

HOW TO EAT LIKE AN ARK ANSAN

WHAT IS ARKANSAS CUISINE?

THAT'S A QUESTION ARKANSANS HAVE BEEN DEBATING FOR YEARS.

IT'S NOT QUITE THE TAMALES OF THE DELTA OR THE BARBECUE IN BLYTHEVILLE. IT'S NOT QUITE THE CORNED BEEF AT OAKLAWN OR AN ARKANSAS BLACK APPLE PIE. IT'S SOMETHING THAT GOES BEYOND JUST ONE DISH.

EATING LIKE AN ARKANSAN MEANS KNOWING THAT WE'RE MORE THAN JUST CHEESE DIP AND A COON SUPPER, BUT DEFENDING BOTH UNTIL THE END. IT MEANS AN EYE ROLL EVERY TIME LITTLE ROCK OR BENTONVILLE ENDS UP ON A LIST OF HIDDEN FOOD CITIES.

BECAUSE, COME ON, WE KNEW THAT ALREADY. AND, ABOVE ALL, IT MEANS EATING DAMN WELL.

EDITED BY EMILY VAN ZANDT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARSHIA KHAN



/01

CRACK A LOCALLY GROWN PECAN WITH YOUR HANDS.

Nutcrackers, right? Who needs 'em? Especially with a soft-shelled nut like the pecan. Place two pecans, long sides touching, in the palm of your hand. Interlock your fingers, and press your palms firmly together. One shell should give way, giving you the chance to peel away the flaky shell and pull out the nutmeats intact.

/02

EMBRACE THE CHEESE-DIP TRADITION.

Most any word that might be used to describe the consistency of melted cheese is going to be unflattering—dribbly, gooshy, slick. But Lord, does it taste good. If, for whatever reason, you've been unaware of Little Rock's favorite viscous stuff, here's what you need to know:

- 1/ There is, in fact, a festival, touted as the World Cheese Dip Championship, that since 2010 has been hosted in locations across Little Rock (it'll be in The Bernice Garden this October). And if you question Arkansans' fidelity to melty fromage, just know that contestants brought in 300 gallons of cheese for this past year's contest, and the dip was then consumed—1 or 2 ounces at a time—with 4,000 bags of chips.
- 2/ For as ostensibly simple as it is in composition, there are untold variations on the theme, with secrets highly guarded and allegiances approaching overzealous. Personally, among those most intriguing? A sort at Taco Mama's in Hot Springs, which as local chip-dip cicerone Kat Robinson tells us, has spices "roasted on-site, the cheese base is queso blanco and mozzarella, and the flavor is just knock-your-socks-off amazing."
- 3/ According to *In Queso Fever: A Movie About Cheese Dip*—because, yes, that is a thing that happened (and is pretty entertaining to boot)—cheese dip was invented here in Little Rock by a Mexican immigrant by the name of Blackie Donnelly at Mexico Chiquito. And, the film makes clear, the Arkansas creation was totally around before nachos were but a glimmer in the eye of their creators in Piedras Negras, Mexico.
- 4/ Although other champions have hoisted the trophy in years past—though, really, who are we fooling, it ought to be a well-notched belt—none seems to have clung so tightly to the renown as inaugural champ-eeen, Dizzy's Gypsy Bistro. And given the quantity of the four-pepper, three-cheese, bechamel-based stuff made on any given Friday—roughly 15 gallons—who are we to question their stature?
- 5/ Above all, if you're going to set about crafting a new recipe, you had better take it seriously. Case in point: Scott McGehee's experience developing one for the soon-to-open Heights Taco & Tamale Co.: "We made at least 100 batches of cheese dip. Eating cheese dip 10 times a day for months. ... We all just hate cheese dip now. Ours draws from what we consider the five great cheese dips of central Arkansas: Blue Mesa, Juanita's, Brownings, Taco Kid and Mexico Chiquito. We took inspiration from all of those. This is the epicenter of cheese dip on planet Earth."

PERFECT A TRIO
OF SOUTHERN
COCKTAILS.



When it came time to choose a local “Southern cocktail” expert for this feature, Tim Stramel—a classic cocktail devotee who slings Bee’s Knees and Gin Rickeys behind the stick at Little Rock’s capital of Southern hospitality, the Capital Hotel—seemed an obvious choice. And when it came time for him to choose the three cocktail recipes every Arkansan should commit to memory, it was equally obvious that these three classics came out on top—no question. Here’s how Stramel shakes and stirs these uniquely Southern libations.

SAZERAC

Add a handful of ice to a double old fashioned glass; set aside. In the bottom of a shaker, soak a sugar cube with 5 dashes of Peychaud’s bitters and 3 dashes of Angostura bitters. Muddle. Add 2 ounces of rye whiskey; shake with ice. Empty the glass; then add a splash of Herbsaint, an anise-flavored liqueur; roll until coated. Pour off excess; then strain the whiskey-sugar mixture into the glass. Garnish with a lemon twist.

MINT JULEP

Add a small handful of mint leaves (without stems) to a julep cup. Muddle gently. Add crushed ice to the cup. Pour 1 ounce of mint simple syrup (boil 1 cup sugar, 1 cup water and 1 cup mint leaves; strain through sieve) and 2 ounces of bourbon over ice. Garnish with mint.

OLD FASHIONED

In the bottom of a double old fashioned glass, soak a sugar cube with 2 to 3 dashes of Angostura bitters, a couple drops of orange bitters and a dash of water. Add an orange slice and 4 brandied cherries; muddle gently, being careful not to mash the orange’s rind. Fill the glass with ice; add 2 ounces of bourbon. Stir and serve.

KNOW HOW TO SOURCE
SOME TRULY WILD
MUSHROOMS (WITHOUT,
YOU KNOW, DYING).

THE FIRST THING YOU NEED TO KNOW about Jay Justice, president of the Arkansas Mycological Society, is that he signs his emails “Fungal-mentally.” The second thing—the fact that he really, *really* knows his way around morels, those edible, honeycomb-shaped mushrooms prized by gourmets—pretty well goes without saying.

When we asked him to share some of his morel-hunting ways with us, he told us there are three things to keep in mind. The first is where to go: Turns out the hills dotting the northwest quadrant of the state are our best bets. The second is when to go: late March through late April, usually, depending on the location. The third? “Well, you have to get there before everyone else does,” he said with a laugh. “That’s the real challenge.”

He elaborated, telling us to search for morels around the base of sycamore, hickory and tulip poplar trees, and on the trunks of decaying elms. He mentioned that it might be a good idea to check websites and message boards for hints as to where folks have spotted the delicate mushrooms of late before heading off into the woods. When it all seemed a tad overwhelming, we asked if he might consider taking us with him on one of his hunts.

“Sure,” he said, and then hesitated. “Well, sure, but I can’t reveal my *best* spots.”

According to Justice, here are the species to keep your eye out for—and one in particular to avoid:

GOOD MORCHELLA



AMERICANA



ANGUSTICEPS



DIMINUTIVA



PUNCTIPES

POTENTIALLY BAD



GYROMITRA CAROLINIANA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SALLY NIXON

/05

Heirloom tomatoes are special. Like a recipe handed down from one generation to the next, the tomatoes come from heritage seeds that have been around for decades, passed down from grower to grower for at least 50 years. Here are three ways to enjoy them.

GET YOUR HEIRLOOM-TOMATO FIX.

SEED.

Test your green thumb with an Arkansas native tomato, like the Arkansas Traveler. The variety originated in the Ozarks in the late 1800s and is resistant to the scorching afternoons that an Arkansas summer is apt to bring. Expect the fruit to be a lighter red with a mild taste. To purchase seeds, check out rare-seeds.com.

FARM.

At Deepwoods Farm in Bradley County, the Donnelly family grows, picks and packs their tomato crop by hand. The 70-year-old farm focuses on heirloom varieties, including Cherokee Purple, Bradley Pink, Arkansas Traveler, Red Zebra and Caroline Gold. During tomato season—that's May through July, give or take a few weeks—the farm is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Sunday for customers to pick up a box or two of the flavorful summertime favorites. Learn more about the farm at deepwoodsfarm.org.

FEST.

Each year, the people of Bradley County fête their region's prized pink tomatoes with a celebratory two-day bash. The pink tomato—named not for a particular variety of tomato but the color the locally grown tomatoes should be when picked by area growers for shipping—is so integral to the food history of the state that it was declared the state fruit and vegetable (you know, because it's both) in 1987. The 59th annual Bradley County Pink Tomato Festival will be celebrated June 12-13 in Warren.

/06

TAKE YOUR FRIED CHICKEN WITH A SIDE OF SPAGHETTI.

IN NASHVILLE, folks serve fried chicken with pickles and a dash of hot sauce—the spiciest you can handle. In Mississippi, it's accompanied by slow-cooked collards or a gooey mess of mac 'n' cheese on the side. At mom-and-pops across our fair state, expect cream-gravy-topped mashed potatoes and a cloverleaf roll.

Unless you're in tiny Tontitown, of course. Then you're getting a heap of spaghetti smothered in meaty marinara. Well, that *and* a cloverleaf roll.

If the Delta means tamales and Blytheville means barbecue, then Northwest Arkansas—Springdale and its environs, specifically—means fried chicken. It's an obvious connection; after all, it's long been the capital of our state's poultry industry (and seeing as we're No. 3 in the nation for production of broilers, we've got a pretty significant stake in the field of fowl). What's perhaps less obvious is the manner in which the places topping myriad "best fried chicken in Arkansas" lists, such as the venerable Venesian Inn in the humble hamlet of Tontitown, serve their birds. Thanks to the Italian immigrants who settled around Springdale—and who, naturally, found work in the poultry plants—ordering "the special" in these parts means one thing, and one thing only.

A soaked salad. A couple of deep-fried ravioli. And tender chicken, spiced, breaded and fried golden brown, snuggled up beside a tangle of "meatsauce"-laden spaghetti.

It might seem a bit unorthodox to some, but here, it's a tradition some 60 years strong. —Katie Bridges

/07 BAKE A TRULY LOCAL PIE.

ROCK TOWN DISTILLERY BOURBON

Punch up a traditional apple-pie filling with a little extra flavor by spiking it with a splash or two of award-winning Rock Town Distillery Bourbon Whiskey, produced in downtown Little Rock. Rock Town (rocktowndistillery.com) is found on liquor-store shelves across the state, or can be purchased at the distillery.

ARKANSAS BLACK APPLES

Arkansas Black Apples—a variety with a dark-red peel and tart, crunchy flesh—are native to the northwestern portion of the state and can be found widely at area pick-your-own farms, such as Cox Berry Farm in Clarksville (coxberryfarm.com), where apple season runs September through October.

WAR EAGLE MILL FLOUR

Stone-ground at a Rogers mill that first opened in 1832, War Eagle Mill's organic, unbleached all-purpose flour is the perfect local option to blend with cold butter, water, salt and sugar to create a flaky base for an apple pie. Purchase War Eagle Mill products directly from the source at wareaglemill.com.

For the full recipe, head to arkansaslife.com.

/08

KNOW A THING OR FIVE ABOUT RICE.

- 1/ 1.3 million acres in the state are dedicated to rice production. That's more land than the entire state of Rhode Island. In rice.
- 2/ Of the six major rice-producing states in the U.S., Arkansas ranks first, accounting for nearly half of all rice produced in the United States.
- 3/ Located at the heart of Arkansas' rice production, Stuttgart is home to the Museum of the Arkansas Grand Prairie, which dedicates exhibit space to honoring the farmers that first brought rice farming to the area in the early 1900s.
- 4/ You can plant rice by airplane. Crop-dusting planes are routinely used to spread fertilizer and other spray over crops in flooded fields, but they can also be used to spread seed.
- 5/ Once the plants have emerged, rice fields are flooded to help keep weeds from overtaking the plants. The plants stay submerged for around 100 days before the fields are drained and the rice is harvested. Most Arkansas rice is harvested in the late summer or early fall.

/09

KNOW HOW TO KEEP A PLACE IN BUSINESS.

BEFORE THE RESTAURANT OPENS, Linda McGoogan has time for stories. About the time decades before when she forgot to slip a charcoal-grilled patty onto a bun—and the patron who has yet to let her live it down even now. About the customers who'd help peel garlic or that one guy who took it upon himself to stem the peppers from her garden. In hearing these stories, it's clear why the El Dorado Minute Man—the very last link in a chain of similarly named restaurants that once numbered just shy of 60 locations across the region—has lasted as long as it has.

That's not to say Minute Man hasn't seen its share of hiccups and obstacles. In the time since McGoogan's been there—by her best estimate since the mid- to early-'70s—she's watched as things have changed. As new businesses and new competitors entered the market. As young customers have aged and had children of their own, making their semi-annual pilgrimages

to the restaurant on return visits home. She still remembers attending managers' conferences in Little Rock and watching as their numbers gradually dwindled until there wasn't really much need to meet anymore. (When the El Dorado location was threatened in the mid-'80s, she and her family bought it out.)

Ask experts in marketing and Southern foodways, and they'll tell you there's any number of reasons why a place like Minute Man was able to stick it out. And while there is not, strictly speaking, any magic bullets or secret sauces capable of single-handedly staving off the harbingers of any given restaurant's looming expiration—aside, that is, from a single-minded adherence to the work at hand—there does seem to be something about El Dorado that allows for places like Minute Man to transcend the franchise-dom to become an integral part of the city's culture. —Jordan P. Hickey

/10

RECOVER YOUR LOSSES WITH CORNED BEEF.

THERE ARE TWO MUST-DO things at Oaklawn.

The first is to bet \$5 on the fifth horse in the fifth race. Win, place or show. Do it. Trust me.

The second is to eat one—or more—of the Hot Springs racing and gaming venue's legendary corned-beef sandwiches. Win or lose—let's say that five-five-five bet doesn't pay—eating one of Oaklawn's legendary corned-beef sandwiches makes a bad day at the track easier to digest.

The sandwich's link to Oaklawn dates back to the track's beginnings in 1905, and the first Saturday of the race season each year recalls those days with 50-cent corned-beef stacks. (Other days they can be had for around \$6.)

The sandwiches are simple, yet delicious—tender, salt-cured beef piled high on deli-rye bread. You can upgrade to a Reuben, adding Swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Thousand Island dressing, but a plain corned beef is fine on its lonesome. Maybe a smear of horseradish or a similarly piquant condiment. That's it. Uncomplicated comfort food. —Shea Stewart



/11



HOST A CRAWFISH BOIL.

Beady-eyed, with pincers and a prickly disposition—crawfish are just plain ugly. A crawfish boil, however, is a thing of beauty, transforming a spring weekend afternoon into an all-day festival. While there's really no wrong way to host a good boil, here are a couple of tips to up your crustacean-cooking game:

CRAWFISH TABLES

All those discarded crawfish shells have to go somewhere. Make the cleanup easier by either purchasing or building crawfish serving tables. You can build your own by securing a large piece of plywood, cutting out the middle, and propping up a industrial-sized garbage can beneath it. Just be sure you line the garbage can with a heavy-duty garbage bag that doesn't puncture easily.

STRAIGHT OR CURVED?

The saying goes, "straight tail, bad crawfish." A straight tail on a cooked crawfish means they were dead before being boiled, right? Not necessarily. The Louisiana State University Agriculture Center researched the myth—yes, crawfish is serious business in Louisiana—and found this: "The age-old adage of avoiding straight-tailed crawfish at a crawfish boil ... may not be reliable and certainly has little to do with knowing the living status of the animal at the time of cooking."

TUNES

A crawfish-boil music mix needs Professor Longhair. The same goes for Fats Domino and Louis Armstrong. Besides the classics, a good crawfish-boil soundtrack is heavy on New Orleans and south-Louisiana staples—think The Meters, Dr. John, Kermit Ruffins, The Dirty Dozen Brass Band and others. Switch that up by tossing in some Galactic, Dash Rip Rock and even Master P or Juvenile.

BEER

A lighter, crisper beer goes well with crawfish, but that doesn't have to mean some flavorless macrobrew. Instead, try Abita's Golden, an American-styled lager, or the Louisiana brewery's Amber, a Munich-inspired lager with a bit more heft. Looking for local brews? Try Lost Forty's Bare Bones Pilsner, Diamond Bear's Southern Blonde or Core's Behemoth Pilsner.

/12

FIND A FAVORITE ARKANSAS WINE.

Sure, it's no Napa Valley—but the history of winemaking in Arkansas stretches back to the 1880s in the Arkansas River Valley. Many of the wineries that operate in Northwest Arkansas have been there for decades, including Post Winery, Wiederkehr Wine Cellars and Chateau Aux Arc. So show some pride of place, and find a go-to bottle that's made right here at home.

One place to start? Lee Ingold, Maitre d' and sommelier at The Capital Hotel, points to Wiederkehr's Muscat di Tanta Maria, a good option for dessert pairings that manages to be fragrant and sweet, not cloying.

/13

PACK AN ARKANSAS BEER COOLER FOR THE LAKE.

When it comes to a weekend on the water, glass containers just aren't kosher. Cans are the way to go. And as the Arkansas craft-beer scene grows, so do the options for aluminum-clad brew. In Little Rock, Diamond Bear serves up its signature Southern Blonde in canned form, while Rogers' Ozark Brewing Co. offers its pale ale and Belgian-style golden ale in lake-ready packaging. Newest on the canned-beer scene is Little Rock's Lost Forty Brewing, which should be churning out its pilsner, pale ale and more in cans by this summer.



/14

ELEVATE YOUR SUMMER STRAWBERRIES.

Shortcake and ice cream are both great and all, but with Arkansas strawberry crops the way they are (read: delicious, plentiful), you're going to want a way to mix it up. Enter the savory side. Capi Peck, chef and owner at Trio's Restaurant in Little Rock, blends sweet summer strawberries with basil, black pepper, goat cheese and pine nuts for a snack that's tangy and complex, rather than over-the-top sweet.

SAVORY STRAWBERRY STACKS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 quart Arkansas strawberries, sliced
- 6 large basil leaves, chiffonade
- 2 tablespoons best-quality balsamic vinegar
- Cracked black pepper to taste
- Balsamic reduction
- 1/2 pound goat cheese
- 1/2 pound mascarpone
- 1/2 cup lightly toasted pine nuts
- 2 sheets puff pastry

DIRECTIONS

Wash, cap and slice the strawberries. Place in a mixing bowl, drizzle with balsamic vinegar, and toss gently until the berries are lightly coated. Set aside for 30 minutes.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cut the puff pastry into 4-inch squares. Roll out until thin; then bake until crisp. Set aside to cool. (This can be done several hours ahead of time or even the day before.)

Spread the pine nuts on a sheet pan; toast until they just start to take on color. Be careful not to burn.

Mix the goat cheese and mascarpone in a food processor until well blended. Add the basil, and mix with your fingers to evenly distribute. Transfer to a pastry bag or a large plastic zip-top bag with a corner cut for piping.

Drain the strawberries, and dust with black pepper. To assemble, pipe a dollop of the cheese mixture onto four of the puff-pastry squares. Place on a plate, and add a spoonful of berries over the cheese, top with another puff pastry, and ladle with more strawberries. Sprinkle with toasted pine nuts, and finish with a ribbon of balsamic reduction.

/15 TAKE A DEFINITIVE STANCE ON BARBECUE.

DO YOU WANT TO CREATE A CONTROVERSY?

Just pick a town, and declare it to be the Barbecue Capital of Arkansas. You'll hear from folks clear across the state, from Little Rock to Hot Springs to DeValls Bluff, who will riot if their city's not picked.

But for me, the city that merits a little pot-stirring is Blytheville. For quality smoked pork per capita, there's not a place around that can quite top Blytheville. Sure, it's a town that's dwindled in size from the peak of its heyday to now, a couple decades after the Air Force base that kept Blytheville buzzing closed. But amazingly, a not-so-insignificant number of barbecue restaurants and takeout establishments hang on.

For starters, there's the venerable Dixie Pig, a direct descendant of a log cabin restaurant called the Rustic Inn that the Halsell family began operating in 1923. (In 2009, a book titled *America's Best BBQ: 100 Recipes From America's Best Smokehouses, Pits,*

Shacks, Rib Joints, Roadhouses and Restaurants declared Dixie Pig the best barbecue in the country.) Other Blytheville folks swear by the Kream Kastle on North Division Street, a classic drive-in that has been around since 1952. And then there's Penn's. And Yank's. And Benny Bob's, and Razorback Carryout, and the trailer that's in the parking lot of the Hays supermarket (locals know it as Old Hays Barbecue). They're all serving the "pig sandwich," which is what you should order when you're in town: finely chopped pork, an almost clear vinegar-based sauce and a de rigueur smear of slaw.

Blytheville and the rest of the Arkansas Delta might be suffering economically, but the famous Blytheville pig sandwich and the places that serve it live on, providing a culinary bright spot in a far corner of Arkansas. —Rex Nelson



/16 IDENTIFY A TRUE BARBECUE SHACK.

"It's not a true, Southern, family-owned barbecue joint if you can't see the woodpile. If there are matching chairs and tables inside, just turn around and leave. And if they own a microwave? You know it's bad news." —Chris Dunkel, owner of *Stubby's Bar B Que* in Hot Springs

/17

COOK A WHOLE TROUT.

Gaston's White River Resort knows a thing or two about trout. Located just off the White River in Lakeview, the resort's restaurant serves up 400 pounds of trout each week, April through October. And while their smoked-trout poppers are raved about, it's the freshly caught and simply prepared rainbow trout that will keep you coming back. Had a lucky day on the river? The kitchen will cook up your catch for \$12. Doesn't get much fresher than that. Keith Larson, manager of the resort for 18 years, walks us through making the most of fresh-caught trout.

STEP 1

Whether fresh-caught or from a market, look for a 12- to 14-inch rainbow trout that weighs in at around 1 1/2 pounds. Look for fish with clear eyes, red gills, a firm texture and no real "fishy" smell. A fishmonger or butcher can take care of gutting and descaling the fish for you, but it's fairly easy to take care of at home. Turn to YouTube for videos on how to DIY this step.

STEP 2

Leaving the tail and head intact, butterfly the trout, opening up the belly so it can be stuffed. For a simple preparation, try filling the cavity with sliced lemon, rosemary, thyme, salt, pepper and a little olive oil. Larson recommends a simple mix of minced garlic and butter for another flavorful take.

STEP 3

Wrap the stuffed fish in aluminum foil, and cook over hot charcoal or an open flame for 5-7 minutes on each side.

STEP 4

With tongs, remove the foil packet from the heat, open, and allow to cool. Trout can be served whole or flaked off the bone and divided into two fillets. Each fish will yield 1-2 servings.



/18 TAKE WATERMELON TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

No other fruit can quench a summer craving quite like a freshly sliced hunk of sweet Arkansas watermelon. We prefer ours ice-cold. At Little Rock's Loblolly Creamery, head chef Nate Hamilton plays the sweet, light watermelon flavor against bold lime juice and fresh basil for a thoroughly fresh, warm-weather-ready frozen treat.

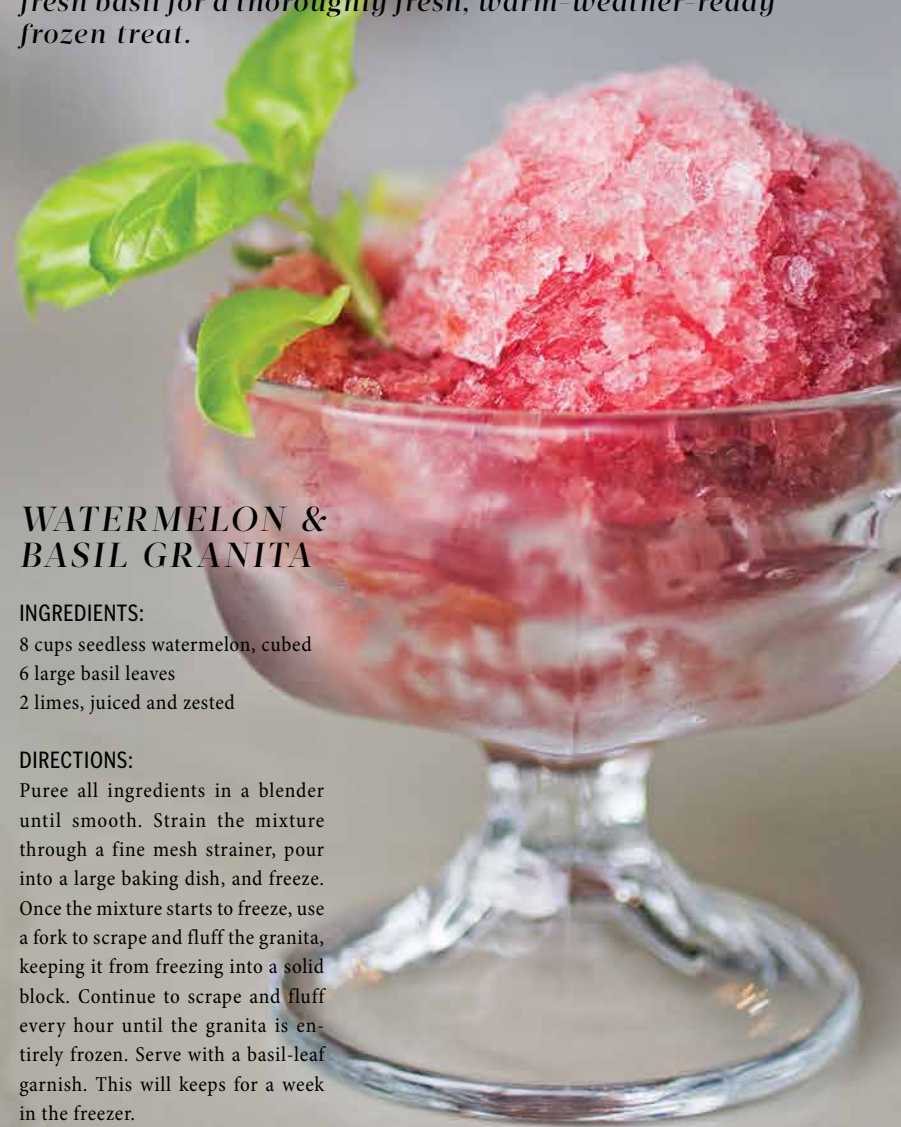
WATERMELON & BASIL GRANITA

INGREDIENTS:

8 cups seedless watermelon, cubed
6 large basil leaves
2 limes, juiced and zested

DIRECTIONS:

Puree all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Strain the mixture through a fine mesh strainer, pour into a large baking dish, and freeze. Once the mixture starts to freeze, use a fork to scrape and fluff the granita, keeping it from freezing into a solid block. Continue to scrape and fluff every hour until the granita is entirely frozen. Serve with a basil-leaf garnish. This will keep for a week in the freezer.



/19

BRING TURKEY SALAD INTO 2015.

SURE, CHICKEN SALAD IS GREAT. But give central Arkansans a choice, and many will say they prefer the darker, richer taste of turkey salad. From Burge's in the Heights to Bray Gourmet downtown, there's no shortage of turkey-salad options in Little Rock, most of them smooth, smokey, creamy and sandwiched between white bread.

But it doesn't always have to be that way. Butcher & Public owner Travis McConnell has a few tips for modernizing the classic Little Rock lunch option.

BRINE, THEN SMOKE.

The rich umami flavor of smoked turkey goes well in this sandwich mix, but don't forget to brine it first. McConnell recommends trying a brine of honey, lemon and herbs to help tenderize and flavor the turkey before cooking.

BALANCE THE MAYO.

Don't be afraid to use grocery-store mayo—McConnell swears by Duke's—but be sure to balance the creaminess with fresh herbs and even lemon zest to add dimension and keep the mayo from overpowering the other flavors.

ADD TEXTURE.

Smooth spreads have their place, but if you're going to take the time to brine and smoke that turkey, why not let it shine a bit more? McConnell prefers a hand-pulled or rough-chopped meat for his salads, rather than blending it thin. The same goes for the mix-ins—celery, carrots, onions, pecans and the like should be diced but still identifiable.

THINK HEARTY.

While white bread is great, a rye or hearty wheat can better stand up to the hefty ingredients in a turkey-salad spread. And don't overlook breads with seeds or other whole grains, which add another layer of crunch.

/20

EAT A TAMALE LIKE A PRO.

1. UNWRAP. Listen, we know you want to get these things in your belly ASAP, but whether it's a corn husk or waxed paper standing between you and that tamale, you're going to want to remove the covering, not bite into it. Don't be that guy.

2. DRESS. Some people will ladle on the chili. Others spoon on the hot sauce. And then there are the ones who can't take a first bite without cracking open some saltines. Practice makes perfect in finding a favorite.

3. CONSUME. If you're at a table, go for a fork. These things are exactly as messy as they look. In a car? Just make sure you snag some napkins.

PERFECT YOUR DUCK GUMBO ENTRY.

GUMBO MAY BE A LOUISIANA classic, but add a little wild duck meat and it becomes a wholly Arkansas tradition. Stuttgart boasts some of the best duck hunting in the country and, with it, a community ready to celebrate all things waterfowl—including some good eating. Each year, Stuttgart hosts the World Championship Duck Gumbo Cook-Off, pitting recipe against recipe to find the reigning mix. Heather

Weaver, head cook for the Cavers Gumbo Team, took home the championship in '12 and '14. And while she won't reveal her secrets, she's quick to offer a starter recipe and a few tips.

"Basically, less is best," Weaver says. "You don't want to throw in a whole bunch of garbage, and keep an eye on your seasonings. Many Cajun mixes already have salt, so don't add more." **AL**

WILD DUCK GUMBO

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup peanut or vegetable oil
4 tablespoons flour
1 1/2 cups onion, diced
1 1/2 cups bell pepper, any color, seeded and diced
1 pound andouille sausage or kielbasa, diced
3 cups boneless, skinless duck-breast filets, each cut into 3 or 4 pieces
3 quarts chicken broth, or stock made from the duck breasts
1 tablespoon filé powder
1 tablespoon gumbo seasoning
1 tablespoon salt and pepper
5 cloves garlic, minced
1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined, or crawfish tails
1 teaspoon ground thyme
6-8 cups warm cooked white rice
1 bag of frozen okra (optional)
1/4 cup fresh parsley, minced (optional)

DIRECTIONS

In a heavy skillet over medium-high heat, combine the peanut oil and flour to make the roux. Cook, while stirring constantly, until the roux is thoroughly cooked (about 45 minutes until dark brown, but not burnt). Be careful not to burn the roux. Remove from heat, and stir in onions and peppers.

In a large, heavy stockpot, cook the sausage over medium heat until browned. Add the duck, and cook until browned. Add the chicken or duck broth, filé powder, gumbo seasoning, salt, pepper and garlic. Stir into the roux mixture thoroughly, and bring to a boil, stirring often. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until the duck is very tender, about 1 1/2 hours.

Once the duck is tender, stir in the shrimp or crawfish tails, thyme and parsley. If you use shrimp, cook until it is pink (about 4 to 6 minutes). Spoon the rice into bowls, and ladle the gumbo over it. Makes 8-10 servings.

/21

