

FOOD

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C8

Make a lasting Summer Memory

BY LAURA HUNT ANGEL
FOR THE MESSENGER

I grew up in the home of a Kentucky coal miner turned Detroit auto worker, and a Kentucky-born stay at home, cooking, cleaning and canning mother of seven. We lived in a tiny bungalow, on the outskirts of a little town largely consisting of Kentucky families that had been uprooted when the coal mines began shutting down after World War II. There were so many Kentuckians in our area that our town earned the charming nickname of "New Boston-tucky." We had created our own little Kentucky in a corner of the Michigan mitten.



LAURA HUNT ANGEL
GUEST COLUMNIST

There were advantages to that. We had great southern style food, lots of lakes, and in our case, room to roam the woods without worrying about chiggers or snakes.

And every July, when the auto workers' "changeover" took place, the Spencer Hunt family would head back to western Kentucky to experience the real thing, grandmaws included.

Up in Michigan one of the summertime treats we enjoyed was salt water taffy. This, and fudge, were two of the specialties you could get when you visited Mackinac Island near the Upper Peninsula, but you could also find it in spots throughout the state if you looked. I have family members that to this day will do just about anything for a piece of salt water taffy.

Imagine my surprise when I learned that here in Kentucky we have a similar treat — sorghum taffy. My father spoke fondly of the sorghum mill that his grandfather owned up on McIntosh Chapel Road back during the Depression years, and of the sorghum laced treats his mother used to make, including taffy.

Sorghum taffy does not require as much pulling as the salt water version, but both are less complicated than you might think.

With warm weather and summer vacation upon us, what better way to address conundrum of children the world over — "I'm bored!" — than to combine food, fun and the old time tradition of a taffy pull.

SALT WATER TAFFY

1 cup sugar

2 tablespoons corn starch
2/3 cup light corn syrup
1 tablespoon butter (plus extra for buttering your hands and dish)
1/2 cup water
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon flavoring (vanilla, cherry, maple, etc.)
Food coloring
Wax paper cut into squares

Butter a cookie sheet or other large shallow dish. In a heavy 2 quart saucepan, blend the sugar and cornstarch. Add the corn syrup, butter, water and salt, and stir it all together over medium heat until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture just starts to boil. After that, stop stirring and let the syrup cook until your candy thermometer reads 255°, when you've reached the hard ball stage. (A drop of syrup in cold water will form a ball that holds its shape, but you can't press flat with your fingers.)

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Take it off the burner and add your desired flavoring and coloring. Pour the mixture onto your buttered cookie sheet and let it cool for 20 minutes or so, until you can easily handle it. Butter your hands really well, and pull the taffy until it becomes lighter in color and hard to pull. Cut the candy into 3 or 4 pieces and roll each piece into a rope roughly a half inch across. Cut the taffy into 1 inch pieces. Wrap each piece in a square of waxed paper. Store in an airtight container. Makes about a pound of taffy.

SORGHUM MOLASSES TAFFY

This is my grandmother, Carrie Hunt's recipe, which is nearly identical to an old colonial version I found. The only thing that has changed over the generations is a teaspoon less vinegar.

Her directions call for cooking the candy to 265° - 270°, which is just at the border of the hard ball/soft crack stage. I thought this seemed high, so I checked other recipes and they seem to indicate cooking to this stage, too.

1 cup sorghum molasses
2 teaspoons vinegar
3/4 cup sugar
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon butter
1/8 teaspoon soda

Butter a large heat-proof plate. In a heavy 2 quart saucepan, stir together the sorghum, vinegar, sugar and salt. Boil until the mixture reaches 265° - 270°, or until the syrup forms bendable threads in cold water. Take it off the burner and add the butter and soda, stirring well. Pour it out onto the plate. When it's cool, gather it up and pull the taffy until it looks like a shiny ribbon.

Cut it into bite sized pieces. Mimi didn't say anything about wrapping it in waxed paper, probably because it never lasted long enough to bother. But if you don't have a houseful to gobble it up, wrap and store it just



Photo by Gina Locke

From the left, Hannah and Madison Lahman, the author's grandnieces, were born in Michigan's "Little Kentucky."

like the salt water version.

Taffy Tips:

- A candy thermometer is handy for taffy making, but not necessary.
- You can also use the cold water test.
- A wooden spoon works good for taffy or any candy making because it doesn't transfer the heat to your fingers.
- Avoid scraping any sugar crystals that form around the edge of the pot into your boiling taffy; this can give the finished project a slightly crunchy texture.
- Keep some extra butter handy in case the taffy gets too sticky before you're through pulling.
- The more you pull, the lighter your taffy will be. But don't worry if the kids get tired of pulling, the point is to have fun!

Versatile Summer Snacking

In my family we usually reserve nuts for the holidays, but here is a handy "go to" recipe for German roasted nuts



Photo by Laura Angel

German roasted nuts look fancy in dainty glassware.

that can be used year 'round for everything from baby showers to Bible study groups. Try tucking some into the pocket of your favorite sportsman on the way out the door for a day of fishing, hunting or golf.

Nuts, like everything else, have gone up in price. But it actually costs no more to make this recipe than to buy a couple of bags of salty snacks, and is much more wholesome. For a less expensive alternative you can use whatever is on hand, including peanuts, the nut that isn't.

In addition to their nutritional value, this recipe offers the added bonus of scenting the house with a wonderful aroma that both guests and family will enjoy. Making them doesn't require a lot of fuss, but the result is something that looks like you took a lot of time and effort.

We are a low salt household so I did not include any extra salt in this recipe, but feel free to add up to a 1/2 teaspoon if you wish, as long as the nuts you

choose are not already salted. You'll notice that there is not a lot of added sugar in this recipe as well.

GERMAN ROASTED NUTS

Lightly grease or spray a cookie sheet; preheat oven to 250°.

1 10 ounce package pecan halves, walnuts or peanuts (about 2 1/2 cups)
1 egg white
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon cold water
1/4 cup white sugar
1/4 - 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

In a medium sized mixing bowl, beat the egg white, water and vanilla extract until frothy. (You do not want meringue, just a nice foam.) Add the nuts to the egg white mixture and toss well to coat. In a separate bowl, combine the cinnamon and sugar. Add the sugar blend to the nuts, a little at a time, tossing in between each addition to thoroughly coat each nut. (I did this in three steps.)

Pour the nuts in a single layer onto the cookie sheet. Bake for about 45 minutes, giving them a stir about halfway through to keep them separate. Cool, then store in an airtight container. Makes about 2 1/2 cups.



Photo by Laura Angel

Decadent Kentucky sorghum and wrapped salt water taffy.