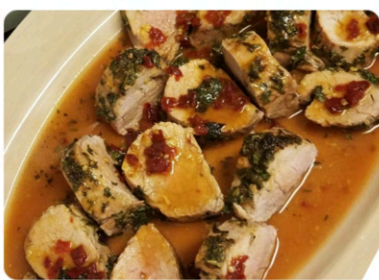




2023



PIC·COLLAGE





"What is important is family, friends, giving back to your community, and finding meaning in life."

— ADRIAN GRENIER



Enjoying great food with family

We had a lovely Christmas with my entire family at the beautiful HiBanks Ranch, my brother and sister in law's place south of Waco. Hubby's and Daughter's schedules were such that they were able to spend an entire week there. Mother and I were busy with work however, so we drove up the Thursday before Christmas and spent four nights there.

It was so nice getting to spend time and catch up with family members we don't see as often as we'd like - especially my grown nieces and nephews. One recently got a nice, big promotion at work and bought a beautiful house. Two recently started new jobs that they're enjoying immensely. Another's business ventures are continuing to multiply. And one revealed the exciting news that they're expecting a new little one in July.

And boy, did we do some good eating! The afternoon that Mother and I arrived the temperature was 23 degrees which was the perfect weather for the big steaming pot of chili and pan of cornbread that Andra had waiting on the stove.

I was excited the following evening when Jimmy and Andra took us to Lounge 93 Kitchen & Cocktails because he'd already told me about it and I was looking forward to it. It's a brand new upscale full-service

bar and lounge located on the ground floor of the new office building of Jimmy and Lisa, his business partner, in Legends Crossing, a commercial development park located at Loop 340 and I-35.

The place was beautiful with its leather chairs, brick accent walls, ambient lighting and warm aesthetics. We started off with some of the signature artfully-crafted cocktails and a large charcuterie board that was mouthwatering. Afterward, some of the others ordered burgers and I selected a Greek salad.

Traditional Christmas Eve fare at Jimmy and Andra's is a beautiful array of Mexican food, including tamales, homemade chalu-pas and homemade enchiladas, chips, queso, salsa and guacamole. Jimmy and Andra enjoy entertaining and are warm and hospitable hosts. Andra's great at always putting out a spread of things to munch on in between meals. She made some wonderful sausage balls that Hubby requested I get the recipe for. I'd planned on making some parmesan crisps but we had so much food that we didn't need them so I waited and made them when we got home instead.

Our main meal on Christmas Day was a huge brunch with a spiral ham, Mother's dressing, breakfast casserole, homemade cinnamon rolls, a fresh fruit tray and a breakfast hash among other things. The day after Christmas, on our way out of town to head home, several of us met for lunch at George's, a Waco icon, before saying our goodbyes. But I'll save that story for another day. ■



"My family is my life, and everything else comes second as far as what's important to me."

— MICHAEL IMPERIOLO



3-Ingredient Everything Parmesan Crisps

- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 teaspoons Everything seasoning, up to 2 tablespoons
- 1 generous tablespoon all-purpose flour

- Preheat oven to 375 and line a sheet pan with parchment paper or a silpat.
- Toss together the cheese, seasoning and flour in a bowl. Portion by generous tablespoons onto the prepared pan, leaving 4 inches between each pile of cheese. The cheese will spread a great deal as it bakes. If you'd like a more regular shape, you can use a 2 1/2 to 3-inch cookie cutter to help shape the cheese, spreading the cheese to the inside edges of the cookie cutter.
- Bake for 5-8 minutes, or until the cheese is completely melted and golden brown and slightly darker at the edges. Let the crisps rest on the pan for 2 minutes before carefully transferring to a cooling rack. Let them cool completely.



"Family is the most important thing in the world."

— PRINCESS DIANA

Sausage Balls

- 1 pound ground pork sausage, at room temperature
- 2 cups biscuit baking mix
- 1 pound sharp cheddar cheese, shredded

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
- Combine room temperature sausage and biscuit mix in a large bowl; mix with your hands until well combined. Add shredded cheddar cheese and mix until fully incorporated. Roll mixture into about 30 walnut-sized balls; transfer to a baking sheet.
- Bake in the preheated oven until golden brown and sausage is cooked through, 20 to 25 minutes.



“Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right.”

— OPRAH WINFREY



Recent New Year's Eves have found us comfortably ensconced at home, on the couch in our pajamas, snacking, listening to music, watching some TV, working jigsaw puzzles and playing games.

This most recent one varied just slightly. First, we wore clothes. Secondly, there were no jigsaw puzzles involved. Lifelong friends Julie and Louis invited us over for supper and we all decided to pitch in and make something. We bandied about various menus until we settled on the following. Julie would make her famous crawfish enchiladas. Hubby would make a pot of his famous pinto beans. Louis chose to boil some fresh Gulf shrimp and I decided to round it off with a bowl of roasted poblano and corn guacamole. Julie was even kind enough to make two batches of her crawfish enchiladas, regular ones for them and a set made with low-carb tortillas for us since we're still trying to eat keto.

No one had mentioned dessert, but at the last minute I decided to whip up the ration cake I'd written about not too long ago. It's super quick and easy and Daughter had been requesting another one after liking the first one so much. We shoved up at Julie and Louis' house, unloaded everything and discovered Julie had decided to make a dessert too — a tres leches cake topped with fresh sliced strawberries. You know what they say — great minds think alike.

It was a lot of food for five people but we thoroughly enjoyed every bite, even treating ourselves to small(ish) helpings of each of the desserts. Following that delicious spread, we adjourned to the parlor where we exchanged Christmas presents with each other and then played a game. Here's wishing you all a Happy New Year! ■



“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

— GEORGE ELIOT



“Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.”

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON



- ½ stick unsalted butter
- 1 cup finely chopped onions
- 1 cup canned green chiles, chopped
- ¾ cup finely chopped green bell peppers
- 1¼ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ¾ teaspoon white pepper, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon cayenne, or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano leaves
- ½ teaspoon minced garlic
- 3 cups heavy cream
- 1 cups sour cream
- 3 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese or other white cheese (preferably non-processed)

• In a large skillet, melt butter. Add the onions, green chiles, bell peppers, salt, white pepper, cayenne, oregano and the minced garlic. Sauté over medium heat for 10 minutes, stirring often. Stir in the cream and bring the mix to a rapid boil; then reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the sour cream; with a metal whisk, beat continuously until the sour cream is dissolved, about 3 minutes. Add cheese and stir until melted. Set the sauce aside.

- ½ stick butter
- 5 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese or other white cheese (preferably non-processed)
- 2 pounds peeled crawfish tails
- 1½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 2 teaspoons white pepper, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon cayenne, or to taste
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- ¾ cup very finely chopped green onions
- ½ cup cooking oil
- 20 6-inch corn tortillas

• In a 4-quart saucepan, melt butter. Add crawfish, green onions and the remaining salt, pepper, 1 teaspoon red pepper and oregano. Sauté over medium heat for about 6 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the cheese sauce to the crawfish mix and stir well. Simmer until the flavors are well blended, about 6-10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Set aside. In a small skillet, heat the oil to 325 degrees. Holding the tortilla with metal tongs, dip each into the hot oil just long enough to soften, about 1 second on each side; drain on paper towels. Spoon about ½ cup of sauce on each tortilla and roll up tortilla; place seam side down in a baking dish. Cover the tortilla from end to end with a generous amount of additional sauce. Then sprinkle it with the remaining cheese.

Place the enchiladas under a broiler near the flame until the cheese melts and begins to brown, about 2 minutes. Or, bake the enchiladas in a 350-degree oven until the cheese melts, about 5-8 minutes. Serve immediately.

- 2 pounds pinto beans
- 2 large bell peppers, chopped
- 1 large white onion, chopped
- 1 14-oz. package of sausage, cut into half-moons
- 2 chicken breasts, roasted and shredded (optional)
- Salt, to taste
- ½ teaspoon cayenne, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons pinto bean mix
- 2 tablespoons Tony Chachere seasoning
- 2 cans Rotel tomatoes & chiles (your preference of mild, regular or hot)

• Soak beans in a pot of water overnight.
 • Add pepper and bring to a boil.
 • Add chopped bell peppers and onions.
 • Add pinto bean seasoning and Tony Chachere seasoning.
 • Add Rotel.
 • Simmer on low until the peppers and onions soften.
 • Add sausage and chicken if using.
 • Cook until pinto beans are tender. Salt to taste.

- 2 poblano peppers
- 1 ear of corn, shucked
- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 avocados
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

• Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil and place the poblano peppers and ear of corn on it.
 • Brush the vegetables with the olive oil and roast until lightly charred, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool to room temperature.
 • Chop the poblanos and cut the corn off the cob. In a large bowl, mash the avocados with a fork. Stir in the poblano peppers, corn, red onion, cilantro, lime juice and garlic. Season with salt and pepper.



- UNKNOWN



- 2 pounds of stew meat
- 1 can of cream of mushroom soup
- 1 packet of brown gravy
- 1 envelope of beefy onion soup mix
- 1 can of water

• Mix everything together in a 9-13 baking dish and cover with foil. Bake at 300 degrees for 3 hours. Serve with mashed potatoes or noodles or cauliflower rice.



- 1 tablespoon avocado oil
- 4 cups cooked cauliflower rice
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 10-oz. can diced tomatoes with green chilies, drained very well

- 1 tablespoon avocado oil
- 2 large bell peppers, diced
- ½ large onion, diced
- Sea salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup sour cream

- 2 lbs. ground beef
- ¾ cup water
- ¼ cup taco seasoning

2 cups Mexican cheese blend, shredded

- Tomatoes, diced
- Jalapeños, sliced
- Avocados, sliced
- Fresh cilantro, chopped

*In a skillet, cook cauliflower rice with 1 tablespoon avocado oil and ½ teaspoon sea salt.

*Stir in the drained diced tomatoes with green chilies. Transfer the mixture to a 9x13 glass casserole dish. Set aside.

*Wipe down the skillet to remove any cauliflower pieces. Heat another tablespoon of oil over medium heat, then add the bell peppers and onions. Sauté for 10-15 minutes, until soft and starting to brown. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

*Arrange the vegetables over the cauliflower rice in the casserole dish. Spread sour cream evenly on top with a spatula. Set aside.

*Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

*Add the ground beef to the pan and increase heat to medium-high. Cook for about 10 minutes, breaking apart with a spatula, until browned.

*Add the water and taco seasoning. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 2-5 minutes, until it thickens and taco meat forms.

*Spread the beef mixture evenly over the casserole dish. Sprinkle with shredded Mexican cheese on top.

*Bake for about 10-15 minutes, until the casserole is hot and cheese is melted.



walked into the house from work recently to a wonderful smell. Sweet Hubby had decided to surprise me by cooking dinner. How thoughtful! It smelled so good and I couldn't wait to see what it was. Turns out it was a keto Mexican casserole topped with an avocado cilantro sauce. And it was wonderful. We all three went back for seconds.

We're still trying to adhere to a keto lifestyle. While we've both lost some weight, we haven't reached our goals yet so we're still plugging along. I recently saw a recipe on social media that I was inspired to try simply because of how easy it was going to be and I knew it would be keto-friendly. It's one of those where you just dump a bunch of stuff together, stir and bake. I almost feel guilty



- UNKNOWN

when I make these types of dishes because they are so easy. It was called "no peek beef tips" and recommended serving it over mashed potatoes or noodles. I knew we couldn't have mashed potatoes or noodles but I knew I could serve it over cauliflower rice. I also roasted some

fresh broccoli to go with it. Daughter loved it. I've also made a couple of keto-friendly snacks recently that were very easy and different. One is called "cheesy bacon fried pickles." I'm not sure why, however, because they're not fried, but baked. The other is called "easy salami appetizer." They both go great with a cold glass of wine. If you've discovered some great keto-friendly recipes that you would recommend, please let me know. Thanks in advance! ■

- UNKNOWN



- 30 slices of hard salami
- ½ cup of spreadable or whipped cream cheese
- 30 pieces of pepperoncini, seeds removed and sliced into strips
- 30 toothpicks

• Lay the salami on a flat surface. Spread each piece of salami with a little bit of cream cheese. Top with a piece of pepperoncini. Fold each piece of salami over and fasten with a toothpick. Pile on a platter and refrigerate until ready to serve.



- Shredded cheddar cheese
- Dill pickle chips
- Bacon bits

• In a greased muffin tin, put a little bit of the shredded cheddar cheese. Place a dill pickle chip on top of that. Put a little bit more shredded cheese on top of the pickle. Top with crumbled bacon bits.

• Bake in a 350-degree oven for 20 minutes. Take out and let cool until they harden.



“One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating.”

— LUCIANO PAVAROTTI



We enjoy shrimp and one of the reasons why is because it is so versatile. While scouring the internet recently for some new recipes for shrimp, I came across these two. They were appealing for several reasons – first, the flavor combinations sounded wonderful, and secondly, they both looked quick and easy. There's nothing I love more than a recipe that comes together quickly for a good weeknight meal and these two definitely fit the bill.

The “20-Minute Honey Garlic Shrimp” was excellent. It came together easily and quickly and was a hit with all of us. For Daughter, I served it over a bed of white rice mixed with chopped broccoli. For Hubby and me, I served it over a bed of cauliflower rice, also mixed with chopped broccoli. And while the recipe refers to the minced fresh ginger and chopped green onion as optional, you'll be doing yourself a huge disservice if you don't use them. I consider fresh ginger a must any time I'm using garlic, honey and soy sauce, as it just completes the marriage of the Asian-inspired flavors.

As for the “Creamy Garlic Shrimp,” let's just say I was extremely underwhelmed. It could possibly be because I served it over a bed of cauliflower rice, which, to be honest, I'm getting more than a bit tired of. However, I really think it was because it just turned out sort of bland and flavorless. If I attempt it again, I will definitely amp up the salt and pepper to begin with, and then add a bunch more spices. It's got potential. ■

“I cook with wine. Sometimes I even add it to the food.”

— W.C. FIELDS

From sallysbakingaddiction.com

- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 2 garlic cloves, minced (or 1 tablespoon jarred minced garlic)
- Optional: 1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger
- 1 lb. medium uncooked shrimp, peeled & deveined
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- Optional for garnish: chopped green onion

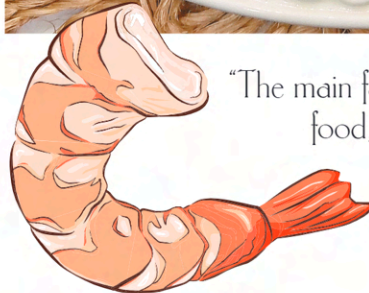
•Whisk the honey, soy sauce, garlic, and ginger (if using) together in a medium bowl. You will use half for the marinade and half for cooking the shrimp.

•Place shrimp in a large sealable container or zipped-top bag. Pour 1/2 of the marinade/sauce mixture on top, give it all a shake or stir, then allow shrimp to marinate in the refrigerator for 15 minutes or for up to 8-12 hours.

•Cover and refrigerate the rest of the marinade. (Time-saving tip: while the shrimp is marinating, we usually steam broccoli and microwave some quick brown rice.)

•Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Place shrimp in the skillet and discard the used marinade. Cook shrimp on one side until pink, about 45 seconds, then flip shrimp over. Pour in remaining marinade/sauce and cook it all until shrimp is cooked through, about 1-2 more minutes.

•Serve shrimp with cooked marinade sauce and a garnish of green onion. The sauce is excellent on brown rice and steamed vegetables on the side.



“The main facts in human life are five: birth, food, sleep, love, and death.”

— E.M. FORSTER



From aheadofthyme.com

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 lbs. jumbo shrimp, peeled, deveined, and tails removed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons white wine
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1/2 cup white cheddar cheese, shredded (or grated parmesan cheese)
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, finely chopped

•Heat oil in a large skillet over medium high heat for 2 minutes until the oil is sizzling hot. Add shrimp and sear for 2-3 minutes on each side until they turn pink and are fully cooked through. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside on a plate.

•Add butter and garlic to the same skillet and sauté until fragrant, about one minute. Add wine and stir well to combine, about one minute.

•Add heavy cream, Italian seasoning and white cheddar. Stir well and bring the sauce to a simmer. Reduce the heat to medium and keep stirring until thickened to a desired consistency.

•Return the cooked shrimp to the skillet and toss well to coat. Garnish with parsley and serve immediately with pasta, rice, or mashed potatoes.



VS

SUNDAY, FEB 12 AT 5:30 P.M. ON FOX

Super Bowl LVII snack food ideas

Super Bowl LVII is one week from today and will pit the AFC Champion Kansas City Chiefs against the NFC Champion Philadelphia Eagles. Kickoff is 5:30 p.m. CST and the game will be played at the State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz.

There are some interesting facts regarding this year's Super Bowl. It will be the first in which both quarterbacks are Black - Patrick Mahomes of the Chiefs and Jalen Hurts of the Eagles. And interestingly enough, both quarterbacks have ties to the Lone Star State. Mahomes was born in Tyler, played high school football at Whitehouse and college ball at Texas Tech. Hurts was born in Houston and played high school football for Channelview.

In what's bound to be some kind of a record, eight other players in this year's Super Bowl also have Texas ties:

KC's number two quarterback Shane Buechele was born in Arlington, played for Arlington-Lamar High School and then played college ball at both UT and SMU.

Nick Bolton, a linebacker for the Chiefs, was born in Frisco and played for Lone Star High School in Frisco. Chiefs Running Back Ronald Jones II played for McKinney North High School.

Eagles Tight End Grant Calcaterra completed his college career at SMU.

Zech McPhearson, a cornerback for the Eagles, played college ball at Texas Tech.

Groveton native Lane Johnson, who played for Groveton High School, is an offensive tackle for the Eagles.

Kyron Johnson, an Eagles linebacker, was born in Arlington and played for Arlington-Lamar High School.

Milton Williams, a defensive tackle for the Eagles, was born in Crowley and played for Crowley High School.

But enough about football. It's time to plan our snacks for Super Bowl Sunday. I scoured previous "Bite by Bites" from over the years and have put together what I consider to be a championship array of food for game day - including two kinds of wings, some innovative jalapeno poppers, a cheeseball, a dip and a stellar margarita. Party on! ■

Buffalo-Style Hot Wings

- 2 packages full-sized chicken wings
- 2 bottles Frank's hot sauce
- 1 ½ sticks melted butter

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
- Line a sheet pan with foil and place a baking rack on it.
- Pour 2 bottles of Frank's hot sauce into medium size bowl. Add 1 ½ sticks of melted butter. Stir and set aside.
- Coat wings thoroughly with olive oil, salt and pepper.
- Cook for 30 minutes then turn over and cook for another 20 minutes.
- Remove from oven and with tongs dip each wing in bowl with sauce mixture then place back on baking rack on sheet pan. Once all wings have been dipped in sauce put back in oven and cook for another 10 minutes.
- Repeat above step and dip wings in sauce again and cook for an additional 10 minutes.

Julie's Garlic Parmesan Wings

- 2 packages full-sized chicken wings
- 1 cup crushed garlic
- 1 cup parmesan cheese
- 1-2 sticks butter

- Line a sheet pan with foil and place a baking rack on it.
- Coat wings thoroughly with olive oil, salt and pepper.
- Cook at 425 degrees for about an hour, turning once.
- Coat with mixture of garlic, parmesan cheese and butter.
- Put back in oven to crisp, but watch or garlic will burn.

Black Pepper Cheeseball

- 1 8-oz. package cream cheese
- 1 package ranch salad dressing mix or ranch dip mix
- Lawrey's seasoned pepper

- Mix first two ingredients together and form into a ball and then roll in the pepper. We usually double this.

Garlic Cheese Dip

- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese
- 1 cup mayonnaise (approximately)
- 2-5 crushed and minced garlic cloves (give or take)
- Chopped jalapenos, to taste

- Mix all together.

Debbie's Jalapeno Poppers

- 1 8-oz. package cream cheese, softened
- 1-2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- Chopped bacon, cooked
- Chopped green onions
- Fresh garlic, minced
- Cilantro, chopped
- 15 jalapeno peppers

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Slice jalapeno peppers in half and remove seeds and ribs.
- Mix remaining ingredients together and spoon into hollowed-out jalapeno pepper halves.
- Bake for 15-20 minutes on a foil-lined sheet pan.

Allison's Margaritas

- 2 shots of Jose Cuervo tequila
- 1 shot of agave nectar
- Juice of 1 lime
- Dash of lemon juice

- Stir well.
- Pour over ice.





"When I'm off the road, and I can really control my diet down to the calorie, I juice seven days a week. Every afternoon, whatever I have at hand, beets, carrots, ginger, whatever. I juice, literally, every single day. And on the road, I try to find fresh juice wherever I can."

- HENRY ROLLINS

Making the most of it

I was a little slow to get on the grocery curbside pickup bandwagon, mainly because I'm fairly particular about my produce. However, after finally giving it a try a few years ago I realized how convenient it could be. I still do my own grocery shopping most of the time, but occasionally if it's an exceptionally busy week I'll take advantage of ordering my groceries online. And I can truly say I've never had a problem with my produce except for maybe a questionable lime one time.

The hiccup that occasionally occurs is figuring out how to order something that is sold based on its weight. For example, I once wanted five individual carrots but ended up with five pounds of carrots. One time my friend Maria thought she was ordering one pound of fresh jalapenos but upon picking up her groceries, discovered she'd ended up with just one jalapeno. My friend Thom once shared his frustration when trying to order fresh ginger for his and his son's stir-fries. "I don't know how much ginger 19 cents' worth is," he lamented.

I experienced Thom's issue firsthand recently when I ordered fresh ginger online. I nearly fell out when I pulled it out of the plastic sack and saw the size of it. It was huge. I couldn't quit laughing. For kicks and grins, I put a dinner fork next to it for perspective and then snapped a quick picture of it and put it on Facebook. And just as I expected, everyone got a kick out of it. "Unless you're planning on a sushi banquet for 200 of your closest friends, that's almost a lifetime supply right there," my friend Joe said. Another friend said you can plant them, and they'll come back every year, sporting a pretty bloom. I had no idea.

I commented that it's a good thing it lasts a while if you put it in the freezer. Several folks were unaware you could freeze it and save for later. In fact, there's no telling how many little knobs of fresh ginger are in the bottom of my freezer right now.

So I decided to look at it as a challenge and to try to come up with various ways to use it, rather than it ending up in the bottom of my freezer. We typically use fresh ginger in stir fries or Asian-inspired shrimp or salmon dishes. My friend Mary said she enjoys it in protein drinks and in salads.

A few days later I was thumbing through the February/March issue of AllRecipes, a magazine that I wasn't familiar with until a friend recently gave me a subscription. And right there on page 89 under the title "Cozy Cups" was a recipe for ginger-turmeric herbal tea.

I already knew that ginger was good for the immune system. I also knew that ginger is good for upset stomachs. I've heard of pregnant women using crystallized ginger or ginger lozenges to alleviate morning sickness. I didn't have any turmeric or fresh lemon wedges, but using the recipe for inspiration, I just made up my own version of ginger tea. I'd recently ordered organic Pu'erh tea bags from Amazon after one of the bloggers I read commented on how much his cholesterol decreased once he started drinking it. I mixed up some honey, cinnamon and fresh grated ginger, placed the tea bag on top of that and then ran some hot water through the Keurig. I let it steep for a few minutes and then removed the tea bag. Let me just say that that hot cup of goodness was excellent. The combination of the fresh ginger, honey and cinnamon was amazing.

I didn't use up the gargantuan piece of ginger, but I made a good dent in it before tossing it in the freezer. Let me know if you have any good ideas or recipes for fresh ginger. ■



"Being a singer now I have to get all fussy ... I must have my ginger and lemon and all that."

- GRAHAM COXON

... coming down
... or just in need of a winter
... aromatic tea may be just what
... the doctor ordered. BY NATALIE MECHEM

PREFER A COCKTAIL?
To turn this tea into a hot toddy, add 1oz. whiskey to each mug.

GINGER-TURMERIC HERBAL TEA
HANDS-ON 5 MIN TOTAL 15 MIN SERVES 2 SUBMITTED BY NASCARRUNNER71
★★★★★ 66 REVIEWS
Ginger and turmeric pair up for immune system support. Honey coats the throat, while lemon brings a healthy dose of vitamin C.

2 cups water
½ tsp. turmeric
½ tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. grated fresh ginger
1 Tbsp. honey
2 lemon wedges, for serving
2 cinnamon sticks, for serving

1. Bring water to a boil in a small saucepan. Add turmeric, cinnamon, and ginger. Reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer, covered, 10 minutes.
2. Strain, if desired, and stir in honey. Pour into 2 mugs. Serve mugs with lemon wedges and cinnamon sticks.

armagazine.com/ginger-turmeric-herbal-tea
QUICK GLUTEN-FREE
PER ½ CUP: 36 CAL, 0G FAT (0G SAT), 0G PRO, 10G CARB (1G FIBER, 9G SUGARS)

"If I could eat only one thing for the rest of my life, it would be rhubarb fool, which I make with ginger and a hint of elderflower cordial."

- SEBASTIAN FAULKS

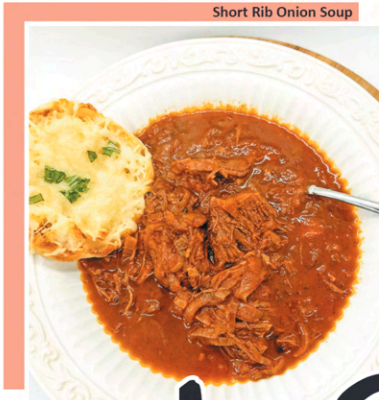




– AUGUSTE ESCOFFIER



White Bean Chicken Chili



Short Rib Onion Soup

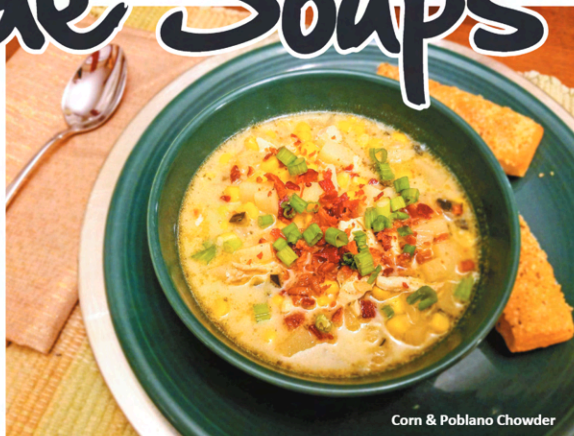


Jalapeno Popper Soup

Homemade Soups

Pve lost count of how many times I've told you, Dear Reader, that I love a good homemade soup, that my mind automatically goes to soup when there's an abundance of a particular ingredient, and that soup is my comfort food. If I'm feeling unsettled or unthethered, the thing that appeals to me most and brings me some comfort is a big pot of homemade soup simmering on the stovetop. It also makes me feel like I'm doing something good for my family. Perhaps it evokes childhood memories of the wonderful fragrance of something simmer-

ing low and slow as it develops flavor. What can I say? I'm a big lover of soups. When we get that first cool snap in the fall, I want to make soup. And it's not unusual at all to be well into spring and warmer weather and I'm still making soup because I just haven't had my fill yet. We're doing something a little differently today. I'm giving you multiple choices of delicious homemade soups with just a picture and the name of it. If you see one, or more, that strikes your fancy, then send me an email to editor@polkenterprise.com and I'll personally email the recipe(s) to you. This'll be fun. And I can't wait to see who my fellow soup-lovers are. ■



Corn & Poblano Chowder

– LAURIE COLWIN



Mexican Chicken Soup



Jalapeno Lime Chicken Soup



Creamy Roasted Asparagus Soup



Brazilian Shrimp Stew

My neighbor's rosé

The other day my neighbor said, "I enjoyed your article on Thanksgiving wines ... how about doing an article on rosé wine? I had a bottle of Whispering Angel the other evening and it was terrific."

The name Whispering Angel intrigued me, so I started to learn a little about rosé wine. I soon realized there is lots to learn. As one wine writer put it, "There is a whole fascinating world of rosé wine to explore."

Rosé for many people has been "the wine people buy who don't know anything about wine." Little did I know how wrong that was ... rosé is likely the oldest type of wine in the history of wine. It is made and drunk worldwide. Although some people think of it as a "summer wine," there are rosé wines that are the perfect wine year-round. In fact, one writer called a sparkling rosé, "the perfect party wine." So much for my wine expertise.

What is rosé wine? Remember – most of a wine's color comes from the skin of the grape. Red wine is red because the grape skin has been left in the grape juice for a long time during the brewing process. Brew without the skin, you get white wine. Leave the skin in for just a short time (e.g. an hour or a day) and the wine comes out rose. That's what rosé wine is. The grape skin has been taken out before the wine has a chance



De Gustibus
By George Hollenbeck

to become red. And it is not just the color that changes. Left in the juice, the grape skins cause a whole raft of other changes. Otherwise, the wine making process is essentially the same.

What does rosé wine taste like? There are so many answers and so many types of rosés that the question is like asking, "what does red wine taste like" or "what does white." There is pink rosé and dark red rosé; sweet rosé and bone-dry rosé (e.g. French rosé Sancerre); there is expensive (\$50+) rosé and cheap rosé ... we found a bottle of Italian rosé at HEB for \$3.71, \$3.21 if you pick six. There is sparkling rosé Champagne, but most popularly, rosé prosecco and still (non-bubbly) rosé.

In the old days (before modern wine making technology), most wine had a light pink color. As the technology got better, red and white wines became the norm. But, after WWII, rosé took a dramatic turn. Two Portuguese wine producer families released sweet, slightly sparkling rosés to

the European and American markets. These wines, Mateus and Lancers, would go on to set record sales in Europe and the U.S., dominating the Portuguese wine industry for most of the 20th century. For those of us of a certain age, Mateus or Lancers was likely the first wine we ever tasted. Nowadays they are not as popular, replaced by traditional drier rosés and by U.S. "blush" wines like White Zinfandel.

Why is it called White Zinfandel if it is pink and a rosé wine? White Zinfandel, which you will find in all our markets, is an "accidental" wine. In 1975 Sutter Home was producing white wine from red grapes and by accident ended up with a sweeter, rosé Zinfandel. Winemaker Bob Trinchero set it aside, and a couple of weeks later tasted it and decided to market it rather than throw it out ... aha ... White Zinfandel.

Moscato is a pink wine that gets a lot of shelf space in our stores. Why do I say it is not a

rosé? Moscato is made from the white moscato grape, a grape with high sugar content. In addition to natural high sugar, the wine making stops before all the sugar turns to alcohol. The result is a typically low alcohol sweet wine. How does it get its pink color? A little red wine (often merlot) is added. A pink wine, but not a rosé.

When do you drink rosé wine? Our motto, de gustibus, means "whatever you like." There are so many rosé wines, it is hard to give guidelines, but there are some preferences. Rosés are usually drunk with lighter meals or as aperitifs. A bone-dry rosé is perfect with lobster or fish; rosé is good with any grilled meat, or chicken or salad – but not with spicy, savory food like pizza, barbecue or very salty food. Sparkling rosé is a great party pleaser. Rosé is almost always drunk on the cold side (40-50 degrees) in white wine glasses. Hold the glass by the stem so your



hand doesn't heat the wine. Although the French put ice in their rosé, Americans don't ... unless it is your spouse at home. Keep the wine cold. Rosé doesn't age gracefully, so don't keep it more than a year.

Where can I get rosé locally? Three places I know of – Walmart, Brookshires and HEB. Much to my surprise this morning, Walmart had stocked up on about a dozen rosés in addition to the Whispering Angel – two classic French and a number of familiar U.S. names – Josh, Decoy, Meio-mi, et al. – in all price ranges from less than \$10 to \$20. I got a bottle of the Ste. Michelle to try, based on the fact that I have enjoyed their chardonnay. Why the sudden availability? Maybe because they know that Spring is on its way and lots of people think of rosé as a spring wine. My guess is we will see more also at our other stores, although they already have a selection for you to try.

We have just scratched the surface of the world of rosé. Get out of your rut and try a rosé. Find the rosé that fits your taste. There is literally one for everybody. If you have to search a little to find the ones you like, there are a lot worse ways to spend your time and money. And remember our motto – De Gustibus Non Disputandum Est – there is no accounting for taste. ■



"I watch cooking change the cook, just as it transforms the food."

— LAURA ESQUIVEL

Hilarious author, mother pens cookbook

I have a huge collection of cookbooks. I'd be embarrassed to say how many, but it's safe to say it's well into the triple digits. Many of them were gifts and some I purchased for myself. A number of them are tried and true and I return to them over and over to the point that they are dogeared. There are a few that have absolutely gorgeous pictures that I like to look at and a few that I read and reread over and over, yet have never made the first thing in them. There's one, however, that I received for Christmas that is like no other. After reading all the blurbs on and inside the front and back covers, I sat down and read the cookbook in its entirety from cover to cover, just as if I were reading a novel. Not in one sitting of course, but over a period of about a week. It's written in a conversational and irreverent tone and is absolutely hysterical. There's no telling how many times I've literally laughed out loud while reading it. Written by Jen Hatmaker, the book is called "Feed These People - Slam-Dunk Recipes for Your Crew."

The mother of five, she should know a thing or two about feeding a crew. And the way she categorizes the recipes into eight specific sections makes so much more sense than a lot of other cookbooks. There's "food for spoons," which is sauces and soups; "food that goes next to your food," which is sides and salads; and one of my personal favorites, "food for when you have no more damns to give," which is shortcuts, semi-homemade



meals and leftovers. The first dish I made – "Jeff's Mom's Oil-Poached Fish with Soy, Ginger and Scallions" – came from the section called "food for when you want to seem fancy." Truth be told, I actually selected it because I saw ginger in the title and I'm still trying to use up all that ginger in my freezer. The dish had so much

potential but as we're somewhat limited locally as to the selection of fresh fish available, I had to use frozen snapper and it was just too thin. Next time I'm in the city, however, I plan to buy some thick white fish fillets and try this again. I served it with glazed garlic green beans.

For my next venture, I made the "Herb-Crusted Pork Tenderloin with Orange-Chi-

potle Honey Glaze" and paired it with her recipe for "Hacked Uchi Brussels Sprouts." These two dishes were amazing. The pork tenderloin was cooked perfectly, so moist and tender, and the glaze was excellent. I'm a Brussels sprouts lover from way back and have prepared them many different ways over the years. This version, however, is my new favorite way to fix them. ■

- 1 pound pork tenderloin
- Salt and pepper
- 2 Tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 3 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 Tablespoon soy sauce
- 3 Tablespoons chopped fresh thyme
- 3 Tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 bunch parsley, chopped

- Orange-Chipotle Honey Glaze:**
- 1 canned chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, diced (no one will be mad if you add a spoonful of that sauce, too)
 - 3 Tablespoons honey
 - ½ cup fresh orange juice
 - 1 Tablespoon Dijon mustard
 - Pinch of salt

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
- Sprinkle tenderloin with salt and pepper.
- In a small bowl, whisk up the Dijon, 1 Tablespoon of the olive oil, and the soy sauce and then brush this mix liberally all over the tenderloin.
- Throw all the fresh herbs into the food

- processor (or just finely chop it all with a knife)
- Spread the herbs out on your cutting board and roll the marinated tenderloin in them, coating all sides.
- In a skillet, heat the remaining two Tablespoons of olive oil over medium-high heat, then sear the tenderloin for about 2 minutes per side.
- Put the tenderloin on a baking sheet, slide it into the oven and bake for 15-25 minutes. Use a meat thermometer and when the internal temperature reads 145 degrees, it's done. Take it out of the oven and let it rest for 10 minutes.
- Combine all of the glaze ingredients in a small saucepan and bring to a boil over medium heat. Lower the heat and cook, stirring, for another 2 minutes or so, until the glaze thickens up, then take it off the heat.
- Cut the tenderloin into one-inch-thick slices and layer them on a serving platter. Generously spoon the orange-chipotle honey glaze all over the slices.



"A recipe has no soul. You as the cook must bring soul to the recipe."

— THOMAS KELLER

- 1 pound Brussels sprouts
- 3 Tablespoons high-temp oil
- Salt and pepper

- Glaze:**
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
 - 1 Tablespoon chopped fresh ginger
 - 3 Tablespoons soy sauce
 - 2 Tablespoons maple syrup
 - Juice of ½ lemon
 - 1 Tablespoon fish sauce
 - 1 Tablespoon sriracha
 - Salt and pepper

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
- Trim the Brussels sprouts by cutting off the bottoms, then cutting them into halves or quarters depending on how large they are. Toss them with oil and salt and pepper to taste on a baking sheet, then roast for 30-40 minutes or so, tossing them halfway through. They should be brown and crispy.
- Put all of the glaze ingredients into a saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring, until reduced and thickened, about 10 minutes. Take off heat and let thicken up a bit more.
- Take Brussels sprouts out of oven and drizzle liberally with the glaze, then put



them back in the oven for another 5 minutes. Take them out, toss to coat and serve immediately.

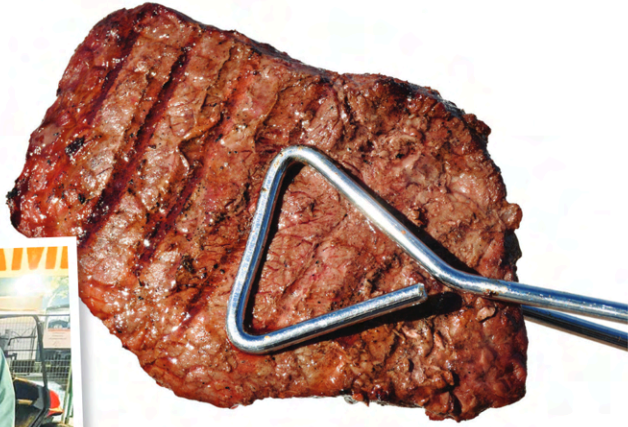
- 4 large cod fillets (you could use snapper or halibut, or any good white fish), about 5 ounces each
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup sliced scallions
- 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh garlic
- 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh ginger
- ¼ cup soy sauce

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees
- Rinse the cod, pat it dry, season both sides with salt and pepper, and set it aside.
- In a skillet, combine the oil, scallions, garlic, and ginger and cook over medium

- heat until fragrant and softened, around 5 minutes. Remove from the heat.
- Place the cod in the middle of a large piece of foil on a baking sheet. Fold the sides of the foil up enough to keep it all in, pour the hot, flavored oil evenly over the fish, then bring the edges of the foil together and crimp to seal them.
- Put in the oven for 10-12 minutes (15 for super thick pieces of fish). Carefully transfer the fish to a serving dish. Drizzle evenly with the soy sauce, then pour the remaining scallion-garlic-ginger oil left in the foil packet over it.

"My best hostess tip is to have good food and really good music."

— JENNIFER ANISTON



Competing in BBQ cook-offs

Cooking runs in the genes for one local young man. John Tucker Drake, 9, competed in the World Championship Barbecue Junior Cook-off Contest held Feb. 24 in conjunction with the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. While John Tucker's father, Marty Drake, is the one that got him into cooking in the first place, John Tucker recently learned that his maternal great grandfather competed in the cookoff 49 years ago.

This is just the third year of the junior cook-off and the first year that John Tucker has been eligible to participate. There are only 35 spots available for youth ages eight through 14 and they must be sponsored by a current official cook team. John Tucker was sponsored by the Polk County Go Texan Committee. He came in 12th of the 32 youth that competed.

"He didn't place (first through third) but that's ok. The memories made can never be replaced. It was a super fun day," Rachel Slocomb Drake, John Tucker's mother, said.

"Talk about a full circle moment. I've always heard that my grandfather, Dick Slocomb, helped start the Houston cook-off with Bill Bailey in 1974, but that was it, no other details. I went on a fact-finding mission to see what I could find out. I learned that Dick — yes, we called our grandparents by their first names — was one of 17 cook teams the very first year of the cook-off, which was by invitation only."

"I'm told that Dick owned the cook team and he and a few friends showed up in his big green RV ready to cook and have a large time. They cooked Dick's award-winning chili recipe," Rachel said.

"Marty, John Tucker and Sean Ericson have spent weeks practicing for the cook-off. They have really enjoyed their Sunday afternoons grilling and perfecting their presentation. Cook-off might come to an end but I bet their grilling time together doesn't. Who knows, maybe in another 49 years, John Tucker's grandchildren will be looking for details of when he cooked in the cook-off," Rachel said.

Marty and Sean own Sully's Catering which does custom cooking for different types of events and specializes in brisket, ribs, chicken, sides and pies, among other things. John Tucker's been helping ever since the venture started. The business is named for John Tucker's younger sister, Sully Drake.

"We want to grow Sully's Catering for Sully to work one day. And one day, hopefully, we'll have a business where we employ people with special needs," Marty said.

For Christmas, John Tucker received a 14-inch Weber Smokey Joe charcoal grill on which to practice. At home he prepares his own coals and lights the fire himself. However, an adult handles that at the competition.

Contestants in the junior cook-off are each provided a grill, charcoal and a ribeye steak. Contestants may add sides or garnishes as long as they enhance the steak and do not take away from it. Marty could be with him in the area and could give verbal instructions but couldn't touch anything. The youth have one hour to prepare and cook. Then they place their entry in a box provided and walk to a different spot to submit it for judging. Judging is based on appearance, tenderness and taste.

John Tucker prepared his ribeye, some grilled shrimp, a Caprese salad and a piece of grilled bread. He said that more than anything, he was scared he would drop it.

"I was sweating," he said.

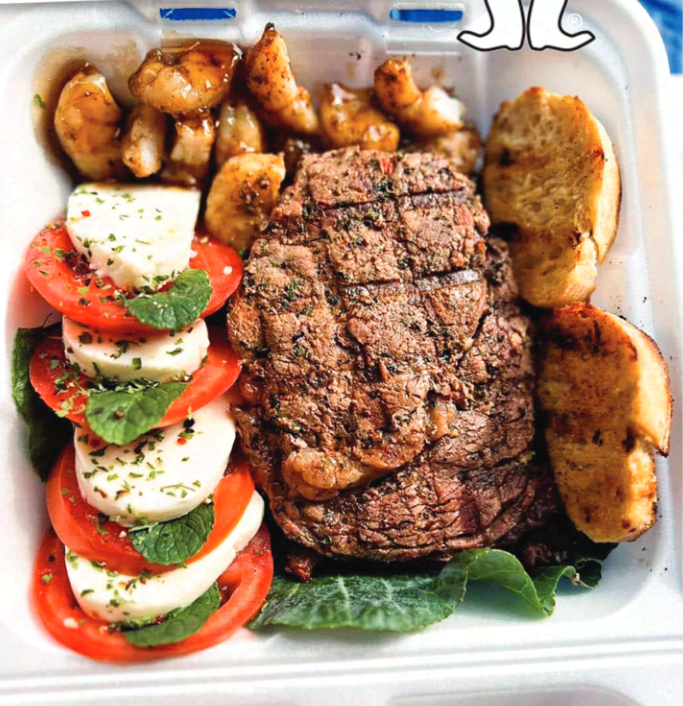
When word got out that John Tucker was a cook-off legacy, he became a bit of a media sensation. He was interviewed several times, made it on two Houston news channels and also in the barbecue cook-off newsletter "Smoke Signals." As he cooked, numerous committeemen and directors came by to talk with him and encourage him.

Not flustered at all by the attention, John Tucker said, "It's surprising that I'm able to come in and do this cooking with my parents." Asked about his technique, he said, "Practice. We practiced for four weeks."

He said he prefers his steaks medium rare with an internal temperature of 120 degrees. And he said he uses Gonzo's Sugar Daddy, a grilling blend created by Sean Steffy and manufactured by Daddy's Seasonings out of Nacogdoches.

"I talked to several different people this past week who shared stories of Dick and my Dad (John G. Slocomb) and I even got my hands on some cool pictures. I learned things I had never heard before and enjoyed every second of it. Forty-nine years later our nine-year-old son is cooking in the HLSR Jr. Cook-off. I imagine Dick and my Dad are bursting with pride. I know our whole family is super proud of John Tucker. The entire experience was a total win for him," Rachel said.

"I'm not sure who was more nervous, Marty or me. John Tucker was cool, calm and collected the entire time. He did a great job cooking his steak and shrimp and it looked beautiful in the box. It was just a fantastic day that a ton of people



played a part of and we're super grateful for everyone. Days like that can't be recreated and will no doubt be a core memory," Rachel said, adding, "Now onto baseball."

Along with the other competitors, John Tucker received a set of barbecue tools with their own carrying case, a hat and apron, a certificate and a goody bag filled with other items.

"It's generation to generation.

I've been cooking probably since I was 5. My grandmother had a taffy hook and I pulled taffy growing up," Marty said with a big smile on his face. Then, in a quieter and much more serious manner, he commented, "Whether he won or not, we made great memories cooking on the back porch. This definitely was the highlight of my cooking career, watching him do that."

The Polk County Go Texan

Committee gives scholarships annually to graduating seniors throughout Polk County. Last year the committee gave 14 \$1,000 local scholarships and based on their efforts, received 2 \$20,000 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo scholarships, for a total of \$54,000. This year the committee will give 21 \$1,000 scholarships and does not know yet what it will receive from Houston. ■



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- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- ½ cup chopped yellow onion
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup whole buttermilk, room temperature
- 1 Tablespoon salted butter, melted
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- Pickle slices, for serving
- Ketchup, for serving
- Burger sauce, for serving

- Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
- Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Add olive oil, ground beef, onion, and salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until meat is browned and crumbly and onions are softened, 8 to 10 minutes. Drain any excess fat from the pan. Add the Worcestershire sauce and cook until absorbed, about 2 minutes more.
- Spray a 9-inch pie plate with nonstick cooking spray. Transfer the meat mixture to the pie plate.
- Whisk together the eggs, buttermilk and melted butter in a medium bowl until smooth. Add flour and baking powder; whisk until smooth. Pour over the hamburger mixture in the pie plate.
- Sprinkle all over with cheese. Bake until the top is browned and the center is set, about 25 minutes.
- Serve the pie in slices with pickles, ketchup and/or burger sauce alongside.



Today is the third anniversary of "Bite by Bite," which I still find hard to believe. The first one appeared on Sunday, March 15, 2020 and was about pie since it ran the day following Pi Day. As time has gone by, I've made a point of earmarking the anniversary each year by going to the beginning ... and talking about pie.

So you're not familiar with Pi Day? Well let's bring you up to speed. Pi Day is an annual, international celebration of the mathematical constant π (pi). What is pi, you ask? When a circle's circumference is divided by its diameter the answer is approximately 3.14 or pi. Always. Pi Day is observed on March 14 (3-14) because three, one and four are the first three significant digits of π. While Pi Day has generally been observed by math aficionados since it became a thing, over time it has been co-opted by pie-lovers. Get it? Pi Day ... Pie Day. Hmmm. Now we're talking.

As I wrote in that first "Bite by Bite," once I discovered the existence of Pi Day I decided it was my responsibility – even perhaps my culinary duty – to observe it gleefully each year with a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. Pi Day usually falls during our daughter's spring break and we're often traveling on some getaway so it becomes my quest to find

just the right place to have that celebratory, annual piece of pie.

One year it was a piece of pina colada ice-box pie in Rosebud. One year it was a piece of Texas trash pie in Round Top. I typically think of sweet when I think of pie, but last year I decided to throw some savory pie into the mix as well. I observed Pi Day with a big piece of homemade classic chicken pot pie followed by a piece of creamy hazelnut pie. I think that made for a nice balance so I endeavored this year to come up with another savory pie, in addition to a sweet pie.

This issue will come out a few days before Pi Day. I planned that purposely to give you a couple days to think about what kind of pie you want to eat on March 14. For the savory version, we recently enjoyed a cheeseburger pie that was super easy and good too. It's one of those recipes that you can easily tweak and make your own. For the sweet pie, I made a grapefruit lime pie that I saw Iron Chef Alex Guarnaschelli make on an episode of The Kitchen. I've always had a soft spot for grapefruit so I knew I must try this. It was light, refreshing and not at all too tangy as some might expect.

As usual, Pi Day falls during Daughter's spring break, which this year, will be spent going on some college tours. Between you and me, however, I'm already scoping out potential places to enjoy the perfect slice of pie.



- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus additional for greasing
- 1 ½ cups finely ground graham crackers (about 12 graham crackers) (see Cook's Note)
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- Pinch of kosher salt

- 2 cups sweetened condensed milk
- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup fresh grapefruit juice
- 2 Tablespoons fresh lime zest
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice

- Fresh grapefruit segments from 1 pink grapefruit
- 3 cups unsweetened whipped cream, optional

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Brush the bottom and sides of a 9-inch pie dish with some melted butter and set aside.
- In a medium bowl, combine the graham cracker crumbs, sugar, cinnamon, ginger, a pinch of salt and the rest of the melted butter. The texture should resemble wet sand. Use the bottom of a glass or measuring cup to press the crust into an even layer on the

bottom and up the sides of the prepared pie dish. Place the dish on a sheet pan and bake until the crust firms and browns lightly, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool.

- In a medium bowl, combine the condensed milk, sour cream, grapefruit juice, lime zest and lime juice.

- Pour the filling into the crust and jiggle the dish to smooth evenly. Place onto a sheet pan and bake in the center of the oven until firm, 18 to 20 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack for at least 2 hours. Chill in the fridge.

- Cut the pie into wedges and serve with grapefruit segments and whipped cream if desired.





More soup please

A month ago in the Feb. 19 issue, I titled my Bite by Bite page "Homemade Soups - The Greatest Hits" and it was basically a compilation of pictures of eight different soups that I had really enjoyed and thought others might as well. I didn't include the recipes because each of them had previously run in this space at some time or another over the last three years. I did write, however, that if anyone was interested in the recipe for one or more of them, to email me and I would send it to them.

I'm not quite sure what I expected but I was absolutely overwhelmed - in a good way - with the response. In the days and weeks that followed, I sent out 63 soup recipes to a number of folks. Some wanted just one. Some wanted two or three. Others wanted all eight. It tickled me to know that other people love homemade soup as much as I do. It also tickled me that of the various requests that I received, only eight of the requests came from friends or people that I personally know. That was rewarding in that it let me know that people are actually reading this weekly food page that I create.

You may or may not remember from the Feb. 26 issue, mentioning a new cookbook that I received for Christmas called "Feed These People - Slam-Dunk Recipes for Your Crew" by Jen Hatmaker. It is my new current favorite and I am totally loving it. In fact, I think I can honestly say that it may be the only cookbook that I own (of hundreds) in which I'll eventually fix each and every recipe in the book. Anyway, I discovered a new soup in it that I had to try, a habanero cream soup. Jen serves it in bread bowls and I didn't, opting instead to just serve it in soup bowls. She uses a regular blender which results in a pretty, solid green color. I opted to use my immersion blender so the color is not as pretty as hers. But I promise you, this soup is the bomb. And just so you know, in the future I won't be using soup bowls. I'll serve the stuff in coffee mugs so I can just drink it and not even fool with spoons.



Habanero Cream Soup in Bread Bowl

- 2 habanero chiles
- 2 jalapenos
- 2 poblano peppers
- 1 onion, quartered
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled
- ½ cup olive oil
- Salt and black pepper
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 1 cup flour
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 4 cups whole milk
- 1-2 cups water (depending on how thick you want your soup)
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated or ground nutmeg
- 8 oz. spinach (maybe 4 big handfuls)
- Juice of 1 lemon, plus more if needed
- 8 bolillos or small sourdough loaves, or any hearty bread that can be hollowed out for individual bread bowls
- 1 cup heavy cream



- Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
- Wearing gloves, halve and seed the habaneros, jalapenos and poblanos. Place on a baking sheet with the onion and garlic, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast for 20 to 25 minutes.
- In a Dutch oven, melt the butter over medium heat, then whisk in the flour until incorporated, around 2 minutes. Add the stock, milk, water, nutmeg, 1 Tablespoon salt and pepper to taste and whisk until smooth. Lower the heat and cook, stirring, until the mixture starts to thicken up, around 5 minutes.
- Add in the roasted peppers, onion and garlic. Add the spinach and cook until it is wilted, around 2 minutes. Remove from heat.
- Working in batches, pour soup into blender and blend until smooth. Pour the pureed soup back into the pot, set it over low heat, and add the lemon juice.
- Hollow out individual loaves of bread, being careful not to break through the bottom. Place bread bowls on a baking sheet and place in the oven for 5 minutes, until toasted. Fill each bread bowl with soup and drizzle with heavy cream.

Whence cometh thy wine?

Whatever the virtues and faults of wine, where and when it originated has captured the interest and imaginations of scholars and wine drinkers for thousands of years. Every culture likely has an "origin of wine" story. Perhaps the best known is the Biblical story of Noah in the book of Genesis: "Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard." (Genesis 9:20). The story goes on that Noah drank too much and got drunk, and on and on. Scholars differ in when Genesis was written (likely about 3,500 years ago) and by whom (it is Biblically attributed to Moses, but not so by scholars). Today we know that cultivating grapes and making and drinking wine predated the Bible by thousands of years. Wine is notable in the New Testament for Jesus having turned water into wine, and perhaps even more so for its use at the Last Supper ... "Drink ye all of this."

Wine was important in the life of the Greeks, so much so that Greek mythology placed the discovery of viticulture to Dionysus at Mount Nysa in his childhood. Dionysus spread the word and was rewarded to become the God of Wine - the great liberator of men's inhibitions! The Romans adopted Dionysus, but called him Bacchus, described as "... the bringer of ecstasies and inducer of frenzied states such as creativity and religious devotion."

Ancient Persian legend attributes the discovery of wine 7,000



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By George Hollenbeck

years ago to a beautiful princess who lost favor with the mythological King Jamshid. The princess was overwhelmed by sorrow and pain, so tried to poison herself by drinking a jar of spoiled grapes labeled "poison." The "poison" intoxicated her and she fell asleep, waking up the next morning no longer depressed but feeling great. The King learned of this, spread the wonderful finding with his court, and decreed that all grapes grown in Persepolis would be used for making wine!

Cultures have legends, of course, to explain the inexplicable. Until recently, nobody really knew where our wine grapes came from and when it all started; guesses included Greece, Persia, and China sometime about 200,000-400,000 years ago. Although theories and legend were widespread, keep in mind that even though the remains of wine grapes had been found in Stone Age pottery, nobody knew.

Enter modern science and modern publishing. Much to our surprise, an article appeared recently (March 4, 2023, pp. 69-70) in, of all places, The Economist magazine. And the article was



not about the wine business but about the origins of the grape! The article reports that a Chinese researcher had solved at least part of the mystery of where and when our grapes (Viti Viniferous) originated. This enterprising researcher obtained over 3,500 varieties of cultivated grapes, as well as 1,000 or so varieties of wild grapes from around the world. Getting cooperation from wine enthusiasts worldwide was no problem. The DNA of each sample was analyzed and fed into a giant computer to develop the family trees of the grapes - their genetic relationships. It turned out that nearly the entire present grape varieties go back to a "mother grape" that fathered the grape varieties (or mothered, you might say).

The researchers found that some 200,000 to 400,000 years ago the mother vine split into two varieties that exist today. Fortunately for us today, climate change (this was the last ice age) caused the grapes to adapt and then survive when the weather warmed.

The essence of this is that the two varieties thrived as they adapted, with changes in about 11,000 BC and then again about 6,000-8,000 BC. The end result is that the grapes we cultivate today all go back to those varieties. In a sense, a merlot then is a merlot today!

Although all our grapes may have common ancestors with the ancients, don't think that the wine we have today tastes the same as the wine the Romans or Greeks or Stone Age people drank. Our weather is different, grape growing methods and storing are much different, and the yeast used to ferment the wine is different. Still, a cabernet is still a cabernet!

One of the fascinating things about wine is that it is so fascinating. Yes, beer and spirits have been around a long time too, but none have generated the wealth of interest, writing, and conversations that wine has. And it is remarkable how much collateral knowledge one can gain by exploring wine, wine making and wine history. Here are a few tidbits:

What modern states made up Ancient Persia? At its peak, Persia included Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

When was the Stone Age? From about 2.6 million years ago until about 3,300 BC when the Bronze Age began.

What is the oldest intact bottle of wine existing today? Lots of dry wine containers have been found, but the wine was long gone. The oldest bottle of wine is the Speyer Wine Bottle from 325-350 AD. Found in the tomb of a Roman soldier in 1867, it is kept in the Pfalz Historical Museum in Speyer, Germany. What saved it is its wax seal and the olive oil suspended over the wine.

What type of wine was drunk in the Bible? Wines of the time were big, round, juicy and harsh, red or amber in color. It was mixed with water to make it less alcoholic and more drinkable.

What is the oldest wine vine in North America? The Mother Vine, located on North Carolina's Roanoke Island, believed to be 400 years old.

How did European grapes get to the Americas? Wine was a necessity of the Catholic Holy Eucharist, so it was brought by the Spanish missionaries in the 16th century. The wine was called "mission wine" and is still made in small quantities today.

What famous Champagne was named after a Benedictine monk? Dom Perignon.

We leave you with a task: when you drink your next glass of wine, take a moment to appreciate those who went before you for literally thousands of years. And remember, de gustibus non disputandum est - there's no accounting for taste! Send us your comments, degustibus@livingston.net.



“Spring will come and so will happiness. Hold on. Life will get warmer.”

— ANITA KRIZZAN

Although our spring started off unseasonably colder than usual with several cool fronts and some rainfall, spring is definitely in the air now. The trees have filled in with new green growth, beautiful flowers are blooming everywhere and if you listen closely you can even hear the birds singing. I'm loving the azaleas and crepe myrtles and the bluebonnets seem exceptionally majestic this year. It's the perfect time to enjoy fresh seasonal produce. Fruits and vegetables such as oranges, grapefruits, carrots, kale, cabbage, asparagus and peas are in season.

With Easter on the horizon, I've been thinking a lot about Easter side dishes. Just like the rebirth and new life that spring represents, I enjoy discovering new, fresh and tasty ways to prepare side dishes for the Easter meal.

On a recent trip down the rabbit hole that is the internet, I found many recipes that were appealing but I finally

narrowed it down to two – an asparagus and cheese tart and a broccoli casserole. I absolutely love asparagus in any form or fashion and a cheese tart sounded just perfect. And I know, we've all had a million versions of broccoli casserole, but there was just something about this one that seemed different – different enough for me to at least give it a try.

However, oftentimes, I get so excited about what something's going to taste like that I forget to consider whether or not it will photograph well. Case in point – the broccoli casserole. It doesn't make a pretty picture. And while the asparagus cheese tart does make for a pretty and appealing pic, wouldn't you know that I photographed it before remembering to garnish it with the fresh lemon zest. Oh well. Squint your eyes and try to envision it topped with a sprinkling of fresh lemon zest. I'll try to do better next week when I share some ideas for Easter desserts. ■



- 6 Tablespoons butter, divided
- 3 Tablespoons all-purpose flour
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 1 cup whole milk or half-and-half
- 1 cup chopped onions
- 1 cup chopped mushrooms
- 3 pounds broccoli florets (about 10 to 12 cups)
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 cups sour cream
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese



- Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Butter a shallow 3-quart casserole.
- Melt 3 Tablespoons of the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Sprinkle in the flour, season with salt and pepper and whisk until the mixture is smoothly blended and starts to turn a light golden color. Gradually add the milk, whisking constantly. Continue to whisk often until the mixture just comes to a simmer, then whisk frequently for another 4 minutes, until the sauce has thickened. Adjust the heat so the mixture stays at a simmer.
- Meanwhile, in a large skillet with a lid, heat 2 more tablespoons of butter over medium heat until melted. Add the onions and mushrooms and sauté for about 8 minutes until the vegetables are brown, and any liquid that gets released evaporates. Season with salt and pepper. Stir the mushroom mixture into the white sauce.
- Return the skillet to medium high heat and add the broccoli and the broth. Bring the mixture to a simmer, then cover the pan and steam the broccoli for 4 minutes until almost tender.
- Pour the white sauce into the pan with the broccoli and remaining broth (there should be about 1 ½ cups left in the pan) and stir to combine. Add the sour cream and the cheese and stir to blend well. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish and spread it out evenly.
- Bake for 30 minutes until bubbly and golden brown on top. Serve hot.

– Use fresh broccoli from the produce section. I used frozen broccoli florets in an effort to save time but the extra moisture in them resulted in the casserole being a little on the gloppy side. I'll make it again but I'll use fresh broccoli next time.



“You can cut the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming.”

– PABLO NERUDA



- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed
- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed
- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- 1 cup grated fontina cheese (about 3 ounces)
- 1 cup grated comte or gruyere cheese (about 3 ounces)
- 1 tablespoon minced shallot
- 2 large egg yolks
- 3 Tablespoons whole milk
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest



- Fill a large bowl with ice water. Bring about 1 inch of water to a boil in a large skillet. Add the asparagus; cook until bright green and crisp-tender, 2 to 5 minutes, depending on the thickness of the asparagus. Drain and transfer to the ice water to stop the cooking; drain and pat dry. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
- Roll out the puff pastry into a 10-by-16-inch rectangle on a floured surface. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet and prick all over with a fork. Bake until light golden brown, about 12 minutes. Let cool slightly on the baking sheet.
- Meanwhile, mix the fontina, comte, shallot, egg yolks, milk, nutmeg and a pinch each of salt and pepper in a bowl until combined. Spread the cheese mixture evenly over the puff pastry, leaving a 1-inch border on all sides. Toss the asparagus with the olive oil, ¼ teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. Arrange the asparagus on the tart and bake until the cheese mixture is slightly puffy, 15 to 20 minutes. Sprinkle with the lemon zest. Serve warm or at room temperature.

– I couldn't find fontina cheese so I substituted provolone.
 – Rather than worry with trying to roll the puff pastry into a 10 x 16 rectangle, I cut a piece of parchment paper to fit my sheet pan and then used the parchment paper as a template for rolling out the puff pastry.
 – Don't skip the fresh lemon zest. It adds a touch of brightness to the tart.



"Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime."

- MARTIN LUTHER



Didn't nail it - a comedy of errors

I found myself thinking about Dr. Frank Leavell this week. Dr. Leavell was the professor for a British literature course that I took at Baylor many, many years ago. Both wise and witty, he was so skilled at drawing in his students through his own enthusiasm for literature. I'll never forget the Scottish brogue he took on as he read "To a Mouse," a poem by Robert Burns, the Scottish poet and lyricist. While the actual line is "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men Gang aft agley," you're probably more familiar with the anglicized, paraphrased version, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." And that, my friends, is why I found myself thinking about Dr. Leavell. I had the best laid plans. But boy, did they go awry.

I typically try to plan out my food columns several weeks in advance to allow time to shop for ingredients, prepare the dishes, photograph them, devise contingency plans, etc. I planned to write about Easter side dishes two weeks before Easter and then explore Easter desserts the week prior to Easter.

Several years ago I stumbled upon a recipe for a honey lavender cheesecake that was absolutely beautiful - a pale, pale lavender that was the perfect shade to set off its delicate flavors. It just looked like spring on a plate. It was quite involved, however, or so I thought at the time, so I decided to book-mark it to save for another day, perhaps even a very special occasion.

So when I started thinking about Easter desserts, I immediately thought it would be the perfect thing. And I was glad I started thinking about it early because it was going to require me ordering a few of the ingredients online that simply aren't available around here, specifically, lavender extract and violet food coloring. In the picture that accompanied the recipe, the



baker had garnished it with a little sprig of fresh lavender and it was just lovely. I'm really not aware if fresh lavender sprigs are available locally or not so I turned to Amazon. Although I didn't find fresh sprigs, I did find what I thought were edible lavender blossoms which I thought would be so pretty delicately sprinkled on top.

I don't know where I would be - or if I could even function on a daily basis - without my sense of humor.

Are you familiar with "Nailed It," a show on Netflix? It's not one of my regulars but I've seen it a time or two. An episode features several contestants who try their hand at recreating edible masterpieces which rarely - if ever - resemble the original. But the funny thing is, they usually truly believe that they nailed it.

I will be the first one to tell you that I definitely did not nail my honey lavender cheesecake. The instructions said to add a few drops of violet food coloring and mix until you achieve the desired color. I was so careful to add just a little but I couldn't even tell it was there. So



I added a little more and the same thing happened. It was so faint that I had to blink several times, trying to ascertain whether or not I could see it. I went through this step several times to no satisfaction and that is when my impatience got the better of me and I got carried away with the violet food coloring. And that is how my honey lavender cheesecake ended up not



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a delicate pale shade of lavender but a screaming neon purple that would rival the socks my elementary school celebrity crush, Donny Osmond, used to sport.

Oh and by the way, the bag of edible lavender blossoms that I ordered weren't blossoms at all, but a big bag of lavender seeds that may be planted, or used to make sachets or steeped to add to hot tea or to make a lavender simple syrup. In fact, I now have two cups of lavender simple syrup in my fridge that only God knows how I'll use. And I haven't even mentioned the fact that you bake this thing in a springform pan that you've wrapped in aluminum foil so that you can bake it in a roasting pan in a water bath. Yes, a water bath really is a thing. I think it's supposed to help it set properly. But evidently I either

didn't use enough foil or didn't seal it adequately, because the water seeped in and made my homemade graham cracker crust totally soggy. [Insert mad/frowny face emoji here.] And have I mentioned lately how grateful I am for my healthy sense of humor and ability to laugh at myself?

The good news, however, is that I also ran across a recipe for a million-dollar pound cake that sounded delightful so I decided to make it as well. It was quick and easy and didn't require ordering any exotic or hard-to-find ingredients and it was absolutely delicious. And if you're so inclined, you could even gussy it up with some whipped cream and fresh seasonal fruit on the side. Happy Holy Week to you and your loved ones.

"Easter is meant to be a symbol of hope, renewal and new life."

- JANINE DIGIOVANNI



Million-Dollar Pound Cake

- 2 cups butter, softened
- 3 cups sugar
- 6 large egg, room temperature
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup whole milk
- Confectioners sugar, optional

• Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

• In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy, 5 to 7 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in extract. Gradually add flour alternately with milk, beating just until blended.

• Pour into a greased and floured 10-inch tube pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 1 hour and 40 minutes.

• Cool for 15 minutes before removing from pan to a wire rack to cool completely. If desired, sprinkle with confectioners sugar.



Honey Lavender Cheesecake

- 1¾ cups graham cracker crumbs
- 4 Tablespoons melted butter

- 2 pounds cream cheese, room temperature
- 1½ cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 Tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon lavender extract
- 1½ Tablespoons honey
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅔ cup sour cream
- ⅔ cup heavy whipping cream
- Violet food coloring

- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 Tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1 Tablespoon honey
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
- Prepare a 9-inch springform pan with cooking spray.
- In a small bowl, combine graham cracker crumbs and melted butter until thoroughly combined.
- Press crumb mixture into the bottom of the pan and about ½-inch up the side.
- Bake for 12-15 minutes until the crumbs are set.
- Let cool on a wire rack.

- Preheat oven to 325 degrees.
- In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, cream the cream cheese until light and fluffy.
- Add the sugar and beat on high for an additional 3 minutes.
- Add vanilla extract, lavender extract, honey and salt and mix until just combined.
- Add eggs, one at a time, scraping down the side of the bowl with a spatula after each addition.
- Add a few drops of violet food coloring and mix until desired color.
- Add sour cream and mix until combined.
- Add heavy cream and mix until combined.
- Wrap the outside of your springform pan in aluminum foil.
- Pour cream cheese filling into springform pan. Smooth the top with a spatula.
- Place the pan inside a high-sided roasting pan.
- Create a water bath by filling the roasting pan with hot water until you reach halfway up the side of the cheesecake pan.
- Bake for 1½ hours.
- After an hour and a half, turn the oven off and crack the door open 1 inch. Leave the cheesecake like this for 1 hour.
- After an hour, take the cheesecake out of the oven and place aluminum foil over the top (making sure the foil does not actually touch the cheesecake).
- Place in the refrigerator for 4 hours.

- In a medium bowl, combine sour cream, honey, vanilla and powdered sugar. Mix until combined.
- Spread mixture over the top of the cooled cheesecake.



“The present was an egg laid by the past that had the future inside its shell.”

— ZORA NEALE HURSTON



“A true friend is someone who thinks that you are a good egg even though he knows that you are slightly cracked.”

— BERNARD MELTZER



This is my fourth Easter to create “Bite by Bite” and for some reason I always gravitate toward egg dishes for the Easter issue. Well, except for Easter 2021 when I cooked, photographed and wrote about baked feta with cherry tomatoes, a recipe on TikTok that had become a bit of a viral sensation. Other than that one exception, I’ve written about frittatas, deviled eggs and egg salad for the Easter issue. With eggs being at a premium these days, you may not be in the market for recipes for egg dishes. Nonetheless, today I’m bringing you two, one that is new to me and the other, an old standby.

A longtime friend I hadn’t seen in a while was in town recently and, being a kindred spirit in terms of our love of food and spreading our wings in the kitchen, we began talking about recipes, cookbooks, recipe blogs and various cooking methods. He turned me on to a blog I wasn’t familiar with called Jo Cooks or jocos.com. I wasn’t on the site long before I’d already bookmarked several things I was interested

in trying. However, being on the lookout for egg dishes, I came across one that intrigued me. It’s called “Creamy Parmesan Baked Eggs” and I found that it checked off a lot of boxes. It’s easy, quick, and good and it’s also what I refer to as a blank canvas, meaning you can tweak it with various additional ingredients to really make it your own.

The other recipe, called “Smoked Salmon Quick Quiche,” is one I discovered a couple of years ago when we had the good fortune to receive a box of smoked sockeye salmon for Christmas from a friend. Caught wild, hand-filleted and alderwood-smoked at the Seabear Smokehouse in Anacortes, Wash., it is quite the delicacy.

All this talk of eggs reminded me of a fun gift my husband gave me back when we were dating – a blue sweatshirt with a picture of an egg that said “You’re a good egg.” It was especially appropriate because that particular phrase was one he frequently said to me back in the day. Maybe reading this column will prompt him to resume saying it to me. Here’s wishing you and yours a safe, happy and blessed Easter! And may we all be “good eggs.” ■

- 1 Tablespoon butter, unsalted
- 4 eggs
- 4 Tablespoons heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon pepper, or to taste
- 2 Tablespoon parmesan cheese, grated

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
- Butter 2 4-inch ramekins. Crack 2 eggs in each ramekin.
- Add 2 Tablespoons of heavy cream to each ramekin. Season with salt and pepper.
- Grate some parmesan cheese over the eggs.
- Bake for 10 to 12 minutes.
- Serve with toast or crusty bread for dunking.

— I topped these with a few shakes of Tabasco and some fresh parsley.
— This recipe feeds two people but is easy enough to adjust for more.

- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed or pre-made pie crust
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup whipping cream, half and half, or whole milk
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- A few shakes of Tabasco hot sauce
- 4 oz. smoked salmon chopped in large pieces
- ¼ cup crème fraiche or goat cheese crumbles
- 2 Tablespoons fresh dill
- 2 Tablespoons chopped green onion

•Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Lightly flour a work surface and roll out the puff pastry. Trim the pastry into a circle so the pastry goes up the sides of a pie tin or baking pan. Trim any excess so it’s flush with the top of the sides. Pierce the bottom of the pastry with a fork then prepare the pan for blind baking by placing a sheet of aluminum foil over the puff pastry and gently mold into the edges of the pan and up the sides. Top the foil with enough dry beans or pie weights to fill the pan. Bake the pastry for 15 minutes.

•Meanwhile, in a bowl or 4-cup measuring cup, whisk the eggs, cream, kosher salt and Tabasco. Pour the egg mixture into the par-baked puff pastry shell then top with the smoked salmon pieces and dot with crème fraiche or goat cheese, green onion and fresh dill. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until the eggs are set. Allow to rest for 5-10 minutes before serving, or serve at room temperature. Top with more fresh dill and green onion and serve.

- I used whipping cream instead of half and half or whole milk.
- I used goat cheese crumbles instead of crème fraiche.





“Classics can be phenomenal when done right. A simple roast chicken dish could be the best thing you ever eat.”

— JOE BASTIANICH



JUST REACH IN AND GRAB IT

Don't be afraid to cook new things

With the current prices of groceries, we've found ourselves eating a lot of chicken lately. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Eating chicken, that is. I'm not wild about the prices of groceries. But alas, it is what it is. The beauty of it is that I've found myself branching out recently and preparing chicken in some new, to me, ways.

I recently prepared a whole chicken, something I've never done before, and it was so easy and tasted wonderful. I really felt like I'd accomplished something. There was one hiccup, however, that I didn't expect. I've always known that when preparing a chicken there are some extra parts in the cavity that need to be removed in advance. Referred to as the giblets, it's actually the neck, liver, gizzard and heart. Fine. No problem. I wasn't concerned with reaching in and pulling all that out. I've always had a strong stomach and have never been unusually queasy. Which is why the visceral reaction I had when I pulled all that out and looked at it just shocked me. I never would have expected it to affect me but my stomach actually did a little somersault. Okay, so maybe this isn't the best way to sell this recipe. I get it. But I promise, it only lasted a second. Have a plastic grocery bag nearby, reach inside, close your eyes, pull that stuff out and put it in the plastic grocery bag and then quickly tie it up before you open your eyes. Stick with me. It will be worth it. And your family will be so impressed when they see that beautiful golden brown bird with crispy skin that you place on a platter while you turn all those pan drippings into a wonderful gravy. And you'll be so proud of yourself.

We also recently enjoyed some pecan-crusted chicken strips that were delightful. I followed the recipe to the letter and was amazed and pleased at how well the breading stayed on. And the recipe includes

“And believe me, a good piece of chicken can make anybody believe in the existence of God.”

— SHERMAN ALEXIE



“I love chicken. I would eat chicken fingers on Thanksgiving if it were socially acceptable.”

— TODD BARRY

PECAN-CRUSTED CHICKEN STRIPS with Honey Dijonnaise

By Jen Hatmaker

- Nonstick cooking spray
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon honey
- Pinch of salt
- 1-2 lbs. chicken strips (or cut 3-4 breasts into strips)
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon pepper
- 1 6-oz. bag crushed pecan pieces
- 1-2 tablespoons Cajun seasoning
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons dried parsley
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 tablespoon milk

•Preheat oven to 400 degrees and spray a baking sheet with nonstick spray.

•In a bowl, mix the the ingredients for the honey Dijonnaise (the ½ cup mayonnaise, 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard, 1 tablespoon honey and pinch of salt) until smooth and then stick in fridge.

•Pat chicken strips dry and sprinkle the with salt and pepper.

•Mix the pecans, Cajun seasoning, panko and parsley in food processor or blender or chop manually with a knife. Big chunks of pecans don't stick as well, so you want a pretty fine breading.

•Set up dredging stations. Put beaten eggs and milk in one shallow dish and the breading mix in another. In batches, dunk your chicken strips first into the egg mixture, then into the breading, making sure to get them good and coated on all sides. Place the strips in a single layer (not touching) on the prepared baking sheet.

•Bake for around 20 minutes, flipping each strip over at the halfway mark to get both sides crunchy brown. To test for doneness, cut into the thickest strip and check the center - there should be no pink.

•Serve chicken strips with the honey Dijonnaise for dipping.

all the components of a wonderful honey Dijonnaise sauce in which to dip the chicken strips.

And while you're probably tired of me raving on and on like a crazy woman, both of these recipes came from that super awesome cookbook that my sister-in-law's super awesome sister gifted me at Christmas - "Feed These People" by Jen Hatmaker. Try these and enjoy! You can thank me later. ■

FRIDAY NIGHT ROAST CHICKEN ON THURSDAY

By Jen Hatmaker

- 1 whole chicken
- Salt and pepper
- 1 lemon
- 1 whole head of garlic
- 1 package fresh thyme (around 8-10 sprigs)
- 5 tablespoons butter
- 2 onions, thickly sliced
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup half and half

•Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

•Rinse the inside and outside of your chicken and pat it dry. Salt and pepper its insides a bunch, using about 1 tablespoon of each.

•Cut the lemon in half, cut crosswise through the head of garlic (don't worry about taking the skin off), grab the thyme sprigs and shove all this into the chicken's cavity.

•Melt 3 tablespoons of the butter, brush it all over the outside of the bird and then liberally salt and

pepper it.

•Place buttered, stuffed chicken in a roasting pan, breast-side up, scatter the onion all around it and place it in the oven. Roast, uncovered, for around 1 hour and 15 minutes. Check it at 45 minutes and add a cup of water if the onions are too charred for your liking.

•When it's done, take the chicken out of the roasting pan, set it on a cutting board and cover it with foil.

•Place the roasting pan on the stovetop over medium heat and add the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter and the flour and whisk it with all the pan drippings and onions for about 2 minutes. Whisk in the half and half and cook for 2-3 more minutes, until the gravy has thickened up to your liking, then take off the heat.



AT

I recently had the opportunity to return to my alma mater for a fun weekend with lots of other women. “Celebrating and Connecting Baylor Women” was the theme of this year’s Baylor Fling, a women’s reunion event that brings together generations of alumni, parents and friends to connect, renew and find inspiration in community. Fling began in 1983 when a group of women thought there was a need to gather Baylor women to return to campus as a group, get reacquainted with former classmates, friends and roommates and share their Baylor memories. It was a resounding success and became a biannual event held in April of even-numbered years. Its name is derived from “We’ll fling our green and gold afar,” a line in the university’s school song, “That Good Old Baylor Line.”

I first became aware of the event as a student worker at the Baylor Alumni Association in the late 80s, one of the jobs I held during my time at Baylor. I remember looking forward to the day when I could return to campus as an alum and participate in the event. Years later, my Mother and I attended, thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and looked forward to returning every other year. We’ve probably attended eight or nine Flings over the years. Our last year to attend was 2018. We were all geared up for 2020, but of course the pandemic changed those plans. This year’s Fling was the first one held since the pandemic and it was so nice to get back, visit with old friends and make new ones. We were also looking forward to the programs and speakers. Through the years, we’ve heard a number of fantastic speakers discuss a variety of diverse subjects, including fine arts, drama, law, medicine, music, politics, sports, fashion and community service among other things. I’ve made the comment to several that even when the topic was something in which I may not have been interested, I always came away inspired and having learned something. This year we invited Andra, my sister-in-law, and were so pleased when she agreed to join us.

This year’s Fling featured thought-provoking keynote sessions focusing on servant leadership, community impact, cultivating self-confidence, the importance of authenticity and being true to ourselves. We began the two-day event Friday night in the Paul and Jane Meyer Conference Center located in the Foster Campus for Business and Innovation, Baylor’s business school. We had a wonderful meal catered by George’s, a Waco icon, and followed that up with Dr Pepper floats, a traditional BU dessert. We were then treated to an inspiring panel of speakers that included Felicia Mulkey, Jovan Overshown, Katie Smith and Sophia Young-Malcolm. Members of the panel offered their insight on two discussion topics – “How To Have it All: Achieving a Work/Life Balance” and “Women in Leadership: How the Baylor Experience Prepares Student-Athletes to Succeed.”

Mulkey serves as head coach of Baylor’s acrobatics and tumbling team at Baylor and has won 11 national championships in the growing sport.

Overshown serves as Baylor’s senior associate athletics director for external affairs. She oversees



all aspects of the department’s external operations, including resource development, strategic marketing and fan engagement, branding and creative services, athletic communications, BaylorVision and trademark licensing.

Smith, a former Baylor volleyball student athlete, serves as Baylor’s director of athletics business operations. She said she enjoys playing a role in giving student-athletes the experience of a lifetime that others gave her.

Young-Malcolm serves as Baylor’s assistant athletic director for player development. She played on Baylor’s first NCAA championship team in 2005, was a two-time All-American and one of seven players in BU history to amass both 2,000 points and 1,000 rebounds in her career. At the time of her selection, she was Baylor’s highest-ever draft pick in the WNBA when she was the fourth overall selection of the San Antonio Silver Stars in 2006.

We finished the evening hearing from Megan Hundahl-Strreete, an Emmy award-winning producer and consultant who has helped

produce Good Morning America, ABC News and Anderson Cooper 360. As a creative consultant, she worked for Grey’s Anatomy creator and executive producer Shonda Rhimes. She has collaborated with top talent in media including Anderson Cooper, Connie Chung, Paula Zahn, Emeril Lagasse and Diane Sawyer. She now owns and operates Strete Media, a company that assists its clients in brand building, strategic messaging and developing unique content for digital platforms. She is also a founder and partner at Positioned South, which serves select high-profile clients with strategic consultation, training and crisis communications for national exposure.

I found her especially interesting as she started out a small-town girl, rose through the ranks in her profession to cover numerous high-profile stories, navigated several twists and turns on her career path, started a family and has experienced a number of “come full circle” moments. I could relate in many ways.

We reconvened Saturday morn-

ing in the Barfield Drawing Room of the Bill Daniel Student Union Building. There were several vendors from which to shop as we also enjoyed a beautiful array of pastries, scones, muffins, fresh fruit, yogurt, granola, coffee and tea.

“Cultivating Self-Confidence: Letting Others See Your Light” was the discussion topic Saturday morning and our first speaker was Cheryl Gochis, Baylor’s vice president and chief human resources officer. Throughout her talk, Gochis used gardening analogies to illustrate the ability to cultivate self-confidence and experience growth, including the importance of communication, change through flexibility and agility, and context without comparisons.

We next heard from Susan Peters, the founder and executive director of Unbound Global, a multinational anti-human trafficking organization headquartered in Waco. Her work in missions ignited her passion to fight the injustice of human trafficking in communities throughout America and across the

world. She has trained thousands of community members and professionals at conferences and events, served survivors and their families, and facilitated the beginning of new Unbound locations worldwide. In 2020, she published “Unbound: Working Together to Restore Lives and End Human Trafficking.” In it, she recounts true stories of the fight against human trafficking and leaves readers motivated to make a difference in their communities.

She shared harrowing, uncomfortable and heartbreaking stories with us on a topic that is far more rampant than many realize as it continues pervading our own backyards. She reminded us, however, that there is hope, and to look for partners in your pursuits and not try doing it alone. She emphasized the need for more advocates, stating that it truly does take a community to bring about the restoration that is possible from this menace. She said the building of relationships is what ignites that hope.

The culmination of our two-day event was the sharing of stories by Chef Darren McGrady, who served as royal chef to Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana and Princes William and Harry for 15 years and cooked for five U.S. presidents. Having lived and worked under the same roof as the royals, he naturally developed close relationships with them and shared with us sweet stories as well as an abundance of insight into their daily lives. Following the tragic and untimely death of Diana, McGrady and his family relocated to Dallas where he is now a culinary consultant, event planner, author, public speaker and owner of Eating Royally, a catering company. I came away with a signed copy of one of his books, “Eating Royally – Recipes and Remembrances from a palace kitchen,” and look forward to preparing some of the dishes and sharing them in a future edition of this column. ■



Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad.

BRIAN O'DRISCOLL



Fogo de Chão, San Antonio



The Ranchhand Cafe, Cleveland



Zoës Kitchen, Waco



Press Box Grill, Dallas

Lettuce celebrate!

I recently ran into a friend at HEB who, peering into my shopping cart, asked if I was preparing a dish for this page. I chuckled and said no, not exactly.

Looking in my cart, there were three bags of various types of salad greens, a couple pints of grape tomatoes, bell peppers, avocados, cucumbers, a red onion, a lemon and three bags of roasted peanuts. I told her that we were trying to incorporate more salads into our diets as we'd like to lose some weight. Although that is true, I then confessed that I simply didn't feel like cooking that evening so we were going to have big salads for supper. (And no, we don't typically put roasted peanuts in our salads. That's our snack - or guilty pleasure - for late-night TV-watching.)

The timing, however, couldn't have been better, as I just recently learned that May is National Salad Month. Created by the Association for Dressing and Sauces in 1992 - I kid you not - National Salad Month encourages people to incorporate more salads into their daily food regimen by, ahem, turning over a new leaf. In other words, changing our eating habits, getting creative with our salads and basically, inspiring others around us to do the same.

And while researching this, I found

some fun facts about salads on a website called National Today, a site in which the goal is to gather all the special holidays and encourage people to celebrate them with special events and plenty of fun.

According to the site, lettuce comes in second as the most popular fresh vegetable in the U.S. right behind potatoes. It also said that back in ancient times, Egyptians viewed lettuce as an aphrodisiac, making it sacred to Min, the God of Fertility. The site explains that salty dressings generally season spinach and that the word salad comes from "salta" which is Latin for "salted herbs." And finally, it shares that American growers in the 1930s saw a 33% increase in the consumption of spinach, crediting it to the popularity of the cartoon character Popeye the sailor.

The site also included a timeline with additional facts about salads. In the 4th century BC, Aristotle wrote about the health benefits of Swiss Chard. In 1504, Leonardo da Vinci was the first artist to paint salad. His piece, "Leda," depicted the goddess of fertility holding a bouquet of lettuce. In 1894, iceberg lettuce was developed as a solution to long distance transportation issues related to other types of lettuce. In 1924, Caesar Cardini, an Italian chef working in Tijuana, created the Caesar salad, although his version omitted anchovies and only permitted the use of Italian olive oil. In 1939, a restaurant in Chicago opened the first salad bar. ■



Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux, Waco



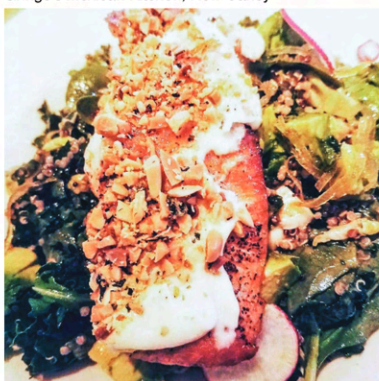
Gringo's Mexican Kitchen, New Caney



Fogo de Chão, The Woodlands



Jason's Deli, The Woodlands



The Cheesecake Factory, The Woodlands



Gringo's Mexican Kitchen, New Caney



– OSCAR WILDE

When Daughter recently asked, “What’s for supper?” and I told her a chicken dish, her exact reply was, “No ... not another chicken dish! I’m so tired of chicken dishes.” Okay, okay, I get it. I’ve been on a bit of a chicken

kick lately. If you’re as tired of it as Daughter is, then don’t fret. I’ll lay off the chicken for a while. But if you’re not, then I’ve got a deal for you. Today I’m bringing you two different chicken dish recipes that are both easy and good. And for what it’s worth, Daughter (and Hubby) loved both of them.

The first, “Creamy Jalapeno Skillet Chicken” from eatingwell.com, showed up in my inbox one day and I’ll be honest – they had me at “creamy jalapeno.” The second, “Crack Chicken,” was evidently a TikTok food craze a while back that appealed to tons of people. And no, as I’ve said before, I don’t do TikTok, but if there’s a food craze going on, then I at least want to check it out. Turns out, it was perfect for our ongoing keto-lifestyle aspirations.

Check them out. I think you’ll agree that they’re not only super easy, but they’re very flavorful as well. ■



– HELEN ROWLAND



- 1½ lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 8-oz. block cream cheese
- 1-oz. package Ranch seasoning mix
- ¼ cup chicken broth
- Chopped green onions, to taste
- Shredded cheddar cheese, to taste
- Cooked and crumbled bacon, to taste

•Place the chicken breasts in the slow cooker. Add the Ranch seasoning mix, the cream cheese and the chicken broth. Cover and cook on low for 5-6 hours or on high for 3 hours.

•When the chicken is done, shred it with a fork right in the slow cooker and gently stir together the components.

•Next, add chopped green onions, shredded cheddar cheese, and cooked, crumbled bacon. There are no measurements for this, so add to your liking.

My notes:

I used the entire bundle of green onions. I used about 2 cups of shredded cheddar cheese. I used an entire 12-oz. package of bacon. In the recipe I read, the completed dish is served on hamburger buns or Hawaiian rolls. I served it on a plate with green beans and coleslaw and we ate it with a fork. In the future I think I’d use boneless, skinless chicken thighs as the breasts were just a little bit dry.

– HENRY IV

- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 4 chicken cutlets (about 1 pound)
- 2 tablespoons avocado oil or other neutral oil, divided
- ½ cup finely chopped onion
- 2 large jalapeño peppers, seeded and finely chopped (1/2 cup)
- ½ cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 ounces cream cheese, cut into cubes
- ½ cup shredded extra-sharp cheddar cheese
- Chopped cilantro for garnish (Optional)

•Stir cumin, chili powder and salt together in a small bowl. Sprinkle both sides of chicken with the spice mixture.

•Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the chicken and cook, turning once, until browned and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part registers 165 degrees, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate.

•Add the remaining 1 tablespoon oil, onion and jalapenos to the pan. Cook, stirring, until softened and starting to brown, about 3 minutes. Add broth and cream cheese and bring to a simmer. Cook, stirring to melt the cream cheese, for 3 to 5 minutes.

•Add the cheddar and stir until melted. Return the chicken and any accumulated juices to the pan and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve sprinkled with cilantro, if desired.





"A little tequila, sunshine, and tacos never hurt anybody."
 - MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY



TEQUILA



inco De Mayo, Spanish for fifth of May, recently came and went. Many people think Cinco de Mayo is Mexican Independence Day which is not correct. Mexican Independence Day is Sept. 16. Cinco de Mayo is the celebration of the Mexican victory over French forces at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862 led by General Ignacio Zaragoza. My understanding is that it is much more popular with Americans than with Mexicans, although it has become associated with the celebration of Mexican-American culture and offers a reason - as if one needed one - to drink margaritas.

We didn't celebrate it at our house this year. It fell on a Friday which is one of the two weekly production days for me in which my team tends to work late, getting the newspaper ready to go to press. And by the time I get home, I'm usually tired and not up for much, other than putting on my pajamas and unwinding in front of something mindless on TV. However, this seemed as good a time as any to pull out some of my tequila inspired dishes.

One night recently we enjoyed shrimp tacos topped with avocado cilantro crema and a peach salsa of which one of the ingredients is tequila. It started off as an experiment. While I have previously made "fried" panko-crusted shrimp in the air fryer, I had never tried a non-battered shrimp in it and was curious to do so. I found various recipes online in which you brush your shrimp with olive oil and then season them before placing them in the air fryer. They were all very similar with the only difference being the seasonings used. I chose to use a keto taco seasoning that I mixed up several weeks ago. I've searched and searched for the exact recipe that I used to make the seasoning and was unable to find it. However, there are many online if you just Google "keto taco seasoning." The avocado cilantro crema is something in a squeeze bottle that Hubby picked up at HEB and the peach salsa is an old recipe from many years ago that is a light, easy spring/summer dish to prepare that may be eaten with lime-flavored tortilla chips or as an accompaniment to something else like shrimp tacos.

Something else we tried recently is what I call "Phonebook Tequila Shrimp." It's a recipe that I cut out of the Livingston phonebook many years ago to try, but stuck in a drawer and never did. When a couple of my friends recently sent the recipe to me in a text, I knew it was time to try it. Cooked on the stovetop in tequila and sautéed garlic, it is quick and easy. I served it with roasted asparagus. ■

"Drinking tequila is more about the journey than the destination."

- RAINBOW ROWELL



- 1 ½ lbs. large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- Taco seasoning
- Olive oil
- Baking spray

- Preheat the air fryer to 400 degrees.
- Spray basket with baking spray.
- Pat shrimp dry with a clean dish towel.
- Brush shrimp with olive oil, then coat shrimp with taco seasoning.
- Using tongs, turn shrimp over, brush with olive oil and coat with taco seasoning.
- Place shrimp in the basket in a single layer and cook in the air fryer for 7-8 minutes.

- 1 pkg. frozen peaches
- 1 medium red onion, chopped
- ½ cup tequila
- Juice of 2 limes
- ¼ cup cilantro, chopped
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste

- Chop frozen peaches while still frozen. Put in a separate container to finish thawing out.
- Once chopped peaches have thawed, drain them and put them in a large bowl with everything else.
- Make at least one hour prior to serving.

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 ½ lbs. large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ½ cup tequila
- ½ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

- Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat.
- Sauté garlic until light brown.
- Place shrimp in the pan and cook for 3 minutes.
- Pour in tequila and season with cilantro, salt and pepper.
- Cook for 2 more minutes.



"O tequila, savage water of sorcery, what confusion and mischief your sly, rebellious drops do generate."

- TOM ROBBINS



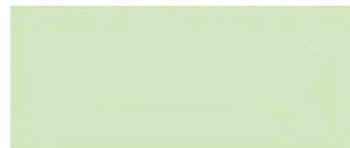


I've written here before about my sister in law, Cathy, who has the greenest thumb I've ever seen and produces gorgeous, huge gardens every year. She can grow anything. When she texted me one afternoon recently asking if I wanted some squash and herbs, I told her definitely, and that I would run out after work. I went by the house first and picked up a bag of shrimp to take to her in return.

I was amazed when we got there. I didn't think it was possible, but her gardens were even bigger and more beautiful than last year. And she's had a time with them recently - protecting them from the multitude of rain we've received lately as well as some tornadic winds. I left with a bag of zucchini and yellow squash, as well as some fresh parsley, dill, basil and cilantro.

Driving home I thought about what I would do with my haul. I've heard of preparing squash and zucchini in the air fryer although I have never done it before. There were oodles of recipes online and I settled on one on a website called keepingthepeas.com. Upon further review, however, I saw that in order to keep it in a single layer I would need to do it in batches. I wasn't up for that. As I'd worked late that day, Hubby and Daughter had already eaten. I was tired, hot and hungry and not willing to do anything that had to be done in batches. So I improvised, roasting my squash and zucchini that I'd cut in half-moons on a sheet pan in the oven after tossing them with some olive oil and an all-purpose seasoning that contained garlic, herbs, black pepper and sea salt. While I roasted them for about 15 minutes in a 350-degree oven, I proceeded to read the air fryer recipe when I stumbled upon this little nugget at the very bottom. "Top with fresh herbs. I suggest parsley, basil, cilantro, or dill." Those were the exact four fresh herbs I'd brought home from Cathy's garden. It's like it was meant to be. I'm including the air fryer recipe in case you want to try it.

In what has been an exciting change of pace for me, a girlfriend recently turned me on to a Greek salad that will probably become one of my mainstays this summer. The reason this has been so revelatory is because I have never cared for cucumbers. I know that's odd, but I just have never liked them. However, in this particular salad, they are sliced very thinly and mixed with the other ingredients which have strong flavors of their own and it just works. I'm glad I have overcome that obstacle because this salad is easy, healthy and extremely flavorful. I think you will love it.



- 1 pint grape tomatoes, halved
- 1 cucumber, thinly sliced into half moons
- 1 cup halved Kalamata olives
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- ¾ cup crumbled feta

- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- Juice of half a lemon
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

- In a large bowl, stir together tomatoes, cucumbers, olives and onion. Gently fold in feta.
- In a small bowl, make dressing. Combine vinegar, lemon juice and oregano and season with salt and pepper. Slowly add olive oil, whisking to combine.
- Drizzle dressing over salad.



- 2 yellow squash
- 1 zucchini
- Olive oil
- Seasoning (of your choice)
- Fresh herbs (of your choice)

•Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut the ends off the zucchini and yellow squash. Slice lengthwise and then into thin half moons. Drizzle with olive oil, turning to coat. Season with salt and pepper or your own choice of seasonings. Roast for 15 minutes. Top with chopped fresh herbs.

- 2 zucchini
- 2 yellow squash
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

•Cut the ends off the zucchini and yellow squash. Then slice lengthwise, and into small half moon shapes. In a large bowl toss the zucchini and yellow squash in olive oil, minced garlic, salt and pepper.

•Transfer to the air fryer basket. Set the temperature to 400 degrees and set the time to 15 minutes. Toss half way at about 7.5 minutes. Transfer to a serving bowl. Sprinkle with fresh herbs.





HAPPY
Memorial Day

Memorial Day is a federal holiday in the United States for mourning the U.S. military personnel who have died while serving in the United States armed forces. It is observed on the last Monday of May. While its true meaning should never be lost or forgotten, many view Memorial Day weekend as the beginning of summer. School's out, the days are longer and people are spending more time outside. Basically, Memorial Day weekend signifies a slower, more relaxed pace.

Whether you're throwing a big bash, or just laying low with your family, I think this menu will be just the ticket to usher in summer. It's fresh, colorful, fairly healthy and very filling.

You know we love our Buffalo-style hot wings. However, if you're not a fan of Buffalo sauce, you may make these the flavor of your choice. We have friends who prefer garlic parmesan over Buffalo-style. No problem. Just substitute a cup of crushed garlic and a cup of parmesan cheese to the melted butter instead of the Frank's hot sauce.

While thinking about various foods suitable for Memorial Day, I checked out numerous websites and blogs. And when I ran across Dave Lieberman's potato, tomato, corn and basil salad on foodnetwork.com, it definitely spoke to me. The picture was so beautiful with all of those colorful fresh vegetables. It's not keto-friendly due to the potatoes and corn, but other than that, it's really a fairly healthy salad or side dish. And it was simple to make. Here's wishing you all a fun and safe Memorial Day weekend. Let the summertime begin. ■

— ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



- 2 packages full-sized chicken wings
- 2 bottles Frank's hot sauce
- 1½ sticks melted butter

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
- Line a sheet pan with foil and place a baking rack on it.
- Pour 2 bottles of Frank's hot sauce into a medium size bowl. Add 1½ sticks of melted butter. Stir and set aside.
- Coat wings thoroughly with olive oil, salt and pepper.
- Cook for 30 minutes then turn over and cook for another 20 minutes.
- Remove from oven and with tongs, dip each wing in the bowl with the sauce mixture and then place back on the baking rack on the sheet pan. Once all the wings have been dipped in the sauce, put back in the oven and cook for another 10 minutes.
- Repeat the above step and dip the wings in the sauce again and cook for an additional 10 minutes.

- 1 pound baby red potatoes, scrubbed
- 5 medium ears of corn (about 3 pounds)
- 1 pint grape tomatoes, halved lengthwise
- 1 small red onion, peeled and sliced thinly (about 1/2 to 3/4 cup)
- 1 large bunch fresh basil, rinsed, dried and leaves picked
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large lemons, juiced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- About 15 grinds freshly ground pepper

- Place the potatoes in a large pot of salted water and bring to boil. Cook until just fork tender, about 15 minutes. Fish out the potatoes with a slotted spoon and place them in a bowl of ice cold water to stop them from cooking.
- Shuck the corn and break each ear in half. Cook in the same boiling water for 5-7 minutes until tender but not soft. Remove the cooled potatoes to a dishcloth to drain. Immerse corn in the same ice bath until cool. Cut each potato into quarters and place in a large bowl.
- Remove corn from water and also let drain. Use a chef's knife to cut the kernels off each ear. Add kernels to the bowl. Add grape tomatoes, onion and whole basil leaves. Add olive oil and lemon juice and toss gently to combine. Season to taste, with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

— JOHN F. KENNEDY



“You have to be a romantic to invest yourself, your money, and your time in cheese.”

– ANTHONY BOURDAIN



SPECIAL

Today is National Cheese Day. Sounds good to me! I've loved cheese

my whole life. And my family of origin does too. I'll never forget in the early days of our marriage when Hubby commented that he had never known a family that liked cheese as much as mine did. And the problem with that is ... ? Don't worry though. We converted him and he now loves cheese as much as the rest of us. Of course the oddest thing about his comment was that it was coming from the same guy that told me when we were dating that he could eat queso every day. In fact, he even had a designated dish just for making queso.

So when I started writing today's column, just for kicks and grins, I peeked in the fridge to see what was in the cheese drawer. Assuming I didn't overlook one, I counted 11 different kinds of cheese. Yes, you read that right - 11 different kinds of cheese. There was grated parmesan cheese, crumbled goat cheese, sharp cheddar cheese, extra sharp yellow cheese, colby and monterey jack cheese, Swiss cheese, mild cheddar cheese, pepper jack cheese, grated Mexican blend, Swiss and gruyere blend and grated pizza blend.

This trip down the rabbit hole all started because I discovered a website called National Today, a site in which the goal is to gather all the special holidays and encourage people to celebrate them with special events and plenty of fun. That's how I learned that June 4 is National Cheese Day.

But if cheese isn't your thing, then don't fret. The month of June is Cucumber Month, Lemon Month, Mango Month and Candy Month. It's also National Iced Tea Month, National Country Cooking Month, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Month, National Steakhouse Month and Turkey Lovers Month. And there's more. June is National Dairy Month, National Frozen Yogurt Month and National Soul Food Month.

Wow! If you enjoy all kinds of food and drink like I do, then we could really go wild during the month of June. I decided to share - via photographs - ways in which you can celebrate these exciting days of June. There's a beautiful cucumber salad. There's a lemon drop cocktail that refreshingly quenched my thirst one hot summer day in The Woodlands. There's a scrumptious-look-



“How can you govern a country which has 246 varieties of cheese?”

– CHARLES DE GAULLE



ing plate of country cooking that I enjoyed for lunch one day at our very own Alma's Courthouse Whistle Stop Cafe downtown. There's a fresh fruit tray that's the perfect snack for hanging out around the pool. There's also a sheet pan full of roasted veggies that would pair nicely with the protein of your choice. There's a beautiful filet I enjoyed with Hubby at Longhorn Steakhouse one Saturday en route to the Hobby Center to see Jesus

Christ Superstar. And to top it off is a lovely turkey sandwich. Daughter has a friend who when much younger commented that his favorite food was a turkey sandwich. Funny thing was that I understood completely. Sometimes a good turkey sandwich is the most satisfactory thing there is.

Here's hoping you enjoy all these special days in June. I'm finding that I'm already curious to see what July has in store for us. ■

“You can't make everyone happy. You're not cheese.”

– ANONYMOUS



“The importance of what we do is transparency. We connect people. We foster community. We build connections. It matters. You matter.”

– Larry C. Jackson, TPA Past President, Retired, *The Fayette County Record*



“Each day you go out into your community and work, you’re earning your swagger. We represent a beacon of truth. We’re news, not noise.”

– Leonard Woolsey, TPA Past President, Publisher, *The Daily News, Galveston*

We recently had the opportunity to travel to Round Rock to attend the 143rd annual Texas Press Association (TPA) Convention & Trade Show. This was the third year that I’ve taken Hubby and Daughter with me. It’s an opportunity to get them out of the house and out of town for a few days. They normally sleep in, swim in the hotel pool or go off exploring while I’m attending various sessions about the newspaper industry. We reunite for the meals, social functions, keynote speakers and awards ceremonies. While it’s a mini-vacation for them, it also gives them a little glimpse into my professional life and chosen career.

This year’s convention was at Kalahari Resort & Convention Center. There are only four Kalahari Resorts – Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Wisconsin – and its biggest claim to fame is that it is home to the largest indoor water park in the nation. The resort is absolutely beautiful. From the regal sculptures of safari animals you first see as you drive up, to the custom-crafted artwork and furniture throughout the resort, Kalahari delights and excels in sharing the beauty of Africa with its guests.

In addition to the indoor water park, there’s also an outdoor water park, a lazy river, multiple restaurants and bars and Tom Foolery’s Adventure Park, an indoor 80,000-square foot array of attractions for the family including arcade games, amusement park-type rides, a climbing wall, ziplining, miniature golf, a cave of mirrors, a bowling alley and two escape rooms – “Lift Yer Loot Saloon” and “Escape from Planet Obscura.”

We had never attempted an escape room before but decided to give it a go. We opted for “Lift Yer Loot Saloon” in which we were placed in the middle of an old western town with the goal of pulling off a daring robbery. With Jesse James as our leader, it was up to us to break into the bank vault and get the loot, including the priceless “Baton Rouge Diamond,” before the sheriff arrived. Once we were given our instructions the timer was set for 30 minutes. Daughter discovered the first clue (not surprising). After bumbling around for about the first eight minutes we received a few hints (which is allowed). Teamwork was a must, but it paid off because we managed to crack the safe, lift the loot and escape with time to spare. It was fun.

Amatuli Marketplace, an outdoor space within the center of the resort, features a marketplace where local artisans and African



craftsmen feature their trades. There’s a covered stage with live entertainment nightly, an outdoor bar, tables and chairs and a firepit in the center that provides a nice ambiance. “North of Luck,” a Central Texas band, provided live music the evening we were there and we thoroughly enjoyed the music which was basically classic rock with a few 80s selections sprinkled throughout.

For this year’s convention, dinner was “on your own.” Our first night

there, we opted for Cinco Niños, a modern Mexican restaurant and tequila bar. We loved the colorful decor and oversized tables.

Daughter selected street steak tacos which were grilled steak, smashed avocado, onions, cilantro, lime and green salsa on flour tortillas. It was accompanied by rice and your choice of beans. She selected refried beans. She also ordered a side of queso. Hubby chose a carnitas burrito with braised pork, cheese mix, refried beans,

pico de gallo and jalapeno crema. I picked tacos al carbon, consisting of grilled achiote chicken, poblano peppers and onion rajas, chipotle crema, radish and cilantro, accompanied by rice and black beans.

The second night we chose to dine at B-Lux Grill & Bar which is located between the bowling alley and the game room. It is known for its unique burgers and shakes handcrafted from scratch, including “hard” shakes (with alcohol). And no, we did not partake of those

(although they did sound intriguing).

Daughter’s a mac and cheese lover from way back and has sampled numerous kinds over the years so she was both impressed and stoked when she discovered the menu offered five different mac and cheeses. She narrowed it down to three choices and then consulted with Kylie – the cutest, most personable server I think we’ve ever experienced – who recommended her own favorite, the bacon and grilled chicken ranch mac and cheese. In addition to the bacon and grilled chicken, it also featured cheddar cheese sauce, green onions, buttermilk ranch and herb butter bread crumbs.

Hubby ordered the hatch chile burger which came with pepper jack cheese, American cheese, hatch chile relish, grilled onions and applewood smoked bacon on a brioche bun. I ordered a chicken sandwich called “Am I Hot or Not.” It consisted of a flash fried buttermilk-pickle brined chicken breast with Nashville style hot sauce, scallion aioli, dill pickles and house slaw on a brioche bun. Both of ours came with “pub chips,” which were hand cut homemade potato chips that were divine.

The lunches during the convention were your standard banquet/convention fare. The first day we started with a Caesar salad with the addition of roasted tomatoes. The entree was a grilled chicken breast topped with a creamy white wine sauce and beautiful brown beech mushrooms accompanied by roasted new potatoes and fresh green beans. Dessert was a darling little miniature cheesecake topped with three blueberries, a strawberry, a dollop of whipped cream with a sprinkling of edible gold leaf and some raspberry sauce. The second day’s lunch was buffet-style with an array of things from which to choose. I selected a salad, a breaded chicken breast with cream gravy, baked cod with a corn salsa, garlic green beans, red beans and rice with andouille sausage and a ratatouille-style vegetable dish. Dessert was your choice of a miniature banana pudding in a shot glass or a miniature pecan pie that was about the size of a 50-cent piece. I selected the pecan pie.

All in all, it was a lovely weekend. We learned some things, visited with old friends, brought back some awards and enjoyed some delightful food and drink. And we really can’t say enough about Kalahari. It’s beautiful, nice and the perfect place for a family outing as there really is something for everyone. ■



“NO MAN STANDS TALLER THAN WHEN HE STOOPS TO HELP A CHILD.”

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Italian Pasta Salad

In a large mixing bowl combine the following ingredients:

- 1 16-oz. box cooked veggie rotini
- 1 8-oz. sharp cheddar, cut into cubes
- 1 8-oz. colby jack, cut into cubes
- 1 8-oz. pepper jack, cut into cubes
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 1 orange bell pepper, chopped
- ½ cup chopped red onion
- 10 oz. hard salami, sliced ¼-inch thick, then chopped
- 10 oz. pepperoni, sliced ¼-inch thick, then chopped
- 8 oz. Kraft light zesty Italian dressing

• Mix together, cover, refrigerate for one hour and serve.

“DADS ARE MOST ORDINARY MEN TURNED BY LOVE INTO HEROES, ADVENTURERS, STORYTELLERS, AND SINGERS OF SONG.”

— UNKNOWN

Greek Cucumber Salad

In a large mixing bowl combine the following ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- Garlic salt, to taste
- 1 English cucumber, quartered and thinly sliced
- ½ medium red onion, halved and thinly sliced
- ½ cup pitted Kalamata olive, cut in half
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese
- ½ cup cooked veggie garden delight pasta

• Mix together, cover, refrigerate for 1 hour and serve.

Looking forward to meeting BABY BOY CREW



As today is Father's Day, it seemed the perfect time to tell you all about the sweetest little baby shower we recently attended. My oldest nephew, Evan, and his wife, Kodi, are expecting a new son around early July. This will be son number three and his name will be Crew. He will join brothers Conley and Cannon.

Angela, Kodi's colleague, and James, my middle nephew, threw the shower and let me just say they pulled out all the stops. It was a co-ed, family-oriented affair and there was so much attention to detail. The decorations were beautiful and the food was amazing. There were some fun, and unique, party games. But one of the show-stoppers were the original and well-thought-out party favors for the guests.

The first thing guests saw as they entered was a gorgeous and colorful charcuterie board on the coffee table, followed by an area of the living room that had been curated to create the perfect spot to take photos.

The table of food was a captivating sight to behold. It was a beautiful array of both sweet and savory, all laid out and displayed on wooden serving pieces, creating a rustic farmhouse vibe. There were doughnuts topped with blue icing, beautiful fruit pastries, a platter of fresh fruit and a regal, towering six-layer vanilla cake with a buttercream and cream cheese frosting. (While it may look like a three-layer cake in the photo, I know for a fact it was six layers because I was given the task, er honor, of cutting it. Yikes!)

And for the savory lovers like myself, there was a veggie platter with spinach dip and hummus along with several other dips, macaroni salad, melted ham and cheese sliders, chicken salad sandwiches on croissant rolls and two of the very best pasta salads I've ever put in my mouth. Unfortunately, I failed to get photos of the pasta salads but Angela graciously shared the recipes with me and I'm sharing them with you today. (You can thank me later.) Topping it off was a drink station with no less than six different fresh fruit juices, in addition to tea and water.

I mentioned earlier that we played a couple of baby shower party games. In the first, a skein of yarn and a pair of scissors were passed around the room and everyone was tasked with cutting a piece of yarn they thought may be commensurate with the circumference of the mother-to-be's belly. I had played that same game at a baby shower many years ago in which a roll of toilet paper was used instead of the yarn.

The other party game, which I'd never heard of before, was a scream. Four different disposable diapers containing melted candy bars were passed around individually and



“IT IS EASIER TO BUILD STRONG CHILDREN THAN TO REPAIR BROKEN MEN.”

— FREDERICK DOUGLASS

we had to attempt to guess the identity of the candy bar. Needless to say, this game elicited lots of laughter as well as a few gasps as we passed around the warm diapers. I think the best anyone did was correctly guess two of them. As it turned out, one was a Snickers bar, one was a Baby Ruth bar, one was a Turtles bar and the other was a Hershey bar with almonds. I'm pretty confident that if I were in a blind taste test I would be able to correctly identify a Snickers and a Baby Ruth. However, melted in a diaper proved considerably more challenging.

As the guests began to leave following the happy and fun event, everyone was instructed to take one of each of the party favors. On top of a console table near the door were three beautiful and clever displays. The first was a variety of little six-inch-tall succulents wrapped in burlap and

tied with twine. Stuck in each one was a little wooden baby onesie that said, “Watch me grow - Baby Banks - July 2023.” The second was a basket filled with individually wrapped bags of blue and white popcorn - coconut and regularly lightly salted - with little tags that said, “Thanks for poppin' by! Crew's Baby Shower 2023.” The third was a selection of little terra cotta flower pots with plantable seeds inside and a little tag that said, “Baby Crew is about to bloom.”

The shower was all so sweet and meaningful. And it was very apparent by all the effort that went into it, as well as the large turnout of friends and family, that Evan, Kodi and Baby Crew are very much loved. So here's wishing a very Happy Father's Day to Evan and all of the fathers out there - new fathers, seasoned fathers and those fathers no longer with us earthly, yet very much still in our hearts. ■



"A world without tomatoes is like a string quartet without violins."

- LAURIE COLWIN



All Things

"The tomato offers its gift of fiery color and cool completeness."

- PABLO NERUDA



"There is nothing better than picking up sun-warmed tomatoes and smelling them, feeling them and scrutinizing their shiny skins for imperfections, dreaming of ways to serve them."

- JOSE ANDRE

I'm

bad about getting really "into" something and then wanting to

have it all the time - to the point that my family begins making looks at each other and making comments like, "That again?" And during the summer, it is usually fresh tomatoes. I go on a binge and have to have all things tomato. A couple of years ago I discovered a recipe for a tomato and vidalia onion pie that intrigued me. In my haste and excitement, however, I misread the directions and ended up using too much olive oil. The dish tasted fantastic even though it was a soupy mess.

When I recently ran across an article on the internet entitled "37 fresh tomato recipes for peak tomato season," I briefly wondered if I had died and gone to Heaven. I couldn't wait to check out the 37 recipes. My mouth was watering as I looked at picture after picture of all kinds of tomato delights. And as it turned out, there were several recipes for tomato pie. I bookmarked numerous recipes with the idea of heading out to Hensley's Produce to pick up some homegrown tomatoes. But darn the luck, they were closed that day. I headed to HEB and proceeded to purchase a ridiculous amount of tomatoes. I came home and made one of the tomato pies, a different one from the one I had made previously. I knew it had tremendous potential when I saw that one of the ingredients was bacon. I made it and it tasted delicious but it was still soupy and this one didn't even call for olive oil. Turns out, I was supposed to peel the tomatoes and then squeeze the juice out of them before assembling the pie. The idea of peeling tomatoes seemed a waste of time to me, especially considering that the skin is perfectly edible. And squeezing the juice out of tomatoes doesn't rank high on my "things I want to do" list. I may break down and peel and squeeze tomatoes for a future iteration but I had already moved on to the next tomato recipe that I wanted to try. And as for the fam, Daughter said it smelled like pizza. She tried a little bit and then turned up her nose. She loves raw tomatoes but she hasn't yet developed a taste for cooked to-



atoes. Hubby liked it and said the flavor was a combination of lasagna and pizza. The next day, even though I still had three of my HEB tomatoes, I cut out of work a little early and hightailed it out to Hensley's to get there before they closed (or ran out of tomatoes). I sacked up numerous beauties and before I could make my way to my car, Mrs. Shirley and a couple of her grandkids talked me into a watermelon. Daughter had been hankering for one and I knew we had people coming in for the weekend, so it seemed like a good idea. Once home, I couldn't wait to make "baked tomato slices." Upon Hubby's arrival from work, he saw all my to-

mato slices laid out and gingerly asked, "Are you making another tomato pie?" I think I sensed his relief when I told him no, not tonight. The baked tomato slices were super easy and quick and may have been one of the best things I've ever eaten. I've long been a fan of a fresh Caprese salad and one of the 37 recipes was for a "stacked tomato and burrata salad." I didn't have any burrata but I knew I had some mozzarella and I thought a pretty stacked Caprese salad just might be the perfect breakfast. I'm including the recipes for "tomato pie," "baked tomato slices" and "stacked tomato and burrata salad" for you to try. ■

From allrecipes.com

- 1 (9 inch) deep dish pie crust
- 4 large tomatoes, peeled and sliced
- ½ pound bacon - cooked, drained, and chopped
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced
- ½ cup chopped fresh basil
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup mayonnaise

- Gather all ingredients. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
- In alternating layers, fill the pie crust with tomatoes, bacon, green onions, basil, oregano, garlic powder and red pepper.
- Stir together cheese and mayonnaise in a small bowl. Spread over the top of the pie. Cover loosely with aluminum foil.
- Bake in the preheated oven for 30 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking for 30 more minutes

From allrecipes.com

- 1 vine-ripened tomato, cored and cut into ½ -inch slices
- Flaked sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ¼ cup burrata cheese, or more to taste
- 1 tablespoon torn fresh basil leaves, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

- Place a tomato slice on a plate; season with sea salt and black pepper. Spread burrata cheese over the tomato slice and top with torn basil leaves. Drizzle with olive oil. Top with another tomato slice. Repeat cheese and tomato layering process with remaining slices, finishing with a tomato slice.

From allrecipes.com

- olive oil, divided, or as needed
- 1 large tomato, cut into ½ -inch-thick slices
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary, leaves stripped and finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- salt and ground black pepper to taste

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Brush baking sheet with about 1 tablespoon olive oil.
- Arrange tomato slices on the baking sheet. Sprinkle rosemary and garlic over tomatoes and brush with remaining olive oil; season with salt and pepper.
- Bake in the preheated oven until tomatoes are tender, 5 to 10 minutes.



- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Festive dessert in honor of *July 4*

We're

getting together with several friends out at the lake for the Fourth of July. When I asked what I could bring, they said dessert. No problem. I'm happy to whip up something to take. Of course, with it being the celebration of our independence, I wanted to do something special, maybe even something red, white and blue. I began researching various

recipes for Fourth of July desserts and found numerous things that were appealing. And then it dawned on me. I remembered coming across a recipe years ago that I thought was so pretty and I bookmarked it to save for when I had more time.

I couldn't remember what it was called but I did a deep dive through my bookmarked recipes and finally found it. The picture of it was still just as beautiful as I remembered.

It's called "Lemon-Berry Sheet Pan Trifle" and was originally published on the site purewow.com in August of 2018. It involves making individual meringues, making a creamy topping and then topping it all with a beautiful array of fresh berries that have been soaked in lemon juice and powdered sugar.

It is not difficult at all, though it is a bit time-consuming, mainly because the meringues bake for an hour and 15 minutes and then, after turning off the oven, remain sitting in the oven for another two hours. And you can't make the creamy topping until just before you put it on the meringues.

This dish turned out

absolutely beautiful and tasted wonderful. And the best part of all was that Hubby and Daughter both loved it just as much as I did. It makes for a very impressive presentation. However, because of the multiple steps involved and the fact that it is to be served immediately upon completion, it will not work for me to take to the Fourth of July get-together at the lake with our friends. But that's okay. I already have something else in mind. Stay tuned. You may see it in a future "Bite by Bite." ■

Lemon-Berry Sheet Pan Trifle

From purewow.com

Meringue:

- 7 egg whites, at room temperature
- ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Creamy topping:

- 1½ cups heavy cream
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Berry topping:

- 8 ounces strawberries, quartered
- 6 ounces raspberries
- 6 ounces blackberries
- 8 ounces blueberries
- ½ cup powdered sugar
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- Lemon zest, as needed for finishing

Make the meringue:

- Preheat the oven to 275 degrees. Line two baking sheets with parchment.
- In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whip attachment, whip the egg whites and cream of tartar on low speed until foamy, about 2 minutes.
- Raise the speed to medium and gradually add the sugar, whipping to stiff peaks, 7 to 8 minutes. Do not over whip; the egg whites should look soft and smooth, not clumpy or dry.
- Add the vanilla extract and mix to combine. Using two spoons, dollop mounds of meringue onto the prepared baking sheets. The meringue scoops should be about a heaping ¼ cup, but you don't need to be precise. Leave at least 1½ inches between each dollop.
- Transfer the baking sheets to the oven and reduce the temperature to 225 degrees. Bake until the meringues are firm and set, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Turn off the oven and leave the meringues to cool completely (and continue drying), another 2 hours.
- Carefully remove the meringues from the parchment and place them on a clean baking sheet.

Make the berry topping:

- In a medium bowl, toss the strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries with the powdered sugar, lemon juice and zest to combine. Let sit for 10 minutes.

Make the creamy topping:

- In the bowl of the electric mixer, whip the cream, powdered sugar and vanilla extract to medium peaks.
- To serve, dollop the cream topping all over the meringues. Arrange the berries in an even layer, garnish with more lemon zest and serve immediately.



- JOEL FUHRMAN





“Stay close to the serenity of a lake to meet your own peace of mind.”

– MUNIA KHAN



LAKE Life

We've

had the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time on Lake Livingston lately. We're blessed to have friends and family who have lake houses and boats and we're enjoying the lake life. Time seems to slow down a bit and life's little stresses seem to fade away when you're on a boat with the wind in your hair and a cold beverage in your hand.

We recently enjoyed a lovely dinner with family and friends at Andy and Allison's lake house in Indian Hills. We brought a big bowl of boiled shrimp and cocktail sauce to snack on as Andy finished preparing a fish dish. He baked amberjack that he and his sons had caught in Venice, La. Amberjack is a thick, firm fish that is mild in taste with a bit of a buttery flavor. It is similar in taste to mahi-mahi. I had never had amberjack before and it was delicious. Andy had seasoned it perfectly and baked it with fresh lemon slices on top. Allison prepared two big beautiful salads, a garden salad and a fruit salad. We finished the meal with key lime pie and chocolate pie and then set off in the boat to view a magnificent sunset.

A few days later, we were back at Indian Hills for a pre-Fourth of July get-together in which our friends, CC and the Road Dawgs, were playing classic rock. Situated on a wooden deck that served as the stage, under two giant shade trees, the band had a beautiful view of the lake as they performed. Our friend Louis plays guitar for the band and over the years, we've gotten to know the other band members and they have become good friends too. Carlos handles the vocals, Lee plays percussion and Steve plays guitar. You may have heard of them before. They've played at Across the Tracks several times and earlier this spring played for an Earth Day event at Tempe Creek Vineyard and Farm.

Afterward, we ended up at Jimmy and Andra's lake house where we grazed on cheese and crackers and a red and blue fruit tray with white dip. Jimmy and Andra treated us to a boat

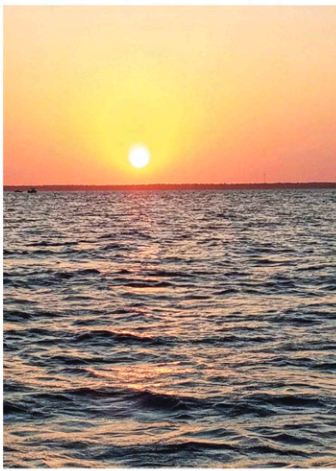
“I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my sense put in order.”

– JOHN BURROUGHS

ride with good tunes and cold beverages. Daughter enjoyed hanging out with her cousins, James and Seth. They took turns swinging from the rope swing on the pier into the lake. Seth does a great backflip from the rope swing. He also pulled in fish every time he cast a line. I threw together a potato, corn, tomato and basil salad and Andra made some pinto beans while Jimmy grilled delicious steaks with beautiful grill marks. Afterward, we enjoyed watching some fireworks.

We spent the Fourth of July back at the lake where our friends, Tommy and Karen, invited us and Julie and Louis out to their condo in Waterwood to spend the afternoon on their boat and swimming in the cove. We had the opportunity to meet and hang out with some other friends of theirs, Larry and Debbie and Gina and Ed and we had a wonderful time. Karen had pre-packed all the fixings for delicious chicken salad sliders and Julie made that good creamy jalapeno cilantro dip like they serve at Chuy's. We had fun and spent several hours playing and floating on the lake. As the afternoon wore on, we experienced some thunder and lightning and decided it was time to get off the lake. We returned to the condo and feasted on Karen's slow cooker queso chicken tacos with lettuce, cheese, onions, pico de gallo and fresh guacamole. We capped that off with red velvet cupcakes with cream cheese frosting and red, white and blue sprinkles that I'd baked earlier that morning.

I mentioned earlier that we're very blessed with good friends and family. And we truly are. And we're looking forward to more outings on the lake before summer ends. ■



“Life is better at the lake.”

– UNKNOWN





"My advice to you is not to inquire why or whither, but just enjoy your ice cream while it's on your plate."

- THORNTON WILDER



Sweet & Spicy RedHot Ice Cream

From frankshredhot.com

- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup sweetened condensed milk
- ¼ cup corn syrup
- ¼ cup honey
- ¼ cup plus tablespoon Frank's RedHot® Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce
- ¼ cup whole milk
- 3 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon apple pie spice
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 20 drops red food coloring

- Place cream in a blender container and cover. Blend on high until stiff peaks form, about 35 to 45 seconds.
- Mix remaining ingredients, except the food coloring, in a medium bowl. Add to the blender container with the cream and cover. Blend on high speed until well blended and slightly thickened, scraping down sides as needed.
- Transfer ¼ cup of the mixture to a small bowl and add the food coloring, stirring to mix well.
- Pour half of the remaining un-tinted ice cream mixture into a freezer-safe container. Drop small spoonfuls of the red mixture over top, using only about half. Run a knife through the ice cream mixture to swirl colors. Repeat with remaining ice cream mixtures, swirling red on top layer. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing down to cover the surface of the ice cream mixture. Freeze at least 6 hours or until firm.



I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream



Today is National Ice Cream Day. Only recently did I learn that July is National Ice Cream Month and that National Ice Cream Day is celebrated on the third Sunday of July. Commemorations for the popular, delicious treat began during the Reagan administration in 1984 when the former president described ice cream as "a nutritious and wholesome food enjoyed by over 90% of the people in the United States."

The timing of this discovery could not have been better. I've recently been tasked with making homemade ice cream for a competition in conjunction with a larger group project. Believe it or not, I have never made homemade ice cream. Therefore, I've conducted a deep dive of late, as I prepare for the upcoming competition and my research has led to some interesting facts that I'll share with you.

According to the Favorite Ice Cream Flavors Index – a study on consumer preferences and trends in America conducted by the financial firm Scholaroo – there has been a significant increase in the demand for ice cream in the country. The consumption of the delicacy in June of this year surpassed the total

purchases in the same period of 2022 by 9.8%. The study also revealed that the most popular ice cream flavors in Texas – ranked in order of popularity in 2023 – are rocky road, chocolate and cookies and cream.

The origins of ice cream and frozen desserts are obscure, although several accounts exist about their history. According to Wikipedia, some sources describe ice cream-like foods as originating in Persia as far back as 550 BC. Using ice houses and ice pools, Persians were able to serve and produce faloodeh and sorbets all year round.

According to National Today, it's been said that ice cream-like food was first consumed in China sometime between 618-97 AD. The first dish was made from flour, buffalo milk and camphor, an organic compound commonly used in lotion. It's also been noted that Alexander the Great adored ice and snow flavored with nectar and honey. A Roman cookbook dating back to the 1st century includes recipes for sweet desserts that are sprinkled with snow, according to Wikipedia, and there are Persian records from the 2nd century for sweetened drinks chilled with ice.

There's no known inventor that can be credited with creating ice cream. According to National Today, the first mention of ice cream in the U.S. derives from a letter written in Maryland in 1744 by Governor William Bladens

guest. Then, the New York Gazette on May 12, 1777, printed the first advertisement for ice cream in the U.S. Following the American Revolution, ice cream became super popular in the U.S.

According to the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), records kept by a New York merchant show that President George Washington spent approximately \$200 for ice cream during the summer of 1790. Inventory records of Mount Vernon taken after Washington's death revealed "two pewter ice cream pots." The IDFA reports that President Thomas Jefferson was said to have a favorite 18-step recipe for an ice cream delicacy that resembled a modern-day Baked Alaska, and that in 1813, First Lady Dolley Madison served a magnificent strawberry ice cream creation at President Madison's second inaugural banquet at the White House.

My favorite ice cream during my childhood and adolescence was always chocolate, although I did go through a brief cookies and cream phase in high school, around the same time I was working as a checker at Big Star Grocery Store. For most of my adulthood, however, coffee has been my favorite flavor of ice cream. Of course, if you find one that is some combination of coffee and chocolate, then that's even better.

I've been waffling back and forth over what flavor to make for the upcoming competition. My first thought was to

make something different and exotic, something that would knock their socks off. I considered honey lavender, honey jalapeno, ginger pineapple, salted caramel, peanut butter and chocolate or maybe cheesecake. But then I realized that the judges' palates may not be as adventurous as mine, in which case I would be smooth out of the running. So I've decided that I will probably stick with the basics and select an ice cream flavor that's a little more mainstream. We'll see. I'll keep you posted.

You already know that my family and I like all things hot and spicy and that we're big Buffalo hot wings-lovers, so when I ran across a recipe for "Sweet & Spicy RedHot Ice Cream" made with Frank's RedHot® Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce – one of the primary components of Buffalo hot wings – you know I would have to try it. It was easy enough and didn't even require an ice cream maker. It starts with a sweet, creamy vanilla base that gets turned sideways with the signature heat of the Frank's RedHot®. It was like nothing I have ever had before and it was absolutely delicious – sweet, hot, spicy and cold, all at the same time. I know it's certainly not for everyone, but if you're up to the challenge – or are just curious about it – I'm sharing the recipe with you today. I wish you all a happy National Ice Cream Day and hope you will indulge in the flavor of your choice. ■





Eating, shopping and dancing throughout the SOUTH

The "Bite by Bite" family is on vacation so we called upon a guest writer to create this week's Bite by Bite. Join as she shares her recent experience eating, shopping and dancing throughout the South.

So, a few Mondays ago, I took a look at my schedule and noticed I had no commitments for the following weekend! Like everyone, I'm busy. I have a husband who plays in a band that takes up many of my Saturday nights, several renovation projects going on in my home, and kids and grands with miscellaneous needs. I think most readers can understand the exclamation point at the end of my first sentence above. My editor will have to leave the punctuation ... I looked it up ... an exclamation point is used to indicate "strong feelings." There is likely not one of us who does not have "strong feelings" when they realize they have no weekend plans ... no music gig, no ball games, no hair appointment, just a free weekend to do whatever we want.

I also noted that I did have the weekend days blocked out on my calendar without explanation. So, I backed up a few days to Thursday, and saw that this was the day my dear friend Nancy, one of my best buds when I lived in the city, had advised me she was leaving to take a group of Bellaire moms (what we used to call ourselves when the kids were little) on a trip to Mississippi. I quickly remembered jotting down the day she had told me she was leaving and blocking off the weekend on my book, just in case there was any way I could possibly join them. I had forgotten all about it, but I was absolutely thrilled at the prospect of a fun mini vacay. After a quick discussion with The Husband, who is always ready for an adventure, I phoned her up to tell her we were both in! While Mississippi might not be the place that comes to mind for a summer vacation, it worked for a quick weekend trip, and, surprisingly, proved to be far more than we expected!

What a great time we had on this spur of the moment little getaway! The purpose of the trip was twofold for Nancy. Her high school class reunion was set for Saturday night, and she had always wanted to show a bunch of her close friends her "hometown." We were all very excited, because we know that the quaint little town in Mississippi where Nancy grew up has, over the past few years, become THE Home Town of the popular HGTV series of the same name. That's right! The show, highlighting the renovation of old homes in a lazy little southern town by the cutesy construction couple, Ben and Erin Napier, is filmed right in Nancy's tiny hometown, Laurel, Miss. So, off we went, to check it all out.

We headed out early Thursday and drove about six hours to our first stop ... the beautiful coast at Biloxi, Miss. We checked into our ocean view room at the MGM Hotel, Casino & Resort, Beau Rivage, early in



the afternoon and began our weekend of fine food and drink. The Husband and I last visited Beau Rivage during COVID-19. At that time, the casino was shut down, and the hotel restaurants had a sparse scattering of tables, keeping everyone six feet apart. It was great to revisit with the place in full swing. The restaurants are terrific, the full casino is exciting, and the shopping is wonderful. My favorite stop within the resort's Promenade of Shops is Bellini Gifts, with its abundance of Mackenzie-Childs home accessories, where I could browse for hours.

Nancy had made reservations at a famous and long-standing local seafood restaurant, Mary Mahoney's Old French House, which is located a few blocks down from Beau Rivage, right off of Beach Boulevard, Biloxi's waterfront drive. What a treat. Mary Mahoney's is housed in one of America's oldest homes, with a grand courtyard built around an incredible oak tree. The home was built in 1737 by a French colonist in the style of New Orleans' Vieux Carre. It was purchased by Mary Mahoney, her husband, and her brother in 1962, and quickly became the landmark seafood house it remains today. The beautiful, exposed brick bar contains sobering photographs of the condition of the restaurant just after being hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, alongside images of the complete repair and restoration that followed, highlighting the love poured into preservation of the truly historical site.

As I scanned the menu,

an interesting selection caught my eye, making my decision fairly quick. The "St. Patrick" dinner was described as spinach stuffed petite pasta covered in butter sauce and topped with a mound of crab meat. Spinach ... pasta ... butter ... crab? Um, "Yes, I'll take one, please!" We were starved from the long day of shopping, so I started with the seafood gumbo, which is so popular they overnight-ship it by the gallon all over the world. While waiting for my meal to arrive, I sipped on my go-to summer cocktail, the Lemon Drop Martini, chilled lemon juice and vodka in a sugar-rimmed glass, while I casually read about the history of Mary Mahoney's printed on the menu. I knew I had ordered correctly when I found a special blurb about the "St. Patrick" I had chosen! Described as their "signature dish", the menu read ... "Imagine traditional escarrot, served in a baking dish full of little recesses packed with a snail in garlic butter ... substitute shrimp, and a legend is born! The St. Patrick is fresh shrimp stuck into pasta shells with spinach, swimming in decadent garlic butter covered in cheese and topped with a huge pile of fresh lump crab meat." Oh. My. Goodness! Words cannot sufficiently describe the explosion of flavor in this dish, rated one of Forbes magazine's "Most Memorable." I can only hope the photo



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does it justice! We spent most of Friday in Ocean Springs, where the shopping is divine. The Husband had no problem hanging with all the girls as we bought fabulous shoes at J. Laurie, because I had fixed him up with an ice cream cone from Kilwin's, a downtown fudge and ice cream shop. (I'm a seasoned pro at shopping, I certainly know how to entertain a tagalong fella!) We had a beautiful lunch at Maison de Lu, munching on delicious fried crab legs, fried shrimp, and crab cakes with an incredible "comeback sauce," a term I had never heard for the garlicky, hot, mayonnaise-based side to my delicious crab cakes. We got in a bit of culture, visiting the Walter Anderson Museum of Art in Ocean Springs. Anderson, Mississippi's most well-known visual artist, spent his life on the Gulf Coast, painting, writing, drawing, and sculpting his view of nature in the South. The Museum states, "Anderson believed

that nature, in its infinite wisdom and variety, could restore societies to a more perfect and participatory existence." Driving along the beautiful winding roads northward to our destination of Laurel, I thought a lot about how true his words were. We made it to Laurel on Friday night and checked into a quaint Vacation Rental By Owner right downtown. There are literally dozens of precious overhauled bungalows lining the streets of the teeny town, thanks to the Napiers and HGTV. On Saturday, we took in all Laurel had to offer, wandering through dozens of incredibly renovated downtown stores for some serious retail therapy. We visited The Laurel Mercantile, as well as The Scotsman, home of Ben Napier's famous woodworking shop, which also houses the world's largest walk-in glass bottled soda store. We took in Erin Napier's Scent Library, an actual library set up to sell her fragrant candles. It would not have

been a vacation without a stop at the huge local motorcycle shop, Hellfighters. The Husband was in hog heaven perusing their "swap meet," consisting of aisles and aisles of used motorcycle parts. Because I come from a long line of Pearls (A LONG line ... I'm lucky my name isn't Julie Pearl), I had to stop by the famous Pearl's Diner and buy a T-shirt. The menu included all kinds of southern comfort food. Ms. Pearl is known for THE BEST fried chicken, and the banana pudding called MY name. I picked up a signed copy of Ms. Pearl's recipe book, and found it funny that in the book, both of those recipes are called "Ms. Pearl's Famous..." so I figured, once again, I have a knack for finding the brightest stars on a Southern menu. Our last night was spent at Laurel's high school reunion, dancing to 70s tunes. The band, called The Classics, was a group of guys from Nancy's school who began playing together when they were in the 8th grade. Even The Husband was up on his feet, twirling me to some terrific covers of Van Morrison's Gloria, Todd Rundgren's I Saw The Light In Your Eyes, and Gary Puckett and the Union Gap's Have You Got Cheating On Your Mind. Oldies, but goodies. Making our way home, passing through the beautiful fields of Mississippi and Louisiana, I realized my 60's era-Husband was not taught much about the south in his New Jersey schools. The long drive gave us plenty of time to discuss the South's big plantations of the past and all that entailed. My Jersey boy listened intently as I educated him on the South, and just how far we have come in his short lifetime ... as well as the origins of some pretty fabulous food. ■



“Summer cooking implies a sense of immediacy, a capacity to capture the essence of the fleeting moment.”

– ELIZABETH DAVID



No bake summer meals

Editor’s note: The “Bite by Bite” family is on vacation, so we are running a Bite by Bite that originally ran in the July 31, 2022 issue. I think you’ll find it timely, however, as it is all about simple, no-bake summer meals to enjoy when you are trying to beat the heat.

It’s been an exceptionally hot, sweltering summer and if you’re like me, the heat often diminishes the desire to cook, especially if it involves turning on the stove. We’ve basically been eating salads, fruits, sandwiches, boiled shrimp, grilled chicken breasts, cheese and crackers. And truth be told, I’ve probably eaten my weight in Caesar salads. I haven’t been able to get enough of those this summer.

Curious as to what everyone else was having for supper in this heatwave, I recently conducted an informal poll on Facebook seeking suggestions. As has happened in the past, the people came through. Close to 50 people responded, providing numerous great suggestions.

Several offered suggestions for cooking methods that don’t heat up the kitchen, such as using the Crock Pot, Instant Pot or air fryer, with one friend commenting that she’s used the air fryer more frequently the last few weeks and another commenting that he’s moved his toaster oven to his back porch. One person prepared a whole chicken in their air fryer. These were all valid suggestions, especially since my air fryer had become a catch-all for mail and newspapers of late. I cleared it off and used it for the first time in months, making some beautiful fried shrimp with panko bread crumbs that I served with a marinated corn and bean salad.

Numerous people suggested grilling – either steaks, burgers or chicken, or different meats to use

in green salads as well as pasta salads. There are lots of folks eating a variety of salads, including taco salads, pasta salads and tortellini salads in which they add chicken or shrimp. One person likes shrimp pasta salad with lots of fresh dill. Another is opting for spring rolls. Two very popular suggestions were rotisserie chicken and shrimp ceviche.

There were some exceptionally specific items suggested that I found interesting. One friend enjoys avocado, cucumber and finely chopped onion and rice vinegar, cut into cubes but not a guacamole. One likes fresh tomato salsa with avocado and crackers, while another prefers fresh tomato salsa over noodles. One likes muenster cheese rolled up in ham slices with spinach and strawberry salad. Another suggested chicken kabobs on the grill with Greek orzo pasta salad, tzatziki sauce and hummus. Someone else suggested cucumber sandwiches with chips and pickle spears.

Then there were the ones I consider the good old standbys – cereal, tuna sandwiches, BLTs, PB&Js, pimento cheese and crackers.

A number of people raved over the Brookshire Brothers deli, specifically recommending their potato salad and fresh baked bread. I guess I should check that out.

A couple of folks suggested take-out and a couple of others suggested ice cream. I like the way they think. My own hubby suggested frozen margaritas. Hmmm. He knows me well. However, a steady summer diet of those might not be the best idea – for a number of



reasons. Plus, what would poor Daughter have?

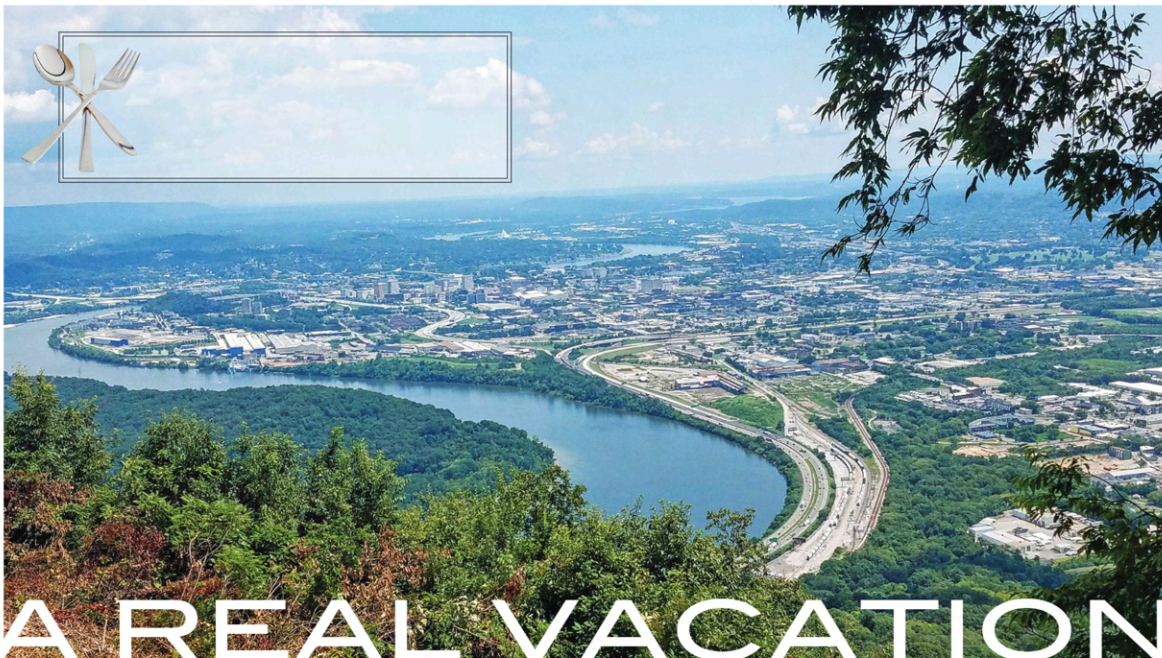
One friend suggested gazpacho. While I’m a big veggie lover, I just can’t get excited about a cold soup

made of raw, blended vegetables. Another suggestion that didn’t appeal to me at all was Spam. I’ve never tried it and really don’t plan to.

I appreciate everyone participating

and leaving their suggestions. You’ve given me some great ideas and reminded me that it doesn’t have to be complicated. It can be just as good when it’s something simple. ■





We recently took a week off and went on vacation. It's not unusual for me to take a day here and there for a long weekend but this was the first time I had taken an entire week off since 2018 when we vacationed with another family in Las Vegas. It was just the three of us and it was time well spent. We went to Tennessee. There were several things that we wanted to do and see but we planned a rather loose itinerary, allowing us to easily pivot if we discovered other things that interested us.

We decided to make a hard charge driving the first day, hoping to reach Chattanooga in the eastern part of the state and then leisurely head west making our way home with stops in the Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge area, Dollywood, Nashville and Memphis.

Waking up in Chattanooga rested and recharged after the eleven and a half hour drive the previous day, we were ready to see the sights. Following a quick breakfast, we headed to Lookout Mountain where we purchased tickets to ride the Lookout Mountain Incline Railway. Called "America's Most Amazing Mile," the cable railway system is over 125 years old and is one of the steepest passenger railways in the world with a 72.7% grade near the top. Once we reached the top, we were treated to magnificent panoramic views of the Tennessee Valley from two different observation decks.

A short walk from the observation decks was Point Park which is part of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. Point Park is the site of the pivotal "Battle Above the Clouds" in the fall of 1863 that helped give Union troops control of Chattanooga. In addition to the cannons on the grounds, the museum there featured an impressive collection of authentic artifacts from the Civil War, including an array of rifles, swords, bullets and other items. It was interesting and the grounds were beautiful.

We'd planned to drive to Gatlinburg next but the traffic was so bad we changed plans and headed to Knoxville to spend the night. Following a drive through the campus of the University of Tennessee, we unpacked, freshened up and went to dinner at a place called Aubrey's. Hubby enjoyed nachos, Daughter selected baked potato soup with a side of mac and cheese and I enjoyed grilled salmon tacos with a side of parmesan spinach.

The next morning we drove to Dollywood where we spent a fun, full day. Dollywood may be one of the most beautiful amusement parks that I've ever visited. It comprises 11 different themed areas, all of which have significance from Dolly's childhood and upbringing. There's Wildwood Grove, Wilderness Pass, Timber Canyon, Craftsman's Valley, Owens Farm, Showstreet, Adventures in Imagination, Rivertown Junction, Jukebox Junction, The Village and Country Fair.

We headed straight for Thunderhead, a massive wooden roller coaster situated between two mountains that features a 100-foot drop and a top speed of 55 miles per hour. Following that, we headed to Mystery Mine, a steel roller coaster where a 1,811-foot track travels through an abandoned coal mine with unexpected thrills, including a 95-degree, 85-foot vertical drop



that plunges into darkness. Hubby and Daughter rode Drop Line while I checked and responded to some emails. We then all rode the Great Tree Swing.

Dollywood offers a variety of different shows so in an attempt to get some respite from the heat, we opted to take in Dreamland Drive-in at the Pines Theater in Jukebox Junction. The hour-long show was amazing. The 12-person ensemble takes a musical trip down memory lane, singing and dancing to hits of the 50s and 60s. We enjoyed it immensely.

In Craftsman's Valley, we ate lunch at Granny Ogle's Ham 'n' Beans. The mom of Dolly's best friend, Judy Ogle, is the inspiration for the Southern eatery that features classic comfort food. Granny Ogle's skilleters are all served with freshly baked cornbread. Hubby had the chicken pot pie that featured a cheddar scallion biscuit crust. Daughter selected the pit ham dinner which consisted of smoked, pulled ham accompanied by mashed potatoes and green beans. I chose the chicken cassoulet which was a slow-simmered stew featuring great northern beans, chicken and smoked sausage. Every single bite was phenomenal.

Daughter and Hubby opted to ride some more rides while I headed to the Grist Mill to wait in line to purchase a loaf of cinnamon bread that I had on good authority was well worth the wait. I waited 45 minutes and can attest that my tipster spoke the truth. I'm not going to even try to describe the goodness that was that cinnamon bread because mere words just can't do it justice. It would have made great gifts to bring home to loved ones,

but I knew deep down that it never would have made it home. I only regret not getting a picture of it.

Walking through Jukebox Junction, I was stopped in my tracks when I rounded a corner and saw a building that said Watson Motor Company. It tugged at my heartstrings and was very meaningful because my maternal grandparents owned and operated Putt Watson Motor Company, the Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac and GMC dealership in Livingston, for many, many years. I had learned enough about Dollywood to know that everything there has significance so I was super curious about Watson Motor Company. Once home, I did a deep dive and learned that Watson Motor Company was once a real business in Sevierville, Dolly's hometown. A sign recalls Dolly saying, "I remember going to town and seeing all those cars at the Watson Motor Company. We didn't have a car when I was little. Daddy couldn't afford one. Finally, Daddy bought a car and would take us to church on Sunday evening and Wednesday night prayer meetings. That's when I started singing in church." Wow. So neat.

Our next stop was Nashville where we spent the better part of a day at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Daughter was thrilled to visit the Taylor Swift Education Center which offered hands-on experiences connected to items in the museum. We saw hundreds of incredible display cases filled with musical instruments, costumes, handwritten lyrics and other various mementos from multiple generations of artists, from some of the earliest such as Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter family and Hank Williams, to some of

the current such as Eric Church, Jason Isbell and Amanda Shires. We saw walls and walls of gold records. We saw Elvis Presley's gold Cadillac and the 1977 Pontiac Trans Am from the movie Smokey and the Bandit which was my dream car during my adolescence.

One of the current exhibits that really spoke to Hubby and me was "Western Edge: The Roots and Reverberations of Los Angeles Country-Rock," which examines the close-knit communities of Los Angeles-based singers, songwriters and musicians from the 1960s through the 1980s. The exhibit surveys the rise of the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Poco, Eagles, Emmylou Harris, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Linda Ronstadt, Jackson Browne and many others who found commercial success through the fusion of rock and roll rhythms with banjos and steel guitars, bluegrass instrumentation and tight harmonies.

An unexpected surprise for me was Hatch Show Print which is located in the same building as the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I don't know if it's the journalist in me and the ink in my veins or what, but I've always been fascinated with typography. Hatch Show Print has been a working letterpress print shop since 1879 that uses its vast collection of vintage type and hand-carved imagery to create timeless designs. I was definitely in my element. I learned that Hatch Show Print prints 500-700 different jobs a year using letterpress printing. It is a process in which raised, inked surfaces – usually made of wood, metal or linoleum – are pressed onto paper, essentially the same method

invented by Gutenberg.

Following our very enjoyable and educational visit to the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, we stopped for lunch at a place called Live Oak which is located on what is referred to as Music Row. The heart of Nashville's music business, it is an area with numerous studios, publishing houses and record label offices. I don't remember what the other two had, but I ordered the jalapeno popper burger that featured fried jalapenos, bacon and a mixture of cream and cheddar cheeses and was served with waffle fries and it was fabulous.

Our initial plans had been to head to Memphis from Nashville and take in some sights there. I had heard good things about the National Civil Rights Museum located there and wanted to visit it, along with several other places. But alas, the universe had other plans. After a series of misadventures that I won't get into here, we determined that Memphis just wasn't in the cards for us this trip so we headed to Little Rock instead to spend the night.

Following some sightseeing downtown the next day, we stopped for lunch at Dizzy's Gypsy Bistro which was a funky little joint with the coolest vibe. The walls were covered with artwork of all different styles and mediums. It was fascinating to take it all in as we waited for our food.

We started off with some of their award-winning le petite roche cheese dip adorned with sour cream, salsa and pico. Hubby ordered the country club sandwich which was petit jean turkey, petit jean bacon, ham, Swiss, cheddar, romaine, tomato, onion, pickle and mustard garlic basil on Texas toast. Daughter ordered the bacon, egg and cheddar burger which was topped with petit jean bacon, egg, cheddar, field greens, tomato, onion and garlic basil mayo on a brioche bun. I ordered the Aimee's turkey and pesto sandwich which was petit jean turkey and Swiss with tomato, spinach, basil pesto and garlic basil mayo on marbled rye. It was all scrumptious.

I'm leaving out some of the details of our trip out of respect for the privacy of my family. We enjoyed ourselves, had fun, learned some things and relished in the beauty of that part of the country. We allowed ourselves the luxury of slowing down, getting some rest, relaxing and reading some books. But most importantly, we spent some quality time together, laughing and making memories that we won't soon forget. ■



Road trip food

that saves the day



We

wanted to cover about 760 miles on the first day of our recent family vacation. That would take about 11 hours, making for a long day. The plan was to stop only to get gas or use the restroom. We planned to pack food to eat that first day in order to make better time.

When I conducted an informal poll on Facebook in which I asked people to suggest ideas for "healthy-ish" road trip food that wouldn't make a mess in the car, over 30 people responded. I had some ideas, but I was curious to hear others' suggestions.

The first few suggestions were trail mix, summer sausage and cheese. Those all sounded perfect.

One friend suggested fire crackers which she said her crew finishes off quickly due to how addictive they are. She said take a whole box of Ritz crackers, ranch dressing mix, garlic powder and red pepper flakes. Mix all the seasonings with one cup of vegetable oil and pour over the crackers. Flip the container about every 30 minutes for a few hours. I've made these before with saltines and with Cheez-Its, but never with Ritz crackers. However, considering the wonderful buttery flavor of Ritz, I bet that would be good.

One person said she takes popcorn, shelled pistachios, almonds and a small cooler with bottles of water and protein shakes and her husband enjoys peanuts. She said she also takes cheese sticks, a baggie of sliced apples and little to-go packs of peanut butter for dipping, a big roll of paper towels and wet wipes. All good ideas.

Another person suggested string cheese, protein bars, beef jerky, fruit, pretzels and almonds. A friend from church suggested dried fruit and almonds. Several people suggested beef jerky, with one specifying Buc-ee's beef jerky. Several people suggested fruit. Another friend suggested hard-boiled eggs, Greek yogurt, veggie cups and ham, cheese and pickle rolls. One person suggested wraps or tacos, something that doesn't require being heated. These all sounded good too.

Some were super specific, which tickled me. One friend suggested a menu of dried apricots, beef jerky, corn nuts and red licorice - not



ing that it is all the food groups, including dessert. Another person suggested Ruby Cattle Company beef snack sticks, quail or bison jerky, dried fruit, nuts and fried pecans. I've never heard of fried pecans, but that sounds wonderful. Another person suggested Trader Joe's Crispy Crunchy Okra, commenting that it is tasty and super crunchy.

My cousin Marcy suggested a snack box. If you're not familiar with it, a snack box is a tackle box filled with all of your favorite snacks. They're all over Pinterest. Google it and you will get tons of ideas. My friend Mitzi thought it was brilliant and beautiful, while my friend Ann asked if anyone knew if the plastic tackle boxes were food grade. I hadn't even thought to inquire about that. Mitzi's right though. They are beautiful and they would be so easy to customize for different family member's tastes and preferences.

I'm sure he was trying to be funny since I was looking for ideas

that wouldn't make a mess in the car, but my friend Michael suggested powdered beignets. Ha. I don't think so.

I packed a tote bag with various leftover paper plates, paper cups, plastic silverware, a roll of paper towels and some wet wipes. We ended up taking beef jerky, summer sausage, several types of cheese, almonds, granola, thin-sliced turkey, low-carb tortillas, peanut butter, hard-boiled eggs, baby bell peppers, strawberries, Texas Heat trail mix and cracked pepper and olive oil-flavored Triscuits. We also packed an ice chest filled with bottles of water. At the last minute, I also stuck a bottle of sauvignon blanc in there as well. And I sure was glad too. That evening when we reached our destination after an eleven-and-a-half-hour drive, we were too pooped to go out to eat so we had road trip snacks for supper. That cold bottle of wine that had been on ice all day sure went down smoothly. Happy travels! ■



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SCAN CODE TO PLAY



“You know, it’s hard to beat bacon at any time of day.”
~ Nick Offerman

Bringing home the **BACON** for National Bacon Lover's Day

Today (August 20) is National Bacon Lovers Day. That’s a day that I am more than happy to celebrate – much to the chagrin of my cholesterol and my friend Dr. Ray Luna. For someone who never cared for bacon as a child, when I finally came around to liking it as I got older, I did so with a vengeance. I guess to make up for lost time. I still chuckle when I think of a comment one of my friends made to my parents many years ago, “I think Emily could eat a Volkswagen if you wrapped it in bacon and cheese.” Okay, so I like bacon, but not the crunchy kind. I prefer it chewy – what my Mother refers to as “easy-fried.”

I recently discovered something that I’d never heard of before. There is an online group called BENSAs. An acronym for Bacon Enthusiasts ‘N Swine Aficionados, it is purportedly the largest community of bacon enthusiasts in North America. According to the website (bensabaconlovers.com) the name was also chosen because it rhymes with Mensa, the international organization for smart people with high IQs. Unlike Mensa, however, BENSAs accepts bacon-loving members of all intelligence levels, the website states.

Founded by Eliza Cross, author of more than a dozen cookbooks including three bacon cookbooks, BENSAs celebrates artisan bacon makers, restaurants, chefs, grillers, bloggers, home cooks and eaters who are crazy for bacon and think it deserves its own food group. The site includes bacon recipes, bacon merchandise, gift ideas for bacon lovers and a list of upcoming bacon festivals and events.

And while I’d always thought the phrase “bringing home the bacon” meant money or a paycheck, turns out there’s a more interesting story behind the commonly used phrase.

According to nationaltoday.com, bacon was such a desirable cut of pork that in the 12th century, a church in the English town of Great Dunmow challenged the married men to a wager of sorts. If a man could go a complete year and a day without quarreling with his wife, a side of bacon would be their prize. Thus was the birth of the term “bring home the bacon,” widely used today to describe a person who can take care of their family financially. An additional source I found agreed. According to wonderopolis.org, one popular story holds that the phrase originated in the 1100s in the small town of Great Dunmow in Essex, England. According to local legend, the church in Great Dunmow would award a side of bacon (called a “fitch”) to any man who could honestly say that he had not argued with his wife for a year and a day. Any such man would “bring home the bacon” and be considered a role model.

For a while now, there has been a bacon hack on social media in which you place bacon in a zip-top bag filled with flour, coat it, shake off the excess and then cook it. I haven’t tried it yet, but supposedly the flour trick works both when pan-frying bacon and baking it in the oven and even prevents the bacon from curling up, but instead helps it remain flat. My friend Jane tried it and said she liked it.

I recently ran across a recipe in Southern Living for “Bacon-Wrapped Dates,” a little three-ingredient appetizer they describe as salty, sweet and smoky. I haven’t made these yet, but they sound like they would be delicious, especially when paired with a glass of wine or a cocktail. I’m including the recipe here today, along with three of my favorite bacon recipes – “Bacon-Fried Cabbage,” “Maple Candied Bacon” and “Shrimp and Bacon Chowder.” Enjoy!!



Keto Shrimp and Bacon Chowder

- 1 lb. peeled deveined shrimp (roughly chopped)
- ½ lb. bacon
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 ½ cups heavy whipping cream
- ¼ cup finely chopped onion
- 2 teaspoons fresh ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- Pink Himalayan salt, to taste

In a large pot, cook bacon until crisp. Remove bacon, let cool, and crumble. Add onion to pot with the bacon grease and cook until lightly sautéed. Add chicken stock, heavy whipping cream, salt, pepper and paprika. Bring to a boil until mixture begins to thicken. Add shrimp and crumbled bacon. Simmer until shrimp are pink and chowder is desired consistency. Ladle into bowl.

Maple Candied Bacon

- 1 pound thick-cut bacon
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup brown sugar
- Coarsely ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil and top with a roasting rack. Lightly spritz the rack with a nonstick spray. Lay out the bacon on the rack, leaving just a tiny bit of room between each piece.

Brush the bacon with the maple syrup and then sprinkle with the brown sugar. Top with a generous sprinkling of pepper.

Finally, bake until the sugar is melted and the bacon is crisp, about 15 to 17 minutes. Or if you like it and prefer it a little extra crispy, feel free to leave it in a little longer. Let the bacon cool for 5 minutes before removing it from the rack and serving.



Bacon-Wrapped Dates

Bake 10 slices of bacon on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet at 400 degrees for about 10 minutes. While that’s cooking, use a paring knife to make a shallow, lengthwise cut into each date (you’ll use 20 in total) to remove the pit.

Stuff each date with a spoonful of cheese (can be crumbled goat cheese, crumbled blue cheese, crumbled feta cheese or manchego) and pinch each date closed.

Cut each strip of pre-cooked bacon in half, and wrap it around each date, securing it with a toothpick. Replace the parchment paper on the same baking sheet, and arrange the dates evenly, so that they aren’t touching. Add a few cracks of black pepper to the top and bake for 5 to 7 minutes per side, flipping halfway through.

Transfer the cooked dates to a wire rack and top with a dash of flaky salt.

When plating, serve with a small dish of hot honey or drizzle some right on top.

Southern Fried Cabbage AKA Bacon-Fried Cabbage

- 3 slices of bacon, cut into thirds
- 1 head cabbage, cored and sliced
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 1 white onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 1 pinch sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper, or to taste

Place the bacon and vegetable oil into a large pot over medium heat. Season with salt and pepper. Cook for about 5 minutes, or until bacon is crisp. Add cabbage, onion and sugar to the pot. Cook and stir continuously for 5 minutes, or until tender.



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SCAN CODE TO PLAY



"The smell of roasting meat together with that of burning fruit wood and dried herbs, as voluptuous as incense in a church, is enough to turn anyone into a budding gastronome."

—CLAUDIA RODEN



RIBS THAT STICK TO YOUR RIBS

I'm not sure what possessed me recently to make braised short ribs on a day in which the high was 105 degrees. What in the world was I thinking – voluntarily choosing to cook a dish that would require two and a half hours in the oven, heating up my already hot house.

It all started with a hankering I've had lately for Korean sticky ribs. I've never

made them before but found a recipe online that sounded great and not too difficult. However, the last step involved putting them on the grill and I just wasn't up for standing over hot flames to see it through. I decided to put a pin in it for now and that's when my mind drifted to braised short ribs. Don't ask me why, but it became a bit of a fixation that I couldn't get out of my head. Plus, I

thought, my family will love this.

Several hours later, we sat down to our braised short ribs over a bed of white rice. Hubby was amazed at how tender the meat was, commenting that he was cutting it with his fork and didn't even need a knife. Daughter was just relieved we were having something other than chicken or shrimp – two proteins that she is "tired of." When questioned

later, however, she said she thought the braised short ribs were "really good" and she'd like to have them again. I thought the sauce/gravy was amazing but I was a little underwhelmed with the rest of it, considering the time that I'd put into it. Maybe I was just tired from the process. I'll make them again, but next time, I'll make them when it's cold outside. ■

BRAISED SHORT RIBS

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil or grapeseed oil
- 5 pounds bone-in beef short ribs
- Coarse salt and pepper
- 2 onions, chopped
- 4 medium carrots, chopped
- 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 (750 ml) bottle dry red wine (nothing sweet)
- ½ cup fresh parsley
- 8-10 sprigs thyme
- 4-5 sprigs oregano
- 3-4 sprigs rosemary
- 2-3 bay leaves
- 1 whole head of garlic, most of the oniony skin peeled off, halved crosswise

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- ½ to 1 cup heavy cream

—Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

—Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy pot over medium-high heat. Season your short ribs pretty liberally on all sides with salt and pepper. In two batches, sear the short ribs on all four sides, around a minute per side. Transfer the seared short ribs to a plate and set aside.

—Put the onions, carrots and celery into the pot. Salt and pepper and stir a bit until the veggies start to get a little brown, 8-10 minutes. Add the flour and tomato paste and stir to coat. You want all that incorporated and cooked out a bit, around 3 minutes.

—Add the whole bottle of wine. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to a simmer. Let this mixture cook down and reduce for about 20 minutes.

—Add all the herbs, the garlic and the



stock and return the short ribs (and any meat juice on the plate) to the pot. Bring back to a boil, cover, and put the whole thing in the oven for about 2½ hours.

—Remove the short ribs to a plate and cover with foil. Set a strainer over a large bowl and carefully pour the sauce through the strainer, discarding the veggies and herb stalks. Let the strained sauce sit for a minute or two, then skim the fat off the top.

—In the same pot, melt the butter over medium heat then whisk in the flour and cook, whisking, for about 2 minutes. Pour in the strained sauce and whisk until smooth. Cook for about 5 minutes, until the sauce thickens. Add the cream, which for 2 more minutes, then turn off the heat.

—Serve in a bowl with either white rice or mashed potatoes or creamy grits or thickly sliced sourdough bread. Top with fresh parsley.



Not your regular meatball

Keto Meatballs with Bacon Tomato Sauce

By Jennifer Banz

- 8 slices thick cut bacon, cut into lardons
- 2 lbs. ground chuck or sirloin
- ½ cup grated parmesan
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1½ teaspoon Kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 jar marinara sauce

•Fry bacon over medium heat until crispy. Remove bacon from pan and let drain on paper towels.

•Combine ground beef, parmesan, parsley, olive oil, eggs, garlic, salt and pepper in a large bowl being careful not to overwork the meat.

•Roll mixture into meatballs. You can bake the meatballs or you can fry the meatballs. Instructions are given for both.

•To bake the meatballs: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and bake the meatballs on a parchment or foil-lined baking sheet for 15 minutes.

•To fry the meatballs: Using reserved bacon grease in skillet, fry each meatball over medium heat until brown on all sides. Remove from skillet and drain on paper towels.

•Remove any remaining bacon grease and add meatballs to the pan. Add the jar of marinara sauce and roll the meatballs around to coat. Let meatballs simmer for 30 minutes.

•Serve meatballs garnished with crispy bacon and fresh parsley.

“Miracles are like meatballs, because nobody can exactly agree on what they are made of, where they come from, or how often they should appear.”

—DANIEL HANDLER

I know people that love meatballs. I don't dislike them per se. I just don't find myself craving meatballs like some do. I had never made meatballs before. I suppose I assumed it would be a laborious task. However, when I stumbled upon a recipe for “Keto Meatballs with Bacon Tomato Sauce” during a recent search for something different for supper that would still be quick and easy, I did a double-take. The recipe was pretty straightforward and didn't seem difficult at all. It even included two methods for cooking the meatballs – baking them in the oven or pan-frying them on the stovetop. Hubby and Daughter both love meatballs and often order them at Italian restaurants.

I went for it and am so glad that I did. The meatballs came together quickly and easily. To keep them tender, you really must avoid

overhanding the meat. That is key. The recipe said it would make 18 meatballs. I may have rolled them too small, however, as we ended up with 26 meatballs about the size of ping pong balls. We all three loved them – even though I forgot to garnish them with the bacon lardons and fresh chopped parsley.

I served them with roasted broccoli and a cracked pepper chopped Caesar salad kit from HEB. After rummaging through the crisper drawer, however, I found a yellow squash and a zucchini that were looking a little long in the tooth and half a purple onion that wasn't long for this world. I sautéed the salvaged produce in a little butter and olive oil and then topped the mixture with some grated parmesan cheese. It was all so good. As I've said before, the true test in my household is if they ask me to make it again. And they both did, individually requesting that I put it in the rotation. That's a win in my book. ■

“I wanted to be a skinny little ballerina but I was a voluptuous little Italian girl whose dad had meatballs on the table every night.”

—LADY GAGA



VINHO




De Gustibus
By George Hollenbeck

Imagine you have just been seated on the veranda of a charming restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean, a light summer breeze adding to the ambience. Your plan is to spend a couple of hours with your companion sipping wine and having a light lunch. Lunch? Maybe a lobster salad or the local seafood.

So what will you order for wine? You notice the French rose Whispering Angel, which you can have at home ... but it's really pricey ... \$21 at Walmart at home, but \$60 euro on the menu; you keep looking on the menu; what is this Vinho Verde for \$18 euros? The description is “always popular, a delightful white, light crisp wine, a slight fizz, lovely lemony aroma, a hint of minerality, easy drinking, great for sipping or with any seafood, only 9% alcohol – one bottle is never enough.”

Dare I buy such a modest wine in such a lovely setting? You better believe it. Everybody I talk with who has been in our imagined situation has a story to tell and remembers the Vinho Verde.

What is Vinho Verde? It is not a grape or a blend. It's a wine produced in the lush, green rolling hills of northern Portugal (and Spain too). Nobody is quite sure why it is called Vinho Verde, some say its slight green tint, others say the lush green region where it is grown. Nowadays, it is almost everywhere considered a bargain, and a major wine export for Portugal. Vinho Verde is for fun, and it is almost impossible to find somebody who doesn't enjoy it.

Where can I get a bottle of Vinho Verde? Unfortunately, not in Polk County, or at least I could not find it. Get out of town though and you will have no problem. Both wine stores and larger grocery stores with a wine section carry several different ones. The one I have pictured was \$7.99. Needless to say, that's an empty bottle – the wine didn't wait for me to write this.

Why this note about Vinho Verde, a wine many of you may not have tried? Many of us (me included) have never been to that charming restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean, but you don't need to go there to enjoy it. I wanted to share the fun. Our weather is getting to be perfect for lunch on the deck overlooking the water. You will have to “import” your vinho verde, but trust me, you'll enjoy it. Or serve it at your next tailgate – but make sure you buy enough. It will go fast! ■

VERDE



The appetizer is just an excuse for an extra meal. Let's see. I will start with the eighty buffalo wings.

– JIM GAFFIGAN

From southernliving.com

- 5 medium poblano chiles (about 1 lb. total)
- 2 8-oz. packages of cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup chopped scallions (from 4 medium scallions)
- ¼ cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 large garlic clove, grated (about ½ teaspoon)
- 8 oz. monterey jack cheese, shredded and divided (about 2 cups)
- Tortilla chips

• Preheat oven to broil with oven rack about 7 inches from the heat source. Coat a medium cast-iron or other

ovenproof skillet with cooking spray; set aside. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil.

• Arrange chiles on prepared baking sheet. Broil, turning occasionally, until blackened all over, about 10 minutes. Remove baking sheet from oven; reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Wrap foil tightly around chiles and let stand for 10 minutes.

• Unwrap chiles. Rub off skins; cut stems from chiles. Slice chiles in half lengthwise; scrape out seeds. (Discard skins, stems, and seeds.) Cut halves lengthwise into thin strips; cut strips into 1-inch pieces.

• Stir together cream cheese, scallions, sour cream, cumin, salt and grated garlic in a bowl. Stir in chiles and 1½ cups of the monterey jack. Spread dip into prepared skillet. Sprinkle remaining ½ cup of monterey jack over dip. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees until bubbly, about 25 minutes. Serve warm with tortilla chips.

I am not a glutton. I am an explorer of food.

– ERMA BOMBECK

With school having resumed, it's a busy time of year for us. I have several upcoming events on the calendar in which I've committed to providing something to eat so I decided this was the perfect time to try out a couple of recipes for appetizers I've seen recently that appealed to me.

Not long ago, I saw a recipe on Yahoo for bacon-wrapped dates. It turned out to be a recipe from southernliving.com that claimed the easy three-ingredient appetizers are so popular at parties that the author just always automatically doubles the recipe. It's basically pitted dates stuffed with cheese and then wrapped with bacon and baked.

As for what kind of cheese to stuff it with, that's completely up to you. The author recommends what I refer to as the "funky" or "tangy" cheeses – crumbled blue cheese, feta cheese or goat cheese. However, she said that manchego, smoked gouda or aged cheddar will also work. Sounds like the perfect combination of salty, sweet and smoky. She even recommends serving it with some hot honey for dipping.

I knew I was experiencing a feeling of deja vu but couldn't quite identify it until one of my girlfriends reminded me that there is also a recipe for bacon-wrapped dates in one of our new favorite cookbooks – Jen Hatmaker's "Feed these People." I checked out that one and found that the two recipes are very similar. Basically, the only differences are that in addition to the cheese, Hatmaker also stuffs a roasted almond inside the date and she recommends drizzling them with a balsamic reduction.

Hubby and Daughter aren't necessarily fans of blue cheese so I opted for some crumbled goat cheese from HEB and I chose not to stuff them with almonds. I didn't have any hot honey or balsamic reduction but I did have some Momofuku Chili Crunch which I knew would be a



perfect dipping sauce. They were easy to assemble. I thought they were fantastic and Hubby liked them. Daughter thought they were "too sweet." I don't think she's ever eaten a date before, something I've often heard referred to as "nature's candy." I'll make them again but next time I'll go ahead and use the blue cheese. I missed the funky pungency it would have added.

The next recipe I was curious to try was for something called Tex-Mex Skillet Poblano Dip, something I saw in my latest issue of Southern Living. It's thicker than a traditional queso but not quite a queso flameado or queso fundido as it doesn't have the spicy chorizo that those do. We thoroughly enjoyed it. And knowing that it was going to be a thick dip, I opted to use Fritos Scoops corn chips. Hubby liked it

but thought it was missing some heat. Of course, poblanos are known more for their flavor and lack of heat. I'll probably throw in some chopped jalapenos next time.

I enjoyed both of these and will definitely make them both again. They're perfect for taking to parties or enjoying while watching football. And they both pair well with a glass of wine or the cocktail of your choice. ■



Snack time heals all wounds.

– BRIDGER WINEGAR

From southernliving.com

• To begin, bake 10 slices of bacon on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet at 400 degree for about 10 minutes.

• While that's cooking, use a paring knife to make a shallow, lengthwise cut into each date to remove the pit. (Or you can save time by just buying pitted dates.)

• Then, fill each date with a spoonful of cheese, and pinch each date closed. Cut each strip of pre-cooked bacon in half, and wrap it around each date, securing it with a toothpick.

• Replace the parchment paper on the same baking sheet, and arrange the dates evenly, so that they aren't touching. Feel free to add a few cracks of black pepper to the tops and bake for 5 to 7 minutes per side flipping halfway through.

• Transfer the cooked dates to a wire rack and top with a dash of flaky salt.

• When plating, consider serving with a small dish of hot honey for any guests who are craving a little heat with their sweet, salty and smoky appetizer – or go ahead and drizzle some right on top if you know they'll love it.



— ROBERT RODRIGUEZ

The Austin Scene

My publisher, Kelli Barnes, and I recently had some newspaper business in Austin that necessitated a mid-week overnight trip. We booked an Airbnb on South Congress, not far from the Texas Capitol Complex where we would have meetings the following morning.

We opted to make the trip via the Grand Parkway, or S.H. 99, because it would shorten the trip a little so I suggested we stop for lunch at Wunsche Bros Cafe & Saloon in Old Town Spring. While I don't make it there as often as I'd like, it is definitely a favorite from way, way back. If you're not familiar with Wunsche Bros, it is a Texas Historical Landmark that opened in 1902 in Old Town Spring. Although a fire broke out in 2015, fortunately, the original historic saloon was left intact. In 2018 the Kosh family purchased the building and restored it back to its glory days.

It is known for its hand-formed burgers, Texas-sized chicken fried steak, homemade beer bread and legendary whiskey cake. It is also known for its live music. In the old

days, it was a stepping stone for the likes of Clint Black and Lyle Lovett. I had the distinct pleasure of seeing one of my all-time faves, Shake Russell, perform there circa 1989. More recently, I've enjoyed the musical stylings of CC & the Road Dawgs there.

Kelli selected the sausage sauerkraut balls which were beef and pork sausage, sauerkraut, cheddar cheese and onions, formed into balls, deep-fried and served with homemade chipotle ranch. She paired that with a side of okra and tomatoes. I selected a wedge salad made of fresh iceberg lettuce, tomatoes, blue cheese crumbles, chopped boiled egg, smoked bacon, green onion and homemade blue cheese dressing. I paired it with a side of pulled pork. We agreed that every bite was delicious.

Thirty years ago, we probably would have been thrilled at the prospect of staying in the heart of Austin's famed South Congress entertainment district and perhaps may have even partied along the loud, colorful and entertaining 6th Street. However, as we're now women "of a certain age," we were perfectly content



— WILLIE NELSON

to don our pajamas, make a cold drink and visit with each other while cooking a delicious homemade meal in the stylish kitchen of our Airbnb. Let me correct that for the record, though. She cooked and I watched, as we chatted away about this and that. She'd thought of everything. She'd been telling me for some time about her favorite cocktail, a French 75. Although I had heard of it, I had never had one and wasn't really familiar with it. However, that soon changed. She had brought all the components and made one for each of us. It was a delicious, light and refreshing drink that she created beautifully. And if you, too, are not familiar with it, it is made from gin, champagne, lemon juice and sugar. It was delightful. Reading a little about

it later, I discovered that it dates back to World War I and that an early form of it was created in 1915 at the New York Bar in Paris — later Harry's New York Bar — by barman Harry MacElhone. We snacked on individual Caprese salad skewers that were served on a bed of balsamic vinegar and drizzled with olive oil, salt and fresh-ground black pepper. We then feasted on steamed sweet potatoes and a wonderful salad made up of greens, sliced strawberries, chopped pecans and feta cheese crumbles, dressed with a ranch vinaigrette. The pièce de résistance, however, were New York Strip steaks encrusted with crushed Lay's potato chips. It was so different, yet so good! Because Kelli was generous enough to do all the driving, I found myself

several times during the trip fondly reminiscing about the twists and turns my life has taken over the years. In my 20s, I would have given my right arm to live and work in Austin. I thought the City of Austin was the greatest place ever, just the end all be all. There are a variety of things that evoked those feelings at the time. My whole life I've loved live music, any genre, and I've always been fascinated by the Texas Capitol and its majesty, beauty and history. Back in the day, I revered Ann Richards and Molly Ivins. And though this may come as a surprise to some, I've always had a little bit of 70s hippie chick in me. We had a lovely time and it's always great to visit Austin. But I was happy to get back to my quiet little spot in East Texas. ■



- MARGARET COUSIN

Chili weather around the bend

Hubby is typically the chili cook in our household and he does a fine job of it. However, when I recently discovered that some folks at my church were going to host a chili cook-off, my competitive streak took over and I began experimenting with various chili recipes. If I'm going to enter any type of cook-off,

I want to do something different, something that will stand out for the judges. So that's how I recently found myself making some very unusual chilis.

I first made a "White Bean Chicken Chili." We all enjoyed it and Hubby said he wouldn't mind it being added to the rotation. As we love all things jalapeno popper, when I ran across a recipe for "Jalapeno Popper Chili," I knew we would have to try it. It was another hit, with all three of us enjoying it.

The next chili I made was called "Slow Cooker Chocolate Chili with Three Beans." Yes, you read that correctly - chocolate. Other ingredients included honey and cinnamon. I had a hard time wrapping my mind around it, but knew I had to make it for the sake of curiosity. I felt like it would either be super good or super bad, but I had to know. It's definitely an acquired taste and once I acquired the taste, I liked it. I didn't tell Hubby in advance about the chocolate, honey

and cinnamon, so he didn't know what he was getting into. He found it very strange at first, but the more he ate it, the more he liked it. And he did go back for a second bowl. However, he also suggested that we NOT add it to the rotation. Daughter wouldn't even try it. She thought we'd lost our minds. Plus, she wasn't wild about the prevalent cinnamon fragrance it emitted.

Turns out, there will not be a chili cookoff at the church after all. However, there will be a "chili

bar" from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 21 at First Methodist Church located at 2801 U.S. Hwy. 190 West in Livingston. It is a fundraiser for the mission committee that is being held in conjunction with "Paws in the Pumpkin Patch," an event hosted by the SPCA of Polk County that will offer pet adoptions, a silent auction, a blessing of the pets, a pet parade and other fun events at the church's annual pumpkin patch. And don't be scared. I'm not in charge of making the chili. ■



Jalapeno Popper Chili

By Colleen Weeden

- 2 lbs. ground turkey or beef
- 2 cups chopped onions
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 15-oz. cans pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 28-oz. can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 15-oz. can tomato sauce
- 1 14.5-oz. can reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 4 fresh jalapeno chile peppers, seeded and sliced
- 1 1.25-oz. package taco seasoning mix
- 1 8-oz. package cream cheese, cubed and softened
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 6 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
- Sour cream

• In a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven cook ground turkey (or beef), onions and garlic over medium-high heat until meat is browned; drain off fat. Transfer mixture to a 5- to 6-quart slow cooker. Stir in the next six ingredients (through seasoning mix).

• Cover and cook on low for 6 to 8 hours or on high for 3 to 4 hours. Turn off cooker. Stir in cream cheese, ½ cup of the cheddar cheese and the bacon. Cover and let stand for 10 minutes; stir until cream cheese is melted.

• Top servings with remaining ½ cup cheddar cheese, sour cream and, if desired, additional jalapeno peppers.



Slow Cooker Chocolate Chili with Three Beans

By BHG Test Kitchen

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 2 14.5-oz. cans diced fire-roasted tomatoes, undrained
- 1 15-oz. can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 15-oz. can pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 15-oz. can dark red kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 14.5-oz. can beef broth
- 1½ cup chopped yellow onions
- 1 8-oz. can tomato sauce
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 canned chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, finely chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- 2 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 1 tablespoon honey
- Sour cream (optional)
- Chopped green onions (optional)
- Unsweetened cocoa powder (optional)

• In a large skillet cook ground beef over medium-high heat until brown, using a wooden spoon to break up meat as it cooks. Drain off fat.

• Transfer meat to a 5-quart slow cooker. Stir in tomatoes, black beans, pinto beans, kidney beans, broth, yellow onions, tomato sauce, chili powder, chipotle pepper, garlic, cumin, cinnamon and coriander.

• Cover and cook on low-heat setting for 6 to 8 hours or on high-heat setting for 3 to 4 hours. If using low-heat setting, turn to high-heat setting. Stir in chocolate and honey. Cover and cook for about 15 minutes more or until heated through. If desired, serve with sour cream and green onions and sprinkle lightly with cocoa powder.

- CARROLL SHELBY

White Bean Chicken Chili

From cookingclassy.com

- 1 small yellow onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 2 14.5-oz. cans low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 7-oz. can diced green chilies
- 1½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 8-oz. Brick of Neufchatel cheese, cut into small cubes
- 1½ cup frozen or fresh corn
- 2 15-oz. cans cannellini beans
- 2½ cups shredded cooked rotisserie or left-over chicken
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, plus more for serving
- Tortilla chips or strips, monterey jack cheese, sliced avocado for serving, optional

• Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add onion and sauté for 4 minutes. Add garlic and sauté for 30 seconds.

• Add chicken broth, green chilies, cumin, paprika, oregano, coriander, cayenne pepper and salt and pepper to taste. Bring mixture just to a boil then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 15 minutes.

• Drain and rinse beans in a fine mesh strainer or colander then measure out 1 cup. Set whole beans aside, transfer 1 cup beans to a food processor along with ¼ cup broth from soup and puree until nearly smooth.

• Add Neufchatel cheese to soup along with corn, whole beans and pureed beans and stir well. Simmer 5-10 minutes longer.

• Stir in chicken, fresh lime juice and cilantro. Serve with monterey jack cheese, more cilantro, avocado slices and tortilla chips if desired.

My Notes:

If you go to the website and read the recipe creator's notes you'll find that she originally used raw chicken that she cooked in the soup but that she eventually started using rotisserie chicken because it was easier, quicker and kept the chicken from drying out. What I did is something that I've been doing for years for anything that calls for shredded chicken. I buy a package of split chicken breasts (skin on, with rib meat). I coat both sides in olive oil and generously season with fresh ground black pepper and kosher salt and put in a 350-degree oven on a foil-lined baking sheet. Depending on the size of the breasts, I leave them in for 50-60 minutes. After allowing them time to cool to the touch, I then peel the skin off, remove the bones and cartilage and tear/shred the chicken into pieces.





“Never underestimate how much assistance, how much satisfaction, how much comfort, how much soul and transcendence there might be in a well-made taco and a cold bottle of beer.”
 – TOM ROBBINS



Do you know your tacos?

TYPES OF TACOS

CARNITAS Slow-cooked braised pulled pork	CHORIZO Smoked and marinated hot spiced pork sausage	SHRIMP Grilled chorizo-marinated shrimp with cabbage slaw	RAJAS Grilled poblano peppers, sliced and sautéed with onions, corn, serrano and cream
BARBACOA Pulled, braised chorizo and spice-marinated beef	CARNE ASADA Grilled marinated beef top or skirt steak with cilantro and chopped onions	FRIED FISH Beer-battered beef fish with shredded cabbage, crema and lime	HONGOS Mushrooms sautéed with onions and served with pickled jalapeños and queso fresco
POLLO ASADA Grilled, chopped chicken and garlic-marinated chicken	KOREAN Bulgogi marinated beef top or skirt steak with cilantro and chopped onions	AL PASTOR Thinly sliced spit-roasted marinated pork ribs with pineapple and salsa verde	NOPALES Cactus paddles sautéed with onions, tomatoes and green chiles
GROUND BEEF Seasoned ground beef with lettuce, tomato, cheese and salsa	BREAKFAST Scrambled eggs with variations of meat, cheese and salsa	LENGUA Beef tongue braised whole with aromatics, then chopped	COCHINITA PIBIL Slow-cooked and braised pork with spices, chiles and achiote
CABEZA Braised pulled cow or calf head (tongue, cheeks, etc.)	TRIPARUCHIE Fried chopped beef/pork tripe	CHAPULINES Quick-fried grasshoppers with guacamole and chopped onions	BEEF AND POTATO Ground beef and cubed potatoes sautéed with onions, garlic, tomato and oregano

National Taco Day, a celebratory day that promotes consumption of tacos, is October 4. While there are some previous mentions of Taco Day being celebrated in the U.S. on May 3, that is no longer the case. In Mexico, Día del Taco, or Day of the Taco, is celebrated on March 31.

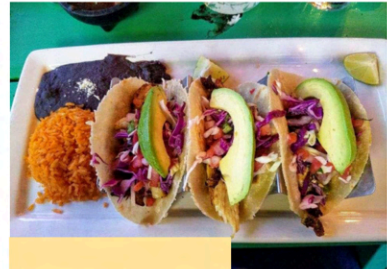
The fact that October 4 is called National Taco Day has led to some confusion as this does not reference any country or correspond to any country's National Taco Day. However, research indicates the holiday was created as part of a 2009 advertisement campaign by the chain Del Taco.

National Taco Day celebrates all things taco – from the tortilla (corn or flour) to the filling, to your preferred choice in salsa and toppings. I can't think of anything better.

According to one of the top Hispanic marketing agencies, the National Today data science team surveyed 1,000 about their taco-eating habits. The results revealed that people love tacos, specifically, 95% of the people surveyed are down with tacos. The most popular taco filling was carne asada, with 26% saying it is their go-to. And 76% of the people surveyed said they have tacos at least every couple of weeks.

How should you celebrate National Taco Day? That's easy. Go out to your local taqueria, Mexican restaurant or Taco Bell. Or, create your own taco, choosing from one of the many taco recipes that can be found online. Or, give the gift of tacos – to your friends, neighbors or co-workers.

This is just a small sampling of some of the tacos my family and I have enjoyed over the years. I've also included a detailed graphic that I found on Facebook in the event you need some inspiration. Viva la taco! ■



"People who love to eat are always the best people."
 - JULIA CHILD



"One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well."
 - VIRGINIA WOOLF



IN Dallas

Hubby recently had a three-night business trip in Dallas so Daughter and I decided to tag along. The opportunity allowed her to spend a couple days with her cousins and I hung out in the hotel, writing, resting and joining Hubby for meals. And oh, what good meals we had.

The first night, some of his colleagues treated us to a lovely meal at Ocean Prime, a seafood and steak restaurant. They started us with a huge, custom-built smoking shellfish tower. I truly regret not getting a picture of it. Hubby snacked on Point Judith calamari with a sweet chile sauce which I enjoyed a crisp iceberg wedge, complete with candied bacon, marinated tomatoes, pickled onions, blue cheese and a Cabernet buttermilk dressing. And those were just the appetizers.

For his entree, Hubby selected the blackened Texas red fish with corn spoon bread, Swiss chard and a corn emulsion. I selected branzino, a European seabass, with artichoke, broccolini and celery root purée with a lemon caper jus. We split a side of jalapeno au gratin.

With Hubby tied up in classes the following day, I ate lunch at Elm Street Cask & Kitchen where I dined on the meatloaf muffins. These were three individual house-made meatloaves, about the size of a tennis ball, topped with whipped potatoes and crispy onions and finished with a Dr Pepper demi-glace. They were delightful, although two would have been plenty.

That evening, we were treated to a lovely experience at Fogo de Chão Brazilian Steakhouse. If you're not familiar with Fogo, let me just say that it's a carnivore's dream that includes continuous tableside service of signature cuts of fire-roasted meat such as filet mignon, bone-in ribeye, bottom sirloin, pork, prime part of top sirloin, bacon-wrapped chicken and steak, lamb chops, pork ribs, beef ribs and spicy pork sausage. And as if all that wasn't enough, there is also an extensive salad bar that features seasonal salads and soups, exotic vegetables, imported cheeses, smoked salmon, cured meats and more. I could easily make a meal at the salad bar alone.

The following day we ate lunch at Press Box Grill, a little sports bar near our hotel. Hubby enjoyed the Laredo burger, a patty with cheddar and jack cheeses, jalapenos and chipotle mayo, served with lettuce, tomato, onion and pickles on the side. I selected the brisket tacos which were two corn tortillas filled with beef brisket, pico de gallo and fried jalapeno onion strings. They were served with barbecue sauce, salsa, borracho beans and rice.

- Ocean Prime is located at 2101 Cedar Springs Rd. #150, Dallas.
- Elm Street Cask & Kitchen is located at 1525 Elm St., Dallas.
- Fogo de Chão Brazilian Steakhouse is located at 4300 Belt Line Rd., Addison.
- Press Box Grill is located at 1623 Main St., Dallas.
- Perry's Steakhouse & Grille is located at 2100 Olive St. Suite #100, Dallas.
- Berries & Batter Cafe is located at 2727 Main St. #600, Frisco.

friends Richard and Will treated us to Perry's Steakhouse & Grille, one of our very favorites. For starters, Hubby selected Blue Point oysters on the half shell and I picked three skewers of Perry's famous pork chop "bites." For his entree, Hubby chose the 14-ounce New York strip seared au Poivre and served with a peppercorn sauce. I selected filet three ways. Served on a warm cast iron plate, it was an eight-ounce filet sliced into three medallions and individually topped Oscar-style with jumbo lump crabmeat, three-peppercorn au Poivre, and coffee crusted. We've always had a thing for the sweet Sriracha Brussels sprouts at Perry's and couldn't not order them. However, we upped our game this visit and in addition to those, also ordered the corn brûlée. And that was a very good call. The Brussels sprouts were as delicious as usual but that corn brûlée was otherworldly.

We're not usually big dessert-eaters but this was a special occasion and our last night so we went for it and ordered the rocky road bread pudding which was a butterscotch bread pudding with chocolate chips in a caramel sauce, topped with candied walnuts and a toasted homemade marshmallow. It was stunning to look at with that Rubik's cube-sized marshmallow and it was absolutely delicious. I'm not usually a bread pudding girl, but this could potentially convert me.

For the last meal of our trip, we met up with Daughter, our nieces and great nephew for brunch at Berries & Batter Cafe and it was the perfect way to end our weekend and head home. Hubby and I both ordered migas, complete with scrambled eggs, tomato, onion, jalapeno, tortilla strips, Monterey Jack and cheddar and served with hashbrowns, homemade salsa and the addition of some chorizo. I don't remember exactly what the others ordered, but all of our plates were beautiful and we were all happy and full when we hugged goodbye and parted ways. ■





RECIPES PAST

This year marks the 175th anniversary of my church – First Methodist Church of Livingston. To commemorate the milestone, we're having a big celebration on Oct. 22 with a blended service, a luncheon and a concert that evening. We've invited all of our previous pastors who are still living to attend. It should be a fun and joyous occasion.

The anticipation and planning leading up to the event have had me reminiscing about my own life and history in the church – from the various Sunday school teachers I had as a child (Mary Nettles, Helen Martin, Kay Frazier, Sid Williams), to my confirmation under the tutelage of Rev. Mark C. Lewis. I have fond memories of the numerous MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship) activities led so patiently by Ruth Bass Hollenbeck and Ruth Winters, my many years of singing in the choir and my involvement over the years with the mission committee, including three wonderful mission trips to Costa Rica.

I then remembered two church cookbooks that were created over the years. One was published in 1984 to celebrate the Methodist Bicentennial and the other, "Nourish and Flourish," was published in 1995. I pulled them out recently and poured over them, selecting several recipes to share with you as we celebrate our 175th anniversary. All of the recipes I selected were submitted by dear people who are no longer with us. One is from my grandmother, Ruth Watson. A couple are from two of her sisters, my great aunts, Lela Chapman and Loyce Cayton Platt. The others are from people who were dear friends and inspired me over the years. I hope you enjoy these and take a moment to reflect on these Godly women and their many contributions to our community.

And with the holidays just around the corner, I think any of these would make a nice addition to your holiday spread. ■

Chicken & Dumplings

By Georgia Bailey

- Boil 1 frying chicken in pot with enough water to cover. Add 4 chicken bouillon cubes to the water. Boil until tender. Remove chicken from broth and cool. Then remove bones and return meat to pot. For dumplings, combine 4 cups all purpose flour and 2 teaspoons salt in mixing bowl. Add enough cool water to form stiff dough. Place dough on heavily floured surface and roll out thin. Cut into squares and drop flour coated pieces into slowly boiling broth. Do not stir, but lift the dumplings with a spoon in the broth so they do not stick together. Gently simmer about 30 minutes. These dumplings are sort of on the tough side. I learned to make them watching my grandmother, Nola Shifflett, who was a wonderful cook.

Bea's Cheese Cake

By Bea Dabney

- 1½ cups graham cracker crumbs
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- ½ cup melted butter
- Mix and spread in a 9-inch springform pan. Make a ½ to ¾-inch rim up the side.
- 2 8-oz packages cream cheese, at room temperature
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- Cream cream cheese until soft and add the eggs, sugar and vanilla. Beat until thoroughly creamed and smooth. Pour into crust. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes.
- 1½ cups sour cream
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- Mix and pour over filling. Return to oven. Increase temperature to 450 degrees and bake 7 minutes more. Cool, then chill.

Buttermilk Pie

By Lela Chapman

- ½ cup butter or oleo
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 rounded tablespoons flour
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- Dash of nutmeg
- Have butter soft and add sugar. Cream well. Add flour and eggs. Stir in buttermilk, vanilla and nutmeg. Bake 45 or 50 minutes at 350 degrees in a 9-inch pie shell.

Sour Cream Cake

By Ruth Watson

- 1 box yellow butter cake mix
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 8-oz. carton sour cream
- 4 eggs
- Mix all ingredients except eggs and beat lightly until smooth. Add eggs, one at a time. Pour batter into greased and floured tube pan and bake at 325 degrees for about one hour or until done.
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- Melt butter with milk and vanilla and stir into powdered sugar until smooth. Drizzle on cake while hot.

Cherry Dessert

By Ruth Pritchard

- 1 ½ cups flour
- 1 ½ sticks margarine
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup chopped nuts
- Mix above ingredients and press into a 9x13-inch pan. Bake for 25 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool thoroughly.
- Mix 2 cups powdered sugar (sifted) with 8 oz. cream cheese (at room temperature). Blend well.
- In another bowl, mix 2 packages of Dream Whip according to package directions and fold into cream cheese mixture. Then spread on cool crust. Spread one can cherry pie filling (or any fruit pie filling) over top. Chill before serving.

Cheese Broccoli Soup

By Cherie Evans

- 1½ lbs. fresh broccoli
- 2 cups water
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup cornstarch mixed with 1 cup cold water
- 1 pint half and half
- 1 lb. pasteurized process cheese, cubed
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- Steam broccoli until tender. Combine half and half and 2 cups water and heat in the microwave, add cheese, salt and pepper. Heat until all cheese is melted. Add broccoli. Stir dissolved cornstarch into cheese mixture. Heat until soup thickens, stirring often.

Sweet Potato Biscuits

By Willouise Hawkins

- 2 eggs
- 1 cup cooked, mashed sweet potato (about ¾ pound uncooked)
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups all purpose flour
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons solid vegetable shortening
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, beat eggs with sugar. Add mashed sweet potato and mix well. Mix in butter, shortening, salt and baking powder. Add flour, ½ cup at a time, mixing after each addition. Dough will be sticky. Turn dough out on lightly floured board. Flour hands and knead gently 3 or 4 times. Cut with 2-inch biscuit cutter. Place on greased baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes.

Kristen's No Bake Cookies

By Jackie Jackson

- 2 cups granulated sugar
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup cocoa
- ½ cup margarine
- ½ cup chunky peanut butter
- 3 cups uncooked oats
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- Drop by teaspoonful on waxed paper or foil and let harden.

Corn Souffle

By Winifred Reuter

- 1 large can creamed corn
- 1 cup Bisquick
- 2 tablespoons cooking oil or melted oleo
- 1 beaten egg
- ½ cup milk
- Mix above ingredients and layer in greased casserole with ½ pound monterey jack cheese (grated) and 1 small can of hot green chiles. Cover with foil and bake at 400 degrees for 30 minutes.

Marinated Green Bean Salad

By Loyce Cayton Platt

- 1 can French-style green beans, drained
- 1 can small green lima beans
- 1 can LeSeur English peas
- 3 ribs celery, cut in pieces
- 1 purple onion, sliced in thin rounds
- 1 bell pepper, sliced in thin rounds
- Chopped pimento, optional
- Place veggies in a large bowl. Blend together ¼ to ½ cup salad oil, 1 cup vinegar, 1 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon salt. Pour over bean mixture and marinate, refrigerated, for 24 hours.





SOUP

season

I've written here numerous times how much I love soup and that I consider it my number one comfort food. Although I eat soup year-round, my favorite time to eat soup is in the fall when we get that first cool snap. While I was longing for some good home-made soup during our recent cold front, I was busy working on several other projects and never slowed down long enough to make any. And wouldn't you know that by the time I got around to it, the cold front was over, and temperatures were back in the high 80s. That didn't stop me, however.

I have been scouring the internet lately for some new soup recipes so when I recently ran across something called "20 Easy Soups Ready In 30 Minutes or Less - For when you're short on time and a hot bowl of goodness has to happen right now," I felt like I'd hit the jackpot. There were several that appealed to me, but there were two that just really called out to me - "Patricia's Green Chile Soup" and "Pumpkin Chipotle

Soup." You know I've yet to meet a chile pepper I don't like, so the first one wasn't a surprise. However, I've never really been much of a pumpkin-eater, so I was a bit surprised at how interested I was in the second one.

You know I've mentioned before that when looking at new recipes online, I always read the reviews. There's usually a wealth of information there, whether it's suggestions of various ingredients to add or substitute, or just multiple ways to tweak the original recipe. I did that with both of these and gleaned several ideas of ways to make them my own.

I made them both recently and thoroughly enjoyed each of them. Hubby and Daughter both loved "Patricia's Green Chile Soup" and suggested it be added to the rotation. Daughter was not the least bit interested in trying the "Pumpkin Chipotle Soup." Hubby reluctantly tried it and was pleasantly surprised at how much he liked it. With apologies to Patricia and whoever came up with the other one, I made several tweaks to both, which I'm adding below in the recipe notes. ■

PUMPKIN CHIPOTLE SOUP

From allrecipes.com

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 4 cups vegetable stock
- 1 29-oz. can pumpkin puree
- 2 chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, minced
- 1½ cups half-and-half
- 2 tablespoons sofrito
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika

• Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Stir in the flour and cook until the flour has turned golden brown, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the vegetable stock and bring to a boil over high heat. Whisk in the pumpkin puree until no lumps remain, then add the chipotle peppers, half-and-half, sofrito, Worcestershire sauce, salt and paprika.

Return to a simmer, then reduce heat to medium low and cook for 8 minutes until thickened and hot.

• I finely chopped half a yellow onion and sautéed it in the melted butter until translucent; then I added two finely minced cloves of garlic and about a tablespoon of finely minced fresh ginger.

• I added about 2 more tablespoons of butter when I was stirring in the flour.

• I topped ours with fresh cilantro leaves and a dollop of sour cream.

• Next time I would probably add a couple more minced chipotle peppers.

• Sofrito is an aromatic blend of vegetables, herbs and spices that is a base to flavor other dishes. You can make it from scratch, or you can buy it in a jar. Although I previously ordered it from Amazon, it is now available at HEB.



"To feel safe and warm on a cold wet night, all you really need is soup."

— LAURIE COLWIN



PATRICIA'S GREEN CHILE SOUP

From allrecipes.com

- 1 tablespoon butter
- ½ cup finely diced onion
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- ½ cup chopped fresh green chile peppers
- 1 5-oz. can chunk chicken
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 10.75-oz. can condensed cream of chicken soup
- 1¼ cups half-and-half
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup sour cream

• Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Sauté onion until translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in garlic, green chiles, chicken meat, and cumin. Cook until flavors

are blended, about 1 minute. Stir in cream of chicken soup and half-and-half. Cook until heated through, about 5 minutes. Ladle hot soup into bowls. Top with cheese and a dollop of sour cream.

• Instead of ½ cup of chopped fresh green chile peppers, I used 2 7-oz. cans of diced mild green chiles and 1 finely chopped jalapeno.

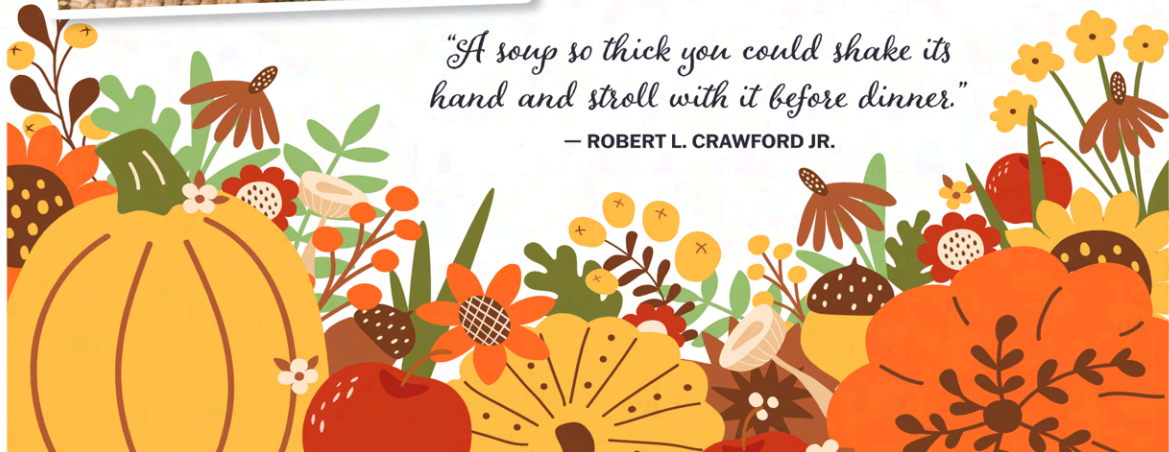
• Instead of 1 5-oz. can of chunk chicken, I had two boneless, skinless chicken breasts that I chopped and then stir-fried in a little olive oil on the stovetop.

• Instead of shredded cheddar cheese, I used shredded pepper jack cheese.

• I topped ours with cheese and some fresh chopped avocados.

"A soup so thick you could shake its hand and stroll with it before dinner."

— ROBERT L. CRAWFORD JR.





When you have the time and energy to think it through and plan it, there's really nothing more fun than a themed party. Having a good theme really opens it up - from the food choices to the decorations and even the tablescape.

I've recently had the opportunity to participate in three different themed events and enjoyed them each immensely. It all started a month or so ago when a wine club that we belong to chose a tailgate theme for its event. It was a perfect choice, being fall and a little cooler and with college football season underway. Much to my delight, I was put in charge of the Baylor table. I selected a khaki-colored tablecloth with green plates and napkins and gold forks. I have a beautiful BU football helmet Hubby got me for Christmas years ago that I used as the centerpiece. I scattered some small green and gold pom poms around the helmet, along with a miniature megaphone and a stuffed momma bear and baby bear that were gifts for Daughter when she was a little tike but just happen to look exactly like Baylor's own bear mascots. I was fortunate enough to have a little fence behind my table where I hung a big wooden BU wall hanging as well as a BU flag. I was pleased with how it turned out. I made a couple platters of jalapeno poppers, some Mexican spinach dip and a big bowl of roasted poblano and corn guacamole. My friend Mary made a beautiful veggie and cheese tray. My friend Londa made some roast beef sliders that were heavenly. For several days afterward, I regretted not putting two or three in my purse to save for later. I'm serious. Although she was unable to attend the event, Londa's mother Jan graciously made a couple of cheese balls that were delicious with crackers.

The evening was a lot of fun and I thought it was a huge success. Hubby was in charge of the Sam Houston table and he made a chili bar featuring a big slow cooker filled with chili, accompanied by all the requisite fixins'. Other tables represented included Rice, University of Houston, University of Texas, Texas A&M and Kentucky.

And speaking of chili bars



... the company in which I work has locations in four different counties with staff at each, so when we have a

staff meeting, it's a big deal and Kelli, our publisher, always does her best to make it special. We recently had a

luncheon/staff meeting with a Halloween theme. Kelli made a big pot of chili with all the fixins' cutely displayed

in a galvanized metal wash-tub. There was a spooky dessert that was reminiscent of a sopapilla cheesecake, but with the addition of some raspberry filling running through it. There were also several candy corn decorations. I think a good time was had by all and we even got some work accomplished.

But most recently, I attended the local designer purse bingo event which had a Barbie theme this year. It was a ton of fun! I had the pleasure of sitting at my friend Julie's table and trust me when I tell you that no one can decorate a table like Julie. She pulls out all the stops and I do mean all of them. It was a beautiful sea of pink with a giant Barbie and a beautiful hand-painted carousel horse as the centerpiece. Each place setting was

decked out with a shimmering gold placemat, antique pink crystal plates and miniature Barbie heads wearing pink glittery cowboy hats, along with various other party favors. And there were precious little place cards here featuring the iconic Barbie silhouette along with our names in pink, of course. She made German chocolate cupcakes that accompanied a beautiful table filled with popcorn, pretzel sticks, grapes, strawberries, cheese, crackers and dip, along with a giant crystal punch bowl filled with pink lemonade punch. Suffice it to say that we all "got our Barbie on" and had a fantastic time. And now I'm sitting around thinking of ideas for other potential theme parties that may be in the not-too-distant future. ■



November is National Nachos Day in the United States, a dish that has an interesting creation story. While one source cites 1941 as the year nachos were invented, another one I found says 1943. Nonetheless, it was wartime and Eagle Pass Army Airfield, a World War II military airfield complex, was located in Eagle Pass, Texas, right across the border from Piedras Negras, Coahuila in Mexico.

According to Linda Ellerbee in her book "Take Big Bites - Adventures Around the World and Across

the Table," a group of women whose husbands were stationed at Eagle Pass crossed the border on a shopping trip, ended up at the Victory Club drinking margaritas and wanted something to nibble on as they drank.

Allegedly, the cook "was momentarily AWOL," so the club owner told a waiter to go to the kitchen and come up with something. The waiter, Ignacio Anaya, quartered some tortillas, deep-fried them, topped them with shredded cheese, placed them under the broiler until the cheese melted and then topped them with sliced pickled jalapeños. In the Spanish language, "Nacho" is a common nickname for Ignacio so when the women

asked what the dish was called, they were told Nacho's Special.

The women told others about Nacho's Special and the dish became quite popular at the Victory Club. Anaya later opened his own place in Piedras Negras called Nacho's Restaurant. The popularity of the dish spread quickly throughout Texas and the Southwest and numerous modifications of it are now found everywhere. Anaya died in 1975 and in his honor, a bronze plaque was erected in Piedras Negras, where the International Nacho Festival is held every October, featuring live music, art, cultural activities and several nacho contests. ■





- JULIA CHILD

Sheet-pan

Potatoes



ot long ago, a recipe from eatin-gwell.com showed up in my inbox that caused me to do a double-take. Called "Sheet-Pan Steak & Potatoes," it appeared to check all the boxes. It looked easy, quick and good – the perfect weeknight meal. It was skirt steak, potatoes and asparagus, all cooked together on a sheet pan. I tweaked it a little, but it was absolutely delicious. I don't remember

the last time a homemade meal came together so quickly and easily and packed this much of a punch. We all three loved it, so it will definitely be added to the rotation.

I've included the recipe here as it was written, but I'll share how I tweaked it. The first thing I did was omit the blue cheese. I enjoy it, but Hubby and Daughter do not. Secondly, I've written here before that I

typically read the reviews of recipes I find online before making them. There was only one review, from someone named Rob, who referred to it as a "really easy prep and bake." However, he suggested either finding a new seasoning for the steak or perhaps marinating it for an hour or two. I took his suggestion to heart and decided to marinate it, so I omitted the garlic powder and dried rose-

mary. I looked at several different marinades online and ended up just throwing something together with some items I had on hand. I don't remember how long I marinated it, but it turned out wonderful. And because the skirt steak cooks on top of the potatoes and asparagus, it really added some nice flavor to them as well. Try this out. I really think you'll be pleased. ■

- REESE WITHERSPOON



Sheet-Pan Steak & Potatoes

- 1 pound potatoes, cut into ½-inch wedges
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- ¾ teaspoon salt, divided
- ¾ teaspoon ground pepper, divided
- 4 cups chopped asparagus
- 1½ pounds skirt steak, trimmed
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon dried rosemary
- 3 tablespoons crumbled blue cheese

•Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

•Toss potatoes with 1 tablespoon oil and ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper in a large bowl. Spread evenly on a rimmed baking sheet. Roast for 15 minutes.

•Toss asparagus with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil and ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper in the bowl. Stir into the potatoes on the baking sheet.

•Sprinkle steak with garlic powder, rosemary and the remaining ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Place on top of the vegetables. Roast until the steak is cooked and the vegetables are tender, 10 to 15 minutes more.

•Transfer the steak to a serving platter. Stir blue cheese into the vegetables and serve with the steak.

- ⅓ cup soy sauce
- ⅓ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Pinch of red pepper

•In a small bowl, whisk together soy sauce, lemon juice, olive oil, Worcestershire sauce, minced garlic, Italian seasoning, pepper salt, and a pinch of red pepper.

•Add steaks to a resealable zip lock bag or large bowl and pour the marinade on top. Marinate for 2 hours or overnight



Thanksgiving

— MARCIE, A CHARLIE BROWN THANKSGIVING

My responsibilities regarding the Thanksgiving meal vary from year to year, depending on where we're going or who is hosting. We'll be celebrating at my brother and sister-in-law's this year, so I'll be making a couple of side dishes. I've long been known for my Thanksgiving side dishes. While I typically stick with the traditional fare, I do try to switch it up a little bit each year. Take the ubiquitous green bean casserole for example. I made it from scratch one year, making my own cream sauce instead of using the canned soups normally used. I even made my own French-fried onions instead of using the ones in the can.

I absolutely love Brussels sprouts any way they're prepared. My immediate family will humor me and eat a few, but several members of the extended family won't touch them at all, no matter how much bacon I add to them. I've tried for numerous years to find just the right combination that will convert them all to Brussels sprouts-lovers but haven't found it yet and have decided to no longer pursue that goal.

After much research, I just decided to keep it simple this year and do a green bean dish and a corn dish. I found a recipe for a green bean casserole by Ree Drummond aka The Pioneer Woman. It riffs on the traditional casserole, albeit with a few hidden surprises — chopped red bell pepper, a tiny bit of cayenne pepper and cheddar cheese in the sauce. I looked at oodles of corn casserole recipes and again opted to keep it simple with a basic one I found at foodnetwork.com.

I learned long ago that Thanksgiving is not the time to experiment, so I recently made both dishes as a trial run to see what I thought. We enjoyed both, in spite of the fact that I accidentally left out one of the ingredients in the corn casserole — the chopped green onions. If you want to keep it traditional but tweak it a little bit, these may be just the recipes for you too. I'm also including recipes for two side dishes I made for some previous Thanksgivings. One is a rather fancified corn casserole called corn pudding with bacon and rosemary. The other is called cranberry almond broccoli salad and it is a delightful little salad that is filled with different textures that really work well together. ■

From foodnetwork.com

- One 15-oz. can whole corn kernels, drained
- One 15-oz. can creamed corn
- 1 large egg
- 1 ½ cups shredded sharp cheddar
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup sour cream
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup chopped fresh chives
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
- Add the whole corn, creamed corn, egg, cheddar, cornmeal, sour cream, butter, chives, sugar, baking soda, 1 ½ teaspoons salt and a generous amount of black pepper to a large bowl and stir until well combined.
- Pour the mixture into a 2-quart baking dish and bake until lightly golden on the outside and set in the middle, 30 to 35 minutes.

By Carolyn Malcoun From eatingwell.com

- 4 ounces bacon
 - 5 large eggs, divided
 - ¼ cup cornstarch
 - 1 teaspoon baking powder
 - 1 cup reduced-fat milk
 - 1 cup crème fraîche or sour cream
 - ½ teaspoon salt
 - ½ teaspoon ground pepper
 - 4 cups frozen corn, thawed
 - 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary or 1 teaspoon dried
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
 - Cook bacon in a large skillet over medium heat until crisp, about 7 minutes. Drain on a paper-towel-lined plate.
 - Whisk 1 egg, cornstarch and baking powder in a large bowl until smooth. Add the remaining eggs and whisk until combined. Whisk in milk, crème fraîche (or sour cream), salt and pepper. Fold in corn and rosemary. Pour the mixture into the prepared pan. Crumble the bacon over the top.
 - Bake the pudding until it is puffed and golden around the edges and still slightly jiggly in the center, 40 to 55 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes before serving.
 - To make ahead: Refrigerate for up to 2 days. Reheat at 350 degrees for 15-20 minutes.



— RANDY PAUSCH



From thechunkychef.com

- 4 ½ cups fresh broccoli, cut into small florets (about 2 heads broccoli)
 - 5 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
 - ¼ cup red onion, finely chopped
 - ¾ cup dried cranberries
 - ½ cup sliced almonds
 - ½ cup roasted sunflower seeds
 - 1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, cut into very small cubes (or shredded if you prefer)
- ¾ cup canola mayo (or regular full-fat mayo)
 - 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
 - 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
 - Zest of 1 small lemon
 - Zest of ½ orange
 - 1-2 tablespoons lemon juice, freshly squeezed
 - ½ teaspoon poppy seeds
 - Pinch of black pepper

- Bring a pot of water to boil. Chop broccoli into very small florets and set aside. Fill a large bowl with cold water and a cup of ice cubes.
- Add a generous pinch of salt to boiling water and add broccoli. Boil for 20 seconds. Drain broccoli and transfer to the prepared bowl with ice water. Let broccoli sit in cold water for a few minutes, until cool. Drain and lay broccoli out onto some paper towels to drain. Allow to continue air drying while you prepare other parts of the recipe.
- To a small mixing bowl, add poppyseed dressing ingredients, then whisk together until smooth and combined. Set aside.
- Add finely chopped red onion to a small bowl of cold water and let sit for five minutes, then drain. This takes some of the "bite" out of the raw onion.
- To a large mixing bowl, add dried broccoli florets, bacon, drained raw onion, cranberries, almonds, sunflower seeds and cheddar cheese. Toss with citrus poppyseed dressing (start with about half the dressing and increase to your liking).
- Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Toss and serve.
- Letting the salad sit in the fridge for 30 minutes or more allows the flavors to really combine and will make for a more flavorful salad. It can be made up to 24 hours in advance.



By Ree Drummond

- 2 pounds fresh green beans, ends cut off
- Salt
- 4 slices bacon, cut into ¼-inch pieces
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ large onion, chopped
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 ½ cups whole milk, plus extra for thinning if needed
- ½ cup half-and-half
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup grated sharp cheddar
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs

- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
- Cut the green beans in half if you like the pieces to be a little smaller. Blanch the green beans: drop them into lightly salted boiling water and allow the green beans to cook for 3 to 4 minutes. Remove them from the boiling water with a slotted spoon and immediately plunge into a bowl of ice cold water to stop the cooking process. Drain the beans once they're cool and set aside.
- Add the bacon pieces to a skillet over medium heat. Cook the bacon for 2 minutes and then add the peppers, garlic and onions, and continue cooking until the bacon is done (but not crisp) and the onions are golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.
- In a separate saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Sprinkle the flour into the pan and whisk immediately to evenly mix it into the butter. Cook for a minute or 2, and then pour in the milk and half-and-half. Continue cooking, whisking constantly, while the sauce thickens, about 2 minutes. Add 1 ½ teaspoons salt, some black pepper and the cayenne, and then add the grated cheese. Stir while the cheese melts. Turn off the heat.
- Add the bacon/onion mixture and stir to combine. Add the green beans and stir gently to combine. Pour into a baking dish and top with the panko. Bake until the sauce is bubbly and the panko is golden, about 30 minutes.



- AMANDA K.

Perfectly Cooked EGGS Everytime

(Disclaimer: I do not now, nor have I ever, had any affiliation with the Dash company. Everything below is my personal opinion and I am not receiving any compensation - monetary, product-wise or otherwise - from the Dash company or anyone affiliated with Dash.)



Several summers ago I was standing in the kitchen of my sister-in-law Cathy as she bagged up for me a treasure trove of goodies she had grown in her garden when I noticed a little contraption on the counter near her sink and I had no idea what it was. While I consider myself curious, Hubby and Daughter would more likely call me nosy. Nonetheless, I asked her what it was and she said, "That's my Dash." Umm, okay, what is a Dash? Turns out, it's a little rapid egg cooker that delivers up to six perfectly cooked eggs in less time than it takes to boil water on the stove. Color me intrigued. I realize there's probably nothing simpler than boiling eggs and I know there are literally hundreds of old wives' tales regarding the best methods to do it. However, as there has been little to no consistency in my egg-boiling skills heretofore, I decided we needed one of these.

I found one on Amazon for around \$13.99, purchased it about a year ago, wrapped it up and placed it under the Christmas tree with a tag that said, To The Wootens, From Santa. In the year that we've had it, I'm the only one in our household that has used it and I absolutely love it. It perfectly



- ERMA BOMBECK

boils six eggs in 16 minutes or less and I do mean perfect, every single time, producing a perfectly butter yellow-colored yolk with nary a tinge of a green or gray ring around it. And the best part of all? The eggs are super easy to peel as well. In addition to the boiling tray replete with instructions for hard-boiling, medium-boiling and soft-boiling,



- MICHAEL M.

there is also an omelet bowl and a two-egg poaching tray.

In the year that we've had our Dash, I have never used the omelet bowl or the two-egg poaching tray. That all changed recently, however. I've tried several times over the years to poach eggs and have never ever mastered it. I'm sure I just need more practice, but with the price of eggs these days, that's not really something I want to waste.

A couple of weeks ago, the day of the chemical plant explosion in Shepherd actually, I was sitting at my dining table taking notes and creating a timeline, having spent the entire morning communicating with first responders and emer-

gency management and keeping up with the play by play, when I realized I hadn't eaten all morning and was hungry. For some reason, I happened to think of that little two-egg poaching tray that I had never used with my Dash and decided I would try it out. It worked out wonderfully, although next time I'll try to remember to apply a little non-stick spray to the poaching tray. I had a little pico de gallo left over from our taco dinner the previous evening, as well as some fresh cilantro, so I topped my poached eggs with these and then added a few little dollops of chili crunch. It was the perfect light lunch and made a beautiful plate.

After posting it on social media, I was tickled by the number of people who commented on it, some of whom were surprised that it was my

own creation. I also learned that not everyone is familiar with chili crunch. When asked about it by one friend, I told her that it is a condiment with dried onion, dried garlic and different spices infused in oil, that kind of gives a spicy kick along with some texture to whatever you add it to. And truth be told, I wouldn't know about chili crunch either were it not for the hours upon hours that I watch Food Network.

I recommend everyone get themselves a Dash. (Again, not a sponsor.) And now that I've broken in my poaching tray, I'll definitely continue to use it. As I told one friend, the only thing that would have made that dish better would have been if the whole thing had been placed on top of a thick slice of sourdough bread. Mmm mmm good! ■





"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

— DR. SEUSS



Helpful tips within the pages of Better Homes & Gardens

We love books and all three of us are big readers. While we usually purchase our books online through Amazon or sometimes AbeBooks, there's nothing like being in an actual book store and soaking up the ambiance as if on an adventure. On the occasional rare Saturday or Sunday afternoon when we have nothing on the calendar, we'll drive down to Humble and go to Barnes & Noble at Deerbrook Mall. Once we cross the threshold, we almost say "see ya" in unison as we each go our separate ways, roaming the stacks in search of new treasures.

Hubby and I have loved reading books ever since our childhood and we've enjoyed sharing that love with our daughter, resulting in her having quite an extensive library of her own. We decided early on that we would never turn down her requests for books. We might go without food, but she would never go without books. (And I'm just joking. You can look at all of us and see that we have never missed a meal.) As a youngster, it wasn't at all unusual for us to purchase three or four books for her at Barnes & Noble, only to discover that she had already finished one of them and was well into the second one by the time we made it back home.

I have stacks of new books at home that I haven't read yet so the last few trips to the bookstore I haven't allowed myself to look at the books, but instead have spent my time in the periodical section, looking at magazines. On a recent trip I picked up a maga-



zine called "Better Homes & Gardens Meal Planning." I truly enjoy cooking when I have time and am not rushed. However, that's rarely the case in the evenings after work so I'm always on the lookout for quick and easy ways to feed my family throughout the week. I sat down on a bench with the magazine and slowly went through it page by page. Not only was it filled with recipes, it also had a

variety of meal-prep strategies, with most of them actually sounding reasonable. There were several things that piqued my interest — slow cooker jump starts, big-batch cooking, flavor boosters, soups to freeze, simmer sauces, freezer marinades — so much so that I could justify the \$12.99 price tag of the magazine.

After reading it from cover to cover, I knew there were numer-

ous strategies that I wanted to try, but the first one I decided to go with was freezer marinades. The colorful page beckoned: "Freezer Marinades — You've made your weekly run to the bulk-buy warehouse store and snagged a mega-deal on meat and poultry. Now what do you do with it all? Divvy it up into family-size portions, bag it with a marinade, and freeze. Later, the flavor infuses while the package thaws in the fridge." There were five — Greek-Style Lemon Marinade, Garlic-Soy Marinade, Avocado-Buttermilk Marinade, Roasted Red Pepper Marinade and Turmeric-Ginger Marinade.

I opted to start with the first three — the Greek-Style Lemon Marinade, Garlic-Soy Marinade and Avocado-Buttermilk Marinade — and see how those turned out before I tried the other two. I selected boneless, skinless chicken breasts for the Greek-Style Lemon Marinade and went with boneless, skinless chicken thighs for the Garlic-Soy Marinade and the Avocado-Buttermilk Marinade. I enjoyed making the marinades one Sunday afternoon. They were quick and easy and smelled delicious — so much so that Daughter even wandered out of her room at one point to see what I was working on. I felt so accomplished afterward, admiring my handiwork before putting it all in the freezer.

About a week and a half later, I pulled out the chicken breasts in the Greek-Style Lemon Marinade to thaw. I cooked them on a foil-lined sheet pan in a 350-degree oven. I served the chicken on a bed of brown rice, accompanied

by a green bean casserole that I was trying out. I knew the rice would soak up that good sauce that I would make with the marinade. Only problem? I forgot to save the marinade to make the sauce, pouring it down the drain instead. Oh well. The meal was good. We enjoyed it. It didn't have as much flavor as I expected but that was probably my fault. I'd failed to season the chicken breasts at all, not even with salt and pepper.

A few weeks later, I pulled out the chicken thighs in the Garlic-Soy Marinade. This time I remembered to save the marinade to make the sauce. I cooked the thighs on a foil-lined sheet pan in a 400-degree oven for about 25-30 minutes and served them, with the sauce, on a bed of white rice, accompanied by some roasted broccoli. This time, I put salt and pepper on the thighs before I put them in the oven. We enjoyed the meal with all three of us going back for seconds. Daughter even suggested adding this one to the rotation. However, deep down, I was still a little disappointed because I just didn't think the flavor was as bold as it should have been with ingredients such as soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, balsamic vinegar and garlic. But that's okay. I'll continue tinkering with it. Next time, I may try cooking it in the air fryer and see how that goes. I can truly say, however, that the meals came together much quicker and easier than if I had been starting from scratch. I haven't tried the chicken thighs in the Avocado-Buttermilk Marinade yet, but will report back after I do. ■



"Books are a uniquely portable magic."

— STEPHEN KING

- ½ cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- ¼ cup finely chopped green onions
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil or olive oil
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves or chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper (optional)
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

• For marinade, in a small bowl combine all of the ingredients, whisking to dissolve the brown sugar.

• To use, place 2-3 pounds of desired poultry or meat in a resealable plastic freezer bag. Add marinade. Seal bag; turn to coat poultry or meat. Lay flat in a shallow baking pan and freeze for up to 3 months.

• To serve, thaw in the refrigerator 24-48 hours or until no longer icy. Drain poultry or meat; if desired, reserve marinade (See tip below). Cook poultry or meat as desired.

After marinating, reserve marinade in a small saucepan. Combine marinade, ¼ cup of water and 1 tablespoon of butter. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Simmer, uncovered, 10 minutes or until slightly thickened.

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one."

— GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

- 4 lemons
- ¼ cup peperoncini salad peppers, drained and sliced
- 1 tablespoon peperoncini salad pepper brine from jar
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil or olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons dried dill
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

• Remove 4 teaspoons of zest and squeeze 6 tablespoons of juice from two of the lemons. Slice the remaining lemon. For marinade, in a small bowl combine lemon zest and juice, peperoncini peppers and brine, and remaining 5 ingredients.

• To use, place 2-3 pounds of desired

poultry or meat in a resealable plastic freezer bag. Add marinade and lemon slices. Seal bag, turn to coat poultry or meat. Lay flat in a shallow baking pan and freeze for up to 3 months.

• To serve, thaw in the refrigerator 24-48 hours or until no longer icy. Drain poultry or meat, discarding lemon slices; if desired, reserve marinade (See tip below). Cook poultry or meat as desired.

After marinating, reserve marinade in a small saucepan. Combine marinade, ¼ cup chicken broth and 2 tablespoons of butter. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Simmer, uncovered, 8 minutes or until slightly thickened.





I entered a Christmas cookie decorating contest

I've participated in a Christmas cookie exchange with a group of co-workers for the last three years. It's not really something I would normally gravitate toward, but I've discovered that I enjoy it more than I expect to and I can usually get a column out of it for Bite by Bite.

Each year the participants were instructed to make fresh, homemade Christmas cookies, accompanied by the recipe, in increments of 12 and each participant would receive a half-dozen cookies of each variety along with a half-dozen of their own, plus the recipes.

The first year I made "Everything Cookies," a recipe I'd received years ago from a former co-worker. The second year I made "Chocolate Ancho Crinkles," a recipe I found in a Better Homes & Gardens publication called Christmas Cookies. Last year I made "Keto Brownie Cookies," a recipe I'd found online while Hubby and I were in the throes of trying to live a Keto-lifestyle.

This year, however, our fearless leader – also known as my publisher – decided to flip the script and shake things up a bit. Instead of the annual cookie exchange, this year we would have a cookie decorating contest. That, in and of itself, decreased the number of people participating immediately. I briefly entertained the idea of not participating because I've never decorated cookies before. But I enjoy writing the column and had already factored in a Christmas cookie column on my Bite by Bite planning calendar. Plus, the stakes were considerably higher this year. A winner would be selected through a blind taste test and would receive a cash prize. Count me in!

Several nights ago over dinner at a friend's house, I laughingly and self-deprecatingly shared how I continue to amaze myself at the vast number of things I undertake with a rationale of "how hard can it be?" I mean, c'mon. I'm smart, reasonable, logical. I'm capable of reading instructions and I'm also capable of watching how-to videos on YouTube. This should be a no-brainer. And this is the part where my baker friends are probably rolling on the floor laughing at me and my audacity.

For reasons that I can no longer remember, I planned to make Christmas tree cookies – not caricature or cartoonish-looking ones but ones that would look almost elegant in their authenticity. I ordered cookie cutters from Amazon, selected a cookie recipe and began planning how to decorate them. I remembered an article that appeared many years ago in Food Network Magazine that told you exactly how many drops of various food colorings to use



to make a variety of different colors. I knew I wanted my Christmas trees to look real and not one-dimensional so there wouldn't be just one shade of green frosting. I was going to make three different shades of green frosting so there would be a gradient to my trees and be multi-dimensional, just like real ones.

Now if I could only find that particular issue of the magazine. I knew I had it because I don't throw away my Food Network Magazines. And if you don't believe me, just ask Hubby. On second thought ... don't. We don't need him reciting a litany of the things I don't throw away. After about an hour searching, I found the issue (May 2012 for future reference), already feeling a bit accomplished. Silly me. I should have recognized the pattern. Any time I start feeling really proud of something I've done, something comes along to knock me down a few notches, kick my butt and put me back in my place.

I'd set aside the better part of a weekend for a trial run before the big day of the contest. I made my cookie dough into flattish round discs wrapped in plastic wrap just like the directions said and had them chilling. I then set about making my three shades of green frosting, but two of them were just too close in color. Had I lost count while trying to squeeze exactly 54 drops of

blue and 27 drops of yellow? I opted to make a fourth shade of green just to break it up. I was starting to feel like a mad scientist now ... or maybe just a crazy person.

I knew I was supposed to chill my dough for a minimum of two hours and I had set a timer so I wouldn't forget. Glancing back at the instructions, it said to take out one of the discs and let it soften for five minutes. I retrieved one of the discs from the freezer and it was rock-hard. I knew it would take way more than five minutes to soften it. Glancing at the instructions again, I saw that I was supposed to have chilled the dough in the fridge and not in the freezer. Well shoot! I knew the dough would be fine whenever it thawed out but I didn't know how long that would take so I put it in the fridge and then proceeded to make a second batch of cookie dough. After it had chilled properly in the fridge, I floured my countertop and began attempting to roll out my dough. It started out smoothly but went downhill quickly. My dough began sticking to my rolling pin and it was just turning into a mess. It was late and I was tired – and getting crankier by the second – so I decided to just put the dough back in the fridge, go to bed and start over the next morning when I was fresh and well-rested.

When I resumed the next morning, I suspected that maybe I didn't have enough



flour on my rolling pin the night before so I floured it liberally and then began rolling my dough again. It rolled out perfectly just like it was supposed to. Excellent!

I was about to grab the cookie cutters and began cutting the cookies when I noticed our dog Cooper nosing around the window behind the Christmas tree, something I'd never seen him do before. I went over to investigate and saw there was a lizard in the house crawling around inside the window sill, inside the house. Great. Just what I needed. I was determined to get the lizard out of the house immediately. I knew I didn't want it ending up in my Christmas tree. Remember the scene in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation when the squirrel jumps out of Clark Griswold's Christmas tree, wreaking havoc? I didn't want a replay of that in my own home. I know lizards are perfectly harmless but I still don't want to touch them, so I propped open the back door with a chair and then with a broom in one hand and a dustpan

in the other, I attempted to shoo the lizard outside without knocking over my tree in the process. Surprisingly, it went smoother than expected and he made a dash right out the door. I suspect he may have picked up on my crazy vibe and decided to get the heck out.

I resumed cutting the cookies but things went downhill fast. Now, my cookie dough was sticking to the cookie cutters. Try as I might, I couldn't get them to cut properly. Later, after the fact, a friend suggested maybe next time spritzing some nonstick baking spray onto the cookie cutters. Using words that would make my Mother cringe, I assured my friend that there would not be a next time.

Feeling defeated, I decided to give up and just back out of the cookie decorating contest. But then I looked over and saw the four shades of green frosting that I'd worked so hard on and I hated the idea of it all being for naught. So I pivoted and came up with a plan B. I decided I would forget about cookie cutters and just free-hand cut out big triangles

to use as my trees. This way I had more control over the size of the cookies and could make them a little bigger than what they would have been had I used the cookie cutters. Realizing that I wanted to have a little bit of uniformity, however, I soon nixed the free-hand idea and cut a big triangle out of a cardboard box that I then used as my pattern.

I had a bottle of holiday sprinkles in red, green and white. I only wanted to use the white, however, so Daughter patiently helped me separate the white ones from the red and green ones.

The cookies were going to be judged during our company Christmas party so I waited until that morning to decorate them. It wasn't long before I realized that these were not going to turn out the way I had planned. Fortunately, I had a lightbulb moment and realized that it didn't really matter how all the others turned out as long as I had one that was perfect and that one would be the one submitted to the judges. Once I made this decision, it definitely relieved me of some of my stress. I selected the most perfectly shaped one and saved it for the very last to decorate. Upon completion, I realized that it still wasn't exactly what I'd envisioned, but it was most definitely better than all the others. I even found myself feeling good about it.

I didn't win the cookie decorating contest, but that's okay. I'm still a winner because I learned something in the process. I learned that I will never again enter a cookie decorating contest. Happy holidays to you all! ■





Remembering Debbie

Savoring recipes from a lifelong friend

My heart is heavy right now for my friend Keith Mayes as he is about to experience his first Christmas without his beloved Debbie. He'll be strong and get through it for his kids and his grandchildren, but I know his heart will ache as his family navigates the holidays without their matriarch.

I've known Debbie so long that I really don't remember the first time I met her. I know I was a kid. I've heard that Keith and Debbie have been together since they were 15, and that's about the age Keith would have been when his little sister Julie and I became best friends. Julie was 5 when she lost her maternal grandmother on Christmas Eve. Mother went and picked her up and packed her a bag and brought her to our house to stay a few days. We've been best friends ever since.

Because Keith was Julie's big brother, he might as well have been mine too. He was handsome and cool and drove a snazzy blue and black El Camino. Taking us to school every morning, the one everyone called "the old Alamo," he introduced me to the music of Elton John. My favorite back then was "Bennie and the Jets" and all these decades later, that's still my favorite Elton John song.

And because Keith was cool and Debbie was with Keith, that automatically made Debbie cool also. She was a cute thing too back then, in her blue jean cutoffs, her hair in two long braided pigtails and a smattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks.

The summer that the movie "Jaws" came out, Keith and Debbie took Julie and me to see it at the local drive-in theater out Hwy. 59 North. Keith was driving a van then and while he and Debbie watched the movie from inside the van, Julie and I crawled on top of the van and watched the movie lying on our tummies with our chins propped in our hands.

Prior to Keith and Debbie's wedding, Julie and I went downtown to Livingston Drug and used our babysitting money to buy a couple of spoons from their registry as wedding gifts. My little sister Jeri even served as their flower girl.

Debbie always had a maternal way about her, even before having children of her own. I remember the time Julie and I were riding three-wheelers in Keith and Debbie's front yard and, not quite steering wide enough to clear it, Julie got tangled up in an old cedar bush resulting in a number of scrapes and scratches. Debbie went in the house and retrieved her first aid kit and lovingly cleaned and bandaged Julie's injuries.

In more recent years, Debbie and my Hubby worked together for a while, becoming fast friends and confidants. She was the first executive director of the Polk County Commerce Center and he was the first direc-

tor of the local Angelina College campus. They began those positions at the same time, faced similar learning curves and were each always willing to lend an ear or a helping hand to the other.

Debbie was an incredible cook and shared recipes with me over the years. She was always complimentary of my little food page and would let me know when she made something from it. She had a servant's heart and was always doing for others. I participated in several of her Bible studies, always leaving blessed and full from her delicious homemade cookies.

Her favorite color was red and her kitchen was the very first red kitchen I ever saw and it was beautiful, warm, welcoming and cozy – just like Debbie. She loved sunflowers, had them sprinkled throughout their home and every summer she and Keith would host Camp Sunflower for their 4 grandchildren who were her pride and joy.

Debbie was happy, funny, loving and giving. I'm grateful for our friendship and will always think of her fondly. With Keith's gracious permission, today I'm sharing three of my favorite recipes from Debbie with you. ■



"There are friends, there is family, and then there are friends that become family."

– UNKNOWN

"It's coming on Christmas. They're cutting down trees. They're putting up reindeer and singing songs of joy and peace. Oh I wish I had a river I could skate away on."

– JONI MITCHELL



Jalapeno Corn Muffins

- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter
- ¾ cup nonfat buttermilk
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon coarse salt
- 4 jalapenos, seeded and finely chopped
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh or frozen (thawed) corn kernels. (If you can find frozen corn with red and green peppers, it's good and makes the muffins so pretty)

•Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spray or grease 12-cup muffin pan. Set aside. Whisk together buttermilk, eggs and sour cream in a medium bowl until combined and set aside. Whisk together cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, jalapenos and corn in a large bowl until combined.

•With a rubber spatula, fold buttermilk mixture into cornmeal mixture until well combined. Fold in melted butter. Divide batter among muffin cups, filling each three-quarters full. Bake until a cake tester inserted into center comes out clean, about 25-30 minutes. Let muffins cool in tin about 5 minutes. Turn out into a basket or bowl lined with a clean kitchen towel; cover to keep warm and serve with butter.

Oatmeal Cookies

- 1 stick Crisco
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup light brown sugar, packed
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt

- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 ½ cups flour
- 3 cups quick oatmeal

•Bake at 350 degrees for 10-13 minutes or until lightly brown.

New Orleans-Style Shrimp and Rice

- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter
- 2 green bell peppers, cut lengthwise into ¼ inch slices
- 1 large onion, halved lengthwise and cut into ¼ inch slices
- 2 celery stalks, cut into ½ inch pieces
- 1 28-oz. can whole tomatoes, crushed
- 1 14½-oz. can low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 teaspoons chopped parsley, plus more for garnish
- 1½ teaspoon cajun seasoning
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon coarse salt
- ½ teaspoon hot sauce, such as Tabasco, or to taste
- 2 lbs. large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 cups cooked white rice for serving

•Melt butter in a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add flour and stir until light brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add bell peppers, onion and celery; cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 7 minutes. Add tomatoes, broth, parsley, spices, salt and hot sauce.

•Bring to a boil; reduce heat, and simmer until vegetables are soft and mixture is slightly thickened, about 30 minutes. Stir in shrimp, and cook until pink and cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes. Sprinkle shrimp with parsley and serve over rice.



A look back at some favorites this year

As we're close to coming to the end of another year, I took the opportunity to go back and reflect on some of the dishes I prepared over the course of 2023 and pick out a few of my favorites. I'm including the dates these recipes ran in case you want to refer back to them. If any of these pique your curiosity and you missed them the first go round, please reach out to me via email (editor@polkenterprise.com) and I'll be happy to send the recipe to you.

One of my favorite recipes right out of the gate was "Herb-Crusted Pork Tenderloin with Orange-Chipotle Honey Glaze" (2-26-23). It's from a cookbook written by Jen Hatmaker called "Feed These People - Slam-Dunk Recipes for Your Crew" that I received for Christmas from Andra, my sister-in-law. It's an easy read, written in a conversational and irreverent tone and will have you laughing out loud. This dish was amazing. The pork tenderloin was cooked perfectly, so moist and tender, and the glaze was excellent. It's not difficult to make, yet it's an impressive dish if you're having company.

Asparagus is one of my favorite vegetables and I love it in any form or fashion so when I ran across a recipe for an "Asparagus & Cheese Tart" (3-26-23), I knew I had to try it. It's another dish that isn't difficult to prepare, but sure makes a pretty presentation. I forgot to garnish it with a sprinkling of fresh lemon zest before I shot the picture, but I still think it looks pretty.

Last spring, I ran across a recipe for a "Million-Dollar Pound Cake" (4-2-23) that sounded delightful so of course I had to make it. It was quick and easy and was absolutely delicious. And if you're so inclined, you could even dress it up with some whipped cream and fresh seasonal fruit on the side.

Although my family occasionally tires of chicken dishes, "Creamy Jalapeno Skillet Chicken" (5-7-23) is one they never complain about. When it showed up in my inbox one day, I knew they had me at "creamy jalapeno." It was super easy and very flavorful.

In what was an exciting change of pace for me this past summer, my friend Barbara turned me on to "Best Greek Salad" (5-21-23) that I made and enjoyed all summer long. The reason this was a big deal was because I had never cared for cucumbers before. In this particular salad, however, the cucumbers are sliced very thinly and mixed with a number of other ingredi-



ents that have strong flavors of their own and it just works. I'm glad I overcame that obstacle because this salad is easy, flavorful and super healthy.

I love big fresh, juicy tomatoes during the summertime and am always looking for new ways to enjoy them. I found a recipe called "Baked Tomato Slices" (6-25-23) that was super easy and quick and may have been one of the best things I've ever eaten. That was another dish that I prepared repeatedly throughout the summer.

One of the prettiest things I made this past year was a "Lemon-Berry Sheet Pan Trifle" (7-2-23). It involves making individual meringues, making a creamy topping and then topping it all with a beautiful array of fresh berries that have been soaked in lemon juice and powdered sugar. It is not difficult at all, though it is a bit time-consuming. This dish turned out beautiful and tasted wonderful and the best part was that we all loved it.

Hubby is typically the chili cook in our household and he does a fine job of it. However, as we love all things jalapeno popper, when I ran across a recipe for "Jalapeno Popper Chili" (9-



24-23), I knew we would have to try it. It was another hit, with all three of us enjoying it.

When a recipe called "Sheet-Pan Steak & Potatoes" (11-12-23) showed up in my inbox, it appeared to check all the boxes. It looked easy, quick and good - the perfect weeknight meal. It was skirt steak, potatoes and asparagus, all cooked together on a sheet pan. I tweaked it a little, but it was absolutely delicious. I don't remember the last time a homemade meal came together so quickly and easily and packed this much of a punch. We all three loved it.

There will be one more installment of "Bite by Bite" before the year officially ends. I plan to share some ideas for New Year's Eve snacks with you. ■





Closing out the year with a quiet evening at home

We haven't made any plans yet for New Year's Eve and I suspect we won't. In recent years, we've realized that we really prefer just staying at home and hanging out. We may watch movies or listen to music, and we'll probably play some of the new games we received for Christmas and maybe work on a jigsaw puzzle. I'm fairly certain I'll make a bunch of random items on which we'll snack. I haven't given much thought yet to what I'll fix. However, I did look through every "Bite by Bite" from the last few years and select several recipes that I would recommend if you're also planning to stay in and relax. Surely one of these will strike your fancy. Happy New Year. ■



Sausage Balls

- 1 pound ground pork sausage, at room temperature
- 2 cups biscuit baking mix
- 1 lb. sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Combine room temperature sausage and biscuit mix in a large bowl; mix with your hands until well combined. Add shredded cheddar cheese and mix until fully incorporated. Roll mixture into about 30 walnut-sized balls; transfer to a baking sheet.
- Bake in the preheated oven until golden brown and sausage is cooked through, 20 to 25 minutes.
- To Make Ahead: Cool sausage balls to room temperature, then freeze in an airtight container. When ready to use, reheat at 350 degrees for 10 minutes.

Tex-Mex Skillet Poblano Dip

- 5 medium poblano chiles (about 1 lb. total)
- 2 8-oz. packages of cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup chopped scallions (from 4 medium scallions)
- ¼ cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 large garlic clove, grated (about ½ teaspoon)
- 8 oz. Monterey jack cheese, shredded and divided (about 2 cups)
- Tortilla chips
- Preheat oven to broil with oven rack about 7 inches from the heat source. Coat a medium cast-iron or other ovenproof skillet with cooking spray; set aside. Line a large, rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil.
- Arrange chiles on prepared baking sheet. Broil, turning occasionally, until blackened all over, about 10 minutes. Remove baking sheet from oven; reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Wrap foil tightly around chiles and let stand for 10 minutes.
- Unwrap chiles. Rub off skins; cut stems from chiles. Slice chiles in half lengthwise; scrape out seeds. (Discard skins, stems, and seeds.) Cut halves lengthwise into thin strips; cut strips into 1-inch pieces.
- Stir together cream cheese, scallions, sour cream, cumin, salt and grated garlic in a bowl. Stir in chiles and 1½ cups of the Monterey jack. Spread dip into prepared

skillet. Sprinkle remaining ½ cup of Monterey jack over dip. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees until bubbly, about 25 minutes. Serve warm with tortilla chips.

Bacon Tomato Cups

- 8 slices bacon, cooked, crumbled
- 1 medium tomato, seeded, chopped
- ½ small onion, chopped
- 3 oz. Swiss cheese, shredded
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon basil
- (10-count) can flaky biscuits
- Combine the bacon, tomato, onion, Swiss cheese, mayonnaise and basil in a bowl and mix well. Separate each dough round into 3 layers. Press one layer into each miniature muffin cup. Spoon the filling into each cup. Bake at 375 degrees for 10-12 minutes or until the edges are brown.

Andra's Tomato Basil Dip

- Combine chopped Roma tomatoes, basil, garlic, olive oil and salt and pepper. Serve on slices of French bread.
- This is one of those recipes that's best if you just wing it. I've never watched Andra prepare it so I don't know what her system is.
- Take 8-12 Roma tomatoes, slice the ends off, scoop out and discard the insides and chop the remainder.
- Grab a handful of fresh basil, chop it and add to tomatoes.
- Chop 6-8 cloves of fresh garlic. Use more or less to your liking.
- Drizzle approximately 2-3 tablespoons of olive oil over the tomatoes, basil and garlic and gently stir. Top with kosher salt and fresh ground black pepper to taste.
- Make this ahead of time (a few hours if possible) and let it sit in the fridge for a while before serving so the flavors have time to marry

Roasted Poblano and Corn Guacamole

- 2 poblano peppers
- 1 ear of corn, shucked
- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil

- 2 avocados
- 1 red onion, chopped
- 1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil and place the poblano peppers and ear of corn on it.
- Brush the vegetables with the olive oil and roast until lightly charred, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool to room temperature.
- Chop the poblanos and cut the corn off the cob. In a large bowl, mash the avocados with a fork. Stir in the poblano peppers, corn, red onion, cilantro, lime juice and garlic. Season with salt and pepper.

Maple-Bourbon Cider

- Ice
- 6 ounces bourbon
- 4 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons pure maple syrup
- 1 cup apple cider
- Cayenne pepper
- Fill four glasses and a cocktail shaker with ice. To shaker, add bourbon, lemon juice, maple syrup and apple cider; shake vigorously. Strain into glasses and top each with a pinch of cayenne pepper, if desired.

Hot Buttered Rum

- 4 cinnamon sticks, broken up
- 1 teaspoon whole allspice
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 7 cups apple juice
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 cup rum (Optional - use more or less as desired)
- Butter
- Tie cinnamon, allspice and cloves in a spice bag or cheesecloth. In a slow cooker, combine spice bag, apple juice, brown sugar and rum. Cover and cook on low for 3-4 hours. Discard spice bag. Ladle hot liquid into mugs and float ½ teaspoon of butter on top.

French 75

- Gin
- Champagne
- Lemon juice
- Sugar