

Hogtown HomeGrown

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A tale of two tables

Recently, my husband and I celebrated our thirty-fourth wedding anniversary. This is also the anniversary of our joint ownership of “the table.” As a wedding present, my cousin Ted made us a coffee table from pieces of stained wood joined and edged with rope. While it has never fit our décor (who am I kidding, we have no décor) we have used it every day of our marriage. It is the table of our adulthood and our children’s childhood.

Granny’s kitchen table from the house on Broad Street in Sparta, Georgia, was the table of my childhood and now our adulthood. It has a 42-inch round top with a pedestal instead of legs, so my Great Uncle George, a Navy man heroically injured in World War II, could roll his wheelchair up to it. When I was young, the table was yellow Formica with a chrome edge. My Dad modernized it in the late seventies by having it re-topped in a burl wood laminate. It’s no longer kitschy, but practical and durable. Memories of Granny’s table are strong—memories of a household with regular mealtimes and expected behaviors.

In Granny’s world, a table was supposed to have some sort of decoration, so in the center sat a lazy susan holding a small vase filled with flowers (real or artificial) and seasonal decorations. During breakfast, the lazy susan also held several glass jars of fruits and preserves. At lunchtime, there might be dishes of salted pecans, pickles, or condiments and, always, matching cut-glass cruets of olive oil and red wine vinegar. Each person’s table setting included a place mat, cloth napkin with a napkin ring, fork, knife, spoon, and plate. In addition, at breakfast there was a cup and saucer, juice glass and a small fruit dish.

The table Teddy made saw no such structure, but, despite that, our three sons and their friends consumed years of meals over its roped borders. It is the perfect height for a child to pull up a tiny chair and dine at their level. They didn’t always use placemats, but I had them “set the table” with napkins, utensils and drinks. Unlike Granny’s, there were no decorations, except maybe an art project in progress or a Lego set under construction.

Teddy’s table has seen service as a true coffee table, homework and play center, gift wrapping headquarters, and more recently, jam storage. I thought about all its incarnations as I moved it into our guest room last week, settling the slightly rickety legs into position as a luggage holder for the suitcases of those now-grown children and their children. The table has been retired to a spot where it can lean against a wall, no longer stable enough to withstand precarious toddlers careening through the living room.

Granny’s table has not retired yet. I have written most of the past seven years of Hogtown HomeGrows sitting on our back porch at the table of my childhood. (This month marks the seventh anniversary of Hogtown HomeGrown.) If you have been to the Cross Creek home of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, you have seen her typewriter on her porch table. I envy her wooden table, but my writing is a part of this table’s history now.

Most often, Granny’s table is our weekend brunch spot since it is situated perfectly for watching birds. Grandchildren eat meals and snacks here, pulling up a booster seat or a high chair. They don’t have to go far when they are done, since a toddler swings hangs nearby and the slide is just a few steps away. Parents and grandparents gather at Granny’s table as they watch the next generation at play. When house guests gather slowly in the morning, they grab their coffee and gravitate to the table on the porch pulling up yet another chair around it, widening the circle of family to call this table home for almost 70 years.



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The end of persimmon season
We have enjoyed this year's persimmon season more than ever before. I have eaten a sliced one every day for the past 6 weeks. Unfortunately, the season is coming to an end, so every week I have purchased a couple dozen as insurance against the end of this year's sweet crop.

Persimmon Pomegranate Medley

Finely dice four to six unpeeled firm Fuyu persimmons. Use a wooden spoon to bang the seeds from a halved pomegranate. Mix the prepared persimmon with the pomegranate seeds. Stir together, cover and refrigerate. Serve chilled.

What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beans**—green, greasy cut
- Bitter Melon**
- Bok Choy**
- Citrus**—juices, lemons, limes
- Cucumbers**—mini seedless, slicers, armenian
- Eggplant**—large purple italian, small purple asian, green thai
- Garlic**—chives
- Grapes**—purple, bronze
- Greens**—malabar spinach, arugula, kale, collards, mustards
- Herbs**—parsley, italian basil, tulsi basil, cilantro, lemongrass
- Honey**—gallberry, orange blossom, wild flower, tupelo, other varieties
- Kale**—red/white russian
- Lettuce**—bibb, oak leaf, romaine
- Microgreens**—assorted
- Mushrooms**—shiitake, dried reishi/maitake/piopino
- Okra**
- Onions**—green scallions, yellow, red
- Papaya**—green
- Peas**—pink/black eye, white acre
- Peppers**—red/green/orange bell, Anaheim, poblano, cubanelle, jalapeno, ghost
- Persimmons**
- Potatoes**—red, sweet
- Prickly pear**
- Radish**—red globe, daikon
- Roselles**
- Shoots**—pea, sunflower, mix
- Sprouts**
- Squash**—yellow, zucchini, butternut, acorn, calabasa, seminole pumpkin, koosa
- Tomatoes**—grape, green, valencia
- Turnips**

Local and Fresh—

Roselle

Roselles, also known as Rosella fruit, are a member of the hibiscus family. The tart, bright flavor is instantly recognizable if you have ever had a sip of Red Zinger tea.

The two part calyx has an inner seed pod which yields pectin when boiled. The outer “flower” can be chopped into jam or boiled in water to create an infusion for tea or tonics.

After removing the seed pod, the flowers can be preserved whole in syrup. They are used to decorate and flavor both food and drinks.

Roselle

Persimmon Butter

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups roselles
- 4 cups water
- 2 lemons
- 12 firm Fuyu persimmons, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup, raw sugar

DIRECTIONS

In a large non-reactive pot, combine washed roselles, water and 1 lemon cut into slices. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 45 minutes. Strain, using a wooden spoon or a potato masher to gently push the liquid out of the roselles. Discard roselles and lemon.

Return liquid to a boil and add chopped persimmon. Cook until softened and use a potato masher to smooth out the chunks.

Add juice and zest of 1 lemon and half the sugar. Return to a simmer and cook 10-15 minutes. Taste for sweetness and add remaining sugar as needed. Cook to desired thickness, but remember it thickens as it cools.

This butter may be preserved in sterilized jars and processed in a boiling water bath.

As an alternative, since it makes such a small amount, why not put half in your fridge to eat within the next few weeks and the rest in the freezer for a midwinter treat?

Whole Grain Shredded Zucchini Melt*

INGREDIENTS

1 Tablespoon olive oil
2-3 shallots, minced OR 1 cup onion, minced
3 zucchini, coarsely shredded (about 6 cups)
1 Tablespoon fresh thyme or oregano OR 1 1/2 teaspoons dried thyme or oregano
2 cups cooked whole grain
1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 lemon, zested and juiced
salt and pepper to taste
OPTIONAL TOPPINGS: a drizzle of olive oil or a light sprinkling of parmesan or feta cheese

DIRECTIONS

In a heavy skillet, heat oil and stir in minced shallots. When shallots are tender, add zucchini and stir to coat with oil and shallots. Sauté about 5 minutes, until tender.

Remove from heat and add thyme or oregano, whole grains, parsley and lemon zest. Mix well and add lemon juice, salt and pepper to taste.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Whole Grain Carrot Ginger Melt*

INGREDIENTS

1 Tablespoon olive oil
3 green onions, halved lengthwise and sliced finely
3-4 carrots, shredded
3 yellow squash, shredded
1 Tablespoon grated fresh ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves (optional)
2 cups cooked whole grains
1 lemon, zested and juiced
salt to taste

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a heavy skillet. Add green onions, carrots, squash and ginger to pan and sauté, stirring occasionally, until veggies are tender.

Remove from heat and mix in ground cloves, cooked grains and lemon zest and juice. Taste and add salt as desired.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

* Inspired by Barbara Kingsolver's Zucchini Orzo recipe—the veggies melt into the grains.

Cooking

Whole Grains

Cooking grains like spelt and einkorn are as easy as cooking rice—the 1 part grain to 2 parts water proportions are even the same! Cooking methods listed below use a one to two-quart saucepan with a tight-fitting lid.

The Simple Boil

Bring 2 cups of water to a full, rolling boil.

Stir in 1 cup of whole grain. Return to boil, reduce heat to low and cover. Check after 45 minutes—the texture should be tender, but not mushy. If using for cold salad, rinse cooked grain in a mesh strainer.

The Pilaf Method

Sauté 1 cup grain in 1 T oil or butter for 1 minute. Add 2 cups hot water, bring to boil, reduce heat, cover and cook 45 minutes before checking. Veggies may be sautéed first, then add grain and continue to cook as described above.

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Tricks and Tips
Gluten-free diets have become popular both with people who have serious medical conditions and those desiring a change in their diets. A few decades ago, the only available options were often cornmeal or potato starch products. Due to overwhelming customer demand, more gluten-free options are now for sale at both mainstream and specialty grocers.

Gluten-free Sweet Breakfast Casserole

INGREDIENTS

- 1 teaspoon butter or oil to prepare baking dish
- 12-15 slices gluten-free bread (I used Udi's, but there are other options)
- 4 very ripe persimmons (or substitute 1 cup unsweetened applesauce)
- 3 cups milk
- 6 eggs
- 1/3 cup honey (increase to 1/2 cup if using applesauce)
- 1 cup dried cranberries (or substitute raisins)
- 8 ounces chevre

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a large, flat baking dish.

Cut bread into small cubes and set aside.

Squeeze persimmons to release pulp and juice into a large mixing bowl. Add milk, eggs and honey. Whisk together until thoroughly combined. Stir in cubed bread and dried cranberries. Add crumbled chevre and gently mix until evenly distributed. Pour into prepared dish.

Bake uncovered 45-60 minutes, until completely set in the center. Serve hot.