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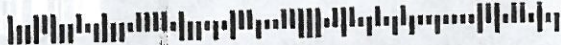
Toasty and Tasty



Vanilla Pumpkin Pie Martini
recipe on page 34

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PEANUTS

THE LITTLE GOOBER THAT COULD

Peanuts — also known in the South at one time or another as groundpeas, groundnuts, goober peas, or just plain goobers — are by far the most popular nut in the United States. But hold the jelly, there's a catch! A peanut is not actually a nut but a legume like beans and peas.

WRITTEN BY SHELLEY SKILES SAWYER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN HAIGWOOD, HAIGWOOD STUDIOS



ORIGINATING IN South America, the loveable legume we call the peanut was delivered across the pond by Spanish explorers; it also spread to Africa and Asia by traders. While peanuts were grown in North America during the 1800s, they were mainly considered fodder for livestock and the poor. Difficult to grow and harvest, peanuts didn't really take off here until around 1900, when labor-saving machinery was introduced to aid in every step of the process. Shortly thereafter, George Washington Carver, through his research at Tuskegee Institute, developed hundreds of uses for peanuts and promoted their value as both a cash and rotation crop. He did so much for the plant that many consider him the "father of the peanut industry." (Don't tell that to the salty guy with the top hat and cane.)

Peanuts are harvested during September and October, but unlike fresh fruits and vegetables, there's no peak time to buy and use them. In the South they are available shelled and blanched (either raw or toasted), as well as whole in the shell, either dried or freshly dug (green). Naturally cholesterol-free, these nutritional powerhouses boast seven grams of protein per one-ounce serving, along with noteworthy levels of antioxidants, fiber and healthy fats. While the peanut acts like a legume botanically and nutritionally, the way we think about it and cook with it makes it "nuttier."

The peanut's international appeal illustrates its remarkable breadth, as evidenced by its comfortable fit in kitchens around the world, from China and Thailand to South America

and Mexico. In the American South, peanuts are considered a regional staple, along with the likes of grits, okra and greens. Their popularity on the Southern table is commonly attributed to African culinary influences.

Hugh Acheson, chef/partner of Five & Ten, The National and Gosford Wine in Athens and Empire State South in Atlanta, grew up in Canada eating peanuts, where they were fixtures at his grandparents' cocktail hour. He now fully embraces the legume and its myriad uses, including those most commonly found below the Mason-Dixon Line. "To me, peanuts are the fava beans of the South," he says. "They're so versatile, going from boiled (at first a bit of an oddity) to roasted, to just plain salted." He appreciates them for their possibilities at breakfast, lunch, dinner, in snacks and desserts. "Puréed in a soup, in a salad, as a garnish, as a simple snack, they can add flavor, texture and umami to dishes," he says. "Peanuts can play with 10 different ingredients perfectly, or be off on their own as the star ingredient. And they cross the gamut from savory to sweet really well — and you can't say that about many vegetables."

Peanuts, our buff-colored wonders, also show up in peanut flour; a basic cooking oil that's appreciated for its high smoke point; and the

little legume's version of extra virgin olive oil, which makes for the perfect final flourish. As Acheson reaches for a high-end roasted peanut oil to finish a dish with "bright beautiful peanut flavors," he grabs a bit of history — and one of the world's great edible treasures. ○

FUN PEA-NUGGETS

- It takes about 540 peanuts to make a 12-ounce jar of peanut butter.
- There are enough peanuts in one acre of a typical peanut farm to make 30,000 peanut butter sandwiches.
- As early as 1500 B.C., the Incas of Peru used peanuts as sacrificial offerings and entombed them with their mummies to aid in the spirit life.
- Arachibutyrphobia is the fear of getting peanut butter stuck to the roof of your mouth.
- Peanuts flower above ground and then migrate underground to reach maturity.

Source: nationalpeanutboard.org

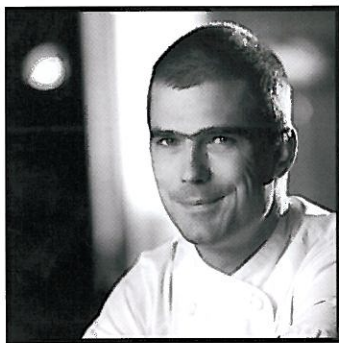


The incredible versatility of the peanut was deliciously displayed at the Bluegrass, Bourbon & BBQ Luncheon at the Four Seasons sponsored by Flavors Magazine and Atlanta Homes & Lifestyles during the Atlanta Food & Wine Festival in May. A visiting chef served pork belly with a side of barbecued peanuts, a riff on the traditional baked bean side dish. It wooed the foodie crowd back for seconds — and thirds.

PHOTO: PESHKOV.COM



This soup originated from some work I did for the National Peanut Board, which led to my researching South Carolina Low Country food and the popularity of peanuts in Gullah cuisine. When I finally wrote down the recipe, I was struck by how odd it looked on paper but how good the results were.



Hugh Acheson

Peanut Soup with Avocado

Recipe reprinted with permission from A New Turn in the South: Southern Flavors Reinvented for Your Kitchen by Hugh Acheson (Clarkson Potter, 2011)

Yield: 6 servings

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup minced yellow onion
- 1/2 cup minced celery
- 1 cup diced tomato
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 tablespoon chopped chipotle in adobo
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/2 cup smooth, unsweetened, all-natural peanut butter
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 ripe avocado
- 1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lime juice
- 1 pinch kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons chopped roasted peanuts for garnish

In a heavy-bottomed soup pot, melt butter over medium heat until it just begins to bubble and froth. Add onion and celery and sweat down for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add tomato, curry powder, and chipotle. Stir and cook through to develop the flavors for about 2 minutes. Add sweet potato, peanut butter, and stock. Raise the heat to medium-high and bring soup to a boil. Once the boil has been reached, reduce to a simmer for 15 minutes, or until the sweet potato is tender. Add cream and remove from heat.

Purée soup while still warm in batches in a blender, taking care not to overfill the blender. Then pass it through a fine-mesh strainer and season to taste with sea salt and black pepper.

Cut avocado in half and remove the pit. Sprinkle with lime juice and season with kosher salt. When you are ready to serve the soup, place it back in a clean pot and reheat. Portion it into 6 bowls and garnish each with a scoop of avocado and a few chopped peanuts.



November is National Peanut Butter Lover's Month, perhaps more widely celebrated (albeit unknowingly) than Thanksgiving, considering peanut butter is consumed in 90 percent of households in the United States. Folks on the East Coast prefer creamy while the West Coast likes theirs crunchy according to the National Peanut Board.



MORE PEANUT-Y ATLANTA FINDS:

Eleven at the Loews Atlanta Hotel

- Peanut butter and banana fried sandwich
loewshotels.com/en/Atlanta-Hotel

Empire State South

- Peanuts and Coke Dessert (Mexican Coke, peanuts and soft serve ice cream with funnel cake)
- Pimiento cheese with bacon marmalade and boiled peanut hummus
- Crispy pork belly with rice grits, pickled daikon and peanuts
- In a jar: boiled peanut hummus
empirestatesouth.com

Highland Bakery

- Peanut butter French toast
highlandbakery.com

Leon's Full Service

- Bacon in a glass with handmade peanut butter
leonsfullservice.com

One Flew South

- Pulled duck sandwich with duck confit, fig and toasted peanut relish, scallions and slaw
oneflewsothatl.com

R Thomas Deluxe Grill

- Thai Express (Quinoa with veggies and spicy peanut sauce)
rthomasdeluxegrill.net

Rathbun's

- Banana peanut butter cream pie
rathbunsrestaurant.com

Star Provisions

- Organic Virginia peanut butter and marshmallow crème on soft white bread
starprovisions.com

The Sound Table

- Fried cauliflower, toasted red chili, peanuts
thesoundtable.com

Vortex Bar and Grill

- The Elvis burger with peanut butter, fried bananas and bacon
thevortexbarandgrill.com

