

A Cook's Journal

Shakers Exemplify Simplicity

by Connie Tucker

The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (called the Shakers) was founded in the 18th century in England as a branch of the Quakers. The sect fled to America to gain religious freedom. Known for their communal lifestyle, pacifism, and practice of celibacy, they also established model for equality of the sexes. Shakers are famous for their simple living, food, architecture, and furniture. Their credo is, *Hands to work; hearts to God*.

Because they relied on evangelism alone to grow their numbers, today only one active Shaker village remains in the U.S.—Sabbathday Lake, near New Gloucester, Maine. The village grows all its own herbs and includes them in most of their dishes. I was privileged years ago to host a Shaker exhibit at the Nylander Museum and to take a cooking lesson from the wonderful staff of kind, gentle folks. Here are a few of the dishes they prepared, and I've adapted their recipes for today's cooks.

Shaker Chicken Tarragon

Four ingredients? How can a recipe be more simple or easy? Tarragon is a type of mint with a mellow grassy flavor that pairs perfectly with chicken or fish. That's why this dish is so flavorful. If you buy a free-range, organic chicken, you don't need a ton of ingredients. And you'll actually taste the chicken! Totally worth it.

Ingredients

One 2½ lb. free-range, organic frying chicken

Butter or cooking oil

Kosher salt

Dried tarragon

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 300° and prepare a small roasting pan by coating inside with a small amount of butter or oil.
2. Thoroughly wash the inside and outside of the chicken with cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Rub entire outside of chicken lightly with oil or butter. Sprinkle salt in cavity and rub in. Sprinkle salt and rub all over outside of chicken. Repeat with the tarragon inside and out.
3. Place in pan and tuck wings under. Tie legs together with cotton twine. Bake about 2 hours or till thermometer inserted in the meatiest part of the breast reads 165°. (Tent with foil if breast or legs get too brown.)
4. Remove from oven. Cover with foil and let rest for fifteen to twenty minutes while you prepare the table. Serve in halves or quarters as needed.

Shaker Herb Biscuits

The secret here is to not overwork the dough. Overworking develops gluten, which is fine in yeast bread, but not in biscuits. Herb biscuits can be made with any herb—totally up to you. This

is great because you can make dill biscuits to serve with fish; basil and oregano to serve with Italian food; or thyme and sage to serve with pork. Measurements are given for dried herbs, but fresh herbs can be used at the ratio of 4 times fresh chopped to 1 dried (1 tsp fresh to ¼ tsp dried)

Ingredients

4 cups flour
3 rounded tsp baking powder
3 Tbs sugar
3 tsp total of any dried herb or combination: thyme, dill, basil, chervil, marjoram, sage, oregano
1 tsp table salt (or 2 tsp kosher salt)
6 Tbs shortening (lard or solid shortening work best)
2 cups milk

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Sift together flour, salt, and baking powder. Stir in herbs.
3. Cut shortening in small pieces and blend into flour mixture with fingers or a pastry blender till it is in pea-size pieces.
4. Gradually mix in milk very gently till well mixed.
5. Turn out onto a lightly floured board and roll to a thickness of one inch, and, if it resists stretching, allow dough to rest if necessary.
6. Use a round cookie cutter or simply cut dough into squares. Place on greased cookie sheets
7. Bake for 20-30 minutes till raised and browned.

Dill Dip

Chop up those celery sticks, baby carrots, mushroom, and bell peppers. Here's a wholesome veggie dip to make at home (store-bought jars of veggie dip are loaded with sugar and chemicals!) that is healthy and nutritious.

Ingredients

2/3 cup mayonnaise or Miracle Whip®
2/3 cup sour cream
1 Tbs minced onion
1 Tbs minced fresh parsley or ¾ tsp dried
2 Tbs fresh dill weed or 1½ tsp dried dill weed
1½ tsp kosher salt

Directions

Mix all ingredients and place in the refrigerator for 8-24 hours before serving. A squeeze of lemon or lime juice and some rind will improve the flavor even more. Serve with prepared veggies and crackers if desired.

TIP: You can buy herb seeds at any local grocery or hardware store and start your own herb garden on your windowsill. Transplant small plants outdoors or grow in containers on your deck or dooryard steps. You can clip them as needed all summer long and cut and dry them for winter

use! If you have any questions about growing or drying herbs, please write to me at stardesign@ainop.com.