

# Herbs Make Scents

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**William (Bill)  
Varney**  
South Central District  
Delegate  
The Herb Society of  
America



This month's member spotlight falls on Bill Varney, business member of The Herb Society of America, who attended our September Zoom meeting. Afterwards he sent me photos of the lemon herb inspired dinner he prepared that night along with kind words about our presentation. Bill is currently serving on the national Board of Directors as our very own South Central District Member Delegate. Happily, he has agreed to apply for a second term which will begin in summer of 2021 for another 3 years. His enthusiasm regarding herbs is contagious.

See the results of Bill's over 35 years of passionate herb gardening at [www.URBANherbal.com](http://www.URBANherbal.com)

Treat yourself to the video presentation on his website to see the wide variety of herbal plants, products, education, and enjoyment he provides to visitors. His finely tuned creative use of herbs for culinary delights and personal care products is phenomenal. Bill donated several door prizes from URBANherbal at the Zoom South Central District Meeting. He also shared a handout of "Recipes from South of the Border." (See next page.)



**Bill's Lemon Herb Inspired Dinner**

When visiting in Fredericksburg Tuesday through Saturday, you can wander around the numerous themed gardens at URBANherbal: Bird Girl, Flower, Italian, Children's, Fragrance, Labyrinth, Medicinal, Mexican, Secret, Working and Sculpture. Then visit the Art Gallery, Boutique Gallery and Gift Shop. His brochure proclaims the experience as "Hill Country Therapy . . . A natural antidote to the routine." All that plus a chicken coop & gazebo – Wow! Introduce yourself to Bill as a member of The Society and thank him for all he is doing for us! ---**Susan Wood**



## Recipes from South of the Border

provided by William Varney  
[www.URBANherbal.com](http://www.URBANherbal.com)

### Tilapia (or fish of your choice) with Con Culantro y Achiote with Onions, Yucca, and Sweet Pepper

2-4 Tilapia fish or fish of your choice  
½ white or yellow onion, diced  
1 clove garlic, peeled and pressed  
3 to 4 medium tomatoes, diced  
½ red bell pepper, diced  
Juice of one lime and zest  
½ tsp. curry powder  
2 potatoes, diced

1 chunk of yucca, sliced  
½ plantain, sliced  
2 tablespoons minced cilantro  
1 packet of Con Culantro y Achiote seasoning  
1 tablespoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
½ cup fish stock  
Coarse Kosher Sea Salt to taste  
Fresh Cracked Black Pepper to taste

Turn the oven on to 400 degrees. In a sauce pan, add the olive oil, then simmer the onions, then after 5 minutes add all the other ingredients, except the fish. Continue sautéing until the vegetables are tender. Next in a baking dish, drizzle a little olive oil, then place the fish down and dish the sautéed veggies over the top and around the fish. Place under the broiler in the oven, just long enough to cook one side, carefully turn the fish over and broil on the other side.

Serve with the Arroz Amarillo (Yellow Rice) and the veggies.

### Roasted Boniatos (Latin type of Potato)

3 Boniatos, peeled and sliced  
1 teaspoon turmeric  
½ teaspoon cumin  
1 teaspoon rosemary, finely minced  
2 tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
Kosher Sea Salt to taste  
Fresh Ground Black Pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Peel the boniatos, and cut into ½ inch cubes. Mix in a large bowl with olive oil, spices, salt and pepper. Spread out onto a cookie sheet. (I put down aluminum foil for quick clean up). Bake at 400 degrees for about 30 minutes total, stirring every 10 minutes so they don't stick to the sheet. Remove them once you can easily insert a fork all the way through.



## **Fried Plantains**

1 plantain, peeled and sliced  
Vegetable Oil for frying or air frying  
Coarse Kosher Sea Salt to taste

Using a small pot, fill half with water and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, add the plantains and boil and reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Drain them well. Then either using your skillet or your air fryer, lightly fry the slices. Remove them and place on paper towels and then flatten with the bottom of a glass or a bottle. Fry them again and sprinkle with a little salt. Drain and pat dry and serve hot.

## **Roasted Yucca with Herbs**

1 fresh Yucca Root, peeled	1 teaspoon Onion powder
1 tablespoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil	2 Garlic cloves, finely minced
1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, minced	1 teaspoon Ground Cumin
1 teaspoon Mexican Oregano, finely minced	Kosher Sea Salt to taste
1 tablespoon fresh Parsley, minced	Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste
2 tablespoons fresh Mexican Mint Marigold, finely minced	1 fresh lime, sliced for serving

In a large pot of salted water, cook yucca until almost tender, about 15 minutes; drain and set aside. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

In a medium bowl, combine olive oil, cilantro or oregano, parsley, onion powder, garlic powder, ground cumin, salt and pepper. Add yucca and toss to coat.

Arrange yucca in a single layer in a lightly greased baking dish, bake until tender and starts to brown, about 30 to 40 minutes.

Sprinkle with lime juice, toss, and serve. Leave the lime slices in the yucca.

## **Mango and Jicama Salad**

1 Fresh Mango, peeled, sliced and diced	½ cup fresh cilantro leaves, minced
1 medium Jicama, peeled and diced	Pinch of Chili Powder
1/3 cup herb vinegar, your choice	Kosher Sea Salt to taste
1/3 cup local honey	Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste
1 lime, zested and juiced	

Mix the mango and jicama in a medium size bowl. Blend in all of the other ingredients and toss. Refrigerate for a few hours or overnight, and toss again before serving. Serve chilled.



## Some of Bill Varney's Favorite Soups

Soups are always popular when the temperatures start to cool off! **Susan Wood** asked, and Bill sent along some of his favorite soups for us to enjoy!



### Pumpkin & Carrot Soup

Makes about 2 quarts

**For the soup:**

- 4 cups of cooked, pureed pumpkin
- 3 cups cooked, pureed carrots
- 1 tsp. fresh grated ginger
- Olive Oil
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon thyme leaves, minced

- 2 cups of heavy whipping cream
- 3 T. butter
- 1 ½ T. brown sugar
- 1 ½ tsp. smoked paprika
- Salt & Pepper to taste

Combine the pumpkin, carrots, and heavy cream in a blender. Blend well. In a large saucepan add the blender contents, and then add the other ingredients, one at a time. Stir well, bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and let simmer for 15 minutes. Serve in small bowls and garnish with sour cream and fried leeks.

### French Onion Soup with Rosemary & Thyme

Ingredients:

- 6 large onions-julienne
- 2 cloves of minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1 cup dry sherry
- 1/4 cup brandy
- 1 quart chicken stock
- 2 quarts beef stock
- 2 TBSP flour
- white pepper
- kosher salt
- 3 sprigs fresh rosemary(finely minced)
- 2 sprigs of thyme( with stems removed)
- 2 Bay Leaves
- 8 TBSP. unsalted butter
- 1 TBSP. Worcestershire sauce
- Swiss cheese or Dofina Fontina
- Crackers or bread slices

Melt butter in large soup pot and sauté onions and garlic until golden brown. Add white wine, flour, mustard and brandy. After it thickens add beef stock, chicken stock, rosemary, thyme and bay leaves. Add Worcestershire sauce, and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 25 minutes. Then put in bowls, add a homemade toasted cracker or bread slice on top of the bowl of soup, and a slice of cheese, and broil in the oven for 2 to 5 minutes until the cheese is melted over the toasted bread slice and serve.



## Ribolitta Soup

Here is the recipe for the Ribolitta soup, I was so excited to to learn how to pronounce it on Friday!

A Tuscan, Italian Soup called Ribolitta (which means reboiled cabbage soup)

### Ingredients:

4 cloves of garlic, minced	1/2 cup olive oil
5 sage leaves, minced	2 cups of dry cannellini beans (you can use great northern beans )
3 bay leaves	4 cups of water
1 sprig of rosemary, minced	32 ounces of chicken broth (plus I cooked in 2 chicken breasts minced )
1 onion, peeled and chopped	a pinch of salt
2 carrots, peeled and chopped	14.5 ounce can of diced tomatoes
3 stalks of celery, chopped	fresh ground black pepper to taste
1/2 head of cabbage, coarsley chopped	10 - 15 slices of toasted Italian bread, cut up
1 bunch of swiss chard, chopped	1 cup of fresh grated Parmesan Cheese
2 potatoes, peeled and chopped	Olive oil to drizzle
1 bunch of kale, chopped	

### Preparation:

1. Rinse the beans and put them in a large pot with the water. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes. Turn off the heat and let stand for 1 hour. Then drain the water off. Set the beans aside.
2. Put the chicken broth and minced chicken, garlic, sage, garlic, bay leaves and salt in a large pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer for about an hour. Cool.
3. Heat the olive oil in a skillet and add the onions, cook until transparent. Combine the carrots, potatoes, cabbage, chard, and kale. Add the rosemary. Then add the tomatoes. Cook for until all the greens have wilted.
4. Then add the beans and the onion mixture in the large pot, and cook for about 45 minutes. Add a little more salt and pepper to taste. Add the toasted bread slices and cook for about 15 minutes.. Cool and refrigerate. It tastes better is you can refrigerate for at least 2 to 3 hours or overnight.
5. Reheat the soup for 25 minutes. Serve in bowls with the grated Parmesan Cheese and drizzled olive oil on top.



## **Butternut Squash Soup**

6 tablespoons unsalted butter  
1 small onion, minced  
6 green onions, chopped with green tops  
2 medium potatoes, peeled and sliced  
2 carrots, peeled and sliced  
2 pounds of butternut squash, seeded and cut into 1 inch cubes  
1 teaspoon fresh thyme  
3 tablespoons flour  
2 quarts chicken stock or broth  
Salt & Pepper to taste  
¼ teaspoon Red cayenne Pepper  
1 Cup Heavy Whipping Cream  
¼ teaspoon Nutmeg  
A pinch of Paprika

In a heavy saucepan, melt the butter. Add the onion & green onions and saute until transparent, about 5 minutes. Add the potatoes, carrots, squash and thyme and stir to coat with butter. Add the flour and stir well. Cook over medium heat for 5 minutes, stirring. Slowly stir in the chicken stock. Season with salt, pepper and cayenne. Cover and cook for about 45 minutes. Puree the soup in a blender in small batches. Return the pureed soup to the pot on the stove. Stir in the cream. Season more is needed. Cook for about 10 minutes. Stir in the nutmeg. Ladle soup and garnish with paprika.  
Makes 8 to 10 servings.

[www.URBANherbal.com](http://www.URBANherbal.com)



## IT'S FALL Y'ALL . . .

...and pumpkin spice is in the air! As our Zone 9 warm weather herbs fade into their final cycle, cool weather seedlings of cilantro, fennel, parsley, sage and the mints plus others begin showing up at plant sales, garden centers and grocery stores. Fresh stems of herbs can be found in produce sections of many of our markets conveniently packaged for culinary use. Along with the cooler fall weather *spices*--defined as the dried seeds, buds, fruit or flower parts, bark and roots—move to center stage in seasonal dishes and recipes heralding the upcoming holiday seasons we all love and look forward to, maybe especially so this year. Since Labor Day we've all seen "pumpkin spiced" foods, beverages and recipes promoted in print ads and on the internet. For a homemade pumpkin spice recipe cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves and allspice are

mixed in amounts determined by the maker. Two popular recipes found on the internet are by Martha Stewart and The Pioneer Woman. Both have the same measurements for the first two ingredients, cinnamon and ginger, but vary after that. Links to both recipes, each which make about ¼ cup mixture, may be found below. Enjoy!

**Many thanks** to all of you who sent in such great recipes, you are appreciated! For November the Recipe Lady is looking forward to receiving Thanksgiving and harvest recipes. For your convenience you may email them to [therecipeladycollection@gmail.com](mailto:therecipeladycollection@gmail.com). For those of you who prefer to use mail or call me, my contact information is in the directory. And did you know you can photograph your recipe with your phone and email it! Don't be shy. *Carolyn Kosclskey*

[www.marthastewart.com/1162252/pumpkin-pie-spice](http://www.marthastewart.com/1162252/pumpkin-pie-spice)

[www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a78588/how-to-make-pumpkin-pie-spice/](http://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a78588/how-to-make-pumpkin-pie-spice/)

## CARROT AND AVOCADO SALAD WITH CRUNCHY SEEDS

Tara Parker Pope, NYTimes

### FOR THE SALAD

- 1 tablespoon sunflower seeds
- 1 tablespoon pumpkin seeds
- 1 tablespoon white sesame seeds
- Cumin and Citrus Roasted Carrots
- 1 avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and cut into thin wedges
- 4 cups sprouts, preferably a mix of radish and beet
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon sour cream

### CUMIN AND CITRUS ROASTED CARROTS

- 1 pound medium carrots, peeled
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red chili flakes



Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste  
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar  
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 ½ oranges  
2 lemons, halved

TO PREPARE THE CARROTS Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bring a wide pot of water to a boil. Add the carrots and cook until a knife pierces them easily, about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, in a mortar and pestle, crush the garlic, cumin, thyme, chili, 1 ½ teaspoons salt, and ¾ teaspoon pepper until crushed and pasty. Add the vinegar and ¼ cup of the oil and continue pounding until well mixed. Alternatively, pulse in a food processor or blender until pasty. Drain the carrots and arrange in a medium roasting pan in a single layer. Spoon the cumin mixture over. Cut the whole orange in half and arrange the halves and 2 of the lemon halves over the carrots, cut sides down. Roast for 25 minutes, or until the carrots are golden brown and transfer carrots to a platter. When cool enough to handle, squeeze 2 tablespoons juice each from the roasted orange and lemon into a small bowl. Squeeze in 2 tablespoons orange juice from the remaining orange half as well as 2 tablespoons lemon juice from the remaining lemon. Whisk in the remaining 2 tablespoons oil to emulsify. Season with salt and pepper and drizzle over the carrots.

TO MAKE THE SALAD Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread the sunflower, pumpkin and sesame seeds in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake, stirring occasionally, until lightly toasted and golden, but not golden brown, about 7 minutes. Cool completely. Arrange the carrots on a serving platter, reserving the accompanying sauce. Put the avocado and then the sprouts on top. Drizzle with the reserved sauce. Dollop the sour cream over the top, then sprinkle with the seeds. Garnish with edible flowers if desired. Serve immediately.

*From the files of **Cynthia Card***

## **PUMPKIN SEED DUKKAH** from Martha Rose Shulman, NYTimes

Dukkah, a traditional Egyptian spice blend, is great sprinkled on rice bowls, salads, roasted meats or fish, on pita bread with a little olive oil or just as a snack. Trust me, you will want to double (or triple!) this recipe.

### Ingredients

1/2 cup hulled pumpkin seeds  
2 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds  
2 tablespoons coriander seeds  
1 tablespoon cumin seeds  
2 teaspoons nigella seeds  
1 teaspoon mild chili powder or Aleppo pepper  
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt or coarse sea salt (or to taste)

Heat a medium skillet over medium-high heat and add the pumpkin seeds. Toast, shaking the pan or stirring seeds, until they pop. Remove from the skillet and allow to cool completely in a bowl. Turn the heat to medium and toast the sesame seeds, then the coriander seeds, then the cumin seeds, toasting just until fragrant and removing as soon as they are toasted. Allow all of the seeds to cool completely. Grind half the pumpkin seeds and all of the sesame seeds briefly in a spice mill and add to the bowl with the remaining





pumpkin seeds. When the coriander and cumin have cooled, grind to a powder and add to the pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds. Add the nigella seeds, chili powder and salt and mix together. Transfer to a jar and keep for up to a month in the freezer. Makes about 1 cup

*From the files of **Cynthia Card***

### SAVORY PUMPKIN QUICHE

[www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/savory-pumpkin-quiche](http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/savory-pumpkin-quiche)

3 large eggs  
1 can (15 ounces) solid-pack pumpkin  
1 can (5 ounces) evaporated milk  
½ pound bacon strips, cooked and crumbled  
½ cup/39 grams sliced fresh mushrooms  
¼ cup/35.5 grams finely chopped onion  
¼ cup/35.5 grams finely chopped green pepper  
½ cup/50 grams grated Parmesan cheese  
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour  
1 frozen deep-dish pie crust

Preheat oven to 375° F. In a large bowl, whisk eggs, pumpkin and milk until blended. Stir in bacon, mushrooms, onion and pepper. Toss cheese with flour; stir into egg mixture. Pour into pie crust. Bake on a lower oven rack 50-60 minutes or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Let cool 15 minutes before cutting. Serves 8.

### SPICED PUMPKIN BISCUITS

9 ounce/255 grams all-purpose flour (about 2 cups)  
2 ½ teaspoons baking powder  
1 ¼ teaspoons pumpkin pie spice  
½ teaspoon salt  
5 tablespoons chilled butter, cut into small pieces  
1/3 cup fat-free buttermilk  
¾ cup canned pumpkin  
3 tablespoons honey

Preheat oven to 400° F. Weigh or lightly spoon flour into dry measuring cups and level with a knife. Combine flour, baking powder, pumpkin pie spice, and salt in a large bowl; cut in butter with a pastry blender or 2 knives until mixture resembles coarse meal. Chill 10 minutes. Combine buttermilk and honey, stirring with a whisk until well blended; add canned pumpkin. Add buttermilk mixture to flour mixture; stir just until moist. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface; knead lightly 4 times. Roll dough into a (½-inch-thick) 9 x 5-inch rectangle; dust top of dough with flour. Fold dough crosswise into thirds (as if folding a piece of paper to fit into an envelope). Reroll dough into a (½-inch-thick) 9 x 5-inch rectangle; dust top of dough with flour. Fold dough crosswise into thirds; gently roll or pat to a ¾ -inch thickness. Cut dough with a 1 ¾ -inch biscuit cutter to form 14 dough rounds. Place dough rounds 1 inch apart on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake at 400° for 14 minutes or until golden. Remove from pan and cool 2 minutes on wire racks. Serve warm.

*From the files of **Donna Adair***



## **PUMPKIN-CRANBERRY MUFFINS**

1 ½ cups/180 grams all-purpose flour (about 6-¾ ounces)  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
¾ teaspoon ground ginger  
½ teaspoon baking powder  
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon salt  
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves  
1 cup/198 grams granulated sugar  
1 cup/227 grams canned pumpkin  
½ cup/113.5 grams low-fat buttermilk  
¼ cup/53 grams packed light brown sugar  
2 tablespoons canola oil  
1 large egg  
2/3 cup/76 grams sweetened dried cranberries (such as Craisins), chopped  
Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 375° F. Lightly spoon flour into dry measuring cups; level with a knife. Combine flour, baking soda, and next 5 ingredients (through cloves); stir well with a whisk. Combine granulated sugar and next 5 ingredients (through egg) in a large bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until well blended (about 3 minutes). Add flour mixture to sugar mixture; beat at low speed just until combined. Fold in cranberries. Place 12 paper muffin cup liners in muffin cups; coat liners with cooking spray. Spoon batter into prepared cups. Bake at 375° for 25 minutes or until muffins spring back when touched lightly in center. Remove muffins from pan immediately and place on a wire rack. Recipe doubles easily.

*From the files of **Donna Adair***

## **PUMPKIN COOKIE DOUGH DIP**

½ cup/113 grams butter, room temperature  
¾ cup/160 grams light brown sugar, packed  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
½ teaspoon nutmeg  
1/8 teaspoon cloves  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
1 cup/227 grams 100% pumpkin puree (not pie mix)  
2 cups/240 grams all purpose flour  
¾ cup/127.5 grams mini chocolate chips

Cream together the butter and brown sugar until light and fluffy, about two minutes. Add in the cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and vanilla one at a time until combined. Add in the pumpkin puree until fully combined. Slowly add the flour a little at a time with the mixer going. Stir in the chocolate chips and serve at room temperature. Use graham crackers or shortbread cookies for dipping.

*From the files of **Yvette Darnell***



## PUMPKIN PIE

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 ½ cup pumpkin (best if homemade)
- 1 2/3 cup evaporated milk (best if full fat/sugar)
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp nutmeg (all best if fresh—do not use “pumpkin pie spice” mix!)
- ½ tsp ginger
- ½ tsp allspice
- ½ tsp cloves
- 9-inch pie shell

Combine all until smooth. Place in pie shell. Bake in hot oven 450oF for 15 Minutes, then lower to 350oF and continue baking about 35 minutes, or until custard is firm. Top with real whipped cream. Makes one single-crust pie.

*From the files of **Janice Dana***

**Homemade Pumpkin Puree Recipe** <https://www.thepioneerwoman.com/food-cooking/recipes/a11184/make-your-own-pumpkin-puree/>

**Spooktacular Halloween Herbs!** <https://herbsocietyblog.wordpress.com/2016/10/25/spooktacular-herbs-for-halloween/>





## FINDING COMFORT IN THE KITCHEN - FOOD, SECURITY, AND LOVE

Karen Cottingham

*It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it... and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied... and it is all one.*

— M.F.K. Fisher, [The Art of Eating](#)



All paintings above by [Jessie Willcox Smith](#), 1863 - 1935.  
American illustrator of magazines and children's books

As **Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher** so eloquently observes, we all hunger for the overlapping necessities of food, security, and love. At one level, our physical hunger for food is a simple need for physiological fuel; at another, our emotional hunger articulates a primal need for security and belonging.



We intuitively - although imperfectly - seek out food that satisfies our emotional needs. Sometimes we choose otherwise “healthy” food, but all too frequently, we don’t, as is so sadly indicated by our growing obesity epidemic.

We use food to bond with others, to celebrate our accomplishments, to soothe our fears and heartbreaks, and to relieve boredom. We feel secure when food is reliably on the table; whether it’s been prepared by ourselves or by someone we love. Above all, we give and receive love by sharing our food. The “secret ingredients” that make Mother’s chicken soup so psychologically nourishing are love and concern.

There is no doubt that food is emotionally powerful, as illustrated in the images above. Created in the 1920s for the covers of Good Housekeeping Magazine, Smith’s paintings capture the deep connection between nourishing food and happy families. Even today, these images have the power to arouse warm feelings and perhaps even a longing for simpler times. In our own more tumultuous world, we consciously look to food as an anchor in the storm. Since 9/11, there has been a steady increase in comfort food internet searches and consumer products, with another enormous surge during the current pandemic.



In times of uncertainty or disruption of our normal routines, we naturally do what we can to recreate safety and stability. For many of us, especially in the midst of COVID, this takes the form of indulging in a favorite childhood meal or snack - the most common “comfort foods.” And with increased anxiety and time spent at home, there’s been a revival in “cooking from scratch,” especially breads. Keeping this in mind, the topic selected for Episode 3 of **Pearls for the Pandemic** is *Comfort Food from Your Herb Garden - Herbal Harvest Soups and Breads*. **Join us on October 21** for a comforting hour of sharing our own versions of COVID comfort foods.



The phrase “comfort food” has been in use since 1966, when the *Palm Beach Post* used it in a story on obesity: “Adults, when under severe emotional stress, turn to what could be called ‘comfort food’—food associated with the security of childhood, like mother’s poached egg or famous chicken soup.”

By recreating our earlier feelings of contentment and security, certain foods help us feel more comfortable emotionally. Specific comfort foods, which reflect each person’s unique experiences, are highly variable. It may be ice cream for one person and spaghetti or sugary cereal for another. Foods that are considered comforting also reflect the traditional foods of various cultures, such as pasta in Italy, paella in Spain and fish and chips in the UK. The Indonesian concept of comfort food is particularly lovely - *masakan rumahan* (home cooking) or *masakan ibu* (mother’s dishes) - and includes traditional dishes such as noodles and soups. My personal comfort food is rhubarb pie - surely not a popular choice, but rooted in the warm, cozy hours that I spent in my Norwegian grandmother’s kitchen.



Regardless of our ethnic background or particular life stories, I think we can all recognize the power of food to lift the spirits. See how this poignant description of a table laden with comfort food makes you feel:

*Mashed potatoes floating in butter, green beans from the garden swimming in pork fat, chicken fried to crispy perfection, a simple salad with iceberg lettuce, tomato and French dressing. Sweet iced tea in a clear glass decorated with yellow lemons. After I ate the meal, my grandmother brought out my favorite desserts: rice pudding with perfect peaks of toasted meringue or blackberry cobbler with ice cream. A perfect meal for a tired single mother, a lost job, another failed relationship, loneliness. (Crystal Wilkenson, <https://emergencemagazine.org/story/praise-song-for-the-kitchen-ghosts/>).*

Calories alone could never satisfy this kind of hunger - the hunger for consolation, for connection, and for familial love, forgiveness, and concern. As Wilkenson explains, her grandmother “equated food with love, and she cooked with both a fury and a quiet joy.” The home-cooked meal conveyed what words could not - that “you are home now and everything will be alright.”

Wilkenson’s words bring us right into her grandmother’s kitchen to observe her approach to cooking - “Every morning of my childhood, my grandmother, who stood a little under five feet tall, donned an apron and cooked breakfast. Slow. Precise. Deliberate.”

How many of us prepare our meals this way - slowly, precisely, and deliberately? Or are you distracted, rushed, and ruminating over what went wrong that day?

Preparing meals doesn’t have to be like this. If “slowly, precisely, and deliberately” appeals to you, consider cooking as an opportunity to practice mindfulness. By adopting this practice in your everyday kitchen activities, you may find yourself calmer, happier, and more focussed.

Here is a brief description of mindful cooking, or as some call it, therapeutic cooking:

*Whether you’re chopping, slicing, whipping, marinating, or kneading, the art of mindful cooking presents the opportunity to anchor the mind and focus attention on the senses, tuning them in to the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the culinary task at hand. In applying attention to the details of what you are doing, you will likely discover an increased calm and clarity in the kitchen.*

<https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness/mindful-cooking>

Even dishwashing can be considered a form of mindfulness meditation. Slow. Precise. Deliberate.



A Good Housekeeping Magazine cover by Jessie Willcox Smith



Cooking mindfully means to slow down and focus on the process of transforming ingredients into flavorful, nourishing food. Rejoin the non-digital world and really pay attention to the taste, touch, smell, and sound of preparing food. How long has it been since you took pleasure in chopping vegetables? Or since you really concentrated on the nuances of seasoning or the complex aroma of simmering soup? When you cook with this degree of intention and awareness, engaging your full mental and physical attention, it is surprisingly easy to abandon your worries and distractions. By cooking mindfully, you might even discover a new calmness and contentment; you might find your own “comfort in the kitchen”.

Mental health professionals are now using cooking or baking as therapy tools for people suffering from anxiety or depression. Patients, who often live “tough, chaotic lives”, are enrolled in classes that teach them healthy cooking and eating skills. In an interview for The Wall Street Journal, counselors report that the cooking classes, which are often held at local culinary schools, can also “soothe stress, build self-esteem and curb negative thinking by focusing the mind on following a recipe.” ([A Road to Mental Health Through the Kitchen \[WSJ\]](#))

Cooking and baking classes are also helpful for individuals with eating disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, and various addictions. Some programs also include tending a garden as part of the therapy.



**Want to “Reach out to others”? Try baking together!**



Bread-baking in particular is a meditative and empowering act that has deeply resonated with today's socially-distanced population. It makes sense - we need to feel in control, self-sufficient, and creative; and to know that we can provide nourishment for ourselves and our loved ones. If we can master this challenging task, we can handle anything that comes our way.

Bread is actually the perfect comfort food. It might call to mind the Wonder Bread sandwiches of your childhood lunches or maybe, if you're lucky, the warm yeasty kitchen smells of grandmother's house. The "breaking of bread" symbolically connects us to family, community, and age-old traditions. And if you can't connect in person, a picture of your daily rustic loaf allows you the satisfaction of connecting on Instagram!

Bread, like many other comfort foods, is high in carbohydrates. Part of our primordial response to stress is to seek carbohydrates for the instant energy we need to run, fight, and make good decisions. To make sure that this happens, the dopamine reward centers in the brain reward us generously when we consume these carbohydrates.

"Quarantine Baking" is as much about the process, though, as it is about the final product. Maintaining the "starter" requires care and attention. Stirring, beating, and kneading are all calming, repetitive motions that help regulate unsettled emotions. There's a gentle rhythm to kneading, a tactile engagement with dough, and a quiet partnership with the yeast and flour. The slow process of rising can't be hurried - it takes the time that it needs. And as the loaf bakes, the kitchen slowly fills with the warm promise of sustenance as you put everything back in order. Let the heat and aroma escape as you take the first bite of the chewy golden crust. It's all a pleasurable exercise in mindfulness and letting your senses take over.

As **Edward Espe Brown**, the Zen priest, cook, and author of *The Tassajara Bread Book*, says:

*For some people, making bread can be what creates a shift in awareness. You mix the ingredients, put your hand in the water to test the temperature, and feel the dough as you're kneading it. You use your senses. Meditation is sometimes referred to as 'coming to your senses,' and in making bread there's the same quality of waking up and giving your attention to something. (Brown, Edward Espe. *The Tassajara Bread Book*. Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1970)*

In 1942, in the midst of wartime deprivation, **MFK Fisher** expressed the same idea but from a different point of view. Here's what she says: "*There is no chiropractic treatment, no yoga exercise, no hour of meditation in a music-throbbing chapel, that will leave you emptier of bad thoughts than this homely ceremony of making bread.*" (Fisher, MFK. *How to Cook a Wolf*. Duell, Sloan & Pierce, 1942) ([https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/250693.How\\_to\\_Cook\\_a\\_Wolf](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/250693.How_to_Cook_a_Wolf))

Our daily loaf, ancient and essential, is quite possibly the original comfort food. And after all these years, there's nothing better than a simple loaf of bread to provide for our three basic needs - food, security, and love.





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## OCTOBER GAVE A PARTY

By George Cooper

October gave a party;  
The leaves by hundreds came--  
The Chestnuts, Oaks, and Maples,  
And leaves of every name.  
The Sunshine spread a carpet,  
And everything was grand,  
Miss Weather led the dancing,  
Professor Wind the band.

The Chestnuts came in yellow,  
The Oaks in crimson dressed;  
The lovely Misses Maple  
In scarlet looked their best;  
All balanced to their partners,  
And gaily fluttered by;  
The sight was like a rainbow  
New fallen from the sky.

Then, in the rustic hollow,  
At hide-and-seek they played,  
The party closed at sundown,  
And everybody stayed.  
Professor Wind played louder;  
They flew along the ground;  
And then the party ended  
In jolly "hands around."

The South Texas Unit is a non-profit educational organization incorporated under the State of Texas. The South Texas Unit has no paid employees. Our activities are accomplished through the efforts of our volunteers.

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[www.herbsociety-stu.org](http://www.herbsociety-stu.org)



The Herb Society of America is dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research and sharing the knowledge of its members with the community.

