



FOOD

F O R

DUDES



There are a lot of guys out there who think cooking isn't worthy of their time. And the least enlightened of these still think of it as women's work. But if men are supposed to be providers, why isn't providing delicious food part of that obligation?

We've enlisted the help of two local chefs to show you just how manly cooking can be (and hopefully make you a little better at it). Thomas Robey of Veranda on Highland shares his thoughts on big hunks of meat, fire and feeding your inner caveman, while Geoff

Lockert of Trattoria Centrale gives his secrets to impressing a date with your culinary prowess. For good measure, we've included an expert guide to getting deeper into the manliest beverage, beer.

Read on, gents, and then get in the kitchen.

Take Comfort I N Man Food

By Thomas Robey

Man food: The first image that comes to my mind is the fabled 48-oz. porterhouse that always seems to be offered in dining rooms with wagon-wheel chandeliers and waiters wearing cowboy boots and string ties. But for food to be “manly,” it doesn’t have to be gluttonous. It should be bold, either in its ingredients or flavor—hopefully both.

The most obvious kind of man food is the oldest: food men obtain with their own hands, by hunting or fishing. I deep-sea fish with a friend who keeps wasabi and sweet soy in his tackle box, and if we catch a tuna, it is enjoyed at its freshest, still flopping on the deck. How manly is that? Venison, wild turkey, striped bass and snapper grace many a manly table, usually accompanied not only by starch and vegetables but also by wildly embellished stories of how they made their way to the plate.

Smoke, whether from a grill or smoker, could be the most popular man-food flavor today. Who doesn’t have a childhood memory of their dad or uncle, decked out in some tacky apron, cold beer in hand, sweating over the summertime grill? At my restaurant, the smoker is constantly filled. We smoke pork shoulders to use for debris and boudin and loins for tasso, a cayenne-encrusted ham that works its way into many dishes. Salmon is brined in brown sugar and salt, smoked slowly, molded into cakes and then topped with capered goat cheese cream for brunch. Not even vegetables are spared: I’ve smoked cabernet-soaked red onions to top steaks or crimini mushrooms for a salad component. (That’s right, salads can be manly, too; you just have to put your mind to it!) If you’re making chicken stock for gumbo, run the bones through the smoker first. It’ll turn the finished product into man food for sure.

What else does man food mean to me? Certainly meat plays a big part. There’s nothing better when it’s cold outside than a beautifully braised lamb shank over white beans (and any dish that provides a bone you can throw over your shoulder when you’re done has to be considered manly). I love cooking with and eating “specialty” meats like pork cheeks, beef tongue, veal sweetbreads. Not only do they sound cool, but it also takes skill to turn these “scary” ingredients into something beautiful. Go find one of the taco trucks that frequent our fair city, and try the *menudo* or a *taco de lengua*. There’s nothing better. (You may want to wait till afterward to look up what’s in them.) Spice is also important to manly food. I make my own hot sauces for the Veranda and always have a few different ones on hand.

So gentlemen, go cook yourselves some man food. My braised lamb shank recipe is a good place to start: It’s got big hunks of meat and involves a smoker (though you can skip that step if you want).

Braised Lamb Shanks with Smoked Mushroom, Tasso and Sweet Potato Hash and Black Pepper-Fig Sauce

Ingredients

For the shanks:

- 4 (1-lb.) Colorado lamb shanks
- 2 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 2 large carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 large yellow onions, peeled and diced
- 1 bunch celery, washed, leaves removed and diced
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 4 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 cup red wine
- 5 sprigs thyme
- 5 sprigs rosemary
- 4 bay leaves
- Chicken or veal stock

For the sauce:

- 1 tsp. unsalted butter
- 1 large shallot, peeled and chopped
- 1 tbsp. fresh Rosemary, chopped
- 3/4 cup fig preserves
- 1/4 cup red wine

For the hash:

- 1 lb. crimini mushrooms, quartered
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and diced
- 1 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 large leek, washed and sliced thinly (white part only)
- 1 tsp. chopped garlic
- 8 oz. tasso or other good ham, diced
- 1 bunch green onions, sliced thinly

1 Preheat oven to 350°. Liberally season lamb shanks on all sides with salt and pepper. Place a pan large enough to hold all 4 shanks over medium-high heat and add oil. Sear shanks, turning to brown on all sides. Remove from pan and set aside. Add carrot, onion, celery and garlic to pan and sauté until beginning to caramelize. Add tomato paste and cook 3 minutes more. Deglaze pan with 1 cup red wine and add thyme, rosemary and bay leaves. Return shanks to pan and add enough stock to just cover. Bring to a simmer, cover, and transfer to the oven. Braise 2 1/2 to 3 hours or until shanks are tender and meat has pulled back from bone. Remove shanks and set aside. Strain the braising liquid into a saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook until reduced by half, skimming any grease that comes to the top. Measure 2 cups of reduced liquid and set aside.

2 Place a small saucepan over medium heat and add butter, shallot and rosemary. Cook until shallot turns translucent, about 2 minutes. Add fig preserves, 1/4 cup red wine, and reserved braising liquid. Simmer 5 minutes and puree until smooth using a stick blender. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and set aside.

3 If desired, smoke mushrooms in a smoker at low heat until tender. Set aside. Deep-fry sweet potatoes in a tabletop fryer until tender, drain on paper towels, and set aside. Melt butter in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add leek and garlic and cook until leek is translucent. Add tasso and reserved mushrooms, and cook 2 minutes more. Remove from heat, stir in green onion and reserved sweet potato, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

4 To serve, divide the hash among 4 large bowls. Place 1 lamb shank in each bowl and drizzle with sauce.



Veranda on Highland
Executive Chef Thomas
Robey was trained
at Johnson & Wales
University and worked
for New Orleans'
Commander Palace
for 18 years.



Geoff Lockert owns Trattoria Centrale along with Brian Somersfield. Trattoria Centrale opened under its original name, Zaza Trattoria, in June 2009.

How **T O** Cook for a Date

By Geoff Lockert

Pulling off an enjoyable and delicious home-cooked meal for a date is not as hard as it may seem. With the right recipe and a bit of preparation, you could impress even Julia Child. Keep in mind: I'm a restaurant owner, not Casanova. I am by no means providing advice on what to say, how to act or how to impress a woman in any sense other than the culinary. (Judging by my track record you would not want my advice.) But following my easy steps will ensure that when your date arrives, you will not look like a fool in the kitchen.

One thing I've learned through 10 years in the restaurant business is that cooking can get out of control very quickly. To at least appear cool, calm and collected when your date arrives, I recommend a recipe that has most of the prep work done ahead of time.

My spring ragu, a slow-simmered meat sauce, is perfect for this sort of situation. You want your place to look clean and smell good once your guest is in the kitchen; by preparing most of the meal beforehand, you'll have delicious aromas already permeating the kitchen, and mess will be limited. You can even make the sauce days ahead and toss it in the fridge if necessary, but then your house won't smell as tasty. Here are a few other suggestions to help avoid an awkward situation and ensure an enjoyable night:

Be sure to take into account your date's dietary restrictions. Imagine the nightmare of having to call 911 from the dinner table.

A glass of wine or a cocktail is of course a nice touch. Just don't get hammered.

A quick, easy dessert is always a plus, but be sure to keep it healthy. I think it's nice to end the meal on a light note. Since it's springtime, a sorbet with fresh strawberries would be perfect.

Buy all your ingredients a day or two before you need them; you're sure to forget something on the first trip.

Pork Ragu with Spring Vegetables

Ingredients

1 lb. ground pork
3 spring onions, diced
2 carrots, diced
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup fresh English peas (frozen is acceptable if necessary)
1/2 cup fresh fava beans (frozen is acceptable if necessary)
3 sprigs fresh tarragon, chopped
1/2 lb. dried rigatoni
Pecorino Romano cheese

1 Cook pork in a large saucepan over medium heat until no pink remains. Add onion and carrot, and cook until onion is translucent, about 5 minutes. Add white wine and cook for about 3 minutes. Add heavy cream, bring to a simmer and reduce heat to low. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until sauce has thickened but still flows freely, about 10 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat and refrigerate if not using immediately.

2 Bring a large pot of aggressively salted water to a boil over high heat. Add peas and favas, and cook 2 to 3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside. Return water to a boil, add pasta and cook following directions on package. Strain, and set aside. Bring about 2 cups of sauce to a simmer over medium heat in a skillet. If sauce is too thick, stir in a little water. Add tarragon and reserved peas, favas and pasta. Toss until everything is hot. Serve in bowls and top with grated pecorino Romano.



So now you can cook a big, manly hunk of meat and impress a date with your culinary prowess. It's time to up your beer game too. Beer geekery has been on the rise in Alabama ever since the Gourmet Beer Bill was signed into law in 2009. By effectively eliminating the legal cap on alcohol content in beer, the bill opened the state to a universe of brews it never had access to before.

And nobody is more responsible for this explosion in sudsy options than Danner Kline. He's one of the founders of Free the Hops, an organization that's been lobbying to change the state's restrictive laws about beer and breweries since 2004, and he currently works as craft manager for local distributor Birmingham Budweiser, which means he's responsible for selling all those fancy brews to stores, bars and restaurants.

With Kline's help, we've put together this easy guide to expanding your beer universe. No matter how long you've been devoted to your stalwart brand, these three steps will lead you to something new and delicious.

Bud Light to Beer Geek in 3 Easy Steps

By Jason Horn

STEP 1 Start with a craft lager.

The most popular beers in the United States—basically anything on the “domestic” section of the beer list or with the word “light” in its name—are all lagers, a beer style that ferments slowly at low temperature and can be stored for a long time without spoiling. These beers use little to no hops and thus have little to no flavor.

You don't want to jump into a heavy, bitter beer directly from one of these “macrobrews;” your tastebuds will be overwhelmed. Your best bet is a lager made by a small craft brewery. “These are a little bit heavier and have a little more hops, but only incrementally,” Kline says, “so you can start to get used to appreciating the flavors in your beer.”

Some great (but mild) craft lagers to start with are Bell's Lager Beer from Michigan, Yuengling Traditional Lager from Pennsylvania, Gordon Biersch Czech Style Pilsner from California and Rogue Irish Lager from Oregon.

STEP 2 Try other styles.

Now that you're comfortable with a bit more flavor, it's time to wade into the wider world of ales. Unlike lagers, ales ferment quickly, at higher temperatures, creating a much larger range of bitter, spicy and fruity flavors. There are also dozens, if not hundreds, of different styles and sub-styles. Kline says there are five main ones every beer drinker should at least try:

Pale ale. This is one of the most popular beer styles in the world. It's light in color thanks to the barley used being dried at low temperature so it doesn't caramelize. It typically contains quite a bit

of hops. India pale ale is so named because it was made with extra hops (they act as a preservative) for export from England to India. Two brews to try are California's Sierra Nevada Pale Ale and Good People IPA, made right here in Birmingham.

Brown ale. This surprisingly large category is held together by lightly toasted barley giving it a—surprise—brown color. Kline says there are two main types: English-style brown ales (not necessarily made in England) are milder and sweeter, while American-style are more aggressively flavored. Central Alabama is rich in great brown ales; two excellent examples are Back 40 Truck Stop Honey Brown from Gadsden (English-style) and Good People Brown (American-style).

Porter and stout. These are technically two different styles, but both are characterized by a very dark, almost black, color thanks to heavily caramelized barley. They have chocolate and coffee notes, but despite what many people think, they're not all heavy in body. For beginners, Kline recommends the famed Irish Guinness, which is actually one of the lightest-bodied stouts out there and Anchor Porter from California. Ready to go balls-to-the-wall? Try an imperial (that just means high-alcohol) stout like Old Rasputin Russian Imperial Stout from California or Great Divide Yeti from Colorado.

Wheat beer. Most beer is made using barley. Throw some wheat into the mix, and you get a malty, sweet brew. These beers are typically heavily carbonated and don't have very much hoppy bitterness. Hefeweizen and witbier are two very common types of this style. Blue Moon is perhaps the best-known wheat beer, but Kline calls it a cop-out. He says that in Birmingham you're better off going with Gordon Biersch Hefeweizen or Canada's Unibroue Blanche de Chambly.

Belgian beer. Over the last thousand years or so, Belgians have gotten really good at making beer. Belgian styles (which don't have to be made in Belgium) vary wildly, but what they share is the use of different yeast strains than most other beer. That gives them spicy, funky flavors that can put off some beginners. A good place to start is with Duvel, one of the most accessible Belgian beers, Kline says. Want to wade deeper? You'll need

some expert guidance. Proceed to step 3.

STEP 3 Go deep.

At this point, you'll have found that one or two of the above styles appeal to you the most. It's time to dive in and try more. Problem is, most beer menus and stores arrange their choices by brand instead of style, and most breweries give beer creative but non-descriptive names. (How are you supposed to know that Good People Snake Handler is an IPA and Fatso is a stout?) You need an expert.

In Birmingham, your first stop should be the J. Clyde. The Cobb Lane bar has probably the best selection in the state (well over 100 beers), on a multi-page menu that's arranged by style. The well-informed staff can also make you a great recommendation, and the place holds frequent beer dinners and other special events.

If you're looking for a new beer to drink at home, Kline says to head for a high-end grocery store—Whole Foods, Piggly Wiggly and the Western Supermarkets in Mountain Brook Village all have massive selections. Once there, look for the wine section. “Usually wine folks are knowledgeable about beer,” Kline says.

Now that you're a beer geek, get involved! Join Free the Hops (freethehops.org) to help its current cause of loosening restrictions on breweries and brewpubs in Alabama. Attend a tasting event like Magic City Brewfest at Sloss Furnaces in June, Rocket City Brewfest in Huntsville in May or Classic City Brew Fest in Athens, Ga., in April. And always keep your newly minted beer-geek radar attuned to new brews and special events in town. ●