

Good Food & Good Luck in 2005!

The first time I met my mother-in-law in Raleigh I knew I was twice blessed by the Jones' women. I not only found a wonderful wife but was adopted into a true southern family with an honest to goodness "grand matron." Mrs. Lucille Jones and her daughter taught me that there are things that must be eaten on New Year's Day. "You don't even think about tempting fate," Lucille explained. Along with that warning came a list of "must haves" for January 1st.

Incidentally, I would advise any single men out there who are thinking of finding a bride south of the Mason Dixon Line to practice up on their traditional country cooking skills. I'm still convinced that my sausage gravy got me accepted into the family!

The three food groups for New Year's Day in the south (now you Yankees listen up) are black-eyed peas, greens and pork. If you want to be sure of health & prosperity in your New Year, don't even think of messing with this menu. I've also been told that your first visitor of the year has to be a man so I suppose if a woman shows up first you'd best not answer the door.

After further investigation, cornbread was added to the list based on popular consensus. (I think part of it is the greens; who would ever think of having greens without cornbread?) But several "reliable" sources have told me that cornbread is one sure-fire way to bring wealth into your New Year.

New Year's customs are many and quite unique through out the world. Just a few of them gleaned from a Google search include:

- Venezuelan people usually wear yellow underwear on New Year's Day for good luck and most eat 12 grapes at the stroke of midnight, which symbolizes 12 months of good fortune.
- In Scotland, the New Year's celebration is called "Hogmanay." The gathering is very loud and festive, often including the firing of cannons. Later friends and neighbors go "first footing," which is visiting other homes with gifts in hand and being the first foot to cross the threshold.
- Greek children leave their shoes outside the front door for St. Basil to place coins and treats in them. Also, a special cake called Vassilopitta is baked with a coin inside and whoever gets the piece with the coin in it is thought to be lucky in the New Year.
- The Italian traditional good luck food choices include sausages and lentils. The sausages represent prosperity and the round shape of the lentils, the cycle of life and the promise of renewal.
- Germans believe the eating of herring at the stroke of midnight will bring good luck.
- An Olie Bollen is a donut-like fritter baked and eaten in Holland as a New Year's tradition.
- One of my favorites comes from Taiwan where the boss of the company you work for treats his employees to a big meal with one hitch. During the meal the boss

usually sets one whole, well-cooked chicken in the middle of the table. After he finishes his speech, he rotates the table tray with the chicken on it to indicate to everyone it is time to start eating. At that moment, you want to make sure that the chicken's head is not facing you. If it is, it means the boss dislikes you, and you will be fired after the Chinese New Year.

Well aren't you glad you won't be staring down at a chicken head this New Year's day? Let's hope you'll be enjoying some of our southern favorites. Here's a great recipe for a black-eyed pea dish called:

Hoppin' John

1 lb. dried black-eyed peas
½ lb. salt pork, cubed
½ lb. cooked ham, cubed
1 large onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 ham bone
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper (or more to taste)
Cooked white rice

Rinse peas and pick out any discolored ones or other things that should not be there...you'll know! Cover with cold water in a large stew pot and bring to boil for about a minute. Remove the pot from heat and allow to sit for at least an hour.

In a large skillet, sauté the salt pork to render its fat, add onions and garlic and cook until the onions are soft, about 5 minutes. Add the onion mixture along with the ham bone and seasonings to the pea pot. Add enough water to cover all ingredients and bring "only" to a simmer, no hotter! Cover and cook for about 1 to 1 ½ hours. The peas should be tender but not mushy. Season with salt and black pepper to taste.

Please note that if you keep your heat to a low simmer rather than boiling, you won't have the problem of the skins on the peas bursting and the dish will have a better appearance. Also, by adding your salt at the very end, after the peas are cooked, they will remain tender and not get tough.

Serve your peas over white rice and offer Tabasco on the side. The Tabasco will put some pep into your New Year! As Lucille would say, "the whole experience will be finer than frog's hair."

Great Reds that Everyone Can Enjoy

Most of us have heard the news over the past several years that moderate amounts of red wine are good for us. They're said to reduce heart disease and cancer and the medical community has had to concede that there seems to be some truth in this. About 15 years

ago, “60 Minutes” ran a program called the French Paradox, which opened up discussion on this subject. The big question was why did the French have a substantially lower risk of heart disease given their diet, a diet loaded with butter, dairy and other foods high in cholesterol.

The conclusion from the 60 Minute’s investigation was that moderate amounts of wine, particularly red wine on a daily basis actually assisted the body in lowering cholesterol levels.

I’ve been approached over the years by clients asking for a red wine they can use in their diet. Most people want a red which is a tad fruity and easy for them to enjoy. The wine industry has done a poor job filling this need, however there are a few good ones out there and I wanted to share them with you.

My favorites are Romanian Vollreiflese Merlot, Hungarian Nemes Kadarka, Rumanian Blaufrankisch Ausbruch and a fruity finished German Dornfelder. Recently I also tried a Pelee Island Semi Dry Merlot from Canada, which was well made, and something of a “best kept secret” locally. The tastes of these wines vary from a fruity black cherry styling to the flavors of spicy currants and blackberries. The Nemes Kadarka is grown in volcanic ash and is from a group of wines used by the royalty of the Hapsburg Dynasty as a daily health elixir.

These are not easy wines to find on the market but we can help you in locating them should you wish. Call us at 888-288-0668 and we’ll point you in the right direction. Have a happy and safe New Year!