

SOUL FOOD

Two Easton women share their recipes

By MARJI MARAZI
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Southern fried chicken, chitterlings, ham hocks, yams, sweet potato pie, cornbread and turnip greens. These are among the many dishes belonging to the category of soul food — a cuisine which has earned a reputation for being both delicious and nutritious.

Two Easton women, Marian Bright and Alberta Houston, have logged many kitchen hours perfecting their culinary talents. And although several similar dishes have made appearances on both their dinner tables, subtle differences can be found in their makeup.

Marian Bright, who lives on West Nesquehoning Street, is married to a veteran chef, Thomas, who once worked as a cook at a Lafayette College fraternity for 18 years. The couple also owned and operated Bright's Food Center in Easton before retiring last October.

Delicious aromas greet visitors to the Brights' cheerful, homey kitchen. On one recent afternoon, sweet potato pies were cooling on one counter. On another sat a plump frying chicken, cut up, ready to be fried. On the stove a kettle of cabbage and salt pork simmered, smelling heavenly.

A gregarious woman, Bright can competently juggle several activities as she goes about her cooking. Two lively grandsons, Justin and Christian, run back and forth asking Grandma for something to eat. Even a constantly ringing telephone doesn't disturb her cooking concentration.

Giving a mischievous smile, Bright calls her cooking international. But her recipes point to traditional soul food, which emphasizes fresh ingredients that are easy to prepare.

Alberta Houston, who also lives on South Side Easton with her husband, Hilton, incorporates soul food standards in her repertoire of recipes. Her neat backyard garden contains rows of healthy okra, collards, turnips and lettuce.

Soul food cookery is a fusion of African, American-Indian, European and Creole cooking that has kept its special African heritage.

According to Houston, American blacks took "hand-me-down" foods to meld their dishes. One example



TOM'S FABULOUS STRING BEANS

- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 stick butter
- 1 can whole tomatoes
- 2 pounds fresh string beans (washed, cut up)
- 1 teaspoon sugar

Saute onion and garlic in the butter. Add tomatoes. Add cut string beans and sugar. Simmer slowly on low heat until the string beans are tender, approximately 45 minutes. Serve piping hot.

CHITTERLINGS

- 10 pounds chitterlings
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 medium onion, cut up
- 3 stalks celery, cut up
- 1 medium potato

Wash chitterlings thoroughly, put in large kettle. Add salt, pepper, onion, celery and whole potato. Cook until tender, about two to three hours. Drain and cut in serving size pieces. Serve at once. Serves six to eight.

CORN BREAD

- 2 cups cornmeal
- 1 cup flour
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons bacon fat
- 1 cup milk

Mix cornmeal, flour, baking powder and sugar. Cut in shortening. Gradually add milk, mixing just slightly. Pour into square pan. Bake 20-25 minutes at 400 degrees.

From the kitchen of Alberta Houston:

COLLARD GREENS

- 6-8 cups of water
- 1 ham hock
- 3 pounds collard greens
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Boil water, put in ham hock, boil for 30 minutes. Wash greens thoroughly and cut into small pieces. Add greens and salt to cooked ham hock and simmer covered for 1 hour or until tender.

HOPPING JOHN

Traditional New Year's Eve Dish

- 3 cups water
- 1 ham hock or shank end of smoked ham
- 2 cups fresh peas or 1 cup dried peas
- 1 cup long-cooking rice
- ½ teaspoon pepper

A little green onion or chives for garnish

Put ham hock and peas into water. If using fresh peas, cook until not quite done. If you use dried peas, soak overnight and increase water in cooking slightly.

After peas are partially cooked, add rice and pepper. Simmer slowly 45 minutes.

Serve hot and garnish with a few chopped green onions or chives.

black-eyed peas and rice.

Below, the two Easton cooks share some of their favorite recipes.

From the kitchen of Marian Bright:

MARIAN'S FRIED CHICKEN

1 large frying chicken, cut up (buy whole chicken and cut up yourself and save money)

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper

¼ teaspoon paprika

1 cup flour

Put salt, pepper, paprika and flour in plastic bag. Put chicken fat in heavy pan. Heat until it sputters, hot enough to brown chicken. (Add more shortening if needed.) While fat is heating, dip each chicken piece in flour mixture and coat thoroughly. Fry each chicken piece 15 minutes on each side until there is no water oozing out. Chicken should be nice and brown.

Serve hot with white rice and chicken gravy.

Use remaining flour for gravy. If any is left, put in refrigerator to use another time.

CHICKEN GRAVY

¼ cup flour mixture (above)

3 cups water

Stir flour into chicken scrapings in pan until it is deep brown. Slowly add 3 cups of water and continue stirring until smooth. Optional: If wanted, stir in 1 can of cream of mushroom soup, cutting water down to 2 cups. For festive holidays, add ¼ cup white wine.

SWEET POTATO PIE

Pie crust (makes 2)

2 cups flour

1 teaspoon salt

¾ cup bacon fat

4 tablespoons water

Put flour and salt in bowl and cut in bacon fat. Sprinkle water in, mix gently. Gather dough together and press into 2 balls. (Put one ball of dough in refrigerator if only making one pie.)

Roll ball of dough out on lightly floured board into round pastry crust. Put in pie pan. Heat oven to 400



Express photographs/ED KOSKEY JR.

Marian Bright, an Easton cook with a flair for Soul Food recipes, shows off some of her cre-

degrees. Partially bake pie crust 10 minutes. Remove from oven and set aside while mixing filling.

SWEET POTATO FILLING

2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cooked or 1 can (18 ounces) of sweet potatoes

1 cup sugar

1 stick margarine

½ cup evaporated milk (must be evaporated)

3 eggs

1 teaspoon nutmeg

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 teaspoon baking powder

Beat sweet potatoes in large bowl until they are well mashed, removing any strings that adhere to the beater. Add next seven ingredients, one at a time,

ations, including Sweet Potato Pie, Fried Chicken and Cabbage and Salt Pork.

beating well after each addition. Continue beating until smooth. Pour into the partially baked pie crust and bake 45 minutes at 400 degrees, making sure center is firm. Serves eight.

CABBAGE AND SALT PORK

2 medium pieces salt pork strips

1 large head cabbage

Saute pork strips in kettle, 10 minutes on each side.

Wash cabbage thoroughly. Slice into thin strips. Add to pork in kettle.

Cook gently on low heat one-half hour or until cabbage is tender or to suit your taste.

If not eaten immediately, turn off heat and reheat when needed.

PEACH ICE CREAM

1 quart milk

6 eggs

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon flour

1 teaspoon vanilla

3 cups mashed peaches (fresh or canned)

1 pint heavy whipped cream

Mix milk, eggs, sugar and flour in saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly.

Cool for 20 minutes. Stir in vanilla, peaches and heavy cream. Pour into freezer can. Cover and place in freezer tub. Fill tub with rock ice.

Churn until ice cream gets hard.

BLACK-EYED PEAS

3 cups water

1 ham hock or salt pork, cut up

¼ teaspoon salt

2 cups black-eyed peas

1 teaspoon pepper

Cook ham hock in water in heavy saucepan for 30 minutes. Add salt, black-eyed peas and pepper. Simmer for one hour.

OLD FASHIONED PIE CRUST

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 teaspoons salt

1 cup butter

4 tablespoons cold orange juice

Measure flour and salt into large bowl. Cut in butter thoroughly. Add orange juice one tablespoon at a time, mixing until flour is moistened and dough almost cleans side of bowl.

Gather dough into ball, roll into flattened round on lightly floured covered board.

SYRUP PIE WITH PECANS

4 eggs

1 cup old fashioned cane syrup

½ cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon flour

1 teaspoon vanilla

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Marian Bright prepares her fried chicken.



Alberta Houston serves some of her freshly made Peach Ice Cream.

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Pinch salt

2 tablespoons butter

1½ cup broken pecans

12 whole pecan nuts

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Beat eggs, syrup, sugar, flour, vanilla, salt and butter with rotary beater vigorously. Stir in nuts. Pour into 9-inch pie crust. Top with whole pecan nuts. Bake for one hour. Cool.

TANGY BARBECUE SAUCE

FOR RIBS OR CHICKEN

6-8 large tomatoes

1 can tomato paste

1 medium onion, chopped fine

1 clove garlic, minced

1 teaspoon pepper

Dash Tabasco sauce

Dash Worcestershire sauce

Cook tomatoes about 10 minutes until soft, then sieve to remove seeds.

Add tomato paste, onion, garlic, pepper, Tabasco, and Worcestershire sauce.

Simmer on lowest heat on stove burner for approximately three hours. Strain while it is hot. Put sauce in quart jars for refrigerator or plastic containers if it is to be frozen. Makes 2 quarts.