



Boston University
Presents



The Deep South

With Shaun Chavis

Thanks for joining me in the kitchen for some Southern food! I have two major things I'd like to share with you: first is a little about the background of my home, the South. Second, we'll learn a bit from what Southerners ate in winter before everyone had refrigerators, freezers, electricity and grocery stores. And, of course, we're going to cook! And eat! Hopefully you'll learn some cooking skills you can carry with you through your life.

The Culture of the South

The Southern US is a product of a convergence of many different cultures: Native American, Europeans, and Africans, and increasingly now, Mexicans and Central / South Americans. Many people who live in the South have mixed heritage from these cultures.

The culture of the South takes elements from all these groups. Their influences can be seen in our language, music, and cooking.

There are words that we take from Native American languages and words from African languages: gumbo, goober, okra, yam, and succotash are examples.

The food of the South also combines elements of these cultures to create a unique cuisine. Both ingredients and techniques used in making Southern food come from the various cultures. In today's class, we'll talk about how elements in these dishes come together.

What Southerners Eat During Winter (*Before Electricity!)

A winter in the South is certainly not as harsh as a New England winter. Still, our growing season tapers off considerably after October, and before modern conveniences were available to everyone, a family had to plan ahead so they would have food to last through the winter and the beginning of spring before the first crops came in.

In the growing months, there is plenty of fresh food to eat. But families grew extra in order to store it for the winter. Most people down South used methods like home canning and curing to store foods. People also had root cellars, which were cool places where items like potatoes and onions could be stored for months. Many families would kill a hog and cure it. They would make things like ham and bacon, and would have enough to last them through winter. My father's family would kill a calf, and my grandmother would can the entire calf. It would take her four or five days and anywhere from 300 to 500 jars to do it! Southerners also canned vegetables and fruits, and made jam and pickles to help preserve enough food to last through winter. Today we'll make two dishes that reflect the type of cooking done with food put up for the winter.

Learning more about Southern food:

Southern Foodways Alliance: www.southernfoodways.com

Southern Food and Beverage Museum: <http://www.southernfood.org>

Sweet Tea

Southerners have a strong sweet tooth. Some say sweet tea helped to give people quick bursts of energy as they worked in the fields during the day, as well as quench thirst and cool them off. Some say that our tea is so sweet because sugar was once cheaper than tea. There are a zillion different ways to make sweet tea; everyone has their own method. This recipe is from author Fred Thompson. There are some secrets to good tea:

- * Don't put hot tea in the fridge or it will turn cloudy.
- * If you want the tea stronger, add more tea leaves or tea bags, don't steep it for a longer time. It will get bitter. If you want the tea weaker, cut the steeping time, not the amount of tea.
- * Adding a pinch of baking soda helps to soften the tannins.
- * Never squeeze the tea bags after you finish brewing, and never press on the leaves. It will make the tea bitter.
- * Please don't ever use bottled lemon juice! Use juice from fresh lemons, please.

6 regular size tea bags

1/8 teaspoon baking soda

2 cups boiling water

1 1/2 to 2 cups granulated sugar (if you're new to sweet tea, start with only 1 1/4 cups sugar)

6 cups cold water

1. Place the tea bags and baking soda in a glass measuring cup or a ceramic tea pot large enough to accommodate the boiling water. Pour the boiling water over the tea bags. Cover and let steep for 15 minutes.
2. Remove the bags. Pour the concentrate into a large pitcher and add the sugar. Stir until almost dissolved. Stir in the cold water.
3. Let it cool, then chill and serve over ice. (makes 2 quarts)

Hoppin' John Salad

Hoppin' John is a dish from the Carolina low-country that combines black-eyed peas and rice. Other than those two ingredients, there are many variations. There are many tales about how the dish got its name. One suggests that it is an invitation to enjoy a meal: "hop in, John!" Hoppin' John is usually served hot. We are making a salad with ours.

1 cup uncooked long - grain rice

1 can (15 - 16 ounces) blackeyed peas, drained and rinsed

1 cup diced red or yellow bell pepper

1 cup seeded, diced tomato

1/2 cup thinly sliced celery

1/2 cup thinly sliced scallions

3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice (2 lemons)

1/4 cup olive oil

salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl, and season to taste.

Oven Fried Chicken Fingers

2 skinless, boneless chicken breasts (you could also use skinless, boneless thighs)

1/2 cup buttermilk

juice from half a lemon

1/4 cup white flour

1 tablespoon paprika

1 teaspoon thyme

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper or white pepper

dash of ground cayenne pepper (optional)

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) butter

* Cut the chicken into 1-inch wide strips.

* Put the buttermilk and lemon juice in a bowl, or a plastic container with a lid, or a plastic zip-top bag. Add the chicken to the buttermilk. Put the chicken in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes (up to a few hours).

* Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.

* In another shallow container, mix the flour with the paprika, thyme, salt, pepper, and cayenne.

* Set up an "assembly line." The first position will be the chicken in the buttermilk. The second position will be the flour mixture. The third will be an empty plate or container for the coated chicken. Use one hand only for taking the chicken out of the buttermilk one piece at a time, and put it into the flour. Coat the piece of chicken all over with the flour. Now, with your other hand, take the chicken out of the flour, shake it a little to get rid of the excess flour, and put it on your empty plate. Repeat this for each piece of chicken.

* Put the butter in a frying pan or a shallow baking dish. Put it into the oven and let the butter melt. You want the butter to begin turning a little brown.

* Now, carefully put the chicken pieces into the pan with the melted butter. Remember, the pan is hot, so don't touch it without a potholder or towel. Also, remember the butter is hot. Drop it in slowly and deliberately so that you don't make a splash.

* Put the pan back into the oven and cook the chicken for six minutes.

* Open the oven and turn the chicken over with tongs. Cook the chicken for six more minutes, then remove from the oven.

* Some people would save the butter and the brown bits in the pan and use them to make gravy.

Tomato Casserole

This is a really easy recipe. In the summer find the juiciest tomatoes you can; peel them, and then just crush them with your hands or cut them into chunks into a casserole. Out of season, use canned tomatoes that taste really good. Because there are only a few ingredients in this recipe, you need really good tasting tomatoes.

6 cups fresh tomatoes peeled and diced, or two 14.5-oz cans of tomatoes
1/8 teaspoon finely ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup brown sugar
2 slices of bread – don't get fancy, just regular store-bought sliced white bread is perfect.
4 tablespoons of butter (1/2 stick), melted

- * Preheat the oven to 400-degrees F.
- * Tear the bread into bite-size pieces (or cut the bread into cubes).
- * Crush the tomatoes with your hands into bite-size chunks (or cut them) over a casserole dish. Be sure to include any tomato juice!
- * Sprinkle the tomatoes with the salt and pepper, and stir.
- * Put everything else on top of the casserole evenly– the sugar, bread, and pour the butter on top.
- * Bake at 400 degrees for 45 minutes to one hour. You want the bread to be brown and the casserole to be bubbly.

Sweet Potato Biscuits

Sweet potatoes are one of the vegetables that you can always find any time of year in the South. They are also incredibly nutritious. Sweet potato biscuits are good alone, with a meal, or as bread for a sandwich -- try it with smoked turkey or ham.

Biscuit making is another good cooking skill to have. These techniques are the same you'd use to make other quick breads like scones and muffins, and also pie crust. This recipe makes about 20 biscuits.

2 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
12 tablespoons cold butter or cold lard
1 cup mashed roasted sweet potatoes
1/3 cup half and half

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F, and line a baking sheet with parchment paper (or grease it).

In a mixing bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and sugar together. Add the butter, and with your hands, work the butter into the flour mixture until the mixture resembles a coarse cornmeal. Stir in the sweet potatoes. Add the half and half a little at a time until a soft dough is formed. Lightly flour a surface. Place the dough onto the surface and dust the top with flour. Lightly press the dough out to 1/2 inch thickness. Using a knife, cut the biscuits into squares. Place the biscuits on the baking sheet and bake for about 15 minutes or until the biscuits are golden brown.

Banana Pudding

If you are familiar with banana pudding, you probably know it as the dish made with Nilla Wafers. But banana pudding dates back to the 19th century. Bananas became widely known in the US around 1880. Banana pudding is really a trifle, which is a traditional British dessert made of layers of cake, fruit, and custard. You can see how banana pudding is a convergence of various cultures: the English dish made with a tropical fruit.

This is the old recipe. If you don't have or want to use pound cake, you can use shortbread or tea cakes. For adults, a nice addition is to sprinkle the slices of cake with bourbon or rum.

Serve 6 to 8

1 recipe pound cake, or sponge cake
bourbon or rum (optional)
4 bananas, peeled and sliced crosswise into 1/4 -inch thick rounds
1 recipe boiled custard (below)
4 egg whites (saved from making the custard)
3 tablespoons sugar

* Preheat the oven to 425-degrees F. Cut the cake into 1/2 inch thick slices and then cut the slices into 1/2-inch wide fingers.

* Cover the bottom and sides of a deep, 2-quart ovenproof dish with the cake. (Option: if you are using rum or bourbon, sprinkle the cake with a tablespoon of it.)

* Cover the bottom with a layer of sliced bananas, pour a third of the custard over them, and put in another layer of cake. Sprinkle this layer with another spoonful of liquor (optional) and cover it with bananas and another third of the custard. Repeat this, finishing the dish with the remaining custard. Set it aside.

* Put the egg whites in a metal or glass bowl that is very clean – there can't be any traces of oil or grease. Beat the egg whites until frothy. Add the sugar and continue beating until they form stiff, but not dry, peaks.

* Top the pudding with the meringue, swirling it decoratively as it suits you. Place it in the center of the oven and bake until the meringue is lightly browned, about 6-10 minutes. Don't overcook it, as longer baking could cause the custard to break and the bananas to throw off liquid, making the custard watery. Allow the pudding to cool before serving.

Recipe from *Classical Southern Cooking: A Celebration of the Cuisine of the Old South* by Damon Lee Fowler.

Stirred or Boiled Custard (Crème Anglaise)

This is a good basic recipe to know by heart, because you can make so many things with it. Once you learn this technique, you will also have the skills to make pudding, cream pie, flan, bread pudding, stratas, and crème brulee. When this custard is thin you can use it as a sauce to make desserts elegant; you can also use it as a base to make your own ice cream.

For our purpose (banana pudding), there are other recipes that call for flour or cornstarch in the filling. I think it tastes starchy. So here we are relying on the natural power of the eggs as a thickener, and I think the flavor is better.

Some secrets to success: make this over a double boiler to let it cook gently; don't let it boil; and stir it slowly in one direction. Sometimes you may have bits of cooked egg; if there isn't a lot then you can simply strain the custard. Also, the more eggs you use, and the heavier cream you use, the thicker this sauce will be.

Makes about 2 ½ cups

2 cups half and half
2 teaspoons vanilla extract OR 1 2-inch piece of vanilla bean
½ cup sugar
6 large egg yolks

- * Simmer some water in the bottom of a double boiler.
- * Put the half and half in an enamel or stainless-steel saucepan (do not use an aluminum pan). If you're using a vanilla bean, scrape out the inside and put both the seeds and the bean into the half-and-half. Put this over medium heat and bring almost to a boil. Turn off the heat. Remove the bean. If you're using vanilla extract, don't add it yet.
- * In the top half of the double boiler, beat the sugar and egg yolks together until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is light and smooth. Slowly pour about half a cup of the warm half-and-half into the eggs, beating the eggs constantly while you're pouring. Place the top of the double boiler over the simmering water.
- * Stir in the rest of the half-and-half, and stir the entire mixture slowly yet constantly with a wooden spoon. Stir until the mixture is thick enough that it will hold a line drawn through the custard on the back of the spoon. Remove the top boiler from the bottom and continue stirring until the mixture has cooled a little.
- * If you are using vanilla extract, stir it in now.
- * If you must wait to use this, put a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface of the custard to keep it from forming a skin.