

Hogtown HomeGrown

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A tale of two birthdays

One of our grands recently turned six and on the same day a good friend celebrated his sixty-seventh trip around the sun. Luckily, even though one celebration was in a cabin at Lake Louisa State Park in Clermont and the other in our living room, we were able to make both birthdays special. And yes, I cooked for both!

Turning six is a milestone, so our grand spent the night in our cozy cabin, braving the cold to sit outside by a campfire 'til bedtime. Since her early-rising little sister was at home, she enjoyed sleeping in until 7am. After a freezing sunrise walk, we warmed up with coffee while she had a grown-up cup of peppermint tea with honey! Family tradition encourages celebrating birthdays for a week and with three cakes, so her parents and siblings joined us for a birthday breakfast. Actually it was a Birthday Pancake Extravaganza, with dozens of small pancakes and three fruit toppings. Wishes made, candles extinguished, pancakes consumed and dishes washed, the tired grandparents were off on our two hour drive home.

A busy afternoon left only an hour to put together the 67 year old's birthday dinner and dessert. We sat down to creamy slabs of Baked Garlic Cheese Grits topped with Saucy Shrimp and accompanied by a Roasted Cauliflower Carrot and Salad. For this friend, a meal is not complete without bread and butter, so we had a small round loaf of crusty bread and softened butter to slather as desired. For dessert and a chance to make a wish, the birthday "candleholder" was a pan of Date Nut Bars—medjool dates, toasted pecans and maple syrup.

So two meals in two different kitchens and I was still relaxed and happy, because I relied on two things—planning ahead and food I had "put by" in our freezer. For the Birthday Pancake Extravaganza, I measured the ingredients the night before and while I made eight pancakes at a time on my electric griddle, I kept the cooked ones warm on a preheated foil-lined cookie sheet in the oven. As for the fruit toppings, each was frozen while in season during the past year—sliced strawberries mixed with a touch of honey, sliced mangoes with a bit of maple syrup, and the blueberries were put by from a big batch of warm berry sauce. Nothing easier than thawing or reheating something straight out of your own freezer!

Dinner was planned days in advance, beginning with an extra large batch of grits which created enough leftovers to cool in a large flat baking dish. Shrimp were purchased peeled and frozen, left in the refrigerator to thaw while we were in the cabin, and were ready to cook after a helper removed the tails. I did have to make the salad and date nut bars, but since the oven was on to heat the grits, I went ahead and filled it up.

Which brings us to that crusty loaf of bread—I pulled it from the freezer to warm in our hot oven. Saved for a special occasion, this was a boule I bought in a bakery in Strasbourg, France on the last day of the river cruise Mom and I took in May. I travel with ziptop freezer bags, purchase sturdy baked goods that will travel well and zip them up to bring them home. Once home, I wrap them in foil and put them back into their labeled bag. I speak no French and the bakery clerk spoke no English, so this purchase was labeled "unknown boule." It proved to be a pumpkin seed, whole wheat loaf that delighted all the birthday diners.

Putting food by in season makes financial sense and the cook's life easier. Putting by food souvenirs is a way to share memories while making any meal special. There's nothing better than sharing a story like the "unknown boule" while breaking bread with friends!

What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beets**
- Bitter Melon**
- Bok Choy**
- Broccoli**—green, romanesco
- Cabbage**—green, napa, red
- Carrots**—orange, yellow, white, red, orange thumbelina
- Cauliflower**—white, cheddar, green, purple
- Chard**—white, rainbow
- Citrus**—orange, grapefruit, lemon, tangerines, tangelos, kumquats, calamondin, limes
- Greens**—mustards, mizuna, arugula, turnip, collard, spinach, tat tsoi
- Herbs**—garlic chives, turmeric, flat leaf parsley, cilantro, dill
- Honey**
- Kale**—dino, curly, tuscan, red/white russian
- Lettuce**—red/green romaine, red/green leaf, bibb
- Moringa**
- Mushroom**—fresh/dried shiitakes
- Onion**—yellow, green
- Peas**—white acre, snow, sugar snap
- Peppers**—shishito, red/green/yellow/orange/mini sweet bell, poblano, jalapeño, variety hot
- Radish**—red, watermelon, easter egg, french breakfast, white/purple daikon, black
- Rutabaga**
- Shoots, Sprouts and Microgreens**
- Sweet Potatoes**—orange, white, purple
- Tomatoes**—cluster, large plum, sun gold, cherry, green
- Turnips**—purple top, tokyo
- Yuca** (also known as cassava or manioc)

It's Citrus Time!

This is the time of year when Florida citrus is flooding our markets. Since the season is short, but the year long, be sure to put by some of that citrus goodness. I freeze zest for use in baked good and juices for everything from marinades to lemonade.

Local and Fresh— Carrots

Orange, yellow, purple and red, a rainbow of carrots have been making their welcome appearance at our local farmers markets. In addition to the traditional long, slender varieties, one farmer is growing the cutest little Thumbelina carrots, perfect for serving whole.

Incredibly popular and versatile, these nutritious and tasty root vegetables are loaded with beta-carotene and Vitamin A, yet even toddlers will eat them!

Look for firm carrots and, if the greens are attached, they should be fresh and bright. Carrot greens may be eaten raw or cooked.

Roasted Cauliflower and Carrot Salad

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups small cauliflower florets
- 2 cups shredded carrot
- 1/2 cup fresh lemon and lime juice
- 1/2 cup flat leaf parsley leaves
- Coarse ground salt (optional)

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
- Heat a heavy-bottomed oven-proof pan over medium heat.
- Add cauliflower florets in one layer and let cook undisturbed until pieces begin to brown.
- Stir in carrots, place pan in hot oven and roast until cauliflower is crisp-tender.
- Remove from pan and allow to cool.
- Toss with lemon and lime juice, add parsley and salt, if desired, and stir to distribute.
- Serve at room temperature.
- Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

 <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</p> <p>Booth #4 Alachua County Farmers' Market at 441</p> <p>Oranges: red/white navel, hamlin, ambersweet, parson brown Grapefruit: white (Marsh seedless), pink (Thompson), red (ruby red)</p> <p>Tangerines: satsuma, sunburst, chinese honey dancy Specialty: orlando tangelo, meiwa kumquat Acid: calamondin, meyer lemons, bearrs lemons, sour orange</p> <p><i>*All grown without pesticides or herbicides</i> We look forward to seeing you! www.facebook.com/henderson.and.daughter</p>	<p>Alachua County FARMERS' MARKET</p> <p>Alachua County Farmers Market</p> <p>Saturdays 830am—1pm 5920 NW 13th Street www.441market.com</p>
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Saucy Shrimp

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 shallot
2 green onions
8 ounces sliced mushrooms
1 cup grape tomatoes
1 cup white wine
1/2 cup fino sherry
1 pound peeled shrimp
2 Tablespoons butter
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil over medium-low heat in a heavy bottomed skillet with a cover.

Add shallot, green onions, mushrooms and tomatoes. Stir well to coat with oil. Cover and cook 15-30 minutes until all veggies are tender and the released juices have created a sauce.

Add wine and sherry, bring to boil and stir in shrimp. Reduce heat to low, cover and cook 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until shrimp are opaque. Remove from heat.

Stir in butter, one Tablespoon at a time to thicken sauce. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Serve immediately.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers

Baked Garlic Cheese Grits

INGREDIENTS

6 cups leftover Garlic Cheese Grits (May 2009)
1/2 cup shredded cheese (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Pour freshly made grits into buttered baking pan. Let cool to room temperature, then cover and refrigerate up to 4 days. Remove from refrigerator two hours before time to serve.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Place covered pan of grits in oven and bake covered for 45 minutes.

Uncover grits and, if using, sprinkle with cheese. Bake an additional 15 minutes until grits are hot and cheese is melted.

Cut into squares and use a spatula to plate portions.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Topping Ideas: Saucy Shrimp - roasted vegetables - chili - fried or poached eggs

Green Curried Cauliflower Soup

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil
4 green onions, chopped
2 Tablespoons each chopped garlic, ginger, turmeric and jalapeño (optional)
2 cups broth
4 cups water
2 cup each chopped carrots and sweet potato
6 cups chopped cauliflower
1 can coconut milk
2 Tablespoons green thai curry paste

DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil in stock pot over medium heat. Sauté shallot and green onion until limp. Stir in garlic, ginger, turmeric and, if using, jalapeño. Cook one minute, stirring continuously. Add broth and water. Bring to a boil. Add carrots, sweet potato and cauliflower. Return to boil, stir well, cover pot, lower heat and simmer until carrots are tender. Let cool a little and then puree in blender with coconut milk and curry paste. Return to pot and heat before serving. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.



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Tricks and Tips

Bar cookies with dates and nuts are a longtime family favorite and a certain friend craves them beyond reason. However, until I made this batch, I have always made the various recipes using pre-chopped dates, raw walnuts and honey. Now that I have discovered how easy it is to pit and chop medjool dates myself, I will never use the dextrose-covered pieces of pre-chopped dates again! As for the rest of the recipe, I was out of walnuts, but happy to discover the flavor of toasted pecans was even better, plus they make the bars local! The maple syrup was tasty, but local honey is a good choice too!

Date Nut Bars

INGREDIENTS

1 cup pitted chopped medjool dates
2 cups toasted pecans, chopped
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
pinch salt
2 eggs
1/2 cup maple syrup
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly oil or butter an 8x8 baking pan.

Mix together dates and pecans in a large bowl. Set aside.

Stir together flour, baking powder and salt. Add to date pecan mixture and stir well to coat completely.

Beat together eggs, maple syrup and vanilla. Pour over date mixture and stir until no flour traces are visible.

Push batter into prepared pan. Use the back of a spoon to smooth into an even layer.

Bake 30-45 minutes. Bars are cooked when edges are browned and center is firm to the touch. Traditional doneness tests using a toothpick are not accurate due to the sticky nature of the cooked bars.

Cool at least 15 minutes before serving. Bars cut more easily when completely cooled.

Cover leftovers. Store at room temperature for up to 4 days or refrigerate.