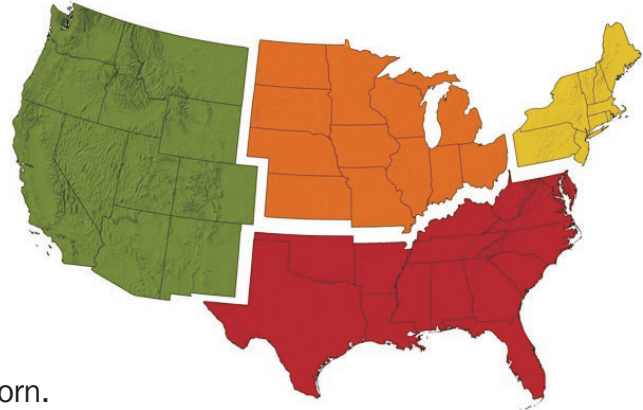


Southern Cuisine

SOUTHERN REGIONAL CUISINE developed through the blending of its residents' varied cultural backgrounds and the area's available food supplies. The South's soul foods and comfort foods are a result of multiple cultural influences: Native American, Spanish, English, African-American, and French. Throughout the inlands, agricultural products are plentiful, including vegetables, fruits, nuts, rice, and corn. Game, fish, and seafood are also abundant. Deer, rabbits, squirrels, birds, ducks, and freshwater fish are found in every state. Oysters, crab, shrimp, and saltwater fish can be found in the coastal states. Southern cuisine is home-style cooking at its very best.



Objective:



Summarize southern cuisine and its influences, common food ingredients, and classic dishes of the south.

Key Terms:



beignet	grits	pawpaw
buttermilk	hoppin' John	potlikker
cobbler	hush puppies	soul food
coleslaw	Lowcountry	southern cuisine
comfort food	Mardi Gras	sweet potato pie
divinity	meat n' three restaurant	sweet tea
greens	moon pie	

Southern Regional Cuisine

Southern cuisine is home-style cooking rooted in local ingredients, necessity, and frugality. The southern region of the United States stretches from Virginia to Texas. These states are home to a variety of unique foods, flavors, and some quintessentially American meals.

SOUTHERN CUISINE'S INFLUENCES

Many southern dishes are associated with comfort, because they are hearty and remind many people of their childhood. Despite being considered unhealthy (lots of fried foods), these dishes have become a large part of the cultural identity of the United States.

Soul and Comfort Foods

There are two common references to southern dining: soul food and comfort food. When eating these meals at a restaurant, you just might find a meat n' three buffet.

Soul Food

In an article found on The Spruce's website, 1960s cookbook (*Soul Food Cookbook*) author Bob Jeffries is quoted as saying, "While all soul food is southern food, not all southern food is soul. Soul food cooking is an example of how really good southern [African-American] cooks cooked with what they had available to them." (Source: The Spruce.)

Soul food is traditional African-American cuisine originating in the rural South. The staples of soul food are beans, greens, pork, and cornmeal (for cornbread, hush puppies, johnnycakes, and as a coating for fried fish). All parts of the pig are used in soul food cooking: pig ears, hog jowl, chitlins, pigs' feet, and ham hocks. Pork fat is used for frying other foods, such as slow-cooked greens. Sweet, cold drinks are also staples. These drinks are common in areas with a history of slave-based plantations, and they have maintained their popularity among black Americans and the Deep South.

The term "soul food" was never mentioned before the 1960s. In those years, the terms soul music, soul brothers and sisters, and soul food were coined. Sylvia Wood also opened her famous Harlem restaurant, *Sylvia's*, and is now known as the "queen of soul food." Soul food is currently the most popular regional cuisine of the South. (Source: The Spruce.)

Comfort Food

Comfort food is satisfying food that creates a feeling of well-being, and it typically contains high amounts of sugar or other carbohydrates. Comfort food is often associated with the childhood memories of mom's chicken soup, grandma's fried chicken, or dad's meatloaf. Comfort foods can be of an individual or cultural nature. Southern comfort foods include pot roast, fried chicken, chicken and biscuits, chicken-fried steak with red-eye gravy, skillet cornbread, buttermilk biscuits, macaroni (mac) and cheese, sweet potato casserole, banana pudding, peach pie, pound cake, and chocolate pie.

Meat n' Three

A **meat n' three restaurant** is often a cafeteria-style establishment in which you pick one meat (from a daily selection of three to six choices) and three sides (fixin's) from twelve or more choices. Meat n' three is closely tied to comfort food in the South. The meal is typically served with cornbread and sweet tea. Common meat choices include fried chicken, country

ham, country-fried steak, meatloaf, pork chops, or beef. Common side-dish choices include mac and cheese, gelatin, creamed corn, creamed spinach, greens, lima beans, or potatoes. Today, you don't have to be in the South to find these restaurants.

- ◆ *Brenda's Meat & Three* restaurant in San Francisco offers a traditional meat n' three with some Frisco flair. Choices include pepper-jelly-glazed pork belly, oyster dressing, and a kale and feta salad.
- ◆ In Chicago, *MacArthur's Restaurant* on West Madison Street offers a meat dish and two sides. Fried chicken, yams, and mashed potatoes and gravy are menu staples. Then, they can add a piece of red velvet cake. At *Bub City* on North Clark Street, the meat-and-three often includes a chopped brisket sandwich, cucumber and tomato salad, barbecue nachos, and mac and cheese. Then, a piece of peanut butter and chocolate pie can be added for \$3.00 more.

State by State Influences

The cuisine of the southern United States is historically derived from the states south of the Mason-Dixon line. This line divides Pennsylvania and Delaware from Maryland, follows the southern portion of the Ohio River (right above Kentucky), and then extends west to Oklahoma and Texas. Each southern state has a favorite recipe for fried chicken, as well as other local specialties.

- ◆ Alabama: Catfish (with Mississippi, provides the most in the United States), orange rolls, crab cakes, and tomato pie
- ◆ Arkansas: Riceland rice, sweet corn, fried catfish, pork barbecue, smoked ham, chocolate gravy, fried okra, and chicken (home of Tyson chicken)
- ◆ Florida: Key lime pie, swamp cabbage, orange juice, gator bites, and Floribbean cuisine
- ◆ Georgia: Peaches, pecans, peanuts, Vidalia onions, meat n' three, pralines, and home of Coca-Cola
- ◆ Kentucky: Burgoo, beer cheese, corn pudding, hot brown, bourbon, mint julep, Ale-8-One soft drink, chess pie, and derby pie
- ◆ Louisiana: Creole and Cajun cuisine, crawfish (the largest supplier in the United States), jambalaya, gumbo, étouffée, red beans and rice, po' boy sandwiches, beignets, King Cakes, hurricanes, and pralines
- ◆ Maryland: Blue and soft-shell crabs, crab cakes, and



FIGURE 1. A Kentucky Hot Brown is an open-faced sandwich with turkey, bacon, and Mornay sauce that is baked or broiled until crisp and brown. Some versions include pimientos.

Smith Island Cake (up to 15 layers of cake and fudge frosting), Old Bay seasoning (home of McCormick & Company), Smith Island cake

- ◆ Mississippi: Catfish (with Alabama, provides the most in the United States), soul food, crawfish, biscuits, black bottom pie, caramel cake, and mud pie
- ◆ North Carolina: Pork barbecue, fried green tomatoes, Krispy Kreme doughnuts, Cheerwine soft drinks, seafood, and shrimp n' grits
- ◆ Oklahoma: Root beer, grain and bean-based dishes, beans and cornbread, biscuits and gravy, chicken-fried steak, and Sonic (a.k.a. Sonic Drive-In)
- ◆ South Carolina: Rice dishes [Hoppin' John (Carolina peas and rice), Charleston red rice], oysters, sweet tea, grits, collards, and Blenheim ginger ale
- ◆ Tennessee: Memphis barbecue (several famous restaurants and a major barbecue cooking competition every May), country ham, dry ribs, whole hog barbecue, biscuits and gravy, greens, potlikker, Goo Goo Clusters, banana pudding, vinegar pie, and moon pies
- ◆ Texas: Barbecue, brisket, chili (chili con carne), queso, Gulf oysters, Tex-Mex food, Whataburger, and Frito pie
- ◆ Virginia: Smithfield ham, shrimp and grits, Brunswick stew, raw and baked oysters, peanut soup, and peanut pie
- ◆ West Virginia: Biscuits and gravy, beans and cornbread, morels, and the double-cut pork chop



FIGURE 2. A biscuit is a soft, leavened quick bread that is light and flaky. Southerners serve biscuits at breakfast, lunch, and dinner with many dishes.

African Influences

African traditions have had the most impact on the flavors and the methods of southern cooking. African-American women continued to hold dominion in southern kitchens after slavery ended. Culinary “Africanisms,” such as the use of smoked meats and fish as seasonings, the use of nuts as thickeners, and the use of okra to prepare soupy stews (often called gumbos), influenced the plantation’s culinary vocabulary. These dishes, along with fried chicken, call upon the West African art of frying. Fritters harken back to the African method of frying in deep oil. They also brought a range of nut soups that represent some of the best cooking in the south.

Other Influences

Aside from Africans, there were many other influences on southern regional cuisine.

- ◆ Native Americans taught European settlers to grow and cook corn, a vegetable unknown in Europe at the time.
- ◆ Spanish explorers brought pigs with them in the 1500s, introducing pork to the region.
- ◆ Creoles, known for their unique use of spices, are descended from French, Haitian, and Spanish settlers that intermingled in and around New Orleans.
- ◆ Cajuns, also recognized for their unique style of cooking, were originally Acadians, French settlers from Canada.
- ◆ Floribbean foods are influenced by Caribbean immigrants that moved to Florida (especially Cubans, followed by Puerto Ricans and Dominicans). Floribbean is a combination of Floridian and Caribbean.

Topographical Influences

Southern geography varies from east to west. Around the regional coastlines of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, seafood influenced cuisine offerings. Moving inland, more fertile soils allowed for the use of various crops. The South shares the Appalachian, Smokey, and Ozark Mountains (as well as numerous rivers and lakes) which provide the region with a variety of unique dishes. There are many branches of southern cuisine related to the region it is found. Creole, Cajun, Tex-Mex, Texas barbecue, North Carolina barbecue, Tidewater, Appalachian, Lowcountry, and Floribbean are all southern cuisines that are associated with their location and unique topographical areas.

Coastal Region

The **Lowcountry** is a geographical and cultural region along South Carolina's coast that includes the four counties of Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, and Jasper. Grits is a staple of Lowcountry cuisine. Besides the Lowcountry, the southern coastline includes the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida that share many of the same food resources as the central Gulf Coast: fish, shrimp, oysters, rice, and okra. It also displays some similarities to Creole and Cajun cuisines. In Virginia, the Tidewa-



FIGURE 3. The Lowcountry boil includes shrimp, corn on the cob, and red potatoes.

ter region extends down into the northeast corner of North Carolina. It is also known for seafood, peanuts, wine, and classic coastal cuisine.

Appalachian Mountain Region

Travel distances, forest conditions, and mountainous terrain limited the crops that early settlers could grow locally. For farmers, pigs and chickens were the primary source of meat. Many farmers maintained their own smokehouses to produce a variety of ham, bacon, and sausage. Seafood, beyond locally caught fish, was unavailable until modern times. Appalachia offered early settlers a wide variety of wild game, and venison and squirrel were particularly common. The necessity of hunting and fishing in Appalachia means that game and fish are often staples of the table. Because mountains are cooler and drier than the lowlands, apples, oats, and potatoes are also common to this region's cuisine. Butter was used extensively, but very little cheese was made. A variety of wild, lesser-known fruits (pawpaws, persimmons, and wild blackberries) were commonly available and used in cooking. A **pawpaw** is a fruit with a pungent aroma and a sweet taste—likened to a combination of an apple, a pineapple, and a banana.

Climatic Influences

Throughout the South, the climate is generally warm and sunny. Summers are usually hot, long, and humid. The areas along the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic coast often experience hurricanes from June through November. Winters in the South are typically short and mild. Snowfall and freezing temperatures generally occur in the northern or mountainous areas. The South usually enjoys a full, temperate spring and autumn.

Cultural Influences

In the South, no other form of cultural expression, not even music, is as distinctively characteristic of the region as a gathering comprised of kin, friends, and food. For as long as there has been a South, food has been central to the region's image, personality, and character. Most southerners are from Christian backgrounds, for whom the main holidays are Christmas and Easter. Ham is a typical main dish for Easter and Christmas. Thanksgiving and Catholic holidays are also celebrated with family gatherings.

The making of fruitcake for Christmas is a longstanding tradition throughout the world. The Claxton Bakery was in Georgia opened (with fruitcakes) in 1910. They sell more than 200 tons of the cake each year. In Texas, the Collin Street Bakery has been selling them since 1896—that's over 120 years!

A Catholic holiday that receives special treatment in the South is Mardi Gras. **Mardi Gras**, a.k.a. Fat Tuesday or Shrove Tuesday, is a carnival-like celebration (starting on the Catholic holiday of Epiphany and ending with a parade on the day before Ash Wednesday) that celebrates feasting before Lent begins. New Orleans is famous for this celebration, which lasts several days and involves parades, balls, music, and lots of food. One traditional element of the feast is the king cake, in which a small figurine is baked inside. Whoever gets the piece with the



DIGGING DEEPER...

UNCOVERING ADDITIONAL FACTS: Creole vs. Cajun Cuisine

The most well known cuisines from the Southern United States are Creole and Cajun cooking. Although they both come from the New Orleans area of Louisiana, they definitely involve different ways and methods of preparing foods. Research these two cuisines. Research and use a Venn diagram (two interlocking circles with similarities in the shared space and differences in the unconnected spaces). This is an easy way to compare and contrast similar items. What is shared? What is different?



figurine is crowned king or queen for the day, and that person is responsible for hosting next year's gathering with a king cake.

SOUTHERN INGREDIENTS AND CUISINE

As you have already learned, the South is made up of several states, and its borders run from Virginia to Texas. Each area has its own local cuisine, yet the entire region has some southern commonalities found throughout its various states. Meats, especially chicken and pork, are central in southern cuisine. Many favorite dishes from this region include country hams, pulled pork, sausage, and bacon. Pigs and chickens grew in popularity in the South because they are easy to raise and inexpensive to feed. This region's freshwater and seafood specialties include catfish and shellfish (especially shrimp and crawfish) found in riverbeds, creeks, ponds and the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. There are many common ingredients found throughout this region.

Spices and Herbs

Traditionally, spices were applied more liberally in warmer climates, both to enhance flavors and to disguise spoiled meats. The use of hot chili peppers is found throughout the South.

Barbecue

Barbecue is a classic example of the way terrain and food sources define each local area of the South. All regions affirm, by the multiple uses of pork and beef, the importance of meat in

southern barbecue. North Carolinians cook pork so long that it falls apart, and they commonly serve it shredded on hamburger buns. Tennesseans in Memphis almost exclusively use smoked pork. South-central Kentuckians serves slices of bone-in pork shoulder as barbecue. It is dipped in sauce and accompanied by white bread. Texans barbecue sausage links. Sometimes barbecue is not even pork. Many Texans and Arkansans barbecue beef brisket, and some Kentuckians feast on mutton barbecue.

Side Dishes

Side dishes are the coin of the realm in the South. Most southern dishes are accompanied by multiple side dishes.

Hush Puppies

Hush puppies are small, savory, deep-fried balls (similar to a fritter) made from a corn-meal-based batter. They are frequently served with seafood and other deep-fried foods.

Coleslaw

Coleslaw is a salad consisting primarily of finely-shredded raw cabbage and dressed with vinaigrette or mayonnaise.

Greens

Greens are any cabbages without a compact head (kale, collards, turnip, spinach, and mustard). Southerners love their greens. They are traditionally cooked by boiling them with a hunk of salt pork or a ham hock for a “long time,” or until the stems and leaves are soft. Greens are often served with cornbread dipped into the **potlikker** (a concentrated broth left over from boiled greens or beans). According to local lore, collards served with black-eyed peas and a hog jowl on New Year’s Day promise good luck and financial reward to the diner.

Grits

Grits are coarsely ground corn kernels boiled with water or milk. Unless grits are topped with something flavorful, they have a very bland taste. Grits originated in the southern United States, but are now available nationwide. Grits are often served as a side at dinnertime, especially when cheese is added, and they are often served with shrimp entrées. Grits can also be served at breakfast, where they are flavored with butter, sugar, or even syrup.

Hoppin’ John

Hoppin’ John (Carolina Peas and Rice) is a rich bean stew made of black-eyed peas simmered with spicy sausage, ham hocks or fatback, and rice. It is found across the South, but it is primarily associated with the Carolinas. Africans working in the rice plantations introduced the dish to the South. The dish has African, French, and Caribbean roots. A New Year’s Day tradition is to bury a dime within the black-eyed peas. If you find the dime, you are supposed to have good luck for the rest of the year. There are many theories about how the dish got its

unusual name. [NOTE: Southerners who serve hoppin' John the day after New Year's refer to the dish as skippin' Jenny.]

Desserts

The native fruits and vegetables of the South contributed to their dessert specialties.

Cobbler

A **cobbler** is a containing a fruit filling (or sometimes savory) that is poured into a large baking pan, where it is covered with batter, biscuits, or dumplings before baking. Some southern cobblers resemble a thick-crust, deep-dish pie with both a top and bottom crust. Common fruit fillings can include peach, apple, blackberry, and blueberry.

Sweet Potato Pie

A **sweet potato pie** is a custard-filled pie made with mashed sweet potatoes, milk, sugar, eggs, and spices (such as nutmeg). Other possible ingredients include vanilla or banana extracts. This traditional southern dessert is often served at Thanksgiving, and it is similar in appearance and taste to pumpkin pie.

Moon Pie

A **moon pie** is a chocolate-dipped snack cake composed of marshmallow cream sandwiched between two round graham cracker cookies. Moon pies were first created in Tennessee's Chattanooga Bakery in 1917 as a portable snack for miners, and they have become a permanent part of southern culture. The Chattanooga Bakery still makes moon pies today, more than 100 years later.



FIGURE 4. A New Year's Day tradition is to bury a dime within the black-eyed peas. If you find the dime, you are supposed to have good luck for the rest of the year. There are many theories about how the dish got its unusual name. One theory is about the pronunciation of the French words "pois pigeon." This is French for pigeon peas (black-eyed peas). The Caribbean servants would have spoken French. When said quickly, "pois pigeon" might have sounded like "oppin' john" to the southern ear.



FIGURE 5. The Chattanooga Bakery (in Chattanooga, Tennessee) created the moon pie snack for local miners in 1917. The traditional accompaniment to a moon pie is an ice-cold RC Cola.

Divinity

Divinity is sweet nougat candy made from stiffly-beaten egg whites, corn syrup, sugar, and pecans or dried fruit. It is often called white fudge or sea foam candy. Divinity has its roots in ancient Turkey, but the American version was created in the early twentieth century. Some tricks to making good divinity include using a candy thermometer and only making the confections on a dry day (recommended humidity level is less than 50%).

Beignet

A **beignet** is a square doughnut made from deep-fried choux pastry (or sometimes yeast dough). It is served immediately after deep-frying, and it is usually heavily coated with powdered sugar. New Orleans is famous for powder-sugar beignets.

Drinks

Southerners have provided the country (and world) with a few unique beverages.

Buttermilk

Buttermilk is the thin, slightly sour liquid left after churning butter from cream. It was once a popular drink in the South, because it kept longer than raw milk in the days before refrigeration. Therefore, it became a staple in southern kitchens. Buttermilk adds tenderness to the crumb of breads and cakes, and it provides leavening when combined with soda. Today, all U.S. buttermilk is made from regular, pasteurized milk. It is fermented with active cultures containing probiotics. Currently, buttermilk ranges in its level of fat, from skim to full-fat varieties. Southerners drink buttermilk in many ways, such as in a drink, smoothie, or a shake. It is also used a lot in cooking. Dishes made with buttermilk include: desserts (pies, pound cakes, or chocolate cakes); quick breads (biscuits, cornbread, muffins, or waffles); and in sauces (salad dressings, marinades, and brines).

Soft Drinks

Soft drinks are popular southern exports. The development of carbonated water (soda water) and glass bottles (combined with Prohibition) set the stage in the late 1800's for the popularity of these drinks. Different "sodas" included ginger ale, root beer (made from sassafras or sarsaparilla), and cola. Soft drinks are called by many names across the country, such as coke, pop, soda, or cola. In the South, "coke" is often a generic term for most soft drinks.



FIGURE 6. Some tricks to making divinity include using a candy thermometer and only making the confections on a dry day (recommended humidity level is less than 50%).

Many soft drinks originated in the South, where relief from summer heat and humidity were a constant desire.

- ◆ Coca-Cola, Atlanta, GA
- ◆ Barq's, Biloxi, MI (root beer, now part of Coca-Cola)
- ◆ Dr. Pepper, Waco, TX
- ◆ Pepsi Cola, New Bern, NC
- ◆ Mt. Dew, Knoxville, TN
- ◆ RC Cola (Royal Crown), Columbus, GA
- ◆ Multiple others, including Cheerwine (NC), Blenheim (SC), Grapico (AL), Dr. Enuf (TN), and Ale-8-One (KY)

Sweet Tea

Below the Mason-Dixon line, if you ask for tea, it usually comes sweet. **Sweet tea** is a non-alcoholic, sugary tea served cold. To make sweet tea, add sugar to the hot water in which bags of black tea are brewing. It is traditionally served ice-cold with lemon; however, raspberry, peach, or mint flavors are sometimes added. South Carolina was the first place in the United States with a tea crop. If you go to a restaurant in the South, they will probably have their own version of sweet tea.

Summary:



Southern cuisine is home-style cooking rooted in local ingredients, necessity, and frugality. The South is home to a variety of unique foods, flavors, and some quintessentially American meals. Comprised of soul food and comfort food, you can find your favorite fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, cornbread, or collard greens in this region. Despite being considered unhealthy (lots of fried foods), these dishes have become a large part of the cultural identity of the United States.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Describe the impact southern culture had on its cuisine.
2. Differentiate between soul food and comfort food in the South.
3. List five cuisines popular in the South.
4. Discuss the role side dishes play in southern menus.
5. Describe a meat n' three restaurant.

Expanding Your Knowledge:



The South is home to soul and comfort food. You can imitate this style of cooking, but you will probably never duplicate it perfectly. No one does it quite like Southerners do! Locate five restaurants around the United States that advertise as specialists in soul food or comfort food. Compare the menus at these restaurants to the traditional dishes of the South. How do they compare? What, if any, discrepancies did you find between traditional southern cooking and southern-style cooking? Write a summary of your findings.

Web Links:



Priscilla's Ultimate Soul Food in Chicago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5RnYC-S-AY>

Soul Food Restaurants Around the World

<http://madamenoire.com/536665/soul-food-restaurants/>

10 Great Places for Soul Food

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/destinations/10greatplaces/2013/10/31/soul-food-restaurants/3325747/>