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**Regional Cuisine - Down Home Southern Cooking**

**By Kirsten Hawkins**

I grew up in New England, the home of 'plain cooking', where corn on the cob is served as is with a slab of butter and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. We boil salted meats with vegetables and call it - well, a boiled dinner. Our clam chowder is white, our baked beans have bacon and molasses in them, and no one in the world has ever invented a food that was improved by the addition of curry. By the time I was eighteen, I could boil a lobster, steam clams and grill a pork chop to perfection. Then I moved to Virginia, picked up a roommate from North Carolina - and discovered a whole new world of down home country cooking goodness.

To an All-American Italian girl from Boston, the menus in restaurants were in a foreign language. Chicken-fried steak, grits, corn pone pudding, strawberry rhubarb pie - sweet potato pie?? In my mind, chicken and steak were two different meats, grits is what's on sandpaper, corn is a vegetable - and what in the world is sweet potato doing in a crust? But I became a fervent convert to Southern cooking the first time my roommate made up a pan of the sweetest, tastiest, most perfectly melt-in-your-mouth delicious Southern baking powder biscuits and topped them with sausage gravy. From that day on, I was Sue's disciple, standing at her elbow as she diced scallions to make up a mess of pinto beans, stirred the milk into a pan of drippings for milk gravy and rolled thin steak strips in chicken batter to make chicken-fried steak.

Down home southern cooking is no different than New England plain cooking - at least at its most basic level. Like any other regional style of cooking, it makes use of the ingredients that are plentiful and cheap. In New England we gussy up our dried beans with brown sugar and molasses, and serve them with thick, sweet heavy brown bread dotted with raisins - perfect fare for cold winter nights. In North Carolina, they simmer for hours with salt pork and onions and served with scallions for scooping and a side of flaky biscuits cut out of dough with a juice glass. Salty, spicy and flaky-good all at once, it's a down home meal that makes my mouth water just to remember.

Some dishes just don't translate, though. There is no New England substitute for a Southern barbecue sandwich - shredded pork simmered with spices for hours and ladled over buns in a 'sandwich' that really requires a fork. The ubiquitous 'sloppy joe' just doesn't cut it. It lacks the spicy-sweet tang and buttery texture of real slow-simmered pork barbecue. Nor is there anything that compares with chicken

fried steak - a dish that can't be described in words without selling it short. If you've had it, you KNOW how good it is. If you haven't, the idea of dredging and dipping strips of beef and frying it like chicken just doesn't do it justice.

My New England Italian roots show wherever I go. Lasagna will always be a favorite meal, and New England boiled dinners still make my mouth water. But I know, deep in my soul, that when I go to Heaven, the diners will serve flaky Southern biscuits with sausage gravy and chicken fried steak. Some temptations even the angels can't resist.

Kirsten Hawkins is a food and nutrition expert specializing the Mexican, Chinese, and Italian food. Visit

<http://www.food-and-nutrition.com/>

for more information on cooking delicious and healthy meals.

## **French is Back: The New Cuisine is Trendy and French**

**By Dylan Miles**

French food is back with a vengeance. French cuisine has evolved into a less pretentious version of its older self. The new French cuisine, or Nouvelle Cuisine, is more accessible and comes in many varieties, including bistro food, brasserie style and the ultimate in luxury food, haute cuisine.

French cuisine is fresh and creative, and a lot more simple than it was in the past. French cuisine is often experimental, but the of the food continues to skyrocket. Basically, the French have gone back to their regional roots and brought a modern version of traditional French cooking. Unlike the sophisticated plates of the past, French food now fits into the public's desire for "real food". But real food is not just about traditional mum's-cooking type of dishes. People want traditional foods and flavors with a distinct contemporary feel. People want the old packaged and presented in a new way. The new French cuisine is exactly this.

Frog's legs are still being served in abundance, but the new French cuisine is also influenced by what is going on outside of France. French food is now transformed by influences from the South American, Asian, Italian and American cuisines. Chefs creating the new French cuisine are incorporating ideas picked up from their travels around the world. These days chefs are knowledgeable of the characteristics of cuisines around the world and can use elements of various cultures in creating their own new cuisine.

The result? The new French cuisine is creative and classical. The new French cuisine is both traditional and contemporary.

Dylan Miles, journalist, and website builder, lives in Texas. He is the owner and co-editor of

<http://www.foodgarden.info>

on which you will find a longer, more detailed version of this article.



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