

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF *THE SUMMER GIRLS*

Mary Alice Monroe

A Lowcountry Christmas

“With intrinsic understanding
of life in the Lowcountry,
Mary Alice Monroe writes
from the heart.”

—Debbie Macomber,
#1 *New York Times*
bestselling author



Picked Shrimp, or “Swimpee”

Makes 2 pounds

I couldn't resist using the name of this recipe from *Charleston Receipts*. It got this name from the vendors who early on walked the streets of Charleston calling out “swimpee” to sell their wares. The recipe, however, is my own. This recipe doubles easily.

<i>2 pounds shrimp,</i>	<i>Salt</i>
<i>cooked and peeled</i>	<i>Freshly ground black pepper</i>
<i>3 large sweet onions, sliced</i>	<i>Fresh herbs to taste, such as</i>
<i>¾ cup olive oil</i>	<i>lemon thyme or lemon balm</i>
<i>1 cup sherry vinegar</i>	<i>Lemon slices, optional</i>

Starting with the shrimp, layer shrimp and onions in a large glass bowl.

Mix oil and vinegar, and season to taste with salt and pepper and herbs. Pour this mixture over the shrimp and onions, and cover tightly. Refrigerate overnight or up to two days.

Herbed Shrimp and Scallop Ceviche

Serves 8

Cool shrimp and scallops are enticing in a glass bowl at a buffet. They can also be served with toothpicks for nibbles or on plates as a first course for a sit-down meal.

We know ceviche was served by Martha Washington in early colonial days (spelled *caveach*), most likely wending its way here from the Spaniards in Mexico and Latin America as well as from Barbados and other islands. This is easy, fast, and beckoning, and is best made a day or two ahead. Poaching the seafood very quickly before marinating takes away the trepidation some people have about eating “raw” seafood.

*1½ pounds large
raw shrimp in shells
½ pound raw sea scallops,
sliced horizontally into
½-inch pieces*

*Grated rind of 3 limes, 2
lemons, and 1 orange, no
white attached
⅓ cup fresh lime juice
(about 3 limes)*

<i>¼ cup fresh lemon juice (about 2 lemons)</i>	<i>½ to 1 teaspoon hot sauce, optional</i>
<i>⅓ cup fresh orange juice (about 1 orange)</i>	<i>Salt</i>
<i>5 tablespoons fresh parsley, thyme, oregano, and basil, chopped</i>	<i>Freshly ground black pepper</i>
<i>½ small red onion, very finely chopped</i>	<i>1 teaspoon commercial seafood seasoning or Creole seasoning, optional</i>
<i>¼ cup olive oil</i>	<i>1 large avocado, peeled and sliced</i>

Bring 2 quarts of water to a boil in a large pot. Add the shrimp and poach just a few minutes, until tender and pink. Remove the shrimp with a slotted spoon or strainer, reserving the poaching liquid, and set shrimp aside to cool.

Return the poaching liquid to a boil. Move the scallops to a heatproof strainer or colander and dip into the boiling water for about 30 seconds, until the scallops are just cooked. Remove and set aside to cool. Peel the cooled shrimp and cut into thirds. Move the scallops and shrimp to a plastic ziplock bag. Add the grated lime, lemon, orange rinds, and the juices. Refrigerate covered, and marinate overnight, tossing occasionally.

When ready to serve, bring to room temperature and drain, reserving the juice. Add the herbs, onion, oil, and

hot sauce, and toss lightly. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Taste and add optional seafood seasoning as desired. Serve chilled with the avocado. It looks smashing in a stemmed wide champagne glass with a wedge of avocado.

Caveach, a noun for “pickled mackerel,” is also a verb that refers to the “cooking of raw fish” using lime juice or other acid. Known in early American cookbooks as *ceviche*—also spelled *cebiche* and *seviche*—this acid “cooking” actually brings about a change of appearance and texture associated with cooked fish but, in fact, does not actually cook it. In French, Spanish, and Portuguese, *escabeche* is a similar term but refers to the pickling of cooked fish.

Spicy Sausage Balls

Makes 100 to 120 balls

This makes a gracious plenty, but the recipe can be cut down proportionally quite easily. Any extra sausage balls can be frozen cooked or uncooked. Chilling the dough makes it easier to work with. The self-rising flour gives it the punch that makes it special.

1 pound hot pork sausage

1 pound grated sharp

1 cup self-rising flour

Cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix together sausage, flour, and cheese with hands to form a dough, or move to a plastic ziplock bag to massage the ingredients together to form a well-incorporated dough, and refrigerate for 20 to 30 minutes.

Divide the dough into 4 pieces. Working with one piece at a time and keeping the remainder refrigerated, take 1 tablespoon of cold sausage mixture and using hands

or a melon baller, roll it into a 3/4-inch ball. Move to a rimmed baking sheet, leaving a small space between balls. Repeat with remaining dough.

Bake 15 minutes. Balls will puff slightly when cooked. Remove pan carefully from the oven, as there will be hot fat on the pan. Discard the fat and serve the sausage balls immediately. They can be refrigerated overnight and reheated, or wrapped well and frozen.

EVALUATING SAUSAGE SEASONING

Usually sausage has a sufficient amount of seasoning, but it's always a good idea to sauté or microwave a small amount of sausage to know how it tastes before proceeding to add other ingredients. It might need more salt, pepper, or spices, depending on your taste.

A Mess of Greens and "Pot likker"

Serves 6 to 8, including "pot likker"

A "mess" of greens, as cooked greens are called, is an armful of bundles of turnips or collards that cook down to a quart of greens in addition to the broth. Regarded as a comfort food, greens can be a meal, eaten just by themselves, or with cornbread or biscuits, as well as part of a larger meal.

When meat was a rarity, the seasoning meat in greens was an important dietary supplement, with the fat giving energy for long days and cold nights.

Greens are best when picked after the first frost, customarily around hog butchering time, when there is a snap in the air, or in early spring; but there is hardly a time anymore when they are not available.

1/3 pound sliced, rinsed salt 1 to 2 slices onion, optional
pork or streak o' lean, smoked 1 small hot pepper, optional
neck, or other cured pork

5 pounds turnip, collard, Salt
poke sallet, or kale greens, Freshly ground pepper
washed Hot sauce, optional

Bring ½ gallon of water to a boil; add the pork, optional onion, and hot pepper and return to a boil. If time is available, cook half an hour or so to flavor the broth.

Meanwhile, tear and discard from the greens the stalks and any tough veins. Tear or cut the remaining greens into pieces and add to the broth.

Return to a boil, reduce the heat to a simmer, pushing any bobbing greens down into the liquid, and cover. Cook 50 minutes to 3 hours, as desired. Take a pair of large scissors and cut any pieces of greens larger than bite-size. Taste and season with salt, pepper, and hot sauce as desired. Serve with the broth (pot likker), or strain, reserving the broth for another time. Cooked greens will last covered and refrigerated for several days. They freeze up to 3 months.

OPTIONAL PREPARATION:

When the greens have returned to the boil, add peeled and cut-up turnips or beets, and cook until the vegetables are done, about half an hour, depending on size.

Add small pieces of potatoes to the boiling greens and cook until the potatoes are done, about 30 minutes, depending on size.

Break up pieces of cornbread and add to bowls of pot likker as desired.

Many Southern homes used to keep a bottle of vinegar infused with peppers on the kitchen table (the closer to Louisiana, the hotter the concoction). Greens were sprinkled with vinegar or hot sauce before eating.

Hoppin' John

Serves 6 to 8

A must-do dish at New Year's and other holidays, the peas represent good luck and health. Traditionally, since this was a New Year's dish, the peas were dried, but, of course, canned or frozen are readily substituted and seen nearly all year long.

<i>2 cups dried black-eyed peas, lady peas, or cowpeas</i>	<i>1 medium onion, chopped Salt</i>
<i>1 piece fatback, hog jowl, or other smoked meat, slashed in several places</i>	<i>Freshly ground black pepper 1 cup uncooked rice</i>
<i>1 hot red pepper</i>	<i>4 tablespoons drippings, preferably bacon</i>

Pour boiling water over the dried peas to rinse in a large pot and set aside while preparing other ingredients. When ready to proceed, drain the peas and discard the water. Add fresh water to cover the peas. Add the fatback, hot

red pepper, onion, salt, and black pepper. Bring to a boil; cover, reduce heat, and simmer until the peas are nearly tender, about 45 minutes to 1 hour, skimming off the foam as needed. Add more water as needed to cover the peas. Continue cooking, covered, until the peas are tender. Remove the peas with a slotted spoon, reserving enough liquid in the pot (about 3 cups) to cook the rice.

Bring reserved liquid to a boil, add the rice, and return to a boil. Cover. Reduce heat and simmer until the rice is cooked, about 30 minutes. Return peas to the pot, stir together, and cook for a few minutes more. Add drippings to flavor the dish, taste, and adjust seasonings. Turn out into a large dish and serve. This may be made into a tasty salad at a later time.

Chocolate Snowballs

Serves 6 to 8

Imagine a deep, dark ball of chocolate, iced with snowy white whipping cream. Now imagine it as big as a bowl, as easy to serve and cut as a cake, and even easier to make using a food processor or mixer. It doubles easily—making one gigantic ball or 2 dinner-party-sized ones.

*1 (10-ounce) package
semisweet chocolate
chips*

½ cup water

1 cup granulated sugar

*1 cup butter, room
temperature*

4 large eggs

*1 tablespoon vanilla extract,
optional*

TOPPING:

1 cup heavy cream

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 tablespoons granulated

sugar

GARNISH:

Chocolate shards

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a 5-cup ovenproof bowl with a double thickness of foil.

Melt the chocolate with the water and sugar over low heat or in the microwave; cool slightly.

Transfer the chocolate mixture to a mixing bowl or to a food processor bowl fitted with the knife blade. Beat in the butter, add the eggs one by one, followed by the vanilla extract, beating after each addition.

Pour the mixture into the foil-lined mold; bake 1 hour or until a thick crust has formed on top. It will still be soft under the crust.

Remove from oven. It will collapse. Cool completely. Cover tightly and refrigerate until solid, 2 to 3 hours or overnight, or freeze. This can be done several days in advance.

When ready to serve, whip the cream, sugar, and vanilla until stiff, and move to a piping bag with a star tip. Remove the snowball from the bowl and peel off the foil.

Place on a serving dish, flat side down.

Pipe rosettes of whipped cream over the entire surface until no chocolate shows. Chill until served. Garnish with chocolate shavings if desired. Leftovers freeze well, tightly wrapped—good enough for family anyway.

A Lowcountry Christmas

The key to this recipe is a nice acid-sweet balance. Use good cider!

To make an individual drink . . .

2 ounces apple pie moonshine Juice of one half lemon

4 to 6 ounces cider

FOR A BATCH:

*1 bottle Firefly apple pie
moonshine*

*½ container of lemon juice
(1 cup)*

2 bottles apple cider

Warm it up in a beverage warmer. Putting on the stove top lends an aroma throughout one's house that will leave you weeping with delight!