



Country CONTEMPORARY

THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION GOES NATIVE

Text and Photos by Abby Laub



Putting together a Thanksgiving meal that is as delicious as it is beautiful might seem intimidating—but thanks to the experts we assembled, brains and beauty worked together to create a holiday masterpiece that pays tribute to native Kentucky foods. A similar look and menu are easy to recreate in your home.

When planning a Thanksgiving meal, Chef **Jeremy Ashby** of Azur Restaurant and Patio in Lexington suggests exploring local ingredients, scouring the farmers markets (many run into mid-November and some stay open year-round indoors) and finding ingredients that naturally complement each other.

“Keep in mind the rule: What grows together, goes together,” says Ashby. “A lot of these recipes are giving you a representation of what was just harvested. You can’t mess it up—there are no bad flavor combinations of anything that comes out of the garden at the same time.”

For the late fall table, some of Ashby’s favorites are heirloom beans and squash. “I really wanted to kind of give a variety of stuff that is native to the area,” he says, adding that he visited Kentucky farmer Bill Best for seeds to grow the heirloom beans he uses in his succotash.

“And when you’re talking about squash, I guarantee everyone knows someone who grows squash and that they can’t wait to get rid of it,” he says with a laugh. “It comes out of your ears—they’ll be happy to give it to you.”

For his heirloom squash and chorizo relleno recipe, Ashby used Kentucky cushaw. He says these curved-neck squashes are huge and will easily last all winter. He notes that local peppers will be winding down by late fall, but they can be home canned.

Ashby crusted the standing rib roast in our Thanksgiving spread with pumpkin seeds, also known as pepitas. Cushaw seeds also could be used. Ashby says when it comes to buying meat locally, he likes to stick with farmers he knows and suggested looking up local beef farmers on the Kentucky Department of Agriculture’s Kentucky Proud website (kyproud.com) and at local food co-ops.

As the final touch for our Thanksgiving feast, Ashby created a roasted apple and sorghum cake. He says local apples are everywhere this time of year and it is hard to go



wrong with sorghum. “I haven’t met a sorghum I didn’t like. There are some that are darker and some that are lighter, kind of like molasses.”

When it comes to decorating the table and the food, Ashby recommends sticking with the dishes’ ingredients. For example, don’t garnish a plate with parsley if parsley is not in the dish. “Think about the completed dish and then have a raw or rustic representation of an ingredient that goes in it,” he explains. “And make it edible.”

DRESSING THE TABLE

A beautiful Thanksgiving spread is not complete without a gorgeous table setting—that is where decorator **James Snowden** came into play. The owner of Finderskeepers Market in Lexington suggests finding a piece around which to build the table décor. Snowden drew his inspiration from a vintage tablecloth. “That took me more in the direction of those more muted traditional colors instead of

Designer **James Snowden** owns Finderskeepers Market, Inc., in Lexington. Snowden calls himself a “new Victorian ruralist” and says he was initially “not smart enough” to follow his true calling in life to be a decorator and designer but now loves the relationships he builds with his clients in making their homes beautiful. Finderskeepers Market has been open for seven years. For more information, visit finderskeepersmarketinc.blogspot.com.

the rustic reds,” he says. “I always encourage people not to be limited by what they think that particular seasons’ colors are, because once you start layering, you can get the look of warmth that fall signifies without going to those traditional colors. There are some people that like to stick to that traditional, which is great, too.”

Snowden says he also was going for a “collected” look, one that was “cozy.” This is achieved by layering pieces and textiles. Build different heights on the table and arrange linens in a rumpled manner rather than the traditional smooth and starched look.

“The tablecloth had a lot of visual texture; then the candlesticks had a lot of chipped paint on them, which tells a story,” Snowden explains, adding that he used vintage wooden book boards from an old desk to create levels for displaying the food. Fresh flowers and unique serving platters also gave the table a dimension. “Don’t be afraid to mix textures and tell a visual story.”

In keeping with the contemporary country setting of The Barn at Cedar Grove, the Adair County venue where we held our Thanksgiving celebration, Snowden felt it important to let the unique, antique table (a find of the barn’s owner, **Amy Mitchum**) show. Another option Snowden says he sometimes uses in lieu of tablecloth or to complement a great table linen is brown butcher paper. He even has been known to cut patterns in it.

Cut out ideas from magazines, gather inspiration, but don’t try to copycat an entire look. Overall, Snowden advises, “It’s important to have a sense of play when you are dressing the table and not feel limited by rules ... I like for it to look casual.”

Everyone Is a Foodie

In addition to creating our Thanksgiving feast and being executive chef of Azur Restaurant and Patio in Lexington, **Jeremy Ashby** also is co-host of the television show *Food News and Chews*. Ashby and his co-host, **Sylvia Lovely**, take viewers on a tour of Kentucky's food scene.

"What we try to show people is you don't necessarily have to keep chickens in your backyard to engage in the food movement," says Lovely, a self-described food policy nut but horrible cook. She and Ashby engage their audience with a respect for growing things, savoring food, trying new things and preserving the state's heirloom crops. "You can have herbs in the windowsill in your kitchen," Lovely says. "It's just about appreciation."



Food News and Chews is one part food news, one part interviews and one part cooking. The pair

often visit local farms and discuss topical food issues from GMOs to food safety and economic development. The co-hosts are seeing positive changes in the way Kentuckians view and appreciate food. According to Lovely, food is becoming the "great convener of community."

Ashby often shares recipe tips and favorites, but also tries to encourage amateur chefs to relax in the kitchen. "It's just dinner," he says. "If you mess it up, order a pizza and laugh about it."

The show specializes in uncovering the state's unique and forgotten ingredients. "We're exploring some of these things and ingredients we don't really know about from this area," Ashby says. "Tasting the difference is interesting. Like tasting the heirloom bean succotash [see recipe, page 24]—if you eat the heirloom bean succotash—the ones that people were writing about 100 years ago in their cookbooks, now you don't have all of those beans. The ones they were originally talking about have withstood the test of time and there's a real difference in the way it tastes."

Ashby and Lovely worked with farmer **Bill Best** to uncover some of these savory, traditional beans from the state of Kentucky. "It's really fun to find the 'lost' ingredients again and use them," Ashby says.

There is information overload about food—what is healthy and what isn't. "Just enjoy life and enjoy food and how it relates to getting together and enjoying each other, which people don't do enough," Lovely says.

Food News and Chews can be seen Sundays at 11 p.m. on Fox 56/WDKY in Lexington. News, blogs, recipes and archived episodes are available at foodnewsandchews.com.



Making Old New at Cedar Grove

"Soon after my daughter got engaged, she began talking of getting married on the family farm and having a reception in the barn," says **Amy Mitchum**, owner of The Barn at Cedar Grove. "I, of course, thought she was crazy. I had never heard of such a thing. I didn't really see her vision until she starting showing me photos she had found online and in magazines."

That was in 2011. Today, Mitchum has a burgeoning destination wedding business. The 100-plus-year-old tobacco barn between Columbia and Greensburg has been lovingly renovated by the family and already has become a wildly popular event venue, drawing brides from as far away as Texas, Colorado and California.

"During renovation we found someone's initials and '1911' carved on one of the barn stalls," Mitchum says. "It was quite dilapidated. It had sat unused and ignored for decades, and the locals had made the hallway of the barn part of their four-wheeler trail."

Restored by an Amish worker, the barn has just less than 3,500 square feet of space and can seat 230 people. "We've taken great pains to keep the original charm and as much of the original structure as possible," says Mitchum.

The more than 200-acre farm offers numerous idyllic locations for wedding ceremonies and photos and includes a recently constructed bridal cottage—with a charming porch swing and lovely shabby chic décor—and a rustic cabin hangout for the groom and his friends. For more information, visit barnatcedargrove.com.



Don't Forget the Fresh Flowers!

Floral artist **David Campbell** of David's Floral and Vintage Inspired Living in Lexington arranged roses, broomcorn (a variety of sorghum), foxtail millet, kale, button and daisy poms, red hypericum berries, dusty miller, red astilbe and stock in vintage serving pieces. davidsfloralky.com



BOURBON MULLED CIDER

8 whole allspice berries
6 cinnamon sticks
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
Orange peel from 2 oranges
Lemon peel from 2 lemons
3/4 cup sorghum
1 gallon unfiltered apple juice
1 cup bourbon (optional, but much better if added)

1. In a large stainless steel pot, combine allspice berries, cinnamon sticks, ground cloves, peel from one orange and peel from one lemon. Add sorghum and apple juice. Stir.
2. Bring mixture almost to a boil, and then reduce heat to low and simmer gently for 30 minutes.
3. Remove from heat and add bourbon. Serve in tea cups or mason jars and garnish with remaining orange and lemon peels.
4. Leftover bourbon mulled cider can be stored in the refrigerator for up to a week.



HEIRLOOM BEAN SUCCOTASH

1 cup assorted dry heirloom beans*
2 cups sweet corn
1 cup shelled soybeans (edamame)
1 cup Sheltowee Farms shiitake mushroom caps, diced, small
2 tomatoes, seeded and diced, small
1 red onion, diced, small
1/4 cup white vinegar
1/4 cup olive oil
1/2 cup ripe autumn olives or fall berries
1/2 cup dried cranberries
Salt and pepper

1. Soak heirloom beans in water for 45 minutes. Drain water. Add new water to cover and place the beans in a pressure cooker. Follow instructions on cooker for safety and cook beans for 20 minutes under pressure.
2. Place pot under cool running water to cool and release pressure. Check beans for tenderness; they should be al dente.
3. Add the beans and the rest of the ingredients to a mixing bowl. Stir to incorporate. Season with salt and pepper.

**ONLINE
Extra**

Get Chef Ashby's recipes for cushaw squash and chorizo relleno, and heirloom tomato pie at kentuckymonthly.com

* Ashby says his growers use seeds from Kentucky producer Bill Best, heirlooms.org. You may substitute a bean mix, such as those packaged for bean soups, if heirloom beans are unavailable.

ROASTED APPLE AND SORGHUM CAKE

Unsalted butter for greasing
2 3/4 cups flour, plus more for dusting
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon ginger
1 1/4 teaspoons baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 eggs at room temperature
1 3/4 cups sugar
1 cup puree from fresh, roasted local apples
1/2 cup sorghum

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9x13-inch baking dish and dust with flour.
2. Whisk together 2 1/4 cups flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, baking soda and salt in a bowl and reserve.
3. In the bowl of a standing mixer, beat the eggs and sugar together until thick and light, about 4 minutes.
4. Sprinkle the flour mixture over the egg mixture and gently fold to make a batter. Incorporate the remaining 1/2 cup flour. Stir in the apples and sorghum.
5. Transfer the batter to the baking dish and bake approximately 40 minutes, until the cake is firm and a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.
6. Serve with sorghum anglaise. (Chef Ashby topped the cakes with sea foam candy.)

Sorghum Anglaise

1 cup heavy cream
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
6 egg yolks
1/3 cup brown sugar
1/3 cup sorghum

(Ashby uses Bourbon Barrel Foods' bourbon barrel aged vanilla)

1. In a small, heavy saucepan, heat cream and vanilla to scald.
2. While cream is heating, whisk together egg yolks and sugar until smooth.
3. Slowly pour 1/2 cup of hot mixture into egg yolk/sugar mixture, whisking constantly.
4. Gradually add egg yolk mixture back to remaining milk mixture, whisking constantly. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture starts to thicken into a custard.
5. Add sorghum to the custard and stir to mix.



Cider recipe courtesy of Theresa Stanley, public relations and production consultant for Food News and Chews. All other recipes are courtesy of Chef Jeremy Ashby.