

Hogtown HomeGrown™

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Dreams of an only child

Dad was the youngest of six children who lived to adulthood. Mom was the youngest of just two. The cousins on my Dad's side of the family were lovely, but it was often a year or three between our visits to their New England homes or their trips to our house in sunny South Florida. Most of Dad's cousins are older than me, so except for Aunt Lil's girls, Susan and Lisa, even though we were family, we were not close.

Mom's sister Nita, was closer geographically and her Christmas eve dinner for family and friends ensured that we made the 5-6 hour drive from South Florida to Georgia at least once a year. I was right in the chronological middle of her four living children, but my cousins' busy schedules meant that most family visits inspired me through all their activities but left me chatting with the adults.

Aunt Nita's household was my dream of what an only child thought a family should look like. Kids' busy schedules of sports practices and dance lessons would still allow them to gather with their friends in Nita's kitchen before heading out. Neighbors dropped in on a regular basis and I grew up knowing some of them as well as my cousins. A couple of those relationships carried on after they moved away from Georgia and ended up in Gainesville as our children's teachers. Small world, isn't it?

When our children were younger and I was earning a living caring for neighbors' children, our house was just as busy as my dreams. The screen door slammed on a regular basis as children came in for snacks or ran out to play. Little boys whose mothers were not home would stop by and stay as late as they could. Older girls would drop in to cuddle a baby, divulge a secret or ask a question they dare not ask their parents.

Our boys grew up and one by one their friends' visits were limited to pickups and drop-offs as they attended Scout, school and church activities. The house got quieter and the screen door slammed less while the food bill stayed the same. I took a job at a church where children and youth were the focus and spent quality time with those I came to call "my children that I didn't have to give birth to" but this was mostly at work.

Now they are all grown up, moved out and moved on—married with children and living hours away or engaged and living across the ocean. Jeff and I are the only ones at home now and it is very quiet. Years of traveling to Aunt Nita's for Christmas left our family without our own holiday traditions. Our sons and their families spend Christmas mornings in their own homes, so my dream of grandchildren gathering in front of our tree and fireplace on Christmas morning has never happened.

Yes, most of us talk from time to time, but that childhood dream of a house full of children and grandchildren is not our reality. We gather for weddings and funerals. The time between gatherings lengthens and as my mom ages, I am afraid that she will not see all of her family in one place again. To be truthful, I am not sure I will either.

Not all dreams come true...

We have our health, just enough money, our home, and friendships begun decades ago that still grace us daily. While the dreams of this only child have not come true, I am grateful every day for the friends, old and new, who fill in our empty spots with a patchwork of love.

What's Fresh Right Now?

Bananas

Bok choy

Broccoli

Brussels sprouts

Cabbage—green head, napa, tokyo bekana (napa-type)

Carrots—orange, yellow

Cauliflower

Celery

Citrus—oranges, grapefruit, lemons, tangerines, limequats

Eggplant—purple italian, fairytale, purple asian

Flowers—edible nasturtiums and pansies

Garlic—chives

Ginger

Greens—collards, tuscan/red/white russian kale, mustards, spinach, escarole, summerfest, chard, rappini, endive, turnip

Herbs—parsley, cilantro, curry leaf, thai basil, mint, thyme, tulsi, dill, kaffir lime, lemongrass

Honey—orange blossom, gallberry, wildflower, tupelo

Jicama

Kohlrabi

Legumes—shelled white acre/creamer peas, butter beans/small lima beans, purple hull (frozen)

Lettuces—spring mix, mizuna, arugula, red/green leaf, romaine, frisee, butter

Moringa

Mushrooms—shiitake, white/blue/yellow oyster, lion's mane, trumpet, dried shiitake

Onions—green

Papaya—green, ripe

Pecans

Peppers—green/red/purple bell, jalapeno, datil, aji dulce, bird's eye

Pineapple

Potatoes—red/white

Radish—red/purple globe, daikon, watermelon, black

Shoots and Sprouts

Squash—green/gold zucchini, yellow crookneck/summer, spaghetti, butternut

Starfruit

Sweet Potatoes

Tomatoes—grape, sun gold, yellow/red plum, green

Turmeric—orange/black

Local and Fresh— Meyer Lemons

As many of you know, I can kill plants with a look, but the big Meyer lemon tree in our back yard seems immune to my deadly touch. For the past few years, it has provided us with more than 30-50 lemons per season.

We squeeze, zest and gift all we can and still have fruit on the tree. The prolific crop reminds me of zucchini in August—many of our friends have bumper crops as well and don't want or need our lovely lemons.

In addition to these bars, I make lemonade and Meyer Lemon Honey Jelly to use up our bounty. While the low-acid juice sometimes isn't tart enough for some recipes, with the rising prices of grocery store lemons, I am grateful for our generous tree.

Frozen Creamy Lemon Bars

INGREDIENTS

2 cups fresh Meyer lemon juice and zest
1 can coconut sweetened condensed milk
1/4 cup coconut milk
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

Line an 8x8 pan with two pieces of foil to create a sling.

Use a whisk to mix ingredients together until smooth.

Pour into prepared pan.

Freeze until firm. Remove frozen bars from pan with foil and place into a freezer zip-top bag for storage.

Remove bars from freezer and cut just prior to serving. Garnish with Lemon Cranberry Sauce or Relish and non-dairy whipped topping.

Cover and freeze leftovers.

VARIATIONS

Use regular dairy-based sweetened condensed milk, cream and topping.

Substitute sour orange or lime juice and zest for Meyer lemon juice and zest.

Serve with mixed berries marinated in orange or lemon liqueur.

Crab, Veggie and Orange Casserole

INGREDIENTS

6 scallions, thinly sliced
1 cup grated carrot
1 cup grated yellow squash or zucchini
1 orange, zested and juiced (divided)
1/3 cup mayonnaise
1-2 Tablespoons dark mustard
1-2 teaspoons horseradish (optional)
2 eggs
1 cup bread or cracker crumbs
1 pound claw crabmeat, picked through for shell and cartilage pieces
Salt and freshly ground pepper
Topping: 2 Tablespoons melted unsalted butter and 1/2 the orange juice

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Oil an 8x8 baking pan.
In a large bowl combine scallions, carrot, squash, all the orange zest and 1/2 the juice. Stir in mayonnaise, mustard, horseradish and eggs until completely incorporated.
Add bread crumbs and crab meat. Season with salt and pepper and lightly mix until completely combined.
Spoon into prepared baking dish and lightly smooth until surface is even.
Make the topping by combining melted butter with remaining orange juice and a pinch of salt. Pour over the top of crab-veggie mixture.
Bake 30 minutes. Remove from oven and let sit 5 minutes before cutting and serving.
Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Fennel Waldorf Salad with Pecans

INGREDIENTS

2 cups red or green grapes (small to medium size or cut in half)
3 cups apples, cut into grape-sized pieces
1 cup fennel, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
1/2 cup pecans, toasted, cooled and coarsely chopped
2-3 Tablespoons cole slaw or poppyseed dressing

DIRECTIONS

Mix together grapes, apple and fennel. Add pecans and dressing. Stir well to combine completely. Cover and refrigerate before serving.
Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Lemon Cranberry Relish

INGREDIENTS

1 Meyer lemon
12 ounces cranberries
3/4 - 1 cup granulated sugar

DIRECTIONS

Cut Meyer lemon in eight pieces. Place in food processor.

Add cranberries to food processor.
(If using frozen cranberries, thaw first for best results.)

Pulse a few times and then process to desired consistency.

Remove from food processor and stir in sugar. Start with the smaller amount, stir it into the fruit mixture and let sit 10-15 minutes before stirring again and tasting.

Add additional sugar, if necessary.

Cover and store in refrigerator.

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Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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Saturday, April 18th	9:30-11am

Lemon Cranberry Sauce

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup Meyer lemon juice
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 12 ounces cranberries

DIRECTIONS

In a deep saucepan, bring juice and brown sugar to a simmer.

Add cranberries, bring to a boil, reduce heat and, stirring occasionally, cook until all berries have burst.

Pour warm sauce into jar or serving bowl. Cool at room temperature, then cover and refrigerate.

Lemon Cranberry Loaf

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 cup sugar
- Zest of one Meyer lemon
- 1 cup Lemon Cranberry Sauce or Relish
- 1 cup unsweetened smooth applesauce
- 4 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup fresh cranberries
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup pecans, toasted and chopped

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350. Lightly oil two loaf pans.

In a large bowl beat sugar into oil. Add lemon zest and cranberry sauce or relish and stir until combined. Add applesauce and beat until completely incorporated.

In a separate bowl, mix together flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt.

Add flour mixture to wet ingredients and stir until a few streaks of flour remain. Stir in vanilla, fresh and dried cranberries and chopped pecans. Stir to distribute evenly.

Smooth into prepared pans.

Place pans in preheated oven and bake 40-60 minutes. Cooking time depends on size of loaf pans. Check for doneness with a toothpick.

Remove from pan to cool.

Wrap well and serve the next day for best results or freeze.

Cover leftovers and eat within a week or freeze up to six months.