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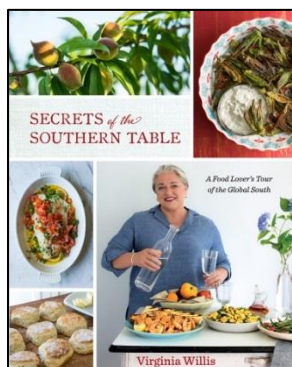
  
CBS  
THIS  
MORNING  
SATURDAY

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“The food of the South is biscuits and burritos, catfish and chapatti, and hoecakes and hummus. This assorted collection of recipes and stories features the familiar – as well as the unexpected. I strongly believe Southern cuisine is a living, breathing, growing thing and have included recipes that reflect the rich diversity.”

-Virginia Willis, from the Introduction

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## SECRETS OF THE SOUTHERN TABLE

*A Food Lover's Tour of the Global South*

By Virginia Willis

ON SALE MAY 1, 2018

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Most often, when we think of Southern food, we think of classics like fried chicken and cornbread, pimento cheese and okra, and biscuits and hoecakes. However, Southern cuisine is so much more than fried and buttered fare. In her new book **SECRETS OF THE SOUTHERN TABLE: A Food Lover's Tour of the Global South (on sale May 1, 2018)**, beloved Southern-cooking expert and award-winning author **Virginia Willis** travels throughout the South on a mission to document this diversity and delve into the rich narrative shaping modern Southern food culture.

French-trained and born and raised in Georgia, Willis is one of the most respected names in the region's cuisine and culture. Along with renowned photographer Angie Mosier, she traveled to 11 states in eight months across the four seasons, interviewing and photographing a wide variety of Southerners. The result is a showcase of the heart and soul of the region.

Each chapter has 2 essays about a farmer, catcher, harvester, or maker as well as 10 recipes that reflect the cuisine of the modern South. She speaks with **Will Harris from White Oak Pastures**, a farm that was founded when his ancestor returned home from fighting for the Confederacy, and **Matthew Raiford** whose farm originated when his ancestor was liberated from slavery. There are essays on **sustainable fishing** with fishermen in Florida and South Carolina, **bluegrass and barbacoa** with local Kentuckians, and **time-honored traditions** like preserving fruits and vegetables, harvesting heritage grains at Anson Mills in South Carolina, and curing country ham.

SECRETS OF THE SOUTHERN TABLE: A Food Lover's Tour of the Global South  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt • On-sale: May 1, 2018  
Hardcover • 336 pages • \$30.00 • ISBN: 978-0-544-93254-8

The collection features 80 crave-worthy recipes for the home cook and stunning full-page food photography. This wouldn't be a Virginia Willis book without well-known classic recipes (i.e. **Pimento Cheese Tomato Pie** and **Whole-Grain Parmesan Cheese Grits with Spinach and Shrimp**) but the book also explores more adventuresome – but still accessible – dishes like **Mississippi-Style Char Siu Pork**, **Greek Okra and Tomatoes**, and **Chicken Larb with Georgia Peanuts**.

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Some down home **dishes perfect for summer** include: **Pan-Seared Summer Squash with Spiced Lemon Vinaigrette**; **Catfish Tacos with Avocado Crema**; and **Spicy Asian Cajun BBQ Shrimp with Grilled Baguette**.

Virginia's new cookbook proves that Southern cuisine is chicken and collard greens — as well as arepas and bulgogi.

With a foreword by Sean Brock and Willis's exceptional, proven recipes and enriching travelogues, **SECRETS OF THE SOUTHERN TABLE** shines as a fresh new addition to the Southern cooking cannon.



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Georgia-born, French-trained chef VIRGINIA WILLIS is one of the most well-respected authorities on Southern cooking today. She is the author of five previous cookbooks, including the James Beard Award-winning *Lighten Up, Y'all* and is the author of the "Cooking with Virginia" column on SouthernKitchen.com. Her articles have appeared nationally including *Food52*, *CNN*, *All Recipes*, *Country Living*, *Eating Well*, *Family Fun*, and *Fine Cooking*. The *Chicago Tribune* has named her one of "Seven Food Writers You Need to Know." Willis lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

## PRAISE FOR SECRETS OF THE SOUTHERN TABLE

*“Secrets of the Southern Table is a masterpiece of discovery and sings with the stories of the diverse South. The recipes are useful for every home cook and best of all, it offers a plateful of southern comfort with a heaping side of social justice.”*

**-Nathalie Dupree, James Beard Award-winning author**

*“Arepas inspired by a Venezuelan stand in an Atlanta market where Martin Luther King Jr.’s family shopped; lemon herb potatoes born of the Greek fishing village of Tarpon Springs, Florida: To hell with that old moonlight and cornpone shtick. Virginia Willis showcases a contemporary South that is dizzily and honestly diverse.”*

**-John T. Edge, author, *The Potlikker Papers: A Food History of the Modern South***

*“Virginia Willis’s *Secrets of the Southern Table* reminds me of a global potluck where everyone brings something and we all feel right at home. In her capable hands, hearts and minds are opened to the people, places, and variegated dishes of a diverse South—a land of classic Southern dishes and regionally sourced ingredients transformed by heady Latin spices, sultry Italian and Greek home cooking, fragrant Southeast Asian street food, and generations-old African American agricultural wisdom.”*

**-Toni Tipton-Martin, activist and author of James Beard Award-winning *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks***

*“Secrets of the Southern Table is an ode to a regional cuisine rich in culture and soul. Virginia writes in a rhythmic cadence and lilting musicality that makes me want to read each word out loud. She takes us along culinary fieldtrips and proves that her beloved South is composed of a multiplicity of good people. Together at the table, they build a framework out of vibrant patches that, once united, result in a culinary quilt filled with reverence for the past, marvel of the present, and excitement for the future of southern foodways.”*

**-Sandra A. Gutierrez, award-winning author of *The New Southern-Latino Table***

## The New York Times

# Is It Southern Food, or Soul Food?

Todd Richards and Virginia Willis, both authors of recent books on Southern cooking, chew on questions of culture, identity and cuisine.



### Image

Todd Richards and Virginia Willis, authors of cookbooks on the food of the American South, at Ms. Willis's home in Atlanta. Credit Dustin Chambers for The New York Times

### By Julia Moskin

Aug. 7, 2018

ATLANTA — When you're a Southern cook everyone thinks they know what you're about. You bake your cornbread in a cast-iron skillet. Your kitchen is stocked with grits and greens and grease. You're probably white or African-American, a churchgoer, a straight woman and a mother. And you learned at your own mother's apron strings, never wanting to cook anything other than the foods of your own tradition.

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More and more Southern cooks are chipping away at that stereotype, both in who they are and what they cook. Two cooks based here — Todd Richards and Virginia Willis — have published cookbooks this year that reflect new ways of thinking about Southern food and the terms that have come to define it.

Mr. Richards, 46, is a self-taught chef with Southern roots; in “Soul: A Chef’s Culinary Evolution in 150 Recipes,” he describes his journey from Chicago, where he grew up, through a culinary career that began in the butcher department at a local Kroger supermarket, continued at the Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton hotels, and now involves overseeing multiple restaurants here in Atlanta. His book is both a manual and meditation, in chapters moving alphabetically from collards to potatoes, on the forces of history that made him the cook that he is.



**Image**

Todd Richards traces his roots to Louisiana and Alabama. Credit Dustin Chambers for The New York Times

Ms. Willis, 51, is a Georgia native, taught the classics by her mother and grandmother, and polished by years spent cooking in France and working in food media in New York. As a gay woman, she felt she had to leave the South to explore her identity, and came out only when she found her way into the professional food world.

“Secrets of the Southern Table: A Food Lover’s Tour of the Global South” is her sixth book, and her first to illuminate the diversity of Southern food: not only its African, Italian, French, Vietnamese, Mexican and other influences, but its agricultural range.

I brought them together for a conversation about this exciting and complicated time for people who love Southern cooking. The rest of the world is waking up to the multicultural reality of the New South: Korean-Southern [fried chicken](#), [Vietnamese-Cajun crawfish](#), [tacos](#) stuffed with barbecue. And new studies and discoveries by historians of African-American food like [Toni Tipton-Martin](#), [Adrian E. Miller](#) and [Therese Nelson](#) are fueling debate over the origins of the Southern culinary tradition.

“There’s a huge piece smack in the middle of the Southern food conversation and that’s the black-white divide,” said Ms. Willis, putting the elephant in the room right on the lunch table.

So far, no one has managed to draw a clear line between white food and black food in the South. Many of the cooking traditions and techniques that define Southern food were invented and executed by African-Americans, whether they were cooking for their own families or for white families that enslaved or employed them.

“When you take a good look, it’s mostly about class and place, not race. People who lived in the same region mostly ate the same food,” according to what ingredients they could afford, said Mr. Miller, the author of “Soul Food” and other books on African-American food history, in an interview. “They weren’t eating it together, but they were eating the same thing.”

And yet, the term “soul food” came to represent the food of black Southerners, and “Southern” or “country” the food of white Southerners — even when the dishes were exactly the same. (According to Mr. Miller, the word “soul” was first used this way around the 1950s, by black jazz musicians who wanted to distinguish their own music from the white copycats they encountered in places like Chicago and Detroit. “Soul music,” “soul brother” and other terms followed.)



Grilled peaches on toast with pimento cheese, a recipe by Mr. Richards, shares the table with a pimento cheese-topped tomato pie from Ms. Willis's recipe. Credit Melina Hammer for The New York Times

In the kitchen, there seems to be more that unites Ms. Willis and Mr. Richards than divides them. Both of their mothers washed fresh-picked peanuts and collard greens in the washing machine. Their family recipes for [potato salad](#) are nearly identical, with not-too-soft potatoes, hard-cooked eggs, pickle relish, mayonnaise, mustard and paprika.

Since it's not every day that I have two great Southern cooks coming to the table, I asked both to bring a variation on pimento cheese, a beloved sandwich filling from the dawn of convenience foods, made from shredded cheese, cream cheese, mayonnaise and canned pimentos. Ms. Willis assembled a savory, summery tomato pie and gave it a topping of melted pimento cheese; Mr. Richards made his pimento cheese smoky and spicy, adding thick-cut bacon and the sauce from a can of Mexican chipotle chiles, and topping that with juicy sweet peaches on toast.



Ms. Willis made upside-down cake with caramelized peaches. Credit Dustin Chambers for The New York Times

We started with iced tea, as you do in Georgia in July, but somehow also polished off a bottle of Champagne before dessert (upside-down peach cake). We reasoned that it would aid the conversation, which is excerpted below in condensed and edited form.

**To people outside the South, it's not always clear what the difference is — Southern food versus soul food.**

**TODD RICHARDS:** First of all, Southern food isn't one thing. Louisiana isn't Georgia isn't the Carolinas.

**VIRGINIA WILLIS:** The food of the South has changed and evolved more than people think. It's not stuck in one time or place.

**RICHARDS:** And Southern kitchens had different influences over hundreds of years. There was fine dining, there were poor farmers, there were slave cooks.

**So is soul food a subset of Southern cooking, or a separate thing?**

**RICHARDS:** Soul food is a marketing term invented by Northerners. It was the home food of the black Southerners who moved in the Great Migration. There weren't a lot of white people leaving the South to go live in Chicago or Detroit, so up North, it became black people's food.



**WILLIS:** Down here, I don't see the food being specifically black or white. It's more a question of who is doing the cooking. And that has a lot of complicated answers.

**RICHARDS:** People get preoccupied with skin color. But it's really a question of poor and wealthy. Only poor people would eat neck bones and chitlins. Fresh meat like chicken and pork was always a luxury.

**WILLIS:** Fresh vegetables weren't a luxury; everyone had a garden, and the growing season is long. Across the South, it was an agrarian culture, for better or for worse.

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**“A lot of Southern cooking comes from just figuring out how to keep things from spoiling in the heat.”**

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**RICHARDS:** Everyone had the same ingredients. The difference was in the expense, in whether you were getting the wings or the breast, or a scrawny old chicken or a fat young one. It's still true: I was just at a place where the fried chicken plate is \$36. And if there is any difference between that fried chicken and my \$9 fried chicken and \$36 fried chicken, other than what kind of chicken you use, I would be hard pressed to find it.

**WILLIS:** And not to sound all California, but when you have great ingredients, when you're cooking with super-fresh tomatoes, onions, okra, you're almost there in terms of flavor.

**RICHARDS:** To me the pursuit of delicious food is the Southern way. There might be greens on every table, but they are cooked a thousand ways. Somebody figured out that a combination of mustard greens and collards tastes better than either one of them tastes alone. Somebody added ham, somebody else took it out and added vinegar instead.

**But why was that pursuit more vigorous in the South than in other places? It didn't seem to happen in New England. And it's not like Scandinavian food was revolutionized with flavor when people settled in the Midwest.**

**WILLIS:** A lot of Southern cooking comes from just figuring out how to keep things from spoiling in the heat.

**RICHARDS:** That strong flavor profile we have — the spice, the smoke, the heat — those didn't come from any English settlers. They were preservation methods that we know were used in Africa long before anyone ever landed in the state of Georgia. We are claiming barbecue as our own. We are claiming cayenne and hot peppers.

**WILLIS:** The pickles, the hams, the preserves — it was not a hobby. It was how you kept your family alive. It sounds very nice and pretty now to say “agrarian,” but the dark side of that was poverty and hunger and backbreaking labor for the vast majority of people.

**RICHARDS:** The good side was that people had real cooking technique. You had to know how to clean a fish or kill a squirrel. Your livelihood could depend on making a good biscuit. That isn’t so different from what you learn in culinary school or studying French technique.

**WILLIS:** I went to France to cook for three months and stayed for three years. The longer I was there, the more I realized that it was like the South. People still have connections to the sources of their food, they know the vegetables in their grandpa’s garden, they’ve seen the grapevines that their wine comes from. And they also argue about cooking all the time.

**RICHARDS:** My father’s family was originally from Louisiana and my mother’s family, from Alabama. It was a rice culture versus a grits culture. My father was appalled when my mother cooked rice with butter. He thought that was sacrilege.

### **So how did your families shape your sense of Southern food?**

**WILLIS:** I learned to cook the classics a certain way from my mother and my grandmother, but even back then in the ’70s, things were already changing. My mother was an adventurous cook. I went through a vegetarian phase. We had food magazines and food TV, so new stuff was coming in all the time.

**RICHARDS:** Maybe because they lived outside the South, my parents liked to cook things just the way remembered them. They cooked for 50 to 60 people at a time. My father was brining chickens all over the house before any chef started doing it, smoking racks of ribs. My grandmother made everything without a recipe: collards, cornbread, poundcake.

### **Is that what defines soul food for you? The memory, the heritage? How do you preserve that into the future?**

**RICHARDS:** Soul food is a black art form. Soul food is a gospel, and chefs are its preachers. It can be handed down once you know it, and once you’re proud of it.