

Recipes and Stories
from Three Generations of
Southern Cooking

BON APPÉTIT, Y'ALL

Virginia Willis

Columbia County native and cook extraordinaire Virginia Willis has put her culinary talents to work for Martha Stewart, Bobby Flay and Natalie Dupree. She's been a chef at the White House and cooked for the stars. This spring, her new cookbook, *Bon Appétit, Y'all! Three Generations of Southern Cooking* (Ten Speed Press, 2008), featuring recipes learned at her mother's (and grandmother's) knee, hits bookstore shelves. We're delighted to feature a few samples of her "refined Southern cooking," sure to tempt the tastebuds of food lovers everywhere.

Vidalia Onion Quiche

Makes one 10-inch quiche

Mama often prepared quiche during the time that coincided with that ridiculous phrase and tongue-in-cheek bestseller, Real Men Don't Eat Quiche. I thought it was absurd then, and still do. Cheesy, yummy, eggy goodness encased in rich, golden pastry? What's not to like?

*French pie pastry (see recipe), blind baked**

1 1/2 cups Vidalia Onion Confit (see recipe)

3 large eggs

3 large egg yolks

2 cups whole milk

1/2 cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Pinch of cayenne pepper

Coarse salt and freshly ground white pepper

Prepare the pastry shell and the onion confit; let both cool. Preheat the oven to 350°F. To make the custard, whisk together the eggs, egg yolks, milk, cream, parsley, and cayenne pepper in a large bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside. **Spread** the cooled onion confit in the pastry shell. Pour the custard over the onions. **Bake** until the custard is lightly browned and set, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove to a rack to cool slightly. Serve warm or at room temperature.

French Pie Pastry

Makes one (10-inch) tart shell

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon fine sea salt

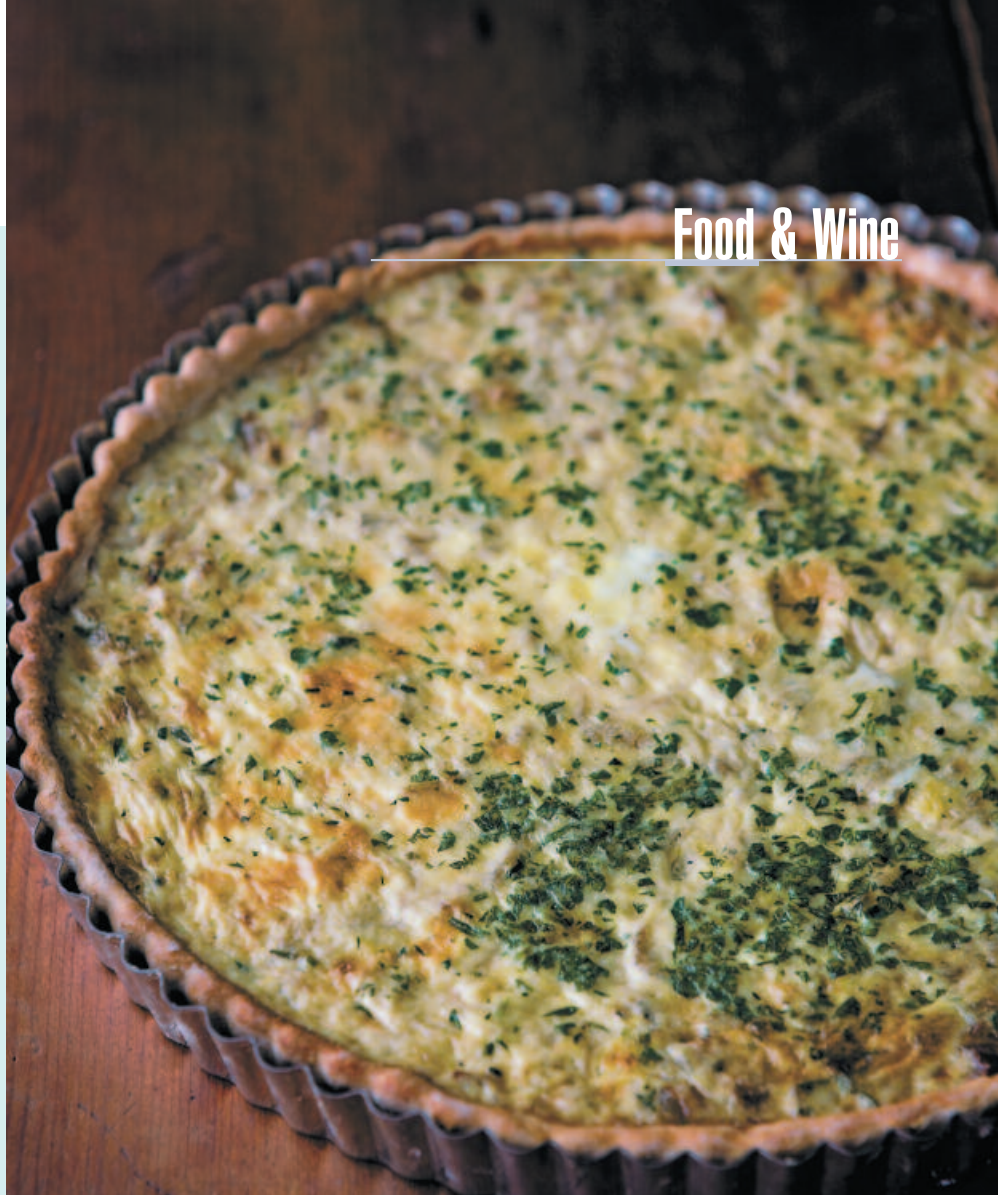
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into bits and chilled

2 large egg yolks

5 to 6 tablespoons cold water

To prepare the dough, **combine** the flour and salt in the bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade. Add the butter. **Process** until the mixture resembles coarse meal, 8 to 10 seconds. Add the egg yolks and pulse to combine. With the processor on pulse, add the ice water a tablespoon at a time. **Pulse** until the mixture holds together as a soft, but not crumbly or sticky, dough. Shape the dough into a disk, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate until firm and evenly moist, about 30 minutes.

To prepare the dough, lightly **flour** a clean work surface and rolling pin. Place the dough disk in the center of the floured surface. **Roll** out the dough, starting in the center and rolling up to, but not over, the top edge of the dough. Return to the center, and roll down to, but not over, the bottom edge. Give the dough a quarter turn, and continue rolling, repeating the quarter turns until you have a disk about 1/8-inch thick. Drape the dough over the rolling pin and transfer to a 10-inch tart pan with a removable bottom, unrolling over the tin. With one hand lift the pastry and with the other gently tuck it into the pan, being careful not to stretch or pull the dough. Let the pastry settle into the bottom of the pan. Take a small piece of dough and shape it into a ball. **Press** the ball of dough around the bottom edges of the tart pan, snugly shaping the pastry to the pan without tear-





Coca-Cola–Glazed Baby Back Ribs

Makes about 20 pieces

Coca-Cola is to Atlanta as Guinness is to Dublin. Friends and family liked my Coca-Cola–Glazed Wings so much that I decided to try a similar combination on pork. Pork has a natural affinity for sweet, rich caramel flavors. These “nouveau” Southern ribs are by no means traditional, but they are lip-smacking good.

Scotch bonnet peppers are intensely hot, but their fire is tempered by the sweetness of the sugar and Coke. To tone down the heat, substitute jalapeños instead.

*1 cup Coca-Cola Classic
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
1 1/2 cups firmly packed light brown sugar
2 Scotch bonnet chiles, chopped
2 racks baby back ribs (3 pounds total)
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper*

To make the glaze, in a small saucepan, bring the Coca-Cola, vinegar, brown sugar, and chiles to a boil over high heat; **reduce** the heat to medium-low and **simmer** until syrupy, about 10 minutes. Decrease the heat to low and keep the sauce warm while the ribs cook.

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Liberally season both sides of the ribs with salt and pepper. **Place** the ribs on a broiler pan and bake for 30 minutes, glazing the ribs occasionally with the Coca-Cola mixture. Turn the ribs over and continue to cook for an additional 30 minutes, glazing occasionally, or until the ribs are tender and the meat is starting to pull away from the bone. When the ribs are cooked through, set the oven to broil. Liberally **spoon** half of the remaining glaze over the ribs and broil until glazed a deep mahogany brown, 5 to 7 minutes. **Turn** over; repeat with the remaining glaze, an additional 5 to 7 minutes. Serve immediately with lots of napkins.

ing it. **Remove** any excess pastry by rolling the pin across the top of the pan. Prick the bottom of the pastry all over with the tines of a fork to help prevent shrinkage during baking. Chill until firm, about 30 minutes.

***To blind bake,** preheat the oven to 425°F. Crumple a piece of parchment paper, then lay it out flat over the bottom of the pastry. Weight the paper with pie weights, dried beans, or uncooked rice. This will keep the unfilled pie crust from puffing up in the oven. For a partially baked shell that will be filled and baked further, bake for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and remove the paper and weights. (You can reuse the rice or beans for blind-baking a number of times.) The shell can now be filled and baked further, according to the recipe directions. For a fully baked shell that will hold an uncooked filling, bake the empty shell until a deep golden brown, about 30 minutes total.

Vidalia Onion Confit

Makes about 2 cups

One of Mama's favorite recipes is to simply peel and quarter Vidalias, top them with a pat of butter, and microwave the pieces until they are tender. This recipe is not much more difficult. Confit is most often meat, such as duck, that has been cooked and preserved in its own fat, but the term also describes a jamlike condiment of cooked seasoned fruit or vegetables. This confit is wonderful as suggested, served on toasts as a nibble, but it also shines served as a condiment with pork or chicken. It is absolutely incredible with blue cheese.

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
6 onions, preferably Vidalia, chopped (about 1 1/2 pounds)
1/2 teaspoon firmly packed dark brown sugar
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup dry red wine
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, plus small sprigs for garnish

Heat the butter and olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and sugar, and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are soft, 15 to 20 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high. Add the wine and cook, stirring occasionally, until the wine is reduced and the

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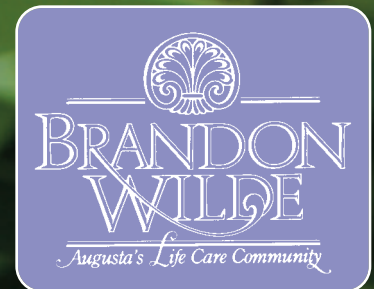
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onions are a deep golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes more. Add the thyme; taste and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper.

(Making ahead: The confit can be made ahead and will actually improve as the flavors marry. Refrigerate the confit in an airtight container for up to 4 days.)

Storing Onions

Onions need circulating air to stay fresh. Vidalia onions are particularly tricky due to their high sugar content. One of the best ways to store Vidalia onions is in the cut-off legs of pantyhose: drop an onion down the leg, tie a knot, and repeat. Hang the onion-filled hose from a hook in a cool, dry place. They will keep for months. Alternatively, wrap them separately in paper towels and refrigerate.

Meme's Biscuits

Makes about 9 biscuits

Meme, my grandmother, most often made rolled biscuits. For large biscuits, she had a special aluminum cutter with a small wooden handle that fit in the palm of her hand. She cut out small biscuits with an

empty apple juice can open at both ends. Some purists use lard instead of butter. Although I like biscuits made with lard and understand the tradition and history, Meme and Mama had started using butter by the time I was born.

The perfect biscuit should be golden brown and slightly crisp on the outside, with a light, airy interior. For a flaky, tender biscuit, don't overwork the dough: gently combine the ingredients until just blended. A very hot oven is essential. The steam interacts with the baking powder to create the biscuit's ideal textures inside and out.

*2 cups White Lily or other Southern all-purpose flour or cake flour (not self-rising), more for rolling out
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into bits and chilled
3/4 to 1 cup buttermilk*

Preheat the oven to 500°F. In a bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt. Using a pastry cutter or two knives, cut the butter into the flour mixture until it resembles

coarse meal. Pour in the buttermilk, and gently mix until just combined.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead lightly, using the heel of your hand to compress and push the dough away from you, then fold it back over itself. Give the dough a small turn and repeat 8 or so times. (It's not yeast bread; you want to just barely activate the gluten, not overwork it.) Using a lightly floured rolling pin, roll the dough out 1/2 inch thick. Cut out rounds of dough with a 2 1/4-inch round cutter dipped in flour; press the cutter straight down without twisting so the biscuits will rise evenly when baked.

Place the biscuits on an ungreased baking sheet or in an 8- by 2-inch round cake pan. If the biscuits are baked close together the sides will be moist. If the biscuits are baked further apart, the sides will be crisp. Bake until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a rack to cool just slightly. Serve warm.

Variation: *If I don't feel like rolling out biscuits, or just want a different texture, I tweak the recipe by adding more buttermilk to the dough and make drop biscuits: use 3 cups of flour—2 for the dough and 1 cup placed in a bowl to shape the dough into biscuits. Increase the buttermilk to 2 cups. The dough will be very wet and resemble cottage cheese. To form the biscuits into balls, scoop up some dough with a large ice cream scoop; place the dough balls in the bowl with the 1 cup of flour. Working one at a time, roll the balls to coat in flour, then set in an ungreased 8- by 2-inch round cake pan. The baking time will be the same as for cut biscuits.*

Peach Jelly

Makes 4 cups, four 1/2-pint jars

Pectin is found naturally in ripe fruits such as apples and citrus fruit. Naturally occurring pectin combined with the proper amount of an acid will set jams and jellies. It is also available commercially in powdered and liquid forms and is used to make jams and jellies. With commercial pectin, the powdered type is added with the uncooked prepared fruit. Liquid pectin is added to the fruit mixture after cooking. Both forms require one minute at a full boil to activate. Cooking fruit without added pectin can take fifteen to forty minutes to reach the jelling point, 220°F, depending on

Poached Georgia Shrimp

Serves 4 to 6

Poaching means to gently simmer food in liquid — water, stock, court-bouillon or even oil. Here, it's court-bouillon, an aromatic stock that transfers its flavors to the food cooked in it, traditionally fish and shellfish. Use the best possible extra-virgin olive oil to make this dish really shine.

Jumbo, large, and medium are all arbitrary designations for shrimp. Chefs buy shrimp according to an industry designation — the count per pound. For example, a count of 41/50 means that there are between 41 and 50 shrimp per pound, while U12 indicates that there are “under 12” shrimp per pound. In general, large shrimp are 21/25 count, extra-large are 16/20 count, and jumbo shrimp are 11/15 count.

12 cups water

1 carrot, coarsely chopped

1 stalk celery, coarsely chopped

1 lemon, halved

1/2 onion, preferably Vidalia, peeled

2 bay leaves, preferably fresh

1 tablespoon coarse salt, plus more to taste

1 1/2 pounds unshelled large shrimp (21/25 count)

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Juice of 2 lemons

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley



1 baguette, sliced 1/4 inch thick, for accompaniment

To poach the shrimp, in a large pot, combine the water, carrot, celery, lemon, onion, bay leaves, and 1 tablespoon of the salt. Bring to a boil over high heat, then decrease the heat to low. Simmer gently for about 10 minutes to make a flavorful court-bouillon. Return the heat to high and bring the mixture to a rolling boil. Add the shrimp and boil until the shells are pink and the meat is white, 1 to 2 minutes. Do not overcook. Drain the shrimp in a colander. As soon as the shrimp are just cool enough to touch, peel and de-vein them.

To dress the shrimp, while they are still warm, place them in a large bowl with the olive oil and lemon juice. Toss to coat, then season with salt and pepper. Marinate the shrimp at room temperature for at least 30 minutes and up to 1 hour before serving. Add the chopped parsley and adjust for seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve the shrimp on baguette slices, drizzled with some of the juices.

(Making ahead: The shrimp can be prepared completely ahead and refrigerated in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 days. The most important part is bathing them in the lemon mixture while they are still warm. Bring to room temperature before serving.)



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Georgia Pecan Brownies

Makes 24

For the most part, Mama has always made everything from scratch. Homemade cakes, cookies, and pies were the norm, but she would open one box when she made brownies. My father worked for a company that made, among myriad other things, brownie mix. I remember opening the Christmas gifts from corporate friends that contained a potpourri of company products, including the familiar red box—the brownie mix. Perhaps one of the reasons I am so fond of these brownies is that they represent my first solo forays into baking. Other than turning on the oven, I was allowed to prepare the brownies all by myself.

*1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, plus more for the dish
2 cups sugar
11/2 cups all-purpose flour
11/4 cups cocoa powder
11/2 teaspoons baking powder*

*1 teaspoon fine sea salt
4 large eggs, at room temperature
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
12 ounces best-quality semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
1 cup chopped pecans*

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Brush a 9 x 13-inch baking dish or pan with butter. In a saucepan, melt the 1 cup of butter over medium heat; add the sugar and stir to dissolve. Keep warm. In a bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa, baking powder, and salt. **Add** the butter mixture and stir to combine. Add the eggs, vanilla extract, chocolate, and nuts. Stir until the chocolate is fully melted and the ingredients are combined (the batter should be very thick). Alternatively, you can **mix** the batter in a heavy-duty mixer. **Spoon** the batter into the prepared pan. Smooth the top with an offset spatula. Bake until set, 25 to 35 minutes. Remove to a rack to cool. **Cut** into pieces and serve. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

the amount of fruit, the stovetop, and the saucepan. It's clear that preserves made with added pectin that only require one minute of cooking will taste fresher and more like raw fruit than cooked fruit.

However, I still generally prefer the old-fashioned method of cooking fruit, sugar, and lemon juice to the jelling point with no added pectin. Many recipes call for equal parts fruit (or fruit juice) to sugar. These proportions will produce a very sweet jam or jelly. I prefer using 3/4 cup of sugar for each cup of fruit (or fruit juice), as it allows the natural flavor of the fruit to come through.

*24 peaches (about 10 pounds), sliced,
pits reserved
2 cups water
6 cups sugar
Juice of 1/2 lemon*

Place the peaches and pits in a large, non-reactive pot, and using your hands, mash until no large pieces of fruit remain. **Add** enough water to keep the mixture from sticking and bring to a boil over high heat. Decrease the heat to low, and simmer until very juicy, about 20 minutes. Place the fruit in a jelly bag and place over a large bowl. Let rest until all the liquid has drained, about 6 hours or overnight. When you are ready to make the jelly, place a wire rack on a rimmed baking sheet. Place several small plates in the freezer to use later to test the consistency of the jelly.

Sterilize four 1/2-pint canning jars and lids in boiling water, following the manufacturer's instructions. Remove the jars from the water and place upside down to drain on the prepared rack. Remove the lids from the water and dry with a clean towel. Turn the sterilized jars right side up on the rack, using tongs or a kitchen towel to protect your hands. When they are cool enough to handle, **dry** them with a clean towel. Set aside.

Measure the amount of peach juice (you should have about 8 cups) and place it in a large non-reactive pot. Add 3/4 cup of sugar for each cup of peach juice, and the lemon juice. **Bring** the peach juice mixture to a boil over high heat, stirring occasionally. The mixture will bubble up, rising

high up the sides of the saucepan. Using a slotted spoon, skim off any light-colored foam as it collects on the edges. **Cook** the jam until it reaches the jelling point, 220°F on an instant-read thermometer, 30 to 45 minutes. (You can also **dribble** a few drops on the frozen plate; if the jelly is about to set, it will crinkle on the plate when you push it with your finger.) While the jam is cooking, place the canning rack in the canner and fill the pot with water; bring to a boil over high heat.

Remove the jam from the heat. For each jar, insert a canning funnel and carefully ladle in the jam, allowing at least 1/4 inch of headroom. Clean the rims of the jars with a clean, damp towel, and tightly secure the lids. Using tongs, place the jars on the rack in the canner. The water should cover the jars by at least 1 inch. **Cover** the canner. Return the water to a boil and boil gently for 5 minutes. Using tongs, transfer the jars to a towel to cool. If the seal works and fits properly, the metal lid will be slightly concave within 24 hours of processing. Store the unopened jars of jam at room temperature for up to 1 year. Once the jam is opened, store in the refrigerator for up to 1 month.

Variation: For refrigerator or freezer jam, transfer the mixture to sterilized freezer-safe plastic containers or freezer-safe jars with lids, leaving 1 inch of headroom. Freeze for up to 1 year or refrigerate for up to 1 month.

Fruit Juice for Jelly

When preparing juice for jelly, water is needed to extract the fruit juice. Wash hard fruits like apples, peaches and pears. Without peeling or coring, quarter the fruit and measure the quantity. Place in a large saucepan. For every 1 quart of fruit, add about 1 cup of water, or just enough to keep the fruit from sticking. Simmer over low heat until the fruit is soft. For soft fruits such as berries, add 1/2 cup of water per 1 quart of fruit and simmer until soft. Finally, berries vary in size and juiciness, so the yield will also vary. Simply stick to the rule of 3/4 cup of sugar (or 1 cup if you want it sweeter) per cup of juice.

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