Our State eats

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Lavender Meringues

Yield: 16 cookies.

- **2 egg whites, at room temperature**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar**
- **1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- **½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- **2 teaspoons fresh lavender buds, stems removed**
- **White sparkling sugar, for dusting**

Preheat oven to 300°. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper and set aside.

Using a stand or hand mixer with whisk attachment on medium-high speed, beat together egg whites, salt, cream of tartar, and vanilla until soft peaks form. Very gradually add sugar, beating until stiff peaks form. Fold in the lavender buds.

Drop the meringue by teaspoonfuls onto the parchment paper. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until meringues set and begin to brown. Dust sparkling sugar over meringues.

Remove and let cool on a wire rack. Store in airtight container until ready to serve.

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Bean & Ham Bone Soup

Yield: 8 servings.

- **2 cups dry great northern beans**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **3 celery stalks, chopped**
- **3 medium carrots, peeled and chopped**
- **1 large yellow onion, finely chopped**
- **3 cloves garlic, finely minced**
- **10 cups chicken stock**
- **4 cups cooked ham, cubed**
- **1 ham bone**
- **4 sprigs fresh thyme**
- **1 teaspoon dried oregano**
- **½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- **Salt to taste**
- **½ bunch fresh parsley leaves, chopped**

Place dried beans in a colander and rinse thoroughly with cold water; discard any discolored beans. Place beans in a large glass bowl and fill with cold water. Soak overnight.

In a large Dutch oven, heat oil on medium and sauté celery, carrots, and onion until tender, about 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in garlic.

Add stock, ham, and ham bone to the pot. Add beans, thyme, oregano, and black pepper.

Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer for 2 to 3 hours, stirring occasionally, until beans are tender. Salt to taste; add parsley just before serving.

For a thicker soup, remove 1 to 2 cups of the soup, let cool slightly, and place in blender. Puree then stir back into the pot. Serve with cornbread.

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Poppy Seed Chicken Casserole

Yield: 8 servings.

- **1 cup whole milk**
- **1 cup sour cream**
- **1 large egg**
- **½ teaspoon onion powder**
- **½ teaspoon garlic powder**
- **4 cups cooked chicken, shredded or finely chopped**
- **1 tablespoon poppy seeds**
- **½ teaspoon salt**
- **½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- **1 sleeve Ritz Crackers, crushed**
- **½ cup slivered almonds**
- **6 tablespoons butter, melted**

Preheat oven to 350°. Prepare a 9 x 13 casserole dish with cooking spray; set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together milk, sour cream, egg, and onion and garlic powders until well combined. Stir in chicken, poppy seeds, salt, and pepper. Spoon mixture into casserole dish and spread evenly into corners. Top with crushed crackers and slivered almonds. Pour butter evenly over casserole.

Bake for 40 minutes or until edges of casserole are golden and bubbly.

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