

“Eat poor on New Year’s and eat fat the rest of the year.”  
 – OLD SOUTHERN SAYING



# BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary Bucket List One Dish at a Time  
 By Emily Banks Wooten

“The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot.”  
 – MICHAEL ALTSHULER

# Good health, prosperity & luck

The meaning behind the foods we eat to ring the new year

I didn't cook on New Year's Day because we were out of town on a little trip. I did, however, make sure we ate all those things you're supposed to eat on New Year's Day. During my upbringing we were told that you eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Day for luck. As an adult, I learned that it's not only for luck, but prosperity too, and that there are other foods you're supposed to eat as well – greens, cornbread and some form of pork.

I've continued to abide by this throughout my adulthood with my own family. On New Year's Day we have black-eyed peas, cabbage, cornbread and pork. Not being big greens-eaters, we have cabbage instead. Many years ago a friend shared a recipe for something called Southern-Fried Cabbage and that's been my go-to cabbage recipe ever since. I'll share it with you.

I'll confess that I cheat a little on the black-eyed peas and used canned ones. I've made them from scratch before but I just don't think they're as good. I don't know. Maybe I'm not doing it right. My favorite canned ones are Trappey's, probably because that's the one my Mother has always used. I'll combine a can of Trappey's regular black-eyed peas along with a can of Trappey's black-eyed peas with jalapenos. Sometimes I'll add some bacon to it.

If you're a regular reader then you already know that I think my Mother's cornbread is the best in the world and is the only kind I make. I shared it in the Oct. 17 issue but will share it again today.

Regarding the pork, my tendency is to shake it up a bit each year. Some years I'll do sausage, some years boudin, some years ham. One year Hubby made pork spare ribs. There have been a few years where I skipped the pork all together because I'd put so much bacon in the cabbage and the black-eyed peas that I knew we were covered.

All this talk of eating certain foods for luck and/or prosperity made me curious. While I've always done it and taken it at face value, I found myself wondering about the origin and decided to find out more.

“On January 1, millions will be serving up the traditional New Year's menu of black-eyed peas, ham, greens and cornbread. It is believed eating these foods on New Year's Day will bring good luck and prosperity for the remainder of the year,” Don-dra Vaughn wrote in an article on farmersalmanac.com.

She wrote that the greens (collards, mustard or turnip greens, cabbage, etc.) symbolize the green of dollar



**Southern Fried Cabbage**  
 From allrecipes.com

- 3 slices of bacon, cut into thirds
  - 1 head cabbage, cored and sliced
  - 1/3 cup vegetable oil
  - 1 white onion, chopped
  - 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
  - 1 pinch sugar
  - 1 teaspoon ground black pepper, or to taste
- Place the bacon and vegetable oil into a large pot over medium heat. Season with salt and pepper. Cook for about 5 minutes, or until bacon is crisp. Add cabbage, onion and sugar to the pot. Cook and stir continuously for 5 minutes, or until tender.

**Cornbread**  
 By Linda W. Banks

- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal
  - 3 tablespoons flour
  - 1 teaspoon salt
  - 1 teaspoon baking soda
  - 2 cups buttermilk
  - 1 egg, slightly beaten
  - 3-4 tablespoons bacon drippings
- Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Put bacon drippings in cast iron skillet and place in oven while it's preheating. Mix all other ingredients in mixing bowl.
- Pour melted bacon drippings into mixing bowl with other ingredients and mix well. Pour mixture into hot skillet and bake for 20-25 minutes.

**HELLO 2022**

“People are so worried about what they eat between Christmas and the New Year, but they really should be worried about what they eat between the New Year and Christmas.”  
 – UNKNOWN



bill, ensuring financial prosperity in the New Year; the black-eyed peas symbolize coins, pointing to monetary gain; the cornbread, with its yellow hue, represents gold; and the pork is meant to bring forward motion or advancement in the year ahead.

My research continued to prove that these customs are very much steeped in Southern tradition and lore. According to an

article by Sheridan Alexander at thespruceeats.com, the practice of eating black-eyed peas for luck is generally believed to date back to the Civil War.

“Originally they were used as food for livestock and later as a food staple for enslaved people in the South. Because of their lowly reputation, the Union Army troops of General Sherman ignored the fields of black-eyed peas while razing or stealing

other crops. During the harsh winter, the Confederate soldiers survived on the remaining black-eyed peas, promoting this humble and nourishing legume into a symbol of fortune and prosperity in the American South,” Alexander said.

In a New York Times article by Kayla Stewart, Author and Food Scholar Adrian Miller said, “The choice of greens, usually cooked with pork for flavor,

comes from the perception among Black Americans that folded collard greens look like paper money. Eating greens on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day is believed to bring about greater financial prosperity. The peas promise good luck, health and abundance.”

Food Historian Dr. Jessica B. Harris concurred. “I don't let a New Year's Day go by without having some form of greens, pork and black-eyed peas,” she said.

Harris' book, “High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey From Africa to America” was the inspiration for “High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America,” a four-part Netflix documentary in which Food Writer Stephen Satterfield traces the origins of African-American cuisine from Africa to Texas. Hubby and I watched it, were absolutely transfixed by it and highly recommend it.

Happy New Year and here's to luck, prosperity and good health for us all! ■

