

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Celebration Food

I don't know about your family, but both sides of my gene pool celebrated every occasion with food. Holidays, birthdays and anniversaries always required a special meal and, more often than not, an amazing dessert. While my childhood birthdays in South Florida were celebrated at our favorite restaurant, Piccolo's, these days I prefer to cook at home.

Our recent wedding anniversary was no exception, but not by choice. Have you ever tried to get a restaurant reservation in Gainesville during UF's Homecoming? Not a chance if you are a football fan and don't want to eat during the second half!

So off we went to shop for dinner and dessert. The grouper was local, the zucchini, shiitakes and basil were farmers market fresh and the carrot cake dessert was a mini French version of our wedding day delight by Publix. Add in the glass of wine and we were set.

We don't eat celebration food every day—between the calories and the cost, we can't afford that kind of decadence. But celebration food is always welcome and celebrating at home allows us a little more control over the amount of decadence it takes to celebrate.

Grouper Bake with Basil Lemon Butter

INGREDIENTS

1 pound grouper
salt and freshly ground pepper
1 Tablespoon olive oil
1 cup shiitake caps, sliced
1 shallot, minced
1 zucchini, halved lengthwise and sliced
8-10 basil leaves, sliced thinly, divided
juice of 1 lemon, divided
2 Tablespoons unsalted butter
pinch of coarse sea salt

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Season grouper and set aside at room temperature. Heat heavy-bottomed oven-proof skillet and add olive oil. Add shiitakes and sauté 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in shallot and zucchini and sauté another 5 minutes. Move veggies aside in skillet and place grouper fillet in open spot. Cover grouper with part of the veggies. Sprinkle with 1/4 of the sliced basil and 1/2 the lemon juice. Place in preheated oven and reduce heat to 350 degrees. Bake 20-30 minutes, depending on thickness of fillet, until fish flakes easily. Remove fish and veggies from hot skillet to a warm platter and cover to keep warm. Place hot skillet over medium heat and add lemon juice. Watch carefully until juice bubbles, remove from heat and swirl in remaining butter, stirring constantly until melted. Add basil and a pinch of salt, stir again and then pour over fish and veggies. Serve hot. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beans**—green, green/purple long
Bitter melon
Chestnuts
Cucumbers—slicers, kirby
Eggplants—purple italian, purple asian, fairy tale
Greens—collards, okinawa spinach, amaranth, tatsoi, white/red baby russian kale, mizuna, mustards, stir-fry mix
Herbs—garlic chives, turmeric, parsley, cilantro, rosemary, italian/lemon basil, peppermint, tulsi
Lettuce—bibb, romaine
Malanga
Moringa
Mushrooms—shiitakes, chanterelles, lion's mane, oyster, dried shiitakes/chanterelles
Okra—green, burgundy
Onions—yellow, green
Papaya—ripe, green
Peas—white acre, zipper/creamer, black-eye, pink-eye (purple hull)
Pears—sand, asian
Peppers—red/green/yellow/orange sweet bell, green/red jalapeño
Persimmon—astringent, non-astringent
Pineapple
Potatoes—red, white, small purple
Radishes
Roselle
Squash—green zucchini, acorn, butternut, yellow summer, seminole pumpkin
Sweet Potato
Taro
Tomatoes—plum, beefsteak, cherry, grape
Turnips
Yuca

Local and Fresh— Fuyu Persimmon

Northerners may be munching on apples right out of the orchard, but here in North Central Florida we have orchards of persimmons. Although native and cultivated persimmons grow here, non-astringent Fuyu are the most popular.

The medium-sized fruit is shaped like a tomato, with a green calyx and shiny orange skin. Dark seeds can be found in some varieties.

The entire fruit is edible, including the skin which is crisp like an apple's when the fruit is still firm. As it ripens, the fruit softens and the skin loses its shine. Ripe fruit should be refrigerated if not used right away.

Warm Persimmon Jalapeño Salsa

INGREDIENTS

- 4 very ripe persimmons
- 1 cup finely diced mango (frozen is fine)
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and diced
- 1 green onion, thinly sliced
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon honey (optional)
- pinch of salt

DIRECTIONS

Place all ingredients in a heavy-bottomed sauce pan and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Remove from heat and let sit at room temperature for 5-10 minutes before serving.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

Drizzle over roasted winter squash, seared scallops or grilled seafood.

Use as a dressing for a wilted spinach salad.

 <p>HAILE FARMERS MARKET</p> <p>Saturdays 830am - 12pm</p> <p>Haile Village Center www.hailefarmersmarket.com</p>	<p>Glades Ridge Goat Dairy Raw Milk and Cheese Hormone/Antibiotic Free Available Fresh or Frozen ACFM/441 Farmers Market Saturdays 8:30am - 1:00pm Union Street Farmers Market Wednesdays 4:00pm - 7:00pm Wholesome Food—Animal Consumption Only Lake Butler 386 266 7041 gladesridge.com</p>	<p>Henderson & Daughter Plants and Produce Thank you for your support! <i>Our season has ended, but we will see you out in the community and at the Alachua County Farmers' Market soon. Take good care of yourselves, and continue to be kind to one another.</i></p> <p>love is love. www.facebook.com/henderson.and.daughter</p>	<p>Alachua County FARMERS' MARKET</p> <p>Alachua County Farmers Market Saturdays 830am—1pm 5920 NW 13th Street www.441market.com</p>
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Savory French Toast

INGREDIENTS

2 large onions, chopped and sautéed in 2 Tablespoons olive oil until caramelized
3 eggs, lightly beaten
1 cup milk
pinch each salt and freshly-ground black pepper or cayenne
8 thick slices of locally-baked savory bread—carrot-onion, rosemary, sunflower, basil-tomato
1 Tablespoon each olive oil and unsalted butter
2 ounces mild white or swiss-type cheese, shredded
Warm Persimmon Jalapeño Salsa, syrup, jam or chutney, as desired

DIRECTIONS

Heat griddle or skillet over medium-high heat. Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Line a cookie sheet with parchment and place in oven.

Beat together eggs, milk and seasonings.

Add oil and butter to skillet or griddle to coat.

Dip each slice of bread into milk to soak for about 15 seconds on each side. Allow excess to drip off and place soaked slices directly onto heated griddle or skillet. Let cook 3-4 minutes, check for doneness and turn when brown. Cook until center is firm, not mushy, when pressed.

Place cooked slices in oven on heated cookie sheet.

Serve hot, with caramelized onions, a sprinkle of cheese and toppings as desired.

Zucchini Corn Chowder

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, diced
2 stalks celery, 2 zucchini and 2 medium red-skinned potatoes, diced
1 cup corn kernels
2 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
4-6 stems fresh thyme
3-4 cups no-chicken broth
1/4 cup cornstarch
1 cup cold whole milk

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a deep saucepan. Add all vegetables and stir. Sauté, stirring occasionally, until onions are translucent. Add thyme and enough broth to cover veggies. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for 45 minutes.

Mix cornstarch into milk and pour into soup. Return to boil, reduce heat and simmer without cover for 15 minutes. Serve hot. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Tricks and Tips

In order to properly caramelize onions there are two not-so-secret ingredients—time and patience. It takes 45 minutes over medium-low heat to achieve the deep color that distinguishes a truly caramelized onion. Caramelized onions are limp, sweet and reduced in volume. Take the time to do half a dozen onions at a time when you are in the kitchen, then refrigerate the leftovers in a glass jar. Use within a week.

Tricks and Tips

While chowders and soups are tasty dishes, sometimes their beauty is lost in the long cooking process. The easiest way to create a better presentation is to take a little extra time and care cutting the vegetables into similar shapes and sizes. While I do not want everything to match the size of a kernel of corn, the onion, celery, zucchini and potatoes can all be cut into pieces that are approximately the same size—in this case, all about 1/2 inch dice. The final result is a chowder that is easy to eat and beautiful to serve.



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Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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Tricks and Tips

We are in the thick of persimmon season right now, but before long it will just be a memory. While I love crunchy slices of firm non-astringent persimmons, that is a short-lived seasonal pleasure. Persimmon butter is a tasty and easy crockpot treat, but the simplest way to preserve the season is to store persimmon puree in the freezer. It is really easy to squeeze the juices and soft flesh from a ripe persimmon.

If the chunkier small "segments" won't work in a recipe, puree the pulp in the blender or food processor before freezing. Try freezing puree in ice cube trays and use the cubes to make frosty, fruity blender drinks.

Persimmon Pineapple Sauce

INGREDIENTS

- 5 very ripe persimmons
- 1 cup finely chopped pineapple with juice
- pinch sea salt
- 1-2 Tablespoons cane syrup, honey or maple syrup
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon

DIRECTIONS

Cut an "X" in the bottom of each persimmon and squeeze contents into a heavy-bottomed saucepan. Bring to a simmer over medium heat.

Stir in pineapple and juice and return to a simmer.

Add remaining ingredients and stir well to combine. Return to simmer, lower heat and cover. Let mixture simmer 30 minutes.

Uncover, stir and continue to simmer until desired thickness is achieved.

Remove from heat and let mixture cool slightly.

Serve warm.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

LEFTOVER RECIPES

Mix chilled sauce with plain yogurt.

Add sauce and chopped green onion to leftover brown rice or quinoa. Mix in fruit or veggies as desired and serve chilled on bed of greens.

Stir lemon juice or vinegar into sauce and brush onto fish or chicken before cooking.