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STACY LYN HARRIS'S HOME LIFE OF ADVENTURE



TV host and cookbook author Stacy Lyn Harris celebrates life's many treasures.

BY JIM HANNAFORD

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TV host and cookbook author **Stacy Lyn Harris** celebrates life's many treasures.

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They say that particular talents, traits, and skills sometimes skip a generation, but there wasn't much chance of that happening with Stacy Lyn Harris' big family.

You may know the creatively adventurous **Stacy Lyn Harris** as an accomplished cook, gardener, writer, photographer, and decorator who stands out as a prominent female presence on The Outdoor Channel's popular *Taste of the Wild* lineup. Or some folks in her home state of Alabama may remember seeing her around the courthouse as a young attorney.

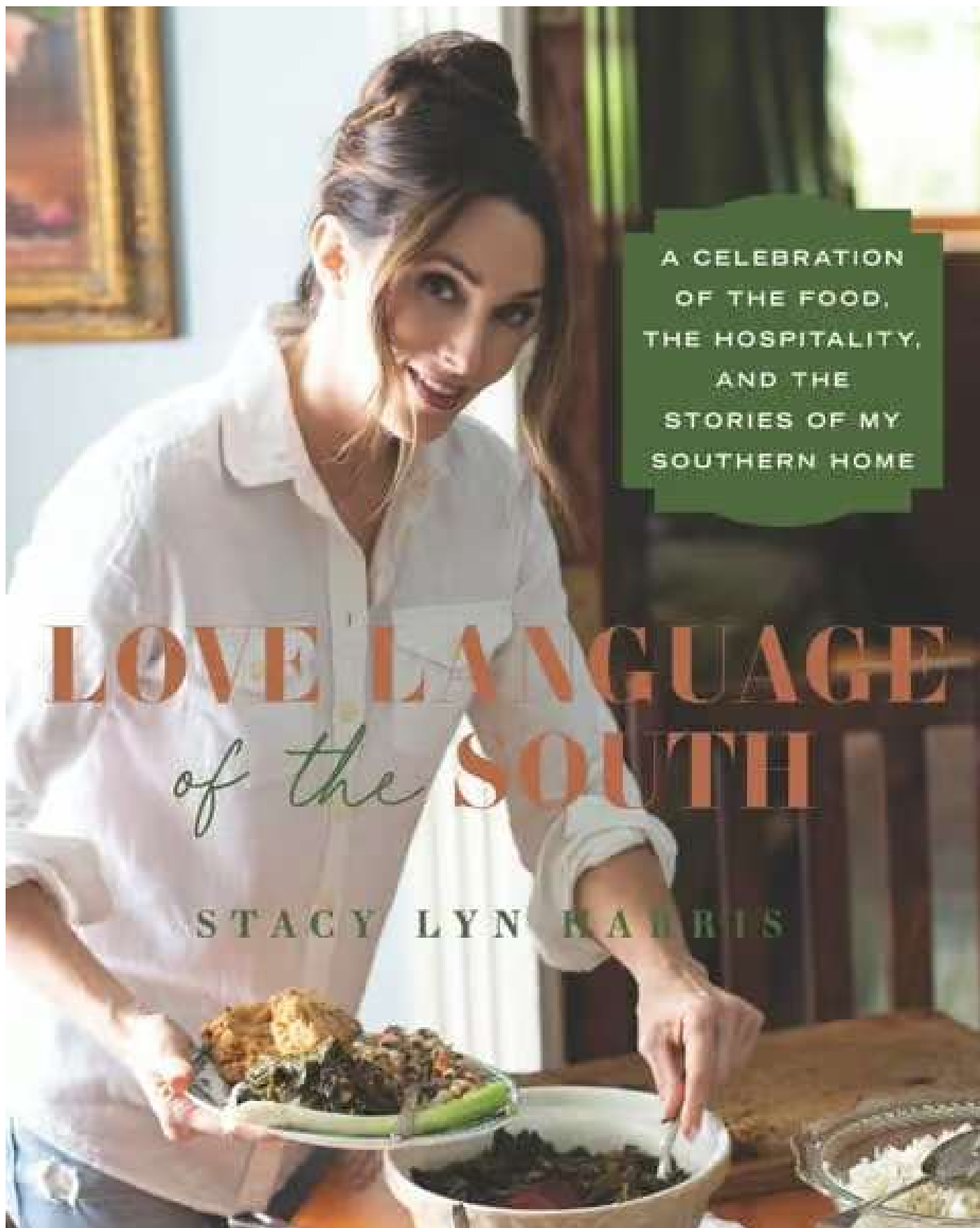


But most don't realize she has also gone on to become a **successful educator**. It kind of surprises her, too, and it's one of the many things she's learned along the way while raising seven children with her husband, Scott, a lifelong outdoorsman who enjoys a successful dentistry practice.

THE HARRIS FAMILY'S WAY OF BEING

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decades, they've lived an unusually self-sufficient way of life in this area of the Deep South that Harris affectionately refers to as "LA" (Lower Alabama).

Working hard together as a family and combining their efforts growing fruits and vegetables and harvesting their own wild game and fish, they've managed to mostly feed themselves, with remarkably delicious and healthy results.

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And with Harris' high profile as a blogger, cookbook author, and popular figure on TV and social media, their family's fervent return-to-roots lifestyle is inspiring many others to do the same. You could even say that she's become a model of sorts for sustainable living in ways that are not just practical but also artful and stylish.

Stacy and her family aren't what you might term survivalists or homesteaders, and they don't live in isolation by any means. "I do go to the grocery store, don't get me wrong," she says. "I go every Thursday." But being able to take care of your own day-to-day needs, she believes, is not only a smart thing to do but just makes life more exciting and rewarding. "We don't live in fear, and we don't stock up on food," says Harris. "It's really more about health and flavor and this adventure of life. We look at everything in life as an adventure."

HOMESCHOOLING THE KIDS

There's a lot to talk about with Harris, but let's start with homeschooling, which they first undertook in 1997. Fostering an at-home atmosphere of constant learning, they felt, was the best way to fulfill what they believed was the Lord's will for them to educate their children to the very best of their abilities.

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The curriculum they put together covered the subjects traditionally taught in schools as well as essential life skills, including a regular schedule of chores in and outside their home.

"I learned to homeschool through trial and error, and just reading a lot," says Harris, but she won't take full credit. "I feel like I failed in a lot of areas. But at the same time, God took over. I have six in college now, and I'm still homeschooling one."

So how are things working out? "One is a dentist (in practice with his dad), one just took the bar exam, one just got her MBA, two are in engineering, and the other one has not yet declared—she just started college." And, oh, the youngest daughter, the only one still at home, already runs her own cake business. "I feel like they've done fairly well," says their mother, "and I think it comes down really to their hard work ethic."

Harris studied hard herself to become an expert on **cooking wild game**. She boned up on this aspect of cooking out of necessity because her husband was such an avid hunter, and she wanted the meat, fish, and fowl he constantly brought home to taste as good as possible. But to trace Harris' culinary passion in general, you have to reach back in time to the influence of her father's mother, whom faithful readers of her blog and cookbooks know as Granny Gray.

HER GRANNY'S INFLUENCE

Harris grew up as an only child in a broken home. Her mother, she says, worked full-time and relied heavily on convenient, store-bought foodstuffs. "[Granny] made sure there was food on the table, which was a great example, but a lot of times it was an of beans, and some rice and a pork chop."

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A meal at Grandma's was a different story. "When I went to her house, everything was delicious and fresh," Harris enthuses. "She grew up real poor and learned how to cook from scratch. It was all of those Southern staples, but all of her food—everything she made—was absolutely amazing." As a tasty example, the homemade soups and stews the older woman created even in the dead of winter seemed almost magical. Watching her grandmother closely is how Harris learned to can the fresh fruits and vegetables at harvest time to preserve them for the colder months ahead. That took the mystery out of how the older woman was able to conjure up those tasty soups and stews even in the dead of winter.

While remaining rooted in her family's traditions, Harris has modified her approach in the kitchen to be more mindful of health and nutrition. "I want to stay in shape and stay healthy, so I gravitate toward a Mediterranean style of cooking, which is mostly meat and vegetables and fish, where I'm eating more whole foods." Besides being nutritious, it's also less expensive, she notes—especially if you're a savvy shopper or are saving your seeds to grow more fresh produce as they do.

THEIR HOME PLACES

Home for the Harris family is a woodsy seven-acre parcel just outside Montgomery in a somewhat rural suburban community called Pike Road. "It's in a neighborhood, but you don't realize it once you're back here," she says. They built their house 20 years ago as a replica of Scott's family's ancestral home in Mississippi. It's just 10 miles or so from where she grew up, so this is the area where she has spent all of her life except for when Scott attended dental school upstate in Birmingham.

There's a broad porch on the front of the house and another on the back, so there's

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outdoor dining. They can cook outside over an open fire if they

want or step inside to the nicely equipped modern kitchen that viewers see regularly on *The Sporting Chef*.

The family can stretch out even more on their nearly thousand acres of property the next county over. They take the 50-minute drive to what's essentially a wildlife sanctuary a couple of times a week or so. This is where they can hunt privately for deer, ducks, squirrels, doves, wild pigs, or turkeys or fish their two stocked ponds for bass, bream, or catfish. They have a comfy cabin there that's a wonderful place to unwind when they're busy with upkeep on the land.

Back at home, their active flock of chickens keeps them supplied with fresh poultry and eggs, and each of their places has a bountiful, carefully tended garden. They grow a dizzying abundance of fruits and vegetables includes potatoes, tomatoes, melons, peas, okra, eggplant, zucchini, peppers, squash, plums, pears, peaches, apples, figs, lemons, loquats, kumquats, and lots of fragrant herbs.

RETURNING HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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Harris has always loved the holidays, planning specific celebrations for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, and Easter. The mostly homegrown food is naturally a centerpiece of the festivities. "Our tradition, on both Thanksgiving and Christmas, is to eat lunch, and then whoever wants to go hunting can go hunting, or they can just stay and talk and play games or watch a movie and just feast on great

JOIN US she says.

Their nest is mostly empty these days, with most of the children grown and out on their own, so the holidays are "super special," she says, because they bring everyone back together under the same roof again, including their daughter-in-law and a brand-new grandbaby. Harris says she does most of the prep work for the meals, but of course, all of the kids know exactly how to pitch in. On Christmas Eve, they all sit down together for her take on venison bourguignon. "We have it over mashed potatoes with some crusty bread."

HER ONSCREEN APPEAL

With her pleasant and sincere manner on camera, Harris captivates Outdoors Channel watchers with her confident but down-to-earth approach. She certainly comes across as knowledgeable but also as someone who acknowledges that there's always more to learn. Perhaps especially with her artistic eye toward design and decorating, more than a few fans have compared her to a younger version of Martha Stewart. She takes that as a compliment and agrees that they probably share some common ground. "We might be coming at it from different world views, but what she does is a beautiful thing," says Harris. "I think it's a natural instinct to want to be excellent in all things. That's what separates us from the animals. We long for art and beauty and laughter and joy—we're not living just to survive."

As you would imagine, fresh, seasonal flavors take on a starring role in the Harris family's holiday celebrations. This time of year, of course that means turkey, duck, and venison. She has generously shared these family favorites:

RECIPES FROM STACY LYN HARRIS

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VENISON TURKEY MASALA



Serves 10

FOR THE MARINADE

- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. turmeric
- 2 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. cardamom
- 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg

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d cinnamon

- 1 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes

- 1/8 tsp. ground cloves
- 3 lemons
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp. fresh ginger root, peeled and grated
- 1/3 cup Greek yogurt
- 1 lb. venison hindquarter, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 lb. turkey breast, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 3 red chiles, sliced

FOR MASALA

- 2 Tbsp. vegetable oil for browning the meat
- 4 Tbsp. butter, divided
- 2 chopped onions
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 red chiles
- 1 Tbsp. ground coriander
- 2 tsp. turmeric
- 1 cup cilantro leaves and stalks, chopped
- 28 oz. plum tomatoes
- 1/3 cup ground almonds
- 2 (14-oz) cans coconut milk

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- Greek yogurt for serving

DIRECTIONS:

In a small frying pan, add the first 8 spices and toast for one minute. Add the spices to a large bowl and finely grate in the zest of 1 lemon and its juice. Add the garlic, ginger, yogurt, venison, turkey, and red chile peppers. Cover with plastic wrap and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

Heat oil and 2 tablespoons of butter in a large Dutch oven. When sizzling, add venison and turkey pieces in batches. Do not crowd the pan. Fry the meat until browned, but not cooked all the way through, about 2 minutes on each side. Remove the meat and set aside.

Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter and add onions until browned, about 3 minutes. Add garlic and brown for about 1 minute. Add the sliced red chile pepper, coriander, turmeric, and cilantro stalks and cook for about 3 more minutes. Give the mixture a stir and add the tomatoes. Add the turkey and venison to the mixture and simmer on low for 30 minutes.

In a food processor, add almonds until chopped very finely. Add the almonds into the Dutch oven and simmer for another 10 minutes. Stir in the coconut milk and halved lemon, then simmer for 15 more minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove lemons and squeeze the juices into the sauce with tongs, and season to perfection. Dollop a few spoonfuls of yogurt and swirl through, then sprinkle the cilantro leaves over the Masala. Serve with Basmati Rice and Indian Bread (naan).

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DUCK AND FREE-RANGE FRIED EGG

DUCK BRINE

- 2 cups black tea
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup kosher salt
- 6 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 Tbsp. black pepper

FOR THE DUCK

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- 4 duck breasts
- kosher salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 4 free-range eggs, fried
- 8 servings fried Arepas (recipe below)
- ½ cup cilantro
- ½ cup green tomato relish (optional)
- 4 Tbsp. goat cheese

DIRECTIONS:

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In a medium saucepan, combine all the brine ingredients and cook over medium heat until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Add about a half of a cup of ice to the mixture and allow the brine to come to room temperature. Add the duck breasts to the brine and refrigerate overnight.

Remove the duck from the brine. Score the skin with a criss-cross pattern, being careful not to cut into the breast.

In a medium-sized cast-iron skillet over high heat, add olive oil. When the oil is shimmering, add the duck, skin side down. Allow it to cook over medium heat for about four minutes. Turn the duck over and cook until the internal temperature reaches 135°F to 140°F. Remove the duck to a cutting board and allow it to rest. Cut across the grain in very thin slices.

To serve, spread one tablespoon of goat cheese on one side of the cut arepas. Spoon the relish over the goat cheese then layer the duck breast over the relish. Add a fried egg, sprinkle the cilantro over the egg, place the top on the sandwich, and serve immediately.

AREPAS

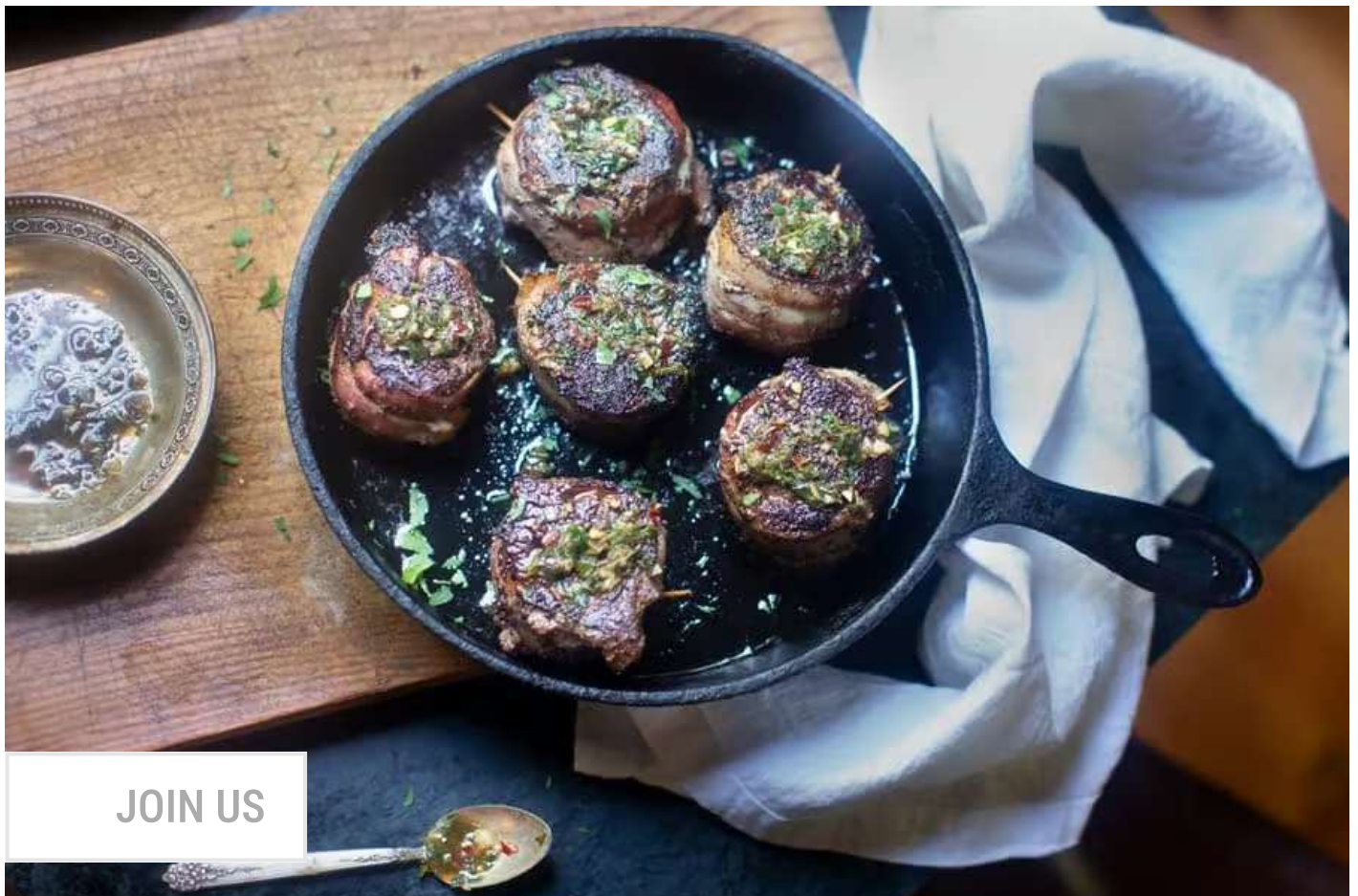
- 2½ cups lukewarm water (around 100°F)
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 cups pre-cooked yellow cornmeal (such as Maserapa)
- ½ cup vegetable oil

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In a medium bowl, add the water, salt, and cornmeal and mix with your hands until well incorporated. Place a towel over the mixture and allow to sit for about five minutes. Meanwhile, in a large cast-iron skillet, add the oil and heat until it shimmers. Roughly divide the dough into eight balls. Press the ball into 1/2-inch patties.

When the oil is hot, add the patties in batches spaced about two inches apart. Fry on the first side for about four to five minutes or until deeply golden on the bottom. Flip to the other side and continue to cook for another four minutes. Remove to a cooling rack over a sheet pan. Allow the arepas to cool completely. With a serrated knife, cut the arepas horizontally creating two pieces for filling.

APPLEWOOD BACON WRAPPED VENISON STEAKS WITH BROWN BUTTER HERB SAUCE



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FOR THE STEAKS

- 2-lb. venison loin, cut into 6 steaks 2-inches thick
- 1/2 lb. applewood bacon
- kosher salt
- freshly ground pepper
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. butter

BROWN BUTTER HERB SAUCE

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 8 Tbsp. unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 tsp. chopped basil
- 2 tsp. chopped parsley
- 1/4 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
- 2 tsp. fresh oregano leaves
- Juice and zest of one lemon
- 2 oz. shaved Parmigiana-Reggiano
- kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS:

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Preheat the oven to 325°F. Liberally salt and pepper all sides of the steak. Wrap the steak with applewood bacon and secure with a toothpick. Heat a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add the olive oil and butter, and two steaks to the skillet. Allow each steak to cook on one side for about three minutes over medium-high heat, then flip the steak and cook for another four minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches around 120°F. Remove to a cutting board and tent the steaks with foil and allow to rest for at least 10 minutes. Repeat with the remaining steaks. Ladle Brown Butter Herb Sauce over each steak, then top with shaved Parmigiana-Reggiano.

FOR THE BROWN BUTTER HERB SAUCE

In a cast-iron skillet, melt butter over medium-heat, whisking constantly. Continue to cook and whisk for about three minutes, or until you see brown bits on the bottom of the pan and the butter turning a light-brown color. Remove the skillet from the heat and add the herbs, lemon juice, and zest. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

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