

# RISE AND DINE

5 BREAKFAST AND BRUNCH  
FAVORITES THAT'LL STICK  
TO YOUR RIBS DAY OR NIGHT

BY **STANLEY DRY** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **EUGENIA UHL**

## SHRIMP AND GRITS

*The recipe calls for cheddar cheese in the grits, but other varieties can be substituted, according to preference.*

*Parmesan, Gruyere or Fontina would be excellent choices. The dish can also be made without cheese.*



**EGGS:** Being able to prepare eggs properly is sometimes a stumbling block even for accomplished cooks. Eggs are delicate and require a deft touch. Restaurant chefs have been known to judge prospective cooks by giving them a pan and a few eggs and having them make an omelet on the spot. A candidate's performance at that task reveals abilities that do not come through on a résumé.



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iven the heat and humidity that envelop the South, an outsider might find it a bit odd that we eat so heartily at breakfast and brunch. Our morning habits appear more suited to a colder climate, where piling on the calories is a necessary preparation for survival. But, alas, logic does not always prevail. We do love to eat with gusto before noon, but breakfast foods are sometimes served for supper and late night breakfasts after an evening on the town are quite common.

A list of Southern breakfast foods starts with biscuits, by which many a cook is judged. Light, tender and hot, biscuits have the ability to absorb large quantities of butter, honey, syrup, jelly or gravy. Along with the biscuits, breakfast and brunch can feature a variety of meats — bacon, ham, sausage, boudin, small beef steaks — eggs cooked every imaginable way, grits and fried potatoes. There are a variety of breakfast breads — pecan waffles, pancakes, cornbread, beignets, calas, muffins and French toast, or pain perdu here in Louisiana.

If breakfast has shaded into brunch, there may well be shrimp and grits, smoked fish, Eggs Benedict or one of its variants, champagne, milk punch and Bloody Marys. Whatever the time of day, there will be fresh fruits and berries, fig preserves, jams and jellies, as well as coffee and tea.

## SHRIMP AND GRITS

### FOR THE SHRIMP

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 small bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 rib celery, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ cups chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ½ cup white wine
- 2 teaspoons tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- 1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
- coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
- hot sauce
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped green onion tops

### FOR THE GRITS

- grits, preferably stone ground or old fashioned
- water
- coarse salt
- 4 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup grated sharp cheddar cheese

**1. FOR THE SHRIMP** Melt butter in large skillet, add onion, bell pepper, celery and garlic and cook on low heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 6-8 minutes.

**2.** Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk flour into chicken broth until smooth; add wine, tomato paste, lemon juice, thyme and paprika and whisk to combine. Add mixture to skillet and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add shrimp and simmer for 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt, pepper and hot sauce. Serve over hot grits, garnished with chopped parsley and green onion tops. *Makes 4 servings.*

**3. FOR THE GRITS** Cook grits for 4 servings according to package instructions, then stir in butter and grated cheese.



**SUNNY-SIDE-UP.** The goal here is to cook the whites of the eggs without overcooking the yolks. Heat a generous amount of butter in a skillet until bubbling, then break eggs into the skillet. Spoon hot butter from the pan over the whites as they cook. You can also cover the skillet briefly, but leave it covered too long and your eggs will have a white film over the yolks. The eggs will still be tasty, but instead of sunny-side-up, they will be total eclipse eggs.

## BISCUITS AND SAUSAGE WITH COUNTRY GRAVY

Soft wheat, low-gluten Southern flour is preferred for biscuits, and the self-rising version is a time-saver. If you don't have self-rising flour, add 1½ teaspoons baking powder and ½ teaspoon salt for each cup of flour.





**FRENCH TOAST (PAIN PERDU) STUFFED WITH HAM AND SWISS**

There are many ways to alter this recipe. For example, in place of the ham and Swiss, you could use bacon and cheese. Or you could stuff the bread with sweetened fruit, such as sautéed apples.



**BLUEBERRY CORNMEAL MUFFINS**

To cut preparation time in the morning, combine dry ingredients the night before and add liquids just before baking. The batter will be ready by the time the oven is hot. If using frozen blueberries, do not defrost them.



**POACHED.** I was dubious when a friend passed on a method he had learned for poaching eggs, but once I tried it, I was converted. Place a small strainer over a bowl and break an egg into it. The thin liquid in the egg will drain off. Slide the egg into simmering salted water and poach until the white is set. Remove with a slotted spoon. The result is a lovely egg without the unsightly strands of white that are so common with poached eggs.

**BISCUITS AND SAUSAGE WITH COUNTRY GRAVY**

**FOR BISCUITS**

- 2 cups low-gluten, self-rising flour, such as White Lily
- 3 tablespoons chilled butter
- 2 tablespoons chilled lard or shortening
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons milk

**FOR SAUSAGE AND GRAVY**

- 1 pound pork sausage
- ¼ cup pan drippings
- Vegetable oil, if needed
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 2-2½ cups milk
- coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

**1. FOR THE BISCUITS** Preheat oven to 450 F. Place flour in mixing bowl; cut in butter and lard or shortening with a pastry blender or use your fingertips to distribute the fats until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Add milk and mix with a fork just until dough forms.

**2.** Turn out onto a lightly floured surface, knead a few times and pat or roll out dough to a thickness of ½-inch. Using a floured 2½-inch cutter, cut out biscuits and place on a heavy, ungreased baking sheet.

**3.** Bake in preheated oven until tops are lightly browned, about 11-12 minutes. Makes 12 biscuits.

**4. FOR THE SAUSAGE AND GRAVY** While biscuits are baking, form sausage into 8 patties and place in cold skillet. Turn heat to medium and cook until sausages are well browned on one side. Turn sausages and cook until browned on the other side. Remove sausages and drain on paper towels. Keep sausages warm while making gravy.

**5.** Measure pan drippings and add vegetable oil, if needed, to yield ¼ cup. Return to skillet and sprinkle with flour. Stir or whisk to incorporate flour and cook until lightly browned, scraping up any brown bits that have adhered to the pan. Add 2 cups milk and stir or whisk to incorporate.

**6.** Cook until gravy is thickened; while stirring, adding additional milk, if necessary. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

**7. TO SERVE** Split biscuits and place 2 on each serving plate. Place sausages on biscuits and cover with country gravy. Makes 4 servings.

**FRENCH TOAST (PAIN PERDU) STUFFED WITH HAM AND SWISS**

- French or Italian country bread
- 4 slices ham
- 4 slices Swiss cheese
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup milk
- pinch salt
- pinch cayenne
- 4 tablespoons butter

**1.** Preheat oven to 300 F.  
**2.** Cut 4 slices of bread, each 1-inch thick. Cut a pocket in each slice, without cutting all the way through. The bread should still be attached on one side. Fill each pocket with sliced ham and Swiss cheese.

**3.** Lightly beat eggs in a bowl, then add milk, salt and cayenne and whisk to combine. Add butter to a large skillet and heat over a medium flame. When butter is sizzling, dip bread in egg mixture, first one side and then the other, and add to skillet. Repeat with the other slices. Fry until browned, then turn and brown the other side.

**4.** Remove bread to a baking sheet and bake in preheated oven until cheese is melted, about 5-8 minutes. Makes 4 servings.



## BLUEBERRY CORNMEAL MUFFINS

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup cornmeal, preferably stone ground
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 8 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 cup blueberries

**1.** Preheat oven to 350 F and grease muffin tins.

**2.** Add all dry ingredients to a mixing bowl and whisk to combine. In a separate bowl, lightly beat eggs, add milk and butter and whisk to combine. Add liquids to dry ingredients and stir with a rubber spatula until just combined. Do not overmix. Fold in blueberries. Fill muffin tins about ¾ full.

**3.** Bake until the muffins brown, pull away slightly from the pan and a tester comes out clean, about 25-30 minutes. *Makes 8 or more muffins, depending on size of the muffin tins.*

## PECAN WAFFLES

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup pecan meal (ground pecans)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup light brown sugar
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- ¼ cup pecan pieces

**1.** Preheat waffle iron. In a medium bowl, combine first six ingredients. Add buttermilk, eggs, vanilla and butter and mix to combine. Stir in pecan pieces.

**2.** Cook on hot waffle iron until browned. Serve with melted butter and choice of syrups or top with fresh berries and a dusting of powdered sugar. *Makes 4 waffles.*

### ↓ SCRAMBLED.

*The mistake many people make with scrambled eggs is cooking them too quickly over high heat. When done that way, they become lumpy and dry. To make perfect scrambled eggs, cook them slowly on low heat, while constantly stirring.*

### PECAN WAFFLES

*Pecan meal is a handy ingredient to have on hand. It is frequently available in grocery stores, particularly during the holiday baking season. If you can't find it, grind pecans in a food processor or nut grinder.*