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FREEAdvice

Brunswick stew can't be rushed

By KRISTA HARRIS
The Brunswick News

In just one week, teams of chefs will compete to see who can earn the title of Grand Champion at this year's Brunswick Rockin' Stewbilee.

"Regardless of its exact origin, Brunswick stew is a Southern tradition that invokes passion in its creators as well as consumers," said Jason Ridinger, executive chef at Christie's in downtown Brunswick.

For those who want to try it at home, Ridinger has some tips – and a recipe.

Ingredients vary from chef to chef.

By its very definition, "stew" calls for whatever you have available, Ridinger said.

However, a few staple items are required – a tomato base, onions, corn, perhaps lima beans. And of course, don't forget the meat, which can range from chicken and pork to squirrel and rabbit.

Virginians tend to make their stew with chicken, Ridinger explains, while Georgians prefer pork and beef.

Don't rush things.

Measurements are not so important, Ridinger said. What is important is a long, slow cook time. The chicken has to fall off the bone and the pork has to pull apart.

Make sure you use a thick heavy pot. It helps with even cooking and keeps the stew from scorching, Ridinger said. That's why many people cook Brunswick Stew in giant cauldrons.

The meat can be cooked anyway you like it.

"The meat can be smoked, grilled or barbecued," he said. "This is a peasant food, so simplicity is one of the keys to making it a great stew. It's kind of a 'everything but the kitchen sink.'" Here's his recipe:

Brunswick Stew

- 1 pound bacon
- 1 whole chicken
- 5 pounds pork butt, diced large
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 1/2 gallon diced tomatoes
- 1 quart water
- 2 cups lima beans
- 2 cups corn kernels
- 2 pounds red potatoes, large diced
- Worcestershire to taste
- Tabasco to taste

In a large pot, sauté the bacon until brown. Add the chicken and pork and brown. Add the tomatoes and water and simmer for one hour. Pull the chicken and remove the bones. Add the remaining vegetables and cook another hour on simmer. Season with Worcestershire and Tabasco.



BATS!

Creepy critters are misunderstood and mostly harmless, but you still don't want them around

By JOE OVERBY
The Brunswick News

Thanks to countless vampire movies, bats have quite the scary reputation – but there's more to the flying mammals than Hollywood would have you believe.

In fact, bats are quite the misunderstood species, according to Dr. Jim Hutcheon, a zoologist and temporary assistant professor at Georgia Southern University.

"I think one of the biggest myths is that bats are flying rodents," he said. "In fact, bats are not closely related to rodents at all."

Much of the bad rap against bats is unfounded, Hutcheon said.

For starters, they don't attack humans and in fact, don't have much use for us at all, he said. They won't get tangled in your hair.

"It's an interesting myth, but bats are really quite agile flyers," Hutcheon said. "They're often well aware of the environment they fly."

That's because bats use a kind of sonar to bounce soundwaves off objects ahead and maneuver smoothly.

Make no mistake, though – having one trapped inside a house can pose a big problem.

One big fear is rabies infection. According to the Center for Disease Control, most recent human rabies cases reported in the United States were caused by rabies virus from bats.

The CDC goes on to say, however, that most bats don't have rabies.

"Bats are really no more likely to carry rabies than any other mammals," Hutcheon said.

That's not to say the mammals don't cause trouble. Just ask McIntosh County Middle School principal Cheryl Peterson.

During an assembly on the final day of school last spring, school officials noticed bats in the rafters of the gym. A colony of bats had taken up at the school, hanging out during the day and flying out at night to feed.

"It was very nerve-racking," Peterson said. "They had the bats flying everywhere."

The school called a specialist from Savannah, who installed one-way screens in the rafters to allow the bats to leave the gym but not return.

The plan worked and the school is now bat-free.



"After a few days, they got the message they couldn't come back to the area, so they had to go somewhere else," Peterson said.

Looking back, Peterson said it was a learning experience for both her and the students, as the kids were curious about the bats and got a "quick science lesson" from their teachers.

Got bats in the belfry?

Like McIntosh school officials, homeowners should take swift action if they notice bats in the house. One of the more serious consequences is their droppings.

"They have a spore in them that can cause infection," said Jay Brown, chief executive officer for Apex Wildlife Control in Savannah. That infection, known as histoplasmosis, is a respiratory condition caused by the spore in dried droppings. "If it's inhaled, it can cause a respiratory infection and it's pretty serious if not treated."

Histoplasmosis, however, can just as easily be caught from chicken feces, Hutcheon said.

Should you suspect bats nesting in your house, it's necessary to call a pest control service with a Wildlife Control License from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Beyond simply seeing bats swooping around, warning signs include droppings on the wall or urine stains around entrance ways, Brown said.

Take preventative measures by walking around your property to find openings into the home. Brown's company, for instance, offers preventative inspections.

The time of year in Georgia most common for finding bats nested in houses is late winter, Brown said.

"They typically start nesting in homes between February and March," Brown said. "The main reason for that is they like the dry, warm environment for mothering their young."

"The only reason bats nest in homes is they want to find a warm place."

Bats then usually are born from May until August, Brown said.

'I want to drink your blood'

Vampire myths aside, there are three species of bats that consume blood – but none of them is found in North America.

"There are a little over 1,100 species of bats worldwide. Of those 1,100, three are blood-eating," Hutcheon said. "Those three are found in Central and South America. Only one consumes mammal blood."

And even then, Hutcheon said, they will more than likely target cows and horses.

"There's essentially no chance of that happening to anyone in Georgia," Hutcheon said. "Just having a bat (inside your house) produces little danger provided people aren't exposing themselves to it or trying to handle it."

Despite potential problems caused by being trapped inside a house, bats are very beneficial in the wild.

"Some of the things they eat are things we personally consider nuisances," Hutcheon said. "One bat can eat a phenomenal course of insects over a given night."

Farmers appreciate bats for the large number of crop pests they consume, he said, like the tobacco hookworm.

In tropical climates, bats eat fruit and play a big role in the distribution of fruit seeds.

"They help to maintain natural growth cycles of forests," Hutcheon said, adding that bats in the Southwest help pollinate desert plants.

"There are a number of (plant) species that are dependent on bats for their pollination," he said.

Bat facts

- Bats are the only mammals capable of natural flight, thanks to their winged forelimbs. Some other mammals, such as flying squirrels, can fly travel short distances.

- There are an estimated 1,100 species of bats worldwide, accounting for 20 percent of all mammal species. They are found throughout the world, including Alaska.

- About 70 percent of bats are insectivores. Of the remainder, most feed on fruits and their juices.

- Only three species sustain themselves with blood: The leaf-nosed bats of Central America and South America, and the two bulldog bat species, which feed on fish.

- Like birds, some smaller bat species play an important role in pollinating tropical flowers.

IF YOU HAVE BATS:

- First, don't try to get rid of the bat yourself. Though rare, some bats have been known to carry rabies. A greater concern is bat droppings, which can cause a serious infection in humans.

- Seal up any holes or openings to prevent bats from entering your house. Install one-way screens so bats already in residence can fly out, but not return.

- For serious bat problems, call an exterminator that specializes in removing small animals.

MORE INFORMATION:

- Kennesaw State University has links to everything you could want to know about bats at edtech.kennesaw.edu/web/bats.html

- Visit Bat Conservation International's Web site at www.batcon.org

- The Centers for Disease Control has information on health risks from bats at www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats.htm

Traveling with Dixie Dew makes me appreciate mothers

Dixie Dew and I went away for the weekend to visit our friends, Stevie and Darrell in Nashville. It was actually Dew's invitation but I was allowed to tag along.

Their family loves animals, evidenced by the two Bassett hounds, one loveable mutt, two cats and an albino rabbit that resides in their house. This is a down-sizing from what they normally have, which usually includes another rabbit, another dog and sometimes another cat. Usually their invitation arrives by phone and goes along the lines of, "Could Dixie Dew come to visit? She's so precious. Would you mind bringing her?" Dew, for her part, is ecstatic to hear me ask, "Do you want



Ronda Rich

to go to Darrell and Stevie's?" She loves them and their daughters, Jessica and Sarah, very much. She picks up her ears, wags her tail frantically, runs around in circles then heads to the door where she plops down her hefty butt and prepares to wait until I say, "No, we're not going today. We're going on Friday." Disappointed, she'll lie down and heave a heavy sigh. Once I was planning to visit

the family without Dew in tow until Sarah, the youngest, called.

"Miss Ronda, could you please bring Dixie Dew with you? I love her and I want to see her."

Dixie Dew rarely gets to travel with me. Usually, she goes to her Maw-maw's where she is content to eat non-stop until I return. But when she does get to go, it's as good to her as a big, juicy pork chop. Not that I give her pork chops, mind you. However, someone I know well does.

But after packing her up and taking her away for the weekend, I have a question: How do you mamas do this all time? Honestly, I was exhausted by the time I got her ready to go.

There were clothes to choose, leashes to pack, bowls to gather up, food and water to load, snacks and toys for the ride and, of course, she wasn't leaving home without her favorite blanket. Her travel bag bulging, I placed it by the door, where it was quickly joined by Dew in her favorite hot pink, hooded sweatshirt. She plopped down and waited impatiently, whining under her breath until we finally headed to the garage.

I sat down in the car and pulled the seat belt across and snapped it. "Whew. I'm tired."

I threw a glance over at the enthusiastic Dew, who was sitting up alert and ready to go. "You're a lot of trouble." Dew tilted her head and looked perplexed.

"Yes, you. Do you think that all this stuff just jumped in the bag and packed itself? It's a lot of work being the mommy."

She stuck her head over and licked my hand. At least she appreciates it.

I have a new respect for motherhood after this last trip. Usually I just drop her at her grandmother's, where there is a separate supply of toys, blankets, leashes, t-shirts and food so nothing has to be packed. It's a walk in the park.

Once we arrived in Tennessee, it was the issue of the children playing well together. They didn't. Or rather Dixie Dew didn't. She was intimidated by the bigger dogs and wanted to snap at them. "Trusty and Olivia won't hurt

Dew," Darrell promised.

"It's not them I'm worried about." I tossed my head toward Dew. "My child is the troublemaker."

It was a great deal of stress all weekend, worrying about Dew's manners and behavior. Once the visit ended, I had to pack up all that stuff again and load it back in the car then unload it at home. I'm used to being completely self-absorbed on trips, without worrying about someone else. Motherhood isn't easy.

Maybe next time I'll travel alone.

– Ronda Rich is the best-selling author of *What Every Woman Know (That Every Woman Should)* and *The Town That Came A-Courtin'*.