

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Mrs. Tulkoff's Honey Cake

Granny and Granddaddy were snowbirds when I was a child. From early May until mid-October, home was Sparta, Georgia, a little town midway between Macon and Augusta. When the weather started to cool off and the leaves began to change, Granny would pack up the household and they would drive south to Miami Beach. Their apartment in Southgate Towers, on the second floor in the North Tower, was small, with just one bedroom—a completely different world from Georgia.

The Granny I spent the most time with was the “Miami Beach Granny.” When I was in kindergarten I spent the afternoons with her until Mom or Dad picked me up. As I got older and we moved farther away, I rode the Greyhound bus to visit her for weekends and vacations. Since my cousins grew up in Georgia, the Miami Beach Granny was MY Granny!

Spending part of each year away from Georgia was never my grandmother's choice. Granddaddy never liked cold weather, plus there were opportunities for cards, cigars and Chivas in the men's card room downstairs. Granny made the best of it, making friends with the neighbors; most were Jewish and many originally from Eastern Europe and Russia

Born in South Carolina and living in rural Georgia, Granny had been exposed to only truly local Southern food, but 1950s Miami Beach was awash in what we now call ethnic foods. During the first part of the 20th century, Jewish immigrants settled into Miami Beach and brought with them both ethnic recipes and a constant demand for familiar foods.

An old-style deli, complete with pickle barrels and sliced tongue, existed inside the Food Fair Supermarket only a block from Granny's apartment. Restaurants had bowls of half sours, sauerkraut and green tomato pickles waiting on the table as appetizers, with pumpernickel, onion and rye rolls. What followed was either huge bowls of soup (borscht or matzoh ball) with overstuffed deli sandwiches or dairy dishes like blintzes or latkes.

Granny's neighbors' kitchens imprinted my taste buds with afternoon snacks of unfamiliar flavors —gefilte fish with Tiger Sauce, a leftover blintz with sour cream, pastries like cheese danish, prune rugelach or honey cake. Some tastes I did not appreciate, like the Limburger cheese favored by Lucy, a French concentration camp survivor. She and Granddaddy would talk politics while they shared “stinky” cheese and beer in her dimly-lit dining room.

But the food goddess of the second floor lived in a light-filled corner apartment. A founder of the Tulkoff food empire in Baltimore, Lena Tulkoff brought her Russian heritage into her Miami Beach kitchen. The first time I had honey cake, she asked if I wanted a piece of cake and brought out a rectangular package. As she unwrapped the three layers of foil, what emerged did not look like cake at all—it was a loaf and crumbly. But she gave me a slice on a plate with a glass of milk, and being a polite child, I took a bite. The spices warmed my mouth and the light honey sweetness slid right into the deeper flavors. The milk was necessary because Mrs. Tulkoff's Honey Cake was not moist—it might have been at one point, but not anymore. The taste was amazing though and I asked for more!

It turns out honey cake was ubiquitous in most kitchens on that floor. They varied very little, as I found out by having an afternoon snack with almost all of Granny's neighbors. Now I have come full circle by tweaking a honey cake recipe to create my own bundt version with whole wheat flour and less sugar. But I will always remember Mrs. Tulkoff and the Honey Cake that started it all!

What's Fresh Right Now?



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Apples

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Celery

Citrus—juices

Cucumbers—mini seedless, kirby

Eggplant—large/small purple italian,
purple asian

Garlic—chives, heads

Grapes—purple, bronze

Greens—malabar spinach, callaloo,
arugula

Herbs—parsley, italian/purple basil,
tulsi basil

Honey—gallberry, orange blossom,
wild flower, tupelo, and other varieties

Microgreens—assorted

Mushrooms—shiitake, dried reishi,
dried piopino, chanterelles

Okra

Onions—green scallions, yellow, red

Peanuts

Pears

Peas—crowder, creamer, black eye,
white acre

Peppers—red/green/yellow/orange/
purple bell, anaheim, poblano, habanero,
jalapeno

Potatoes—red, sweet

Shoots—pea, sunflower, mix

Sprouts

Squash—yellow, zucchini, butternut,
acorn, spaghetti, calabasa, seminole
pumpkin, various hard squash, koosa

Tomatoes—red cluster, grape, sun
gold, green

**Be sure to look for the
Blue Oven Kitchens' table at the
Wednesday Union Street Market in
Downtown Gainesville from 4-7pm.
Meet some of the entrepreneurs and
taste their yummy products.**

Local and Fresh—

Crowder Peas

Part of the cow pea family and cousin to black-eyed and creamer peas, crowder peas are named for the way they fit into their pods.

Known for their almost squared shape because they are so crowded in the pods, crowder peas can be a multi-colored mix of tans, browns and black.

Buy them ready to cook from the farmer or in their pods. I usually buy two bags of shelled peas, cook one, put the second one in a freezer bag and pop it into the freezer.

Cook crowder peas at a simmer in water to cover. If you plan to use them in a salad, scoop cooked peas into a strainer and run cold water over them until they have cooled.

Greek Crowders

INGREDIENTS

2 cups shelled crowder peas, rinsed
water to cover

1 Tablespoon dried oregano

2 teaspoons dried basil

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 Tablespoons olive oil

1 lemon, zested and juiced

DIRECTIONS

In a covered saucepan, bring crowder peas to a boil, reduce heat to simmer and cook 45 minutes. Test for doneness—the center should be soft, but not mushy.

Stir in herbs, salt, pepper and garlic. Bring to a boil and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Stir in olive oil, lemon juice and zest. Reduce heat and simmer until liquid is reduced. Remove from heat and taste for seasoning.

May be served hot or cold. Try serving on a bed of raw arugula or spinach.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Southern Summer Salad

INGREDIENTS

4 cups yellow summer squash, quartered lengthwise and chopped into 1/2 inch pieces, roasted
2 cups crowder peas, cooked and chilled
2 cups grape tomatoes, halved
2 green onions, sliced thinly
1/4 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
1/4 cup olive oil
1 lemon, juiced and zested
salt and pepper to taste
12-15 basil leaves

DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients, except basil, and mix well. Taste for seasoning. Just before serving, tear basil and scatter over salad. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Butternut and Red Lentil Soup

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil
1/2 red onion, minced
1 carrot, finely diced
1 apple, peeled, cored and diced
8-10 sprigs of fresh thyme
pinch each of ground cayenne and coriander
4 cups butternut squash, roasted
4 cups no-chicken broth (vegetable or chicken broth may be substituted)
1/3 cup red lentils
1 Tablespoon sherry
pinch of salt (as needed)

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a 2 quart lidded saucepan over medium heat and stir in onion. When onion is translucent, stir in carrot, apple and thyme. Sauté until carrot is softened. Add cayenne and coriander, stir to combine completely and cook for one minute before adding squash and broth.

Bring to a boil and stir in lentils. Lower heat to a simmer and cook for 30 minutes until lentils have dissolved. Add sherry and simmer for 10 minutes. Taste for salt and adjust as needed. Remove thyme stems and discard.

Allow soup to cool slightly. Puree in a blender in two batches and return soup to pot. Bring to a simmer before serving. Serve hot. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Leftover Recipe

When the variety of summer veggies is wearing thin, we eat the same veggie 2-3 times a week. So when I cook crowder peas and squash for other meals, I cook extra and stash them in the refrigerator until I'm ready to make this salad.

Tricks and Tips

Packed with flavor and protein, lentils are part of the pulse family and served all over the world.

Red lentils, one of many varieties, are smaller than a pencil eraser and cook very soft in a short time.

Familiar green lentils also cook soft but maintain some shape when cooked and pair well with tomatoes or rice.

French Lentils, smaller than green lentils, maintain their shape after cooking and can be served chilled in salads.

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Tricks and Tips

This honey cake was inspired by a recipe in the Edible Communities cookbook, *edible*.

I preferred whole wheat flour and less sugar though. Since honey cakes are an oil-based cake, they are already dense, so I could only substitute two cups of whole wheat flour. By using demerara sugar, I could make it less sweet with a more deep, rich flavor.

Granny's Honey Cake

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| butter or oil and flour to prepare pan | 2 cups whole wheat flour |
| 1 cup all purpose flour | 2 teaspoons baking powder |
| 1 teaspoon baking soda | 1 teaspoon Vietnamese cinnamon |
| 1/2 teaspoon each salt, ginger and allspice | 3 eggs, room temperature |
| 1/2 cup demerara or raw sugar | 1 cup oil (not olive) |
| 1 cup honey (strong and dark types preferred) | 1 cup cold strong brewed coffee |

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a bundt pan. Lightly flour and shake out excess.
- Whisk together flours, baking powder and soda, spices and salt. Set aside.
- Beat together eggs and sugar until light and fluffy. Slowly add the oil, honey and coffee and beat until well combined.
- Add the flour to the wet mixture in three or four parts, mixing lightly until just combined. Scrape sides and bottom of bowl and mix until flour is completely incorporated.
- Pour batter into prepared pan, being sure to scrape the bottom of the bowl as the batter is flowing into the pan to eliminate any heavy spots. Bang filled pan on the counter to remove air bubbles before placing in the oven. Bake 50-65 minutes, until a toothpick tests clean.
- Cool on rack for 15 minutes. Remove from pan, Store in an airtight container.