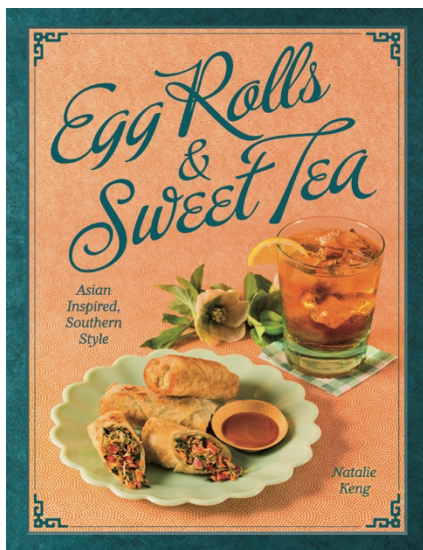


Southern Living®

The Delicious Combination Of Egg Rolls And Sweet Tea

Author Natalie Keng blends both her Asian and Southern heritage into recipes in her debut cookbook.



"I consider myself lucky to be born closer to Canton, Georgia, than to Canton, China," writes Natalie Keng in the introduction to her debut cookbook *Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea: Asian Inspired, Southern Style*. As the third daughter in her family, considered unlucky in most traditional Asian cultures, her upbringing in the South lent her both a deep appreciation of her hometown of Smyrna, Georgia, and pride for her Asian heritage.

"When I was growing up, my family's favorite fried chicken was from the Big Chicken, a landmark KFC outpost in Marietta, Georgia, up the street from our old house," Keng writes before her recipe for Fried Chicken Spring Rolls with Honey, which makes use of leftover fried chicken. Many Georgians, and Southerners for that matter, know the iconic cartoonish red chicken sign, if only as a highway mile-marker, but not as many might know how to roll an eggroll.

Her story serves as segue into the recipe for readers, which uses the Southern flavors of fried chicken drizzled in honey, just in a new form. Keng uses food as a bridge between cultures not just in her recipes, but also in her work outside cookbook writing.

Keng's business, Global Hearth, uses food and culture to promote team building and employee engagement, and she has also headed diversity teams for national non-profit organizations. The multi-hyphenate has also served in public office.

But perhaps the best example she has of how one can embrace a culture outside their own is her parents, Margaret and Edward, who immigrated to Atlanta from Taiwan in the 1960s on graduate school scholarships.



"I grew up going to the state fair, going fishing at Lake Allatoona, my parents just loved everything about the South, about being American," Keng says. That love of the South included food, like her meatloaf recipe inspired by her father (included in the book), which contains a very Atlantan ingredient: Coca-Cola.

Keng's mother also embraced classic American dishes and even entered an Atlanta chili cooking competition with Keng called The Chomp & Stomp Chili Cook-Off, where together they made six types of chili. "I made four chili recipes, and she made two...My mom is so competitive that she even competed against my chili entries. Everyone thought she was a hoot, and she won the People's Choice Award," Keng writes in the cookbook.

Just as her parents wholeheartedly embraced the South, it's clear through both her writing and recipes, that Keng does too.

From Vidalia Onion Burgers, made with her homemade teriyaki sauce, to a Sour Green Mango and Peach Salad that uses the beloved Georgia fruit alongside mangos, as a nod to her mother who grew up with wild mango trees in Taiwan, the recipes are a reflection of who Keng is, and also a testament to how food can connect different cultures together.

But in fusing these two cuisines together, she importantly doesn't erase either part of who she is. As she writes in her cookbook,

"Diversity, after all, is the ingredient that makes our country great."

By: Alana Al-Hatlani (June 2, 2023)