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SOUTHERN-STYLE ENTERTAINING IS EASY AS PIE

Sharon Thompson, Herald-Leader Food Writer

People who grow up with a parent who enjoys cooking and entertaining are usually comfortable having dinner parties. But if you're timid about cooking for friends, calm your fears with Rebecca Lang's *Southern Entertaining for a New Generation* (Cumberland House, \$22.95). Lang learned to cook from her Southern grandmothers and was professionally trained at Johnson & Wales University. She apprenticed with Nathalie Dupree, television host and author of *New Southern Cooking*.

According to Lang, you don't have to be raised in the South to entertain with the hospitality of a Southerner. Lang makes it easy by sharing what her grandmothers taught her with tips alongside each recipe.

Many of the recipes have been in her family for generations.

"I cooked with my grandmothers until I could make biscuits with my eyes closed," said Lang, who understands how difficult it is for busy people to schedule a party and then cook all the food.

"Inviting my friends over to share a meal is what I truly love," she writes.

Timelines are the key to Lang's successful parties. Planning for a bunch starts two days before the party.

One menu features Miss Tom's basic biscuits, Charleston shrimp and creamy grits, balsamic strawberries, Southern mimosas, coffee, orange juice and apple juice.

RECIPE

Charleston shrimp and creamy grits

1 12-ounce package bacon, chopped

1 large onion, chopped

1 medium red bell pepper, chopped

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 cup all-purpose flour

2 1/2 pounds medium shrimp, peeled

3 cups chicken broth

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Hot sauce to taste

For the grits:

4 cups chicken broth

1 cup quick-cooking grits

11 ounces cream cheese

4 ounces shredded Monterey Jack cheese

In a large stockpot, cook the chopped bacon over medium heat until brown and crispy. Remove the bacon to paper towels to drain, reserving the drippings in the pan. Set the cooked bacon aside.

Add the onion, bell pepper and garlic to the bacon drippings and cook over medium heat until soft, about 5 minutes. Remove the onion mixture with a slotted spoon, reserving the drippings in the pan, and place in a bowl; set aside.

Place the flour in a large zippered plastic bag. Add the peeled shrimp, seal the bag, and shake well to coat the shrimp. Using your fingers, remove the shrimp from the flour and gently shake to remove excess flour.

Add the shrimp to the bacon drippings; cook for 5 minutes. The shrimp will be lightly pink and not fully cooked. Remove the shrimp from the pan and set aside.

Return the onion mixture to the pan. Add the chicken broth, Worcestershire sauce and lemon juice. Simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes.

Add the reserved shrimp, thyme and parsley. Simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes or until the sauce is thick and bubbly. If the sauce becomes too thick, add extra chicken broth or water, 2 tablespoons at a time. Add salt, pepper and hot sauce to taste.

Meanwhile, make the grits. In a large saucepan bring the chicken broth to a boil. Stir in the grits and reduce the heat to low. Cook, whisking constantly, until thickened, about 10 minutes. Then cook for 8 to 10 more minutes, whisking often, until the grits are no longer crunchy.

Slice the cream cheese and add to the grits. Stir until the cheese is melted and well blended. Add the Monterey Jack cheese and stir until blended. Sprinkle with crumbled bacon and hot sauce. Serve immediately. Makes 8 servings.