

The South

The fashionable and classic publication “Southern Living” owes some of its popularity due to the fact that the editors realize that the American South is not a “one size fits all.” While reading through its monthly issues you soon become aware that the region has very distinct lifestyles that affect the way of life throughout the region. One of these prominent distinctions is Southern food. A blanket definition is all but impossible, though you could build a case that a good portion of [Southern cookery](#) is built on a foundation of pork, corn, beans, and greens. While many of the basic food ingredients are common, there is often no similarity how they are used and cooked.

[Southern cooking](#) is a unique blend of African, Spanish, Scots/Irish, French and Native American foods and cooking techniques. From the [Cajun and Creole](#) flavors of New Orleans to the down home tastes of soul food to the unique blend of rice and seafood from the [Low Country](#). Here is a profile of some of the separate areas and their food characteristics. (We are skipping the Gulf Coast, Cajun and Creole foods as they have been featured recently)

Appalachian Country



Southern MD, VA, West VA, and Eastern Kentucky below the grits line, the home of the “hillbilly.” The Northern sections of these states are not considered Southern.* Most of the food was grown or raised locally and it is one of the few areas in the South that depended on herbs to flavor their dishes.

Smoked hams and bacon, pork sausage, cream gravy, chicken and dumplings, greens, pinto beans, grits, corn bread, mush, hominy and wild animals. (iffin it moves it’s good eatin)

Low Country

Eastern North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia make up the Atlantic coastal area noted for its scenic mix of sandy beaches, marshlands and beautiful sea islands. The inland wetlands were the major source of rice

in America until the end of the 19th century. It is also renowned for seafood which is usually cooked in stews, soups and casseroles.

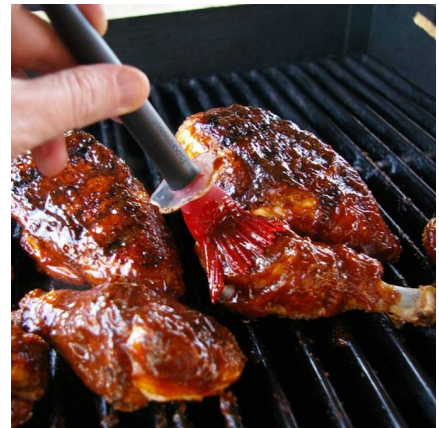
Fish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, rice, okra and beans make up the primary ingredients to cook the tasty dishes of hoppin john, Charleston red rice, she-crab soup, Brunswick stew, gumbo, Low Country boil, and shrimp and grits.

The Uplands and Hill Country

The central plains of North Carolina, South Carolina Georgia and Easton Tennessee rise up to form the Uplands from low hills to small mountains. This is where the standards of Southern cooking still prevail

Fried chicken, country ham, red eye gravy, smothered pork chops, pulled pork, field peas, collard greens, sweet potatoes, cornbread, biscuits, pecan pie, fruit cobbler and sweet tea.

This is as good a time as ever to discuss **Barbecue**. Aside from its succulent taste, delicious sauces and the smoky atmosphere of a barbecue pit, barbecue has become a universal icon, a symbol that is cherished by Southerners. Authentic barbecued meat or chicken is cooked indirectly from a cool smoke in a wood or charcoal oven or directly over, or aside, of the fire as a hot smoke. Barbecue recipe styles are divided into two categories, dry seasonings (rubs), sauces, or a combination of both. Sauces are used as marinades, mops (applied while cooking) and dips after cooking. Rubs are applied before cooking. The basic ingredients for a barbecue include vinegar, mustard, tomato sauces or catsup, hot sauces/peppers, sweetenings, herbs and spices.



There are endless variations according to the locale. Eastern Carolina uses a vinegar based sauce or a combination of vinegar and mustard, Central Carolina adds catsup to vinegar, while Western Carolina prefers a heavier tomato base. South Carolina uses a combination of tomato, vinegar, and mustard bases that are cooked for a long time before use.

Alabamans and Georgians like their barbecue covered with a sweet tomato sauce. Northern Alabama is known for its distinctive white sauce, a mayonnaise and vinegar concoction that is served at the table rather than cooked on the food. The addition of large amounts of extremely hot peppers to sauces is a relatively new trend and the devotees of tongue scorching heat, at the expense of flavor, have replaced the Colonel Blimps drinking ale in local English pubs, bragging how hot a curry they can eat.

Floribbean

Florida and Southeast Alabama represent the essence of "[Floribbean](#)" that it is heavily influenced by Caribbean cooking, fused with the American foods of the deep South and Gulf Coast cookery. There are two distinct styles, one dominated by Cuban food culture and the other following the cuisines of the Bahamas, Trinidad, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. Floribbean cooking uses less heat than the Caribbean dishes but there is extensive use of peppers. This spiciness, however, is almost always moderated by a more gentle flavorings such as mango, papaya, limes, rum, coconut, brown sugar and honey.

The basic ingredients of Floribbean food are chicken, seafood, rice, red or black beans, tropical spices, tropical fruits and fresh vegetables.

Cuban style dishes rely on pork as well as chicken.

Floribbean is a lighter version of Caribbean fare, with less oils and frying used in food preparation.

Deep South

Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Southern Tennessee are often referred to as the Deep South where Soul Food was born and raised. Soul food preparation is characterized by deep frying, usually in lard, fatty meat for flavoring beans and vegetables, large amounts of salt and above all an excessive cooking time. It is best described as the source for "finger lick'n good."

The classic and delicious foods are fried chicken, chicken fried steak, fried catfish, beans, greens, yams, fried green tomatoes pulled pork and pork byproducts like chitterlings (pork intestines), ham hocks, pigs feet and salt pork/fatback.

Nowadays, soul food is considered one of the unhealthiest diets on the planet and there have been serious but tasty revisions. Deep frying has been replaced by oven fried or lightly sauteed cooking. Chitterlings have given way to fried pork rinds with the blessings of cardiologists. String beans and greens have gained their nutrients and flavors back by



reducing cooking time from hours to minutes, using stir frying methods. Dried beans are flavored with less fatty meats and salt has been reduced by adding spices and herbs. (There is no substitute for cooking chicken fried steak smothered with cream gravy, so why bother and just enjoy it while you can).

Well, there it is, a summary of [fine eating South of the Mason-Dixon Line](#) and a great opportunity to test our culinary skills. Don't forget to use some of this month's featured herbs.

Y'all come back soon, hear... An bring the childr'n

Bob Hall

My Ode To Grits

When my mind's unsettled
and I don't feel spruce
When my nerves gets frazzled
and my flesh gets loose
What knits me back together is grits
Grits, grits, grits I sing
Grits fits in with ever'thing

**Take, for example, the famous beaten biscuits, which are more like tooth breaking hardtack compared to the soft-as-a-cloud ones further south. The locally popular Maryland fried chicken is overwhelmed with a thick coating of batter rather than a lightly seasoned flour coating that lets the chicken flavor dominate.*