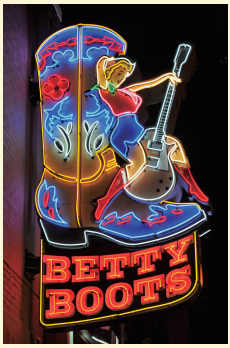
EXTRAORDINARY RECIPES FROM

NASHVILLE CHEF'S TABLE

STEPHANIE STEWART-HOWARD
Photography by Ron Manville

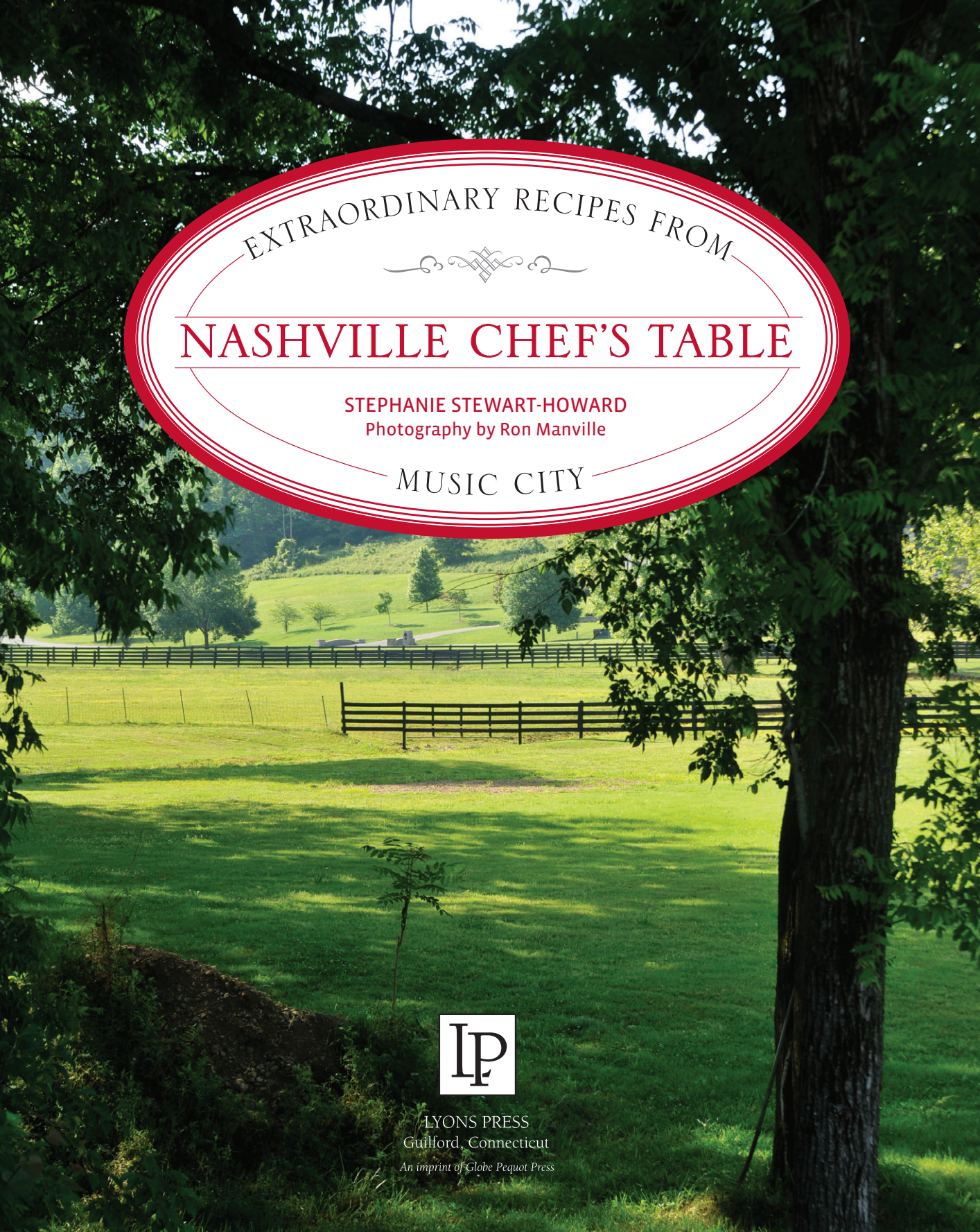
MUSIC CITY



Nashville has been a music town for decades now, ever since the Grand Ole Opry began in the 1930s with the rise of "old-time" music, followed by an even greater musical influx after World War II, with the birth of Music Row. Those were the days of RCA Studio B, then Hank and Patsy, and later George, Tammy, Dolly, and Porter. Next came Willie, Kris, Johnny, and Merle, and then Garth Brooks, George Strait, Carrie Underwood, and Blake Shelton. But there is more to Music City than years of music.

Today Nashville is a star on the US culinary landscape. Talented chefs, many trained under culinary experts at longer-standing restaurants, are branching out and starting their own places, and new chefs are moving to town to start their careers here. Neighborhood restaurants are cropping up—not with the aim of being giant powerhouses, but intending to serve very good food to people who live nearby and help build neighborhood cultures.

Nashville Chef's Table gathers the city's best chefs, restaurants, farmers, and purveyors under one roof, featuring recipes for the home cook from over fifty of the city's most celebrated eateries and showcasing beautiful full-color photos of mouthwatering dishes, award-winning chefs, and lots of local flavor.



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Restaurants and chefs often come and go, and menus are ever-changing. We recommend you call ahead to obtain current information before visiting any of the establishments in this book.

This book is dedicated to my husband Seth Howard, for all the love and support he's given to me, and to my late grandmothers, Myra Stewart and Lula Webb, who introduced me to the art of Southern food.


BETTY
BOOTS

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Acknowledgments

Trying to represent Nashville's burgeoning food culture in such a small space has been a stunning task. I owe a lot of gratitude to the people who taught me what food and food writing are all about in this spectacular town.

The marvelous Martha Stamps familiarized me in so many ways with Nashville's traditional food culture, and food critic Kay West introduced me to both the newest and the oldest of the restaurants that define who we are as a culinary city. Miss Daisy King reminds me what Nashville cooking is truly all about with everything she does.

My friends and fellow writers Chris Chamberlain, Jennifer Justus, Dara Carson, Kay West, and Tammy Algood have inspired me, as have the chefs and artists who have become more than passing acquaintances, including Pat Martin, Tyler Brown, Jason McConnell, Carl Schultheis, Tandy Wilson, Siva Pavuluri, Sarah Souther, James Hensley, and Sarah Scarborough. Marne Duke, Robin Riddell Jones, Janet Kurtz,and Jennifer Hagan-Dier, thanks for your knowledge and advice over the years.

Photographer Ron Manville and I have worked together quite a bit over the past few years, first at Nashville Lifestyles, then on other projects. He has taught me to look at images of food in a way I never thought possible, and I'm delighted to have had the chance to work with him on this book.

My parents, Joe and Yvonne Stewart, opened up the culinary world for me, not only from their own Southern background, but through world travel and the opportunity to experience native foods across the globe—and they taught me to bring the recipes home and cook them for myself. They are both outstanding cooks, and I'm lucky they still believe in family meals.

Likewise, my late grandmothers, Myra Fendley Stewart and Lula Prillaman Webb, were my first teachers about eating fresh food you grew yourself and just how good the simplest things, like biscuits and yeast rolls, could be. (Needless to say, they were also both absolute masters of the complex, especially when it came to dessert.)

The greatest thanks of all belong to my husband, Seth Howard, who encouraged me to pursue my dreams and put up with my incessant talk about this book. He is my constant source of inspiration in all the arts I pursue and the goals that I make for myself.

Introduction

Nashville has been a music town for decades now, ever since the Grand Ole Opry began in the 1930s with the rise of "old-time" music, followed by an even greater musical influx after World War II, with the birth of Music Row. It dates back to the days of RCA Studio B, on to Hank and Patsy, through George and Tammy and Dolly and Porter, then Willie and Kris and Johnny and Merle, on to Garth Brooks and George Strait, to Carrie Underwood and Blake Shelton. We've been viewed through the eyes of *Hee Haw* and Robert Altman's *Nashville* and *Nashville* the TV show. But there is more to "Music City" than years of music—then and now.

Two thousand thirteen, the year this book was written, saw Nashville become an "it" city in the eyes of the nation and the world—about, for once, more than just the musical superstars. Dozens of publications, domestic and international, rushed to talk about us—our food, our arts, our craftspersons, our businesses, our sports, and our real estate—and proclaim us the hottest thing in the nation.

Well, that's nice and all, but most of those things were here prior to this year, and more will happen when the fickle media has moved on to Cleveland, Syracuse, or Billings. The eyes of the world will still be on us, because we genuinely have that much to offer, even if we aren't the "hot new thing."

In this moment, as the world rediscovers us, our culinary culture is blooming. Unlike Charleston and New Orleans, we don't have a fundamentally defined cuisine that's spent two hundred years fermenting into something distinct. We have instead a food history that is deeply tied to the history of the South itself.

Nashville, and the areas surrounding it in Davidson, Williamson, and Rutherford Counties, had a thriving Native American culture for centuries before European settlers arrived. In 1779 James Robertson and John Donelson left North Carolina and set up Fort Nashborough, a replica of which can still be visited today. The presence of the Cumberland and Harpeth Rivers provided myriad advantages, from irrigation for cotton fields to river transport, and a city was born.

The nineteenth century offered up notable pieces of American history, from presidents Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Andrew Johnson to Civil War battles and occupation. After the Civil War, Nashville grew up as a center of trade, thanks to the railroads. If it had any national culinary claim to fame prior to World War II, it was probably the celebrated coffee blend at the Maxwell House Hotel downtown.

As one of my local culinary heroines, Miss Daisy King, tells it, until comparatively recently there was no defined restaurant history in Nashville. What you got when you visited the city were a lot of chain-type places, with a few notable local spots—many more renowned for the songwriters who hung out there than for the food served. All the big department stores, like downtown's late, lamented Cain-Sloan, had their own in-house restaurants, and a few places, like Sperry's and Jimmy Kelly's (both steak houses), managed to make names for themselves as fine-dining institutions by the 1970s (Kelly's dates to 1934).

Miss Daisy's own famous tearoom got its start in Franklin (just to the south of Nashville proper) in 1974 and helped define the moment's "taste" of Nashville. During the 1980s locally owned places finally started to gain a slender foothold, though most were downtown or in Green Hills, not spread out in the smaller neighborhoods—unless you counted small iconic places like Bobby's Dairy Dip in Sylvan Park.

When my parents moved here in the mid-1990s (I was in grad school), the chains still dominated. A handful of really good locally owned places had sprung up by then—F. Scott's, Jay Pennington's Bound'ry, and Randy Rayburn's Sunset Grill among them—and the owners of these and other locations banded together to form Nashville Originals, an organization to promote and support independent restaurant owners in and around the city. That organization still thrives today, supporting Nashville Restaurant Week and providing deals to patrons who come out and explore locally owned eateries.

I jumped in and out of the city until about 2004, when I settled here permanently and reinvented myself from theater professional to journalist. Over the past nearly ten years, the restaurant scene has changed uncannily fast. Talented chefs, many trained under culinary experts at our own longer-standing originals, are branching out and starting their own places, and new chefs are moving to town to start their careers here, rather than choosing larger, more trafficked locations.

Neighborhood restaurants are cropping up—not with the aim of being giant powerhouses, but intending to serve very good food of all types to people who live nearby and help build neighborhood cultures. Germantown, Sylvan Park, East Nashville, and even longtime holdout and chain-centric Franklin are now thriving with those new establishments—places that, in the words of local supper club creator and chef Avon Lyons, "are manageable, with delicious food. They're focused on sharing with just enough people, not trying to bring in massive crowds and not spending the budget on public relations."

We find these restaurants everywhere now, from the older and more established, like East Nashville's Margot Cafe, to Jason McConnell's more recent Red Pony in Franklin or Germantown's brand-new Rolf and Daughters. Even the exceptional "old-school" spots, like Capitol Grille in the Hermitage Hotel, attain that feel, thanks to the work of their chefs and dedicated staffs. We tend to favor intimacy over the overblown and outsized.

With our growing interest in fresh foods and the spread of the Slow Food movement and others concepts like it, we've built an exceptional system of farmers' markets, with one accessible to nearly everyone, regardless of where you live in the city, and a huge and thriving downtown Nashville Farmers' Market. These markets not only help us support local farms and make fresh produce more readily available, but also encourage and support up-and-coming chefs, restaurateurs, and artisan food producers.

Nashville has moved from a place where a few restaurants had microbrew options to thriving microbreweries all over the city—Yazoo, Jackalope, Blackstone, Bosco's, Mayday (in nearby Murfreesboro), Fat Bottom, Cool Springs, and more—some of which are gaining serious national attention. A change in our state laws has made Tennessee's microdistilleries, many centered in and around the Nashville area (Speakeasy, Corsair, Collier & McKeel), something to be talked about on a worldwide level. And each May the Toast to Tennessee Wine Festival comes to town, showcasing the state's thirty-some


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wineries and underlining that places like Château Ross, Beachhaven, and Arrington Vineyards are making things that aren't the syrupy wine equivalent of overly sweet tea.

In the past few years, we've evolved further still: Scott Witherow's Olive & Sinclair chocolate company and Sarah Scarborough's Firepot Chai make a good representation of the plethora of small, artisan food businesses that have emerged, impacted our food landscape, and moved to national prominence.

Amidst all this growth, our chefs have become the backbone of the rising trend of the farm-to-fork movement that's still growing forty years after Alice Waters popularized the idea. More, they're reintroducing us to the things that are best about Southern food. What was once intrinsic to the Nashville and Southeastern diet is being rediscovered.

So what is Tennessee food, anyway? Like most of the cuisine native to the South, it depends on seasonal eating and what's available on the farm at the time. It is the food of farmers more than it is the culinary creation of the affluent, and like much of what we love best about classic French or Italian country cuisine, it grows out of a need to make the best possible with what one has at hand.

At its heart, traditional Southern food is tied to the food our grandparents ate growing up during the Depression, which isn't all that different from what their own parents and grandparents ate during their farm-based childhoods. Many of us who are adults now are fortunate enough to have had grandparents and great-grandparents who still maintained "gardens" (my grandparents essentially had small farms in town) through our childhoods, who canned the fresh produce or froze it and sent it home in boxes with us each time we visited.

What you got was straightforward: corn and beans, peppers, greens, squashes, and pumpkins; tomatoes whole and made into sauces; chow chows and pickles, and even old-style fermented sauerkrauts. Jellies and jams and preserves were there, too, made

from the fruit they or the neighbors grew. Today we connect all of that with the notion of farm-to-fork and somehow often forget that it's a rediscovery, not a new thing.

Coming from a Southern family (Virginia and South Carolina, in full disclosure), albeit one centered first in the military, then corporate America, I learned about this kind of food from my own parents and grandparents. The first thing I learned to cook was biscuits, by the time I was about six years old. Self-rising flour, shortening, milk—even a kid could do it, and knead dough, and make a good biscuit. To this day I can make them without ever resorting to a measuring cup and still get it right. Thanks, Mom.

My friends are learning how to can again, and make jams and preserves. Dara Carson, who has a farm of her own as well as a little house "in town," is my constant inspiration in this. We're learning to forage—flowers like honeysuckle for simple syrups, wild berries and herbs, morels. In part we're learning it because it's on trend, no doubt about that. But in a few years it may not be, and we will still have the skill. We've learned to appreciate the taste of things that don't come from supermarket shelves—that are fresh, or freshly preserved—and value that which we make with our own hands.

Many of us are buying chicken, pork, or beef directly from the farmers. There is new appreciation for game meats like wild turkey, duck, and venison, and freshly caught fish that we can fry up in cornmeal or grill. Barbecue is a thing for us—slow-cooking meats until they are tender to falling apart, then shredding them with a good fork.

And with that, as we follow the trends, we've returned to the Southern foodways of previous generations. Into it we've blended the popular post–World War II starches, like macaroni and cheese, and made them our own with willful delight.

When we prepare these simple, fresh foods, cooking them in a traditional manner—the turnip greens long simmered with a bit of pork, the tomatoes and cucumbers marinated overnight in vinegar and oil—we return to our roots.

Nashville's chef contingent is very aware of this past, and true to it. A few of them, most notably Tyler Brown at Capitol Grille and Matt Lackey at Flyte, have turned farmer themselves. That doesn't mean that they aren't also blending in the tastes and traditions of other cultures—hints of South Asia and France, Germany and Morocco. They are indeed.

In point of fact, we have grown to enjoy ethnic food as a city in a way we never have before. But what seems to underlie the best of all of it now is the understanding that the shared past of fresh food and seasonal flavors—in our Southern culture and in others—produces the best meals. And it is the root of all our flavorful cooking.

When putting together this cookbook, I was faced with the daunting task of sorting out the most representative of Nashville's restaurant scene. My preliminary list had over a hundred places on it, and I've reduced it to half that for you here. I hope it will serve not only as a cookbook, but also as a guide to all Nashville has to offer, whether you're cooking for your family or planning a trip to the area.

As I wrote this book, Chef Sean Brock was preparing to open a Nashville version of his Charleston-favorite Husk, and several other chefs I knew were making announcements about new places and spaces across the city. I can only imagine that things will grow more exciting and expansive in the coming years, whether we are an "it" city of the moment or not.

AM@FM

900 Rosa L. Parks Boulevard, Germantown
(615) 291-4585
www.amfmnashville.com/
Chef/Owner: Arnold Myint

The simplicity and grace of Chef Arnold Myint's AM@FM (psst—that's Arnold Myint at the farmers' market) quickly made it one of my favorites at the downtown farmers' market when it appeared a couple of years ago. Open daily 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., AM@FM keeps generally longer hours than many of its market counterparts, but the timing is not its only appeal.

Arriving at the bright counter, you'll find a selection of sandwiches (I adore the Mu Shu Chicken wrap) suited to almost any dietary need, together with potential side offerings—usually salads and fresh vegetables in creative yet simple incarnations. A board lists the daily specials, including full-sized salads and soups. A rarity in the farmers' market, a wine list that offers a rather more in-depth set of options than simply red or white makes this a great late afternoon meeting spot as well. Of course, you expect the best from former *Top Chef* contestant Myint—he has proved himself again and again in this city.

The downtown farmers' market has done its best to bring in truly exceptional offerings to create an alternative to chains and drive-thrus for the business crowd downtown. AM@FM is one of the best examples of fresh, healthy, often locally sourced food being done right at a comparable cost. It meets the needs of those who want something with a hint of sophistication, but the menu options are diverse enough to have something to please everyone. A waiting line at lunch has customers dressed in everything from business suits to workmen's coveralls. And that's as it should be.

Edamame Salsa

(SERVES 4–6)

⅓ cup light soy sauce
⅓ cup rice vinegar
¼ cup olive oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil
1 cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 cups shelled edamame (out of pods)
1 cup diced sweet white onion
1 cup diced tomato
½ cup sliced scallion
½ cup rough-chopped cilantro
2 tablespoons black and white sesame seeds

Whisk the soy sauce, vinegar, olive oil, sesame oil, sugar, and mustard together until sugar is dissolved.

Combine all the remaining ingredients in a mixing bowl. Add the dressing and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

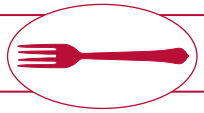
Arnold's Country Kitchen

605 8th Avenue South, The Gulch
(615) 256-4455
facebook.com/Arnoldsmeatand3
Chef: Kahlil Arnold

The mythic meat-'n-three restaurant that dominates the Southern landscape gets taken to the next level with Arnold's Country Kitchen. It's not just the James Beard Foundation America's Classic Award or Guy Fieri's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* that make that definitive, but the locals who line up daily from the moment the doors unlock. Set just at the boundary of The Gulch on 8th Avenue South, Arnold's has been a legend since Jack Arnold and his wife, Rose, started the whole thing thirty years ago. The chef these days is Jack's gifted son Kahlil, who astounds me both with his graciousness and his talent every time I walk in the place.

You never know just exactly what will turn up on the menu, though a board advertises the entrees by day of the week. The tiny space is always filled for lunch (no dinners, sorry), and you should expect to share a table if you and your party don't fill it up (there are plenty of two-tops).

When I go in, I have to admit a weakness for the roast beef, which Arnold's legends are made of, but there's also the fried chicken, the pork, the meat loaf—oh, man, the meat loaf. But meat-'n-three culture prides itself on doing traditional Southern foods right, and the catfish served up by Kahlil Arnold and his folks is meant to be enjoyed. If you're not catching them yourself, your grocery store or fishmonger should have them, even if you live in a non-catfish-centric part of the nation.



Catfish

(SERVES 4–6)

5–6 (5–7 ounces each) farm-raised catfish fillets
8 cups warm water
3 tablespoons kosher salt
3 tablespoons hot sauce
(Louisiana Hot Sauce preferred)
3 cups enriched, self-rising white cornmeal
(White Lily preferred)
2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons black pepper
2 teaspoons granulated garlic
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
6–8 cups canola oil

To brine the catfish, fill a bowl with warm water (hot tap water is fine) and whisk in kosher salt and hot sauce until salt evaporates. Put mixture in the freezer for 15–20 minutes. Remove from freezer and put catfish fillets in brine. (I usually put some ice cubes on top to keep the fish really cold.) Put in the fridge for about 3 hours or overnight.

When the fish is ready to be fried, mix the cornmeal, salt, pepper, garlic, and cayenne pepper in a bowl.

Remove catfish from fridge. Drain and rinse off brine in with cold water in a colander. Let excess water drain completely off.

Heat canola oil in a deep-dish sauté pan or iron skillet, making sure you don't put too much oil in it. You want to fill it a little less than halfway. Check the temperature with an oil thermometer. When the oil gets to 335°F, it's ready to go and you can turn it down a little.

Dredge both sides of the catfish in the cornmeal mixture. Shake off excess meal. Place the catfish in the skillet and cook for 5–6 minutes. Turn catfish over halfway with metal tongs during cooking if needed to get both sides browned.

Remove fish and set on a plate lined with paper towels so excess oil can drain. After about 15 seconds, it's ready to serve.

THE THREES

Khalil Arnold's Southern Green Beans, Mac & Cheese, and Tomato Basil Pie all complement the catfish recipe above. There are plenty of entrees you can pair them with, of course, but the trio together is fairly marvelous—hence the "meat-'n-three" concept. And all of them meet the "kid food" challenge when you're cooking for family.

These days, after a shift away from fresh foods over the past few decades, local produce, fresh and grown nearby, is making a comeback. Kahlil's mom, Rose, once told me that much of hers came from early-morning visits to the Nashville Farmers' Market. Once you taste them, it's easy to believe the Arnolds don't take fresh for granted.

The whole advantage to meat-'n-three style is that you get to choose from a wide variety to make up your plate.