

County Agent's Report - 1 Jan 2011
New Year - Old Ways

The new year, full of promise and excitement, offers a myriad of reasons to celebrate, reflect, observe, plan, or maybe, do penance in preparation for the near future. New Year's Day is one of few holidays that is universal. Devoid of religious, historical, or political roots, every year for nearly every culture has a beginning and an end. That demarcation is celebrated in a myriad of ways, and accompanied by a plethora of superstitions.

* Kissing at midnight: We kiss those dearest to us at midnight not only to share a moment of celebration with our favorite people, but also to ensure those affections and ties will continue throughout the next twelve months.

* Stocking Up: The new year must not be seen in with bare cupboards, lest that be the way of things for the year.

* Paying Off Bills: The new year should not be begun with the household in debt.

* Nothing Goes Out: Nothing — absolutely nothing, not even garbage — is to leave the house on the first day of the year..

* An oft-repeated belief holds that one must not eat chicken or turkey on the first day of the year lest, like the birds in question, diners fate themselves to scratch in the dirt all year for their dinner (that is, bring poverty upon themselves).

* Work: Make sure to do — and be successful at — something related to your work on the first day of the year. However, do not do the laundry on New Year's Day, lest a member of the family be 'washed away' (die) in the upcoming months. The more cautious eschew even washing dishes. (I'm with them - why take chances?)

* New Clothes: Wear something new on January 1 to increase the likelihood of your receiving more new garments during the year to follow.

* Breakage: Avoid breaking things on that first day lest wreckage be part of your year.

* Loud Noise: Make as much noise as possible at midnight. You're not just celebrating; you're scaring away evil spirits, so do a good job of it!

* The Weather: Examine the weather in the early hours of New Year's Day. If the wind blows from the south, there will be fine weather and prosperous times in the year ahead. If it comes from the north, it will be a year of bad weather. The wind blowing from the east brings famine and calamities. Strangest of all, if the wind blows from the west, the year will witness plentiful supplies of milk and fish but will also see the death of a very important person. If there's no wind at all, a joyful and prosperous year may be expected by all.

Here in America, no holiday observance would be complete without a myriad of food rituals. New Year's Day is no exception. The traditional New Year's Day meal in the South (and spreading rapidly Northward, for purely gastronomic reasons) includes Black-eyed peas, greens (collards vs. cabbage is hotly debated), pork, and cornbread.

How do these rituals get started, and what do they mean? According to researchers at Wikipedia, Black-eyed peas are for luck, in general, and for prosperity in particular, as they represent coins. Greens are eaten to insure prosperity as they symbolize money. (Greenbacks) Pork is consumed to remind us to look forward to the future, and not look back at the past. (A hog is ripe for slaughter when he is so fat he can't turn and look behind himself.) And cornbread? Every good Southern cook knows that cornbread goes with peas and greens!

As holiday foods go, the traditional New Year's Day meal is packed with vital nutrients,

and is as easy on the budget, as it is to prepare. Black-eyed peas are an excellent source of fiber, b-complex Vitamins, and are an incomplete protein. Paired with cornbread made with whole corn and milk, and you have a complete protein. Collard greens are a powerful source of iron, antioxidants, and fiber. One of my college professors, Dr. Richard A Willis, PhD, Dept of Human Nutrition, often stated that Collards were one of the most underrated and overlooked foods in the American diet. You can easily boost the iron content of your greens by cooking them in a cast iron pot with a little vinegar – the acid will cause the pot to leech iron which the greens will absorb. [I still don't like collards, though.]

Cornbread is all ready a fairly nutritious bread, but the following recipe boosts the nutrients, texture and taste. From Southern good-old-boy chef, Alton Brown, cCook it in a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet dedicated for this very purpose.

Ingredients

- * 2C yellow cornmeal
- * 1 tsp kosher salt
- * 1 Tbsp sugar
- * 2 tsp baking powder
- * 1/2 tsp baking soda
- * 1 C buttermilk
- * 2 eggs
- * 1 C creamed corn
- * 2 Tbsp oil

Directions

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Place a 10-inch cast iron skillet into the oven.

In a bowl, combine all dry ingredients. Whisk together to combine well.

In a large bowl, combine the buttermilk, eggs, and creamed corn, whisking together to combine thoroughly. Add the dry ingredients to the buttermilk mixture and stir to combine. If the batter will not pour, add more buttermilk to the batter.

Swirl the oil in the hot cast iron skillet. Pour the batter into the skillet. Bake until the cornbread is golden brown and springs back upon the touch, about 20 minutes.

Have a wonderful 2011!!!

Sources for this article include: <http://fcs.tamu.edu>, www.wikipedia.com, www.snopes.com, www.foodnetwork.com, www.ask.com

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