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# NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURE



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# A Culinary MECCA

Discover what makes North Carolina cuisine stand out in the crowd

**W**ith the influences of the mountains on one side and the sandy coast on the other, it's no wonder that North Carolina has developed a reputation as a culinary mecca. Foodies from all over flock to the state to savor some of the country's best flavors. But what is it about this great state that makes it the place to

go for a delicious meal?  
According to three of North Carolina's top chefs, the magic happens with a combination of local flavors, incredible culinary innovators and soulful cooking.  
**Cooking from the Heart**  
For Matt Register of Southern Smoke BBQ, the best kind of

North Carolina cuisine happens when you cook from the heart. "I always try to cook from a soulful place," Register says. "Flavors can transport people back to their childhood. That's especially true with barbecue. One of the biggest compliments I've gotten is when people say they haven't tasted flavors like



North Carolina chefs take advantage of the state's fresh ingredients to make delicious culinary magic.



Chef Matt Register and his wife own Southern Smoke BBQ in Garland. He says he tries to always cook from the heart.



this since they were little."

While Register believes infusing meals with soul is one of the main reasons North Carolina food stands out among the crowd, he also credits part of the state's booming culinary scene to its farmers and strong agrarian roots.

"In large cities, you may know

the area where the food comes from, but you may not know the farmer," Register says. "But I've been blessed to know my local suppliers personally. Just today, four of the farmers whose products we use came into the restaurant to eat."

As it turns out, it isn't something in the water. North Carolina simply

brings together incredible local flavors and a strong sense of community to create memorable Southern dishes for foodies everywhere.

Register also uses his culinary prowess to give back to the community.

After many North Carolinians

were devastated by Hurricane Florence in September 2018, Register teamed up with Harrells Christian Academy to host a benefit dinner for hurricane victims called "Come to the Table."

"It's devastating," Register said in a previous article in *The Sampson Independent*. "Through this, my hope is to be able to touch as many families as we can. There's no better way, no more Southern way to do it than have a supper."

Held on Oct. 27, Register planned to use as many local ingredients as possible from Sampson County, including sweet potatoes, which are a major focal point of agriculture in the region.

#### Eating Local

Self-taught cook, winner of the 2017 James Beard Foundation's Blended Burger Project, and owner and chef at The Bistro at Topsail, Chef Bud Taylor draws inspiration from his deep, local roots. He grew up in rural North Carolina, where his family and neighbors filled their plates with food fresh from the backyard.

"We would get home from school, go out to the garden and pick dinner," Taylor says. "Years later, people call it farm-to-table. In my mind, it was always just how country folks ate."

Taylor has carried this tradition of eating local food with him into his career. Depending on the season, he sources nearly 90 percent of his menu from North Carolina producers.

"I've made an effort in the last several years to really embrace my local farmers and fisherman," Taylor says. "It takes more effort and time, but it pays off in spades in the final product."

With mouthwatering dishes like slow-roasted North Carolina duck, low-country egg rolls, local mussels and clams, and a local heirloom tomato salad, it's easy to understand why he prioritizes quality, local ingredients.



## BISTRO SHRIMP & GRITS

### Ingredients

3 cups cold water  
1 cup whole milk  
6 tablespoons butter  
1 cup stone-ground yellow grits  
1 cup Asiago or Parmesan, grated  
Salt and pepper  
1 pound local shrimp  
1 tablespoon shallot or red onion, minced

¼ teaspoon garlic, minced  
4-6 ounces North Carolina country ham, cut into small strips  
½ cup dry white wine  
1 green tomato, cut into ½-inch dice  
2 cups shrimp stock  
Unsalted cold butter, cut into cubes  
2 tablespoons scallion, thinly sliced  
1 teaspoon each fresh thyme, basil and parsley, diced

### Instructions

- For grits: In a stockpot, bring water, milk and butter to a boil. Slowly whisk in grits and return to a boil for 1 to 2 minutes. Reduce heat to a high simmer and cook for 30 to 45 minutes or until grits are tender. Remove from heat and stir in cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
- For the shrimp: While grits are cooking, peel and clean shrimp. Season with salt and pepper and set aside.
- For the sauce: In a hot sauté pan, place 2 tablespoons butter, shallot or red onion, garlic and country ham and cook until lightly browned. Deglaze pan with white wine. Add green tomatoes and cook about 1 minute. Add shrimp stock and 2 tablespoons butter and reduce by one quarter. Add scallions and fresh herbs. Remove from heat and finish sauce by stirring several cubes of cold butter in, until it thickens slightly. Season with salt and pepper.
- In a separate pan, heat 2 tablespoons butter and seasoned shrimp. Cook just until shrimp turn pink on bottom, then turn shrimp and remove pan from heat. Shrimp will finish cooking with residual heat. To serve, toss cooked shrimp into sauce. Divide grits into four bowls and spoon sauce and shrimp mixture equally into bowls on top of grits. Do not stir. Garnish with fresh chives.



Chef Bud Taylor of The Bistro at Topsail draws inspiration from his deep, local, N.C. roots.



PHOTOS: STACEY SPINALE/TOPSAIL NEWS GROUP; ANDREW NELSON

PHOTO: CHRIS BOB THOMAS



"I'm not going to make or serve food that I wouldn't serve to my family," Taylor says. "I'm going to make real, genuine food with real ingredients. Period." He also offers cooking classes to teach others in the community how to work with local ingredients and eat within the season.

The restaurant was damaged during Hurricane Florence, but The Bistro at Topsail plans to recover and continue serving delicious and local foods.

#### A Sense of Community

"There is a unique sense of community here that's different from any other place," Ashley Christensen says. "There are



men and women working together here to elevate our industry."

Renowned chef and recipient of the 2014 James Beard Award for

Best Chef Southeast, Christensen is one of the most influential women in Raleigh. In addition to her catering company, Christensen has opened a cocktail bar and five restaurants, including Poole's Diner, which was included on Eater's 38 Essential Restaurants list; Beasley's, serving delicious fried chicken; Chuck's, a burger shop; Fox Liquor Bar; and Death and Taxes. She plans to release her second cookbook in 2020.

"I love the agricultural diversity that exists in the space between the mountains and the coast," Christensen says. "I'm a big believer that there is no excuse not to make great food in North Carolina." In a previously published article for Eater, Christensen said that

being a chef is a huge responsibility, but it's also a tremendous privilege to do something that you love that much.

"For that, I feel a very pleasant responsibility to give something back," she said.

In that vein, Christensen and her restaurant group participate in many charitable events and fundraisers, and it's easy to witness, when you visit one of her restaurants, that she puts those same community values into practice at each and every one.

—Kayla Walden

#### FIND MORE ONLINE

Discover more farm-to-table restaurants in North Carolina at [NCagriculture.com](http://NCagriculture.com).

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#### CANYON KITCHEN STAYS TRUE TO ITS ROOTS

Canyon Kitchen restaurant, located in the Lonesome Valley community in Cashiers, brings farm-fresh food to the table, focusing on local ingredients from the restaurant's own garden as well as local producers, including Sunburst Trout Farms, Brassdown Beef and Looking Glass Creamery.

And while the food is the star, North Carolina's stunning beauty is also showcased at the restaurant, with guests enjoying fresh flavors while looking at thousand-foot granite cliffs and vast forests. Canyon Kitchen's sliding barn doors allow for fresh mountain air as well. Plan your visit and find more information at [lonesomevalley.com](http://lonesomevalley.com).

