

# Heirloom South: Real Comfort for the Modern Kitchen



Recipes with love from

**The Robot Book Club**

# **Heirloom South: Real Comfort for the Modern Kitchen**

*Timeless Recipes and New Traditions from the American  
South*

The Robot Book Club

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# Table of Contents

Liquid Gold & The Iron Skillet: Southern Pantry Foundations

---

The Southern Morning: Quick Starts to Weekend Lingering

---

Granny's Pot on the Stove: The Weeknight Skillet

---

The Sacred Sunday Dinner: The Midday Feast

---

The Meat-and-Three: Potlikker & Produce

---

Front Porch Gatherings & Holiday Traditions

---

# 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

Forget the caricature, the tired tropes of mint juleps and porch swings. This isn't that book. This is about the *real* South, the one that lives in well-seasoned cast iron, in the deep, honest scent of collards simmering low, in the quiet, undeniable wisdom of a grandmother's hands coaxing magic from humble ingredients.

For generations, Southern cooking has been more than sustenance; it's a language of legacy, a testament to ingenious survival refined into celebratory art. It's the sacred ritual of the Sunday table, the non-sense satisfaction of a weeknight skillet meal, and the almost spiritual reverence for rendered bacon fat – the true liquid gold that seasons everything, the very soul of the kitchen.

But the modern world rarely affords the luxury of a full Sunday in the kitchen, or the boundless time a country cook once commanded. The demands of busy lives push these slow-simmered traditions to the margins. We crave that taste of home, that deep, unpretentious comfort, the echoes of meals shared, but time, that cruel master, often dictates compromise.

This is where *Heirloom South* steps in. This book isn't a nostalgic fantasy, nor some tourist-board vision. It's an honest blueprint, a collection of truths. It decodes generations of culinary wisdom, translating time-honored techniques into tangible, weeknight-friendly victories. We're talking about those true, unvarnished flavors,

achieved with honest-to-goodness grocery store staples, making authentic comfort not just a memory, but a delicious, attainable reality.

No shortcuts on soul, just smarter paths to the plate. The grandmothers knew the secrets, understood the rhythm. Now, with a little guidance, so will you. Welcome home.





# Liquid Gold & The Iron Skillet: Southern Pantry Foundations

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

**L**ook 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

THIS IS NOT A CAKE. TRUE SOUTHERN CORNBREAD IS A savory, elemental sponge forged in the blistering heat of a cast-iron skillet, relying entirely on the alchemy of stone-ground cornmeal, tangy buttermilk, and rendered bacon fat. It rejects the cheap crutch of refined sugar and wheat flour, leaning instead into the unpretentious, unsweetened truth of a grandmother's kitchen. It is built to soak up potlikker, blister gracefully around the edges, and provide deep, resonating comfort on a busy weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

|                |                                 |                  |  |
|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------|--|
| <b>2 cup</b>   | stone-ground yellow<br>cornmeal | <b>1 3/4 cup</b> | whole-fat buttermilk<br><i>shaken well</i> |
| <b>1 tsp</b>   | kosher salt                     | <b>2 large</b>   | eggs<br><i>lightly beaten</i>              |
| <b>1 tsp</b>   | baking powder                   | <b>4 tbsp</b>    | unsalted butter<br><i>melted</i>           |
| <b>1/2 tsp</b> | baking soda                     | <b>3 tbsp</b>    | bacon grease                               |

## PREPARATION

- **Preheat the skillet.**

Place a clean, dry 10-inch cast-iron skillet on the middle rack of the oven and preheat to 425°F. Let the skillet sit in the heat for at least 15 to 20 minutes until it possesses massive thermal mass.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1**

### **Whisk the dry ingredients.**

In a large mixing bowl, vigorously whisk together the cornmeal, kosher salt, baking powder, and baking soda to ensure the leavening agents are completely distributed.

**2**

### **Combine the wet ingredients.**

In a separate, smaller bowl, mix the lightly beaten eggs, buttermilk, and melted butter until perfectly smooth.

**3**

### **Fold the batter together.**

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and stir gently with a wooden spoon or spatula just until moistened. Do not overmix; the batter should remain thick and slightly lumpy, otherwise the bread will bake up tough.

**1 Coat the blazing hot skillet.**

Using a heavy-duty mitt, remove the screaming-hot skillet from the oven to the stovetop and immediately drop in the bacon grease. Swirl the pan carefully to coat the bottom and halfway up the sides as the fat instantly melts and smokes.

**2 Temper the batter with hot fat.**

Pour about one tablespoon of the melted bacon grease from the skillet directly into the batter and give it one quick stir to infuse the crumb with heat and savory depth.

**3 Pour and sizzle.**

Immediately pour the batter into the hot skillet. It must screech aggressively upon contact, flash-frying the exterior edges to form an impenetrable crust.

**4 Bake to a deep golden brown.**

Carefully return the skillet to the 425°F oven and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the top is deeply browned, the edges have pulled away crisply from the iron, and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

**5 Invert and serve.**

Let the bread cool for 5 minutes in the pan, then confidently invert the skillet over a cutting board so the dark, bacon-fried bottom crust faces upward.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Embrace the savory reality.**

This is traditional, unsweetened bread built to accompany savory stews, beans, and greens. If you serve it entirely on its own, a pat of good salted butter and a drizzle of honey will perfectly balance the smoky crust.

- **Pantry substitutions.**

If you do not keep a jar of reserved bacon grease in your fridge, substitute 3 tablespoons of a neutral, high-smoke-point oil like canola in the skillet. Avoid using butter to grease the pan, as the milk solids will rapidly burn at 425°F.

- **The grandmother's leftover trick.**

True Southern cornbread dries out quickly without the crutch of wheat flour. Crumble day-old slices into a glass, pour cold buttermilk over the top, and eat it with a spoon for a classic, deeply comforting snack.



# Paper Bag Pan-Fried Pork Chops

THE PAPER BAG IS NOT SOME FOLKSY GIMMICK; IT IS brilliant mid-century culinary engineering. It violently and perfectly distributes the seasoned flour across the meat, and more importantly, it aggressively wicks away grease without trapping steam the way a modern paper towel does. This preserves the crust you just worked so hard to build. This is the unpretentious, deeply comforting taste of a Southern grandmother's kitchen, streamlined for a Tuesday night in an Ohio suburb. You need a heavy cast-iron skillet, a spoonful of bacon fat for soul, and the good sense not to mess with a generational classic.

## INGREDIENTS

|                  |   |                |                                       |
|------------------|---|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>4 med</b>     | bone-in pork chops<br><i>1/2 to 3/4-inch thick, patted completely dry</i> | <b>1 tsp</b>   | black pepper<br><i>freshly ground</i> |
| <b>1 cup</b>     | buttermilk<br><i>well shaken</i>  | <b>1 tsp</b>   | garlic powder                         |
| <b>1 tbsp</b>    | Louisiana style hot sauce   | <b>1 tsp</b>   | onion powder                          |
| <b>1 1/4 cup</b> | all-purpose flour   | <b>1/2 tsp</b> | smoked paprika                        |
| <b>2 tsp</b>     | seasoned salt   | <b>1/4 tsp</b> | cayenne pepper                        |
|                  |   | <b>1/2 cup</b> | vegetable oil                         |
|                  |   | <b>2 tbsp</b>  | rendered bacon fat                    |

## PREPARATION

- **Remove the pork chops from the refrigerator twenty minutes before cooking.**

Taking the chill off the meat ensures your hot frying oil won't drastically drop in temperature the second the chops hit the pan.

- **Tear open a clean brown paper grocery bag and lay it completely flat on your countertop.**

This is your draining station; absolutely do not substitute paper towels, which will trap steam and instantly ruin your crust.

- **Whisk the buttermilk and hot sauce together in a wide, shallow bowl.**

Submerge the dried pork chops into the mixture, making sure both sides are coated, and let them sit while you prepare the dredge.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1 Build the seasoned dredge inside a second paper bag.**

Open a clean brown lunch sack or grocery bag and drop in the flour, seasoned salt, black pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, and cayenne pepper. Fold the top over and shake it vigorously for a few seconds to evenly distribute the spices.

**2 Heat your liquid gold in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat.**

Add the vegetable oil and the bacon fat, allowing them to melt and heat together until the oil reaches about 350°F. If you don't have a thermometer, drop a tiny pinch of flour into the skillet; if it immediately sizzles and dances without burning, you are ready to fry.

**3 Shake the chops one at a time.**

Lift a pork chop from the buttermilk, let the excess liquid drip off for a second, and drop it into the seasoned paper bag. Fold the top shut to trap some air like a balloon, shake vigorously up and down for a few seconds, then remove the chop and tap off any loose flour.

**4 Fry the chops to a deep golden brown.**

Carefully lay the breaded chops into the hot oil, dropping them away from your body to prevent splashing. Fry undisturbed for 4 to 5 minutes on the first side until a deep crust forms, then carefully flip and fry for another 3 to 4 minutes until the internal temperature reaches 145°F.

1

**Drain the chops directly on the flattened paper bag.**

As soon as they finish frying, move the chops onto the brown paper you prepared earlier. Let them rest for 3 to 5 minutes while the paper rapidly wicks away the grease, leaving behind nothing but a shatteringly crisp exterior.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Bacon fat is the secret to generational flavor.**

Using pure lard is historically accurate but often impractical today. Supplementing neutral vegetable oil with a spoonful of reserved bacon grease bridges the gap, offering high-heat stability with the unmistakable savory smoke of the rural South.

- **If you don't have brown paper bags, adapt carefully.**

You can shake the chops in a large gallon-sized ziplock bag instead. However, for draining, you must use a wire cooling rack set over a baking sheet to keep the chops elevated and crisp.





# The Southern Morning: Quick Starts to Weekend Lingering

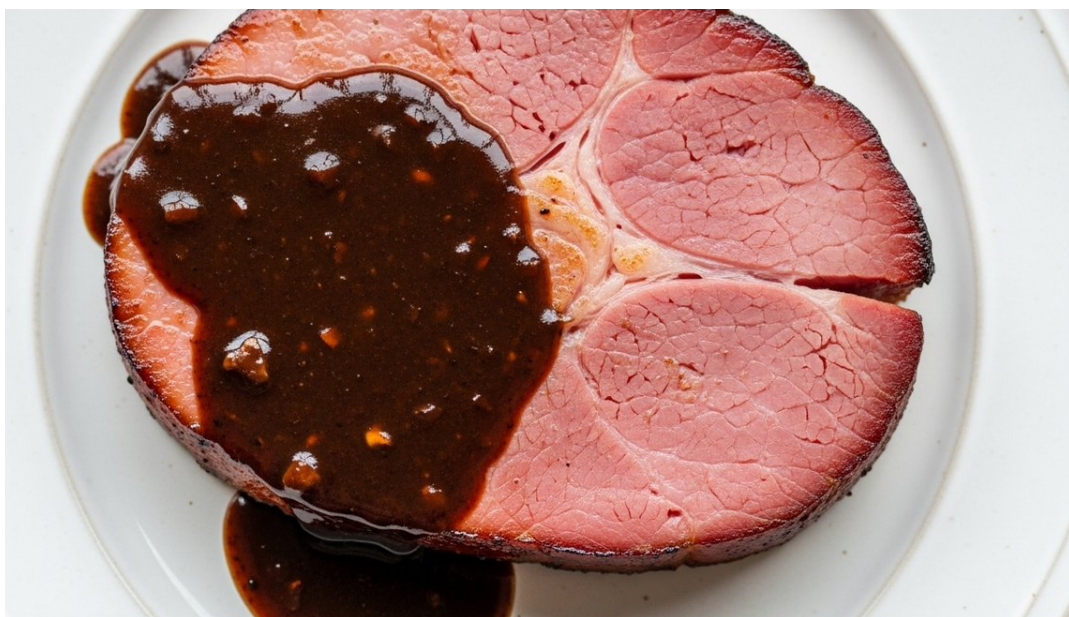
*Bridging the gap between busy weekday mornings and slow Saturdays with traditional agrarian breakfasts translated for the modern clock.*

**T**he 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 AS FUNDAMENTALLY SOUTHERN AS humidity. Born of pure necessity in working-class kitchens, it is a masterclass in culinary resourcefulness. There are no culinary school tricks here—just the aggressive salt of dry-cured pork fat forcefully tamed by the bitter acidity of strong black coffee. It creates a thin, potent jus that settles in the bowl looking exactly like a bloodshot eye. Unpretentious, zero-waste, and intensely flavorful, this is the taste of an agrarian morning.

## INGREDIENTS

|                |  |                |                                       |
|----------------|--|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>1 lb</b>    | authentic country ham slices                 | <b>1/2 cup</b> | water                                 |
| <b>1 cup</b>   | milk or water                                | <b>1 tsp</b>   | brown sugar                           |
| <b>1 tbsp</b>  | unsalted butter                              | <b>1/4 tsp</b> | black pepper<br><i>freshly ground</i> |
| <b>1/2 cup</b> | strong black coffee<br><i>freshly brewed</i> |                |                                       |

## PREPARATION

- **Soak the ham slices in milk or water to draw out the aggressive salt.**  
Country ham is heavily dry-cured. Place the slices in a shallow dish, cover with the liquid, and let them sit at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes. Skip this, and your meal will be overwhelmingly salty.
- **Dry the meat and score the outer band of fat to prevent curling.**  
Remove the ham from the soak and pat it entirely dry with paper towels. Take a sharp knife and make small cuts through the outer ring of fat every two inches so the meat sears flat and evenly against the cast iron.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 **Sear the ham in a heavy skillet over medium heat until the fat renders.**  
Melt the butter in a cast-iron skillet, then pan-fry the ham slowly for 3 to 5 minutes per side until the fat is translucent and a mahogany crust forms. Do not overcook, or the cured meat will turn tough.

**1 Transfer the ham to a warm platter and leave the pan drippings undisturbed.**

Your skillet should now hold a pool of liquid fat and dark, sticky caramelized bits of protein. This fond is the entire foundation of the gravy.

**2 Pour the black coffee and water into the hot skillet and scrape the bottom aggressively.**

The pan will immediately hiss and steam. Use a wooden spoon or flat spatula to unstick all those browned bits, dissolving the concentrated pork flavor into the bitter coffee.

**3 Simmer the liquid briefly to concentrate the flavors without thickening.**

Let it bubble for 3 to 5 minutes. Authentic red-eye gravy is a thin jus, not a heavy stew. Stir in the brown sugar and black pepper to balance the bite, but add absolutely no salt.

**4 Serve immediately alongside the hot ham, warm biscuits, or creamy grits.**

Spoon the liquid directly over the food, or pour it into a small bowl where the translucent fat will naturally separate from the dark coffee, forming the namesake red eye.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the right ham is non-negotiable.**

Do not attempt this with a wet-cured city ham or generic deli ham steaks. You need the intense fat density and enzymatic breakdown of a vacuum-sealed, dry-cured country ham, like a Smithfield or Virginia cut.

- **Never add flour or cornstarch.**

Many modern recipes attempt to fix the broken emulsion by thickening it. Doing so destroys the authentic broth-like texture and masks the sharp interaction between the coffee and pork fat.



# Appalachian Skillet Tomato Gravy over Scrambled Eggs

IN THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS, TOMATO GRAVY ISN'T some bastardized marinara. It is a proper, stick-to-your-ribs Southern roux born of strict frugality and summer garden abundance. Known locally as 'mater gravy,' it transforms a spoonful of leftover bacon grease and a jar of preserved tomatoes into a deeply savory, velvety sauce that historically sustained a family through a day of hard labor. Poured steaming hot over a plate of soft, buttery scrambled eggs, the

SMOKY TANG OF THE GRAVY CUTS RIGHT THROUGH THE richness of the curds. This is the unvarnished taste of a Southern morning, streamlined for a standard kitchen on a busy Tuesday.

#### INGREDIENTS

|                  |   |                |                     |
|------------------|---|----------------|---------------------|
| <b>3 tbsp</b>    | bacon grease                              | <b>1/2 tsp</b> | kosher salt         |
| <b>1/4 cup</b>   | yellow onion<br><i>finely diced</i>       | <b>1/2 tsp</b> | coarse black pepper |
| <b>3 tbsp</b>    | all-purpose flour                         | <b>1/4 tsp</b> | granulated sugar    |
| <b>1 1/4 cup</b> | chicken broth                             | <b>8 large</b> | eggs                |
| <b>14.5 oz</b>   | canned diced tomatoes<br><i>undrained</i> | <b>2 tbsp</b>  | unsalted butter     |
|                  |   | <b>1 tbsp</b>  | whole milk          |

#### PREPARATION

- **Managing the thickness of the gravy over time.**

This gravy will set up very thick in the refrigerator. If making ahead or saving leftovers, reheat gently on the stove with an extra splash of chicken broth or water, whisking until it returns to its original silky consistency.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Sauté the onion in the rendered bacon fat until translucent.**  
Place a medium cast-iron skillet over medium heat, add the bacon grease, and once shimmering, cook the onions for about three minutes.

**1 Whisk in the flour and cook until it smells intensely toasted.**

Sprinkle the flour directly over the hot fat and whisk constantly for two to three minutes until the paste turns a light, golden-blond color. Do not skip this step; cooking out the raw flour taste is what gives a true Southern gravy its backbone.

**2 Slowly hydrate the roux with the chicken broth.**

Pour in the broth in a steady stream while whisking continuously to prevent lumps from forming, letting the mixture sputter and thicken into a perfectly smooth base.

**3 Fold in the tomatoes and seasonings, then simmer to thicken.**

Add the entire can of tomatoes along with their juices, the salt, heavy black pepper, and sugar. Reduce the heat to medium-low and gently simmer for five to seven minutes until it takes on a velvety texture that thickly coats the back of a spoon.

**4 Soft scramble the eggs in butter.**

While the gravy finishes, vigorously beat the eggs with a splash of milk. Melt the butter in a separate non-stick skillet over medium-low heat and cook the eggs slowly, pushing them gently with a spatula to form soft, pillowy curds.

**5 Serve the eggs generously smothered in the hot gravy.**

Divide the soft scrambled eggs onto warm plates and ladle the steaming mother gravy directly over the top.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Substituting the bacon grease.**

If you do not keep a jar of bacon drippings on the stove like a Southern grandmother, melt two tablespoons of butter with one tablespoon of neutral oil to mimic the fat without burning.

- **Controlling the acidity.**

The tiny pinch of sugar is a traditional regional trick for mellowing the harsh acidity of canned tomatoes. Taste the gravy before serving and add another pinch if it remains too tart.





# 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.*

**T**here 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

IN THE SOUTH, SMOTHERING ISN'T JUST A COOKING technique; it's an act of love. This is the kind of deeply comforting, generationally perfected skillet dinner that fills the house with the smell of home. Forget the high-end restaurant Salisbury steaks loaded with exotic mushrooms. A true Southern grandmother knows that a handful of crushed crackers, a hot cast-iron skillet, and a mountain of

SWEET VIDALIA ONIONS COOKED DOWN IN BEEF DRIPPINGS are all you need to make magic. It's an unpretentious masterpiece, streamlined for a busy weeknight.

#### INGREDIENTS

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

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Hydrate the panade and mix the meat with a gentle hand.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the crushed saltine crackers and milk, letting it sit for 2 minutes so the crackers absorb the liquid. Add the beaten egg, 1 tablespoon of the Worcestershire sauce, garlic powder, onion powder, seasoned salt, and black pepper. Crumble the ground chuck into the bowl and use your hands to gently toss and mix until just combined; overmixing will give you tough, rubbery meat.

**1 Form the mixture into dimpled oval patties.**

Divide the mixture into four to six equal portions and gently shape them into oval patties about 3/4-inch thick. Using your thumb, press a shallow indentation into the center of each patty to prevent the steaks from puffing up into the shape of a baseball as the proteins contract in the pan.

**2 Sear the patties hard in a hot cast-iron skillet.**

Heat the oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches if necessary, sear the patties undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes until a dark, rich brown crust forms. Flip and sear for 3 more minutes. They won't be cooked through yet; remove them to a plate and leave all the beautifully browned beef fat right there in the skillet.

**3 Caramelize the Vidalia onions in the residual beef fat.**

Reduce the heat to medium, add the butter to the beef drippings, and toss in the sliced onions once the butter melts. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 8 to 10 minutes until the onions are incredibly soft, sweet, and lightly caramelized.

**4 Build the gravy by cooking the roux and whisking in the broth.**

Sprinkle the flour evenly over the softened onions and stir constantly for 1 to 2 minutes to cook out the raw flour taste. Slowly pour in the beef broth, whisking constantly to prevent lumps and scraping up all the savory browned bits from the bottom of the skillet. Stir in the remaining 1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce and bring the liquid to a gentle simmer.

1

**Smother the steaks in the gravy and simmer until tender.**

Return the hamburger steaks to the skillet, nestling them deep into the onions and gravy along with any juices left on the resting plate. Cover the skillet tightly, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer gently for 15 to 20 minutes. This finishes cooking the beef through and allows the patties to soak up the phenomenal onion flavor.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

- **The panade is non-negotiable.**

Culinary purists might claim a real hamburger steak contains zero binders, but Southern grandmothers knew better. The cracker and milk mixture traps moisture and interrupts the meat's protein network, guaranteeing a meltingly tender patty that doesn't turn into a dry brick in the skillet.

- **Serve over a starch that can handle the gravy.**

This dish is canonically served over a mountain of buttery mashed potatoes designed to soak up the copious amounts of pan gravy. Egg noodles or steamed white rice are completely acceptable regional alternatives.



# One-Pot Southern Goulash (Macaroni and Tomatoes)

THIS IS THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF AMERICAN survivalist ingenuity—a Great Depression-era staple born in the Appalachian Mountains that fed a family on nothing more than canned tomatoes, dried elbows, and a spoonful of saved bacon grease. It bears zero resemblance to a Hungarian gulyás. Instead, it is an unpretentious, working-class masterpiece where dry macaroni

SIMMERS DIRECTLY IN A SEASONED BEEF BROTH, RELEASING its starches to create a thick, velvety gravy in a single pot. It smells exactly like a chilly weeknight in a Southern grandmother's kitchen.

#### INGREDIENTS

|                |                                     |                  |   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|---|
| <b>1 lb</b>    | lean ground beef                    | <b>1 1/2 cup</b> | beef broth                              |
| <b>1 tbsp</b>  | bacon grease                        | <b>1 tbsp</b>    | Worcestershire sauce                    |
| <b>1 med</b>   | yellow onion<br><i>diced</i>        | <b>1 tsp</b>     | granulated white sugar                  |
| <b>1/2 med</b> | green bell pepper<br><i>diced</i>   | <b>1 tsp</b>     | dried Italian seasoning                 |
| <b>3 clove</b> | garlic<br><i>minced</i>             | <b>1/2 tsp</b>   | Cajun seasoning                         |
| <b>14.5 oz</b> | stewed tomatoes<br><i>undrained</i> | <b>1/2 tsp</b>   | black pepper<br><i>freshly ground</i>   |
| <b>15 oz</b>   | tomato sauce                        | <b>1 1/2 cup</b> | elbow macaroni                          |
|                |                                     | <b>1 cup</b>     | sharp cheddar cheese<br><i>shredded</i> |

#### PREPARATION

- **Prep the vegetables before you begin.**

Dice the onion and bell pepper, and mince the garlic in advance, as the dish moves very quickly once the beef starts browning.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Brown the beef and aromatics in a heavy Dutch oven.**  
Heat the bacon grease over medium-high heat, add the ground beef, onion, and bell pepper, and cook for 5 to 7 minutes until the meat is browned and the vegetables are softened, breaking the beef apart with a wooden spoon as it cooks.

**1 Bloom the garlic and dry spices.**

Stir in the minced garlic, Italian seasoning, Cajun seasoning, and black pepper, cooking for just one minute until the garlic is highly fragrant.

**2 Build the tomato gravy.**

Pour in the undrained stewed tomatoes, tomato sauce, beef broth, Worcestershire sauce, and the sugar, scraping the bottom of the pot to release any browned bits before bringing the mixture to a rolling simmer.

**3 Simmer the dry pasta directly in the broth.**

Pour the uncooked macaroni into the pot, stir to submerge the noodles, reduce the heat to medium-low, and cover tightly with a lid to simmer for 15 to 18 minutes.

**4 Let the starches thicken the sauce.**

Check the pot occasionally and give it a gentle stir to prevent sticking, cooking until the pasta is plump and has magically transformed the watery tomato juices into a rich, velvety gravy.

**5 Melt the cheese and serve immediately.**

Remove from the heat, taste the sauce for salt, scatter the cheddar cheese over the top, and cover the pot for two minutes until melted.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

• **Save your bacon grease.**

A tin of bacon grease kept on the stove is the culinary secret that decodes the true flavor of a Southern grandmother's kitchen, providing a smoky depth that plain oil simply cannot replicate.

- **Do not skip the sugar.**

Adding sugar to the sauce does not make the dish sweet; it chemically neutralizes the sharp, tinny acidity of the canned tomatoes and rounds out the savory profile perfectly.

- **Stretch the meal if needed.**

Just like in the Great Depression, you can easily stretch this skillet for more mouths on a weeknight by doubling the macaroni and broth while keeping the meat exactly the same.





# The Sacred Sunday Dinner: The Midday Feast

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

**I**n 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

IF YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND THE ARCHITECTURE OF A TRUE Southern Sunday dinner, look to the macaroni and cheese. This isn't the watery blue-box stuff, nor is it a flour-choked French béchamel. It's a lineage tracing straight back to enslaved culinary genius James Hemings, built on a sturdy custard of evaporated milk and eggs that binds a mountain of freshly grated cheddar into a glorious, sliceable

MASTERPIECE. GRATE YOUR OWN CHEESE, PULL THE NOODLES early, and respect the mandatory resting time; skip any of these, and you're just making noise.

#### INGREDIENTS

|                  |  |                |  |
|------------------|--|----------------|--|
| <b>1 lb</b>      | elbow macaroni                                   | <b>1 tsp</b>   | onion powder   |
| <b>4 tbsp</b>    | unsalted butter<br><i>cut into small cubes</i>   | <b>1 tsp</b>   | seasoned salt  |
| <b>12 oz</b>     | evaporated milk                                  | <b>1/2 tsp</b> | smoked paprika   |
| <b>1 1/2 cup</b> | whole milk                                       | <b>1/2 tsp</b> | black pepper<br><i>freshly ground</i>                              |
| <b>3 large</b>   | large eggs<br><i>brought to room temperature</i> | <b>1 lb</b>    | extra-sharp cheddar cheese<br><i>freshly shredded from a block</i> |
| <b>1 tsp</b>     | dry mustard powder                               | <b>8 oz</b>    | Colby Jack cheese<br><i>freshly shredded from a block</i>          |
| <b>1 tsp</b>     | garlic powder                                    | <b>4 oz</b>    | cream cheese<br><i>softened and pinched into small pieces</i>      |

#### PREPARATION

- **Liberaly butter a standard 9x13-inch glass or ceramic baking dish.**  
This prevents sticking and encourages the legendary crispy edges that everyone fights over.
- **Grate all of the block cheese by hand using a box grater.**  
Do not skip this. Pre-shredded bagged cheese is dusted with potato starch and anti-caking agents that prevent a smooth emulsification, guaranteeing a gritty, split sauce.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C).**

- 1 Boil the macaroni in heavily salted water for one to two minutes less than the package directs.**

The water should taste like the ocean. Pulling the pasta early is critical; it will continue cooking in the hot custard, and boiling it to death now guarantees a mushy, sad casserole later.

- 2 Drain the pasta without rinsing and immediately return it to the warm pot to toss with the cubed butter and cream cheese.**

Rinsing washes away the surface starches needed for the custard to cling. Toss the hot noodles gently until the fat melts, coating them thoroughly so they don't bloat in the liquid.

- 3 Vigorously whisk the eggs, evaporated milk, whole milk, and dry spices in a large bowl.**

This is your architectural mortar. The mixture should taste aggressively seasoned to the point of being slightly too salty, as the bland pasta will absorb much of this flavor during the bake.

- 4 Combine the cheddar and Colby Jack, reserve one and a half cups for the crust, and gently fold the rest into the buttery noodles along with the liquid custard.**

Use a large spoon to marry the ingredients until every single noodle is swimming in the cheese and seasoned milk.

- 5 Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish and scatter the reserved cheese evenly across the top.**

Spread it out into an even layer. This scattered top lid of cheese will undergo the Maillard reaction, forming a golden, bubbling crust without the need for irrelevant breadcrumbs.

**1 Bake uncovered on the middle rack for 35 to 40 minutes.**

You are looking for the edges to be violently bubbling and the top layer of cheese to be deeply golden brown. If you want a slightly darker crust, flip on the broiler for the final two minutes, watching it like a hawk so it doesn't burn.

**2 Remove from the oven and let the casserole rest undisturbed on the counter for at least 15 to 20 minutes before cutting.**

Do not touch it. The custard is still in a semi-liquid state. Cutting it now yields a soupy mess; waiting allows the proteins to finish setting, rewarding you with the legendary, sturdy squares that hold their ground on the plate.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never substitute sweetened condensed milk for evaporated milk.**

This is a common mistake for modern cooks. Evaporated milk is simply protein-dense milk with the water cooked out, allowing it to survive a hot oven without curdling. Sweetened condensed milk is loaded with sugar and will turn your savory dinner into a bizarre dessert.

- **Embrace the corner pieces.**

In authentic Southern cooking, the crispy, slightly caramelized edges where the cheese meets the hot glass of the baking dish are the most highly prized portions of the meal.

- **Reheat leftovers with respect.**

Because it lacks a flour roux, this custard-style mac and cheese reheats beautifully without turning into a solid brick. Cover loosely with foil, add a splash of milk to the edges, and warm in a 325°F oven. Avoid the microwave, which will cause the cheese proteins to seize.



## Slow-Braised Smothered Turkey Wings with Holy Trinity Gravy

IN THE PANTHEON OF SOUTHERN SOUL FOOD, FEW THINGS command the reverence of smothered turkey wings. This isn't the watered-down, cream-of-mushroom shortcut born of suburban convenience. This is the real deal—a working-class masterclass in transforming tough, cartilage-heavy joints into pure, fall-off-the-bone comfort. It requires an aggressive spice rub, a heavy-handed sear, and the patience to let a proper butter-and-flour roux do its slow, dark

MAGIC ALONGSIDE THE HOLY TRINITY OF ONIONS, CELERY, and green pepper. It is an act of cultural preservation, built for a sacred Sunday dinner but entirely achievable in a standard American kitchen.

#### INGREDIENTS

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

#### PREPARATION

- **Process the turkey wings.**

If you buy whole turkey wings, ask your local butcher to split them at the joints into drumettes and flats for you, or separate them at home using a heavy chef's knife.

## INSTRUCTIONS

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

Moisture is the enemy of browning. Coat the wings in the olive oil, then aggressively massage the garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, poultry seasoning, Cajun seasoning, salt, and pepper deep into the skin.

- 2 Arrange the wings in a single layer in a heavy roasting pan and roast uncovered for 30 to 40 minutes.**

Turn them halfway through until the skin is beautifully golden-brown and fragrant. Remove the pan from the oven and transfer the wings to a plate.

- 3 Pour all the rendered fat and liquid from the pan into a measuring cup.**

Do not wash the pan—leave the stuck-on brown bits exactly where they are. This fond is the liquid gold foundation of an authentic gravy. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (175°C).

- 4 Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat, then add the diced onion, green pepper, and celery.**

Sauté the Holy Trinity for 5 to 7 minutes until softened and translucent, then add the minced garlic and cook for one minute more until fragrant.

- 5 Sprinkle the flour evenly over the vegetables and stir continuously for 2 to 3 minutes.**

Cook the mixture until it turns a light peanut butter brown. This step is non-negotiable—it eliminates the raw flour taste and deepens the flavor of the roux.

- 1 Slowly whisk in the reserved pan drippings, warmed chicken broth, and Worcestershire sauce.**

Simmer gently for 5 to 7 minutes until it thickens into a rich, velvety sauce, making sure to scrape up any flavor bits from the bottom of the skillet.

- 2 Return the turkey wings to the roasting pan, pour the gravy completely over them, and cover tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil.**

The foil creates a seal that traps the steam. Bake at 350°F (175°C) for 1 hour and 30 minutes, allowing the tough collagen to break down into tender gelatin.

- 3 Remove the foil for the final 15 minutes of baking.**

This grandma flourish allows the gravy to thicken further and slightly crisps the exposed skin. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving generously over long-grain white rice.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Make it a one-pot meal.**

If you own a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven, you can sear the wings on the stovetop over medium-high heat instead of the oven. Remove the wings, build the gravy directly in the Dutch oven, add the wings back in, cover, and transfer straight to the oven.

- **Standard supermarket substitutions.**

If you cannot find whole turkey wings, turkey thighs or large turkey legs work beautifully with this exact same method and timing.

- **Let it sit overnight.**

Like many braised dishes, the flavors of smothered turkey wings deepen and improve the next day. You can make this entire dish on Saturday, store it in the fridge, and gently reheat it on Sunday.



## The Meat-and-Three: Potlikker & Produce

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

**T**here'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.





## "Cigar-Cut" 20-Minute Skillet Collards

A PROPER SOUTHERN MESS OF GREENS IS A LABOR OF LOVE, usually demanding a ham hock, a massive stockpot, and three hours of Sunday simmering. But when you want the deep, smoky, vinegary comfort of your ancestors on a Tuesday night, you look to a globally revered technique. By stripping the tough stems and rolling the leaves into a tight cylinder—a method identical to Brazil's *Couve à Mineira*—the greens are shredded into fine ribbons that cook in minutes. Deglazed with a quick pan-potlikker of broth and apple cider vinegar, they deliver the undeniable taste of home, streamlined for a real working kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

|                      |   |                 |                          |
|----------------------|---|-----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>1 large bunch</b> | fresh collard greens<br><i>washed, stems removed, rolled into cylinders, and sliced into 1/4-inch ribbons</i> | <b>1/2 cup</b>  | low-sodium chicken broth |
| <b>4 slices</b>      | thick-cut bacon<br><i>chopped into 1/2-inch pieces</i>  | <b>2 tbsp</b>   | apple cider vinegar      |
| <b>1 med</b>         | yellow onion<br><i>finely diced</i>   | <b>1/2 tsp</b>  | red pepper flakes        |
| <b>3 cloves</b>      | garlic<br><i>minced</i>   | <b>1/2 tsp</b>  | granulated sugar         |
|                      |   | <b>to taste</b> | kosher salt              |
|                      |   | <b>to taste</b> | black pepper             |

## PREPARATION

- **Purge the sand.**

Collards grow close to the ground and harbor a lot of grit. Plunge the whole leaves into a clean sink or large bowl full of cold water, swish aggressively, drain, and repeat until the water runs crystal clear.

- **Execute the cigar cut.**

Lay each leaf flat and run your knife down both sides of the thick central stem to remove it. Stack 6 to 8 leaf halves, roll them tightly away from you into a firm cylinder, and slice crosswise into 1/4-inch ribbons.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Render the bacon fat.**

Place a large cast-iron skillet over medium heat, add the chopped bacon, and cook until crispy, about 6 to 8 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the crispy bits to a paper towel, leaving the liquid rendered fat in the pan.

**1 Build the flavor base.**

Add the diced onions to the hot bacon fat and sauté until translucent, about 4 minutes. Stir in the minced garlic and red pepper flakes, cooking for 30 seconds until deeply fragrant.

**2 Hard sear the greens.**

Add the shredded collard ribbons to the skillet. Toss the greens continuously with tongs for 2 to 3 minutes until they shrink, wilt, and turn a vibrant, glossy emerald.

**3 Steam the pan-potlikker.**

Pour in the chicken broth, apple cider vinegar, and sugar. Stir well, reduce the heat to medium-low, and cover tightly to let the greens simmer and steam for 10 to 12 minutes.

**4 Finish and serve.**

Remove the lid and let any excess liquid cook off for a minute. Taste for seasoning, adding salt and pepper as needed, then fold the crispy bacon bits back into the pan just before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Pork-free and halal swap.**

Replace the bacon with 2 tablespoons of olive oil or butter, and add 1/2 teaspoon of smoked paprika or a pinch of smoked sea salt along with the garlic to replicate the rich, hearth-cooked profile of cured pork.

● **The sugar trick.**

Adding a half teaspoon of sugar doesn't make the dish sweet; it scientifically neutralizes the natural, astringent bitterness of dark leafy brassicas so you can eat them immediately.

- **Respect the acid.**

Do not skip the apple cider vinegar. It provides a sharp, bright contrast that lifts the heavy rendered fat, transforming the greens from a dense side into a mouth-watering star.

- **Zero waste stems.**

Save those discarded thick central stems. Chop them up and freeze them in a bag alongside onion peels and carrot tops for your next vegetable or chicken stock.



# Shatteringly Crisp Fried Green Tomatoes

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL IRONY THAT THE MOST ICONIC DISH OF THE American South was actually born in the Midwest, brought over by Jewish immigrants trying to save their unripened crop from an early frost. This is food born of necessity, not pretense. There are no panko breadcrumbs here, no air-fryer gimmicks. Just firm, tart fruit, a buttermilk bath, and a cast-iron skillet slicked with bacon fat. The secret to a crust that shatters rather than slides off is patience: sweat the water out of the tomatoes first, and let the breading hydrate before it hits the hot oil. A working-class masterpiece, reclaimed for a modern weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

|                |   |                |                              |
|----------------|---|----------------|------------------------------|
| <b>3 med</b>   | unripe green tomatoes<br><i>cored and sliced into 1/4-inch rounds</i> | <b>1/2 tsp</b> | cayenne pepper               |
| <b>1 tbsp</b>  | kosher salt   | <b>1/2 cup</b> | full-fat buttermilk          |
| <b>1/2 cup</b> | all-purpose flour<br><i>divided</i>                                   | <b>1 large</b> | egg<br><i>lightly beaten</i> |
| <b>1/2 cup</b> | fine yellow cornmeal  | <b>1 tsp</b>   | Louisiana-style hot sauce    |
| <b>1 tsp</b>   | black pepper<br><i>freshly ground</i>                                 | <b>1/2 cup</b> | vegetable oil                |
|                |   | <b>2 tbsp</b>  | bacon drippings              |

## PREPARATION

- **The Cast Iron Mandate.**

A heavy cast-iron skillet is non-negotiable here. Aluminum or thin stainless pans suffer rapid temperature drops when cold tomatoes hit the oil, leading to greasy, limp crusts.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1** **Sweat the tomatoes to draw out crust-destroying moisture.**  
Arrange the tomato slices in a single layer on a wire rack or paper towels. Season both sides generously with the kosher salt and let them sit for 15 minutes. This osmotic pull is the grandmother trick that guarantees a crisp exterior instead of a soggy, sliding breading. Afterward, thoroughly pat the slices completely dry with paper towels.

**1 Set up a standard three-step dredging station in shallow dishes.**

Place 1/4 cup of the flour in the first dish. In the second, whisk together the buttermilk, egg, and hot sauce. In the third, whisk the remaining 1/4 cup of flour with the cornmeal, black pepper, and cayenne pepper.

**2 Dredge each slice and press the cornmeal firmly into the flesh.**

Working one slice at a time, press the dried tomato into the plain flour, shaking off the excess. Submerge it in the buttermilk mixture, then press it firmly into the cornmeal. Don't just toss it; physically pack the breading onto the tomato. Move the breaded slices to a clean wire rack and let them rest for 5 to 10 minutes to hydrate the starches while the oil heats.

**3 Fry the tomatoes in a cast-iron skillet until shatteringly crisp.**

Heat the vegetable oil and bacon drippings in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until it reaches 350°F, or until a pinch of cornmeal aggressively sizzles on contact. Working in batches to avoid dropping the temperature, carefully lower the slices into the oil and fry for 2 to 3 minutes per side until a deep, glorious golden brown.

**4 Drain on a wire rack and serve immediately.**

Transfer the fried tomatoes to a clean wire rack set over paper towels. Do not place them directly on the paper, or the undersides will steam and soften. Hit them with a tiny pinch of flaky salt while hot.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Out of season substitutions.**

If hard green tomatoes aren't available, tomatillos make a culturally adjacent and highly effective substitute.

- **The bacon fat is negotiable, the smoke is not.**

If keeping halal, kosher, or vegetarian, swap the bacon drippings for peanut oil, but add a pinch of smoked paprika to the flour dredge to mimic the missing campfire depth.

- **Leftover revival.**

Microwaves will destroy the crust. Revive any leftovers in a 400°F oven or air-fryer for 5 minutes.





# 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.*

**S**outhern 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.





## Authentic "Church Potluck" Deviled Eggs

WALK INTO ANY CHURCH BASEMENT SOUTH OF THE MASON-Dixon line, and there is one platter guaranteed to disappear before the ham even hits the table. Politely referred to as Angel Eggs to keep the devil away from a Sunday potluck, this is the holy grail of unpretentious Southern appetizers. There are no truffles or fancy whole-grain mustards here—just the quiet, magical alchemy of older eggs, tangy mayonnaise, sweet relish, and a grandmother's absolute insistence on mashing the yolks into a dry powder before a single drop of liquid touches the bowl.

## INGREDIENTS

|                 |  |                |                                       |
|-----------------|--|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>12 large</b> | eggs<br><i>at least one week old</i>   | <b>1/4 tsp</b> | kosher salt                           |
| <b>1/2 cup</b>  | Duke's mayonnaise  | <b>1/4 tsp</b> | black pepper<br><i>freshly ground</i> |
| <b>3 tbsp</b>   | sweet pickle relish<br><i>pressed through a fine mesh strainer to<br/>drain completely</i> | <b>1 tsp</b>   | sweet paprika                         |
| <b>2 tsp</b>    | yellow mustard   | <b>1 tbsp</b>  | fresh chives<br><i>finely snipped</i> |

## PREPARATION

- **Set up an ice bath.**

Before the eggs finish boiling, prepare a large bowl of cold water and ice cubes to immediately shock them, halting the cooking process and preventing the dreaded gray sulfur ring from forming around the yolk.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1**

**Boil and shock the eggs.**

Place the eggs in a single layer in a saucepan covered with an inch of cold water, bring to a rolling boil, then immediately remove from heat, cover, and let sit exactly 12 minutes before transferring them to the ice bath for 10 minutes.

**2**

**Peel and halve the eggs.**

Gently tap and roll each egg to crack the shell, peel under cold running water, and slice lengthwise, wiping the knife blade with a damp paper towel between cuts to keep the whites clean.

**1 Mash the yolks to a dry powder.**

Pop the yolks into a bowl and use the back of a fork to completely smash them against the sides of the bowl until every lump is gone and they resemble fine, yellow dust.

**2 Fold in the wet ingredients.**

Add the mayonnaise, drained relish, mustard, salt, and pepper to the powdered yolks, stirring vigorously with a spatula until the mixture is immaculately smooth and velvety.

**3 Pipe and garnish.**

Transfer the filling to a zip-top bag, snip off the corner, and pipe a neat swirl into each egg white half, finishing with a light dusting of paprika and a scatter of fresh chives.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Always use older eggs.**

Fresh, farm-stand eggs are a nightmare to peel. Use standard grocery store eggs that have been sitting in the refrigerator for a week or two so the internal membrane pulls away from the shell naturally.

- **Respect the mayonnaise.**

Duke's is the Southern standard for its sharp, cider-vinegar tang. If substituting with Best Foods or Hellmann's, add a quarter-teaspoon of apple cider vinegar to replicate the profile. Never use sweetened salad dressing.

- **Manage the relish brine.**

Sweet relish holds a lot of water. Press it into a fine-mesh strainer or dab it dry with a paper towel to prevent the filling from weeping and turning your yolks into soup.



## Generational 3-Ingredient Sausage Balls

IF YOU HAVE EVER WALKED INTO A SOUTHERN HOLIDAY PARTY or a crisp autumn tailgate, you know the smell of these baking. This isn't some elevated, chef-driven reinvention of the wheel with delicate herbs and complex reductions. It is three unapologetic ingredients, brought together by the warmth of bare hands and the sheer force of generational tradition. Grate your own sharp cheddar, buy the right fatty pork, and skip the modern supermarket shortcuts—this is exactly how a Southern grandmother gets it done, zero pretensions required.

## INGREDIENTS

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

## PREPARATION

- **Respect the room temperature rule.**

Take the sausage and the block of cheese out of the refrigerator and let them sit on the counter for 20 to 30 minutes; cold pork fat will not incorporate into the dry flour, leading to dense, overworked dough.

- **Preheat the oven and prepare your pan.**

Preheat your oven to 350°F and line a large, rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Combine the ingredients by hand.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the room-temperature sausage, freshly grated cheddar, and baking mix. Wash your hands, take off your rings, and dig in, mashing and kneading the mixture together.

- 2 Trust the process and do not add water.**

At first, the dough will look impossibly dry and crumbly, but the ambient heat of your hands will slowly melt the pork fat and the cheese to hydrate the baking mix into a cohesive, slightly sticky dough after 3 to 5 minutes of patient kneading.

**1 Portion the dough into uniform pieces.**

Pinch off pieces of the dough and roll them between your palms to create uniform balls about 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter, spacing them about an inch apart on your prepared baking sheet.

**2 Bake until golden brown.**

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, looking for a crispy, golden-brown exterior and an internal temperature of 165°F for the pork.

**3 Drain the excess grease immediately.**

Remove the baking sheet from the oven and immediately use a spatula to transfer the sausage balls to a plate lined with paper towels to absorb the rendered fat.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Avoid pre-shredded cheese at all costs.**

Bagged, pre-shredded cheese is coated in an anti-caking cellulose powder that prevents melting and will turn your sausage balls into dry, crumbly sawdust.

● **Stock the freezer for future gatherings.**

You can roll the raw mixture into balls, freeze them solid on a baking sheet, and transfer them to a ziplock bag. They can be baked straight from frozen by adding 3 to 5 extra minutes to the cook time.

● **Serve with a simple, contrasting dip.**

While excellent entirely on their own, Southerners often serve these alongside a quick mixture of equal parts mayonnaise and Dijon mustard, or with a sweet red plum jam for contrast.