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and Fettuccini, page 38.

A match made in heaven

Succulent and sweet, local shrimp have always had
a place in our hearts – and on our tables

Photography by **Matthew Scott** | Written by **Holly Herrick**

Shrimp and the Lowcountry are like two peas in a pod. They've been together for so long it's hard, if not impossible, to think of one without the other.

The waving marsh grasses, the ebb and flow of the tide, and the complex network of creeks that wind their way into residents' hearts and souls are integral to sustaining the shrimp through the travails they may face in their relatively short lives (on average, 9 months).

Shrimp have been harvested here for centuries around picturesque places such as McClellanville, Rockville and Shem Creek. In recent years, though, local shrimpers have felt the financial squeeze of shrinking fleets and increasing operational costs. Yet because of their efforts, the shrimp still come in and, well, someone's just got to eat them. Right?

From this time of year through December or January, Lowcountry shrimpers are bringing in white shrimp, rather than the slightly smaller brown shrimp harvested in the summer months. Some local shrimp fans, such as 19-year seafood-business veteran Joan Cooksey of Crosby's Fish & Seafood Co., describe the brown shrimp as "sweeter." Others, including Carolina Seafood's Rutledge Leland, who's been around shrimp his whole life, says he's hard-pressed to tell the difference between the two species, especially when they're "just fresh out of the water."

What no one disputes, however, is that white shrimp tend to grow larger, starting out at a count of 41-45 shrimp

per pound and increasing in size to 25-30 per pound by the end of the growing season.

Both Cooksey and Leland say they like white shrimp best fried, and agree that their firm but pliable texture and relative girth make them ideal candidates for everything from boiling to sautéing.

Bigger shrimp plus cooler fall air and water temperatures add up to shrimp that are well-suited for freezing, according to Cooksey. "It makes a difference because they're cooler when they hit the deck," she says. So, now is the time to stock up on shrimp to help carry you through the winter. (See the shrimp-baiting story on Page 13 for tips on one popular local method of filling the freezer.)

Cooksey advises tossing the shrimp in ice water before freezing to create a "glaze" that will help prevent freezer burn. Rather than storing them in a plastic bag that can be pierced by the shrimp tails, allowing the protective water barrier to leak out, Cooksey suggests storing shrimp in an empty paper milk carton along with the ice water bath and folding down the top to seal. "They will stay like that for months," she says.

To store fresh shrimp in the refrigerator, toss them with ice and place in a colander over a drainage receptacle, such as a deep bowl. Keep replacing the ice and tossing out the accumulated drainage water, and the shrimp will keep for several days. *recipes, page 33*



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RECIPES

Driving out to Crosby's from downtown initiates a vacation from real life just about the time you reach the flashing yellow light on Folly Road. After that, it's smooth sailing through salty, pluff-mud-infused air until you arrive at the small, ocean-blue house with white trim sitting on the edge of sparkling water that's framed with bright green marsh grasses. Ellie, Joan's twin sister, assisted me in packing up the fat, translucent shrimp that were so fresh, I could hardly wait to get home and get cooking. The recipes that follow are all well-suited to late summer/early fall Lowcountry weather and ingredients.

Shrimp-Stuffed Onions Provencale

A dash of herbes de Provence, garlic and tomatoes give sweet onions and Lowcountry shrimp a zippy French twist. Herbes de Provence is a blend of dried herbs and spices that usually contains basil, fennel seed, lavender, marjoram, rosemary, sage, summer savory and thyme.

These onions can be served whole as a light entrée or cut in half or quartered as a side dish to pasta, salad or an omelet. They can be served fresh from the oven or at room temperature.

Store the cooked, stuffed onions in the refrigerator for 1-2 days until ready to serve. They can be re-heated, covered, in a 300-degree oven for about 10 minutes.

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Chop off about ¼-inch of the top of the onions and peel. Using a sharp-edged spoon, hollow out the center of the onions, leaving about ¼-inch thickness on the sides and the bottom of each; save the flesh that's hollowed out from the onions.

Season the interior of each onion with salt and pepper and the herbes de Provence. Drizzle the interior and the exterior of each with the olive oil, rubbing in to distribute evenly. Bake in a pan, covered lightly with foil, until lightly browned and tender, about 30-40 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the filling. Finely chop the flesh that was hollowed out of the onion to make 1 cup. Heat the butter and olive oil together in a medium-sized sauté pan over medium-high heat until lightly bubbling. Add the chopped onions and the garlic. Season with salt and pepper and the herbes de Provence. Sauté until softened over medium heat, stirring, about 3 minutes. Add the tomato, shrimp, olives and white wine. Cook until the shrimp begin to turn slightly opaque and the wine has reduced by about half, about 2-3 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. Stir in the fresh parsley and set aside to cool.

When the onions are done baking, remove from the oven and fill to the top with the filling. (You may have some filling remaining. This can be chilled and saved for another meal, such as tossed with pasta). Top with a thin layer of the cracker and butter topping, patting down firmly. Return to the oven and bake, uncovered, until just heated through. The topping should be golden brown. Serves 2 to 4.

FOR THE ONIONS:

2 large sweet onions, peeled and hollowed (save the flesh that's removed)
Salt and fresh ground pepper
Dash of herbes de Provence
2 tablespoons olive oil

FOR THE FILLING:

1 tablespoon butter
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 cup finely chopped onion (use the reserved flesh from the hollowed onions)
2 cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
Dash of herbes de Provence
Half of a medium tomato, coarsely chopped
12 to 14 (about ½ cup) white shrimp, peeled and coarsely chopped
6 large pitted olives, coarsely chopped
Splash of dry white wine
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley

FOR THE TOPPING:

¼ cup crushed crackers (any savory variety) blended with 1 tablespoon softened butter (mixture will be crumbly, like a loose pastry dough)



TRUE GRIT:
Is it all in vein?

To devein or not to devein? That is the question, and happily the answer with the smaller local shrimp is usually no. Unlike the large, gritty intestinal vein of colossal or jumbo shrimp, the relatively petite white shrimp (except for white roe shrimp in the spring) have a virtually indiscernible intestinal vein, so deveining is not necessary.

◀ Sweet and Crunchy Shrimp Salad and Lettuce Rolls

The wave of carb-phobia has given way to lettuce rolls, the latest, greatest method of enveloping your salad of choice. This one is a sweet mix of chunks of Lowcountry shrimp, tart/sweet nuggets of dried cranberries and licoricelike bites of chopped fennel. Refreshing and light, it's a cool ode to the waning days of summer, yet invites thoughts of the imminent cooler fall days in every bite. If you're not afraid of bread, go ahead and pile this salad on a soft roll topped with a leaf of crunchy lettuce. The pliable texture and buttery hues and flavor of Boston lettuce leaves make decadent, edible wrappers that are easy on the waistline.

FOR THE SHRIMP SALAD:

24 white shrimp, boiled, shelled
(see directions for cooking shrimp in Chow Chow Deviled Shrimp and Eggs recipe, page 37) and coarsely chopped
Half of a small fennel bulb, cored and finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh fennel fronds, plus 4 to 8 small fronds for garnishing the plate
1 small shallot, finely chopped

Zest of half a lemon, finely grated and chopped

Zest of half a lime, finely grated and chopped

¼ cup dried cranberries

2 tablespoons mayonnaise

Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

¼ cup toasted, chopped pecans (optional garnish)

4 large, fresh Boston lettuce leaves, rinsed and dried

Combine the chopped shrimp with the remaining ingredients, except for the pecans and lettuce leaves, in a small bowl. Season and taste, adjusting seasoning as needed. Chill, covered, for at least 2 hours (and up to 24 hours) before serving to develop the flavors.

When ready to serve, place the pecans, if using, in a small pan heated over medium high heat. Toast, tossing occasionally, until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Set aside.

To serve, place a generous scoop of salad in the center of a lettuce leaf, wrap the leaf around the center, roll slightly and serve seam-side down on a chilled plate. If desired, sprinkle a handful of toasted nuts on the plate and garnish with a fennel frond to serve. Makes 4 salad rolls.

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"Don't ask if a specific item is local because some of the less honest people out there will lie just to get you to buy it. Make them tell you what is local."

South Carolina Aquarium's Web site

SHRIMP SHOPPING: How to find out if they're LOCAL

Some Lowcountry residents swear that the easiest way to be sure you're buying local shrimp is to ask for them with the heads still on.

If you don't want to do the heading yourself, or if you're eating out and want to know where the restaurant gets its shrimp (or other seafood), the best way to get a straight answer is to ask the question this way: "Which of your selections is local?"

"Don't ask if a specific item is local because some of the less honest people out there will lie just to get you to buy it," says the South Carolina Aquarium's Web site. "Make them tell you what is local."

Whether it's shrimp, soft-shell crab, oysters or fish that you want to buy, it helps to know what's in season at the time.

"The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources regulate the seasons of many local fisheries. Check their Web sites for more information," says the Web site. "If a fishery is closed, you can be fairly certain that a restaurant serving that fish is either importing it or, less likely, had stocked up their freezer while the season was open."

Chow-Chow Deviled Shrimp and Eggs

The rich, bland background flavor of egg yolks marries well with everything from curry to pickles. In this Lowcountry take on a classic favorite, the cooked yolks are blended with chow-chow, a mustard-flavored, vegetable-and-pickle relish. Fresh chunks of boiled shrimp are folded in to complete what turns out to be an extra-special treat.

TO COOK THE EGGS:

6 eggs, room temperature
Water to cover

TO COOK THE SHRIMP:

10-12 white shrimp
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 bay leaf
1 tablespoon salt
Water to cover

FOR THE EGG FILLING:

Yolks from the cooked eggs
2 tablespoons chow-chow (Mrs. Campbell's brand recommended)
Dash of red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
Salt and fresh ground pepper, to taste
10 chives cut into ½-inch lengths for garnish

Place the eggs in a single layer in a medium-sized pot. Bring the water up to a boil over high heat. Once the water has reached a boil, remove the pan from the heat, cover and allow the eggs to sit in the hot water for exactly 17 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a deep skillet, prepare the shrimp by combining the shrimp, thyme, bay leaf, salt and enough water to cover. Bring up to a boil over high heat, reduce to a simmer and cook until the shrimp are just opaque in the center, about 3 minutes. Drain. When cool enough to handle, peel and discard the shells. Coarsely chop eight of the shrimp; cut the other shrimp into ½-inch lengths to garnish the tops of the eggs. Set both aside.

After the eggs have stood in the hot water for 17 minutes, remove them from the water (but don't pour

the water out) and transfer them to a bowl of ice water. Chill for 2 minutes. Bring their cooking water back up to a boil, place the eggs in the water and boil for 10 seconds, then return the eggs to the ice water. Chill for 15 minutes before peeling. (Note: The chilling and heating and chilling steps facilitate the peeling process. Also, it's easier to peel older eggs than very fresh ones).

Once chilled, peel the eggs and cut each in half lengthwise. Carefully scoop out the yolks of each, smashing and blending them thoroughly with a fork in a small bowl. Set aside the egg white halves.

Whisk the remaining filling ingredients, except the shrimp and chives, into the egg yolks, tasting carefully to verify seasoning. Fold in the chopped shrimp. Scoop a generous tablespoon of filling into each egg white half, topping each with a piece of the reserved shrimp and 3-4 chive pieces for garnish. Chill and serve within several hours. Makes 12 deviled eggs.



Creamy Citrus Shrimp and Fettuccini

The sweetness of Lowcountry white shrimp just begs for an acidic edge, and it gets it here in threes – lemon, lime and fresh orange juice. A dash of cream and a pat of butter smooth out the edges like a creamy cloud wrapped around broad, flat fettuccini noodles. Fast and easy to make, it makes an ideal casual late summer dinner party feast.

¾ pound fettuccini, fresh or dried
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
¾ pound Lowcountry white shrimp, peeled with tail on
Salt and fresh ground pepper
3 small cloves garlic, smashed and chopped
1 small shallot, finely chopped
Juice of half a lemon
Juice of half a lime
4 tablespoons fresh squeezed orange juice
3 tablespoons clam juice
2 tablespoons capers
2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme
¼ cup whole cream
1 tablespoon butter
Fresh sprigs of thyme for garnish (optional)

For the pasta, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the pasta according to package directions to just al dente (slightly firm to the bite). Start the shrimp sauté about 5 minutes before the pasta will be done to help coordinate a mutual completion time.

For the sauté, add the olive oil and butter to a large sauté pan heated over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp, season with salt and pepper, and sauté briefly, about 1 minute on each side, turning to brown evenly.

Reduce the heat to medium. Add the garlic and shallots. Cook gently for about 1 minute. Add the lemon juice, lime juice, orange juice and clam juice. Cook until the amount of liquid is reduced by half. Whisk in the remaining ingredients, except for the thyme sprigs, and heat through over low heat. Season to taste.

Drain the pasta thoroughly.

Add to the sauté pan and toss well. Serve immediately in individual bowls or on a platter. Garnish with fresh sprigs of thyme if desired. Serves 4. 

