



On Neighborday, share food and talk with your neighbors

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It's been decades since the popular PBS children's favorite Mr. Rogers sang "Won't you be my neighbor?" But getting to know the people who share your home base is more important than ever in an era when communication often takes place behind a keyboard or phone screen.

That's why online community [Good](#) has dubbed April 27 Neighborday, encouraging community residents to gather for food, fun and good old-fashioned face-to-face communication.

Sarah R.M. Johnson personally knows the importance of a simple neighborhood potluck. As a coordinator for Welcoming Indianapolis, a project created to promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans, she organizes potlucks between the two groups.

"A potluck may seem like a simple act of eating together for an afternoon, but it means much more than that," Johnson said. "Potlucks bring together neighbors of diverse backgrounds onto common ground. They share not only food, but also excitement and concern for their children and families. They are invested in the same community and share dreams of similar futures for what their neighborhood could become if they work together. Potlucks open the door for new friendships and collaborating neighbors — that's what living in a community is all about, right? ... A short afternoon together can really transform a community."

Get inspired by some Indy-area residents who know the power of a potluck, then sign up to organize your own Neighborday event at <http://www.good.is/posts/host-a-neighborday-celebration-on-april-27>.

Tedd Grain, Clifton on the River

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We are blessed to have wonderful neighbors from diverse and interesting backgrounds. Clifton on the River is home to portrait artists, sculptors, designers, retired teachers, entrepreneurs, singer/songwriters, distribution specialists, community builders, tax consultants, volunteer coordinators, aspiring sound engineers and bike activists.

Last year, we organized the first Clifton on the River Green Tomato Festival. This involved a group of neighbors from Clifton on the River going door to door giving out tomato plants to all who wanted to grow them. In September, more than 50 neighbors came together to celebrate the green tomatoes from their gardens with 10 pans of fried green tomatoes made by neighbors and brought out hot from their homes. So, of course, our favorite recipe is for fried green tomatoes.

Clifton on the River Fried Green Tomatoes

Ingredients

Green tomatoes (they should be firm, and feel heavy in your hand)

Salt

Black pepper

Sugar

1 egg

1 1/2 cups buttermilk

1 1/3 cup all-purpose flour

2/3 cup yellow cornmeal

Canola oil

1. Cut tomatoes into 1/3-inch slices; place on flat sheet of foil. Generously add salt, pepper and a pinch of sugar to each slice. Let sit 10-15 minutes.
2. Pour oil one inch deep into skillet and heat to 360 degrees (use cooking thermometer). In bowl, beat egg; add buttermilk. In a gallon-size plastic zip bag or other sack, mix flour and cornmeal.
3. Coat each tomato slice with layer of flour/cornmeal mix, then dip in egg/buttermilk mixture. Toss each slice again in flour/cornmeal mixture. Slowly drop each slice into skillet. Brown until golden; turn and brown opposite side. Use slotted spoon to transfer slices to plate lined with paper towels. Enjoy immediately.

Mitzy Martin, Fairway Lakes, Franklin

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Paula Deen has nothing on me (except millions of dollars). In 1996, I wrote a cookbook called “Cooking Right—With Love To Mandy Martin” to celebrate my daughter’s graduation from Georgia Tech. This cookbook captured recipes from generations, and each included a story about family and friends. While I have many favorites, My Southern Souffle is one of my most frequently requested. Until grits became a bit more mainstream, I never acknowledged the foundation of this dish until after it had been consumed. I figured that any guest who had an unfavorable prior experience with the South’s truly heavenly corn would find it to be camouflaged, as my dish is chockfull of other non-healthy, but divine, ingredients — butter, cheese and eggs.

While many in our extended neighborhood have enjoyed the dish in our home and theirs, it has gained its greatest acclaim as part of the Southern Dinner for Six that Jeff and I annually donate to the Johnson County Community Foundations auction at its gala. The first and second years, Franklin’s mayor, Fred Paris, and his wife, Michelle, purchased it for around \$500. The high-water mark was reached at the 2011 auction, when Franklin College’s Tom Armor and his wife, Heather, bid \$2,100. No matter how you calculate it, that’s a lot of dough for a spread of Southern Heritage Souffle, accompanied by bowls of beans and greens, hog and other Southern delicacies.

My Southern Souffle

(Serves 6 to 8)

Ingredients

3 cups cooked grits

1 pound Velveeta cheese, cubed

1 cup cheddar cheese, grated

1 stick butter

Hearty dash of red pepper

Hearty dash of garlic

6 eggs, beaten

1/2 cup milk

2 teaspoons baking powder

Salt to taste

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut cheeses and butter into hot grits. Add pepper and garlic. In separate bowl, beat eggs; add milk and baking powder. Stir into hot grits mixture; salt to taste. Pour into buttered 8- by -11-inch baking dish. Bake 45 to 60 minutes.

Sarah E. Kesterson, Greenfield

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I love Greenfield for the volunteer town that it is. It is big enough to offer lots of amenities, and yet I still get a small-town feeling. We have wonderful festivals, fairs and events with numerous art shows and theatrical productions at the local Ricks Theatre. Greenfield is a great place to live and volunteer! And everyone here loves a good pitch-in.

Dessert recipes are always my favorite, especially brownies with everything in them but the kitchen sink. However, the most requested dish and the one most taken to events is a very simple macaroni and cheese that I have been making for more than 60 years. It's comfort food extraordinaire. How can one simple and easy-to-make dish be best-loved for so many years by family and friends? Easy — it's made with love.

Pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In large kettle, prepare macaroni until al dente according to package directions. Drain. Layer half of macaroni into three-quart dish. Top with one-half grated cheese; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Repeat with second layer.

2. Bake covered for about 30 minutes; uncover and bake for an additional 10 minutes. Remove from oven and relish good old-fashioned comfort food.

Tyson Domer, Mapleton-Fall Creek

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We've done an outdoor chili cookout every Halloween since 2008; we call it "Halloween in the 'hood."

Basically, we make chili over a firepit and invite the whole Mapleton-Fall Creek neighborhood. I love the chili made by Avis White — it's always super-hot because of the bonfire and super-hearty because of the pasta. Avis really knows how to cook chili on a wood fire.

Avis White's Halloween Chili

(Serves 175-200)

Ingredients

7 1/2 pounds ground beef

6 large bell peppers, diced

2 pounds diced onion

6 pounds chili beans

14 pounds tomato sauce

10 pounds tomato paste

1/2 gallon prepared fresh tomatoes

1 gallon sliced fresh tomatoes

Fresh herbs, hot peppers, garlic to taste

1/2 pound beef base

1/4 pound Lawry's seasoned salt

1/4 pound cumin

1/4 pound hot chili powder

2 cups sugar

1 pound cornstarch

Water

2 1/2 pounds spaghetti, cooked

Toppings

3 pounds diced onion

3 pounds oyster crackers

5 pounds shredded cheddar cheese

5 pounds sour cream

1. Set large pot over outdoor fire and heat. Flash pot with bleach water to sterilize; rinse.
2. Brown beef in pot; drain fat. Saute chopped vegetables. Add tomato sauce through sugar; cook until hot. Add cornstarch/water mixture to thicken as necessary. Simmer until almost ready to serve.
3. Just before serving, add pasta. Serve with toppings.

Sarah Kamer, Brockton

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My “neighborhood” includes a wide geographic area. There are geographical components, yes, but my neighbors are also people connected through common interests and involvements (church, love of board games, kids of similar ages, a willingness to get out and get to know new people). I love that my neighborhood is diverse and that people are willing to be a part of one another’s lives.

This recipe goes beyond the usual casserole fare with more complex flavors. It can cater to a wide range of guests’ diets (whole grains, gluten-free if you serve the soy sauce on the side), I can vary the spiciness to fit the crowd, and it can either pass as a one-pot meal or complement a number of sides. Making food for people is a chance for me to show how much they mean to me, so I try as much as I can to tailor my recipes to the unique people in my life.

Thai Chicken Soup

(Serves 4)

Ingredients

2 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth

1 can (15 ounces) coconut milk

2 to 3 teaspoons Thai red (or yellow) curry paste

1 can (15 ounces) diced tomatoes, including liquid

1 1/2-pound bone-in, skinned chicken thighs or split breasts (I use thighs and drumsticks)

4 scallions, thinly sliced (keep white and green parts separate)

1/4 cup finely diced red bell pepper

1 1/2 cup cooked Chinese black rice (can substitute brown basmati, brown jasmine or Thai black sticky rice)

1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

2 to 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice

Soy sauce to taste

1. In a four-quart pot, blend broth, coconut milk and curry paste. Set pot over medium heat; add tomatoes, chicken, scallion whites and bell pepper. Bring to simmer; cover and simmer until chicken is cooked, 20 to 30 minutes, depending upon size.

2. Remove chicken from pot. When cool enough to handle, shred meat and discard bones. Return chicken to pot; stir in rice. Add cilantro, scallion greens, lime juice to taste and soy sauce to perk up flavors. Before ladling out portions, stir well to bring up rice from bottom.

Kim Shell, Barrington, Johnson County

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In the early '80s, I was a transplanted Jersey Girl who became an Accidental Hoosier. My husband, John, and I chose Greenwood for its small-town feel, family-centered community and proximity to Indianapolis. When we outgrew our first small house, we chose to build barely one mile away in the community of Barrington. What I have grown to love about my neighborhood is that it has become a dynamic place full of young and old families (and those of us in between) and all kinds of people.

Being of German descent, the food and culture surrounded me as a child, and as I became a parent, those traditions were ones that I have passed along to my children. As with any culture, the food tends to be memorable, and I remember many a Sunday at the German-American Club eating my share of wurst, sauerkraut, schnitzel and my personal favorite, German potato salad. This recipe is easy and delicious, and while it is traditionally served warm, it's just as tasty right out of the fridge. Because it has no mayonnaise, this recipe is great for a potluck or pitch-in, as it can sit out and be safe to eat for a couple of hours.

German Potato Salad

1 teaspoon celery seed

Place potatoes, bacon, onions, celery and egg in a large bowl. In saucepan on stovetop, place reserved bacon fat; stir in flour and cook one minute. In separate bowl, mix together sugar, vinegar, water or broth and celery seed; add to pan, stirring until thickened. Thin with additional water or broth, if necessary. (I prefer to keep sauce on thin side, as it will coat potato mixture evenly.) Pour the sauce over potato mixture; stir gently. Serve warm. Guten Appetit.