

Cook

Southern

Food



Recipes with love from
The Robot Book Club

Cook Southern Food

Authentic Recipes and Timeless Traditions from the American South

The Robot Book Club

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Published by The Robot Book Club

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Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: The American South.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

So, you want to cook Southern food. Not the version airbrushed for glossy magazines, nor the one packaged for tourist consumption. You want the real thing. The food born from crossroads—Native American resourcefulness, West African ingenuity, European traditions—that settled in the soil and kitchens of the American South. This isn't about gentrified grits or artisanal collards. This is about the true flavors that cling to memory, the ones your grandmother, or her grandmother, patiently coaxed from everyday ingredients with a well-seasoned hand and an unyielding cast-iron skillet. And rest assured, that authentic taste doesn't demand obscure ingredients or a specialty butcher; just what you can find at any respectable grocery store, wielded with intention.

For those carrying that heritage in their bones, now navigating lives that rarely allow for an entire Sunday spent simmering a pot roast—be it in a Brooklyn brownstone or a Midwestern suburb—this book is for you. It's for the busy weeknight warrior, the expatriate Southerner, the one who craves the true taste of home but needs a practical map to get there without losing their mind, or their entire Saturday. The kitchen clock may run faster now, but the soul of the cooking doesn't have to change.

We're diving deep into the foundational truths: the liquid gold of rendered bacon fat, the almost sacred bond with a black iron pan, the simple, genius tricks passed down through generations. We'll untangle the secrets of those unwritten family recipes, decoding them into actionable steps that fit your modern schedule. From a lightning-fast biscuit that tastes like slow Sunday mornings to a proper plate of collard greens that would make any Granny nod in approval on a Tuesday night.

These pages guide you through the Southern culinary rhythm—from the essential toolkit of ‘Liquid Gold & The Iron Skillet’ to the practicality of ‘Granny’s Pot on the Stove’ and the celebratory abundance of ‘The Sacred Sunday Dinner.’ This isn’t just a collection of recipes. It’s an inheritance, decoded for right now. Now, let’s get to work.



Liquid Gold & The Iron Skillet: Southern Pantry Foundations

The indispensable toolkit for the modern Southern cook, decoding the foundational techniques of building authentic flavor.

Look behind the curtain of any self-respecting Southern kitchen, and you won't find a pantry lined with artisanal finishing oils. You'll find a dented coffee can sitting on the back of the stove, holding the rendered, smoky truth of a hundred breakfasts. This is the bedrock. The alchemy of the Southern pantry doesn't happen with tweezers and garnishes; it happens in the heavy, blackened belly of a cast-iron skillet.

It's the paper bag of seasoned flour waiting for a Tuesday night pork chop, and the patient, rhythmic stirring of a roux until it smells like roasted nuts and home. These aren't just prep steps. They are the unsung, grease-stained workhorses that turn cheap grocery store staples into pure, unadulterated religion. Master these, and the rest is just cooking.





Cast-Iron Skillet Buttermilk Cornbread

True Southern cornbread is not cake. It hides behind neither wheat flour nor a single grain of sugar, standing instead as a savory, rugged quick-bread designed to sop up the potlikker from braised greens or crumble into a bowl of chili. The magic lies entirely in the technique: a trinity of stone-ground cornmeal, tangy buttermilk, and a scorching cast-iron skillet slicked with bacon grease. Pouring the batter into that blistering pan effectively deep-fries the outer crust in seconds, yielding a lacy, golden edge that gives way to a tender, steaming center. It is an honest, unadorned inheritance of the Southern kitchen, taking exactly as long to make as your oven takes to preheat.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	stone-ground cornmeal	2 cup	full-fat buttermilk <i>well-shaken</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
1 tsp	baking powder	4 tbsp	bacon grease
1/2 tsp	baking soda		

PREPARATION

- **Make your own soured milk if true buttermilk is unavailable.**

Add 2 tablespoons of white vinegar or lemon juice to a measuring cup, fill it to the 2-cup line with whole milk, stir, and let sit for 10 minutes before using.

- **Save your breakfast drippings.**

Keep a jar of bacon grease by the stove. If you are entirely without pork fat, you can substitute 4 tablespoons of unsalted butter, but watch the pan closely so the milk solids do not burn.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the skillet in a blazing hot oven.**

Place a 9-inch or 10-inch cast-iron skillet on the middle rack of a cold oven, then set the temperature to 425°F (220°C). Let the skillet heat up with the oven for at least 20 minutes; it must be blistering hot to achieve the signature Southern crust.

- 2. Whisk the dry ingredients.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the stone-ground cornmeal, kosher salt, baking powder, and baking soda.

- 3. Combine the buttermilk and eggs.**

In a separate measuring cup or small bowl, whisk the shaken buttermilk and lightly beaten eggs until fully homogenous.

1. Gently mix the batter.

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry, stirring with a wooden spoon just until combined. A few lumps are perfectly fine; overmixing will result in a dense, tough crumb. Let it sit for a minute while you retrieve the skillet.

2. Melt the fat in the scorching skillet.

Wearing a heavy oven mitt, carefully remove the hot skillet from the oven and set it on the stove. Drop in the bacon grease, swirling the pan to coat the bottom and sides as the fat melts, foams, and smokes slightly.

3. Listen for the sizzle as you pour the batter.

Pour the batter directly into the pool of superheated fat. It should screech and sizzle on contact, instantly setting the crust and frying the edges.

4. Bake until deeply golden.

Return the skillet to the oven and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the top is browned and the edges have pulled away slightly from the pan.

5. Invert and serve immediately.

Let the cornbread cool in the pan for no more than 5 minutes before carefully turning it out onto a cutting board. Serve hot in wedges, preferably with a pat of butter.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the flourless tradition.**

Authentic Southern cornbread relies entirely on the natural sweetness and robust texture of the corn itself. Resist the urge to add wheat flour or refined sugar; they mask the true flavor and soften the historical crumb.

● **Leftovers belong in a glass of milk.**

Traditional flourless cornbread dries out relatively quickly. Crumble day-old stalwarts into a bowl of hot chili, or follow generations of Southern tradition and crumble it into a tall glass of cold milk for a late-night snack.



Paper Bag Pan-Fried Pork Chops

This is an artifact from a time before pre-packaged shake-and-bake mixes, a direct culinary inheritance from the mid-century Southern kitchen optimized for a Midwestern weeknight. The brown paper bag isn't some rustic gimmick; it is a highly efficient tool that perfectly coats the meat and, crucially, wicks away grease after frying without trapping crust-killing steam. Spiked with hot sauce and shallow-fried in a cast-iron skillet laced with bacon fat, this is the unpretentious, deeply comforting taste of a grandmother's kitchen executed flawlessly and without fuss.

INGREDIENTS

4 med	bone-in center cut pork chops <i>patted completely dry</i>	1 tsp	garlic powder
1 cup	buttermilk <i>well shaken</i>	1 tsp	onion powder
1 tbsp	Louisiana-style hot sauce	1/2 tsp	smoked paprika
1 1/4 cup	all-purpose flour	1/4 tsp	cayenne pepper
2 tsp	seasoned salt	1/2 cup	vegetable oil
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	2 tbsp	rendered bacon fat

PREPARATION

- **Let the pork chops rest at room temperature for twenty minutes before cooking.**
Taking the chill off the meat prevents the cold pork from violently dropping the hot oil's temperature, ensuring an even, golden fry.
- **Source two large, clean brown paper grocery bags.**
One bag will be used as your shaking vessel for dredging the meat; the second bag should be torn open and laid flat on the counter for draining the finished chops.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the buttermilk and hot sauce together in a wide, shallow bowl and submerge the pork chops.**
Ensure both sides of the meat are coated in the acidic liquid, which gently tenderizes the pork while acting as the glue for our seasoned crust.
- 2. Combine the flour and all the dry spices in your first brown paper bag.**
Add the flour, seasoned salt, black pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, and cayenne pepper directly into the sack, fold the top over, and shake it vigorously to distribute the seasoning evenly.

- 1. Melt the vegetable oil and bacon fat together in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat.**

You are looking for a frying temperature of roughly 350 degrees Fahrenheit. The grandmother's trick: drop a tiny pinch of flour into the skillet, and if it immediately sizzles and dances on the surface without burning, you are ready to fry.

- 2. Drop the damp pork chops into the paper bag one at a time and shake aggressively.**

Lift a chop from the buttermilk, let the excess drip off, drop it into the bag, trap some air to create a balloon, and shake it up, down, and sideways for about ten seconds. Tap off any loose excess flour and move the chop to a clean plate.

- 3. Fry the breaded pork chops undisturbed for four to five minutes on the first side.**

Lay them carefully into the hot oil away from your body, and do not crowd the pan; fry in two batches if your skillet is small.

- 4. Flip the chops and fry for an additional three to four minutes until deeply golden brown.**

The meat is ready when the exterior is heavily crusted and the internal temperature hits a safe, juicy 145 degrees Fahrenheit.

- 5. Transfer the finished pork chops directly onto the torn-open second paper bag to drain.**

Never use modern paper towels for this. The brown paper will aggressively wick away the excess frying fat without reflecting steam back into the meat, ensuring the crust remains shatteringly crisp while it rests.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Swap the buttermilk for a simple egg wash if your fridge is bare.**

Whisking two beaten eggs with two tablespoons of milk or water is a highly traditional, Midwest-adapted substitution that forms a perfectly fine binder for the seasoned flour.

- **Use a gallon-sized plastic bag for dredging if you lack paper sacks.**

You can shake the meat in a large Ziplock, but you absolutely must drain the finished chops on a wire cooling rack set over a baking sheet to keep the crust crisp—again, no paper towels.



Southern Fried Cabbage with Smoked Bacon

In the Southern kitchen, nothing goes to waste, and poverty is often the mother of the most profound culinary genius. The magic here isn't the cabbage—it's the rendered pork fat, the 'liquid gold' left behind in the cast-iron skillet. A splash of apple cider vinegar lifts the smoky, browned bits off the bottom of the pan, and a pinch of sugar helps the cabbage caramelize rather than boil into a sulfurous mush. This is deep, smoky, unpretentious comfort food that cooks up in thirty minutes, proving that the humblest ingredients, treated with respect, will always deliver the goods.

INGREDIENTS

6 slice	thick-cut smoked bacon <i>chopped into 1-inch pieces</i>	2 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 med	yellow onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 tbsp	apple cider vinegar
3 med clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 tbsp	light brown sugar
1 med	green cabbage <i>cored and chopped into rustic 1-to-2-inch squares</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
		1 tsp	coarse black pepper
		1/2 tsp	Cajun seasoning
		1/4 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes

PREPARATION

- **Chop the cabbage into thick, rustic squares rather than shredding it.**

Resist the urge to buy pre-shredded coleslaw mix in a bag. It is sliced far too thin and will turn into a watery mush in the skillet. Taking sixty seconds to roughly chop a fresh head of cabbage is the single most important textural trick for this dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the bacon in a cold cast-iron skillet over medium heat until deeply browned and crisp.**

Starting in a cold pan helps the fat render out completely, taking about 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the crispy bacon with a slotted spoon to a paper towel, but leave exactly two to three tablespoons of that rendered 'liquid gold' right there in the pan, along with all the dark, stuck-on bits.

- 2. Melt the butter into the hot bacon grease, then sauté the onion until translucent.**

Add the yellow onion and let it soften for 4 to 5 minutes until it takes on the color of the pan. Toss in the minced garlic and cook for exactly thirty seconds—just enough to release its oils without burning.

1. Pour in the apple cider vinegar and scrape the bottom of the pan.

The vinegar will violently sizzle and steam. Use a wooden spoon to scrape up the savory fond from the skillet, then stir in the brown sugar to dissolve. This balance of acid and sugar is the grandmother's secret to cutting the richness of the fat and helping the cabbage caramelize.

2. Pile in the chopped cabbage, season heavily, and cover to wilt.

It will look like an impossible mountain of raw vegetation, but trust the process. Toss it gently with tongs to coat in the fat, add the salt, pepper, Cajun seasoning, and red pepper flakes, then cover the skillet for 3 to 5 minutes to let the steam dramatically reduce its volume.

3. Remove the lid and continue to cook, tossing frequently over medium-low heat for 10 to 15 minutes.

You want the moisture to evaporate so the cabbage actually fries in the fat, taking on golden, caramelized edges. Stop cooking while the leaves are silky but still retain a slight, satisfying bite—they should never be mushy.

4. Fold the crispy bacon back into the skillet and serve immediately.

Pull it off the heat, taste for seasoning—adding a final pinch of salt or hot sauce if you need it—and bring the cast iron straight to the table.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Turkey Bacon Swap.**

If your family doesn't eat pork, fry chopped smoked turkey bacon in 2 tablespoons of neutral oil and 2 tablespoons of butter to mimic the fat volume. Add a half-teaspoon of smoked paprika or a single drop of liquid smoke to replicate the deep flavor of traditional pork fat.

● **Make it a meal.**

In many Southern homes, this side dish is instantly transformed into a busy weeknight main course by slicing up a ring of smoked Andouille or Kielbasa sausage and frying it right alongside the bacon.



Old-Fashioned Tomato Gravy Over White Rice

This isn't Sunday gravy; it's a testament to the rural South's mastery of the pantry. Born of agricultural surplus and lean times, it relies on the alchemy of a blonde roux built from rendered bacon fat—what the old-timers rightly call liquid gold. Paired with fluffy white rice, a nod to the Gullah-Geechee traditions of the Carolina Lowcountry, this is a deeply savory, unapologetically peppery masterclass in turning humble canned tomatoes and a handful of flour into profound comfort.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup long-grain white rice
rinsed

2 cup water

1/2 tsp kosher salt

4 slices	thick-cut smoked bacon	1 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
3 tbsp	all-purpose flour	1/2 tsp	granulated sugar
1 small	yellow onion <i>very finely diced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked, plus more for garnish</i>
14 1/2 oz	petite diced tomatoes <i>undrained</i>	2 tbsp	heavy cream

PREPARATION

- **Mise en place is essential.**

The roux moves quickly once the flour hits the hot bacon fat, so ensure your broth is measured and your canned tomatoes are opened before you begin cooking.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Prepare the rice.**

Bring the water to a boil in a medium saucepan, stir in the rice and salt, then reduce the heat to the lowest setting. Cover tightly and simmer for 18 to 20 minutes until the water is absorbed, leaving it to steam off the heat without ever lifting the lid.

- 2. Render the liquid gold.**

Place the bacon in a cold, well-seasoned cast-iron skillet and slowly bring it up to medium heat. Cook until the fat renders completely and the pork is deeply browned and crisp, about 8 to 10 minutes, then move the meat to a paper towel, leaving the rendered fat in the pan.

- 3. Soften the onion in the rendered fat.**

Drop the finely diced onion directly into the hot bacon grease and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until translucent, scraping up any browned bits of pork from the bottom of the skillet.

1. Build a blonde roux.

Sprinkle the flour evenly over the fat and onions, whisking constantly to form a thick paste. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes until it smells nutty and turns the color of pale peanut butter; do not let it scorch to dark brown, or you'll lose its thickening power.

2. Whisk in the liquids to form the gravy.

Slowly pour in the chicken broth, whisking vigorously to kill any lumps, then add the entire can of tomatoes with their juices, the sugar, and the heavy dose of black pepper.

3. Simmer until glossy and thick.

Bring the skillet to a gentle bubble, then drop the heat to medium-low and let it cook uncovered for 8 to 12 minutes until the sauce heavily coats the back of a spoon.

4. Finish with cream and serve.

Pull the skillet from the heat, stir in the heavy cream, and adjust the salt only if needed. Ladle heavily over wide bowls of the steamed white rice, topping with the reserved, crumbled bacon and an extra twist of black pepper.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The grandmother's secret is the sugar.**

A tiny pinch of sugar doesn't make the gravy sweet; it chemically neutralizes the tinny, harsh acidity of the canning process, allowing the deep, savory tomato flavor to shine.

● **Respect the rice.**

In the coastal South, rice is sacred. Do not peek or stir the rice while it cooks; you want fluffy, distinct grains to soak up the gravy, not a mushy porridge.



Sawmill Sausage Gravy

Born in the grueling Appalachian logging camps of the nineteenth century, this was survival food built to fuel men through punishing labor. Today, it stands as a testament to the transformative alchemy of the Southern cast-iron skillet. There is no pretense here—just the honest, profoundly comforting marriage of rendered pork fat, toasted flour, and whole milk, blanketed in an aggressive amount of black pepper. It is liquid gold, requiring only a handful of pantry staples and a few minutes on a weeknight to resurrect the true warmth of a generational kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb bulk pork breakfast sausage **1/4 cup** all-purpose flour

2 1/2 cup whole milk
gently warmed

1/2 tsp kosher salt

1 tbsp black pepper
freshly cracked

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brown the sausage and build the base.**

Place a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and cook the sausage, mashing it into fine crumbles until deeply browned. Leave all the rendered fat in the pan.

2. **Form the blond roux.**

Drop the heat to medium-low and sprinkle the flour evenly over the sausage. Stir constantly for two to three minutes until the flour lightly toasts and smells faintly nutty, cooking out the raw, pasty flavor.

3. **Emulsify the gravy.**

Pour the warmed milk into the skillet in a slow, steady stream while stirring continuously, deliberately scraping the bottom of the pan to release the savory, caramelized brown bits.

4. **Simmer to the perfect consistency.**

Allow the gravy to gently bubble for three to five minutes until it thickens, pulling it off the heat just before it reaches your ideal texture, as it will continue to tighten as it cools. Season heavily with the black pepper, taste, and adjust the salt if necessary.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Assess your fat.**

You need roughly a quarter cup of liquid grease in the pan to properly absorb the flour. If your modern store-bought sausage is exceptionally lean, supplement the skillet with a spoonful of bacon grease or butter.

- **Respect the biscuit dough.**

If you are baking buttermilk biscuits to accompany the gravy, push your biscuit cutter straight down and pull it straight up. Twisting the cutter seals the dough's edges, destroying your chances of a sky-high, flaky rise.



Southern Salmon Croquettes

If you want to understand the true culinary resilience of the American South, look no further than the canned goods aisle. Born from Depression-era necessity to stretch a dime and feed a struggling family, the salmon croquette is an absolute masterclass in pantry magic. There is no gentrified, fresh-catch pretense here—just canned pink fish, crushed saltines, and the transformative power of a hot iron skillet. It is the unadulterated, deeply comforting taste of a Southern grandmother's kitchen, proving once again that the most profound meals often come from the humblest beginnings.

INGREDIENTS

14 3/4 oz canned pink or red salmon
drained

1/2 cup yellow or white onion
finely diced

1/4 cup green or red bell pepper
finely diced

1 large eggs
lightly beaten

1/2 cup saltine crackers
finely crushed

1 tsp seasoned salt

1/2 tsp black pepper
freshly ground

1/2 tsp garlic powder

1/4 cup vegetable oil

PREPARATION

- **Finely chop the aromatics.**

Dice the onion and bell pepper as finely as possible so they blend seamlessly into the croquettes and cook through quickly.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Drain and flake the canned salmon.**

Drain the liquid thoroughly, then flake the fish apart in a mixing bowl with a fork, choosing either to mash the soft, calcified bones right in for extra calcium like a true grandmother, or taking a minute to pick out the round vertebrae and dark skin.

- 2. Combine the salmon with the aromatics, binders, and seasonings.**

Add the diced onion, bell pepper, egg, crushed saltines, seasoned salt, black pepper, and garlic powder to the salmon, gently mixing with a fork or your hands until it holds together when squeezed.

- 3. Form the mixture into patties and chill them in the refrigerator.**

Shape the mixture into six to eight half-inch-thick patties, place them on a plate, and rest them in the refrigerator for 20 minutes.

- 4. Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed cast-iron skillet.**

Place the skillet over medium-high heat and add about a quarter-inch of oil, letting it get hot until a stray crumb of the salmon mixture sizzles immediately upon contact.

1. Fry the croquettes until deeply golden brown, flipping only once.

Carefully lay the chilled croquettes into the hot oil and fry undisturbed for three to four minutes per side, using a thin spatula to flip them just once to build a deep crust without breaking them.

2. Transfer the cooked croquettes to a cooling rack to drain.

Let the fried croquettes rest on a wire rack or paper towel-lined plate for a minute before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the chilling step.**

Resting the formed patties in the fridge allows the cracker crumbs to absorb excess moisture and firms up the egg, guaranteeing the croquettes will not disintegrate when they hit the hot oil.

- **Adjust the moisture matrix as needed.**

If the raw mixture feels too wet and sloppy, add another crushed saltine; if it feels crumbly and dry, add a tiny splash of water or a half-teaspoon of mayonnaise.

- **Serve it like you are in the South.**

For a weeknight dinner, serve alongside macaroni and cheese, collard greens, or a pot of slow-simmered pinto beans and cornbread. For a true Southern weekend breakfast, serve them alongside a bowl of buttery grits and drizzle the salty, crispy croquettes with a little bit of sweet maple or cane syrup.



20-Minute Creole Shrimp and Quick Grits

The soul of Creole cooking doesn't require standing all day over a hot stove; it demands respect for the architecture of flavor. This recipe trades the agonizing wait of a dark roux for a high-heat, aggressive reduction built on the smoky, rendered fat of Andouille sausage and caramelized tomato paste. It rescues quick grits from their bad reputation—they are simply fine-milled stone-ground corn that cook in minutes, provided you salt the liquid before they ever hit the pot. It is a masterpiece of pantry improvisation, delivering the profound, comforting tastes of a New Orleans kitchen on a busy weeknight.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	water	1 med	green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>
2 cup	whole milk	2 med	celery ribs <i>finely diced</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	3 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
1 cup	quick-cooking grits	1 tbsp	tomato paste
3 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>cut into cubes</i>	1 tbsp	Creole seasoning blend
1 cup	sharp white cheddar cheese <i>freshly grated</i>	14.5 oz	petite diced tomatoes <i>undrained</i>
1 lb	raw shrimp <i>peeled and deveined</i>	1/2 cup	chicken stock
8 oz	Andouille sausage <i>sliced into 1/4-inch rounds</i>	2 tbsp	heavy cream
1 tbsp	olive oil	1 tsp	hot sauce
1 small	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 bunch	green onions <i>thinly sliced</i>

PREPARATION

- **Mise en place is non-negotiable.**

The high-heat reduction of a Creole gravy moves at breakneck speed. Ensure your Holy Trinity is diced, your garlic is minced, and your spices are fully measured before you ever turn on the stove.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Establish the liquid gold.**

Place a large iron skillet over medium-high heat with a drop of olive oil, sear the sliced Andouille sausage until crisp, and remove the meat with a slotted spoon while leaving the smoky, reddish fat behind.

1. Start the seasoned liquid for the grits.

In a medium saucepan, bring the water, whole milk, and kosher salt to a gentle boil, watching closely so it does not boil over.

2. Sauté the Holy Trinity.

Lower the skillet heat to medium, dump the diced onion, bell pepper, and celery directly into the hot sausage fat, and cook for four minutes until softened and fragrant.

3. Whisk and simmer the grits.

Slowly pour the quick grits into the boiling milk mixture while whisking vigorously to prevent lumps, immediately drop the heat to the lowest setting, cover, and simmer for five to seven minutes, whisking occasionally.

4. Caramelize the tomato paste.

Push the vegetables to the edge of the skillet, drop the tomato paste into the center, and cook for sixty seconds until it darkens to a rusty brick color before stirring in the minced garlic and Creole seasoning.

5. Deglaze and reduce the gravy.

Pour in the undrained diced tomatoes and chicken stock, return the sausage to the pan, and let the sauce aggressively bubble and reduce for four to five minutes until glossy and thick.

6. Finish the grits.

Remove the grits from the heat and vigorously stir in the cubed butter and grated cheddar cheese until completely melted and velvety smooth.

7. Poach the shrimp.

Turn the skillet heat to medium-low, stir the heavy cream and hot sauce into the gravy, and nestle the raw shrimp into the pan in a single layer to cook for exactly two to three minutes until just opaque.

8. Plate the masterpiece.

Ladle a generous portion of cheesy grits into a wide, shallow bowl, spoon the rich Creole gravy and shrimp directly into the center, and garnish generously with sliced green onions.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not buy instant grits.**

Quick grits are mechanically milled to a finer grain for a faster cook, which is perfectly acceptable for a weeknight. Instant grits, however, are precooked and dehydrated, yielding a gummy, flavorless paste that is considered culinary heresy.

- **Salt the liquid, not the grits.**

Like pasta, cornmeal absorbs liquid as it cooks. If the water and milk are not aggressively seasoned from the start, the interior of the grits will remain hopelessly bland regardless of how much salt you add later.

- **Respect the iron skillet.**

The immense thermal mass of cast iron prevents the temperature from plummeting when the cold raw shrimp are added, ensuring they poach gently rather than turning into tough rubber.



The Southern Morning: Quick Starts to Weekend Lingering

Bridging the gap between busy weekday mornings and slow Saturdays with traditional agrarian breakfasts translated for the modern clock.

The Southern morning meal wasn't born of leisure; it was built for survival. It was designed to fuel brutal hours in the dirt or the mill. Yet somewhere along the line, that pure, caloric utility became the region's soul. It's the smell of cured pork fat hitting cast iron in the dark, the quiet alchemy of cold buttermilk and soft winter wheat rising in a blistering oven. You don't need to work a plow to crave that kind of grounding before the world starts demanding things from you.

This isn't Sunday brunch theater. It's utility meeting grace. Whether you have ten frantic minutes before the commute or a sprawling, rain-soaked Saturday, these are the unapologetic staples of a real Southern kitchen. Biscuits that shatter on the outside, proper grits that tend to themselves, and a red-eye gravy born straight from the honest drippings of a country ham. No tourist-trap clichés. Just the real thing, dialed in for the modern clock.





Authentic Country Ham with Black Coffee Red-Eye Gravy

Red-eye gravy is a masterclass in agrarian pragmatism, born from the necessity of preserving meat and wasting absolutely nothing. The magic lies in the violent meeting of rendered dry-cured pork fat and strong, bitter coffee in a hot cast-iron pan. It is thin, potent, and brutally authentic—an unpretentious, working-class staple that demands only real country ham and the patience to let the ingredients speak for themselves.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	authentic dry-cured country ham slices	1 cup	milk or water
		1 tbsp	unsalted butter or neutral oil

1/2 cup strong black coffee

1 tsp brown sugar

1/2 cup water

1 pinch black pepper

PREPARATION

- **Desalinate the meat to draw out the intense cure.**

Country ham is aggressively salty by design. Place the slices in a shallow dish, cover them with the milk or water, and let them soak for 30 to 60 minutes at room temperature.

- **Score the fat to prevent curling in the pan.**

Remove the ham from the liquid and pat it completely dry with paper towels. Use a sharp knife to make small cuts into the outer ring of fat every 2 to 3 inches, severing the connective tissue so the ham lies flat when seared.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the ham slowly in a heavy cast-iron skillet.**

Melt the butter over medium heat, add the dried country ham, and pan-fry until the fat turns translucent and a mahogany-brown crust forms—about 3 to 5 minutes per side. Do not overcook, or the cured meat will turn irreparably tough.

- 2. Remove the ham to a warm serving platter.**

Leave the pool of liquid fat and the dark, caramelized bits of protein stuck to the bottom of the pan entirely undisturbed; this is the foundation of your gravy.

- 3. Deglaze the skillet with the coffee and water.**

Pour the liquids directly into the hot pan, and as it hisses, aggressively scrape the bottom with a wooden spoon or spatula to release every bit of the fond.

- 4. Simmer and reduce the liquid.**

Let the pan bubble for 3 to 5 minutes to concentrate the flavors. Stir in the brown sugar and black pepper if using, but absolutely no salt—the ham has provided plenty.

1. Serve immediately over the ham, biscuits, or grits.

Watch the namesake "red eye" form in the bowl as the golden, translucent pork fat separates from the dark, bitter coffee.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the right meat is non-negotiable.**

Standard, wet-cured "city ham" from the deli lacks the enzymatic breakdown, fat density, and concentrated salinity required to flavor this gravy. Seek out vacuum-sealed Smithfield, Virginia, or Kentucky dry-cured country hams.

● **Never attempt to thicken red-eye gravy.**

Many modernized recipes try to stabilize the sauce with flour or cornstarch. Doing so destroys the authentic, brothy nature of the dish and masks the sharp, clean interaction between the coffee and the pork fat.



Stone-Ground Grits with Caramelized Fried Bologna

If you want to know what a Southern grandmother's kitchen actually smells like on a Saturday morning, this is it. Long before brunch spots gentrified the dish, fried bologna—affectionately known as poor man's steak—was the savory, salty hero of the working-class table and Johnny Cash's absolute favorite breakfast. The true secret here isn't just scoring the meat so it fries perfectly flat in its own fat; it is the grits. By soaking coarse, stone-ground corn overnight, you bypass the chalky tragedy of instant grits and cut the cooking time in half, yielding a profoundly rich porridge that serves as the perfect bed for crispy, caramelized pork.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	stone-ground yellow or white grits	4 large	eggs
3 cup	water	2 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 cup	whole milk	1/2 cup	sharp cheddar cheese <i>shredded</i>
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
8 oz	thick-cut deli bologna <i>casings removed and cut into 4 thick slices</i>	1 tbsp	hot sauce

PREPARATION

- **Hydrate the grits overnight.**

The evening before cooking, combine the grits and water in a heavy-bottomed saucepan, stir, skim off any woody chaff that floats to the surface, and leave covered at room temperature overnight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring the soaked grits to a boil.**

Add the milk and salt directly to the saucepan with the overnight soaking liquid, place over medium-high heat, and whisk constantly as it comes up to a boil to prevent lumps.

- 2. Drop the heat and simmer.**

The second it boils, reduce the heat to the absolute lowest setting, cover, and cook for 20 minutes, vigorously scraping the bottom every five minutes to prevent scorching.

- 3. Score the bologna.**

To prevent the meat from doming up and cooking unevenly, use a paring knife to cut four small 1-inch slits around the outer perimeter of each bologna slice.

1. Sear the meat in a dry cast-iron skillet.

Heat the skillet over medium-high heat and drop the scored bologna in, letting it aggressively sizzle for two to three minutes per side until the edges are dark, crispy, and slightly blistered, then remove to a paper towel.

2. Fry the eggs in the rendered pork fat.

Crack the eggs directly into the hot, salty bologna drippings left in the skillet and fry them sunny-side-up or to your preference.

3. Finish the grits and plate.

Remove the grits from the heat, vigorously stir in the butter and cheddar, taste for seasoning, and serve hot beneath a slice of crispy bologna and a fried egg.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Never use instant grits.**

Instant or quick-cooking grits have the germ and hull removed and cannot replicate the robust corn flavor or creamy texture required for this dish.

● **Pre-salting is non-negotiable.**

Properly salted cooking liquid means properly seasoned grits; you cannot add enough salt at the table to fix an under-seasoned pot.



Cast-Iron Southern Fried Cinnamon Apples

If there is a scent that defines a true Southern morning, it's the pop of bacon grease followed immediately by apples and cinnamon hitting hot cast iron. Born in the Appalachian mountains out of sheer agrarian necessity, this isn't the cloying, cornstarch-thickened version you'll find at a roadside chain restaurant. The secret a real grandmother teaches is just patience, heavy iron, and a crucial pinch of salt to drag the natural juices out of the fruit. This is a masterclass in making something profound out of almost nothing—deeply comforting, unapologetically authentic, and exactly what home tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

5	large Granny Smith apples <i>washed, cored, and sliced into 1/2-inch wedges</i>	1/4 cup	granulated sugar
3 tbsp	unsalted butter	1 1/2 tsp	ground cinnamon
1 tbsp	bacon grease	1/4 tsp	ground nutmeg
1/4 cup	light brown sugar <i>packed</i>	1/4 tsp	kosher salt
		1 tsp	fresh lemon juice

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toss the fruit.**

Toss the sliced apples in a bowl with the fresh lemon juice to stave off oxidation and bring a hit of brightening acid to the pan.
- 2. Melt the fats.**

Place a 10 to 12-inch cast-iron skillet over medium heat, melting the butter and bacon grease together until they softly sizzle.
- 3. Season the apples.**

Drop the apples into the hot fat in an even layer, then scatter the brown sugar, white sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt evenly over the top, gently folding everything with a spatula until coated.
- 4. Cover and sweat.**

Drop the heat to medium-low and cover the skillet tight. Walk away for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring gently only once; the trapped steam softens the fruit while the salt and sugars coax out its natural juices.
- 5. Reduce the skillet gold.**

Pull the lid off. It will look watery, which is exactly the point. Bump the heat back to medium and let it simmer uncovered for 5 to 10 minutes until the excess water boils off, leaving behind a thick, glossy, self-thickening cinnamon syrup.

1. Rest before serving.

Kill the heat and let the pan sit for three minutes so the syrup tightens up, then serve hot over biscuits, alongside pork, or straight out of the iron.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Trust the process.**

Resist the modern urge to dump in cornstarch or apple cider. The gentle, covered heat combined with the osmotic pull of the salt does all the necessary work to build a rich glaze.

● **The peel preference.**

Appalachian grandmothers often left the skins on to save time and give the fruit structure, but you can definitely peel them beforehand if you prefer a softer, more uniform texture.



Golden Baked Cheese Grits Casserole

It is a dish born in the American Lowcountry, passed down through generations of Gullah Geechee matriarchs, and fiercely guarded against the insidious creep of instant cornmeal. A proper baked grits casserole is an architectural marvel of humble pantry staples. Coarse corn is simmered into a rich pudding, sharp hand-grated cheddar is folded in with an unapologetic knob of butter, and a binder of tempered eggs turns the whole affair into a savory, sliceable soufflé. Deeply comforting and rigorously authentic, it requires proper technique but rewards the smart home cook who simply assembles it the night before.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	low-sodium chicken broth	2 cup	extra-sharp cheddar cheese <i>hand-grated from a block and divided</i>
2 cup	water	1/2 cup	evaporated milk
1 tsp	kosher salt	2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
1 cup	old-fashioned or stone-ground grits	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
4 tbsp	unsalted butter		

PREPARATION

- **Hand-grate the block of sharp cheddar.**

Pre-shredded supermarket cheese is coated in cellulose and other anti-caking agents that ruin the smooth, custardy texture of the final bake.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the grits in the broth and water.**

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, bring the chicken broth, water, and kosher salt to a rolling boil over medium-high heat, then slowly whisk in the grits and reduce to the lowest possible heat setting.

- 2. Cook the grits until completely thick and tender.**

Cover the pot and cook for 20 to 30 minutes, stirring vigorously every 5 minutes to prevent the starches from scorching on the bottom, until the mixture is creamy and the corn is fully softened.

- 3. Enrich the cooked grits with butter, dairy, and cheese.**

Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the butter until melted, then gradually fold in the evaporated milk, black pepper, and 1 1/2 cups of the hand-grated cheddar until uniformly smooth.

1. Temper the eggs to prevent scrambling.

In a small bowl holding the lightly beaten eggs, briskly whisk in two or three tablespoons of the hot, cheesy grits to gently raise their temperature, then pour the warmed egg mixture back into the main pot and stir thoroughly.

2. Bake until a golden crust forms along the edges.

Pour the mixture into a generously buttered 9x13-inch baking dish, top evenly with the remaining half cup of cheddar, and bake at 350°F (175°C) for 40 to 45 minutes until the edges pull away and the center is set like a thick pudding.

3. Let the casserole rest before serving.

Allow the dish to sit at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes to let the egg matrix firm up, ensuring clean, sliceable portions.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Assemble ahead for busy mornings.**

You can prepare the entire casserole the night before, cover the dish tightly with plastic wrap, and refrigerate it. Let it sit at room temperature for 30 minutes in the morning before baking as directed.

● **Never compromise on the grits.**

Quick or instant grits completely lack the structural integrity for baking and will result in a gummy, unpalatable texture. If coarse stone-ground grits are entirely unavailable, a coarse Italian polenta can serve in a pinch.



Granny's Pot on the Stove: The Weeknight Skillet

Fast, one-pot and skillet meals that deliver authentic, slow-cooked Southern depth in under 45 minutes.

There is a specific kind of tired that settles into the bones by Tuesday evening. It's the hour when the grand Southern tradition of all-day braising collides head-on with the brutal reality of the modern commute. But this is where the true alchemy of the home kitchen happens. The weeknight skillet is an unapologetic engine of survival. It doesn't ask for six hours of your life; it asks for forty-five minutes, a hot burner, and whatever's waiting in the pantry.

Here, canned salmon transforms into golden, crispy patties of pure comfort, and a thin pork chop finds sudden redemption under a quick, onion-heavy smother. This isn't the romanticized, slow-drawl mythology of the South sold to tourists. It's honest, intensely satisfying food that gets an exhausted family fed without sacrificing a single ounce of soul.





Southern Smothered Hamburger Steak with Vidalia Onion Gravy

There is zero room for pretense in a cast-iron skillet. What high-end joints try to dress up as Salisbury steak, a true Southern grandmother knows as a hamburger steak—a working-class marvel of stretching ground chuck with cheap saltines and bathing it in a dark, sweet Vidalia onion gravy. This is weeknight comfort food that demands nothing more than a hot pan, basic pantry staples, and the sheer patience to let an onion melt into sweet, savory submission.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	ground chuck <i>80/20 or 85/15 blend</i>	1 tsp	onion powder
1/2 cup	saltine crackers <i>crushed fine</i>	1 tsp	seasoned salt
1/4 cup	whole milk	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 large	large egg <i>lightly beaten</i>	1 tbsp	vegetable oil
1 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce	2 large	Vidalia onions <i>halved and sliced 1/4-inch thick</i>
plus 1 tsp	<i>divided</i>	2 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 tsp	garlic powder	3 tbsp	all-purpose flour
		2 cup	low-sodium beef broth

PREPARATION

- **Create the panade.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the crushed saltines and milk, letting them sit for 2 to 5 minutes to form a starchy paste that traps moisture inside the meat.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the meat with a gentle hand.**

Add the lightly beaten egg, 1 tablespoon of the Worcestershire sauce, garlic powder, onion powder, seasoned salt, and black pepper to the soaked crackers, then gently fold in the ground chuck with your hands until just combined.

- 2. Shape the patties and press a dimple into each.**

Divide the meat into 4 to 6 oval patties about 3/4-inch thick, using your thumb to press a shallow divot into the center of each so they stay flat instead of puffing up in the pan.

1. Sear the patties to build a crust.

Heat the oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, then sear the patties for 3 to 4 minutes per side. Remove them to a plate; they won't be fully cooked yet, and you want to leave all that beautiful browned beef fat in the skillet.

2. Caramelize the onions in the beef drippings.

Reduce the heat to medium, melt the butter into the skillet, and toss in the sliced onions. Cook for 8 to 10 minutes until they are incredibly soft, sweet, and lightly browned.

3. Build the roux and whisk in the broth.

Scatter the flour over the onions and stir constantly for 1 to 2 minutes to cook out the raw cereal taste. Slowly whisk in the beef broth and the remaining 1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce, scraping up every bit of fond from the bottom of the pan until it simmers into a glossy gravy.

4. Smother the steaks and simmer until tender.

Nestle the patties back into the gravy, pour in any resting juices from the plate, cover tightly, and gently simmer on medium-low for 15 to 20 minutes.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Source the right onions.**

Vidalia onions are highly seasonal. If you can't find them, generic sweet yellow onions or Walla Wallas provide the necessary sugar-to-sulfur ratio to balance the savory gravy.

● **Serve over a starch.**

This dish canonically demands a massive pile of buttery mashed potatoes to absorb the gravy, though egg noodles or white rice do the job perfectly well.



One-Pot Southern Goulash

In the American South, goulash isn't some paprika-dusted relic of the Austro-Hungarian empire—it is a Depression-era miracle born of frugal ingenuity. Grandmothers took whatever was in the pantry, dumped it into a single heavy pot, and let the starch from dry elbow macaroni naturally thicken the tomato broth into a rich, clinging gravy. The real secret here isn't the beef; it's a quiet splash of soy sauce and Worcestershire to trick the palate into tasting a slow-simmered, all-day stew in under thirty minutes. It is unpretentious, profoundly comforting, and exactly what a busy weeknight demands.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb lean ground beef

1 large yellow onion
finely diced

1 med	green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1 tbsp	granulated sugar
3 large	garlic <i>minced</i>	2 small	dried bay leaves
1 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce	15 oz	tomato sauce
1 tbsp	soy sauce	15 oz	petite diced tomatoes <i>with juices</i>
1 tbsp	Italian seasoning blend	2 1/2 cup	beef broth
1 tsp	seasoned salt	2 cup	elbow macaroni
1/2 tsp	black pepper	1 1/2 cup	sharp cheddar cheese <i>freshly grated</i>
1/2 tsp	smoked paprika		

PREPARATION

- **Chop the vegetables in advance.**

This recipe moves quickly once the meat starts browning, so have the onion, bell pepper, and garlic prepped and ready by the stove.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brown the beef and vegetables to build the foundation.**

Place a large Dutch oven or heavy skillet over medium-high heat, adding the ground beef, onion, and bell pepper. Cook until the meat is fully browned and the vegetables soften in the rendered fat, then drain off all but a tablespoon of the grease.

- 2. Bloom the spices in the hot fat.**

Reduce the heat to medium and stir in the garlic, Italian seasoning, seasoned salt, black pepper, and paprika. Cooking these in the hot fat for about a minute wakes up the dried spices and releases their essential oils.

- 3. Create the savory tomato broth.**

Pour in the Worcestershire, soy sauce, tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, and beef broth, stirring in the sugar and bay leaves while scraping up any browned bits from the bottom. Bring the entire mixture to a rolling boil.

1. Submerge the pasta and simmer.

Add the uncooked elbow macaroni directly to the boiling broth and stir well.

Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover tightly, and simmer for 12 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally to keep the pasta from sticking.

2. Rest the dish to set the starches.

Once the macaroni is tender and the liquid is mostly absorbed, remove the pot from the heat and discard the bay leaves. Letting it sit uncovered for a few minutes allows the pasta starches to thicken the remaining sauce into a rich gravy.

3. Fold in the cheddar cheese.

Stir half of the grated cheese directly into the hot pasta until melted, then sprinkle the rest over the top and cover briefly just until it melts.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Trust the one-pot method.**

Do not boil the macaroni in a separate pot of salted water. Cooking the dry pasta directly in the tomato-beef broth forces it to absorb the flavors from the inside out and naturally thickens the sauce with released starches.

● **The umami trick is non-negotiable.**

The soy sauce and Worcestershire might seem out of place, but they are essential for mimicking the deep, savory complexity of a slow-cooked stew in a quick weeknight meal.

● **Sugar balances the tinny acidity of canned tomatoes.**

A single spoonful of sugar neutralizes the metallic taste of out-of-season canned tomatoes, a classic Southern kitchen secret that rounds out the entire flavor profile.



"Slick" Dumplings and Shredded Chicken

Mainstream food media will sell you a bowl of stew topped with fluffy, biscuit-like clouds and call it Southern. But walk into a real kitchen in rural North Carolina or Delaware, and the grandmother at the stove is making something entirely different: the slick dumpling. Born from the agrarian necessity of stretching a tough stewing hen, these are wide, handmade noodles rolled dangerously thin and coated in raw flour. The genius of the dish lies right there—that excess flour washes off into the bubbling broth, naturally thickening it into a rich, velvety gravy. By

swapping the old hen for bone-in thighs and leaning unapologetically on the generational secret of concentrated bouillon, we can bring the definitive, unpretentious soul of the South to a Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	1 tsp	black pepper <i>coarsely ground</i>
6 cup	chicken stock	1/2 tsp	dried thyme
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 large	bay leaf
2 large	carrots <i>peeled and sliced into half-moons</i>	2 cup	all-purpose flour
2 stalks	celery <i>finely chopped including leafy tops</i>	1/2 cup	all-purpose flour <i>reserved for heavy dusting</i>
1 tbsp	chicken bouillon paste	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
		3 tbsp	unsalted butter or vegetable shortening

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the chicken thighs to render their fat.

Place the chicken skin-side down in a heavy Dutch oven over medium-high heat for about 5 minutes until the skin yields its fat, providing the foundational flavor for the entire dish.

2. Sauté the aromatics.

Toss the diced onion, carrots, and celery into the rendered fat and cook for 3 minutes until slightly softened.

3. Build and simmer the broth.

Pour in the chicken stock, bouillon paste, black pepper, thyme, and bay leaf, bring to a rolling boil, then reduce to a simmer and cover for 30 minutes until the chicken is cooked through.

1. Remove the chicken and reserve a portion of the broth.

Take the chicken out to cool, then scoop three-quarters of a cup of the hot broth into a bowl and set it in the fridge to cool down for the dough. If you prefer to use authentic chicken fat for the dough instead of butter, skim three tablespoons from the top of the pot now.

2. Shred the cooled chicken meat.

Discard the skin and bones, then use two forks to pull the meat into bite-sized shreds and set aside.

3. Mix the dumpling dough.

Whisk the 2 cups of flour and salt together, cut in the butter or reserved chicken fat until it resembles coarse sand, then stir in the cooled broth until a shaggy dough forms and gently knead it into a ball.

4. Roll the dough thin and cut into squares.

Generously dust your counter with the extra flour and roll the dough out to an eighth of an inch thick, leaving the raw flour on the surface to act as the natural thickener for the gravy. Cut into roughly two-inch squares.

5. Boil the dumplings gently.

Bring the broth back to a rolling boil and drop the squares in a few at a time, using a wooden spoon to push them under the surface rather than stirring aggressively, which would turn them to mush.

6. Finish the dish and let it rest.

After boiling for 15 minutes, the broth will transform into a rich gravy; stir the shredded chicken back in to warm through, remove from the heat, and let it sit for 10 minutes before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not fear the bouillon.**

Using bouillon or chicken base is the authentic, mid-century secret weapon of Southern grandmothers, providing the deep umami engine that elevates the broth from bland to spectacular.

- **The ultimate weeknight shortcut is perfectly acceptable.**

If you have absolutely no time to boil chicken on a Tuesday, bring high-quality boxed broth and bouillon to a boil, drop in your handmade dumplings, and fold in a shredded store-bought rotisserie chicken at the end.



The Sacred Sunday Dinner: The Midday Feast

*Honoring the most critical cultural institution in Southern foodways with
scaleable, traditional centerpieces.*

In the South, Sunday dinner isn't just a meal; it's an institution, executed squarely in the middle of the day. It is the gravitational center of the week, built on the steady, unpretentious labor of generations who understood that the easiest way to gather the flock was to offer them something they couldn't refuse. It's the smell of a pot roast that's been quietly surrendering to the heat since dawn, or the violent, sputtering alchemy of proper buttermilk fried chicken.

These are the heavy hitters. There are no trendy reinventions here, just honest, fortifying dishes designed to anchor a family to a single table. From macaroni and cheese that commands absolute respect to pan-seared shrimp and grits that

bring the lowcountry inland, this is how you feed the people you love.





The "Custard-Cut" Generational Baked Macaroni and Cheese

This isn't the neon-orange stuff from a cardboard box, nor is it some over-intellectualized, flour-thickened French béchamel. This is the authentic, generational Southern custard-cut—a dish tracing its lineage back to enslaved culinary genius James Hemings. It relies on an unapologetic matrix of eggs, evaporated milk, and hand-grated cheese that bakes into a sturdy, quiche-like monument. When given the proper respect of a mandatory resting period, it cuts into glorious, sharp-edged squares ready to hold their own on a crowded Sunday plate.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	elbow macaroni	1 tsp	onion powder
4 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>cut into small cubes</i>	1 tsp	seasoned salt
12 oz	evaporated milk	1/2 tsp	smoked paprika
1 1/2 cup	whole milk	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
3 large	eggs <i>at room temp</i>	16 oz	Extra-Sharp Cheddar cheese <i>freshly shredded</i>
1 tsp	dry mustard powder	8 oz	Colby Jack cheese <i>freshly shredded</i>
1 tsp	garlic powder	4 oz	cream cheese <i>softened and pinched into small pieces</i>

PREPARATION

- **Grate your own block cheese by hand.**

Pre-shredded bagged cheeses are coated in starches that refuse to melt into the custard properly, resulting in a gritty, split sauce. Taking five minutes to use a box grater is the single biggest secret to reproducing the authentic texture.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat your oven to 350°F and liberally butter a standard 9x13-inch glass or ceramic baking dish.**
- 2. Boil the elbow macaroni in heavily salted water exactly two minutes shy of the package's al dente instructions.**

The pasta will finish cooking in the oven's custard bath; boiling it to complete softness on the stove guarantees a sad, mushy casserole.
- 3. Drain the pasta without rinsing, return it to the warm pot off the heat, and gently toss with the cubed butter and cream cheese.**

Rinsing washes away the surface starches needed for the custard to cling tightly. Toss until the fat is entirely melted and coats every noodle.

- 1. Vigorously whisk the eggs, evaporated milk, whole milk, and all the dry seasonings in a large bowl until completely uniform.**
Taste the liquid before adding the raw eggs; it should taste aggressively seasoned, as the pasta will absorb much of the salt and spice during the bake.
- 2. Combine the shredded Cheddar and Colby Jack, reserve one and a half cups for the crust, and fold the rest into the buttered noodles alongside the custard mixture.**
Ensure every single noodle is thoroughly acquainted with the cheese and the seasoned liquid.
- 3. Pour the mixture into the prepared dish, scatter the reserved cheese evenly across the top, and bake uncovered for 35 to 40 minutes.**
You want the edges bubbling and the top layer of cheese deeply golden and crisped.
- 4. Remove from the oven and let the casserole rest undisturbed on the counter for at least twenty minutes before slicing.**
This is the most critical step; the resting period allows the egg proteins to finish setting, guaranteeing the legendary, sturdy "custard-cut" squares.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Evaporated milk is non-negotiable.**
Do not confuse it with sweetened condensed milk. Evaporated milk is incredibly protein-dense, allowing it to withstand the high, prolonged heat of the oven without curdling or breaking.
- **Embrace the caramelized edges.**
The crispy, deeply browned corners where the cheese meets the hot glass of the baking dish are the most highly prized portions of the meal.



Slow-Braised Smothered Turkey Wings with Holy Trinity Gravy

In the pantheon of Southern soul food, smothered turkey wings command a reverence reserved for the sacred. Born of survival and culinary genius, this dish transforms tough, inexpensive cuts into a luxurious centerpiece. The secret lies in the "smother"—an aggressive spice rub, a hard oven sear to build a foundation of flavor, and a long, low braise under a tight seal of foil. There are no canned soup shortcuts here. Instead, you'll rely on the real, canonical methods: a foundational Holy Trinity, a proper butter-and-flour roux, and the patience to let the oven work its magic.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	turkey wings <i>split at the joints into flats and drumettes</i>	4 tbsp	unsalted butter
2 tbsp	vegetable oil	1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>
1 tbsp	garlic powder	1 med	green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>
1 tbsp	onion powder	2 med	celery stalks <i>finely diced</i>
1 tbsp	smoked paprika	3 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
1 tsp	poultry seasoning	1/4 cup	all-purpose flour
1 tsp	Cajun seasoning	3 cup	low-sodium chicken broth <i>warmed</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	1 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp	black pepper		

PREPARATION

- **Ask the butcher to split the wings.**

If you don't own a heavy meat cleaver, save yourself the hassle and have your local butcher separate the turkey wings into flats and drumettes at the joint.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C) and aggressively dry the wings.**

Moisture is the enemy of a good sear, so pat the turkey wings down thoroughly with paper towels.

- 2. Massage the spices deep into the meat.**

Place the wings in a large bowl and drizzle with the vegetable oil. Combine the garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, poultry seasoning, Cajun seasoning, salt, and pepper, then rub the mixture deep into every inch of the skin.

1. Roast the wings to build the fond.

Arrange the wings in a single layer in a large roasting pan or heavy Dutch oven. Roast uncovered for 30 to 40 minutes, turning halfway, until the skin is golden-brown and fragrant. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (175°C).

2. Reserve the pan drippings.

Transfer the wings to a plate. Pour all the rendered fat and liquid from the pan into a measuring cup, making sure to leave the stuck-on brown flavor bits exactly where they are in the pan.

3. Sauté the Holy Trinity.

In a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the diced yellow onion, green bell pepper, and celery. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes until softened, then add the minced garlic and cook for 1 minute more.

4. Build the traditional roux.

Sprinkle the flour evenly over the softened vegetables. Stir continuously with a wooden spoon for 2 to 3 minutes until the flour coats the vegetables and turns a light peanut butter brown, cooking out the raw flour taste.

5. Whisk in the liquids to form the gravy.

Slowly whisk in the reserved pan drippings, followed by the warmed chicken broth and Worcestershire sauce. Scrape the bottom of the skillet to lift any flavor bits, and simmer gently for 5 to 7 minutes until it thickens into a velvety sauce.

6. Smother the wings.

Return the browned turkey wings to the roasting pan. Pour the thickened Holy Trinity gravy completely over them, ensuring every piece is smothered.

7. Seal and braise low and slow.

Cover the roasting pan tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil to trap the steam. Bake at 350°F (175°C) for 1 hour and 30 minutes, allowing the tough collagen to break down into tender gelatin.

8. Uncover for the final flourish.

Carefully remove the foil for the final 15 minutes of baking. This allows the gravy to thicken further and slightly crisps the exposed skin before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Make it ahead.**

Like all great braises, the flavors of smothered turkey wings deepen overnight. Make this entire dish on a Saturday, store it in the fridge, and gently reheat it for the ultimate stress-free Sunday dinner.

- **Respect the starch.**

This dish demands a vehicle to catch the liquid gold gravy. Serve it heavily ladled over long-grain white rice or mashed potatoes alongside a proper buttermilk cornbread.

- **Supermarket substitutions.**

If your local market doesn't have whole turkey wings, swap in large turkey thighs or legs using the exact same method and timing.



Mississippi Fish Fry Cornmeal Catfish

In the Mississippi Delta, catfish is not just a meal; it is a cultural institution born of muddy waters and community survival. This recipe pulls directly from the matriarchs of Humphreys County, demanding three non-negotiable steps: a tangy buttermilk purge to sweeten the farm-raised fish, an aggressively seasoned cornmeal crust, and a mandatory ten-minute rest before it hits the hot oil. That resting period is the difference between a crust that shatters perfectly in your mouth and one that falls apart in the pan. Serve it straight from the grease

alongside a heaping pile of baked spaghetti, a brilliant and enduring testament to the historic intersection of Deep South sharecroppers and Italian immigrants.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	U.S. farm-raised catfish fillets <i>cut lengthwise down the natural seam if thick</i>	1 tbsp	kosher salt
1 cup	buttermilk	1 tbsp	black pepper
1 large	large egg	1 tbsp	smoked paprika
2 tbsp	Louisiana-style hot sauce	1 tbsp	garlic powder
1 tbsp	yellow mustard	1 tsp	onion powder
1 1/2 cup	fine yellow cornmeal	1 tsp	cayenne pepper
1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	2 qt	peanut oil

PREPARATION

- **Rinse the catfish fillets under cold water and pat them completely dry with paper towels.**
- **Set a clean wire cooling rack over a baking sheet for resting the breaded fish.**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Whisk the wet ingredients and soak the catfish.

In a large shallow dish, whisk together the buttermilk, egg, hot sauce, and yellow mustard until combined, then submerge the dried fillets and refrigerate for at least 15 minutes.

1. Prepare the heavily seasoned cornmeal dredge.

In a wide bowl, vigorously whisk the cornmeal, flour, kosher salt, black pepper, smoked paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, and cayenne pepper until completely uniform.

2. Coat the fish and enforce the mandatory resting period.

Remove a fillet from the buttermilk, let the excess drip off, and toss it in the dry dredge, pressing firmly so the cornmeal adheres. Move the breaded fish to the wire rack and let it sit entirely undisturbed for 10 to 15 minutes to hydrate the starch into a cohesive paste.

3. Heat the frying oil to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Pour two inches of peanut oil into a heavy cast-iron skillet or Dutch oven and heat over medium-high until a deep-fry thermometer registers between 350 and 365 degrees.

4. Fry the fish in uncrowded batches without touching them.

Carefully lower the fillets into the oil, dropping them away from your body, and leave them completely alone for three minutes to let the crust set before carefully flipping once to finish frying until deeply golden brown.

5. Drain the catfish on an elevated wire rack.

Transfer the freshly fried fish to a second clean wire rack set over paper towels, ensuring air can circulate beneath the fillets so the bottom crust does not turn to mush.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Never drain fried fish directly on paper towels.**

Placing hot, freshly fried fish directly on a flat paper towel traps the escaping steam, instantly ruining the crunch you just worked so hard to achieve.

● **Farm-raised catfish is mandatory for this recipe.**

While wild-caught sounds romantic, large river catfish often carry a distinct muddy flavor that requires excessive purging, whereas U.S. farm-raised pond catfish provides a sweet, clean canvas.

- **The oil temperature is critical.**

If the oil drops below 350 degrees, the fish acts like a sponge for grease, so be sure to fry in batches of two or three fillets maximum to maintain proper heat.



The After-Church Slow Cooker Pot Roast

Sunday dinner in the South isn't just a meal; it's an institution. For generations, grandmothers needed a midday feast that could essentially cook itself while the family sat in the pews, relying on the slow cooker to bridge the gap between devotion and dinner. This recipe leans unapologetically on mid-century pantry staples—dry onion soup mix and canned cream of mushroom—pushing back against the gourmet snobbery that demands a twelve-hour demi-glace. A hard, non-negotiable sear locks in the foundation before the machine

does the heavy lifting, yielding a tender, umami-rich pot roast that tastes exactly like home and demands nothing more than a busy weeknight's minimal effort.

INGREDIENTS

3 1/2 lb	boneless beef chuck roast <i>patted completely dry</i>	1 oz	dry onion soup mix
1 tbsp	kosher salt	10 1/2 oz	condensed cream of mushroom soup
1 tsp	black pepper	1 cup	low-sodium beef broth
2 tbsp	vegetable oil	2 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce
1 large	yellow onion <i>peeled and cut into thick wedges</i>	3 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>
1 lb	baby carrots	1 med	bay leaf
1 1/2 lb	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>halved, unpeeled</i>	3 med	fresh thyme sprigs

PREPARATION

- **Bring the meat to room temperature.**

Season the dried chuck roast aggressively on all sides with the salt and pepper. Let it sit on the counter for 20 minutes to take the chill off the meat, ensuring a much better crust when it hits the hot skillet.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the chuck roast to build the foundational flavor.**

Heat the vegetable oil in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat until almost smoking. Sear the beef undisturbed for 4 to 5 minutes per side until a deep, dark brown crust forms, then transfer it to the slow cooker insert.

1. Layer the aromatics and root vegetables.

Scatter the thick onion wedges, carrots, and potatoes around and on top of the seared beef. Toss in the minced garlic, bay leaf, and fresh thyme sprigs.

2. Whisk together the church-lady gravy.

In a medium bowl, whisk the dry onion soup mix, cream of mushroom soup, beef broth, and Worcestershire sauce until completely smooth, then pour it evenly over the beef and vegetables.

3. Let the slow cooker do the heavy lifting.

Cover and cook on low for 8 to 10 hours. The roast is ready when it yields completely to a fork and shreds with zero resistance.

4. Shred the beef and serve.

Discard the bay leaf and thyme stems. Use two forks to gently pull the beef apart directly in the pot, letting the large chunks soak up the rich, dark onion gravy before serving hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not skip the sear.**

Dropping raw meat straight into the slow cooker robs the gravy of its color and depth. The caramelized crust formed in the skillet is non-negotiable for real Southern flavor.

● **Make it weeknight friendly.**

Sear the meat and chop the vegetables the night before, storing them separately in the fridge. In the morning, simply dump everything into the slow cooker, turn it to low, and head to work.

● **Thicken the gravy if desired.**

The cream of mushroom soup usually provides enough body, but for a super-thick diner-style gravy, whisk 2 tablespoons of cornstarch with 2 tablespoons of cold water and stir it into the liquid during the last 30 minutes of cooking.



Sunday Buttermilk Fried Chicken

Long before fast food buckets dominated the landscape, Southern fried chicken was a profound American synthesis, marrying Scottish shallow frying with West African seasoning and battering techniques. We don't all have two days to brine a bird and render lard, but we can capture that exact, heart-stoppingly perfect flavor on a weeknight. The secret isn't in obscure heritage ingredients, but in the patience of a heavily seasoned buttermilk soak, a touch of cornstarch for shatteringly crisp skin, and trusting your heavy cast iron skillet.

INGREDIENTS

4 lb	chicken thighs and drumsticks <i>bone in and skin on</i>	2 cup	all purpose flour
2 cup	whole buttermilk	1/2 cup	cornstarch
2 tbsp	hot sauce	1 tbsp	sweet paprika
2 tbsp	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	2 tsp	garlic powder
2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground and divided</i>	2 tsp	onion powder
		1/2 tsp	cayenne pepper
		1 qt	peanut oil <i>for frying</i>

PREPARATION

- **Submerge the chicken in heavily seasoned buttermilk.**

In a large bowl, mix the buttermilk, hot sauce, half the kosher salt, and half the black pepper. Drop the chicken in, ensure every piece is coated, and refrigerate for at least four hours or overnight to break down the proteins and pull the seasoning deep into the bone.

- **Whisk together the dry ingredients for the crust.**

In a large shallow dish, combine the flour, cornstarch, paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, cayenne, and the remaining salt and pepper.

- **Dredge the chicken and let it rest on a wire rack for at least twenty minutes.**

Pull the chicken from the buttermilk, press it firmly into the seasoned flour, and place it on a wire rack. Do not rush this; letting it sit turns the flour into a tacky paste that bonds to the skin, guaranteeing your crust won't slide off in the hot fat.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Bring an inch and a half of peanut oil to 350°F in a heavy cast iron skillet.

Cast iron is non-negotiable here because it holds heat brilliantly and creates gorgeous caramelized spots where the chicken touches the pan. Pour in the oil and heat over medium-high until a deep-fry thermometer hits 350°F.

2. Carefully lower the chicken into the oil skin side down and fry in batches.

The temperature will drop when the cold meat hits the fat; adjust your stove to maintain a steady, rolling fry around 315°F to 325°F. Overcrowding the pan plummets the temperature and leaves you with greasy, steamed bird.

3. Fry for twelve to fifteen minutes total, turning once.

Let the pieces cook undisturbed until deep golden brown, then flip with tongs and finish until the thickest part registers 165°F for white meat or 175°F for dark meat.

4. Move the finished chicken to a clean wire rack and season immediately.

Never put fried chicken directly on paper towels unless you want trapped steam to ruin the crust you just worked so hard to build. Set it on a rack over paper towels, hit it with a final pinch of salt, and let it rest for ten minutes to lock in the juices.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Keep batches hot in a low oven.**

If you are making a mountain of chicken, keep the finished pieces on a wire rack in a 200°F oven while you fry the rest. It keeps them piping hot and safely renders off excess oil without overcooking.

- **The secret to the crunch is the cornstarch.**

The half cup of cornstarch in the dredge is a generational secret; it inhibits gluten formation in the flour, yielding a lighter crust that stays crunchy long after the chicken has cooled down.



Slow-Simmered Sunday Collard Greens with Smoked Turkey

A pot of greens simmering on the back of the stove is the undeniable scent of a Southern Sunday. Rooted in the profound resourcefulness of enslaved West Africans, this dish transforms a tough, bitter leaf into something dark, velvety, and deeply comforting. The secret isn't some Michelin-starred technique; it's just patience. While pork was the historical standard, generations of soul food cooks have embraced smoked turkey to build the potlikker—that rich, smoky, nutrient-dense broth that is the absolute soul of the dish. Don't you dare pour it down the drain; bake some hot cornbread and soak up every last drop.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	neutral oil	3 large bunches	fresh collard greens <i>stems removed, rolled tightly, and sliced horizontally into 1-inch ribbons</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/4 cup	apple cider vinegar
4 med cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	2 tbsp	white or light brown sugar
2 lb	smoked turkey wings, tails, or drumsticks	1 tbsp	seasoned salt
6 cup	chicken broth	1 tsp	smoked paprika
		1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		1/2 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes

PREPARATION

- **Execute the triple wash.**

Fill a clean sink with cool water, aggressively swish the fresh collard greens to loosen the grit, and lift them out before draining the sink. Repeat this at least three times until the water is completely clear—a single grain of sand will ruin the entire pot.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the savory foundation.**

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over medium heat. Sauté the diced onion for about 5 minutes until soft and translucent, then stir in the garlic and cook for one minute more until fragrant.

- 2. Build the potlikker.**

Nestle the smoked turkey pieces into the pot and pour in the chicken broth. Bring to a rolling boil, then drop the heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes to extract the collagen and deep smoke from the turkey.

1. Wilt the greens.

Uncover the pot and add the prepped collard greens a few handfuls at a time. Let them wilt into the hot, smoky broth for a minute or two before adding the next batch.

2. Season and simmer into submission.

Once all the greens are submerged, stir in the apple cider vinegar, sugar, seasoned salt, smoked paprika, black pepper, and red pepper flakes. Cover tightly, reduce the heat to low, and simmer gently for 1 1/2 to 2 hours until the leaves are dark, silky, and melt-in-your-mouth tender.

3. Shred the turkey and serve.

Carefully remove the turkey pieces with tongs, let them cool slightly, and shred the meat from the bones, discarding any skin or cartilage. Return the meat to the pot, taste the broth for a final adjustment of vinegar or hot sauce, and serve piping hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the weeknight schedule.**

For a busy Tuesday, assemble the sweated aromatics, turkey, broth, and washed greens in a slow cooker in the morning. Set it to low for 8 hours, and you'll come home to a perfectly developed potlikker.

● **Bagged greens are acceptable, with caveats.**

If using pre-washed, bagged chopped greens to save time, you must still manually sort through them and discard any thick, woody stem pieces that slipped past the commercial sorters.



The Meat-and-Three: Potlikker & Produce

A love letter to the Southern vegetable patch, elevating simple produce into deeply flavorful sides.

There's a quiet dignity in a dented aluminum pot simmering on a back burner. For generations, Southern cooks haven't just prepared vegetables; they've wrestled them into submission, coaxing deep, smoky resonance from stubborn greens and tough roots using nothing more than a little pork fat and sheer force of will. This isn't the pristine, twee farm-to-table nonsense of modern menus. This is the working-class soul of the meat-and-three, where the sides routinely upstage whatever protein sits next to them.

You don't need a rusted cast-iron cauldron and an entire afternoon to get it right, either. These are the workhorse dishes—collards infused with quick smoke, green tomatoes fried to a shattering crunch, cabbage wilted down in bacon grease—hacked for a busy Tuesday night, but tasting exactly like a Sunday afternoon at your grandmother's table. Grab a skillet. Save the potlikker.





Fried Green Tomatoes

If there is a single secret to be stolen from a Southern grandmother, it is the understanding that patience is a non-negotiable ingredient. The tragedy of a bad fried green tomato is that beautiful, savory crust violently sliding off the slice on your first bite, ruined by the fruit's own pressurized water. The fix is unapologetically simple: salt them, and walk away. Frying the cured slices in a hot cast-iron skillet fortified with a spoonful of reserved bacon grease is a nod to the old days that fills the kitchen with the undeniable, smoky aroma of true Southern heritage.

INGREDIENTS

3 large unripe green tomatoes **1 tbsp** kosher salt
ends trimmed and sliced 1/3-inch thick

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

2 large eggs

1/2 cup buttermilk

1 tsp hot sauce

1 cup fine or medium yellow cornmeal

1 tbsp Creole or Cajun seasoning blend

1 cup neutral oil

2 tbsp bacon grease

PREPARATION

- **Mind the thickness of your slices.**

Tomatoes must be sliced between 1/4-inch and 1/2-inch thick. Cut too thin, and the tomato dissolves during frying; cut too thick, and the crust burns before the tart interior has a chance to soften.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the moisture.**

Lay the tomato slices flat on a wire rack or cutting board, sprinkle both sides generously with the kosher salt, and walk away for 15 to 20 minutes to let osmosis draw out the water.

- 2. Dry the tomatoes completely.**

Using paper towels, firmly dab the beads of moisture off the slices until they are completely dry; this step is non-negotiable for a crust that actually sticks to the fruit.

- 3. Set up the breading station.**

Prepare three shallow bowls: mix the flour with half the seasoning in the first, whisk the eggs, buttermilk, and hot sauce in the second, and mix the cornmeal with the remaining seasoning in the third.

1. Execute the triple dredge.

Working one slice at a time with one wet hand and one dry hand, dredge the tomato in the flour, submerge it fully into the buttermilk wash, and then press it firmly into the cornmeal mix, packing the crumbs tight.

2. Rest the breaded slices.

Place the coated tomatoes back on a dry wire rack for 5 to 10 minutes, allowing the flour and egg time to act like cement, locking the crust to the tomato.

3. Heat the fats.

Place a heavy cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat, adding the neutral oil and bacon grease until it reaches 350°F, or until a pinch of cornmeal instantly sizzles and dances without smoking.

4. Fry in uncrowded batches.

Carefully lay the tomatoes into the hot oil, frying for 3 to 4 minutes until the bottom is a deep, golden mahogany, then carefully flip and fry for another 2 to 3 minutes.

5. Drain on a wire rack.

Transfer the fried slices to a clean wire rack set over a paper towel-lined baking sheet, avoiding flat plates where trapped steam will instantly turn the bottom crust to mush.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the tomatoes.**

True green tomatoes are rock-hard and entirely unripened. If they aren't on display, ask the produce manager at the local supermarket to grab them from the back room before they are set out to turn red.

● **The modern crunch upgrade.**

While pure cornmeal is deeply traditional, swapping half the cornmeal with Panko breadcrumbs in your final dredging bowl is an incredibly valid modern adaptation for a lighter crunch.

- **Gluten-free adaptation.**

The structural integrity of the slice relies on the tomato's natural pectin. The all-purpose flour can be seamlessly swapped 1:1 with any standard gluten-free flour blend or extra-fine cornstarch.



Bacon-Simmered Green Beans and New Potatoes

There is a prevailing, somewhat snobbish modern culinary orthodoxy that insists green beans must be quickly blanched, kept crisp, and rendered a vibrant spring green. A Southern grandmother knows better. To unlock the true soul of this dish, you have to subject the beans to a slow, intentional death, simmering them until they surrender completely to a smoky, pork-laced broth. The resulting olive-drab beans melt in your mouth, but the real prize is the potlikker—the nutrient-dense, savory liquid left behind in the pot. It is liquid gold, a testament to the working-class genius of making magic from scraps, and it practically demands a wedge of cornbread to soak it up.

INGREDIENTS

6 slices	thick-cut bacon <i>chopped into 1/2-inch pieces</i>	2 lb	fresh green beans <i>washed, ends snapped off, and broken in half</i>
1 med	sweet yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	3 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
3 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 1/2 lb	small red potatoes <i>halved or quartered</i>
1/4 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes	2 tbsp	unsalted butter
		1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the pork fat slowly to build your savory foundation.**
Place a large heavy pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chopped bacon and cook for about 7 to 8 minutes until the fat has rendered completely and the bacon is crisp. Do not drain the fat; this is the engine of the dish.
- 2. Sweat the aromatics until they soften into the rendered bacon grease.**
Toss the diced onion into the pot. Sauté for 4 to 5 minutes until translucent. Stir in the minced garlic and crushed red pepper flakes, cooking for just 30 seconds until deeply fragrant.
- 3. Coat the green beans and begin the slow simmer.**
Add the prepared green beans, tossing them thoroughly so every bean is slicked with the savory bacon fat. Pour in the chicken broth, which should come just to the top of the beans. Bring to a rolling boil, then immediately reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and let it simmer undisturbed for 45 minutes.
- 4. Stagger the starches to prevent the potatoes from disintegrating into mush.**
After the beans have a 45-minute head start, remove the lid and nestle the halved red potatoes down into the broth. Cover and continue to simmer on low for an additional 30 to 45 minutes.

1. Finish with butter and an aggressive hit of black pepper.

The dish is ready when the potatoes are fork-tender and the green beans are incredibly soft and olive-green. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter if using. Taste the potlikker—add salt only if absolutely necessary, as the bacon and broth carry plenty, but do add the black pepper. Serve hot in shallow bowls with plenty of the broth.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The slow cooker method is a perfectly valid weeknight shortcut.**

If you don't have two hours to tend a stove on a Tuesday, render the bacon and onions in a pan first, then dump them into a slow cooker along with the beans, potatoes, and broth. Set it to low for 6 to 8 hours before you leave for work, and come home to a kitchen smelling exactly like a Southern grandmother's house.



"Scraped" Fried Sweet Corn

To understand the soul of a Southern grandmother's kitchen, look past the deep fryer and toward the cast-iron skillet. True Southern fried corn isn't battered or drowned in oil; it's a slow, patient braise relying on an indigenous technique called "milking the cob." By scraping the denuded cobs with the back of a knife, you extract the thick, starchy nectar locals affectionately call the "goody." It's a frugal, ancient method that transforms summer produce and a spoonful of saved pork fat into something deeply comforting, sticky, and completely perfect.

INGREDIENTS

6 to 8 ears fresh sweet corn
med *shucked and silks removed*

3 to 4 thick-cut bacon slices
med

2 tbsp unsalted butter

1 tsp kosher salt

1/2 tsp black pepper
freshly cracked

PREPARATION

- **Secure the cutting station.**

Place a small bowl upside down inside a larger, wider mixing bowl to catch the flying kernels and starchy milk.

- **Milk the cobs to extract the goody.**

Stand each shucked ear upright on the small bowl and slice straight down to shear off the kernels, then turn the knife around and press the blunt back edge firmly against the top of the cob, scraping all the way down to release the thick, white corn milk.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the bacon fat over medium-low heat.**

Lay the bacon strips in a cold, heavy cast-iron skillet and let them fry slowly until crispy, about 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the bacon to a paper towel, leaving about two tablespoons of liquid rendered fat in the pan.

- 2. Fry the scraped corn and milk in the pork fat and butter.**

Add the butter to the hot bacon grease, then pour in all the kernels and every drop of the scraped corn milk. Season immediately with the kosher salt and black pepper.

- 3. Braise and caramelize until thick and silky.**

Stir the corn to coat it in the fats, then reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, stirring frequently, for 15 to 20 minutes. The natural starches will thicken the liquid, allowing the corn to tenderize and pick up light, caramelized brown spots from the cast iron.

1. Garnish with the reserved bacon and serve immediately.

Once the liquid forms a thick glaze that coats the corn, remove the skillet from the heat, crumble the crispy bacon over the top, and serve hot directly from the pan.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Embrace the winter frozen corn hack.**

If fresh corn is out of season, substitute 5 cups of high-quality thawed frozen corn. Because you cannot scrape a frozen cob for milk, sauté the kernels as directed and stir in 2 tablespoons of heavy cream and a tiny pinch of flour during the last 3 minutes of cooking to recreate the creamy texture.



Southern "Secret Sugar" Creamy Butter Beans

If you grew up around a Southern grandmother's kitchen, the smell of a simmering pot of butter beans is the smell of home. For those who didn't, butter beans might sound like a bland afterthought, but in the South, vegetables are treated with reverence, bathed in smoky pork fat and slow-cooked until they yield a rich, savory potlikker. The secret to this weeknight version is skipping the hours-long simmering of a ham hock in favor of thick-cut bacon and rich chicken broth. Most importantly, we use a generational trick: a spoonful of sugar. It doesn't

make the beans sweet, but rather performs a culinary magic trick, balancing the smoke and coaxing out the natural creamy earthiness of the beans.

INGREDIENTS

4 slices	thick-cut bacon <i>chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	onion powder
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
28 oz	frozen baby butter beans	to taste	Kosher salt
3 cup	high-quality chicken broth	2 tbsp	unsalted butter
2 tbsp	granulated white sugar	1 dash	apple cider vinegar <i>optional, for serving</i>
1 tsp	garlic powder		

PREPARATION

- **Do not thaw the frozen butter beans.**

They are meant to go directly from the freezer into the hot broth to maintain their structural integrity.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cook the chopped bacon in a large Dutch oven over medium heat until the fat renders and the meat is crispy.**

This takes about 7 to 8 minutes. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon and set it aside on a paper towel, but leave two to three tablespoons of the hot pork grease in the pot to serve as your foundational seasoning.

- 2. Sauté the diced onion directly in the hot bacon grease.**

Cook for 5 to 7 minutes until the onions are soft, translucent, and have lifted the browned bits from the bottom of the pot.

- 1. Pour in the chicken broth, frozen butter beans, sugar, garlic powder, onion powder, and black pepper.**

Give everything a good stir to dissolve the sugar, which will neutralize the aggressive saltiness of the pork and highlight the natural sweetness of the starchy beans.

- 2. Bring the pot to a rolling boil, then immediately reduce the heat to medium-low and cover tightly.**

Let the beans simmer undisturbed for 35 minutes until they are perfectly tender.

- 3. Remove the lid and use the back of a wooden spoon to mash about a half-cup of the beans directly against the side of the pot.**

Stir the mashed beans back into the liquid and simmer uncovered for another 5 to 10 minutes. This mechanical starch release naturally thickens the broth into a luxurious, creamy gravy without needing a roux.

- 4. Remove the pot from the heat and stir in the unsalted butter and reserved crispy bacon.**

The butter emulsifies the starchy broth into a glossy sauce. Taste the potlikker, adding Kosher salt only if needed, and serve immediately with a dash of vinegar if desired.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Substitute canned butter beans with caution.**

If using canned beans, simmer the broth and seasonings by themselves for 15 minutes to concentrate flavors, then fold in the rinsed canned beans during the final 5 minutes so they do not turn to mush.

- **Vegetarian adaptation.**

Omit the bacon and swap chicken broth for vegetable broth. Sauté the onions in olive oil and butter, and add a half teaspoon each of smoked paprika and hickory liquid smoke to replicate the essential pork flavor.



Candied Yams

If you want to start a fight in a Southern kitchen, ask whether candied yams belong on the stove or in the oven, or whether they should be buried under a charred blanket of marshmallows. Let's clear the air: authentic, generational Soul Food relies on a slow-simmered, spice-infused syrup, not a 1917 corporate marketing stunt. Built on Black culinary brilliance, the dish utilizes the sweet potato—adopted by enslaved West Africans who named it after the starchy *nyami* of their homeland. This canonical stovetop method bypasses the oven entirely, reducing butter, sugars, and a sharp hit of ginger and clove into a glossy, complex glaze that coats every single bite.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	orange-fleshed sweet potatoes <i>peeled and sliced into 1/2-inch thick rounds</i>	2 tsp	ground cinnamon
1/2 cup	unsalted butter <i>cut into cubes</i>	1/2 tsp	ground nutmeg
1/2 cup	dark brown sugar <i>packed</i>	1/4 tsp	ground ginger
1/2 cup	granulated white sugar	1/8 tsp	ground cloves
1/4 cup	water	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
		1 tbsp	pure vanilla extract

PREPARATION

- **Slice uniformly.**

Cut the sweet potatoes into even 1/2-inch rounds to ensure they cook at the same rate. If the potatoes are exceptionally wide, halve the rounds into half-moons.

- **Prevent oxidation.**

If you aren't cooking the sliced sweet potatoes immediately, submerge them in a bowl of cool water so they don't turn brown, draining well before they hit the pot.

- **Select the right tuber.**

Ensure you purchase orange-fleshed sweet potatoes like Jewel, Garnet, or Beauregard, which may be erroneously labeled as 'Yams' in standard American grocery stores.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the syrup base.**

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, combine the butter, dark brown sugar, granulated sugar, water, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, clove, and salt over medium heat, stirring gently until the butter melts and the sugars dissolve into a dark liquid.

1. Coat the sweet potatoes.

Add the sliced sweet potatoes to the pot and toss them gently with a large wooden spoon until every piece is coated in the butter-sugar mixture.

2. Simmer covered.

Bring the liquid to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low, cover with a tight-fitting lid, and let simmer for 35 to 40 minutes, stirring gently from the bottom every 10 minutes so the potatoes don't stick or break apart.

3. Reduce into a glaze.

Once the sweet potatoes are fork-tender, remove the lid, slightly increase the heat to medium, and simmer uncovered for 10 to 15 minutes to evaporate the water and allow the syrup to thicken and cling to the potatoes.

4. Finish with vanilla and rest.

Turn off the heat and stir in the vanilla extract to preserve its delicate notes, then let the yams sit in the pot for 5 to 10 minutes to allow the glaze to set up as it slightly cools.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The secret balancer.**

Ginger and clove are the closely guarded secrets of a Southern grandmother's kitchen, utilized specifically to keep the dish from leaning one-note sweet.

● **A bright or boozy substitution.**

For added complexity, swap the water for fresh orange juice to add a bright acidic counterbalance, or a quarter cup of spiced rum or bourbon for a deep caramel undertone.

● **Mind the sugar.**

The line between perfectly caramelized and burnt sugar is incredibly thin; lower the heat during the final uncovered reduction if it thickens too rapidly.



Shortcut Skillet Yellow Squash and Onions

In the humid, agrarian sprawl of the American South, vegetables are rarely treated as an ascetic, steamed afterthought. They are cooked long and low in cast iron with rendered pork fat until they surrender entirely, becoming something sweet, savory, and profoundly comforting. This shortcut iteration of the classic diner staple employs a splash of chicken broth to steam-braise the squash in a fraction of the time, capturing the exact, unapologetic soul of a grandmother's kitchen without the thirty-minute wait.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	yellow summer squash <i>washed, trimmed, and cut into 1/4-inch thick rounds</i>	1 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 large	sweet onion <i>peeled, halved, and sliced into 1/4-inch half-moons</i>	1/3 cup	chicken broth
2 large slices	thick-cut bacon	1/2 tsp	granulated sugar
		1/2 tsp	kosher salt
		1/4 tsp	coarse black pepper

PREPARATION

- **Slice the vegetables uniformly.**

Slicing the squash into precise 1/4-inch rounds ensures rapid, even heat penetration, which is absolutely essential for pulling off this weeknight shortcut.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the bacon fat in a large cast-iron skillet over medium heat.**

Cook the bacon slices for 5 to 7 minutes until crispy, then remove them to a paper towel, leaving the rendered liquid gold in the pan.

- 2. Sauté the sweet onion in the hot bacon drippings.**

Cook for 3 to 4 minutes until the onions just begin to soften and turn translucent, laying the savory foundation for the dish.

- 3. Add the squash, butter, sugar, salt, and pepper, tossing well to coat.**

The pinch of sugar is the generational secret here; it will not make the dish overtly sweet, but it amplifies the natural sugars of the squash and balances the smoky pork fat.

- 4. Pour in the chicken broth, immediately cover with a tight-fitting lid, and reduce the heat to medium-low.**

This is the shortcut. The broth generates an instant, high-volume steam that collapses and tenderizes the squash in just 5 to 7 minutes.

- 1. Uncover the skillet and concentrate the juices over medium-high heat.**
Cook for another 2 to 3 minutes, stirring gently, until the excess water evaporates and leaves behind a rich, emulsified glaze.
- 2. Crumble the reserved bacon over the top and serve immediately.**
Serve warm alongside roasted meat or a wedge of cornbread to sop up the deeply flavored pan juices, known regionally as the potlikker.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Pork-Free Substitution**

To achieve the authentic smoky umami without bacon grease, omit the bacon and melt 2 tablespoons of butter with 1/4 teaspoon of smoked paprika and 1/2 teaspoon of vegetable bouillon paste before adding the onions.

- **Squash Selection**

Crookneck squash is the historical standard, but straight-neck works perfectly. Avoid oversized, mature squash, as their skins are tough and the centers turn watery and bitter.



Front Porch Gatherings & Holiday Traditions

Communal afternoon snacks and deeply nostalgic desserts that define Southern hospitality. Perfect for lingering weekend afternoons or ringing in the holidays with loved ones.

Southern hospitality isn't the glossy, pastel-hued myth peddled in lifestyle magazines. It's the humid, slow-motion afternoons where an unspoken agreement dictates that when people gather, you feed them. It's a sleeve of saltines next to a tub of aggressively sharp pimento cheese, or a damp paper

sack of brine-soaked boiled peanuts acquired from a roadside shack. There is no pretense here. Just a screen door that slams shut behind anyone looking for a place to sit.

Then come the traditions. The cast-iron cobblers bubbling with bruised summer fruit, the from-scratch banana pudding built in proper custard layers, and the Hoppin' John simmering dutifully on New Year's Day to keep the bad luck out. These are recipes guarded like state secrets but served to anyone who walks up the steps. No tweezers, no garnishes. Just grab a spoon, find an empty chair, and settle in.





"Church Potluck" Deviled Eggs

Down South, you don't show up to a church potluck or a family barbecue without a platter of deviled eggs. Some grandmothers, preferring to keep the devil out of the church parlor, called them "Angel Eggs" or "Dressed Eggs," but the standard of excellence remains the same. The secret isn't fancy ingredients or modern twists. It is an unwavering loyalty to a holy trinity of standard supermarket finds: the sugar-free tang of Duke's mayonnaise, the sharp zip of yellow ballpark mustard, and the sweet micro-crunch of pickle relish. Combined with a

foolproof hot-water boiling trick to guarantee flawless peeling, this is the exact, unpretentious flavor of a Southern front porch, streamlined for your weeknight.

INGREDIENTS

14 large	large eggs <i>straight from the fridge</i>	1/4 tsp	kosher salt
1/2 cup	Duke's mayonnaise	1/4 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
3 tbsp	sweet pickle relish <i>drained of excess liquid</i>	1 dash	hot sauce
2 tsp	yellow mustard	1 dash	sweet paprika

PREPARATION

- **Prepare an ice bath.**

Fill a large mixing bowl with cold water and a generous amount of ice cubes before you begin boiling the eggs.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring a wide pot of water to a rolling boil.**

Fill a pot with enough water to submerge the eggs by an inch and bring it to a rapid, aggressive boil before the eggs go anywhere near it.

- 2. Shock the cold eggs in the boiling water.**

Using a slotted spoon, gently lower the eggs straight from the fridge into the boiling water. This sudden temperature shock separates the membrane from the shell for effortless peeling. Lower the heat slightly to maintain a gentle boil and set a timer for exactly 12 minutes.

1. Plunge the eggs into an ice bath.

The second the timer goes off, transfer the eggs directly into the ice water. Let them sit for at least 10 minutes. This halts the cooking process instantly, preventing the dreaded green sulfur ring around your yolk.

2. Peel the eggs.

Gently tap the eggs on the counter to crackle the shell all over. Peeling them submerged in the ice water or under a gentle stream of cool tap water helps the shells slip off in large, satisfying sheets.

3. Slice and separate the yolks from the whites.

Slice the peeled eggs in half lengthwise and gently pop the firm yellow yolks into a medium mixing bowl. Arrange the empty egg white boats on a serving platter.

4. Mash the dry yolks into a fine powder.

Do not skip this step. Rigorously mash the dry yolks with a fork against the side of the bowl until they are completely crumbled. Mashing the yolks before adding any wet ingredients is the generational secret to a lump-free, creamy filling.

5. Mix the filling.

Fold the mayonnaise, sweet pickle relish, yellow mustard, salt, pepper, and hot sauce into the powdery yolks. Stir vigorously until the mixture is incredibly smooth. Taste and adjust—add a touch more mustard for zing, or a spoonful more mayo for creaminess.

6. Pipe the filling into the egg whites.

Scoop the yolk mixture into a small plastic zip-top bag, push it to one corner, and snip a small triangle off the tip. Squeeze gently to pipe a neat, generous mound of filling into each egg white half.

7. Garnish and serve.

Dust the tops lightly with sweet paprika, holding the shaker high above the eggs for an even, elegant dusting. Serve immediately, or cover loosely and chill until the potluck begins.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Cold-Water Myth**

Starting eggs in cold water bonds the egg whites to the shell membrane. Dropping cold eggs into rapidly boiling water, followed immediately by an ice bath, is the scientifically backed trick to foolproof peeling every single time.

- **Brand Loyalty**

Southern cooks swear by Duke's mayonnaise for its rich mouthfeel and sugar-free tang. If you only have standard mayonnaise like Hellmann's or Best Foods, stir in a half teaspoon of apple cider vinegar to replicate that authentic zip.



Generational 3-Ingredient Sausage Balls

If you have ever found yourself on a Southern porch with a paper plate in hand, you know the profound comfort of these sausage balls. Born from the mid-century marriage of regional pork and boxed convenience, this is the unembellished, three-ingredient truth of authentic Southern hospitality. Skip the modern internet crutches and added spices; the secret lies entirely in the patience of kneading room-temperature pork fat and freshly grated cheddar with your bare hands until it surrenders into a perfect dough. It is unpretentious, deeply traditional, and utterly foolproof if you respect the technique.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	bulk pork breakfast sausage <i>brought to room temperature</i>	8 oz	sharp cheddar cheese block <i>brought to room temperature and freshly grated by hand</i>
		1 1/2 cup	baking mix

PREPARATION

- **Allow both the sausage and the block of cheese to sit at room temperature for thirty minutes before you begin.**

Cold pork fat is solid and will not easily incorporate into the dry flour, resulting in a dense, overworked, and ultimately crumbly failure.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and line a large rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.**
- 2. Combine the room-temperature sausage, freshly grated cheddar, and baking mix in a large bowl.**

Do not use a spoon or spatula for this process.

- 3. Wash your hands, take off your rings, and knead the mixture vigorously with your bare hands for three to five minutes.**

It will look impossibly dry at first, but do not panic and do not add water. The ambient warmth of your hands will slowly melt the pork fat and cheese, eventually forming a cohesive, slightly sticky dough.

- 4. Pinch off pieces of the dough and roll them between your palms to create uniform one-inch spheres.**

Using a medium cookie scoop ensures they bake evenly without the smaller ones drying out. Space them about an inch apart on the prepared baking sheet.

- 5. Bake for twenty to twenty-five minutes until the exteriors are crispy and golden-brown.**

The internal temperature of the pork must reach 165°F.

- 1. Transfer the baked balls immediately to a paper towel-lined plate to absorb any excess grease.**

Serve warm or at room temperature alongside a simple dip of equal parts mayonnaise and Dijon mustard.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Absolutely do not buy pre-shredded bagged cheese for this recipe.**

Commercial pre-shredded cheese is coated in cellulose to prevent clumping, which acts as a moisture barrier and will turn your sausage balls into dry, crumbly sawdust.

- **Use standard, fatty pork sausage rather than lean poultry alternatives.**

The canonical texture relies entirely on an 80/20 fat ratio to hydrate the dry baking mix. If you must use turkey or chicken sausage, you will likely need to add a tablespoon of whole milk to bind the dough.

- **These are the ultimate make-ahead party food.**

You can roll the raw mixture into balls, freeze them solid on a baking sheet, and transfer them to a bag. Bake them straight from frozen by adding three to five extra minutes to the oven time.



Fellowship Hall Grape Jelly Meatballs

If you grew up attending church potlucks or neighborhood tailgates anywhere south of the Mason-Dixon, you know exactly what these smell like. The aroma of simmering grape jelly and tangy Heinz chili sauce hitting a warm Crock-Pot is the official scent of Southern hospitality. It sounds like a culinary practical joke, but the science is flawless: high-sugar, pectin-rich jelly melts down and collides with the zesty, acidic punch of the chili sauce to create a complex, sweet-and-sour glaze that coats homestyle beef perfectly. Do not try to elevate this

with artisanal preserves or scratch-made reductions; the absolute soul of this generational masterpiece lives in unapologetic, mid-century supermarket convenience.

INGREDIENTS

32 oz	frozen homestyle meatballs	24 oz	Heinz chili sauce
18 oz	Concord grape jelly	1 tsp	hot sauce

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grease the slow cooker.

Lightly spray the ceramic insert of a standard 4- to 6-quart slow cooker with non-stick spray to prevent the sugars from scorching onto the edges.

2. Add the frozen meatballs.

Empty the entire bag of meatballs directly into the slow cooker without thawing.

3. Mix the sweet and sour glaze.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the grape jelly, chili sauce, and hot sauce until mostly combined. It will look lumpy, but the heat will eventually melt it into a perfectly smooth glaze.

4. Coat the meatballs.

Pour the jelly mixture over the frozen meatballs and use a wooden spoon to give everything a good stir, ensuring every meatball is coated.

5. Cook low and slow.

Cover and cook on low for 3 to 4 hours. Once the meatballs are heated through and the sauce is bubbling and glossy, switch to the warm setting and set out the toothpicks.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the homestyle meatball.**

Buy the plain beef or beef-pork blend meatballs. Avoid Italian-seasoned varieties, as the oregano and basil will violently clash with the sweet-and-sour profile of the sauce.

- **Stovetop shortcut.**

If you need these ready in twenty minutes, whisk the jelly and chili sauce in a Dutch oven over medium heat until smooth. Add the frozen meatballs, cover, reduce to medium-low, and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until piping hot.

- **Thickening the glaze.**

Frozen meatballs release a bit of water as they cook. For a vastly thicker, stickier glaze, simply leave the lid off the slow cooker for the final 30 minutes to allow evaporation.



"Cuppa Cuppa Cuppa" Peach Cobbler

If you want to understand how a Southern grandmother effortlessly fed a house full of neighbors on a busy Tuesday evening, look to the "Cuppa." Long before food blogs, home cooks relied on simple mnemonics: one cup each of flour, sugar, and milk. This isn't the dense fruit-cocktail cake of Hollywood fantasy, but the genuine, deep-South deal where canned peaches are a historically accurate pantry staple, not a weeknight cheat. The magic of this dish requires no rolling pins or chilled fats, relying instead on a single, ironclad rule of assembly: do not stir.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	unsalted butter	1 tsp	vanilla extract
1 cup	self-rising flour	29 oz	sliced peaches in juice or light syrup <i>drained well</i>
1 cup	granulated white sugar		
1 cup	whole milk	1/2 tsp	ground cinnamon

PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Melt the butter directly in the baking dish.**

Place the unwrapped stick of butter into an 8x8-inch glass baking dish or a 9-inch cast-iron skillet and set it in the preheating oven until the butter is entirely melted and just starting to bubble, about 5 to 7 minutes.

2. **Whisk together the simple batter.**

In a mixing bowl, whisk the self-rising flour and sugar, then pour in the milk and vanilla extract, mixing gently just until smooth with a few tiny lumps remaining.

3. **Pour the batter into the hot butter without stirring.**

Carefully remove the hot dish from the oven and pour the batter directly into the center of the melted butter, letting the fat slosh up and pool around the edges.

4. **Spoon the peaches over the top and step away.**

Evenly distribute the drained peaches over the wet batter and sprinkle with the ground cinnamon, completely resisting the urge to stir the mixture together.

5. **Bake until the crust is golden and the fruit bubbles.**

Place the dish on the middle rack and bake for 40 to 50 minutes, allowing the batter to magically rise through the fruit and the butter to fry the edges into a chewy, crispy crust.

1. Let the cobbler rest before serving.

Allow the cobbler to cool for 10 to 15 minutes so the fruit juices can thicken slightly, then serve warm with a generous scoop of vanilla ice cream.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The self-rising flour substitute is simple.**

If you cannot find a soft-wheat Southern self-rising flour like White Lily, easily make your own by whisking 1 cup of standard all-purpose flour with 1 1/2 teaspoons of baking powder and 1/4 teaspoon of salt.

● **Respect the rule of the spoon.**

The entire structure of this cobbler relies on culinary physics: the butter fries the outer crust while the batter naturally seeks the path of least resistance and bubbles up through the heavy, sinking fruit. Stirring will ruin this process and leave you with a heavy brick.



Hoppin' John

If there is a dish that tells the unvarnished truth of the American South, it is Hoppin' John. Born from the sheer ingenuity of enslaved West Africans in the coastal Carolinas, this isn't the sanitized, multi-day restaurant vanity project you'll find in gentrified downtowns. It is a one-pot marvel of smoke, pork, and aggressive starch management. The real magic happens when you wash the hell out of your rice, yielding distinct, fluffy grains that soak up the pot likker without turning into a gloomy paste, finished with a hit of vinegar to wake the whole thing up.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz

thick-cut smoked bacon
chopped

1 large

yellow onion
finely diced

1 med	green bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>	1 med	bay leaf
2 med stalks	celery <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 tsp	dried thyme
3 med cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/2 tsp	smoked paprika
1 lb	dried black-eyed peas	1/4 tsp	cayenne pepper
4 cup	low-sodium chicken broth	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 1/2 cup	long-grain white rice <i>aggressively rinsed until water runs completely clear</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
		1 tbsp	apple cider vinegar
		3 med	scallions <i>sliced</i>

PREPARATION

- **Wash the rice.**

Rinse the long-grain white rice under cold water 4 to 6 times until the water runs completely clear to remove surface starch and guarantee fluffy, distinct grains.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the pork.**

In a large heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, fry the bacon until crisp, about 6 to 8 minutes, then remove the meat with a slotted spoon, leaving the glorious fat behind.

- 2. Sauté the aromatics.**

Add the onion, bell pepper, and celery to the bacon fat and cook until soft, about 5 minutes, then stir in the garlic, thyme, paprika, and cayenne for 1 minute more.

- 3. Simmer the peas.**

Pour in the dried peas, chicken broth, and bay leaf, bring to a boil, drop the heat to low, cover slightly, and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes until the peas are tender but entirely intact.

1. Add the washed rice.

Season the broth with the salt and pepper—it should taste a bit too salty—then stir in your aggressively rinsed rice and bring back to a gentle simmer.

2. Execute the final steam.

Cover the pot tightly, drop the heat to the absolute minimum, and walk away for 20 minutes without lifting the lid.

3. Fluff and finish.

Kill the heat and let it rest covered for 5 minutes, then discard the bay leaf, fluff with a fork, and stir in the vinegar, scallions, and reserved bacon.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Weeknight Shortcut.**

If simmering dried peas isn't in the cards, substitute two 15-ounce cans of black-eyed peas. Drain and rinse them completely to ditch the metallic canning sludge, reduce the broth to 3 cups, and add the peas at the same time as the raw rice.