

The Cornbread Tradition

COVID-19 prevents many of us from enjoying a traditional Thanksgiving with loved ones this year, which means missing out on family favorite foods like cornbread. Cornbread plays a role in many Thanksgiving meals, either as a side or as an ingredient in a beloved dish, like stuffing. We asked a few chefs across the country about the role that this food favorite plays in everyday life and Thanksgiving, and we encourage those who are partaking in small gatherings or eating alone to reconnect to their roots by making cornbread and video calls!

For many Americans, cornbread tastes like tradition. Cornbread reminds us of memorable meals with those we love. Cornbread reminds others of struggling to put food on the table while somehow developing a fondness for a staple of that struggle.

However, you think of it, cornbread remains a quintessential American dish for many people, one that works for holidays like Thanksgiving and any other day of the year.

A Pastry Chef Shares Her Love of Cornbread in Chattanooga, Tennessee

Chattanooga pastry chef Sarah Wall has worked at some of the hottest bakeries in Chattanooga, including Niedlov's. This pastry chef makes a variety of baked goods, but cornbread holds a special place in her heart.

“I feel like, historically, cornbread was a nice, hearty, cheap bread to make----not much to it unless you jazz it up, otherwise it's cornmeal, fat, and eggs, which most Southerners had at the ready.” Chef Wall’s point aligns with historical narratives about how cornbread gained popularity among class, race, and geographical lines.

“Nowadays, I think the tradition has endured for the same reason that pinto beans in the fall have:



there's something nostalgic and simple about it. Most of us would have grown up eating, probably because it was a simple enough side for Mom to throw together,” Chef Wall says.

Known for biking, mountain climbing, and Southern hospitality, Chattanooga covers the Southeastern corner of Tennessee. The Tennessee River runs right through the city so you can chill by the water with ease. Entertainment includes concerts and festivals. Modern influences and tradition permeate the city, creating a mix of cornbread styles and nighttime adventures.

Another tradition that cornbread factors into is the tradition of eating out. Americans love to eat out and places that serve delicious cornbread draw sizeable crowds of locals and tourists. Chimayo Stone Fired Kitchen and Redstone American Grill are two such places.

Chimayo Stone Fired Kitchen

D u r a n g o , C o l o r a d o

Nestled on the Southwestern side of the Rocky Mountains and bordering New Mexico, [Durango, Colorado](#), offers a variety of Southwestern culinary experiences. Locals and tourists alike flock to [Chimayo Stone Fired Kitchen](#) for its take on cornbread with a Southwestern flair. Michael and Birgette Lutfy own this town favorite.

Michael serves as the executive chef while Birgette runs the front of the house.

Chef Lutfy understands the important place that cornbread holds in the American culinary experience because he's eaten in places ranging from Georgia and the Carolinas to parts of New England, which proves his point. Chef Lutfy classifies cornbread as traditional because it aligns with certain long-standing aspects of America, such as being a corn-centric country of different ethnicities.

“Corn is like meatloaf...both are considered American food. Cornbread's open to a lot of regional interpretations, and it works for all ethnicities.” Chef Lutfy says he developed his cornbread recipe, “thinking about what he doesn't like” and what reflected the culture of Durango and its geography. To give the recipe a southwestern flair, Chef Lutfy adds roasted jalapenos and bakes his cornbread in a sugar-rimmed skillet.

Durango's high-altitude dries out bread, so Chef Lutfy adds creamed corn and grated cheese to his recipe. Chef Lutfy says to come and stay for the cornbread, but in between meals, you can check out the art



Photo by Chef Lutfy of Chimayo Stone Fired Kitchen

galleries, bike through stunning views, and catch a ride on the [Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad](#). Chimayo usually shuts down for a few weeks in November because Durango's a tourist town that gets quiet this time of year.

But this November, the Chimayo staff is taking off the month starting on November 1. Chef Lutfy says that everyone's been working hard given what's happening across the country and the world, so it's time for a break. Chimayo reopens on December 2. Masks and socially distanced dining are required for indoor dining, or you can opt for takeout.

Redstone American Grill

N a t i o n a l H a r b o r , M a r y l a n d



Sous Chef John Ronk of [Redstone American Grill National Harbor](#) says cornbread is one of those comfort foods everyone craves because it reminds them of family. Redstone American Grill cornbread comes infused with green chilis and cheddar cheese. It's served in a cast iron skillet with maple syrup and compound butter.

Chef Ronk also loves to make cornbread stuffing or dressing with day-old cornbread, a great idea for anyone who's looking for a way to incorporate a savory cornbread dish into their Thanksgiving holiday. It works for Christmas and any other time the craving for some savory cornbread hits.

Redstone American Grill at National Harbor offers indoor dining at designated times as well as two patios for outside dining plus takeout. Chef Ronk says that masks and social distancing are required. While there, you can visit [National Harbor](#), a D.C. waterfront development featuring condominiums, a convention center, hotels, shops, and more.

Near the Potomac River and a twenty-minute drive from D.C., you can ride the National Harbor Capital Wheel, see the Frederick Douglass statue, and listen to live music at one of the many happening hot spots before stuffing yourself silly with Redstone American Grill's cornbread.

There are new traditions to make and cornbread to break no matter the time of year, so heat your skillet, whether you're dining alone or with masked friends. Happy Thanksgiving!