

'My Nana Was a Force of Nature'

Chef and farmer Matthew Raiford honors his heritage—and his expertise

OUR LAND HAS been in my family since 1874: 40-plus acres in Georgia. My children are the seventh generation to have planted, harvested and eaten from a crop off this land, and there's an eighth generation. We raise our own chickens, and we grow potatoes, peppers, arugula and more. We feel very fortunate, very blessed that we're able to carry on this legacy. There are so many people who can't do that.

But when I was 18, I left home and swore I'd never come back to the South. I joined the Army for 10 years. Then I went to culinary school to study French cuisine and became an executive chef in Washington, D.C.

As my parents and grandparents were getting older, though, less and less of the farm was being cultivated. Every time I'd go home to visit, my nana would ask my sister and me, "What we going to do with all this land?" In 2010, for some reason, I told her, "We should go back to farming it." My nana asked, "Did you say 'we,' baby?" I said, "Yes, ma'am, I did," and she said, "Great. Get started."

She gifted my sister, Althea, and me 12 acres of land, and we've been at the farm ever since. Nana didn't stop growing her almost quarter-acre garden until she was nearly 90. When she passed at 96, she was still helping us out at the farm.

That woman was a force of nature. Her name was Ophelia. Like many of my relatives, she was a wonderful cook, and one of her signature dishes was her egg pie, a recipe I've adapted. She'd whip the eggs, sauté up all the vegetables, slide the pan into the

RECIPE

Nana's Egg Pie

SERVES 8

INGREDIENTS

- Olive oil spray
- ½ teaspoon pink Himalayan salt
- ½ teaspoon salt-free vegetable-pepper seasoning blend
- 1 dozen large eggs
- 2 cups coconut cream
- 4 cups stale bread, cut into cubes
- 2 cups spinach leaves, roughly chopped or torn
- 1 large portobello mushroom cap, sliced (½ cup)
- 1 small onion, finely diced (½ cup)
- 1 bell pepper, seeded, stemmed and diced (½ cup)
- 2 jalapeño peppers, seeded, stemmed and diced (¼ cup)
- 1 tablespoon basil, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- 1 cup crumbled feta
- 2 Roma tomatoes, sliced

1 Heat oven to 375°F. Spray the bottom and sides of a 3-quart baking dish or 10-inch cast-iron skillet with olive oil.

2 In a small bowl, combine the salt and the vegetable-pepper blend. In a



large bowl, whisk the salt-and-pepper mix with eggs and cream.

3 Gently fold the bread cubes, spinach, mushroom, onion, bell and jalapeño peppers, basil, parsley and ½ cup of the feta into the eggs. Pour the egg mixture into prepared dish or skillet, and top with remaining feta and the tomatoes. Let sit for 15 minutes.

4 Bake egg pie for 40 minutes, until firm and golden, rotating halfway through.

5 Remove egg pie from the oven, and let rest for 5 minutes before serving. Serve on its own or with oven-roasted potatoes.

Nutrients per serving: 490 calories, 15g protein, 54g carbohydrates, 2g fiber, 24g fat, 295mg cholesterol, 500mg sodium



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Raiford's land has been in his family for nearly 150 years.

oven, and less than 30 minutes later, breakfast would be ready. One slice has all the nutrients that you need to get through the morning. And all of it's fresh and unprocessed, which is what the body needs. It's also a beautiful dish to serve to guests, especially during the holidays, when

you forget about breakfast until you realize, "Oh, dang, we've got to cook for everybody?" This is one of those fast and furious dishes. It comes together quickly.

When I was little and Nana served egg pie for breakfast, I'd go back immediately for seconds. But

now I'm an adult, so I have to adult. I have to eat my piece and say, "OK, I've got to get back to work." —As told to Leslie Quander Wooldridge

Matthew Raiford, 55, is the author of Bress 'n' Nyam: Gullah Geechee Recipes from a Sixth-Generation Farmer. He lives with his wife, chef Tia Raiford, in Brunswick, Georgia.