America's Fair Foods
with Francine Segan
State Fair Recipes
from Movie Menus by Francine Segan

OLD-FASHIONED SOUTHERN FRIED CHICKEN WITH GRAVY

Serves 4

- 1 frying chicken, cut into 10 pieces
- Salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 1/2 cups self-rising flour plus more as needed
- Peanut or vegetable oil for frying
- 1/3 cup chicken stock

Place several ice cubes into a bowl of cold water and soak the chicken for 5 to 10 minutes. Pat dry, and liberally season with salt and pepper. Put the cayenne pepper and flour into a large bowl and add more salt and pepper. Roll each piece of chicken in the flour.

Fill a heavy-bottom skillet with oil to a depth of 3/4 inch. Heat the oil over high heat until hot but not smoking. Put the dark-meat pieces into the skillet first, as they take longer to cook than white meat. Put the pieces into the hot skillet one at a time, slowly, so that the oil temperature does not drop. After they have been cooking for about 5 minutes, slowly add the breast pieces. Brown the chicken well on one side before turning, about 8 minutes per side.

Remove the cooked chicken pieces and place on absorbent paper. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of the oil, add 1 tablespoon of flour, and stir well over a low flame. Gradually add the chicken stock and continue stirring until smooth. Season with salt and pepper, and serve on the side.
ONION SQUARES
Serves 6

Try this healthier version of the state fair whole fried onions.

- 1 large red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 large Vidalia onion, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ cup raisins
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- 1 sheet supermarket frozen puff pastry

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

On a floured work surface, roll the puff pastry into a rectangle. Place the pastry on a baking sheet, and pierce every few inches so it does not puff up too much while baking. Bake for 15 minutes, or until golden.

Meanwhile, sauté the onions in the olive oil over medium-high heat for 15 minutes, or until very soft. Remove from the heat; stir in the raisins, sugar and vinegar; and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Spread the cooked pastry with the onion mixture, and cut into squares. Serve warm.
TEXAS CHILI
Serves 8

- ¼ pound bacon, diced
- 1 large red onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pounds round steak, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1 16-ounce jar tomato salsa
- 1 8-ounce jar green chilies
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- 3 tablespoons finely ground cornmeal
- Salt and pepper
- Red pepper flakes or cayenne, optional

In a heavy-bottomed pot, cook the bacon over medium-high heat until the fat is rendered, about 4 minutes. Add the onions and cook until golden, about 8 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the beef, turning frequently until browned, about 5 minutes.

Stir in the beef broth, salsa, chilies, chili powder, oregano and cumin, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook, uncovered, until the meat is tender, about 45 minutes.

Carefully remove about ½ cup of the liquid and stir the cornmeal into the liquid until smooth. Pour the mixture back into the pot and simmer until thickened, about 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and add red pepper flakes or cayenne to taste.
STATE FAIR FRY BREAD
Serves 6

- 3 cups flour, plus more for kneading
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 ¼ cups milk
- Vegetable oil, for frying

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, baking powder and salt until combined. Add the milk, and stir with a wooden spoon until dough forms. Knead the dough until smooth, about 2 minutes. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and let it rest for 20 minutes.

Divide the dough into 12 equal-sized balls. Using your hands, press the dough balls flat to a thickness of about 1/4 inch. Poke a large hole in each with your fingers. (It will look like a doughnut.)

Pour vegetable oil into a nonstick frying pan to a depth of about 1/8 inch and heat over medium heat. Fry the bread rounds, turning once, until golden and puffy, about 1 minute per side. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain. Serve warm.
POPCORN SHRIMP

Serves 6

- 4 cups popped unsalted popcorn
- 3 tablespoons milk
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons cornflake crumbs
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 pound precooked medium shrimp (61 to 70 per pound), peeled and tails left on

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Lightly grease a large nonstick baking sheet and set aside.

Put the popcorn into a sturdy plastic bag and crush it with a rolling pin or heavy skillet. Transfer to a bowl.

In another bowl, whisk together the milk, egg, flour, cornflake crumbs, salt and baking powder until well combined.

Dip the shrimp, holding it by the tail, into the batter, shaking off any excess. Roll in the crushed popcorn and place on the baking sheet. Repeat until all the shrimp are coated, spacing them evenly in one layer on the sheet.

Bake until the batter is golden brown, about 10 minutes. Serve warm in a large popcorn bowl.
BOURBON SWEET POTATO PIE
Serves 8

- 2 large sweet potatoes, about 10 ounces each, boiled
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- ¾ cup dark brown sugar, plus more for garnish
- 2 ounces bourbon
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- Zest of 2 lemons
- 4 large eggs
- 1 9-inch homemade or store-bought deep-dish pie crust

Mash the sweet potatoes, while they are still warm, in a large bowl. Add the butter, sugar, bourbon, nutmeg and zest of one of the lemons until well combined.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

In a separate bowl, beat the eggs. Add the eggs to the cooled sweet potato mixture and stir well to combine. Pour the mixture into the piecrust and bake for 35 to 40 minutes until the filling is firm and the crust golden.

Cool on a rack. When cool, top with a sprinkle of brown sugar and the remaining lemon zest.
PASTA SHISH KEBOB
Serves 4

Here is a delicious Italian take on food on a stick from my book Pasta Modern: New & Inspired Recipes from Italy. Pasta, scallops, sweet peaches and red onion grilled on a stick, Italy’s delightful version of a shish kebob.

- 8 short rosemary branches or wooden skewers
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, finely minced
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 8 large scallops
- 1 peach, cut into 8 slices
- ½ small red onion, cut into bite-size pieces
- Fresh or dried chili pepper, to taste
- 1 pound wagon wheel pasta
- Salt

Soak the branches or skewers in water for 1 hour to prevent charring. Preheat the broiler or grill. (If using the broiler, coat a baking sheet with a little olive oil.)

In a bowl, combine the oil, garlic, lemon juice, scallops, peaches, onion and chili pepper.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta in boiling salted water until al dente. Drain and toss into the bowl with the other ingredients. Thread a pasta wheel, peach slice, scallop, onion piece and a second pasta wheel onto each branch or skewer. Season the skewers with salt, and grill or broil, turning 1/2 turn every minute or so, until the scallops are done, about 3 minutes.