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# Food

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## CARNY-VORES DELIGHT

*Fair food lovers need not cry foul despite lack of summer carnivals*

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The county fair means something different to everyone. Shows and competitions, rides and entertainment — and food. Lots of food. Most of it deep fried — and on a stick.

Numerous fairs and carnivals were canceled this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. That doesn't mean you have to give up the food.

We're lucky in the Juniata Valley because some of our fairs are still on the calendar — the Juniata County Fair in early September, followed by the McClure Bean Soup and the Beaver Community Fair — but for the most part, it's been food truck-like operation by fair food vendors that's satisfied our craving for deep fried food. On a stick.

There's another way. Chef and author George Geary lets you enjoy the food of county fairs without leaving your house in his best-selling cookbook, "Fair Foods: The Most Popular and Offbeat Recipes from America's State and County Fairs." Geary celebrates the fun, delicious, strange and wonderful foods sold at state and county fairs.

Geary was a pastry chef for the Walt Disney Company, is a Certified Culinary Professional and was recently awarded as the Culinary Educator of the Year by the International Association of Culinary Professionals. He is perhaps best known for creating all the cheesecakes for The Golden Girls and other top-rated television programs.

Geary has worked as a critic and/or judge for ABC's The Taste with Anthony Bourdain, The American Baking Competition with Jeff Foxworthy, Hell's Kitchen, Supermarket Superstar, and many other popular television shows. For eight years, He was a guest chef on board the Holland America Line's ships.

For more than thirty years, Geary has been a culinary contest judge for major food manufacturers. And from 1982 to 2010, He was the culinary coordinator of the Los Angeles County Fair.

There was a time when fair food was simple — popcorn, cotton candy, candy apples. But, Geary explained, it became a contest to come up with something crazier every year.

"About 20 years ago, the vendors that sold those items realized that if they offered something offbeat, the news media would run with it in a story," he said. "After that, yearly, major newspapers list the crazy items offered at the fairs. They try to one up the other vendors each year now."

Convenience is what put everything at the fair on a stick. Unless a food vendor provides it, there's not a lot of seating for diners at the fair.

"Think about it — you need to eat something with one hand and walk at the same time while at the fair. You need the other hand to hold on to the stuffed animal you won or the hand of your sweetheart," Geary explained. "So everything started being put on a stick."

Fair food is comfort food, he said, because it's simple, is a throwback to our youth and is shared with family. It's not, he said, completely unhealthy.

"The Pickle Dog, watermelon, turkey legs, pulled pork sandwiches, lemonade — only about 35% of the food is fried," he notes.

One thing he does not expect is for the move by fair vendors into the mainstream to cut into the appeal of the fair and its culinary offerings.

"I really don't think so. Some fair vendors are also having drive-thru fairs so you can get your yearly fix,"

he said. "Many items first start at fairs or carnivals and that are now mainstream like fried green beans, deep fried Oreos and fried raviolis."

Look for Geary at one of the simpler food stands. His favorite is ice cream.

"And any local item that pertains to that fair," he said. "Nothing really strange."

Geary's "Fair Foods" cookbook highlights not only the new culinary classics at state and county fairs, but also longstanding favorites such as maple and bacon, and triple cheese-burger doughnuts; cheesecake (on a stick, of course); corn dogs; fried pickles; and fried Coca-Cola.

Here are a few of Geary's recipes you can try at home:

### FUNNEL CAKE WITH BERRIES

*Funnel cake at the fair is as American as the Ferris Wheel. This summer make this delicious dessert for a backyard barbecue or picnic.*

**Special supplies:**  
 Electric mixer  
 Stockpot  
 Medium saucepan  
 Candy/deep-fry thermometer  
 Pastry bag  
 Wire rack

6 Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into small pieces  
 1 cup water, cool  
 1/2 tsp sea salt  
 1/2 tsp granulated sugar  
 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
 3 large eggs  
 2 large egg whites  
 Canola oil  
 Confectioners sugar

Combine butter, water, salt and sugar in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat and quickly stir in the flour. Return the pan to low heat and cook, stirring frequently, for about three minutes to cook the flour slightly and rid the mixture of an starchy floury taste.

Remove the pan from the heat and place the dough in the bowl of the mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Mix on medium speed until most of the steam subsided, then add the eggs and egg whites, one at a time, until each is incorporated, and a batter is formed.

Pour three inches of oil into a stockpot and heat to 350 degrees. Meanwhile, place the batter in a pastry bag that is fitted with a round pastry tip no wider than 1/4 inch in diameter. Holding the pastry bag over the hot oil, push the batter out into the hot oil in a zigzag or spiral shape. Fry no more than one large or two smaller funnel cakes at a time.

Fry the cakes until puffed up and golden (they will triple in size), 3 to 5 minutes, flipping every 30 seconds or so.

Drain the cakes on a rack and cool slightly, then sprinkle with confectioners sugar and berry topping (recipe follows).

### Berry topping

1 quart fresh berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries)  
 1/2 cup granulated sugar  
 Pinch sea salt

In a bowl, combine berries, sugar and salt. Let stand for 30 minutes before serving.

### DEEP-FRIED TWINKIES

*The Texas State Fair in Dallas was the first to offer this sinful treat.*

**Special supplies:**  
 Dutch oven  
 Candy/deep fry thermometer  
 Skewers (6)  
 Baking sheet, lined with parch-

ment paper  
 Paper towels  
 6 Twinkies  
 3 cups all-purpose flour  
 3 Tbsp granulated sugar  
 3 tsp baking powder  
 1 tsp baking soda  
 3/4 tsp sea salt  
 1 cup buttermilk  
 1/2 cup whole milk  
 3 large eggs  
 3 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted  
 Canola oil  
 Confectioners sugar

Skewer each Twinkie and place on baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Freeze for two hours.

Meanwhile, prepare the batter: In a large bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, whisk together buttermilk, milk, eggs, and melted butter. Pour into flour mixture and blend just until smooth.

In a Dutch oven, heat two inches of Canola oil over medium heat to 375 degrees. Working two at a time, dip the Twinkies into the batter until fully coated. Place in the hot oil, turning after a few seconds until all sides have reached a light brown color, about 4 to 6 minutes.

Drain on paper toweling, then dust with confectioners sugar.

### CARAMEL KETTLE CORN

*Fair-goers have been snacking on this rich, tasty caramel treat for years.*

3 quarts popped corn, unsalted (1/2 cup unpopped)  
 1 cup almonds, chopped  
 1/2 cup pecans, chopped  
 1/2 cup unsalted butter, room temperature  
 1 cup brown sugar, packed  
 1/4 cup honey



**TOP: Caramel popcorn. ABOVE: Deep-fried Twinkie.** Recipe(s) and photo(s) reprinted from **FAIR FOODS: The Most Popular and Offbeat Recipes from America's State and County Fairs** by George Geary (cover below).

Santa Monica Press

1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 250 degrees. If using unpopped corn, prepare popcorn according to the directions. Divide the popcorn between two baking pans sprayed with non-stick cooking spray and lined with parchment paper. Sprinkle the almonds and pecans evenly on top of the popcorn. Set aside.

Melt butter, brown sugar, and honey in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Begin stirring when the mixture starts to bubble. Continue to stir for five minutes exactly, then remove from heat. Carefully add the vanilla to the saucepan and stir. Pour the mixture over the popcorn and nuts. Stir to combine, then place the baking pans in the oven.

Bake for 1 hour, stirring the popcorn mixture every 15 minutes. Transfer the kettle corn to parchment paper and let cool.

### DIPPED ROAST BEEF SANDWICHES

*A hearty sandwich that is absolutely delicious dipped in mouth-watering beef consomme.*

12 ounces beef consomme  
 6 ounces water  
 16 ounces deli roast beef, sliced thin  
 8 slices cheese  
 4 hoagie buns, sliced horizontally and toasted  
 1/8 cup prepared mustard (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a small saucepan, bring beef consomme and water to a low boil and cook for about eight minutes. Add sliced roast beef. Let cook for four minutes.

Pile the beef on top of the toasted roll and spread with mustard. Reserve the beef consomme. Place cheese on top of the beef and place in the oven until cheese melts, about five minutes.

Serve warm with a dish of extra consomme on the side.