

You don't have to live in the South to practice the tradition of Southern hospitality.



It's true that much of the South has grown and changed, but a warm welcome is a Southern tradition that remains. True Southern hostesses are always prepared with sweet tea and a "little something to eat" to offer their guests. This week's menu highlights some old Southern favorites with updated twists. The meal begins with Fried Chicken Breasts with Honey-Pecan Sauce. Fried chicken is about as Southern of a dining tradition as there is! This version features boneless chicken breast halves that are marinated overnight in buttermilk and hot sauce; battered and fried; and topped with a luscious sauce of honey, chopped pecans, and Creole mustard. The chicken is accompanied by spicy-hot Jalapeno Cheese Grits and an old-fashioned Iceberg Lettuce Salad topped with tomatoes and bacon and drizzled with blue cheese dressing. Sea Island Strawberry Bread with Strawberry butter is simply fabulous served on the side! Dessert is a scrumptious family favorite – Pina Colada Cream Pie. Ya'll enjoy, you hear!

### **Fried Chicken Breasts with Honey-Pecan Sauce**

For the Chicken:

8 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves  
2 cups buttermilk  
7 dashes hot sauce  
1-1/2 cups flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon black pepper  
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
Vegetable oil for frying

Place the chicken breasts in a large glass bowl. Combine the buttermilk and hot sauce and pour over the chicken. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Drain the chicken breasts and discard the marinade. Combine flour, salt, pepper, and cayenne pepper in a large bowl. Add the chicken breasts, one at a time, shaking to coat well. Set aside. Heat 3 inches of oil in a Dutch oven. Add several of the chicken breasts, being careful not to crowd them. Fry on one side for several minutes, until golden. Turn and fry on the other side. Cook until chicken breasts are completely cooked through. An instant-read thermometer will read 170 degrees when the chicken is done. Repeat the process until all chicken breasts are cooked. Keep chicken warm in a 200 degree oven while sauce is being prepared.

For the Honey-Pecan Sauce:

1-1/2 cups chopped pecans  
12 ounces honey  
3/4 cup Creole mustard  
2 teaspoons hot sauce

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and heat through. Place the chicken breasts on a serving

platter and drizzle with the sauce. Serves 8.

### Iceberg Lettuce Salad

3/4 cup mayonnaise  
1/2 cup sour cream  
1/4 cup buttermilk  
1 tablespoon cider vinegar  
1-1/2 teaspoons garlic powder  
Salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
6 ounces crumbled blue cheese  
1 large head iceberg lettuce, cored, and cut into 6 wedges  
1 large ripe tomato, diced  
6 strips of bacon, cooked, drained, and crumbled

Combine mayonnaise, sour cream, buttermilk, cider vinegar and garlic powder in a blender. Pour into a bowl, fold in blue cheese, and season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Place lettuce wedges on chilled salad plates and drizzle with the dressing. Top with diced tomato and crumbled bacon. Serves 6.

### Jalapeno Cheese Grits

2 (14 1/2-ounce) cans chicken broth  
1-3/4 cups uncooked quick-cooking grits  
1/2 cup butter  
1 onion, chopped  
2 jalapeno peppers, seeded and diced  
1 large sweet red pepper, chopped  
2 cups (8 ounces) shredded sharp Cheddar cheese  
2 cups (8 ounces) shredded Monterey Jack cheese  
4 large eggs, slightly beaten  
1/4 teaspoon salt

Bring broth to a boil in a large saucepan; stir in grits. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally for 5 minutes. Cover. Melt butter in a large skillet. Add onion and peppers and saute for 5 minutes or until tender. Stir in grits, Cheddar cheese, Monterey Jack cheese, eggs, and salt. Pour into a lightly greased 13x9-inch baking dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until set. Serve immediately. Serves 8 to 10.

### Sea Island Strawberry Bread with Strawberry Butter

For the bread:

2 cups sliced fresh strawberries  
2 cups sugar (plus extra for sprinkling)  
3 cups all-purpose flour  
1-1/2 tablespoons cinnamon  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1 cup vegetable oil  
4 large eggs, beaten  
1-1/4 cups chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour 2 (9x5-inch) loaf pans. Place the strawberries in a bowl; sprinkle with a little sugar and set aside (to draw out juices). In another bowl, combine sugar with the flour, cinnamon, salt, and baking soda. Mix well. Combine the oil and eggs with the strawberries, then stir them into the flour mixture. Add the pecans and stir until the dry ingredients are just moistened. Divide the batter between the prepared pans and bake for 50 to 60 minutes or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Let the bread cool completely in the pans on a wire rack. Serve with Strawberry Butter. Serves 16, 8 slices per loaf.

For the butter:

1 cup butter, softened  
1/2 cup strawberry preserves or jam  
Process butter and preserves in a food processor until well blended. Chill.

Pina Colada Cream Pie

1-1/3 cups shredded coconut  
3/4 cup sugar  
1/4 cup cornstarch  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
3 cups whole milk  
4 egg yolks, beaten  
4 tablespoons butter  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
2 tablespoons rum or 1 teaspoon rum flavoring  
Baked crust (Dough or Crumb) for 9-inch pie  
1 cup heavy cream, whipped

Toast coconut on a baking sheet 5-7 minutes in 350 degree oven, tossing frequently, until barely brown. Remove. Mix sugar, cornstarch and salt thoroughly. Gradually whisk in milk, then egg yolks. Mix thoroughly. In a heavy saucepan over medium heat, cook mixture, stirring constantly and vigorously so no lumps form, until it begins to boil. Reduce heat to simmer and continue to cook and stir 2 minutes. Remove from heat and immediately stir in butter, vanilla extract, rum, and toasted coconut. Stir until butter melts. Cover tightly with plastic wrap (to prevent a skin from forming on top of mixture) and let cool 15-20 minutes. Stir thoroughly again

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and pour into prepared pie shell. Chill at least 2 and up to 8 hours. When ready to serve, mound with whipped cream. Serves 6 to 8.

*The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is [www.cateringbydebbicovington.com](http://www.cateringbydebbicovington.com) . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at [debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com](mailto:debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com).*