

Southern Cooking Brings Soul to Food

I was born and raised in the heart of the Deep South. From as far back as I can remember I remember long summer afternoons spent drinking iced tea and shelling peas and butterbeans on my grandmother's porch. I have moved on from my roots and have made my way into other regions of the world. One thing, however, that has remained constant in my life is my deep and abiding love for southern cooking and cuisine.

I was probably well into my teen years before I realized that tea could be served any other way than loaded with sugar and over ice. It was about that same time that I realized some folks would eat vegetables that hadn't been soaked in batter, dredged in cornmeal, and deep fat fried. Southern cooking is not for the faint of heart though it can cause many hearts to grow faint. One thing that can be said is that you'll never find anything else like it on earth.

People in the south learned to make do with little in many instances. Some of the poorest people in America live in the southern part of the country. Of course, you will find that many of these people despite their poverty are also among the most generous. The same can be said of food. It's the one thing that seems to be in ample supply in most southern homes and very few will turn you away with an empty stomach.

Perhaps it's the seasonings that are often used when cooking southern food. From the crab boil and gumbo file of Cajun Cuisine to the secret ingredient that almost every southern kitchen contains for their fried chicken recipes (and no one on earth can fry chicken like a born and bred southern grandma). Perhaps it's the Sunday church dinners where everyone shares a little of what they have with others or the love that goes into preparing these meals that are shared with friends and family. Whatever the case may be, if you ever have the occasion to experience real southern cooking, do not pass it up. You might shave a day off your life, but a good southern fried chicken leg is really living and well worth the sacrifice if you ask me.

Of course it would be remiss to mention southern cooking without bringing up some of the more delicious desserts that seem to be perfection for the south. I mentioned banana pudding above but there are so many more. Pralines are a perfect for those living down around New Orleans as is bread pudding. A little to the east there are grandma's who have taken their lemon icebox pie recipes to the grave with them so coveted were these delicious deserts and the same holds true for pecan pies as well. We should never forget the flavorful Mississippi Mud cake though, and so many other wonderfully delicious treats that southern cooking has introduced to the world at large.

Favorite vegetables in the heart of the south as I mentioned above included peas and butterbeans, snap beans, corn, summer squash (after all, it's summer all year in the south), and okra (fried or boiled in many southern kitchens). Not all vegetables were deep fried though few were off limits. I remember eating my share of fried okra, fried squash, and yes, fried green tomatoes. Life was good back when calories weren't counted and no one really worried about clogging arteries. While I wouldn't make these a daily dish in any household, I certainly would recommend trying them out if you ever find the opportunity.

Another great thing about southern cooking is the wonderful fried seafood that seems to abound. From fried fish (almost any variety works well when it's southern fried) to fried oysters, seafood just seems to taste so much better in the south. If you are hoping to learn some of the southern cooking and cuisine you will most likely need to order your spices and have them shipped unless your grocery store has a rather extensive 'exotic' foods selection. You can sometimes find great southern seasonings on the International food aisles in grocery stores as well. If you want to really treat your family to an outstanding meal, you should really try southern cooking for the night.

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