

Country Living

April 2011

make a
fresh start
this spring!

- Organize with style
- Instant makeover ideas
- What to plant now

**HEALTHY
COMFORT
FOOD!**
Recipes
inside

Easy,
adorable
Easter
crafts
SEE PG.55

COUNTRYLIVING.COM \$4.50

04>



4470 08350 4

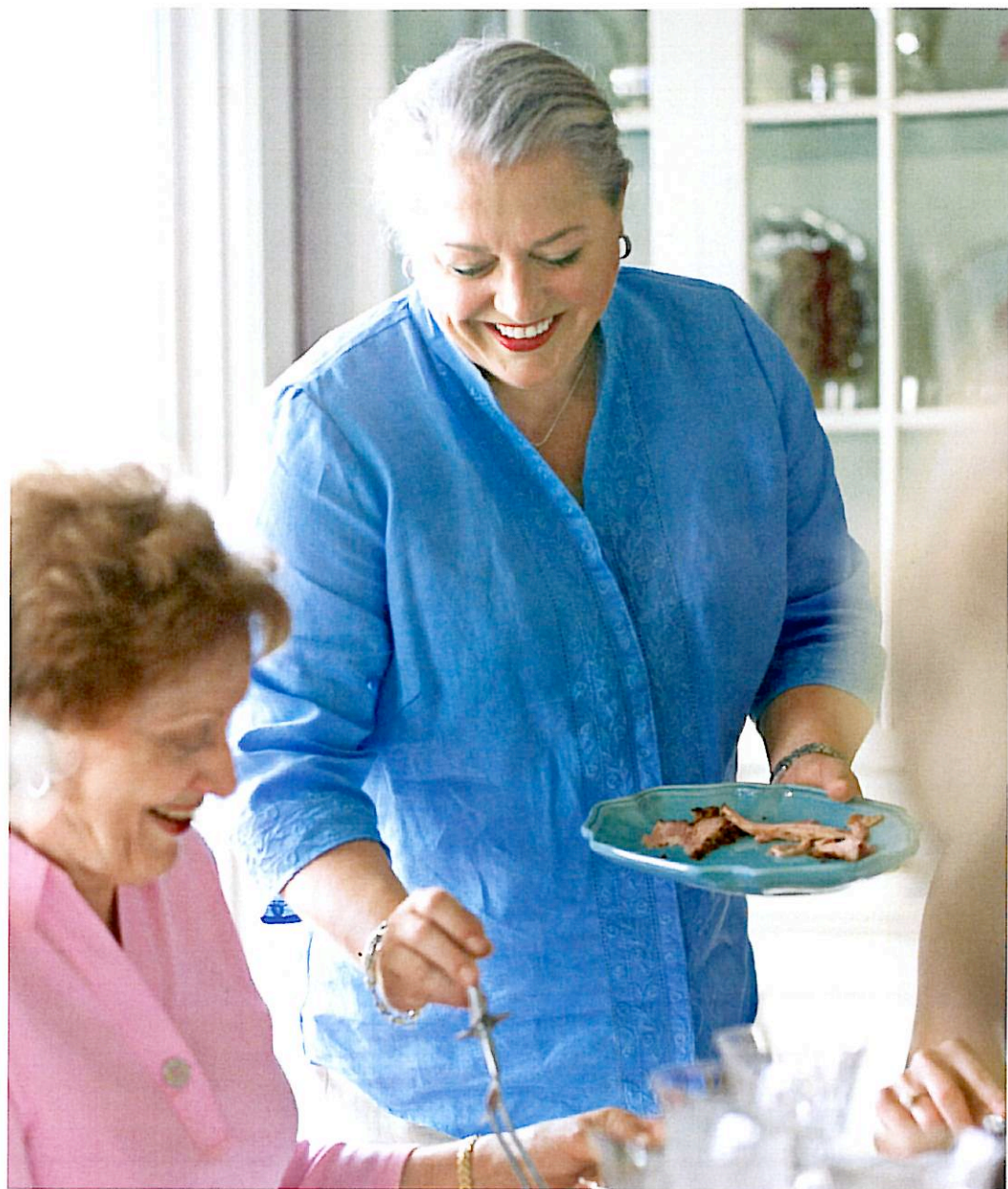
**BONUS
COVER** 
The prettiest
potting
shed ever!

THIS PAGE Virginia Willis bypasses the marshmallows and instead roasts sweet potatoes with sugar, allspice, and fennel seeds.

OPPOSITE PAGE

"Easter just wouldn't be Easter without a baked ham," says Willis (in blue), author of *Bon Appétit Y'all* (Ten Speed Press).





Virginia Willis's Easter Dinner

The cookbook author takes delicious liberties with her family's old favorites, serving ham flavored with lavender, simple roasted sweet potatoes, and citrus-spiked strawberry shortcake. (The biscuits, however, are completely classic.)

written by VIRGINIA WILLIS | photographs by JOHN KERNICK | styling by HEATHER CHONTOS



Guests at Willis's Easter dinner feast on roasted Vidalia onions, Parmesan grits with fresh morels, spiced sweet potatoes, and baked fresh ham.

The Menu

Appetizer

SLICED RADISHES
with horseradish-buttermilk dip

Main Course

BAKED FRESH HAM
with herbes de Provence
SPICED SWEET POTATOES
STEAMED ASPARAGUS
with tangerines
ROASTED SPRING ONIONS
PARMESAN GRITS
with morels
BUTTERMILK ANGEL BISCUITS

Dessert

TURBINADO SHORTCAKES
with strawberries
and whipped cream

Truth be told, I'm not a big fan of pastel dresses, and early morning has never been my favorite time of day. But, oddly enough, many of my most cherished childhood memories center around Easter and the sunrise service at Riverview United Methodist, a simple country church with red double doors just down the road from my maternal grandparents' home in Augusta, Georgia. Every Easter until we were old enough to protest, my mother dressed my sister, Jona, and me like tiny dolls in pink and yellow Swiss dotted jumpers, accessorized with lacy ankle socks and shiny patent-leather Mary Janes. Shortly before church got under way, my grandfather, whom we called Dede, would hoist us up to ring the steeple bell. We'd tug the coarse, bristled rope with our tiny hands and giggle as the loud clangs broke the silence. As soon as we slid into those wooden pews, however, any fooling around came to a halt: We sat up straight, listened to the preacher (or at least pretended to), and hummed along as my grandmother, Meme, played piano and the choir sang "He Lives" and "Blessed Assurance."

Once I got a little bit older, I started spending the hours following church with Meme in the kitchen, helping prepare dinner. She always put her ham in a roasting bag, and as it cooked, the fat would melt to create a salty, smoky broth. There'd be buttery, slow-cooked grits; homemade biscuits with scuppernong jelly; and sweet-potato casserole topped with a gooey layer of charred marshmallows. When Meme passed



"This simple bis-
recipe protects even
worst bakers fr
failure," swears Wi



To keep everyone's stomach from grumbling before dinner, Willis sets out a horseradish-butter milk dip along with crunchy 'Watermelon' and 'Cherry Belle' radishes.



LEFT Simplicity's the way to go with asparagus, says Willis, who steams the spears, then tops them with tangerines.

BELOW "It surprises people that I put lavender in the herb rub for my ham, but it's an incredibly versatile flavoring," she notes.

BELOW LEFT Virginia Willis and her mother, Jenny



away 12 years ago, I took charge of the meal that had meant so much to me growing up. Over time, my menu's evolved and changed, but much of it remains true to the Easter suppers of my youth and the grandmother I loved so dearly.

Instead of a cured ham, I like to bake a fresh, bone-in one, coated with an aromatic rub of lavender, rosemary, tarragon, and thyme. My sweet potatoes are more straightforward than the marshmallowy casserole, with fennel seeds and allspice coaxing the earthy richness from the tubers, and I prefer fresh asparagus to Meme's recipe, which consisted of opening a can. A trio of leaveners—baking soda, yeast, and baking powder—guarantees that my biscuits always come up light and fluffy. Plus, the dough's foolproof enough that it can be made ahead, then rolled out, cut, and baked right before dinner.

Since Vidalia onions are grown nearby, I feel compelled to roast the newly harvested bulbs, and although I didn't grow up eating morels with grits, the dish has been a well-received addition. Finally, forget fancy génoise and towering trifles. At our family gatherings, shortcake suits everyone just fine. My recipe calls for a little orange zest and a finish of turbinado sugar that sparkles like amber, but the end result's as simple as can be: tender cakes, sweetened with juicy strawberries and airy whipped cream. I can't think of a more appropriate dessert for a holiday that celebrates newness and rebirth by honoring our rituals and connections to the past. ♦



"Forget fancy génoise and
towering trifles.
At our family gatherings,
shortcake with
juicy strawberries and airy
whipped cream
suits everyone just fine."

To intensify the
natural sweetness of
strawberries, Willis
macerates the fruit
in orange juice and a
tiny bit of sugar
before assembling
her dessert.

Virginia Willis's Easter Dinner

PAGES 106–111

The cookbook author's recipes—all fresh takes on old family favorites—raise the stakes on spring's holiday meal. Save room for the strawberry shortcake!



Sliced Radishes with Horseradish-Buttermilk Dip

Makes 8 servings. Working time 10 min. Total time 10 min., plus chilling

- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup low-fat buttermilk
- 1/3 cup freshly grated horseradish or prepared, drained
- 2 green onions (white and green parts only), chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 garlic clove, very finely chopped
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 pound radishes (such as 'Cherry Belle' and 'Watermelon'), sliced

In a medium bowl, combine first eight ingredients. Season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately with sliced radishes or transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate. (If making horseradish-buttermilk dip more than 8 hours in advance, add garlic just before serving, as its flavor becomes very strong over time.)

PER SERVING protein: 1 g; fat: 11 g; carbohydrate: 5 g; fiber: 1 g; sodium: 177 mg; cholesterol: 9 mg; calories: 122.



Baked Fresh Ham with Herbes de Provence

Makes 8 servings. Working time 25 min. Total time 4 hr.

- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon each chopped fresh rosemary and tarragon leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon dried untreated lavender,* chopped
- Half a fresh bone-in ham (6 to 8 pounds), preferably shank end, with skin on
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 cups chicken stock

*Order dried lavender (\$8.95 for 4 ounces) at penzeys.com.

1. In a small bowl, combine thyme, rosemary, tarragon, and lavender. Place ham in a roasting pan and season with salt and pepper. Rub herbs all over ham and set aside until ham reaches room temperature, 30 to 45 minutes.

2. Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake ham until an instant-read thermometer inserted near the bone reaches 155°F, 2 to 2½ hours (about 25 minutes per pound). Transfer ham to a wire rack. Tent ham loosely with aluminum foil and let stand until the center of ham registers 160°F on an instant-read thermometer, 25 to 30 minutes more.

3. Meanwhile, skim and discard fat from pan drippings. Transfer defatted drippings to a small saucepan, add chicken stock, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium, season with salt and pepper, and keep warm until serving.

4. Once ham has rested, transfer to a cutting board, carve, and serve with jus on the side.

PER SERVING protein: 60 g; fat: 47 g; carbohydrate: 1 g; fiber: 0 g; sodium: 155 mg; cholesterol: 214 mg; calories: 681.

FRESH VS. CURED HAM

A quick explanation of how these main-course options differ:

Fresh hams are raw and uncured. The meat, which cooks up white like a pork loin, has a subtler, less salty flavor than its deep-pink cured brethren. "Ask your butcher for the shank end, as it tends to be easier to carve," suggests Virginia Willis. Store fresh ham in the refrigerator and cook or freeze it within 5 days.

Cured hams have been either soaked in or injected with a tenderizing brine (wet cured) or rubbed in salt and spices, then hung to age (dry cured). Some dry-cured pork, like Virginia country ham, is also smoked, resulting in an even saltier flavor. Store in fridge and cook or freeze uncooked cured hams within 5 days; country hams will last up to 8 weeks.



Spiced Sweet Potatoes

*Makes 8 servings. Working time 10 min.
Total time 1 hr.*

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- ¼ cup turbinado sugar
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- ¼ teaspoon ground allspice
- 3 pounds small sweet potatoes, halved
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. In a small saucepan over low heat, melt butter. Stir in sugar, fennel seeds, and allspice until combined and sugar is dissolved.

2. In a large bowl, toss potatoes with spiced butter. Season with salt and pepper. In a baking pan, roast potatoes until tender, about 45 minutes, turning once halfway through. Transfer to a warmed platter and drizzle with pan juices. Season with additional salt and pepper, if desired.

PER SERVING protein: 2 g; fat: 12 g; carbohydrate: 28 g; fiber: 4 g; sodium: 42 mg; cholesterol: 31 mg; calories: 219.

Steamed Asparagus with Tangerines

*Makes 8 servings. Working time 5 min.
Total time 10 min.*

- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 pounds asparagus, ends trimmed
- 2 tangerines, segmented and juice reserved

1. In a large skillet over high heat, bring 1 inch salted water to a boil. Add asparagus in a single layer. Return to boil, cover, and steam until crisp-tender, 3 to 6 minutes.

Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a shallow bowl or platter.

2. Scatter tangerines over asparagus and pour reserved juice on top. Season with salt and pepper.

PER SERVING protein: 2 g; fat: 0 g; carbohydrate: 5 g; fiber: 2 g; sodium: 8 mg; cholesterol: 0 mg; calories: 24.



Roasted Spring Onions

*Makes 8 servings. Working time 5 min.
Total time 40 min.*

- 15 baby Vidalia onions or other large-bulb spring onion, ends trimmed and halved lengthwise
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place onions in a baking pan. Sprinkle with thyme and season with salt and pepper. Add butter in slivers, especially around bulbs. Roast onions until tender, browned, and caramelized, about 35 minutes. Transfer to a warmed bowl and drizzle with pan juices.

PER SERVING protein: 1 g; fat: 2 g; carbohydrate: 4 g; fiber: 1 g; sodium: 8 mg; cholesterol: 4 mg; calories: 28.



Parmesan Grits with Morels

*Makes 8 servings. Working time 30 min.
Total time 50 min.*

- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup coarse-ground grits*
- Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1½ pounds fresh morel mushrooms (or cremini or chanterelles), cleaned
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 2½ ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano, freshly grated (¾ to 1 cup)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

1. In a large heavy-duty saucepan, bring 2 cups water and milk to a gentle boil and slowly add grits, whisking constantly. Season with salt and pepper. Reduce heat to simmer and cook, stirring often, until mixture is very thick, 30 to 45 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium-high heat, heat oil. Add mushrooms and sauté, stirring occasionally, until barely tender, about 2 minutes. Add wine, cooking until liquid evaporates and mushrooms are tender, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Set aside.

3. Remove grits from heat and whisk in cheese and butter. Season with additional salt and pepper, if desired. Transfer grits to a warmed serving dish. Spoon mushrooms over grits and sprinkle with parsley.

PER SERVING protein: 6 g; fat: 10 g; carbohydrate: 21 g; fiber: 3 g; sodium: 106 mg; cholesterol: 17 mg; calories: 214.

*Check your grocery store for coarse-ground grits or order at mysouthernpantry.com (\$9.99 for 20 ounces).



Buttermilk Angel Biscuits

Makes about 3 dozen biscuits. Working time 30 min. Total time 1 hr. 20 min.

- 1 package active dry yeast (2¼ teaspoons)
- ¼ cup warm water (100°F to 110°F)
- ¼ cup sugar
- 6 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for surface and rolling pin
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 cup solid vegetable shortening (preferably Crisco), cut into bits
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1. In a liquid measuring cup, combine yeast, water, and 1 tablespoon sugar. Set aside until mixture becomes creamy and foamy, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk together flour, remaining sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Using a pastry cutter or two knives, cut shortening into dry ingredients until mixture resembles coarse meal.

3. Add yeast mixture and buttermilk and stir until dough just comes together. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead 5 or 6 times; dough should be soft and moist. Return dough to bowl, cover bowl with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight or up to 1 week.

4. Turn dough out onto a heavily floured work surface. Knead dough about 10 times. Using a lightly floured rolling pin, roll dough out to ¼-inch thickness. Using a 2¼-inch round cutter, cut biscuits as close together as possible. Gather dough scraps and place one on top of the

other. Knead and roll out dough again. Stamp out as many biscuits as possible. Discard remaining scraps.

5. Arrange biscuits, with sides touching, on an ungreased baking sheet. Brush with melted butter and set aside to rise in a warm place for about 30 minutes.

6. Meanwhile, preheat oven to 425°F. Bake biscuits until golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Serve warm.

PER BISCUIT protein: 3 g; fat: 7 g; carbohydrate: 18 g; fiber: 1 g; sodium: 149 mg; cholesterol: 3 mg; calories: 145.

Turbinado Shortcakes with Strawberries and Whipped Cream

Makes 8 servings. Working time 40 min. Total time 1 hr.

- 3½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for surface
- ⅓ cup plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1½ sticks unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small pieces
- 1 large orange, zested and juiced
- 1 cup heavy cream, plus more for brushing
- ½ cup whole milk
- 2 tablespoons turbinado sugar
- 2 pints strawberries, hulled and quartered lengthwise
- 2½ cups whipped cream

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. In a heavy-duty mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, add flour, ⅓ cup granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt and mix on low speed to combine. Add butter and zest, and mix on low until mixture resembles coarse meal, about 2 minutes. Add cream and milk and increase speed to medium; mix until dough comes together.

2. Transfer dough to a lightly floured surface, lightly knead a few times, and shape into a rectangle about ¾ inch thick. Cut out dough circles using a 3-inch round cutter and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Lightly brush tops with heavy cream and sprinkle with turbinado sugar. Bake until shortcakes are golden brown, about 20 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool. (Shortcakes can be stored in an airtight container for up to 2 days.)

3. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, combine strawberries, orange juice, and remaining granulated sugar. Gently stir together. Set aside.

4. To serve, halve shortcakes horizontally with a serrated knife. Place bottom halves on individual serving plates, and top each with a dollop of whipped cream, some berries, then another dollop of whipped cream. Top with remaining shortcake halves.

PER SERVING protein: 8 g; fat: 42 g; carbohydrate: 62 g; fiber: 3 g; sodium: 521 mg; cholesterol: 134 mg; calories: 644.

