

Our State eats

Published in the January 2018 issue of Our State

John Fleer's Buttermilk Cornbread Soup

Yield: 4 servings.

Peanut oil

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup chopped leeks

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup chopped celery

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon minced garlic

$2\frac{1}{4}$ cups chicken stock, plus extra if needed to thin out soup

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled day-old cornbread, plus extra for garnish

1 cup buttermilk (see note on buttermilk)

3 tablespoons heavy cream

Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Add enough peanut oil to coat the bottom of a medium soup pot or Dutch oven. Place over medium heat. Add leeks and celery, and reduce heat to medium-low; sweat, stirring often, for about 5 minutes, or until vegetables become translucent. Add garlic and cook for another minute, then add chicken stock and cornbread. Bring to a low simmer, and let simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from heat.

Stir buttermilk and heavy cream together in a large bowl. Add the hot soup very slowly to the milk mixture, stirring constantly. Puree soup until smooth in a blender or with an immersion blender. Taste and season with salt and pepper.



If the soup is too thick for your liking, add a touch of extra chicken stock.

Return the soup to the pot and heat very gently over low heat until warmed through. Serve with crumbled cornbread on top as a garnish. It's also quite delicious served chilled.

A note on buttermilk: The better your buttermilk, the better this soup will be. When I don't have Cruze on hand, I look for whole-milk buttermilk without stabilizers or additives. Smaller local dairies sometimes have this, and the organic buttermilk found in natural-food groceries is often good, too.

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Published in the February 2023 issue of Our State

North Carolina Brunswick Stew

- 1 whole chicken, approximately 5 pounds
- 2 cups corn, frozen
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 2 cups lima beans, frozen
- 2 cups sweet onion, chopped
- 1 large russet potato, peeled and cut into small cubes
- 1 pound chopped barbecue
- 2 cups cut okra, frozen
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- Saltine crackers (optional)

Place whole chicken in a large soup pot or Dutch oven. Add 8 cups cold water or enough to just cover chicken. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to medium. Cook chicken until bones can be easily removed, approximately 45 minutes. Remove chicken from stock and place in a large bowl to cool. Reserve stock.

Remove bones from chicken and discard. Pull or chop chicken into bite-size pieces and return to stock.

Add corn, tomatoes, lima beans, onion, and potato to stock. Cook on medium heat for 20 to 30 minutes. Add barbecue, okra, red pepper flakes, salt, black pepper, and Worcestershire sauce. Continue cooking for another 10 to 15 minutes or until stew thickens. Add more water if stew is too thick. Serve with saltine crackers.



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Published in the April 2016 issue of Our State

Fish Muddle

Yield: 8 to 12 servings.

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1½ pounds large, wild shrimp, peeled, deveined, shells and heads reserved
- 6 cups water
- 8 ounces thick-cut bacon, chopped
- 2 large celery stalks, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 large carrots, finely chopped (about 1½ cups)
- 2 large onions, finely chopped (about 3 cups)
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 4 bay leaves
- 4 short thyme sprigs
- 2 (28-ounce) cans crushed tomatoes
- 1 pound new potatoes, scrubbed and quartered
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- 2 teaspoons hot pepper sauce, or to taste
- 1½ pounds lean fish fillets (such as snapper or striped bass), cut into 2-inch pieces
- 6 cups freshly cooked rice or stone-ground grits
- 4 hard-cooked eggs, coarsely chopped
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley, coarsely chopped
- Buttered saltines

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the shrimp shells and heads. Cook, stirring constantly, until they turn pink. Add the water and bring to a simmer. Cook gently until the liquid reduces to 4 cups, about 15 minutes. Strain the stock and discard the solids.

Cook the bacon in a large pot over medium-low heat until it is crisp and rendered, about 15 minutes. Transfer with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels.

Increase the heat to medium. When the bacon fat begins to sizzle, stir in the celery, carrots, onions, and a pinch of salt.



Cook, stirring often, until the vegetables are tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in the garlic, bay leaves, and thyme sprigs; cook, stirring, for 2 minutes.

Stir in the tomatoes and cook, stirring often, for 20 minutes.

Add the shrimp stock, potatoes, and the salt. Simmer until the potatoes are almost done, about 15 minutes.

Discard the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Season with pepper and hot sauce. Taste for salt.

Gently stir the fish into the stew. Arrange the shrimp over the top of the stew. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover the pot, and let cook until the fish and shrimp are barely opaque in the center, about 5 minutes.

Spoon hot rice or grits into serving bowls. Ladle muddle over the grits. Sprinkle with the eggs, reserved bacon, and parsley. Serve hot with buttered saltines.

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Published in the January 2018 issue of Our State

Chef Vivian Howard's Eastern Carolina Fish Stew

Yield: 12 servings.

- 1 pound sliced smoked bacon
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 3 pounds white or red potatoes, peeled and sliced into ½-inch rounds
- 2 pounds yellow onions, peeled, halved, and cut into ¼-inch slices
- 6 garlic cloves, sliced (optional)
- 3 pounds fish steaks, about 3 ounces each, with bones intact (red drum, rockfish, or sheepshead are good options)
- 1 fish head, rinsed well (optional)
- 2½ tablespoons salt
- 1½ teaspoons chili flakes
- 1 dozen eggs
- 1 loaf white bread

Cut the bacon slices into 1-inch squares. Brown it in the bottom of an 8- to 10-quart Dutch oven or cast-iron pot. Once it's crisp, remove it and reserve. Whisk the tomato paste into the bacon fat, making sure you scrape up all the bits left from browning the bacon.

With the heat off, begin layering the ingredients. Keep in mind you want to end up with three layers. Start with a layer of potatoes, followed by a layer of onions and of garlic, if using, followed by a layer of fish. Top the fish with a third of the salt and a third of the chili flakes. Repeat with two more layers. Fill the pot with enough water to just barely reach the top of the fish. If there's a little fish peeking out over the top,



that's ok – better than if it's swimming in water. Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid and bring it to a boil slowly over medium heat. Once it starts to boil, reduce the heat and let it cook at a high simmer for about 15 minutes. Check the potatoes for doneness. They should be barely tender, not falling apart.

Taste the broth and add more salt if needed. Then, with the stew at a good simmer, add the eggs one by one in a single layer over the top of the stew. I like to crack the eggs into a small cup before I drop them in. What you're trying to do is cook whole eggs in the broth. Once the eggs are cooked through, use a large ladle to portion the stew. A proper serving is at least one piece of fish, two potatoes, some onions, and an egg swimming in broth. Shower each bowl with some bacon and set it up with a slice or two of white bread.

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Published in the January 2014 issue of Our State

Wrightsville Beach Oyster Stew

Yield: 10-12 servings.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 4 small onions, chopped
- 1 bunch celery, chopped
- 8 ounces sliced mushrooms
- ¼ teaspoon minced fresh garlic
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 (2-ounce) jar pimientos
- 1½ teaspoons thyme
- 1½ teaspoons peper
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- 8 cups milk
- 8 cups heavy cream
- 1 gallon shucked oysters with oyster liquor

Melt butter in a large stockpot over medium heat.

Add onions, celery, mushrooms, and garlic, and sauté until tender. Reduce heat to low.

Add flour, undrained pimientos, thyme, pepper, and salt. Cook for 3 minutes, stirring constantly.

Add milk, cream, and undrained oysters.

Simmer for 30 minutes or until the edges of the oysters curl. Do not boil. Ladle into soup bowls.



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Published in the January 2013 issue of Our State

Cape Fear Clam Chowder

Yield: 8 cups

- 8 ounces chopped bacon or 2 (1-inch) cubes salt pork**
- 1 onion, chopped**
- 1 quart shucked clams, chopped,
or 2½ cups canned, minced clams; reserve broth**
- 3 tablespoons flour**
- 3 cups fresh clam broth or bottled clam juice**
- 2 cups raw potatoes, diced**
- 3 cups tomatoes, canned or cooked and peeled**
- ½ cup green pepper, diced**
- 1 bay leaf**
- ¼ cup ketchup**
- 1 teaspoon lemon pepper**
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- Salt to taste**
- 1 cup Clamato juice (optional)**

Sauté bacon or salt pork slowly. Remove and reserve. Add onion and chopped clams to grease. Stir and cook slowly, about 5 minutes. Drain excess grease from pan, and sift flour over clam mixture. When blended well, add heated clam broth to mixture. Blend well and add remaining ingredients. Cover pan and simmer until potatoes are done but firm. Add bacon or salt pork, and simmer for 3 additional minutes. For extra broth, add 1 cup Clamato juice with bacon or salt pork.



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Outer Banks Clam Chowder

Yield: 4 servings.

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- 2 large yellow onions, chopped**
- 2 large russet potatoes, peeled and diced**
- 2 (8-ounce) bottles clam juice**
- 4 cups seafood stock**
- 2 dozen fresh clams, shucked and chopped,
or 2 (6.5-ounce) cans chopped clams,
juice reserved**
- Salt and pepper to taste**
- Fresh chives, chopped**

In a soup pot, melt butter over medium heat. Add onions and cook until lightly browned. Add potatoes, clam juice, and seafood stock. Continue to cook until potatoes are just fork-tender. Add clams and reserved juice. Bring to a simmer and cook until clams are done, about 5 to 7 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with chives.



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