# A Sunshine State Boatgate

COOKBOOK AUTHOR **REBECCA LANG** CHEERS ON HER GEORGIA BULLDOGS AT A FLOATING TAILGATE WHERE THE RIGHT COCKTAILS AND BITES ARE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE FINAL SCORE



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t's before 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning in October, but in the shadow of Jacksonville, Florida's TIAA Bank Field, a flurry of activity unfolds across the parking lots and grassy fields in a patchwork of orange and blue, black and red. Things are wak-

ing up on the water, too. The St. Johns River meanders some 20 miles from the Atlantic Ocean past the stadium, and the Metropolitan Park Marina fills up fast in advance of this college football matchup between Florida and Georgia. According to dockmaster Capt. Jim Suber, when the 70 or so slips are made available in early September, "They're completely booked in 30 to 45 seconds."

The game has been played here, in neutral territory, since 1933, so there are decades of Gator/Bulldog bragging rights at stake. As the sun glints off the brackish water, "boatgaters" line up along deck railings to survey the adrenaline-fueled scene below. It's still hours before kickoff, but turkey fryers are already bubbling, and blue flames roar under giant pots of Brunswick stew. There's an ever-present aroma of coffee beans in the air from the Maxwell House historic roasting facility a few blocks away, but today, fans opt for bloody Marys and a mysteriously electric-blue concoction referred to variously as "gator punch" or "gator juice."

There's a reason they call this "The World's Largest Outdoor Cocktail Party"—a nickname coined, the story goes, after a local Florida newspaper reporter witnessed an overserved fan offering a police officer a tailgate tipple. On Howard and Valerie Scott's 80-foot Burger motor yacht, Capricho, cocktails are the first order of business; grapefruit-rosemary mimosas greet guests at the top of the ladder. This is a civilized floating tailgate, to be sure, with burgers and dogs making way for pickled-okra deviled eggs, fried oyster tacos topped with smoky pimiento cheese, and a tangy black-eyed pea salsa dubbed "Bulldog caviar."

A massive Georgia "G" flag whips from the mast of the Capricho, but the boastful predictions on the docks are good-natured as friends cross from boat to boat. And Florida fans, it turns out, are easily lured into enemy territory with the promise of spicy cucumber cocktails and double-decker pecan brownies.

By midafternoon, dueling marching bands begin to summon the crowds off the gently rocking yachts and into the raucous stadium. Savvy boatgaters make sure to fortify with the last of the marinated shrimp and another handful of boiled peanuts before heading to the stands to find out whether the sun will stripe the sky Georgia red or Florida orange as it sets over the water.



# **Marinated Shrimp**

SERVES 12 ACTIVE 35 min.

TOTAL 36 hours, 35 min., including 36 hours marinating

- 3 lb. cooked, tail-on medium shrimp, peeled
- 1 large Vidalia onion (about 1 lb.), thinly sliced (4½ cups)
- 1 (3.5-oz.) jar capers, undrained
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar 1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 Tbsp. lemon zest plus 3 Tbsp. fresh juice (from 2 lemons)
- ½ tsp. table salt
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 1 pt. heirloom cherry tomatoes
- 1. Combine shrimp and onion in a large bowl. Add capers and caper brine.
- 2. Place olive oil, vinegar, sugar, Worcestershire sauce, lemon zest, lemon juice, salt, and pepper in a medium bowl. Whisk until sugar is dissolved. Pour over shrimp. Cover and refrigerate 24 hours, stirring occasionally.
- 3. Cut tomatoes in half; add to shrimp, and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate 12 hours.







## Grapefruit-Rosemary Mimosas

SERVES 1
ACTIVE 5 min.
TOTAL 40 min

- 3 Tbsp. fresh grapefruit juice
- 1½ Tbsp. Rosemary Simple Syrup (recipe follows)
- 2 dashes of peach bitters
- 6 Tbsp. (3 oz.) chilled dry sparkling wine or Champagne

Rosemary sprig Grapefruit wedge

Combine grapefruit juice, simple syrup, and bitters in a Champagne glass, and stir gently. Top with sparkling wine. Garnish with rosemary sprig and grapefruit wedge, and serve immediately.

### **ROSEMARY SIMPLE SYRUP**

MAKES 13/4 cups ACTIVE 5 min. TOTAL 35 min.

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 3 Tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary

Heat all ingredients in a saucepan over medium until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat. Cool completely, about 30 minutes. Pour through a fine wire-mesh strainer, discarding rosemary. Store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 1 month.

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set after a full day of

# Cucumber-Jalapeño Gin Coolers

SERVES 12 ACTIVE 10 min.

TOTAL 24 hours, 15 min.

- 3 cups (24 oz.) gin (such as Tanqueray)
- 3 large jalapeño chiles, sliced and seeded
- 3/4 cup fresh lime juice (from 6 to 8 limes)
- 2 English cucumbers, cut into long, thin strips
- 3 cups chilled club soda
- 1. Combine gin and jalapeños. Cover and refrigerate 24 to 48 hours. Strain, reserving jalapeños separately from infused gin.
- **2.** For each cocktail, combine ¼ cup infused gin, 1 tablespoon lime juice, and 1 cup ice in a cocktail shaker. Shake vigorously for 30 seconds. Line a 12-ounce rocks glass with 2 strips of cucumber; add ¾ cup ice. Strain shaker contents into glass. Top with ¼ cup club soda. Garnish with reserved jalapeño slices.

# Deviled Eggs with Pickled Okra

SERVES 12 ACTIVE 20 min. TOTAL 40 min.

- 12 large eggs
- ⅓ cup mayonnaise
- 3 Tbsp. pickled okra brine
- 2 Tbsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/4 tsp. table salt
- 1/8 tsp. black pepper
- 4 pickled okra pods, thinly sliced (24 slices)
- **1.** Place eggs in a single layer in a saucepan. Add water to cover by 1 inch. Bring to a rolling boil over high. Cover, remove from heat, and let stand 10 minutes. Drain.
- **2.** Submerge eggs in ice-cold water; let stand 10 minutes. Tap each egg firmly on the counter until cracks form all over the shell. Peel under cold running water.
- **3.** Slice eggs in half lengthwise; remove yolks, keeping egg white halves intact.
- **4.** Using fine holes of a grater, grate yolks into a bowl. Stir in mayonnaise, okra brine, parsley, mustard, salt, and pepper. Spoon or pipe filling into egg whites. Top each deviled egg with 1 slice of pickled okra.

# **Boiled Peanuts**

SERVES 10 ACTIVE 5 min.

TOTAL 3 hours, 5 min.

4 lb. fresh green peanuts

1½ cups kosher salt

2 garlic cloves

Combine peanuts, salt, garlic, and water to cover in a large stockpot. Cover and bring to a boil over high. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until tender, about 3 hours. Drain and serve.

### Bulldog Caviar

SERVES 12
ACTIVE 15 min.
TOTAL 4 hours 15 min.

½ cup rice vinegar

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. granulated sugar
- 3/4 tsp. table salt
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 2 (15-oz.) cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 (15-oz.) cans black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 2 cups fresh corn kernels, or 1 (15-oz.) can white corn, drained and rinsed
- 2 red bell peppers, chopped
- 2 jalapeño chiles, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- ½ cup thinly sliced scallions (green and white parts only) (about 2 scallions)

### Tortilla chips

- 1. Whisk together rice vinegar, oil, sugar, salt, and garlic powder in a medium saucepan over medium. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; cool 20 minutes.
- 2. Combine black beans, black-eyed peas, corn, bell peppers, jalapeños, onion, and scallions in a large bowl. Pour dressing over bean mixture, and toss to combine. Refrigerate 4 hours before serving. Serve with tortilla chips.

# Mini Tacos with Fried Oysters, Pimiento Cheese, and Fennel Slaw

SERVES 16 ACTIVE 45 min. TOTAL 45 min.

16 (4½-in.) corn tortillas Chipotle Pimiento Cheese (recipe follows)

Cornmeal-Crusted Fried Oysters (recipe follows)

Fennel Slaw (recipe follows)
Lime wedges
Hot sauce

Heat tortillas according to package directions. Spread 1½ tablespoons pimiento cheese on each tortilla. Top with 2 to 3 fried oysters and desired amount of slaw. Serve tacos with lime wedges and hot sauce.

### CHIPOTLE PIMIENTO CHEESE

MAKES 13/4 cups ACTIVE 10 min. TOTAL 10 min.

- 8 oz. extra-sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded (about 2 cups)
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1 chipotle chile in adobo sauce, diced
- ½ tsp. adobo sauce
- 2 Tbsp. diced pimientos, drained
- 1/4 tsp. table salt

Combine cheese and mayonnaise in a food processor. Process until blended. Add chile, adobo sauce, pimientos, and salt; pulse to combine. Store in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

### **FENNEL SLAW**

MAKES 4 cups ACTIVE 5 min. TOTAL 5 min.

- 1 large fennel bulb, thinly sliced
- ½ sweet onion, thinly sliced (about 1 cup)
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 Tbsp. mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lime juice (from 1 lime)
- 1 tsp. red wine vinegar
- 1/8 tsp. table salt
- 1/8 tsp. black pepper

Combine all ingredients in medium bowl. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

# CORNMEAL-CRUSTED FRIED OYSTERS

MAKES about 48 ACTIVE 25 min. TOTAL 25 min.

- 2 cups (about 11½ oz.) finely ground yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup (about 41/4 oz.) all-purpose flour
- 6 Tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 Tbsp. table salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper Canola oil

### 2 (8-oz.) containers fresh shucked

- oysters, well drained (about 48 oysters)
- **1.** Whisk together cornmeal, flour, cornstarch, salt, and pepper in a large bowl.
- **2.** Pour oil to a depth of 2 inches into a Dutch oven; heat over medium-high to 350°F. Set a wire rack over a rimmed baking sheet.
- **3.** Working in batches of about 8 oysters, dredge each oyster in cornmeal mixture.
- **4.** Carefully place dredged oysters in hot oil. Fry, turning often, until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Drain on wire rack. Repeat with remaining oysters. Serve immediately.

# Georgia Pecan Doubledecker Brownies

SERVES 24
ACTIVE 20 min.
TOTAL 1 hour. 50 min.

### **CRUST**

- 1 (9-oz.) pkg. chocolate wafer cookies (such as Nabisco Famous)
- 10 Tbsp. (5 oz.) unsalted butter, melted
- ⅓ cup granulated sugar

### **BATTER**

- 1/2 cup bittersweet chocolate chips
- 1/4 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 Tbsp. milk chocolate chips
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup (6 oz.) unsalted butter
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs

heat: cool 1 minute.

- 1 cup (about 4¼ oz.) all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/8 tsp. table salt
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly grease a 13- x 9-inch pan. Line bottom and sides with parchment paper, allowing 2 to 3 inches to extend over sides; lightly grease parchment paper.
- 2. Prepare the crust: Pulse chocolate wafers in a food processor until finely ground. Stir in melted butter and sugar. Press evenly into bottom of prepared pan.
- **3.** Prepare the batter: Combine chocolate chips and butter in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium, stirring often, until melted, about 4 minutes. Remove from
- **4.** Whisk in sugar. Add eggs, 1 at a time, whisking until well blended after each addition. Whisk in flour, vanilla, and salt. Fold in pecans. Pour into prepared pan; smooth top.
- 5. Bake in preheated oven until a wooden pick inserted in the center comes out with moist crumbs, about 30 minutes. Cool completely in pan on a wire rack, about 1 hour. Lift brownies from pan, using parchment paper sides as handles. Cut into 24 squares. —recipes by Sarah Austin, Meghan Garrard, Kelly Grow, Rebecca Lang, and Trey Niolon



