

To Brie or not to Brie

Serve it the Southern way, baked with fig preserves and pecans

First, we have a little something sweet and savory for Carnival parties. Then we have some intriguing follow-ups.

This twist on a classic party food is from Rebecca Lang's brand new "Quick-Fix Southern: Homemade Hospitality in 30 minutes or Less" (Andrews McMeel, \$16.99). Lang is a contributing editor for Southern Living.



JUDY WALKER

Exchange Alley

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Baked Brie with Fig Preserves and Pecans

Makes 8 servings

- 1 8-ounce wheel Brie cheese
- 1/4 cup fig preserves
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary
- 8 pecan halves
- Crackers or French bread

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Trim the rind off the top of the Brie, leaving a 1/4-inch border around the edge.

Combine fig preserves and rosemary in a small mixing bowl. Spread over the top of the trimmed Brie.

Bake 8 minutes. Arrange pecans over the preserves and bake for an addition 5 minutes.

Serve immediately with crackers or French bread.

NEW AND OLD SWEET POTATOES: After last week's discussion of the New Orleans street food known as pain patate or sweet potato pone, I got this note from T.M.B. Does this sound heavenly or what?

"I would like to add a recipe

to your suggestions for sweet potatoes.

"I cut 4 or 5 of them unpeeled into 8 wedges each, put them in a mixing bowl, coat them with grapeseed oil, add garlic salt, a dash of Cajun spice; pizza or Provençal herb mix, a generous amount of caraway seeds and mix it all up until the wedges are well coated with the mix.

"Then I cover a baking tray with aluminium foil, place the wedges on it with the peel down and roast them at 350 degrees for about one hour in the middle rack.

"There is nothing like it."

Another pain patate reference that mentions the signature black pepper turned up in, of all places, a 1946 Times-Picayune account of the Olympians Ball (the group's first ball since 1941, and the court that would have ruled in 1942 was also presented).

The ball theme recreated Faranta's Show, described as "a colorful amusement center (for) both rich and poor from 1884 to the early '90s." It seems to have been a tent show at the corner of Bourbon and Orleans streets. And outside were vendors "traditionally associated with old New Orleans."

The pain patate vendor offered her "confection of sweet potatoes, 'sucre brut,' an overdose of black pepper and cinnamon bark," the story reported. (I believe 'sucre brut' refers to raw sugar.)

Other vendors offered "mais tactac" or popcorn balls, "marron" or roasted chestnuts and "bierre douce," cold beer.

FROM-SCRATCH CHICKEN AND DUMPLINGS: After the two chicken and dumplings recipes shared here last week, I heard from two people who swear by flour tortillas. As dumplings.

As in cutting them into strips and throwing them into the broth. I haven't tried this, but they swear it's good.

Then we have the old school. "If you want it from scratch, this recipe is the ticket," writes C.D.



from Carriere, Miss.

"My sister-in law, the late Radie Reviere of Bogalusa, was renowned for her chicken and dumplings and her graciousness. She not only shared the dish and the recipe, she gave me a lesson in her kitchen. And I wasn't the first person she messed up her kitchen for in her generosity," C.D. writes.

Radie took her dumplings to church suppers in a casserole dish with an optional lattice topping. C.D. says she makes hers without the topping.

A couple of techniques make the dumplings hold together well, so they're easy to transfer into the pot.

"Vigorous kneading will toughen the dough so the dumplings hold their shape. And the rest allows it to relax enough to roll thin," C.D. writes.

The recipe calls for the meat and broth from a stewing hen. Stewing hens are chickens bred to lay eggs that have outlived their egg-laying days. They are tougher than chickens bred for meat and make rich, flavorful broths and stews.

If you can't find a stewing hen, make broth out of a whole chicken. C.D. notes that after she debones the hen, she throws "all the skin, bones and gristle back in the stock to strengthen and extend it. I get 3 quarts."

Radie's Chicken & Dumplings

Meat and stock from a large stewing hen

DUMPLINGS

2-1/2 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup Crisco
1/2 cup cold milk
1 egg

LATTICE TOP (OPTIONAL)

1 cup self-rising flour
1/3 cup Crisco
1/4 cup cold milk
Butter

Heat stock to near-boiling in a large pot. Season as desired. (Radie used only salt and pepper to taste.) Let simmer. (If using lattice top, preheat oven to 350 degrees.)

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle, mix flour and salt. Add Crisco and let the mixer cut it into the flour. Add egg and milk. Add enough flour, a little bit at a time, until the dough gathers itself onto the beater and pulls away from the edge of the bowl.

Remove from bowl onto a floured board and knead vigorously 2 or 3 minutes. Cut in fourths, cover with the mixing bowl, and let it rest for about 15 minutes.

Turn dough out onto well-floured surface, and set out 4 cookie sheets. Roll each portion of dough as thin as possible and transfer it to a cookie sheet.

Use a pizza cutter to cut the dough into strips roughly an inch wide by 2 inches long.

Rub tops of dough lightly with additional flour. With a thin spatula, scoop strips of dumplings into the simmering stock.

Use a large spatula or spoon to scrape the bottom of the pot occasionally to keep dumplings from sticking. Add additional canned broth, if needed.

Stir in the cut-up meat, cover the pot, turn it off, and let it sit for about 5 minutes. Because they are so thin, the dumplings will be cooked.

Optional step: Pour the chicken and dumplings into a greased deep casserole dish. Add additional broth or milk if needed.

Make the lattice top just like dumplings. Crisscross on top of pan and press to the pan at the sides. Dab with butter.

Bake for 1/2 hour, until golden.

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jwalker@timespicayune.com. Send mail to: EXCHANGE ALLEY, Food section, The Times-Picayune, 3800 Howard Ave., New Orleans, La. 70125-1429.

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