

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Wood Stove Sisters

I don't know how they did it, day after day, 365 days a year, no matter the weather, but both of my grandmothers cooked on wood burning stoves.

For Granny, my mom's mom, a stove was a step up from cooking in a fireplace with a dutch oven and a skillet. Despite the heat of Georgia summers, she produced three meals a day for not only their family, but often the farm help as well. It wasn't possible to only use the stovetop to keep things cooler though, since biscuits and cornbread are practically required with every Southern meal.

Sitto, my dad's mom, had a big enamel stove which dominated the front room and sat right next to the kitchen table. Even during the hottest summer days in New Hampshire, using the oven was an absolute necessity for Sitto, because she baked fresh Syrian bread (now commonly known as pita or pocket bread) for their family of six children every day.

For me, cooking on a wood burning stove was a dream, not a daily requirement. As early as junior high, when I discovered the Foxfire books, I was enamored with the idea of cooking on a wood stove. When our boys were in elementary school, class field trips to Morningside Nature Center always ended up walking through the kitchen. I was fascinated as we were served biscuits or cornbread fresh out of the 1870s wood stove.

The fascination continued on field trips to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' home. Her stove is an early 20th century enameled model with a firebox on one side, oven, four burners, warming box, and a reservoir for hot water. According to Cross Creek Cookery, she created some incredible meals on that stove and I really wanted a chance to do the same.

Asked to do a cooking demonstration as part of the year-long celebration of Rawlings' classic, The Yearling, I finally had my chance. When it came time to learn how to use the stove, I brought two friends who I knew would appreciate the experience. Taught by the best, Sheila Barnes and Judy Baker, on a unseasonably warm day last December, Val Leitner, Andi Houston and I had a great time while learning the in-and-outs of getting a fire going and maintaining even temperatures.

In March we donned our best 1930s aprons for the Yearling program. Soon after came an invitation to join Stephanie Bartsch in the cook house at Dudley Farm. Stephanie has worked as a volunteer for over five years now and is a skilled caretaker of the Dudley family's beautiful old cast-iron stove. Val and I have spent some time at Dudley and a couple of weeks ago Stephanie joined us in Cross Creek to present a Cracker Holiday Feast for an enthusiastic crowd. The Cane Boil at Dudley will have us in our 1870s garb once again.

So now we are four—Val, Stephanie, Andi and I. Informally dubbed the Wood Stove Sisters we keep history alive, enjoy each other's company and teach some of the old ways. We are sure we have like-minded friends. Who wants to learn and share the kitchen skills of our ancestors before they are forgotten in a microwave, fast-food society?

What's Fresh Right Now?

- Bok choy—tatsoi
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Chayote
- Citrus—satsumas, grapefruit, orange, sour orange, meyer lemon, juices
- Cucumbers—mini seedless
- Fennel
- Garlic—chives, elephant
- Ginger
- Greens—collards, mustards, arugula, chard, mizuna, asian stir-fry mix
- Herbs—cilantro, parsley, dill, mint, allspice/curry/lime/bay/cinnamon leaf
- Honey
- Kale
- Kohlrabi
- Lettuce—salad mix, romaine
- Onions—white, sweet, green
- Peppers—red/green sweet bell, cubanelle, poblano, habanero
- Potatoes—small red/white
- Radish
- Shoots, Sprouts and Microgreens
- Squash—yellow crookneck, zucchini, pumpkin, calabaza
- Sunchokes
- Sweet Potatoes
- Tomatoes—grape, plum, beefsteak, green
- Turnips—white, purple-topped, golden
- Yuca (cassava)

Local and Fresh— Parsley

Tasty, yet often overlooked, parsley is not only a fabulous garnish, but a nutritious addition to raw and cooked recipes.

While curly parsley is very common, the flat-leaf variety is preferred for its great flavor and tender texture.

To store, wrap parsley in a paper towel and place in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Couscous Tabouleh

INGREDIENTS

- 1 ¼ cups water
- 1 cup pearl couscous
- 3 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, grated or pressed
- 1 cup finely chopped parsley
- ½ teaspoon kosher sea salt
- 2 cups each diced zucchini and tomato
- 2 cups seeded diced cucumber
- 3 Tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tablespoon fresh lime juice
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Bring water to a boil, add couscous, stir, cover, lower heat, simmer for 8 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool for 10 minutes.

Fluff couscous with fork. Stir in olive oil, garlic, parsley, and salt.

Place diced veggies in a large bowl. Stir in couscous mixture. Add lemon and lime juice, stir again and taste for seasoning.

Serve with fresh salad greens, feta cheese and toasted seeds or nuts



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Roasted Fish with Cornbread Stuffing

INGREDIENTS

1 whole fish, 3-4 pounds (ask fishmonger to butterfly fish to allow room for more stuffing)
salt and pepper
4 Tablespoons unsalted butter, softened (divided)
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
1/2 cup finely chopped shallot (onion or leek may be substituted)
4 cups crumbled cornbread (your favorite recipe, without sugar)
2 eggs, beaten well with 1/4 cup water
2 Tablespoons dried sage
2 Teaspoons each dried thyme and basil
1/4 cup fresh parsley, finely chopped

DIRECTIONS

Place fish in a large roasting pan and season inside and out with salt and pepper. Rub with 1 Tablespoon butter. Set aside.

Melt 1 Tablespoon butter in heavy skillet. Stir in celery and shallot. Sauté until softened. Mix into cornbread along with egg/water mixture, sage, thyme, basil and parsley.

Fill fish with cornbread stuffing, mounding excess alongside the fish and compacting lightly as needed. Melt remaining butter and pour over stuffing.

Bake 45 minutes or until done. Serve hot. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Apple Bake with Cheddar

INGREDIENTS

4 assorted apples, cored and cut into 1/2 inch dice
3 Tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
1 onion, sliced into half-rounds
4 ounces sharp cheddar, finely diced
coarsely ground salt and pepper

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees and lightly butter a casserole dish or small pie plate.

Melt one tablespoon butter in a heavy skillet. Add apples and sauté until just tender.

In a separate pan, melt butter, add onions and sauté over low heat until golden brown.

Layer apples in prepared dish with caramelized onions and diced cheddar. Dot the top with remaining tablespoon of butter and a light sprinkling of salt and pepper.

Bake 30 minutes, until cheddar is melted and top is beginning to brown.

Serve hot. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Tricks and Tips
We had mangrove snapper with cornbread stuffing for our Thanksgiving dinner this year. It was a big fish for just the two of us, so when we finished eating, I removed the chunks of leftover fish and then boiled the bones and skin to make stock for a pot of fish chowder. After straining, I added a couple of leeks and potatoes, plus the leftover fish. It reminded me of watching my mom use the holiday turkey carcass to make my dad's favorite—Turkey Rice Soup!

Tricks and Tips
The combination of apples, onions and cheddar is incredibly versatile. It can be baked by itself as written or piled into a tart or pie shell. But don't stop there—how about using it as a filling for handheld pastries? Imagine wrapping it in puff pastry, phyllo dough or empananda pastry crusts!

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New Cracker Cooking

Back in the day, Florida

Crackers used what they could gather and grow to create wonderful meals. Traditional Cracker cooking does not rely on store-bought items, but we modern cooks have easy access to so many more foods. To create New Cracker recipes, I try to mix the old and new. In our home, two or three kinds of cranberry sauces or relishes grace the holiday dinner table.

Combining local persimmons with traditional cranberries creates a dish with less sugar and new flavors!

Cranberry Persimmon Compote

INGREDIENTS

4 medium persimmons
2 bags cranberries, fresh or frozen
2 regular lemons OR one Meyer lemon, juiced and zested
1 1/2 cups demerara or raw sugar

DIRECTIONS

Use a small sharp knife to remove the green leaves from the persimmons. Cut persimmons into eighths and place in bowl of food processor.

Add cranberries, lemon juice and zest, and sugar. Pulse until persimmon pieces are about half the size of cranberry pieces (depending on the size of the food processor bowl, this may have to be done in batches).

Pour processed mixture into a large heavy saucepan, making sure to scrape the sides well to get all the sugar.

Over medium heat, bring mixture to a simmer and cook until sugar is melted and almost all the cranberries have burst. Stir well and remove from heat.

Cool before placing in airtight containers. Must be refrigerated. Will stay fresh for a week or two, so it may be made in advance!

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

- Side dish for holiday dinners
- Condiment with a cheese platter or on sandwiches
- Topping for ice cream, cheesecake or pound cake