

So till food

Loosen your belts. The hottest food trend right now is big, juicy and nourishing, just like momma used to make Recipes MADISON COWAN Photographs GUS FILGATE

FOOD STYLING ANNIE RIGG STYLING PENNY MARKHAM

Fried green tomatoes (recipe page 68)





Fried green tomatoes

10 minutes

This simple dish is known to legions of Southerners and has lent its name to a Hollywood movie. Also referred to as tomatillos, green tomatoes are easily found in markets and ethnic food shops. www.thespiceshop.co.uk usually has them in stock.

corn meal or polenta 110g
onion powder 2 tsp
smoked paprika 1½ tsp
dried thyme 1 tsp
green tomatoes 4 medium, ends removed and halved
plain flour 70g
egg 1, lightly beaten
corn oil 4 tbsp

Mix the corn meal with the onion powder, paprika and thyme. Sprinkle both sides of the tomatoes with sea salt and pepper. Dip in flour, shaking off the excess, then dip into the beaten egg and coat in the seasoned corn meal.

Heat a frying pan over moderate heat and add the corn oil. Fry the tomatoes until golden, about 3–4 minutes each side. **Serves 4**

Smothered pork chops

45 minutes

Pork chops in onion gravy is a great everyday dish. This is my variation on my mother's recipe – worth running home from school for.

pork chops 6, about 175g each
plain flour 250g
pancetta 4 slices, chopped
butter 50g
shallots 250g, peeled and halved
dessert apples 3, peeled, cored and quartered
rosemary 2 large sprigs
sage 2 leaves
vegetable stock cube 1
dry cider 600 ml

Heat the oven to 220C/fan 200C/gas 7. Season both sides of the chops with sea salt and pepper, dip in the flour and shake off the excess. Heat a flameproof casserole over a medium-high heat and cook the pancetta until crispy. Remove, then add half the butter and brown the chops in 2 batches. Turn once and cook for about 5 minutes each side, transfer to a plate and cover loosely with foil.

Reduce the heat to low and add the remaining butter, the shallots and apples. Tie the herbs together with string and add to the casserole. Brown the shallots all over. Remove the apples and set aside. Crumble in the stock cube and slowly add the cider. Bring to a boil, scraping up the sticky bits, and cook until the gravy thickens slightly.

Return the chops to the casserole, cover with a lid and cook in the oven for 15 minutes, then add the apples and pancetta and cook for an additional 5 minutes until the chops are tender (add a bit of water to the gravy if it needs it). Remove the herb bundle and check the seasoning. Serve with rice or sweet potato mash. **Serves 6**

Born of necessity and ingenuity, soul food is a cooking style that grew up around the ingredients available to African slaves in the American South. Key elements, such as okra and watermelon, came with the slaves from Africa; these were married with local corn, kale and collard greens and seasoned with lard, crackling and black molasses, the leftovers from the master's table.

The original soul food was necessarily heavy on the calories as its purpose was to sustain the slaves through long, hard days of manual labour in the fields. Over time it has evolved from its painful roots to become an African American cuisine in its own right and now, thanks to restaurants such as Harlem and Ashbell's in London and Momma Cheri's Soul Food Shack in Brighton, it's arrived in the UK. But don't expect dishes to be caloried out to the max; modern soul food replaces lard with oil and frying with baking.

Madison Cowan, former head chef at Ashbell's, who put together these recipes for **olive**, knows just why Britain is succumbing to soul food's sensuous appeal: ➤ **page 70**





Cajun crab and prawn cakes

30 minutes

In the South, fishcakes are traditionally served for breakfast with grits and gravy. You can use a good ready-made Cajun spice mix if you prefer. Serve with the spicy remoulade or aioli.

CAJUN SPICE MIX

sea salt 1 tbsp
black pepper 2 tsp
garlic granules 2 tsp
cayenne 1½ tsp
smoked paprika 1½ tsp
cumin 1½ tsp
dried thyme 2 tsp
ground ginger 1 tsp

CRAB AND PRAWN CAKES

crabmeat 450g, fresh or tinned (drained and squeezed dry)
peeled tiger prawns 250g, chopped
shallots 3, finely chopped
egg 1
mayonnaise 2 tbsp
lemon 1, juiced
Worcestershire sauce 2 tsp
parsley 1 large handful, chopped
coriander 1 large handful, chopped
Cajun spice 1 heaped tbsp
breadcrumbs 125g for coating

Combine the ingredients for the spice mix in a pestle and mortar or spice grinder. This makes plenty but will keep for some time in an airtight jar.

Mix all the crab cake ingredients together, apart from the breadcrumbs, to make a fairly moist mixture. Wet

‘Although Europe has come late to soul food, the new kid on the block here is a time-honoured tradition in the American South. It’s down to the fact that it’s pure comfort food. Even if people have negative preconceptions they quickly abandon them once they try it. I’ve loved it since I was small – in fact, my first food memory is me, age three in Alabama, where my mother’s family come from, tucking into a plate of pork chops, soul food style.’ Fiona Ruane, executive chef at Harlem, agrees, ‘Soul food’s about nourishment for both body and soul – that’s why people in the UK have finally come round to it’

Chef Madison Cowan

has worked all over the world, both in restaurants, including New York’s Monkey Bar and Ashbell’s in London, and for private clients, such as Donna Karan. He currently runs an international private chefs service and gives cookery classes (stirrup@tiscali.co.uk).



your hands and shape the mix into patties (what size you want is up to you – small ones make great snacks to go with drinks). Coat each patty in breadcrumbs. Heat a little olive oil in a frying pan and fry in batches for 3–4 minutes on each side until crisp and golden. Serve straight away.

Serves 6

Remoulade

10 minutes

Mix together 200g mayonnaise, 2 tsp hot mustard, 2 chopped garlic cloves, the juice of 1 lemon, 1 tsp of Tabasco sauce, 1 tbsp of rinsed and chopped capers, 1 handful of chopped parsley. Set aside. Serves 6

Cornbread

50 minutes

My secret for this is never to measure the liquid. The finished mixture should resemble Yorkshire pudding batter – but thicker and rougher.

corn meal or polenta 225g
plain flour 110g
baking powder 3 tsp
bicarbonate of soda 1 tsp
caster sugar 1 tbsp
nutmeg 1, for grating
eggs 3
unsalted butter 125g, melted
buttermilk 1 carton
milk

Brush a 20cm x 30cm x 5cm tin liberally with oil and line the bottom with baking parchment. Heat the oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6. In a large bowl, mix the first 5 dry ingredients with a whisk. Grate in a little nutmeg, no more than ½ tsp, and whisk in. Next stir in the eggs, butter and liquids all at once. The key here is to add enough buttermilk to bring everything together nicely and just enough milk to slightly thin the mixture. Don’t over-mix.

Tip the batter into the tin and bake for 30–35 minutes or until golden; a knife inserted in the centre should come out clean. Serve warm. Serves 12



Black eye peas

15 minutes

Along with yams, black eye peas are indigenous of many African nations and widely available throughout the world. Normally cooked with smoked meat, I have found this vegetarian treatment just as rewarding.

olive oil
onion 1, chopped
garlic 2 cloves, chopped
dried chilli flakes ½ tsp
celery 1 stalk
thyme 2 large sprigs
rosemary 1 large sprig
bay leaf 1
white wine 120ml
black eye peas 2 x 400g tins, rinsed and drained
vegetable stock, cubes or powder made up to 120ml
butter

Heat a bit of olive oil in a pot over moderate heat and sauté the onions until soft, then add the garlic and chilli flakes. Tie the celery and herbs together to make a bouquet garni, add it to the pot and fry briefly to release the flavours.

Pour in the wine and simmer for 3 minutes. Next add the peas and stock, bring to a boil and reduce the heat. Simmer until most of the liquid is absorbed, then add a knob of butter and season. Serve with a warm slice of cornbread. Serves 6



Southern fried chicken

50 minutes + marinating

The queen of the soul food menu. Eat straight from the pan, cold at a picnic or from the fridge as a late-night snack. Frying in vegetable lard gives the crispiest skin.

chicken legs 4, with skin on

lemon 1, halved

smoked paprika 1 tbsp

garlic granules 1 tbsp

dried thyme 2 tsp

nutmeg 1, for grating

vegetable lard 500g, for frying (or use oil if you prefer)

plain flour 250g

Put the chicken in a large bowl of cold water. Squeeze in the lemon and add the squeezed halves to the bowl. Soak the chicken in the lemon water for a few minutes, rinse and pat dry. Put the legs in a bowl and season with the paprika, garlic and thyme. Grate in a little nutmeg and massage everything into the chicken. Leave to marinate for 30 minutes or until ready to cook.

Meanwhile, melt the lard in a deep, heavy-based frying pan over a medium heat. Season the flour with sea salt and pepper and tip into a strong plastic bag. Add the chicken and shake well to coat. When the fat is hot, carefully put the legs into the pan and cover with a lid. DO NOT leave the pan unattended. Use tongs to turn the chicken at intervals, replacing the lid to ensure they are properly cooked, about 30–40 minutes. The key is to fry until the chicken legs are golden brown and crispy, but not allow them to burn and dry out.

Take the chicken out and drain on kitchen paper.

Serves 4



Watermelon with frozen vodka, rock salt and mint

5 minutes

This is a refreshing summertime treat or a wonderful finale to any dinner party. Use your favourite vodka and make sure it's been thoroughly frozen first.

watermelon 1, medium

vodka frozen

rock salt or salt flakes 2 tbsp

mint a large handful

Quarter the watermelon lengthwise into wedges and slice as thick as you like. Put the slices on a platter, splash on the vodka (no measurement required) and sprinkle with salt. Finely slice the mint and sprinkle over the top.

Serves 6

Peach cobbler

35 minutes

This is by far my favourite pudding. As a child I would ask for it each year instead of birthday cake. You can use fresh peaches (you'll need 6–8 in all) plus some fruit juice.

peaches 2 x 450g tins of halves in syrup

caster sugar 70g, plus extra for sprinkling

soft dark brown sugar 70g

cinnamon 1 tbsp

nutmeg 2 tsp

cornflour 1 tbsp

vanilla extract 1 tbsp

bourbon 60ml, optional

unsalted butter 50g

ready-rolled puff pastry 375g packet

egg 1 yolk

Heat the oven to 220C/fan 200C/gas 7. Drain the peaches over a large bowl, keeping 120ml juice. Mix the sugars, cinnamon and nutmeg together and add to the peaches. Mix the cornflour with the juice and add to the peaches along with the vanilla and bourbon if using.

Tip into a shallow ovenproof dish and drop in half of the butter in lumps. Melt the remaining butter. Cut the pastry to fit the top of the dish, leaving a border to hang over the edge. Mix the egg yolk with a little water and brush the dish rim. Drape the pastry over the dish and press round the edge. Brush the pastry with melted butter, sprinkle over a little caster sugar and make 3 small air holes with a sharp knife. Bake for 20–25 minutes until the pastry is golden brown and the juice has thickened and bubbled up through the holes. **Serves 8**

WHERE TO EAT SOUL FOOD

Harlem

78 Westbourne Grove,

London W2

(020 7985 0900)

(A branch at 469 Brixton

Road, SW9, will open

in mid-June)

Ashbell's

29 All Saints Road, London

W11 (020 7221 8585;

www.ashbells.co.uk)

Momma Cherri's

Soul Food Shack

11 Little East Street,

Brighton BN1

(01273 774545;

www.mommacherri.co.uk)

