

GREAT BITES

THE TASTE OF SUMMER MEMORIES

BY SEAN-PATRICK M. HILLMAN

Growing up, summer was always about fresh and flavorful produce, brilliant barbecue, movie theater popcorn and an insatiable desire for fairground treats. So, this month, I wanted to take you on a trip down memory lane and learn how to make some summertime yumminess of your own!

When it came to fresh produce, I was spoiled as a Manhattan kid who spent his weekends in the Hudson Valley. Especially during the summer. Some of my fondest childhood memories are of shucking fresh corn from Mr. Potts' farm in Tivoli, just as my dad and I were wrapping up grilling steaks for our Saturday night dinner. I remember going to farm stands, and farms themselves, in towns like Red Hood, Rhinebeck, Tivoli and around the Taconic region. Whether it was running to get berries from "The Wayside Stand" by Montgomery Place Orchards just west of Red Hook or grabbing fruit pies at Meisner's Heritage Farm stand outside of Hudson, there was always an abundance of yumminess in the summer air.

In honor of that, I thought a little summer pie was in order. As strange as this sounds, I am not a fan of Apple Pie in the summer because prime apple picking season is in the Fall (YUMMO!). During July/August, I prefer more traditional summer flavors, like strawberries!



Sullivan's Strawberry Rhubarb Pie

Ingredients

- 1 Cup Cane Sugar
- 1/2 Teaspoon Pure Vanilla Extract
- 1/2 Teaspoon Salt
- 1 Tablespoon Orange Juice
- 1/2 Cup All-Purpose Flour
- 1 Pound Rhubarb, Cut Into 1/4-Inch Slices
- 4 Cups Fresh Strawberries, Hulled and Quartered
- 1 (14.1 Ounce) Package Pastry for a Double Crust 9-Inch Pie
- 2 Tablespoons Irish Butter, Chopped
- 1 Large Egg Yolk
- 2 Tablespoons Coarse Sugar for Sprinkling Garnish

Instructions

While the oven preheats to 400°F, mix flour and sugar together in a large bowl, set aside.

Add strawberries, chopped rhubarb, vanilla extract, orange juice and salt to a bowl and stir. Then mix with sugar and flour bowl, let stand for 30 – 40 minutes. Pour filling into prepared pie crust (layering bottom dough into the tin). Add butter chunks evenly across the top of the filling.

Take the dough for the top crust onto a floured surface, and using a pastry wheel, sharp knife, or pizza cutter, cut strips 1/2- to 1-inch wide. Carefully thread the strips over and under one another, pulling back strips as necessary to weave. Press the edges of the strips into the bottom pie crust edges to seal. Use a small knife to trim off excess dough. Seal edges of top and bottom crust where they meet with water. Lightly brush top lattice with egg yolk. Sprinkle with coarse sugar.

Place the pie onto a large baking sheet and bake for 20 minutes. Keeping the pie in the oven, turn the temperature down to 350°F and bake for an additional 30 minutes. After the first 20 minutes of bake time, you should wrap the rim of the pie crust with foil so it just covers the crust to prevent the edges from browning too quickly. Cool pie on wire rack for about 2 hours to let the filling thicken and set.

Serve with vanilla ice cream and enjoy!

A TASTY AF-FAIR OF FOOD

Now when it comes to those nostalgia fueled moments of fairground food, I always look back to those scorching childhood summer days at the Dutchess County Fair at the end of August. After riding the Gravitron, because no one was silly enough to eat before that gravity sucking adventure, there was nothing like strolling along the Midway eating cotton candy, or being on the Ferris wheel enjoying a funnel cake or bag of zeppoles. Yes, fair and carnival food is certainly a tempt of fate as you board the cholesterol roller coaster ride, but it is worth every triglyceride – until the stomachache hits you the next morning if you ate too many fried Oreos, corn dogs or sweet Italian sausages and peppers!

Midway Funnel Cake

You can't go to a street fair, carnival or county fair without having funnel cake! This is a no-nonsense simple recipe I've used for years for backyard parties.

Ingredients

1 1/3 Cups All-Purpose Flour
1 1/2 Tablespoons White Sugar
3/4 Teaspoon Baking Powder
1/4 Teaspoon Salt
1 Egg
3/4 – 1 Cup Whole Milk
1/2 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract
1/3 Cup Confectioners' Sugar for Dusting
Vegetable Oil for Frying



Instructions

Using a heavy pan, fill with oil (about 1-inch deep) and heat to 375°F.

In a large bowl, beat together egg, vanilla extract, and 3/4 cup of milk (reserve 1/4 cup). Using the same bowl, sift flour, salt, sugar, and baking powder in; beat together until mixture is smooth. If mixture is too thick, slowly add more milk to thin it out.

If you have a funnel, pour batter through it over hot oil in a circular motion to form a rounded mesh. If you don't have a funnel, you can use a measuring cup and pour it in a thin stream in a circular motion into the hot oil. Fry in hot oil until bottom is golden brown; flip and continue cooking until golden brown all over. Drain on paper towels. Repeat until the batter is gone.

Sprinkle cakes with confectioners' sugar through a sifter while still hot.

County Fair Fried Ice Cream

This one always amazed me. Think about it – *fried* ice cream. And I used to watch them do this at a few different fairs and street festivals. It was messy as all hell, complicated and used a lot of oil. But it was one of the tastiest fair treats I had ever had. So, I put myself through the ringer to develop this alternative that still delivers the same flavor punch and crunch the original does, but without the pain of oil, and certainly the extra fat!

Ingredients

5 Cups Corn Flakes Cereal
1 Cup Sweetened Shredded Coconut
2 1/2 Tsp Ground Cinnamon
1/2 Cup Salted Butter
1 Quart of Vanilla Ice Cream, Firm Enough To Shape But Just Soft Enough To Scoop
Honey

Instructions

Crush the cornflakes to small bits.

Melt butter in a nonstick medium size fry pan over medium heat. Stir in crushed cornflakes, coconut, cinnamon and increase heat to just under medium-high.

Pan fry mixture, stirring constantly until golden brown (corn flakes and coconut should be crispened up a bit), 2 – 3 minutes.

Remove from heat, pour mixture in a shallow bowl, letting cool. Remove ice cream from freezer and scoop out desired serving (8 single and 4 double scoops are in each quart). Using gloved hands, shape into a ball.



As soon as ice cream balls are formed, drop into cornflake/Coconut mix and roll to evenly coat. Pressing mix into outside of ice cream ball for a thicker crust.

Freeze for 15 minutes to harden ice cream and keep frozen until ready to serve. When ready, place ball into a bowl, and drizzle honey over the top. You can also use hot fudge, chocolate syrup or whatever other topping you want. Enjoy!

SNACK BITES

THE CRUNCH THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

If you haven't crunched into a bag of Jackson's Chips yet, you're seriously missing out on one of the boldest, cleanest snacking experiences around. And that's saying something from me considering I was reticent about trying it. I am normally not a fan of sweet potato chips, or chips made in anything other than traditional oil. However, since trying Jackson's Chips, I have become a true believer – lighter on the gut, great on crunch, healthier (per se) and packed with yummy flavors!

Born out of passion and purpose, Jackson's sweet potato chips aren't your average chip. These beauties are cooked low and slow in premium avocado oil, delivering a crisp that's addictive—but never greasy. What really sets Jackson's apart is their commitment to real ingredients and wellness. Made with non-GMO heirloom sweet potatoes and absolutely no artificial flavors or preservatives, these chips are a go-to whether you're gluten-free, paleo, or just looking to eat a little smarter without sacrificing flavor. And let's talk flavor: from Sea Salt to Spicy Jalapeño, each variety pops with personality.



Even better, the story behind the brand is heartwarming. Created in honor of Jackson—the founders' son—who had special dietary needs, this company stands for health, love, and legacy. It's a mission you can taste in every bag. To learn more, or to find out where to buy, please visit snackjacksons.com



CHEESE GLORIOUS CHEESE

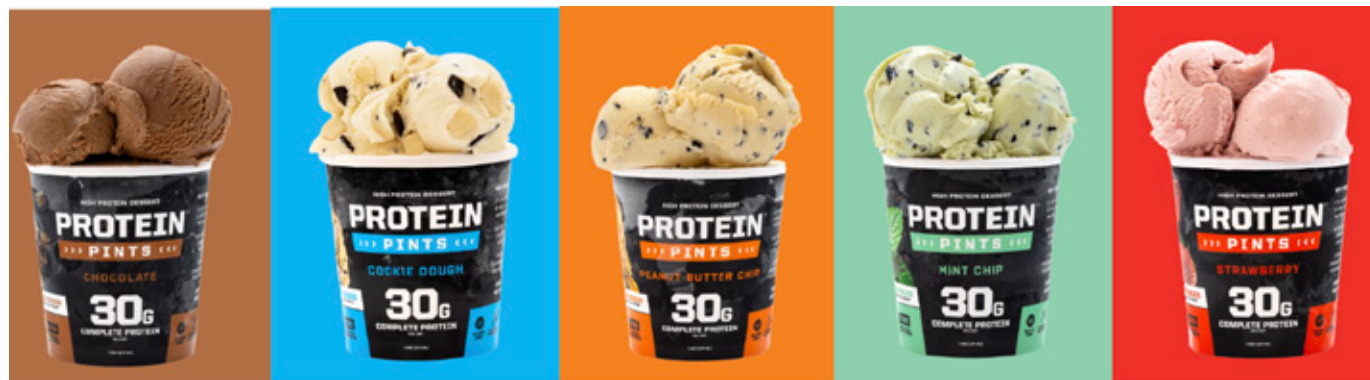
I've waxed poetically, or sweetly depending on your view, about M.Cacao Chocolates a few times on these sacred pages. You might want to regularly check out this amazing house's website every couple of months because they seem to come up with a new innovation every time I turn around. As an example, their Fromage Chocolate Collection is the sophisticated twist your dessert palette didn't know it needed. This luxurious line blends fine chocolate with eight artful cheese pairings — from Roquefort & Port and Cheddar & Apple to Gruyère & Kirsch and Comté & Peanut Butter.

Each piece is a mini-masterpiece: grasp the gleaming shell, bite into sumptuous ganache marrying creamy or aged cheese with complementary flavors, and savor a balance of sweet, savory, and umami that's almost science.

Equally captivating are the visual flourishes — vibrant coatings marked with delicate motifs hinting at each cheese inside. And for New Yorkers who love to curate experiences? The option to include a personalized video playing inside the Expressio box makes this a gift and event centerpiece.

Whether you're hosting a soirée or seeking a savory-sweet indulgence, the M.Cacao Fromage Chocolate Collection is a bold, boundary-pushing delight. These aren't just chocolates — they're culinary conversations in bite-size form. Snag an 8- or 16-piece box, share them over wine, and watch them elevate any evening. For more information, please visit mcacao.com

Editor's Note: Check out our YouTube & IG channels in mid-July for a special presentation with M.Cacao's Fromage Chocolate Collection.



ICED PROTEIN

For those craving protein in everything, and you know who you are, you should check out Protein Pints. It's a new innovative, protein-packed ice cream brand that's "redefining frozen desserts with indulgent flavors and all-natural ingredients." Each pint has over 30g of protein, 85% less sugar than traditional ice cream, and no artificial sweeteners while delivering a rich, creamy experience—minus the chalky texture of similar. And for my gluten-challenged readers, it's a gluten-free, low net carb, made with natural ingredients dessert that contains all 9 essential amino acids. To learn more, please visit proteinpints.com

SPIRITS OF THE CITY

Like my love for the culinary arts, my affection for mixology has come from a lifetime of being around Master Mixologists like “King Cocktail” Dale DeGroff (who I have known since I was “knee-high”), “The Cocktail Guru” Jonathan Pogash and Clover Club founder Julie Reiner. Then there are those masters who are no longer with us, but with whom I have so many fond memories like Gary “Gaz” Regan, Murray Stenson, and John Lermayer. Throughout my life, these legends of both yesterday and today have taught me one thing or another about mixology and cemented my respect for the craft of a cocktail. That is why I started this section of my Great Bites column earlier this year. And occasionally I will include a cocktail recipe that requires a master to create it. This stunning example of the craft I am referring to comes from BarChef New York (an outpost of the original in Toronto) which opened in mid-June.

Heirloom Garden

Created by Frankie Solarik, owner of BarChef New York

Ingredients

.25 oz Bergamot Water
.25 oz Celery Bitter
.25 oz Roasted Chicory Maraschino
.50 oz Cinzano Sweet Vermouth
.50 oz Campari
1oz Sundried tomato infused Bombay Gin
Garnish: Dehydrated Heirloom Tomato / Nasturtium Leaf / Nasturtium Flower

Instructions

Place all ingredients in a mixing glass, fill the mixing glass with ice and stir for 3 rotations to chill. Fine strain into double old-fashioned glass over ice. Garnish with dehydrated tomato and nasturtium flower.

To Make Each Ingredient:

Roasted Chicory Maraschino

Time: 1 Week

3 tbsp Roasted Chicory

750ml Maraschino liqueur

*Place all ingredients in a sealable mason jar, seal, let infuse for 1-week, fine strain through chinois and store in a sealable container.

Celery Bitter

Time: 2 Months

2g Caraway Seeds

2g Fennel Seeds

3g Coriander Seeds

4g Green Cardamom

4g Celery Seed

750ml Bombay Sapphire Gin

*Place in sealable mason jar, infuse for 2 months. Fine strain through chinois.

Sundried Tomato Bombay Gin

Time: 2 Weeks

40g Sun dried tomato

750ml Bombay Gin

*Place all ingredients in sealable mason jar, seal, let infuse for 2 weeks, fine strain through chinois.



To learn more about BarChef New York, please visit barchefnewyork.com

RUM:

When it comes to summer, I just can't help myself and often end up making a rum-based cocktail. And while I wanted to stick with a classic rum push for this month, I thought it might be fun to use a hot and different take on the yumminess of the traditional Hurricane – courtesy of my friends at Melinda's!

Melinda's Hot Honey Hurricane

Anyone who's been to the Big Easy for Mardi Gras will attest that a Hurricane (cocktail) is one of the best tasting things on Earth. Use a rum that actually has an official Cuban Maestro Ronero as their Master Distiller alongside some Melinda's Hot Honey, and you have the perfect storm (pun intended)!

Ingredients

2 oz Light Rum (Pa'lante Blanco recommended)

2 oz Gold or Dark Rum (Pa'lante Reposado or Anejo recommended)

2 oz Passionfruit Juice

1 oz. Orange Juice

.5 oz Of Lime Juice

1 Tbsp Grenadine

1 Tbsp Melinda's Hot Honey or Ghost Hot Honey

Garnish: A Skewer of Luxardo Cherries And A Slice Of Orange

Instructions

Mix rums, juices, grenadine and hot honey with some ice in a mixing cup, shake vigorously, pour over ice in a hurricane glass and garnish with a skewer of cherries and a slice of orange.

If you are curious about more Melinda's-based recipes, please visit melindas.com

To learn more about Pa'lante Rum, please visit palanterum.com



VODKA:

There are a million vodka brands on the market, all claiming to be cleaner, more filtered, blah blah blah. It's mind-numbing how many of these I see on the daily. So, when I was introduced to Reyka by a couple of friends, I was cautious at first. Believe it or not, it's exactly what it purports itself to be! This small batch vodka is *actually* made of Iceland – hand-crafted with Icelandic glacial spring water and filtered through lava rocks making for a clean, crisp taste. It has quickly become a new fav for sure.

I thought this recipe with some coffee liqueur might be just what the night calls for, whether it's to get you going or for a little "pick me up" after dinner. The balance is perfect along the flavor profiles so trust me when I tell you, you're going to love it!

The Icelandic Dude

Created by Sebastien Derbomez, Manager Brand Advocacy, William Grant & Sons.

Ingredients

1.5 oz Reyka Vodka
0.5 oz Mr Black Coffee Liqueur
1 oz Espresso (Fire Poppy Blend)
1/4 oz Organic Date Syrup
Pinch Of Salt

Instructions

Shake All Ingredients with Ice. Fine Strain into Chilled Glass.
To learn more about this stunning vodka, please visit reyka.com



BOURBON:

I am normally a purist when it comes to the sacred spirit of the South. However, occasionally I will find a brand that piques my interest and Five Springs Infused Bourbon certainly did! Their claim is that they are "honoring the old while embracing the new" with their infused line of bourbons. I have to say I was pleasantly surprised. So much so that I am including these two recipes for those hot summer nights in a rocking chair on the front porch!

Paper Plane

Ingredients

1 oz Five Springs Honey Sage Bourbon
1 oz Aperol
1 oz Amaro Nonino
1 oz Lemon Juice

Instructions

Shake all ingredients with ice and strain into a coupe glass.

Honey Sage Iced Tea

Ingredients

2 oz Five Springs Honey Sage Bourbon
1 oz Peach Liqueur
Iced Tea

Instructions

Fill a glass with ice. Add bourbon, peach liqueur, and top with unsweetened iced tea. Stir gently and garnish with lemon or peach.

With what is purported to be a hot July and August, these kinds of cocktails, as well as a traditional mint julep using the Honey Sage Five Springs Bourbon, might be a welcome respite! For more information, please visit fivespringsbourbon.com

Here's to a delicious and endless summer, my friends...and, please, remember to drink responsibly! Bon Appetit!

