

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Inside this issue:

Steamed Shrimp 1

Farmer's Market Update 2

Florida Pears 2

Sweet Potato Facts 2

Sweet Potato Casserole 3

Vegan Fall Harvest Thai Curry 3

Sweet Potato Pie 4

The Perfect Fall Saturday in Gainesville

Every fall, I have one perfect "Gainesville" Saturday—this year that Saturday is November 4th, the first day of the Downtown Fall Festival and Art Show. When I get up that morning, there always seems to be a nip in the air. I'm up early to walk the dog, feed the animals and read the Gainesville Sun—then I'm off.

The first stop every Saturday is the Alachua County Farmer's Market on 441, across from the Highway Patrol Station. Although I have my favorite stands, I try to buy something from as many different farmers as possible. By the time I can't carry any more, my Farmer's Market cash is usually gone, so it's time to move on....

After I drop the produce at home, the next stop is downtown for the Hippodrome Cinema Poster Sale. This is their Fifth Annual Sale! I love the movies/films (I'm not getting into that debate!) they show and there's always a poster or two I want to add to our growing collection.

At this point the artists and exhibitors are setting up the art show, so I take a quick power walk through the vendors, noting places I want to be sure to visit with my husband when he gets back on Sunday.

There's one more stop on the way home, Northwest Seafood, to pick up one pound of the freshest shrimp in the case. Then I head home...

This whole Perfect Fall Saturday idea started five years ago when my husband and sons were out of town during the Downtown Festival. I actually had TIME ALONE! I took the time to spoil myself and I liked it so much that when the next year came and they were gone, I just knew how to have *my* perfect day!

Time to make dinner, which needs to chill for a while (see the recipe below), but once I have it in the fridge, my time's my own. The air which had a nip this morning has definitely turned warm. I sit on the porch watching the birds and listen to the Gator game on the radio. Just about the time the Gators have won and the sky is turning pink from the sunset, it's time for dinner—one pound of perfectly cooked shrimp, one dish of Seminole Foods Cocktail Sauce (they use the best horseradish) and one icy cold Corona beer with a wedge of lime. I sit on the porch, peel and eat the shrimp, drink the beer and say to myself, "This has been the Perfect Fall Saturday in Gainesville. I can't wait for next year!"

Perfect Fall Saturday Shrimp

INGREDIENTS

One pound of fresh shrimp per person

Seminole Cocktail Sauce or your favorite dip

EQUIPMENT

Large pot and steamer basket

Rinse the shrimp, place in steamer basket and place in pot with just enough water to steam. (The water shouldn't touch the shrimp) Steam until the shrimp are bright pink, opaque and firm. Once the water boils, it is usually 3-5 minutes at most.

Place steamer basket with shrimp in the refrigerator to chill for at least an hour or two, depending on how cold you like them. Peel and eat!

It's Local, It's Fresh, It's Florida Pears

Last week at the Farmer's Market I found a special once-or-twice-a-year treasure—Florida Pears!

Tricks and Tips

Just like apples, pears can turn brown when cut surfaces are exposed to air. Sprinkle lemon juice on cut fruit or drop pieces into cold water mixed with a little lemon juice.

Admittedly, they are ugly, but the flesh is sweet, crunchy and juicy—similar in fact to an Asian Pear. I cook them sort of like baked apples to bring out all the flavor. The farmer who sold them to me said that she was going to pick some more and make a cobbler with hers.

Here's my simple "non-recipe" recipe.

Wash, quarter and core the pears. (Peeling is optional, but most people would prefer to avoid the tough skin that helps the pears deal with the brutal Florida heat.) Place in a baking dish and add a few raisins or dried cranberries for color and flavor. Pour apple or cranberry juice (only 100% juice) to a depth of 1/2 inch surrounding the pears. Drizzle with honey or maple syrup. Bake covered at 350 degrees until the pears are fork tender, about 60-90 minutes.

Can be served alone, as a side dish to roast meats, or as a dessert—with ice cream or on top of a plain cake, like my Aunt Mae's Poundcake. Make sure to drizzle some of the "pan juices" over the top of the ice cream or cake.

What's fresh right now at the Farmer's Market?

Sweet potatoes are a great first food for babies—just mash boiled or baked sweet potatoes 'til smooth for the young ones or cube cooked potatoes for older toddlers' finger food.

Sweet Potatoes

Okra

Eggplant

Onions

Cucumbers

Tomatoes

Yellow Squash

Green Beans

Basil

Elephant Garlic

Green Peppers

Lots of herbs and plants

During the winter the selection is not as bountiful, but it is still worth a trip for produce that was grown locally and picked recently. Don't forget the Downtown Farmer's Market on Wednesday afternoon at the Sun Center near the Hippodrome and the Haile Plantations Village Farmer's Market on Saturday morning.

Sweet Potatoes

The sweet potatoes I bought at the Farmer's Market will be used for three separate dishes—Sweet Potato Casserole, Vegan Fall Harvest Thai Curry, and Sweet Potato Pie.

Sweet potatoes are full of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron and thiamin and they taste good too! Make sure you choose potatoes with a deep orange color for maximum vitamins and flavor.

We eat them baked right in their skins, just like a baked potato. They bake just as well in the microwave as the oven. Instead of the butter and sour cream which add fat and calories to your baked potato, try a sweet potato with a drizzle of honey, a splash of maple syrup or a dollop of applesauce. Purists will enjoy it split open with a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Next time you have the oven on, just throw in a few sweet potatoes to bake. After you wash them, either wrap them in foil or place right on the oven rack. (Sometimes they tend to leak sticky juices, so if you place a sheet of foil on the rack below the potatoes, you don't have to clean the oven or smell the burning juices.)

Sweet Potatoes—not just for Thanksgiving!

Sweet Potato Casserole

Wash, peel and coarsely chunk 5-6 medium sweet potatoes (a medium sweet potato is just a little larger than your fist). Boil in a large saucepan until fork tender and drain in a colander. Set aside.

In the same pan, mix 1/2 cup orange juice, 1/4 cup sugar and 1 Tablespoon butter. Stir constantly while heating over medium-high heat until bubbly. Remove pan from heat, add sweet potatoes and mash into orange juice mixture until it is as smooth as you want it (we like it a little chunky). Place in buttered casserole dish and bake for 20-30 minutes at 350 degrees. Serves 4-6 as a side dish.

Optional Toppings

Marshmallows—after baking 20 minutes, cover sweet potatoes with mini or large marshmallows and bake until golden brown. Serve immediately.

Pecan Crumble—In a small bowl mix 1/2 cup flour, 1/2 cup sugar 1/2 cup melted butter (1 stick) and 1 cup chopped pecans. Before baking casserole, spread the pecan crumble over the top. Bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees. Can be served hot or warm. Also good as a dessert with a ice cream or whipped cream.

Tricks and Tips

Sweet Potato Casserole tastes good hot, warm or room temperature, so it is an “easy on the cook” potluck or Thanksgiving side dish.

Vegan Fall Harvest Thai Curry

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, red, yellow or sweet
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 ribs celery, chopped
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1 butternut or acorn squash, peeled and chopped
- 1 parsnip, chopped (can substitute carrot)
- 1 large apple or pear, chopped
- 1 can (15 oz.) garbanzo beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1 can (13.5 oz) light coconut milk
- 1-2 tablespoons (or more) Thai Red Curry Paste*
- 15-20 leaves fresh basil (Thai variety is best), chopped
- 6 scallions/green onions, chopped

Set aside green onions and 1/2 the basil for garnish.

In a large (6 quart) stockpot over low heat, sauté onions in oil until soft and clear, about 30 minutes, stirring once or twice. (You can do it faster, but the flavor is never the same.) Add garlic, chopped pepper, carrots and celery and sauté for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add all the remaining ingredients to the pan with enough water to almost cover the vegetables. Stir well and raise the heat to bring to a boil. Lower heat to low, cover and cook for one hour, stirring once or twice during that time.

After an hour, take a look and test the squash with a fork. If the fork pierces it easily it is ready. Taste the broth. Too thin? Mash some of the veggies to thicken the broth. Too thick? Add some water and cook a little while longer. Need salt? Add a little soy sauce or tamari. Need spice? Add some cayenne, Tabasco or black pepper. Too salty? Add a little sugar. Too flat? Add a little rice wine vinegar or lemon.

Serve over couscous or rice. Garnish with reserved basil and scallions. Serves 4-6.

* Curry Paste can be found in most Asian markets

Tricks and Tips

Don't like the whole Thai curry idea? Just use vegetable broth or water in place of the coconut milk and curry paste. Cook as directed. You can even add some thyme or other herbs for a richer flavor.

Hogtown HomeGrown

Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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Editor's Notes

I've been cooking since I could reach the stovetop and reading cookbooks since I could read, so writing a newsletter about local, fresh food is a labor of love. The recipes you will see in this monthly publication are food that I have cooked for family and friends, so the recipes are tested and tasted before you read them. That said, I must admit that I never cook anything the same twice, so feel free to experiment with my recipes. You can expect both the familiar and the new as together we try all the fresh foods that the local farmers have to offer.

I look forward to hearing from you — comments, questions and recipes are all welcome. Any recipes published will be credited to the first person who sent it to me, but may be revised in the testing and tasting process.

Stefanie Samara Hamblen

Sweet Potato Pie

My mom's mom, Granny, won a prize for her Sweet Potato Pie recipe from the Georgia Dairy Council. She used butter and light cream in the pie and served whipped cream on top. No rum or brandy, but it sure was good!

4 cups cooked, mashed sweet potatoes (they can be boiled or baked before mashing)

1 cup lowfat milk

3 lightly beaten eggs

1/3 cup honey

2 teaspoons total of cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and/or apple pie spice or mix to your taste

1/4 cup rum or brandy (optional)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix all ingredients until smooth. If you like it really smooth, you can use a mixer or food processor, but I usually use a whisk or wooden spoon.

Pour into a prepared deep dish pie shell (my favorite frozen crust is Marie Callender's) and smooth the top.

Bake for 10 minutes and then lower oven temperature to 350 degrees and bake an additional 20-30 minutes. The pie is done when the center doesn't jiggle. Let cool before cutting. Serves 6-8. Good for breakfast too!