

# Hogtown HomeGrown

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## Food writers create desire, not porn

Lately, there has been a lot of talk on the internet about food writing—mostly that food writers as a population are growing so fast, that the cachet of being a food writer no longer exists. Gone are the free meals, the travel assignments with expense accounts and, for many, gone are the days of compensated writing. Those who have been food writers for years are feeling the pinch as the open world of the paid staff writer now becomes either the unstable country of the freelancer or the tenuous microcosm of the unpaid blogger (just think of all the exposure you will get!)

There are many types of food writers out there—restaurant critics, cookbook authors, recipe developers, the food porn “what I had for dinner” Facebook posters. Those I deem the real food writers are people whose passion about food makes others want to eat or cook as they do. Sometimes I am simply a recipe developer with a ready-made platform for sharing my discoveries, but I want to be more—I want to make you not only desire food, real food, but to desire food so much that you will actually cook!

Dad used to say that my descriptions of food could make him try anything, even if he knew he didn't like it. Those descriptions are not just from a voyeur's point of view—my version of food writing is a hands-on business. Food porn, in contrast, like real porn, is a stylized image of something that is generally unattainable. My business is not food porn—I don't want you to drool uncontrollably over something you, as a mere mortal, can never make or have. My business is to create desire and to bring you back to the sensuality of food. Sensuality is not only about sex, but the use of all your senses, in this case, to create food that generates desire in the eater. And that is the true value of a food writer—we create desire—desire to eat, desire to cook, desire to learn, desire to improve.

- For any eater, a food writer can create a desire to eat, especially the desire to eat new foods presented in new ways. Food writers can partner with farmers to showcase a hitherto unknown variety or type of produce in order to create a desire, and maybe a market, for that food.
- For the eater who is only a consumer, we can create the desire to cook their own food—to take charge of what they eat, the quality of their food and how they consume it.
- For the eater who is a novice cook, a food writer can create a desire to learn—to read recipes, to learn more and better ways to cook the foods they know and to experience foods they have never tried.
- For the experienced cook, we spark a desire to improve—new recipes and ideas create a pathway of imagination leading to a jumping-off point for the cook's experimentation.

Both as a food writer and a cook, I like creating desire—I love hearing moans as people linger over the cheesecake that took me hours to make. And yes, sometimes listening to great food being consumed can remind you of the staged moans in porn. But creating desire is not the same as creating porn. Nothing I do as a food writer is unattainable—you might have to learn or practice a new technique, but generally, if I can do it, so can you.

So it's time to give up food porn in favor of a lusty desire for the sensual side of food. Don't give up posting those luscious restaurant pictures, but create some desire of your own as well. Real food + real cooking = a wonderful experience available to anyone.



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**What's Fresh Right Now?**

- Beans—yard long beans
- Beets
- Citrus—juices, satsumas
- Cucumbers—mini seedless, kirby, slicers, yellow
- Eggplant—purple
- Garlic—chives
- Greens—callaloo, tropical spinach, cress, collards, giant red mustard
- Herbs—tarragon, garlic chives, holy basil, italian basil, thai basil
- Honey—orange blossom, gallberry, tupelo, palmetto
- Lettuce—mizuna, arugula, salad mix
- Microgreens
- Mushrooms—chanterelles
- Okra
- Onions—green, yellow
- Papaya—green, ripe
- Peas—creamer
- Peppers—green/red/yellow sweet bell, banana, jalapeno, poblano, hot/sweet banana, black beauty, cayenne, chocolate, habanero
- Persimmons
- Potatoes—red, sweet
- Prickly Pear
- Radish—daikon, globe, french breakfast
- Roselle
- Shoots—pea, sunflower, corn, spring mix
- Sprouts—alfalfa, clover, quinoa, wheat, sunflower, garbanzo, mung bean, french lentil, green lentil, radish
- Squash—calabasa, pumpkin, yellow, kabocha, hubbard, acorn, butter nut, zucchini, georgia sugar roaster, buttercup, jarrah dale
- Sugar Cane
- Tomatoes—red beefsteak, grape, plum
- Wheatgrass

**Look for these  
at the farmers markets soon**  
kale and cabbage

**Local and Fresh—  
Chestnuts**

Did you know we have chestnut orchards in North Central Florida? Chestnuts had been important in North America for thousands of years, but the blight in 1904 wiped out almost all the trees. Blight resistant trees have brought the chestnuts back, not just for the nuts and wood, but for the excellent flour made from the ground nuts.

We are all familiar with the special holiday treat of roasted chestnuts—my trip to Italy had me eating chestnuts from street vendors every afternoon, since we ate a lot of late dinners. European bakers and candy makers use chestnuts for all kinds of sweets, but they are also good in savory dishes as well.

Roasting chestnuts requires cutting an “X” through the outer skin, so the nut does not explode as it heats. Did you know you can boil them instead? All you have to do is cut them in half and that is much easier than cutting an “X”.

**Boiled Chestnuts**

INGREDIENTS

Fresh chestnuts in the shell

DIRECTIONS

Fill a large pot with 2-3 quarts of water. Cover pot and bring water to boil over high heat.

Cut each chestnut in half vertically with a sharp heavy knife. When all nuts are halved, drop them into boiling water.

Return water to full boil and cook 7-10 minutes.

Drain nuts in colander and cool slightly.

Separate nut meat from shells. Work quickly since they separate better when warm.

The chestnuts are not fully cooked at this point, so use in recipes or roast 15-20 minutes at 350 degrees to eat immediately. Refrigerate or freeze peeled nuts for future use.

# Herbed Chestnut Sauté

## INGREDIENTS

2 teaspoons unsalted butter  
1 cup chestnuts, boiled and peeled  
3 stems fresh thyme, reserve 1 Tablespoon of leaves for garnish  
pinch dried thyme  
pinch salt (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

Over medium heat, melt butter in a heavy skillet. Add chestnuts and stir to coat completely with butter. Add the stems of thyme (be sure to reserve the leaves for garnish) and the dried thyme. Stir well, lower heat and slowly sauté for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Remove from heat and discard herb stems. Taste for seasoning and add salt if desired.

Finely chop reserved thyme leaves and stir into chestnuts. Serve immediately or keep warm until serving. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

## PRESENTATION

Sautéed chestnuts may be served as a side-dish or as part of an entrée atop stir-fried veggies.

## VARIATIONS

Different herbs may be substituted for thyme—try basil, sage or chervil. They are mild enough to let the chestnut flavor predominate. Try finishing the dish with a splash of sherry or top with a drizzle of balsamic or sherry vinegar.

# Sweet Chestnut Puree

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup sugar  
2 cups water  
1 cup chestnuts, boiled, peeled and chopped  
½ vanilla bean, split

## DIRECTIONS

In a deep pan, stir together sugar and water. Bring to a boil and cook until mixture is clear. Stir in chestnuts and vanilla bean. Lower heat and simmer for 30-45 minutes, until most of the liquid has evaporated. Remove from heat and cool slightly.

Puree chestnuts and sugar syrup in food processor until a paste is formed. Spoon into a covered container and either refrigerate or use immediately.

# Chestnut Fool

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup whipping cream  
1 cup Sweet Chestnut Puree, at room temperature  
2 Tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

## DIRECTIONS

Whip cream into soft peaks. Mix ½ cup whipped cream into puree to lighten it. Slowly fold in remaining whipped cream until only the faintest streaks remain. Spoon into serving dishes and lightly dust with cocoa powder. Serve immediately.

## PRESENTATION

A stemmed, wide glass is the best presentation piece for this dessert – a martini or champagne glass would be perfect. Provide demitasse spoons so your guests can slowly savor their dessert.

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## Tricks and Tips

Rolling little balls of cookie dough requires clean hands and a light touch. I have been making cookies this way since the peanut butter cookies of my childhood. With experience, you can make each ball of dough almost exactly the same size, with a smooth, crack-free surface. Press flat with a fork or the bottom of a glass dipped in water or sugar.

## Sugar Cookies with a Southern Flair

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 stick unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup turbinado or raw sugar
- 2 Tablespoons butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 ½ cups whole wheat flour
- ½ cup cornmeal
- ½ teaspoon each baking soda and salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ cup buttermilk, divided

### DIRECTIONS

Combine melted butter with sugar and softened butter. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Mix together dry ingredients. Stir 1/2 the dry mixture and 1/2 the buttermilk into the butter mixture. When completely mixed, add remaining flour and buttermilk. Mix thoroughly, cover and refrigerate for one hour.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Roll dough into small balls, place on parchment covered cookie sheets and flatten with a glass dipped in warm water. Bake 8 minutes until tops are firm.