Rooted In Place And History; Appalachian food culture is tied to the land, Laura Brehaut learns from cookbook author


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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)
Like many who were forced to leave to find work in the 20th century's "many hillbilly diasporas," they returned whenever they could. Besides representing varied cultural influences, central and southern Appalachia is also North America's most diverse foodshed. Serves: 8 to 10 1/4 lb (114 g) leaf lard, cut into large cubes, at room temperature, plus a little to grease the pan (see note) 1 cup (250 mL) packed light brown sugar 3/4 cup plus 2 tbsp (210 mL) all-purpose flour 3/4 cup plus 1 tbsp (195 mL) stone-ground white cornmeal 1 tsp (5 mL) baking powder 1 tsp (5 mL) baking soda 1 tsp (5 mL) salt 1 1/2 tbsp (22.5 mL) ground cinnamon 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) freshly grated nutmeg 1/8 tsp (0.5 mL) ground cloves 1 cup (250 mL) apple butter 1 cup (250 mL) whole buttermilk 2 tbsp (30...  

FULL TEXT
Where some see stereotypes, author Ronni Lundy sees wisdom and resourcefulness. She views her connections to the southern Appalachian Mountains as a "beautiful and remarkable gift."

In Victuals (Clarkson Potter, 2016), she explores the ties between the land and the people who rely on its bounty. As it turns out, Lundy writes, her people were right about victuals all along - in pronunciation (viddles), practice and sentiment.

Lundy drove nearly 6,500 kilometres meeting farmers, seed savers, chefs, home cooks and shop owners throughout Kentucky, West Virginia, southern Ohio, northern Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina. In 2008, she began to see evidence of an exciting food movement and spent the next six years "testing her assumptions."

In researching and writing Victuals, her fourth book, Lundy found that "those beliefs were indeed valid"- something special was happening. "I saw potential for this movement very early on. And what was gratifying to me was to discover that it was far deeper than I had even realized at the outset. It's gotten broader and fuller," she says. "What I discovered is that underneath the chef and restaurant stories, there are still these very powerful farm, community, and family stories going on. And that was wonderful."

Born in Corbin, a railroad town in Kentucky, Lundy grew up in Louisville. Although her family moved away from the mountains, she says they never fully left. Like many who were forced to leave to find work in the 20th century's "many hillbilly diasporas," they returned whenever they could.

Besides representing varied cultural influences, central and southern Appalachia is also North America's most diverse foodshed. From practices such as canning, seed saving and grafting fruit trees to hunting and foraging, human activity in the area has contributed to the retention of agrobiodiversity.

"People are still growing foods from seeds that their family has kept through generations. ... "The people of the southern Appalachians have continued farming, hunting and foraging practices that they learned from Native Americans. And some of which they brought here from Europe, that were traditions of not just exhausting a food source. But nurturing the crops or nurturing the forest and not killing off all of the animals."
COLIN PERRY'S SORGHUM & APPLE STICKY PUDDING

Chef Colin Perry plies his art in Montreal at Dinette Triple Crown. The food there taps into traditions of both the far north and the high country south, as in this delectably oh-so-sticky pudding.

Serves: 8 to 10

1/4 lb (114 g) leaf lard, cut into large cubes, at room temperature, plus a little to grease the pan (see note)
1 cup (250 mL) packed light brown sugar
3/4 cup plus 2 tbsp (210 mL) all-purpose flour
3/4 cup plus 1 tbsp (195 mL) stone-ground white cornmeal
1 tsp (5 mL) baking powder
1 tsp (5 mL) baking soda
1 tsp (5 mL) salt
1 1/2 tbsp (22.5 mL) ground ginger
1 1/2 tsp (7.5 mL) ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) freshly grated nutmeg
1/8 tsp (0.5 mL) ground cloves
1 cup (250 mL) apple butter
1 cup (250 mL) whole buttermilk
2 tbsp (30 mL) bourbon
2 large eggs
1 large egg yolk
1 cup (250 mL) sorghum syrup (see note)
1/2 cup (125 mL) heavy cream

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F (175 C). Grease a 10-inch (25-cm) round cake pan.
2. Place the lard and brown sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix on low speed to combine and then increase the speed to high to cream them together. Mix until the mixture becomes smooth and a very light brown, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed; this takes about 20 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, whisk together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves in a large bowl. In a separate large bowl, whisk together the apple butter, buttermilk and bourbon.
4. Once the lard-sugar mixture is ready, reduce the speed to medium and add the eggs and egg yolk, one at a time, until incorporated.
5. Add the flour mixture in thirds, alternating with the apple butter mixture, mixing only until the batter is smooth each time.
6. Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan and bake for 40 to 45 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the centre comes out dry. Turn out of pan onto a rack to cool while you make the syrup.
7. Combine the sorghum and cream in a heavy bottomed saucepan and bring to a boil. Then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Whisk until well blended.
8. Transfer the cake to a serving plate. Poke holes throughout the top of the cake with a fork and slowly pour the syrup all over the cake until it has been absorbed. Serve slightly warm.

Notes: If you can't get real lard, Lundy recommends using butter. "Shortening and grocery store lard aren't worth it," she writes. Sorghum syrup is available online and at specialty markets. As a substitute, Perry recommends using maple syrup. "That's actually what I use at (Dinette Triple Crown) as I try to keep everything as local as possible," he said in an email. Recipe reprinted from Victuals by Ronni Lundy. Published by Clarkson Potter/Publishers.

Credit: Laura Brehaut; Vancouver Sun

Illustration

Johnny Autry / Kentucky-born and Montreal-based chef Colin Perry's "oh-so-sticky pudding" calls for sorghum syrup. But you can make it as Perry does with maple syrup.