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spring feast!
Bittman & Sifton Head South

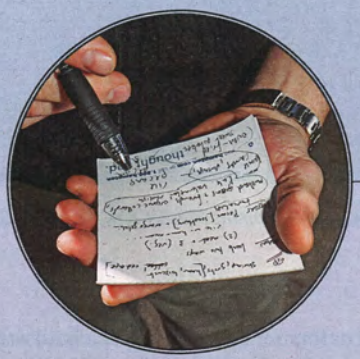
a man and his opera

THE EPIC UPS AND DOWNS OF PETER GELB.
BY CHIP BROWN

FEAS

THES

HOW TO CREATE A SPRING DINNER PARTY WITH FRIENDS – AND NOT KILL EACH OTHER IN THE PROCESS.

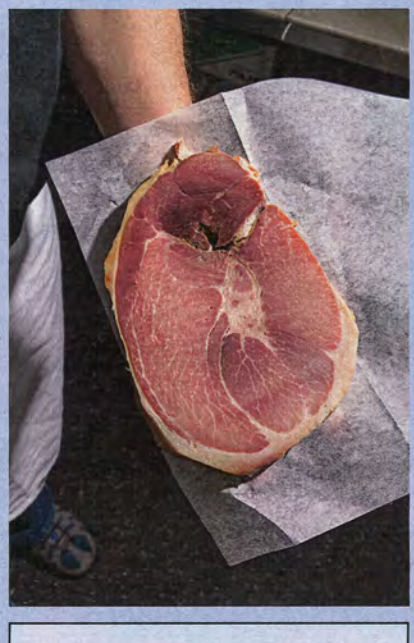


Photographs by Grant Cornett

STIN

MARK BITTMAN AND SAM SIFTON ON A CULINARY TRIP TO CHARLESTON, S.C.

OUTH



Buttermilk Salad Dressing

Time: About 10 minutes

- **2 scallions, white and green parts minced**
- **2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice**
- **2 tablespoons Dijon mustard**
- **3 tablespoons mayonnaise**
- **1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 garlic clove, grated**
- **1 cup buttermilk**
- **Kosher salt and black pepper to taste.**

1. Combine everything but the buttermilk and seasoning and mix well. Whisk in the buttermilk until the dressing is smooth. Season to taste.

Yield: 8 servings.

We went looking for spring, Mark and I, down in Charleston, S.C., a stunning city, rich with history both sad and ecstatic, in a region that offers a tremendous bounty of fresh ingredients and regional flavors. We had the vague idea of a holiday feast for the season — one that was grand and nondenominational — that would help banish memories of winter. The hitch was that we had only about eight hours to shop and cook before a dozen people showed up to eat with us in a marvelous old house off the Battery.

This is nice work if you can get it. Mark and I tried to pull off a similar task last winter in Brooklyn, and now, as then, our plans solidified as we shopped. There is a great lesson in that for the home cook: buy what's fresh, what makes sense for the season and what looks good, then cook it simply. We found amazing local greens and decided to make a composed salad, in part to highlight their beauty and in part to show how little you need to do to great ingredients. We found good lamb and decided to cook it two different ways, braised and grilled, to bring different textures and flavors to the plate — and also to nod to the role of the paschal lamb in Jewish and Christian springtime traditions. (One of the oldest synagogues in America was built in Charleston in the 1840s. But owing to our obsession with country ham, some of our dishes were hardly kosher.) We bought local grits to celebrate the region; likewise, rice and shrimp and pecans.

When we got back into the kitchen, we sketched out our menu on paper, then figured out what we needed to start on first, what could come later and what we needed to do at the very last minute. Then we threw out almost everything that required work at the very last minute. The last thing you want when you're cooking a big feast is a lot of complicated work at the end.

This plan allowed for some simple work — a long-cooked rice pudding from Mark and some biscuits from me, as a lamb shoulder bubbled away on the stove. We braised some root vegetables in butter. We whisked up some grits. We cleaned up as we went. And as you'll see on the timeline of our day, we kept an eye on a single goal: to give each dish the time that it needed, in the hope that it would all come out right at the end.

Thankfully, it did. Here's how we pulled it off — and how you can, too. **SAM SIFTON**

 PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRANT CORNETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PORTRAITS: KYLE HILTON. TIMELINE: MELINDA JOSIE.

HOW TO GIVE AN EASTER-SUNDAY SERMON
BY THE REV. AL SHARPTON, TV HOST

You have to bring your Michael Jordan game. My message would be: If we see the crises of today as a crucifixion and believe that behind every crucifixion there's a resurrection, our faith gives us the strength to survive.
As told to Spencer Bailey

Grilled Leg of Lamb

Time: About 1 hour, plus time to heat the grill

- **4 cloves garlic, chopped fine**
- **2 tablespoons fresh rosemary leaves, chopped fine**
- **2 tablespoons olive oil**
- **1 boneless leg of lamb, 5 to 6 pounds, butterflied**
- **Kosher salt and black pepper**
- **2 handfuls pecan shells, or wood chips, soaked in water.**

1. Combine the garlic, rosemary and olive oil in a bowl. Season the lamb with salt and pepper, then massage with the garlic and rosemary mixture and put the meat in the bowl. Cover and allow to marinate in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

2. Allow it to come to room temperature, approximately 30 minutes. Meanwhile, build a fire in your grill, leaving a third of the cooking area free of coals.

3. When the fire is hot, sprinkle the pecan shells or wood chips over the fire and place the lamb fat side down. Sear each side of the lamb for approximately 4 minutes each, then remove the lamb to the side of the grill without coals and roast, covered, for approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

4. Tent in foil for 10 to 15 minutes, and serve.

Yield: 8 servings.

THE PLAY-BY-PLAY

S.S.: Charleston is a serious food city with a lot of good restaurants specializing in local ingredients. I thought the groceries would be good if we went to where the chefs shop.

M.B.: GrowFood Carolina gets vegetables from farms within 120 miles and sells them to local restaurants and supermarkets. The greens — kale, mustard, collards — were ultrafresh. So we decided to make them into a salad with buttermilk dressing.

9 A.M.
Pick up vegetables at GrowFood.

S.S.: Then we saw sweet potatoes that were the size of W.N.B.A. basketballs and decided to make sweet-potato fries.

M.B.: They had those beautiful carrots and parsnips that were thinner than pencils. You never see that! So we decided to braise them.

10 A.M.
Shop for shrimp at Magwood's Seafood.

10:45 A.M.
Arrive at Ted's Butcherblock. Buy ham, lamb shoulder, leg of lamb.

S.S.: Shrimp and grits is this iconic Charleston dish, but I was a little worried about cooking clichés.

M.B.: Still, they were pretty nice-looking shrimp — head on, recently live, flash-frozen. We knew we could use them for something.

S.S.: I was obstinate about getting country ham — a ham that's salt-cured, smoked and aged forever (and hard to find in New York). And Mark and I agreed that lamb, which you find in all monotheistic religions, was the perfect protein for this feast.

HOW TO MAKE AN EASTER PLAYLIST
BY CALLIE KHOURI, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, "NASHVILLE"

I would start with the Abyssinian Baptist Gospel Choir: "I Want to Ride That Glory Train" or "He Stays in My Room" or "Sweet Jesus." The Johnny Paycheck version of "Amazing Grace" would be fun. Radney Foster's version of an old hymn called "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" is absolutely beautiful. You have to include pop staples. I would just go with the good old-fashioned "I Shall Not Be Moved." There's a song by the O'Neal Twins called "Jesus Dropped the Charges." I would definitely play that. *S.B.*

Grits

Time: 40 to 60 minutes

- **2 cups water or stock**
- **2 cups whole milk**
- **1 cup grits, preferably stone ground**
- **1½ teaspoons kosher salt**
- **¼ teaspoon black pepper**
- **4 tablespoons butter, or more**
- **2 cups sliced or chopped mushrooms**
- **½ cup diced country ham, or more, optional**
- **Chopped parsley leaves for garnish.**

1. Put the water or stock and milk in a small saucepan and bring it to a boil over medium-high heat. Turn the heat to low and slowly stir or whisk in the grits. Beat with a wire whisk to eliminate lumps and stir in the salt and pepper. Continue to cook, stirring.

2. Heat 2 tablespoons of butter in a skillet over medium-high heat and cook the mushrooms, stirring occasionally until they give up their liquid; stir in the ham and continue to cook until the mushrooms are browned.

3. When the grits are creamy and have lost their raw taste (after about 50 minutes), season to taste, stir in the remaining butter and serve, garnished with the mushroom-ham mixture.

Yield 6 to 8 servings.

HOW TO WEAR YOUR EASTER BEST
BY CLINTON KELLY, CO-HOST, "WHAT NOT TO WEAR"

This is not the day to be wearing a tight little sundress with your boobs hanging out. You don't want to wear only color; you should wear some neutrals, but softer neutrals: navy, brown, grays. Then pop those neutrals with color. *S.B.*

Stovetop-Braised Carrots And Parsnips

Time: About an hour

- **2 pounds carrots, peeled, trimmed and halved if more than ½-inch thick**
- **2 pounds parsnips, peeled, trimmed and halved if more than ½-inch thick**
- **4 tablespoons butter or extra-virgin olive oil**
- **Kosher salt and black pepper**
- **Freshly squeezed lemon juice**
- **Chopped fresh parsley, dill, mint, basil or chervil leaves for garnish (optional).**

1. Combine all ingredients except lemon juice and garnish in a skillet with a cover; add a splash of water. Bring to a boil, then cover and adjust heat so mixture simmers gently. Check every few minutes and add more water if necessary.

2. Cook until the vegetables are tender and the liquid is almost gone, about a half-hour. Uncover and boil off remaining liquid if necessary, then taste and adjust seasoning, adding lemon juice as needed. Garnish and serve hot, warm or at room temperature.

Yield: 8 servings.

I kind of do anything you wouldn't normally see together. I've even put gladiolas together with roses and daisies. I know any floral person would say: "Are you on crack? I would never do that." But stick them together in a tiny vase. It doesn't take up that much space on a table, and guests can easily take them home. *S.B.*

HOW TO ARR A TABLE BOU
BY KRISTIN CHENOWETH, ACTRESS

S.S.: The other lamb dish was inspired by an old Easter favorite: lamb with mint jelly. We had a boneless, butterflied leg, and I grilled it on a Weber in the yard. We'd bought a bunch of pecans and pecan shells, which we added to the fire. Just as the fat was beginning to render and the thing was starting to flare, I put the top of the grill on and the pecan smoke really, really got into the meat.

2 P.M.
Start rice pudding.

2:30 P.M.
Begin work on pecan tartlets.

M.B.: A mint jelly would have been terrific, but I was thinking of it as a mint chimichurri.

S.S.: Mark also had this idea to do a rice pudding that we would serve as dessert with pecan tartlets. That was the best call of the day.

M.B.: The rice pudding cooked for three or four hours, very low, at about 200 degrees.

M.B.: At around 3, Sam was panicking that we were running out of time.

3 P.M.
Quick break.

5 P.M.
Put the lamb on the grill, reheat root vegetables, assemble salads.

S.S.: I took 20 minutes off, walked around the block. And there's a lesson in that for people doing dinner parties. That short break helped a lot. I came back focused and ready to finish.

M.B.: I sat down, and I did start drinking bourbon, which I thought was quite helpful.

S.S.: We cooked the shrimp on the stove with olive oil and paprika, salt, pepper, garlic and lemon. We served it as an appetizer with the salads.

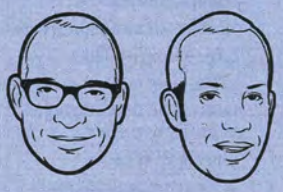
CHARLESTON CHEW Tag along with the authors for a real Southern dinner at *nytimes.com/magazine*.

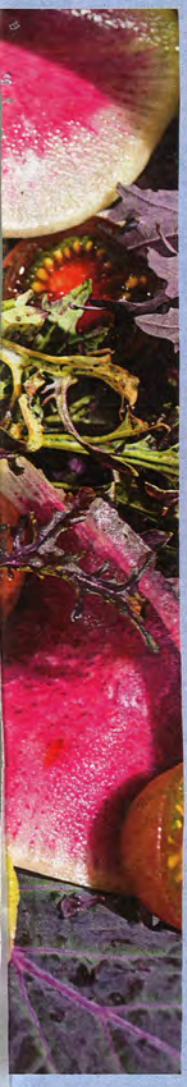
 PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRANT CORNETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PORTRAITS: KYLE HILTON. TIMELINE: MELINDA JOSIE.

Ted: A really nice spring cocktail is kumquat-infused gin with a little kumquat piece in it topped up with sparkling white wine. You can drink it throughout the meal. *Matt:* You can load a tray of glasses with a tablespoon and a half of kumquat gin and the garnish slice of kumquat, and put it to the side while you wait for the guests to arrive. Then, at the last minute, top it up with the Champagne or sparkling wine. *S.B.*

HOW TO PICK A SOUTHERN SPRING COCKTAIL

BY MATT AND TED LEE, AUTHORS, "THE LEE BROS. CHARLESTON KITCHEN"





Biscuits and Momofuku Red-Eye Mayo

Time: About an hour

- **2¼ cups all-purpose flour, preferably White Lily or Southern Biscuit brand, plus more for dusting**
- **1 tablespoon baking powder**
- **1 scant tablespoon sugar**
- **1 teaspoon salt**
- **6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, preferably European style**
- **¾ cup whole milk or buttermilk.**

1. Preheat oven to 425. Sift flour, baking powder, sugar and salt into a large mixing bowl. Transfer to a food processor. Cut butter into cubes and add to flour, then pulse until the mixture resembles rough crumbs. Return dough to bowl, add milk and stir until it forms a rough ball.

2. Turn the dough out onto a well-floured surface and pat it down into a rough rectangle, about an inch thick. Fold it over and gently roll with a pin. Repeat. Now gently pat out the dough some more, so that the rectangle is roughly 10 inches by 6 inches. Cut dough into biscuits using a floured glass or a 3-inch biscuit cutter. Do not twist cutter when cutting; this crimps the edges of the biscuit and impedes its rise.

3. Bake biscuits until golden brown, about 10 to 15 minutes. Serve with sliced country ham and Momofuku Red-Eye Mayo (see below).

- **1 large egg**
- **1 tablespoon instant coffee**
- **2 tablespoons cold water**
- **1½ teaspoons sherry vinegar**
- **½ teaspoon kosher salt**
- **½ teaspoon Sriracha, or to taste**
- **1 cup grapeseed oil.**

1. Combine egg, coffee, water, vinegar, salt and Sriracha in a food processor or blender.

2. Start the machine and add the grapeseed oil in a slow, steady stream. Process until the moisture is thick and creamy, then serve.

Yield: 8 servings.

Braised Lamb With Dried Fruit

Time: 3 hours, largely unattended

- **1** lamb shoulder, boned, about 4 pounds
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste
- **1** large onion, peeled
- **1** tablespoon minced garlic
- **1** tablespoon minced ginger, or 1 teaspoon dried
- **1** cinnamon stick
- **1** tablespoon ground cumin
- **2** tablespoons ground coriander
- **10** allspice berries or a pinch of ground allspice
- **½** to ¾ bottle not-too-soft red wine
- **¾** cup pitted prunes
- **¾** cup pitted apricots
- Chopped parsley or cilantro for garnish.

1. Season the meat with salt and pepper and put it in a pot that will fit it snugly and can later be covered. Add the spices and a ½ bottle of wine. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to a slow bubble, and cover. Cook about an hour, then add dried fruit, and check to make sure the liquid isn't evaporating too quickly; turn and continue to cook. Add the remaining red wine if the mixture looks dry, but essentially cook this without fuss.

2. When the meat is very tender — after about 2½ hours — uncover. Check and adjust the seasoning as necessary, garnish and serve.

Yield: At least 8 servings.

HOW TO HIDE THE AFIKOMEN
BY JEREMY LEBEWOHL, OWNER, SECOND AVENUE DELI

We would go to Florida a lot when I was a kid for the actual Seder. All the parents would come in their suits and their ties. Within two minutes, everyone had their jackets hanging on the backs of chairs. I would hide the afikomen in the breast pocket of my dad's jacket, because I figured that was the last place he would look for matzo. *S.B.*

 PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRANT CORNETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. PORTRAITS: KYLE HILTON. TIMELINE: MELINDA JOSIE.

Shrimp, Mark's Way

Time: 30 minutes

- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons slivered garlic
- 1 tablespoon pimentón or paprika
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- 3 to 4 pounds shrimp, in the 20-to-30-per-pound range, peeled or not
- Kosher salt and pepper
- Chopped parsley
- Lemon wedges.

1. Put the oil in a large skillet over medium heat and add the garlic. Cook carefully, lowering the heat as necessary, until the garlic is just colored; add the spices and stir.

2. Raise the heat to medium and add the shrimp; sprinkle with salt and pepper and cook gently, turning once or twice, until nicely coated with the spices and oil and cooked through, about 10 minutes.

3. Serve the shrimp with the pan juices, garnishing with the parsley and lemon wedges.

Yield: 8 servings.

5:30 P.M.
Sauté shrimp, make whipped cream.

5:45 P.M.
Guests arrive.

S.S.: I think that grilled lamb was the biggest success of my day. The biggest disaster, which took three or four hours to unfold, was a demi-glace made from Cheerwine, that red soda from South Carolina, which I thought I could use for a whipped cream. But Mark said, "I won't eat that whatever you do with it." It tasted like the worst cough syrup. I threw it out.

M.B.: Thank God. So when are we going to do this again?

HOW TO HOST AN EASTER-EGG HUNT
BY PAULA DEEN, CHEF AND TV HOST

I do the most magnificent Easter baskets, with very surprising things, from underwear to a baseball glove. I keep the eggs easy to find for my grandchildren. *Easy* to find, honey. I've got a chicken coop. I can hide them in there. The chickens, they see all these bright eggs. We have a good time. *S.B.*

Pecan Tartlets

Time: About 1½ hours

- 2 cups shelled pecans
- 5 eggs
- ¾ cup white sugar
- ½ cup brown sugar
- Pinch salt
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract.

1. Preheat the oven to 375. Toast the pecans on a baking sheet in the oven for about 8 minutes. Cool the pecans; coarsely chop half of them and leave the other half intact.

2. Beat the eggs with a mixer until they are foamy. Beat in the sugars, salt and butter. Warm this mixture in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, until it is hot to the touch; do not boil. Stir in the vanilla extract and the pecans.

3. Spoon the mixture into a greased or nonstick 12-cup muffin tin; bake 20 minutes, until the mixture shakes like Jell-O but is still quite moist. Cool on a rack and serve warm or at room temperature.

Yield: About 12 servings.

Rice Pudding

Time: About 2 hours, largely unattended

- ¼ to ⅓ cup rice
- ½ cup sugar
- Small pinch kosher salt
- 4 cups milk
- Cinnamon stick.

1. Preheat the oven to 300. Combine all ingredients in a 3- or 4-quart casserole, stir and place in the oven. Cook for 30 minutes, then stir. Repeat.

2. Cook for 30 more minutes. Return the mixture to the oven and check the pudding every 10 minutes, stirring gently each time.

3. The pudding may be done 10, 20 or 30 minutes later. Invariably, it is done before you believe so.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.