauce

### Instructions:

- Shake well
- Serve in a salt-rimmed glass with ice and 12 oz. of beer



## BLOODY CAESAR®

- Rim glass with celery salt
- Over ice cubes, add 2 dashes hot sauce, 4 dashes Worcestershire sauce, 3 dashes salt and pepper

### Add:

- 1 part vodka
- 4 parts Clamato® Tomato Cocktail
- Garnish with celery stalk and slice of lime





to be a huge pecan-producing state. In fact, there is a Pecan Research and Extension Station just outside of Shreveport where 65 of 90 acres are planted with pecan trees. According to its page on the LSU AgCenter's website, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established the facility in 1930 and transferred it to the LSU AgCenter in 1973. Pecan production adds, on average, about \$12 million to the Louisiana economy each year. That's a lot of nuts.

Mama LOVED pecans, but she was also fond of sweet potatoes. Her repertoire of sweet potato recipes are now in my care, and I'm happy to share these with you.

Sweet potatoes (also known as yams) have long been a part of Louisiana's history and cuisine. It is believed that the sweet potatoes originated in the West Indies and Central America.

According to history, when the French began settling in south Louisiana in 1687, they discovered the native Indians — Attakapas, Alabama, Choctaw and Opelousas tribes — growing and enjoying the tasty, nourishing sweet potatoes. It wasn't long before the French and Spanish settlers soon made it one of their favorite food items.

It's no wonder that a variety of sweet potato dishes hold a place of honor on holiday tables at Thanksgiving and Christmas. They can be boiled, baked, fried, mashed and combine well with a variety of ingredients to create an endless list of delicious concoctions.

When I was a toddler, Mama and I enjoyed a baked sweet potato, lathered with butter and drizzled with cane syrup, on many a cold autumn afternoon. As I got older, I came to adore them fried, much like French fries, sprinkled with salt and black pepper, or sometimes sugar and cinnamon. Of course, I ate my fair share of them candied, creamed with milk and butter, in pies, and sometimes rolled in honey and chopped pecans. I consumed so much of these golden tuberous roots that I had the nickname of "Patate Douce" well into my teens.

With the holidays staring us in the face, I encourage you to get in your kitchen and rattle some pots and pans! Recipes are from *Pecans: From Soup to Nuts* published by Pelican Publishing Company, Inc. Available online and at area bookstores. ■

**M**y mother was fanatical about pecans. Every year when autumn arrived, we knew what our after-school chore was to be. She handed out paper sacks to my siblings and me and directed us to forage for pecans under the four pecan trees that stood like sentinels near the gate to our backyard. Our mission was to pick as many of the nuts before the sun set on the early, chilly evenings.

After supper, Mama cracked the pecans with an old wooden gadget and piled them up in a box on a TV tray. It was Papa's job to pick the pecans out of the shells while he watched his favorite television programs. By Thanksgiving, there were a good amount of plastic storage bags in the freezer ready for Mama to make pralines, fudge, pecan pies and cookies not only for gift-giving, but also to offer at the festive occasions during the holidays.

Her love for anything made with pecans was passed on to me. I still have her pecan-cracking device and continue to make good use of it. And although I do make the candies and other sweet goodies from her

recipes, I have developed other methods for using the beloved nuts of the South. Several years ago, I co-authored a book *Pecans: From Soup to Nuts* with the late Keith Courrégé, a bon vivant and a great cook. He and I often got together to cook and share our favorite dishes while we sipped on Old Fashions in his cozy kitchen overlooking Bayou Teche.

He was absolutely devoted to the pecan, which he called the Crown Prince of the Nut Kingdom. His enthusiasm inspired me to research the history of pecans and to experiment using the nut for various applications.

Pecans have long been associated with the South. History tells us that Antoine, a slave gardener at Oak Alley Plantation along the River Road near Vacherie, Louisiana, succeeded in grafting sixteen trees near the plantation mansion in 1846 or 1847. Later he successfully grafted 110 trees. The variety used later was named Centennial. This was an epoch in the history of pecan growing since it was the first successful effort of record to graft pecan trees, and it was the first commercial orchard developed to produce nuts for sale. Louisiana continues



## Basic Roasted Pecans

Roasting is one of the most popular ways of preparing pecans. Just about everyone has his or her method and recipe. There are those who will tell you to roast the nuts quickly in a hot oven, while others prefer the slow-roasting method. Slow-roasting is our preference. I recommend using the largest size of pecan halves you can find for this delicious treat. Be aware that the cooking time will vary according to the size of the pecan halves. Smaller pecans will, of course, roast quicker than larger ones.

Although roasted pecans are popular for snacking, they can also be chopped and sprinkled on ice cream, yogurt, and fresh fruit, and they add a delightful taste and crunch to salads, cereals and steamed vegetables.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 4 cups pecan halves
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon salt

### HOW TO PREP

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Spread the pecans evenly in one layer on a heavy baking sheet pan. Bake for 30 minutes. Add the butter and stir to coat the pecans evenly. Bake for 15 minutes. Sprinkle with the salt and stir again. Bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

Remove from the oven and cool completely before storing in airtight containers. (Makes 2 pints)



## Cheesy Pecan Wafers

Similar to cheese straws, these wafers are from Keith Courrégé's repertoire of recipes. They are ideal to serve during the cocktail hour and make a great food gift during the Christmas holidays.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- ½ pound finely grated sharp cheddar cheese, at room temperature
- 1 stick (8 tablespoons) butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ⅛ teaspoon hot sauce
- ¼ cup pecan halves

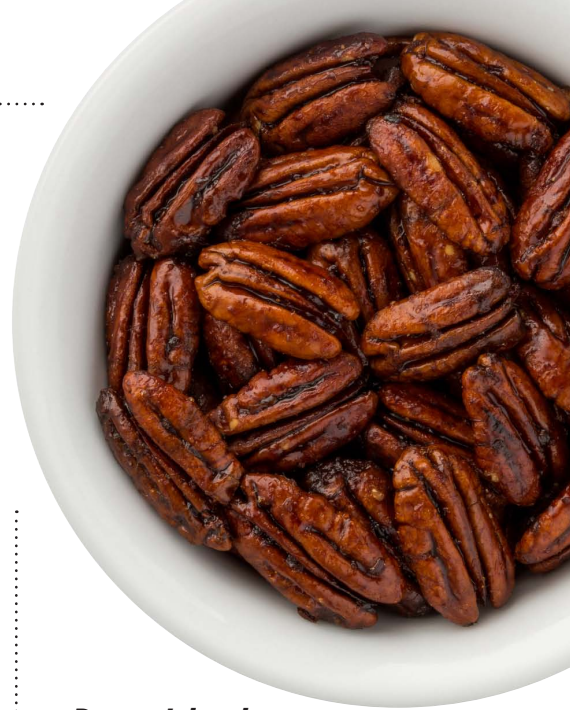
### HOW TO PREP

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.

Combine the butter, cheese, Worcestershire, cayenne, salt and flour in a food processor or electric blender and pulse several times to blend. The mixture should be soft and smooth.

Form the mixture into small balls, about the size of a large pecan, and place on an ungreased nonstick cookie sheet. Flatten the balls with the tines of a fork and place a pecan half on each wafer.

Bake until just lightly browned, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool slightly before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely. Once the wafers are completely cooled, store them in between sheets of wax paper in airtight containers. (Makes about 4 dozen)



## > Pecan Island

Pecan Island, about an hour's drive southwest of New Iberia, is a prime duck and fishing area. This is true Cajun country. The island — a chenier made up of three sandy ridges covered with pecan trees and live oaks — sits right below the southern peak of White Lake in the prairie-marsh region of Vermillion Parish's "outback." The brackish marsh is home to alligator, deer, nutria and waterfowl. Fishing is year-round and the redfish are plentiful.

## Super-Duper Yams

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 4 medium-size sweet potatoes
- ¼ cup chopped pecans
- 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
- 1½ tablespoons butter
- 3 teaspoons dark crème de cacao
- ½ cup honey

### HOW TO PREP

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and place the potatoes in the pan. Bake for 30 minutes and reduce the heat to 375 degrees and bake until soft to the touch, about 20 minutes.

Remove from the oven and cool. When cool enough to handle, remove the skins and slice the potatoes into ½-inch rounds. Arrange the potatoes in a baking dish large enough to accommodate the potatoes in 1 layer.

Increase the oven temperature to 425 degrees.

Sprinkle the potatoes with the pecans and brown sugar, dot with butter and drizzle evenly with the crème de cacao and honey. Bake until heated through, about 15 minutes. Serve hot. (Makes 4 servings)

## Sweet Potato Pie

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 3 medium-size sweet potatoes (about 1¼ pounds)
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup (packed) light brown sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cloves
- ⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ⅛ teaspoon ground allspice
- ⅛ teaspoon ground mace
- Pinch of salt
- ½ cup evaporated milk
- Flaky Pie Crust (recipe follows), unbaked
- Whipped cream

### HOW TO PREP

In a medium-size saucepan of boiling water, cook sweet potatoes until tender, about 30 minutes. Drain, let cool, then peel and mash. You should have about 3 cups.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In a medium-size bowl, beat together the butter and brown sugar until creamy. Add the eggs, vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, allspice, mace and salt. Stir in the mashed sweet potatoes and add the evaporated milk. Beat with an electric mixer until smooth.

Pour the filling into the unbaked pie shell and bake on the bottom rack of the oven until the center is firm, 50 to 60 minutes. Remove and serve warm or at room temperature. Garnish with a dollop of whipped cream. *(Makes 1 pie)*

## Flaky Pie Crust

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup vegetable shortening
- 3 to 4 tablespoons ice water

### HOW TO PREP

In a medium-size bowl, mix the flour and salt together. Cut in the shortening until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Add three tablespoons water, one tablespoon at a time, stirring lightly with a fork after each addition. Add one more tablespoon of water, if needed, so that the dough holds together. Gather into a bowl and flatten slightly.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough until it is about ⅛-inch thick. Transfer the dough to a 9-inch pie pan and fit it against the bottom and sides without stretching. Trim to ½-inch of the edge, fold the extra dough under and crimp decoratively.



## Rum-Glazed Sweet Potatoes

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 3 pounds sweet potatoes, pricked several times with a fork
- 3 Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored and sliced lengthwise
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 cup roasted pecan halves
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter
- ½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons dark rum
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon ground mace

### HOW TO PREP

Bake the sweet potatoes in a 400-degree oven for 45 minutes, or until tender. Let cool and peel. Cut the potatoes crosswise into ¼-inch slices. Toss the apples in the lemon juice. Arrange the sweet potatoes and apples in a buttered baking dish. Sprinkle with the pecans.

In a saucepan, combine the butter, sugar, honey, rum, cinnamon, ginger, and mace. Cook the mixture over medium heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Spoon the syrup over the potato and apple mixture. Bake for 30 minutes at 400 degrees, basting occasionally with the butter sauce. Then place the pan under the broiler, about 4 inches from the fire, until the edges of the potatoes and apples are slightly brown. *(Makes about 8 servings)*

## Sweet Potato Pudding

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 3 cups drained and mashed sweet potatoes (or one 29-ounce can)
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup butter, softened
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup grated coconut
- ½ cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup butter, melted
- Pinch of salt

### HOW TO PREP

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

In a large mixing bowl, beat together the sweet potatoes, sugar, butter, eggs, coconut, milk and vanilla. Pour into an 8x8-inch buttered baking dish.

Combine the brown sugar, pecans, flour, butter and salt until well mixed. Spoon the mixture over the sweet potatoes. Bake for one hour. *(Makes 10 to 12 servings)*

### ➤ We Make The Holidays Easy As Pie!

*Our Southern pecan pie is made the old fashioned way with corn syrup and Louisiana pecans from New Iberia. We bake dozens of pie flavors and combinations for the holidays, from traditional sweet potato, apple and pumpkin, to fancy custards, creams and meringues.*



# FARM *to* FORK

*We work closely with local farmer partners all over the Gulf Coast.*

## Sirmon Farms

The Sirmon family has spent over a century farming the same Baldwin County, Alabama, landscape. For the past 30 years, Joel Sirmon and his father, Gordon, and brother, James, have been growing sweet potatoes. They are sold at Rouses Markets all over the Gulf Coast. The tubers are raised from sprouts, or “slips,” the green shoots from mature sweet potatoes, that were selected and stored at the end of the previous planting. Sirmon’s sweet potatoes are exceptionally sweet and perfect for traditional sweet potato casseroles. Sirmon Farms also provides Rouses with hydroponic lettuce.

## Bergeron Pecans

More than five million pounds of Louisiana pecans are shelled each year at H. J. Bergeron Pecan Shelling Plant in New Roads near False River. The family business started much smaller with a much smaller harvest. H.J. — Horace Joseph Bergeron — began selling pecans in 1909 at his small general store in New Roads. The pecans were shelled by hand. A decade later he came up with the idea to have his customers help hand shell the pecans and sell the meat to local candy makers. Hand shelling is an arduous process. In 1941, a second generation, Lester and Bennett Bergeron, built a shelling plant right next to the general store. Today their children, Lester Jr., Steve, and Andre Bergeron, oversee the family business. Along with their family-owned orchards, they buy pecans from over 90 Louisiana growers.

## Garber Family Farms

Michael, Matt and Wayne Garber carry on an Iota, Louisiana, farming tradition started in 1881. Michael manages the farm crop production. Matthew deals with the storage, packaging and marketing of sweet potatoes and other crops. And Wayne handles the day-to-day administrative management of the business. Their 5,000-acre farm sits on a sandy ridge between Bayou Nezpique and Bayou Des Cannes in the heart of South Louisiana’s Cajun Country. The gentle, moist breezes from the Gulf of Mexico, along with their rich sandy loam soil, provide an ideal natural environment for their sweet, golden Louisiana yams (sweet potatoes).

**“There’s a difference between sweet potatoes grown in northern states and those grown on the Gulf Coast. Our sweet potatoes are soft, because they are grown in rich soils commonly found in the South, which means they are higher in natural sugar, more moist and have a bright orange flesh color. This soft type of sweet potato is often referred to as a yam.”**

—Patrick, Rouses Produce Director



## Ben & Ben Becnel

Father and son farming team Ben Becnel Sr. and Ben Becnel Jr. are the fifth and sixth generation to work their family-owned farm. The two have been in business together for over 40 years, since the younger graduated from high school. The secret to their success, they say, is in their soil. The Becnels manage 250 acres in the rich delta soil along the banks of the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. Their land — 250 acres of fields and trees — lies roughly fifteen miles downriver from the tunnel, around Jesuit Bend. This gives their satsumas, oranges, grapefruits and Meyer lemons a uniquely rich and sweet flavor. Ben & Ben Becnel also provides Rouses with Creole tomatoes during that season.

## Butch Millet

Fruit trees grow everywhere in Paulina, Louisiana, in St. James Parish, on the north bank of the Mississippi River. Robert “Butch” Millet has been farming citrus in Paulina’s delta soil for over 40 years. His citrus orchards produce satsumas, oranges, lemons, limes and grapefruit.

**“Nearly 600 acres of Louisiana oranges, grapefruits and lemons are planted every year. Seedless, sweet, easy-to-peel satsumas turn from green to yellow as they ripen and to orange at full maturity. We’ve been sourcing satsumas from Butch for nearly a decade. He grows entire fields just for Rouses.”**

—Patrick, Rouses Produce Director

## > Opelousas Is Sweet on Gumbo

*We asked Marcelle Bienvenu, the Queen of Cajun Cooking, about the tradition of serving baked sweet potatoes with gumbo instead of potato salad. “A perfectly baked sweet potato hits a high note with my taste buds when I’m having a thick (almost stew-like) chicken and sausage gumbo. The combination of sweet and savory makes me groan with pleasure. Of course, around Opelousas, home of the annual Yambilee Festival, there is no question as to what they like with their gumbo.” You might also find sweet potatoes in gumbo in Avoyells Parish.*



Matt Garber, Garber Family Farms  
photo by Frank Aymami

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## Chocolate Chip Cookie Cherry Cheesecake

### Ingredients:

- 1 (16.5 oz.) roll refrigerated chocolate chip cookie dough
- 2 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 cans (21 oz.) **Lucky Leaf® Regular or Premium Cherry Fruit Filling**, divided

### Instructions:

- Preheat** oven to 350°F.
- Press** cookie dough evenly into bottom and sides of a deep dish (2" deep) 9" pie plate.
- Bake** 12 minutes at 350°F. Cool completely. While crust is cooling, prepare filling. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese, sugar, egg and vanilla until smooth. Stir in 1 can of cherry fruit filling.
- Pour** filling into cooled crust.
- Bake** 55-70 minutes (or until filling is set and golden brown) at 350°F.
- Cool.** Refrigerate until ready to serve. Top with remaining can of cherry fruit filling.



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# Christmas ON THE WATER

by Jyl Benson

**H**oliday boat parades are common from Newport Beach, California, to Palm Beach, Florida. In most cases massive yachts are decorated by hired hands and the vessels' nattily attired owners and their friends watch the procession of boats float by from the comfort of their waterfront homes or a yacht club terrace. Usually, there is hefty admission fee to have your boat included in a spectacular parade that's really just a cocktail party with aquatic entertainment.

This year the 31st Annual Sarasota (Florida) Holiday Boat Parade of Lights will offer expanded VIP seating. Save for the occasional sloppily decorated dinghy captained by a teenager just for kicks, the affair is, once again, expected to be a brilliantly hued

pageant of one-upmanship.

For the most part things are quite different throughout Louisiana and along the western Gulf Coast.

Founded over 20 years ago, the Ala Bayou Terrebonne Christmas Boat Parade has become a family tradition and everyone in every clan pitches in to decorate and bedazzle the shrimp trawlers and Carolina skiffs upon which the families' livelihoods depend. Thus adorned the flotilla will make its way down Bayou Terrebonne from the Bourg Volunteer Fire Station to Dugas Cemetery in Montegut to a blaring soundtrack of holiday tunes. Along the waterline VIP seating goes to those who show up first with their lawn chairs and ice chests. Celebrants crack open

their beers lit by the glow of burning bonfires on the shoreline meant to guide Santa's boat through the gloom.

When Santa makes his appearance he will wave from the dock of the Genesis, Kevin Belanger's 60-foot boat, attired in his customary plush red suit and ridiculous pompom-adorned hat. He will also be wearing crabbing gloves and white shrimp boots — because that's how Santa rolls when he's down in these parts.

"For the towns of Bourg and Montegut, the water is a major part of our lives," says Joey Pierce, a spokesperson for the Houma Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. "For many of our families, these boats provide work and a means of support. When we celebrate, the



boats are going to be included as well! The Christmas Boat Parade is a way to take a few things we love most — family, celebrating, and our water — and bring them together in a festive holiday celebration!”

If this sounds like your kind of fun, grab your lawn chair and your ice chest and head out early to one of the following Christmas boat parades:

**Bayou Gauche Island (St. Charles Parish), LA:** The Bayou Gauche Island Holiday Boat Parade begins at Gulfport Lake. The annual parade floats the waters surrounding Bayou Gauche Island and boaters will throw beads and candy to the crowds on shore. For more information call 985.209.7098 or visit [neworleansplantationcountry.com/events/christmas-bayou-boat-parade](http://neworleansplantationcountry.com/events/christmas-bayou-boat-parade).

**Biloxi, MS:** The 31st Annual Christmas on the Water Boat Parade will begin at 6 p.m. on December 3rd at the Biloxi Lighthouse and progress to Point Cadet. Fireworks will follow. For more information call 228.617.3112 or visit [biloxi.ms.us/christmas](http://biloxi.ms.us/christmas).

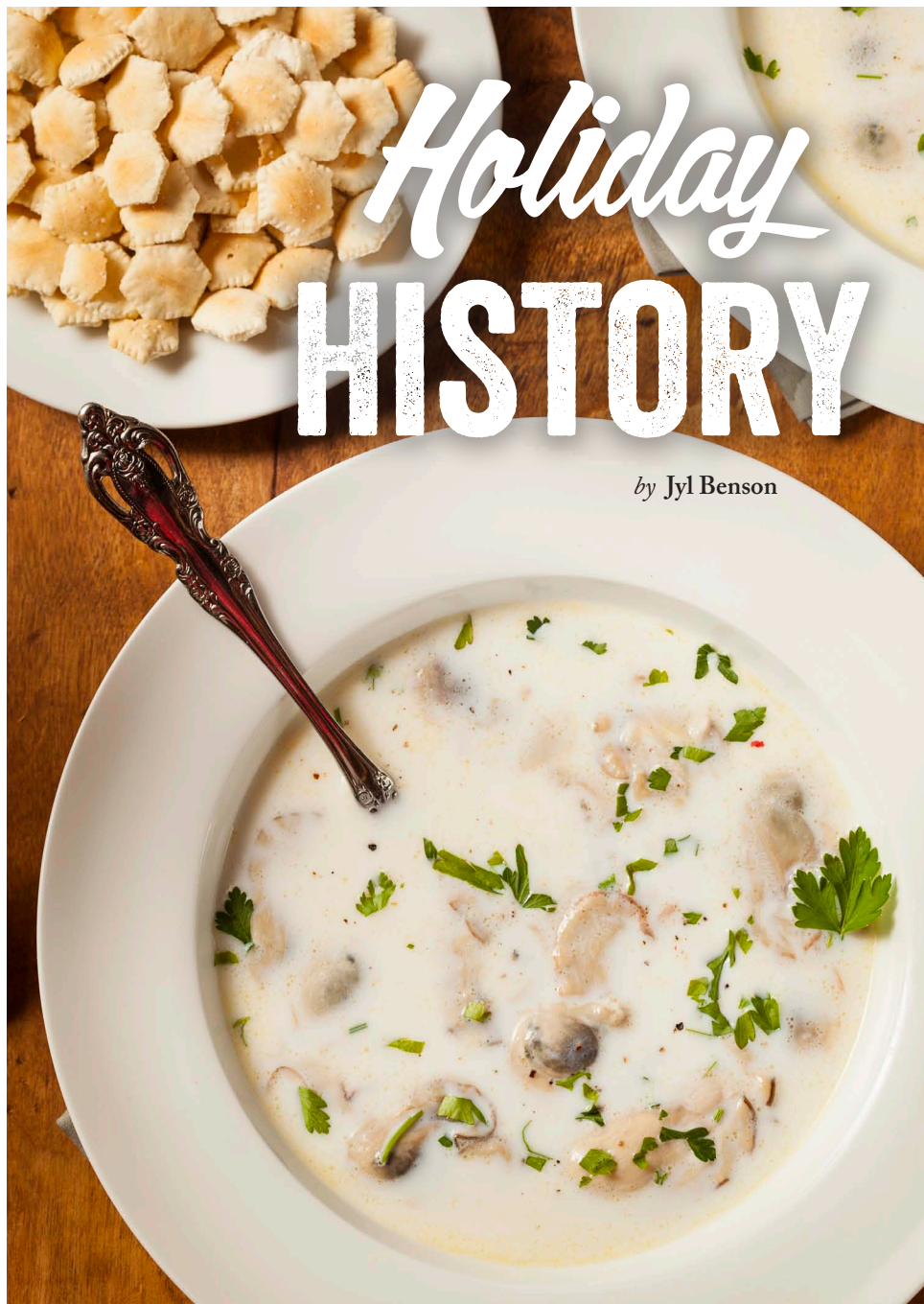
**Delcambre, LA:** The Delcambre Christmas Boat Parade starts at the Delcambre Docks (411 S. Richard St.). It’s fun for the whole family as you watch lighted boats of all sizes cruise Bayou Carlin while listening to Christmas music. For more information call 337.658.2422 or visit [vermilion.org/events/delcambre-christmas-boat-parade](http://vermilion.org/events/delcambre-christmas-boat-parade).

**Eden Isles, Slidell, LA:** Festively decorated boats will light up the night in the Eden Isles canals. The parade will start at the Tammany Yacht Club dock in the Oak Harbor Marina, process through the canals of Eden Isles and

return to the Tammany Yacht Club dock.

**Gulf Shores, AL:** *The 32nd Annual Lighted Boat Parade* will begin at Lulu’s (200 E 25th Ave, Gulf Shores) and end at Cobalt in Orange Beach (28099 Perdido Beach Blvd.) For more information call 251.981.2300 or visit [alabamacoastalchristmas.com/event/2016-lighted-boat-parade/](http://alabamacoastalchristmas.com/event/2016-lighted-boat-parade/).

**Houma, LA:** The Ala Bayou Terrebonne Boat Parade begins at dusk in Bayou Terrebonne at the Bourg Volunteer Fire Station (4317 Highway 24). Decorated boats parade down the bayou to Montegut, 3 miles passed Sacred Heart Church. Families gather and light fires lining the bayou sides. For more information call 985. 594.2125 or [houmatravel.com/news-and-events/calendar/ala-bayou-terrebonne-christmas-boat-parade1](http://houmatravel.com/news-and-events/calendar/ala-bayou-terrebonne-christmas-boat-parade1). ■



# Holiday HISTORY

by Jyl Benson

No matter the depths of their devotion, as the Mass that began at midnight on Christmas Eve dragged on, Louisiana's 19th century French Catholics would have squirmed on the hard wooden pews in anticipation of the words that would set them free: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

The Creoles in New Orleans and the Acadians in the swamps and prairies would have burst through the church doors and into the chill air in the wee hours on Christmas morning. That this devout,

drama-loving bunch had been fasting since the previous Midnight to ready themselves to receive Holy Communion at Midnight Mass would have put a bit of zippity do-da in their steps as they rushed home in their Sunday best to lavish holiday feasts upon which they would sup.

The sharing of an opulent meal, the Reveillon, following the holiday mass on Christmas Eve and again on New Year's Eve (the feast day of the French Saint Sylvestre) was a custom inherited by Louisiana Catholics from their European

ancestors. Often described as "meals fit for a trip to heaven," only the finest foods the family could muster would suffice. While their European brethren broke their fasts on escargots, foie gras, and turkey stuffed with chestnuts, the south Louisiana celebrant would have enjoyed a regionally adapted menu. Both the country Cajuns and the city Creoles might have started their meal with oyster stew or turtle soup, but while the city folks' entrées were likely cold beef daubé glace, or smothered medallions of pork or veal, their country counterparts would have enjoyed a variety of fragrant roast game they hunted themselves. Both groups would have enjoyed rich puddings and custards, copious amounts of wine, brandy, and cordials, and candied fruits and fanciful desserts like blucher de Noël or croquebouche.

Christmas Day gift giving was modest among Louisiana's Catholics. Children's stockings were hung on Christmas Eve and they may have found a trinket and small sweets. Adults did not exchange gifts on Christmas Day.

"At that time, Christmas was a very religious experience," said the late Florence Hardy, Louisiana State Archivist, in a 2004 interview with *The Times-Picayune*. "On Christmas Day, you visited *la creche* — the manger scene. Gifts were exchanged on New Year's Day."

In a December 2004 article for *The Daily Advertiser* of Lafayette Jim Bradshaw wrote "Santa didn't begin to visit Cajun children until the late 1800s. Before then, *le petit bonhomme Janvier*, sometimes called "the Little January Stranger" in English, delivered gifts at New Year's. If the children were good during the year, he left them fruit and perhaps a bauble or two. But if they had been bad, he turned trickster and left them ashes."

William Webb says his mom Lola Fontenot Webb delightedly recalled piles of oranges and apples on her family's Grand Prairie porch on New Year's Day. "Her people were sharecroppers, their resources lean but New Year's Day was special."

Prior to the turn of the 20th century — most assuredly before the Louisiana purchase — throughout Catholic Louisiana New Year's Day was spent visiting neighbors to sup and



sip, greeting them with a hearty “Bonne Année!” a custom that originated with the Romans. They would wish each other happiness and health. They exchanged gifts they called “bonnes étrennes” (good gifts). It was customary for enemies to reconcile and wish each other good fortune and prosperity at the dawn of the New Year.

It was also traditional on New Year’s Day for young men wishing to marry to ask their sweetheart’s parents for permission to wed. A woman or girl was to avoid receiving the first good wishes of the day from someone of her own sex. To do so would bring bad luck. Likewise for men and boys, meeting a woman or girl on the morning of New Year’s Day was thought a bad omen for the New Year. ■

### ➤ **Rouses Famous King Cakes**

Though the Carnival season doesn’t officially kick off until Twelfth Night (January 6th) king cakes have become a Christmas and New Year’s Eve tradition. Our bakers will make and decorate more than 375,000 king cakes between now and Mardi Gras Day.

Shipping is a piece of cake! Order online at [www.rouses.com](http://www.rouses.com).



## Born & Braised ON THE GULF COAST

**B**lack-eyed peas and cabbage can be found on New Year’s Day menus all over the South. The peas are for luck while the cabbage (really any greens for that matter) represents prosperity. The Gulf Coast’s warm climate and fertile soil create the perfect environment for cabbage to grow. Anthony Liuzza oversees a five-generation family business near Tickfaw, Louisiana, that raises some of the cabbages we sell at Rouses. Larry Daigle, Rouses Local Produce Buyer, is a frequent visitor to the Liuzza Family Farms, as well as growers Mark Liuzza in Amite and Matt Ranatza in Belle Chasse. “We buy from local farmers all over the Gulf Coast,” says Daigle. “And we personally meet with each farmer. We like knowing exactly where our food comes from and how it’s grown and harvested.” ■

### ➤ **The Right Stuffed**

Our turduchens, stuffed chickens and boudin-stuffed, bacon-wrapped pork loins, crown roasts and pork roasts are perfect for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Eve celebrations.

### **Braised Cabbage**

#### **WHAT YOU WILL NEED**

- 2 ounces Rouses tasso, cubed
  - 6 ounces Rouses smoked sausage, cut into 1-inch coins
  - 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
  - 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
  - 1 head green cabbage, cored and coarsely chopped
- Rouses salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

#### **HOW TO PREP**

Heat tasso and sausage in an 8-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until fat is rendered and sausage is browned, 7-9 minutes. Remove meat from pan but keep the fat. Add garlic and onion; cook, stirring occasionally, until wilted and fragrant, 5-7 minutes. Return the tasso and sausage to the pan, add chopped cabbage, salt, and pepper. Cook until slightly wilted, about 6 minutes. Reduce heat to medium. Cook, covered and stirring occasionally, until cabbage is tender, 45 minutes to an hour. Season with additional salt and pepper. (Serves 6 to 8)

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