

K THURSDAY, NOV. 11, 2004

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Food & Drink



CONTACT US: Susan Puckett, Food editor / spuckett@ajc.com / 404-526-5443

DINING OUT

► **Today in accessAtlanta:** Meredith Ford likes the pork chops at Vine — but not much else.

► **Friday in Movies & More:** Check out our weekly Best Bite.

► **Free dining newsletter:** "On the Menu" includes a sneak peek at our weekly critic's review, plus other dining news and favorite restaurant recipes. Sign up on accessatlanta.com/restaurants.



ONLINE

Find recipes at ajc.com/food

Lost that recipe you clipped from this section months ago? You can look it up in seconds. First, click on Recipe Search in the bar under the Food & Drink mast. Then click on the appropriate category (i.e., appetizers, desserts, etc.). The most recent recipes will be at the top.

INSIDE



From the Menu of . . .

When Susanne Torres and her boyfriend dined at Che recently, their favorite dish was the Marinated Beets With Goat Cheese and Spiced Walnuts. Find out why. K7

A WEEK of menu ideas

TONIGHT



Country Club Chicken
(5:30 Challenge, K2)
White rice
Steamed broccoli

FRIDAY

Peanut Noodles (*Fit to Eat*, K8)
Fruit salad

SATURDAY

Broiled lamb chops
Cauliflower With Currants and Pine Nuts (K5)
Steamed spinach
Vanilla ice cream with **Old-Fashioned Fudge Sauce**
(*Desperation Dinners*, K6)

SUNDAY

Apple and Spice Pork Loin Roast
(*Double-Duty Dinners*, K10)
Roasted sweet potatoes
Green peas
Brownie Trifle
(*In the Kitchen With . . .*, K10)

MONDAY

Pasta e Fagioli (*Success Story*, K8)
Green salad

TUESDAY

Baked Pork and Sauerkraut
(*Double-Duty Dinners*, K10)
Mashed potatoes/carrot salad

WEDNESDAY

London Broil With **Pomegranate Glaze** (*Try This!* K2)
Couscous
Sautéed green beans



Virginia Willis (pictured with her late grandmother Louise Baston) takes pleasure in bringing something sweet to the table. Above are pecan pie (clockwise from left), poundcake and cobbler.

RICH ADDICKS / Staff

Sweet Traditions { OLD FRIENDS }

By VIRGINIA WILLIS
For the Journal-Constitution

Several years ago, I spent Thanksgiving evening walking the beautiful Champs Elysées in Paris. I was living and working as an editorial assistant at the cooking school Ecole de Cuisine LaVaranne. Aside from the magical twinkling lights in the trees, what I remember most is dining in a petit bistro on poulet rôti and crème brûlée, not feeling like it was Thanksgiving at all.

An American in Paris? No, I was a pitiful homesick Southerner. I wanted, in this order: my mama, the smells of roast turkey and dressing in my grandmother's

From buttery poundcake to bubbling cobbler, Thanksgiving desserts top off a time of feast and fellowship

kitchen and a buttery wedge of Meme's poundcake with a little piece of Mama's pecan pie on the side.

Thanksgiving Day is now about being with my mother, sister and my better half, along with my aunts, uncles, cousins and everyone's husbands, wives and partners. My sister and I laugh with our cousins and their children, eat and play games, then eat some more. (My mother and aunts pore over the sales circulars, plan the next day's shopping assault, and then eat some more.) We say a prayer for those with us, and those — like my dear Meme, my grandmother, and Dede, my

► Please see TRADITIONS, K4

Laborious harvest, importation drive up price of tiny pine nuts

By DONNA DEANE / Los Angeles Times

If you've ever gazed up at the pine tree in your yard and wondered if you could harvest some fresh pine nuts from those cones, the answer is yes — and good luck.

Pine nuts, also known by their Italian and Spanish names, "pignoli" and "piñon" (often spelled "pinyon"), come from specific varieties of pine trees, about 20 worldwide, that produce edible seeds. The individual seeds are encased in a hard shell inside the pine cone. After harvesting, the cones must first be heated, then left to dry before small, hard seeds can be shaken out of the cones. These seeds are cracked open to get to the pine nut.

► Please see PINE NUTS, K5



LORI SHEPLER / Los Angeles Times

The side dish Cauliflower With Currants and Pine Nuts contrasts sweet, buttery and nutty flavors.



Traditions: Dessert buffet tops off feast and fellowship

► Continued from K1

grandfather — who have passed away. Thanksgiving stands out as the most family-oriented holiday in many clans, and ours is no exception. The emphasis is not on gift-giving; it's about good food and fellowship, and lots of both.

Our fellowship starts days before as we share the shopping and chopping. The baking commences early in the week, and the cakes and pies are held captive in various collections of Tupperware. The buttery smell of the cakes coming out of their pans is intoxicating.

Whoever is hosting the dinner calls everyone and assigns a dish, often something on the sweet side. Aunt Lee normally tries something new from one of the food magazines, and I'll usually prepare something French just to mix things up. The turkey is always the star, but in the land of the Southern sweet tooth, the pièce de résistance is the dessert buffet, a tantalizing expanse of butter and sugar concoctions on a groaning sideboard.

Our Thanksgiving prelude to the sweet end is a selection of crisp vegetable salads as well as salads disguised by heaping quantities of mayonnaise. Then, roast turkey, smoked or fried turkey and honey-baked ham accompanied by several receivers for the giblet gravy: rice, corn bread dressing, mashed potatoes. We have eight or so different types of vegetables in various stages of cooked and overcooked Southern style, the greens usually studded with bits of salt pork.

Is sweet potato casserole a vegetable side dish? Can anything topped with huge quantities of toasted pecans and brown sugar be considered a vegetable? It tastes good and that's a yes in our family. There's a basket of yeast rolls made from Meme's recipe, lightly dusted with flour and brushed with butter.

And no Southern table is without accessories. We round things out with

cranberry sauce, bread and butter pickles, homemade jelly, relish and chowchow. We clear the dishes, and we take a little break to make room for dessert.

Imagine a profusion of towering tender layer cakes slathered in buttery frosting, golden pecan pies, burnt sienna-colored pumpkin pies, cinnamon-kissed apple pies, amber peanut brittle and bubbling cobblers. These are old friends that visit every November and evoke fond taste memories from my childhood and remind me of where I came from.

Aunt Louise always prepares caramel cake, a high-sugar masterpiece expressing the genius of the Southern sweet tooth. There's also red velvet cake, Italian cream cake, and Meme's poundcake, now made by my mother. Mama also makes pecan pie and apple pie, and there's often peach cobbler made from peaches we froze in the summer.

Since I am a culinary professional, many of my students, friends and colleagues often think I slave away making desserts over the holidays. Au contraire! Even now with Meme gone, there's almost 175 years of cooking experience in my family, and I gladly take a back seat. I may be chef to most, but to the ladies in my family — bossy women all — I'm still "little Virginia."

But in my own kitchen, I've made these family heirlooms many times to share with friends and students, incorporating my professional skills to make them taste and look even better.

Mama teases me on my insistence that everything be fresh. I refuse to use a store-bought whipped topping, far preferring the rich taste of real whipped cream. I'd never make a pie with store-bought crust. It's butter or nothing, and when I can substitute a real vanilla bean for vanilla extract, I always do.

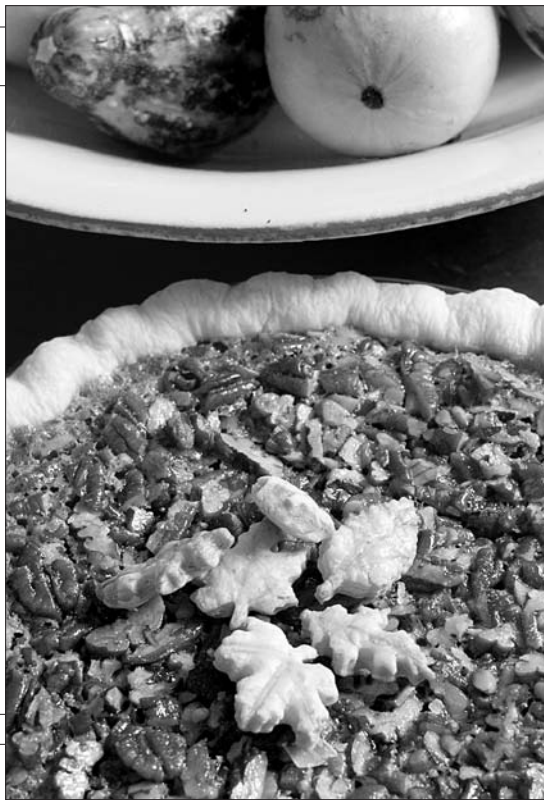
I am certain that my Meme would approve.



Styling by VIRGINIA WILLIS / Special Photos by RICH ADDICKS / Staff
Virginia Willis' peach cobbler, which uses fruit frozen from the summer, is made with a recipe handed down by her late grandmother Meme (Louise Baston, in photo).

Recipes By VIRGINIA WILLIS / For the Journal-Constitution

Here are the desserts that show up at all of my family's Thanksgivings and would be worthy additions to any holiday spread.



Mama's Pecan Pie

8 servings

Hands on: 1 hour Total time: 2 hours

I remember as a child helping Mama chop the pecans in an old-fashioned nut chopper. It's always been a favorite pie in our family. The trick to this pie is having more nuts than goo.

- 3 large eggs, slightly beaten
 - 1 cup granulated sugar
 - 1 cup light corn syrup
 - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
 - 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 - ¼ teaspoon salt
 - 3 cups coarsely chopped pecans
 - 1 (9-inch) unbaked pie shell, recipe follows
 - Whipped cream, for serving
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine the eggs, sugar, corn syrup, butter, vanilla and salt in a medium bowl; stir until blended. Add the pecans and stir to combine. Pour into the unbaked pie shell.
- Bake the pie about 55 minutes or until a knife inserted halfway between center and edge comes out clean. Remove to a wire rack to cool. Serve with whipped cream. Keeps up to 1 week refrigerated in an airtight container.

Per serving (including crust): 744 calories (percent of calories from fat, 55), 8 grams protein, 80 grams carbohydrates, 4 grams fiber, 47 grams fat (11 grams saturated), 104 milligrams cholesterol, 275 milligrams sodium.

I learned this pie crust as an apprentice. Serious business, I thought, but the truth is it's a really easy pie crust for beginners. The key is the shortening because it does not melt as easily as butter. For a double crust pie, simply double the amounts and divide the dough before rolling out.

All-American Pie Crust

enough for 1 9-inch pie crust

Hands on: 15 minutes Total time: 1 hour

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, more for rolling
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup Crisco vegetable shortening, chilled
- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, chilled
- 3 to 8 tablespoons ice water

Combine the flour and salt in the bowl of a food processor fitted with the blade attachment. Add the vegetable shortening and butter. Process until the mixture resembles coarse meal, 8 to 10 seconds.

With the processor on pulse, add the ice water a tablespoon at a time. Pulse until dough holds together without being sticky. It should not be crumbly. Shape the dough into a disk and wrap in plastic wrap. Chill until firm and

the moisture has been distributed evenly, about 30 minutes.

Flour a clean work surface and rolling pin to roll out the dough. If making a double crust pie, work with one disk at a time, keeping the second disk chilled. Place a dough disk in the center of the floured surfaced. Starting in the center of the dough, roll to, but not over, the top edge of the disk. Return to the center, and roll down to, but not over, the bottom edge. Pick up the dough and turn it a quarter circle. Continue rolling, repeating the quarter turns until you have a disk about ⅓ inch thick.

Transfer the pastry to a 9-inch pie plate. Trim the pastry 1-inch larger than the pie pan and fold the overhanging pastry under itself. To deco-

rate, press the tines of a fork around the edge. To make a fluted pattern, use your fingers and thumb to pinch crimp the dough around the rim. Chill until firm, about 30 minutes.

For blind baking: Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Crumple a piece of parchment and place it over the crust. Weight the paper with pie weights or dried beans or uncooked rice. This will keep the pie crust from bubbling up. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove the paper and weights. (The rice or beans may be used again the next time you blind bake a pie crust.) The prebaked shell is ready to be filled and baked according to filling directions. If the filling requires no cooking, bake the pie shell until deep golden brown, about 10 additional minutes.

Meme's Poundcake (below)

12-16 servings

Hands on: 30 minutes Total time: 1½ hours

This cake has been a constant in my life — it's been my birthday cake many times. Our family holidays wouldn't be complete without it. This cake will stay moist in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

- 3 cups all-purpose flour, preferably White Lily
 - ½ teaspoon baking powder
 - ½ teaspoon salt
 - ½ cup Crisco vegetable shortening, room temperature
 - 2 sticks unsalted butter, room temperature, more for the bundt pan
 - 3 cups granulated sugar
 - 1 cup whole milk, room temperature
 - 5 large eggs, room temperature
 - 1 vanilla bean, split and scraped or 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Grease a large bundt pan with butter. Set aside. Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.
- In the bowl of an electric

mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream together Crisco, butter and sugar until light and fluffy.

In a large liquid measuring cup, combine milk, eggs and vanilla. Stir to combine.

Add the flour mixture to the butter sugar mixture, alternating between the dry and wet ingredients in 3 parts, starting and ending with dry. Fill the prepared bundt pan with batter no more than ¾ full.

Transfer to the oven and bake for 15 minutes. Increase oven temperature to 325 degrees and bake an additional 45 minutes, until the cake is warm golden brown and pulls away from the sides of the pan. Remove to a rack to cool for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto a rack to cool completely.

Per serving (based on 12): 566 calories (percent of calories from fat, 42), 7 grams protein, 75 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram fiber, 27 grams fat (14 grams saturated), 134 milligrams cholesterol, 149 milligrams sodium.



► Please see RECIPES, K5

Aunt Louise's Red Velvet Cake

12-16 servings

Hands on: 45 minutes Total time: 2 hours

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour, more for the pans
- 2 teaspoons cocoa
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 cups vegetable oil, more for the pans
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 ounce red food coloring
- Pecan Cream Cheese Frosting, (recipe, K5)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Brush three 9-inch cake pans with oil. Dust with flour and shake to remove excess. Set aside.

Sift together the flour, cocoa, salt and baking soda. Set aside. In a liquid measuring cup, combine the buttermilk and vinegar. Set aside.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine vanilla, oil, sugar and eggs. Add the food coloring. With the mixer on low speed, add the dry ingredients, alternating with buttermilk, starting and ending with flour.

Divide the batter between the prepared pans and transfer to the heated oven. Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean and the cake pulls away from the sides of the pan. Remove the pans to a rack to cool for 5 minutes. Invert the cakes onto the wire rack to cool completely.

To assemble, place one cake layer on a cardboard cake round. Spread with ¼-inch of frosting. Repeat with remaining layers, placing the final layer bottom-side up. Lightly coat the assembled cake with a thin layer of frosting to protect against crumbs in the frosting. Finish with remaining frosting.

Per serving (with frosting, based on 12): 817 calories (percent of calories from fat, 56), 6 grams protein, 84 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram fiber, 52 grams fat (14 grams saturated), 78 milligrams cholesterol, 384 milligrams sodium.

