

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Blackberries and fireflies

Summertime at Granny's—cool humid Georgia mornings giving way to blazing hot afternoons and evenings. Full days doing things I never did at home—picking tomatoes, counting cows, stripping peas and beans from green pods, chasing fireflies—a girl from the suburbs of South Florida, having fun in the country.

My mornings were leisurely. When I got up, Granny let me make egg concoctions—testing flavor combinations only I would eat. She got up very early, leaving a pan of buttered biscuits ready to toast under the broiler and a jar of sweet and juicy sliced fresh peaches—she had eaten hours before and was already busy in the garden.

Lunch was the big meal of the day. While Granny was in the garden, pots bubbled away on the stove and pans were lined up on the counter waiting to go in the oven. Fresh produce was the main event at lunch—ripe tomatoes, peeled and sliced, okra fritters, fresh peas or beans—and always biscuits or cornbread—sometimes both! It was a feast—washed down with sweet tea and followed by enough dessert choices to make you swoon.

Afternoons were either spent on the porch, talking and picking peas, or driving in the country—visiting cemeteries and family headstones, filling up gallon jugs with spring water, driving through the pasture to count the cows (try counting over a hundred moving objects!) and, eventually, learning to drive on a mud-slick clay road.

Car trips with Granny always had frequent stops—"check that wild plum tree for ripe fruit", "can you see that field of beans/peppers/corn just coming up?", "look a there, ripe blackberries." We always seemed to bring something home—even if it was a just a clean tissue filled with ripe blackberries.

Evenings meant an early supper, usually lunch leftovers, and lots of time—to talk, to sit and watch the light change as the sun went down, to wait for the cool breeze that almost never came, and to chase fireflies. I would fill a jar, bring them inside and sit at the kitchen table, eating my stash of blackberries by the light of the fireflies. Then I would let them go free and hop into bed with a book. Summers have never been the same since.

Granny's Cobbler

INGREDIENTS

4 cups peeled, sliced peaches (about 8-10)	1 cup water
1/2 cup brown sugar	1 cup whole wheat flour
1/4 cup brown sugar	1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons butter	1 cup buttermilk

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. On the stove, heat peaches, water and 1/2 cup brown sugar in oven proof pan, until very bubbly. In a bowl, mix remaining dry ingredients together, cut in butter, and lightly blend in buttermilk until a soft dough is formed. Plop spoonfuls on top of simmering peaches and bake until topping is firm, about 30 minutes.

Fresh Peach Bellinis

Puree 2 cups of Juicy Peaches. Pour 1/4 cup into champagne flute. Top with chilled Asti Spumante, prosecco or champagne. Non-alcoholic versions use carbonated soft drinks—the bubbles are the secret ingredient!

Herbs

Nothing is quite as aromatic as a shopping tote full of fresh herbs. The variety available now just inspires new recipes.

Basil

Thai Basil

Thyme

Lemongrass

Oregano

Peppermint

Spearmint

Sage

Rosemary

Catnip

Flat-leaf parsley

Curly parsley

Cilantro

Dill

When you get your herbs home, rinse in cool water and wrap the damp herbs in towels or paper towels. Store refrigerated in plastic bags.

Local and Fresh—Peaches

There are about a dozen peach varieties successfully grown commercially in Florida and almost all were developed at the University of Florida since 1952. Most are freestone peaches and grow from one type of disease-resistant root stock. Cling peaches, found mostly in other states, have flesh that clings to the seed, but freestone peaches separate easily from the pit. Florida peaches are special—they must require fewer cold days and trees must flower and fruit before summer's rains, heat and diseases. There are a few u-pick peach orchards in our area, so get out there and pick a bushel!

Juicy Peaches—Peel and slice 12 ripe, but not mushy, peaches. Place in bowl and mix in 1/2 cup sugar and the juice of 1/2 lemon. Let sit at room temperature for up to 2 hours or refrigerate for up to 72 hours. Can be frozen. Want a sweeter cobbler? Start with 4 cups of Juicy Peaches!

What's Fresh Right Now?

Beans—roma, green, filet, yellow wax, cranberry, lima, butter

Berries—blueberries, strawberries

Cabbage—green, savoy, red

Carrot—bunches

Citrus—orange, grapefruit

Corn—bi-color, silver queen, yellow

Cucumbers—mini seedless, traditional

Eggplant—white/purple Italian, oriental

Fennel

Garlic—chives, dried heads

Greens—curly tuscan/red Russian kale, escarole hearts, sorrel

Lettuce—green head, arugula, romaine, frisee

Melons—cantaloupe, watermelon

Mushrooms—shitake

Okra

Onions—sweet, red, green scallions, leeks

Peas—black-eye, pink-eye

Peppers—green/red sweet bell, cubanelles, jalapeno, poblano

Potatoes—sweet, red skin

Radishes—globe, daikon

Roots and Greens—red/golden beets

Squash—summer, crookneck, zucchini, patty pan, spaghetti, acorn

Tomatoes—cluster, beefsteak, sun gold/yellow cherry

Grilled Peach Bake

INGREDIENTS

8 peaches, halved and seeded

1/4 cup rum or orange juice

1/4 cup Gran Marnier or orange juice

1/4 cup brown sugar

1 Tablespoon orange zest

1 Tablespoon unsalted butter, melted

1 cup Junselle's Turkish Gold

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Preheat grill to medium-high heat.

Place peaches skin side down and grill 3-5 minutes. Using tongs, turn peaches and grill another 3-5 minutes, or until distinct grill marks appear. Place grilled peaches in a buttered oven-proof casserole, skin side down.

Combine liquids with sugar, zest and butter. Scatter Turkish Gold over the top of the grilled peaches, then drizzle liquid mixture over all peaches, making sure to distribute it evenly. Bake at 350 degrees for about 20 minutes until peaches are soft and topping is crunchy.

Variation—Mix together 1/4 cup whole wheat flour, 1/2 cup brown sugar, 3/4 cup oatmeal, 3/4 cup sliced almonds, 2 tablespoons melted butter and 1/4 cup Gran Marnier or orange juice. Place on top of peaches and bake at 350 degrees until topping is lightly browned.

Grilled Wahoo with Peach-Beet Salsa

INGREDIENTS

2 beets, boiled or roasted	2 ripe peaches, peeled
1 orange, zested and juiced	1 lemon, zested and juiced
1 Tablespoon onion, minced	1 Tablespoon cubanelle pepper, minced
1 teaspoon jalapeno pepper, minced	1/2 teaspoon salt
1 pound wahoo, or other firm-fleshed fish	1 teaspoon olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Dice beets and peaches into similar sizes. Mix with juices, zests, onion, peppers and salt. May be refrigerated in a covered, non-metallic bowl up to 48 hours before serving.

Preheat grill to 450 degrees. Rub wahoo with olive oil and season with salt and pepper if desired. Place wahoo on hot grill—do not move it for five minutes. Flip fish to other side and continue to cook to desired doneness—remember, it will continue to cook after being removed from heat. Serve sliced with salsa on the side. Try it on a bed of salad greens for a complete meal.

Tricks and Tips

Yes, this is a very pink salsa! It is sweet and hot, with tons of vitamins from the beets and peaches. The cubanelle pepper isn't hot, but you can increase or decrease the heat by adjusting the amount of jalapeno pepper.

Herbed Gnocchi

INGREDIENTS

1 pound fresh or frozen gnocchi	6 ounces soft goat cheese
1 Tablespoon unsalted butter (optional)	1/2 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/2 cup fresh basil	2 Tablespoons fresh oregano
1 Tablespoon fresh thyme	4 fresh peppermint leaves (optional)
1/2 teaspoon salt	1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Finely chop all herbs, combine together and chop again until very fine. Place in bottom of a large ceramic bowl. Break up goat cheese and butter into small pieces on top of herbs. Bring 4-6 quarts of water to boil in a large pot. Add gnocchi and cook until they float. Reserve 1 cup of starchy cooking water. Carefully drain gnocchi and add to herbs and cheeses in bowl. Pour in 1/2 the reserved water and mix lightly until well-combined and creamy—it will work, trust me! Add more water if sauce is sticky. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper, if desired. Serve immediately or cover for up to 15 minutes before serving.

Variation—Pasta—This recipe works with any favorite pasta. Just cook pasta to desired doneness, reserve cooking water, drain and toss with herbs and cheese. Since the pasta is hot, you will probably need all the reserved water to keep the sauce creamy. Serve immediately or the pasta will absorb all the sauce and become sticky.

Variation—Vegies—Toss steamed vegies with herbs and cheese. The butter is optional with this variation, and it needs less water, but you will probably need both salt and pepper.

Tricks and Tips

Gnocchi is another of my infamous cooking disasters. I have tried several times since childhood to recreate the light, delicious potato pasta, with no luck. Now, I don't need luck—fresh gnocchi is available at Dorn's. Just call ahead to see if they have it in stock. It sure is easier than making it from scratch!

Hogtown HomeGrown

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HogtownHomeGrown.com

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hogtownhomegrown@gmail.com



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Tricks and Tips

Many families have their own way of making cornbread. I use just cornmeal for cornbread—but not for corn muffins.

The flour provides that extra bit of body and chewy texture.

Sugar is another point of contention—Yankee cooks swear by sugar—I'm not brave enough to tackle that debate!

Blueberry Corn Muffins

INGREDIENTS

2 cups finely ground white cornmeal

1/3 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 cup oil

1 1/2 cups Kurtz's drinkable yogurt

1/2 cup unbleached flour

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 eggs

1 cup blueberries

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare a 12 cup standard size muffin pan.

Mix together dry ingredients in a large bowl. Stir together wet ingredients, oil, eggs and yogurt, beating until eggs are thoroughly combined. Pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and stir until a few small streaks of flour remain. Gently fold in blueberries and mix until flour streaks are gone and blueberries are distributed—stir as little as possible for tender muffins.

Scoop into prepared pan—fill each muffin cup about 2/3 full. Bake in preheated oven for about 20–25 minutes—a toothpick will test clean. Tilt in pan to cool. Store in air-tight container at room temperature.

Variation—substitute 1 1/2 cups of buttermilk for drinkable yogurt.