



## My Day of Independence

I'VE GOTTEN TOGETHER WITH several couples over the years for holiday dinners. Dianne and Jim hosted most of the events. They had two grills: outside AND inside. So, we had barbeques on Halloween as well as St. Patrick's Day. I can remember a year when it snowed on both occasions. We still had delicious grilled food.

But my turn, MY holiday, is the Fourth of July. My one-and-only grill is outside. It's not under an overhang or verdant tree, whose leaves protect me from the elements. "When it rains, it pours," advertises Morton Salt. I've experienced this phenomenon from Mother Nature herself. I've stood outside watching my meal steam rather than smoke. Damp food has never been a selling point on any menu.

"Just keep it simple," my friends said. Make hot dogs and hamburgers. Spoiler Alert! This isn't simple. Wonderful, yes. Simple, hardly. You need

chopped onions for the hot dogs, grilled for the burgers. Two kinds of mustard. Yellow, and for me, Dijon. Relish, pickles, tomatoes. Buns. And.... You have to stand at the grill, rain or shine, flipping, while your guests are out of smoke's way laughing and talking. So, although arguably hot dogs and burgers are divine (my food of choice for my birthdays), this year I'm declaring my flipping independence. I am keeping it simple, but succulent.

Corn is a must. By July, those gorgeous ears of gold are hitting their stride. Rather than boiling them in the largest pots I own, then rushing them to the table with sticks of softened butter, I'm making a corn pudding that's creamy with crispy edges, savory with a hint of sweetness. And (drum roll), it can be put together a day in advance, browning away in the oven, unattended, while you're joining the laughter and conversation.

Untraditional, but guaranteed crowd pleaser, are thick juicy pork chops. Marinated in advance,

they require only minutes on a hot grill, then a short rest, unattended, while I attend to gathering my guests to the table where I'll actually be eating with them. (Join me on the 5th for a medium-rare burger; on the 6th for a hot dog with all the trimmings.) U



PHOTO: GIRMANTAS URBONAS

*KATHY HARRISON is a Barrington Hills resident who teaches the fine art of cooking. For more information, call 847-381-4828.*

## Creamy Crispy Cornbread

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 stick unsalted butter
- 1 cup corn kernels
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 ½ cups flour
- 1 cup cornmeal



### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Place an 8- or 9-inch ovenproof skillet in the oven (I use cast iron), and melt the butter in the pan, swirling the pan to coat the sides with butter. Set pan aside.
2. Place the corn, sugar, and salt in a food processor and pulse until the mixture is coarsely chopped. Add the buttermilk and blend well. Add the melted butter and eggs. Blend. Whisk the baking soda and baking powder into the flour. Add the flour mixture to the processor and pulse just to combine. Turn the batter into the skillet, spreading evenly.
3. Bake in the center of the oven for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Serve warm with additional butter, honey, or jam. The cornbread can be made a day in advance, covered with foil and rewarmed in a 350-degree oven.

## Grilled Sweet and Salty Pork Chops

### INGREDIENTS:

- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup fish sauce (preferably Red Boat)
- 1 stalk lemongrass, finely chopped (optional)
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 large shallot, finely minced
- ½ jalapeno chili, or more if desired, seeded and minced
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 4 pork chops, 1-inch thick

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients except pork chops. Whisk to dissolve the sugar. Lay the pork chops on a rimmed baking sheet in a single layer and pour the marinade over the top. Cover the pan with plastic wrap or foil and marinate for 2 hours at room temperature or refrigerate overnight. Bring to room temperature before grilling.
2. Prepare the grill with a hotter side and a cooler side, if possible. Remove the chops from the marinade and discard the marinade. Place the chops on the hottest part of the grill and cook for 1 minute on each side to sear. Move chops to the cooler side of the grill, or reduce the heat on a gas grill, and cook the chops for about 10 minutes until an instant-read thermometer registers 140-145 degrees. Remove chops, cover loosely with foil and let stand for 10 minutes before serving. Serves four.



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