

Hogtown HomeGrown™

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Inside this issue:

Tales of bread and cheese	1
What's Fresh Right Now?	2
Local and Fresh—Pecans	2
Granny's New Toasted Pecans	2
Persimmon Jam	3
Sweet Potatoes with Persimmons	3
Roselle Orange Relish	3
Pecan Bars	4

Tales of bread and cheese

We headed off for our anniversary trip to Paris with our hope-to-see list of artists, galleries and gardens. While eight days sounds like a long time, Paris is huge, with people from all over the world who want to see the same sights as you. But I don't think anyone else had our other itinerary—a hope-to-eat list of foods, experiences and restaurants.

From the first slice of baguette served as an afternoon snack to the final crunchy end of our last breakfast baguette, bread was a constant on every table at every meal we had in Paris. The “staff of life” we preferred was the baguette traditional, whose ingredients, size and price are protected by French law. The biggest surprise was how four ingredients, flour, water, yeast and salt, can taste different in every baker's hands. Fortunately, there are so many bakers in every neighborhood, it is easy to find a favorite boulangerie within a block or two. A bread baker since middle school, I thought I knew how to make a baguette, but a three hour, completely hands-on, baking class (in English) at La Cuisine Paris taught me new ways of creating and handling dough. Instead of shaping my dough into a baguette, Chef taught me to use scissors to create a Pain D'Epi, a wheat-shaped decorative loaf.

But back to that first baguette on the afternoon we got to Paris. With it, our hosts served a choice of salted or unsalted butter, and three cheeses—Comte (nutty mild gruyere flavor), a round of aged chevre (a creamy cheese made with goat's milk) and a blue from Auvergne (like Roquefort with a buttery texture). In cafés, cheese is not a usual breakfast food, but to our delight, our hosts served it with every breakfast.

Artisan cheeses are available at neighborhood fromageries, stand alone cheese stores, as well as daily markets, grocery stores and sometimes even the corner fruit stand. One tent at an evening market was filled with stacks of 40-70 pound wheels of mountain cheeses. It was great fun to taste and buy varieties I had only read about, including Beaufort and, a new favorite, Kaltbach.

Before I go any farther—yes, you can bring cheese and butter home with you from most countries. Look it up. There are two basic rules according to the USDA and CBP—the cheese cannot contain any meat and it cannot be liquid. While cheese doesn't have to be vacuumed packed, it does make transport easier. Choose cheese varieties that can handle hours without refrigeration, depending on the amount of travel time. Put cheese in your carry-on since the cabin temperatures are better for it. Declare everything you have at customs.

Now back to Paris—our last night was a time to walk the neighborhood, shopping along the way. Our first stop, Quatrehomme, is famous for aging cheeses as well as selling a large variety. We tasted more than a dozen different types as the fromager guided us through cheeses made from cow, goat and sheep's milk. Most were made in France, but one favorite, Estivaz, was made in Switzerland. Eight cheeses and two butters later, we headed off to the boulangerie for brioche, wholemeal and rustic bread. Add in the four fresh baguettes purchased the next morning and our extra suitcase was filled with bread and cheese.

Everything made it home—the cheese is getting eaten bit by bit, but I must admit, the first package of Quatrehomme beurre demi-sal is gone already and one baguette never made it into the freezer. It was a lovely anniversary trip with memories from both the hope-to-see and the hope-to-eat lists and our souvenirs are very tasty.

What's Fresh Right Now?

Bananas

Beans—green/purple/yellow, purple/green yard long

Bitter Melon

Cabbage—tokyo bekana (napa-type)

Chestnuts

Cucumbers—kirby, slicers

Eggplant—purple italian, fairytale, purple asian

Garlic—chives

Ginger

Greens—collards, kale, mustards, malabar spinach

Herbs—parsley, cilantro, curry leaf, italian/lemon/thai basil, mint, thyme, tulsi

Honey—orange blossom, gallberry, wildflower, tupelo

Leeks

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

Lettuces—spring mix, mizuna, arugula, leaf, romaine

Moringa

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

Okra—green/red

Onions—green, sweet

Pak Choi

Papaya—green, ripe

Peanuts—green, boiled

Pecans

Peppers—green/red/purple bell, shishito, jalapeno, datil, cherry bomb, serrano, poblano, anaheim, banana, cayenne

Persimmons

Pineapple

Potatoes—red/white/purple

Radish—red/purple globe, daikon

Roselle

Shoots and Sprouts

Squash—green zucchini, yellow crookneck/summer, kabocha, spaghetti, butternut, calabaza, seminole pumpkin

Sweet Potatoes

Tomatoes—cluster, heirloom, grape, sun gold, yellow/red plum

Turmeric

Local and Fresh— Pecans

North Central Florida is home to several varieties of pecan trees. Desirable, Moreland, Eliot, Curtis, Stuart and others vary in shell thickness, size, oil content (determines flavor and longevity) and sweetness.

Freshly shelled pecans should be used as soon as possible or stored in the freezer in airtight containers or bags. The oils in pecans, as with any nut, can become rancid with age. Excess heat during storage can also cause pecans to become bitter.

The fat in pecans is monosaturated, containing the “good fats” and antioxidants. They also have a healthy dose of Vitamin A, potassium, manganese, zinc and other nutrients.

While pecan pie is one of my favorites, just one slice a year is my limit. I do eat pecans right out of the package as a snack several times a week and feature them in trail mix and granola.

Granny served pecans before meals, either stuffed into a dried date or toasted with butter. While I do enjoy a butter-drenched pecan, this new recipe is a healthier way to enjoy the same nutty appetizer.

NOTE: Pecan oil can be found in specialty grocers and online.

Granny's New Toasted Pecans

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound pecan halves
- 2 Tablespoons pecan oil
- 1 teaspoon salt of choice

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 300 degrees.
- Place pecans in large baking pan.
- Drizzle with oil and toss with hands to coat pecans completely.
- Bake 15 minutes, stirring once.
- Pour hot pecans onto an opened brown paper bag.
- While pecans are hot, toss with half the salt and taste. Add more salt, if desired.
- Cool completely.
- Store in a tightly covered container.

Persimmon Jam

INGREDIENTS

2 cups ripe persimmon pulp
1/4 cup sugar
Zest and juice of 1/2 lemon
4 grains of kosher salt or just a few grains of sea salt

DIRECTIONS

Rub persimmon pulp through a strainer to reduce any lumps. Place strained persimmon in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat and bring to a full simmer.

Stir in sugar, zest and juice. Return mixture to simmer and, stirring occasionally, cook 10-15 minutes, until thick. Remove from heat.

Taste. Add salt, stir well and let jam sit 5 minutes. Stir well and taste again.

VARIATIONS

Replace the lemon zest with fresh vanilla scraped from the interior of a vanilla bean.

Sweet Potatoes with Persimmons

INGREDIENTS

6 cups sweet potatoes, peeled, halved or quartered lengthwise, and sliced
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/4 cup water
2 cups persimmon pulp (4-6 ripe persimmons pushed through coarse sieve)
1/2 cup cane syrup, maple syrup or honey
Pinch of salt
1/2 cup pecans, chopped (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat to 400 degrees. Lightly oil a large flat casserole.

Toss sliced sweet potatoes with ground cinnamon to coat. Place in a even layer in the prepared casserole.

Drizzle water over the top of the sweet potatoes. Cover tightly with foil.

Bake 45 minutes. Check for tenderness with a fork. If necessary, return to oven and cook until tender.

Mix together persimmon pulp and cane syrup. Stir in salt until dissolved.

Uncover sweet potatoes and pour persimmon-syrup mixture over the top. If using, scatter pecans evenly across the potatoes.

Bake uncovered for 15 minutes. Let sit 5 minutes before serving.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Roselle Orange Relish

INGREDIENTS

1 cup roselle, calyxes removed
1 navel orange, zested, peeled, chopped and seeds removed
1/4 - 1/2 cup granulated sugar

DIRECTIONS

Tear or cut roselle into quarters. Place in food processor.

Add orange zest and chopped orange to food processor.

Pulse 10-15 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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Hogtown HomeGrown

Local and Seasonal Recipes, Menus and More

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November 2019 is Hogtown HomeGrown's 13th Anniversary!

Tricks and Tips

The trick to this recipe is cooking the butter and sugars in a saucepan. Cooking them together creates a chewy texture and emphasizes the buttery flavor.

Add the toasted chopped pecans to the cooking butter-sugar mixture and stir well to coat the nuts completely, as the mixture continues to cook.

Pecan halves are best for recipes that call for toasting the pecans, even if the nuts are to be chopped. Chopped nuts will not toast uniformly. Toast pecan halves and then chop as desired. This also applies to walnuts halves and whole cashews.

Pecan Bars

INGREDIENTS

- 1 stick unsalted butter (4 ounces)
- 3/4 cup brown sugar, light or dark
- 2 Tablespoons cane syrup
- 2 cups pecans, toasted and chopped (NOTE: prepare pecans before beginning recipe)
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 egg, lightly beaten

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 350. Lightly butter an 8x8 baking pan.
- In a saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Stir in the sugar and cook, stirring often, until bubbly. Let mixture cook 4-5 minutes, stirring constantly.
- Stir in cane syrup and return mixture to simmer.
- Add toasted, chopped nuts and stir well. Cook 2 minutes or until mixture is gooey, stirring constantly.
- Remove from heat.
- Mix together flour, baking soda and salt. Add flour mixture to butter mixture and stir until no streaks of flour remain.
- Add vanilla and beaten egg and beat by hand for 1 full minute.
- Smooth into prepared pan.
- Place pan in preheated oven and bake 20 minutes. Check for doneness by pressing the dough in the center and the edges of the pan lightly with one or two fingers. Baked bars will feel firmer on the edges than in the center. If not done, bake 5-7 minutes more.
- Allow to cool completely before removing from pan and cutting into small bars.
- Store covered at room temperature for 3-4 days or freeze leftovers.