

# FOOD & DINING

The AJC Dining team covers all facets of Atlanta's robust restaurant scene. Catch the latest at [www.ajc.com/food](http://www.ajc.com/food)

## GLOBAL COOKING



Recipes from Natalie Keng, author of "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea: Asian Inspired, Southern Style" (Gibbs Smith, \$32), include (from left) Curried Coconut-Cauliflower Fried "Rice," Japchae-Inspired Glass Noodles with Swiss Chard, and Hot Hot Hunan Fresh Chile Sambal. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN

## DINING NEWS

### Planta puts down roots in 2 Atlanta locations

Florida-based Planta is now open in the former Watchman's space at 99 Krog St., offering such menu items as Bang Bang Broccoli, 1,000 Layer Potatoes, Avocado Lime Tartare and Udon Noodles, in addition to a full bar. The menu will also feature some dishes that are specific to the Atlanta location.

This is the first of two Planta concepts opening in Atlanta. Asian-inspired, late-night Planta Queen will open at 3035 Peachtree Road NE in Buckhead Village later this year, with a menu featuring vegan sushi, dumplings and noodles.



Bang Bang Broccoli from the menu of Planta. COURTESY OF PLANTA

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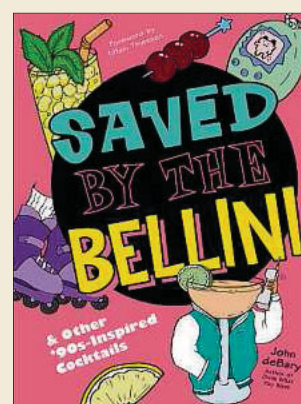


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## EAT MORE INSIDE:



### The '90s called: They want their cocktails back

New book "Saved by the Bellini" provides nostalgia-spiked recipes and commentary. **E12**



### Sweeten up your week

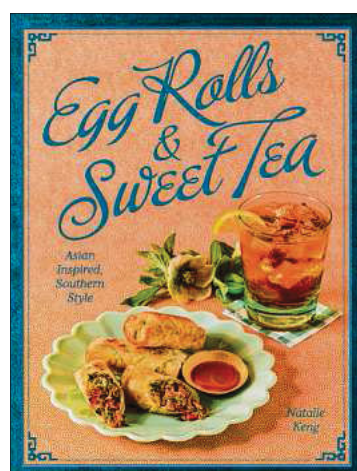
The crew at Brittle Britles Bakeries in Fort Gaines makes buttery, nutty brittles with peanuts, cashews and pecans. See where to find them and check out two more sweet treats to try. **E13**

# Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea

Smyrna entrepreneur's cookbook unites Asian, Southern influences.

By **Bob Townsend** | For the AJC

In the introduction to her vibrant new coffee-table cookbook, "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea: Asian Inspired, Southern Style" (Gibbs Smith, \$32), Natalie Keng asks, "Can food be the catalyst for accepting diversity? Can it break down barriers and stereotypes?" The answer is yes. But Keng's explorations of the intersections of race, class and gender are filtered through her experiences growing up Asian and Southern in Atlanta.



"Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea: Asian Inspired, Southern Style" (Gibbs Smith, \$32) is a debut cookbook/memoir by Natalie Keng. The Smyrna resident's entrepreneurial journey includes creating condiments, first under the Chinese Southern Belle label and now as part of her Sauce Maven brand. COURTESY OF CRAIG HAIGWOOD



"I was born and raised in Georgia, attended public schools and worked at the mall," she noted in a recent interview. "My parents grew up in Taiwan, then lived their adult lives here in Atlanta as first-generation Americans. I've had the chance to travel to many U.S. cities, and around the world, and Atlanta is a lush metropolis that offers the best of the South."

A graduate of Vassar College, with a Master of Public Policy degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Keng worked in the nonprofit sector and was a strategic marketing executive, before returning to her Georgia roots.

Currently, she lives in her hometown of Smyrna, where she's the founder and CEO ("Chief Eating Officer") of Global Hearth: Cooking Up a Better World, a food and culture business featuring interactive presentations, tours and events.

"Global Hearth reflects our city's amazing, diverse culinary offerings, broadens the vision of opening minds, one mouth at a time, and gives back to the

Keng continued on **E14**

## ONLY IN THE AJC

### New ag chief moves to protect Georgia's leading industry



**Ligaya Figueras**  
Adventures in Food

Six months into his new job, Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper, a native of Ocilla and a seventh-generation farmer, is moving to protect and promote Georgia agriculture – the state's leading industry, with an annual economic impact of more than \$74 billion.

Enhancing food safety and security was among the priorities stressed on the campaign trail by Harper, who spent 10 years as a member of the state Senate, representing the 7th District.

And protection of the state's agriculture industry is a national security issue, Harper told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, because of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The war in Ukraine shone a light on how interconnected we are on a global scale when it comes to agriculture," Harper said, pointing out that 30% of the world's wheat is in Ukraine, and 67% of the world's supply of ammonium nitrate (a widely used fertilizer) is in Ukraine and Russia.

"So when it comes to providing the food, the fiber, the shelter for Americans, for Georgians, it's vital that we protect the agricultural industry here at home," he said.

In June, Harper took steps to restore the status of the state Department of Agriculture as a law enforcement agency and named Harlan Proveaux

Figueras continued on **E14**



Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper (center right) has been an outspoken advocate for Georgia Grown, a division of the department that helps grow local agribusinesses in the state.

CHRISTINA MATA-COTTA FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

# FOOD & DINING

## Figueras

continued from E11

as the inspector general and director of the Law Enforcement and Emergency Management Division. (The GDA's law enforcement division had been disbanded in 2013.)

Proveaux previously was deputy director of Homeland Security for Georgia, and under him GDA's law enforcement division will have full arrest powers and will assist local, state and federal law enforcement agencies with investigations.

"There's a variety of things that we can be involved in, not only from protecting the food supply and from a Homeland Security perspective, but also labor trafficking and human trafficking," Harper said.

Trafficking of foreign farmworkers in Georgia became national news in late 2021 when a wide-reaching federal investigation, known as Operation Blooming Onion, uncovered a mod-



In January, Tyler Harper, 37, a native of Ocilla and a seventh-generation farmer, became Georgia's 17th commissioner of agriculture. COURTESY OF DOUG COULTER

ern-day slavery ring that involved bringing people from Central America to the U.S. and forcing them to labor in horrific conditions on Georgia farms.

With the department's expertise in that area, Harper said, "we want to be able to provide that resource to our local law enforcement around Geor-

gia, to ensure that they have the appropriate resources they need."

Responding to natural disasters and severe weather are other responsibilities of Harper's department. In late June, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a natural disaster declaration for 18 Georgia coun-

ties affected by a spring freeze.

Besides lobbying for federal emergency funding when severe weather and natural disasters hit Georgia farms, Harper sees a need for new legislation to protect the state's agricultural industry. For example, he noted, "a lot of our fruit and vegetable crops

in Georgia don't have the same type of product protections that other commodities do."

He'd like to get additional provisions to fix that added to the federal farm bill that is under consideration in Congress.

Harper also sees consumers playing a role in supporting Georgia farmers. This year, he has doubled down on Georgia Grown, a division of the department that promotes agribusinesses in the state. In June, the department partnered with the Atlanta Braves for a Georgia Grown Night at Truist Park, to raise awareness of Georgia-grown specialty crops.

As Harper looks to create pathways to success for current farmers, he also sees the importance of investing in getting the next generation to fill a variety of needs in agriculture.

"Agriculture is more than cows, plows and saws," he said. "We need farmers and producers, but we also need veterinarians, nutritionists, geneticists, chemists and

so on."

Among those initiatives, he said, are the Elementary Education Program, which began as a pilot in 2019, grew to include 27 elementary schools statewide and now is a permanent option for all elementary schools in Georgia. Ag education already had been available to Georgia middle and high school students, but not to elementary students.

"We are the first state in the nation to provide agricultural education curriculum from kindergarten to 12th grade," Harper said.

And for budding entrepreneurs who want to explore opportunities in agriculture, there is the Foundational Leadership and Entrepreneurship Experience, or FLEX, a competition that Harper likened to the television program "Shark Tank." Begun in Ben Hill County in south central Georgia, it will expand next year to 10 school systems, with winners taking home \$5,000 — and a better understanding of what it takes to make it in today's marketplace.

## Keng

continued from E11

community by supporting local businesses and women entrepreneurs," Keng said. "When we learn to love the food, we are more open to the people, whether it's a sandwich called banh mi or snails called escargot. I've seen that over and over again through my events with organizations and

corporate teams."

Much more than just a cookbook, "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea" is filled with family stories and food memories. But Keng's recipes aren't exactly traditional. They're more about a question: Does it taste good?

"The dishes in this collection are my version of authentic, even if they don't fit perfectly into any textbook genre," she said. "I present these cher-

ished recipes in the hope that they will become part of everyone's family's supper-table favorites and evolve into the reader's own version of authentic."

Keng's entrepreneurial journey includes creating condiments, first under the Chinese Southern Belle label and now as part of her Sauce Maven brand.

"My refrigerator door was lined with sauces,"

she said. "Yet none captured the flavors of my childhood growing up in the Bible Belt: juicy peaches, honeysuckle nectar, Vidalia sweet onions and my po-po's (grandmother's) tomato wedges marinated in sugar-vinegar brine. Using my own taste buds as a litmus test, I set out to fill the gap."

Right now, Keng has several award-winning sauces for sale at global-

hearth.com. The Sauce Maven's Recipe-In-A-Bottle products include My Sweet Hottie Sweet Chili Peach Dip, Glaze & Dressing; You Saucy Thing Soy Ginger Vidalia Stir Fry Sauce & Marinade; and Wild Wild East Asian BBQ Teriyaki Pineapple Grilling Sauce & Marinade.

Homemade versions of those sauces are included in "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea," along with Hot Hot Hunan Fresh Chile Sam-

bal, which is a tribute to her maternal grandfather.

"This cookbook is really drawn from my own kitchen and my own palate, and it's inspired by my mom, and my grandmother, and the women in the family who did most of the cooking," Keng said. "But it's also inspired by my travels in Asia. That's why you'll see Japchae-Inspired Glass Noodles with Swiss Chard."

# Recipes

These Asian American and Southern fusion recipes from Natalie Keng's cookbook, "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea," reflect a breadth of influences — from Curried Coconut-Cauliflower Fried "Rice," to Japchae-Inspired Glass Noodles with Swiss Chard, and Hot Hot Hunan Fresh Chile Sambal. Recipes adapted from and reprinted with permission from "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea." Copyright © 2023 by Natalie Keng. Excerpted by permission of Gibbs Smith.



Curried Coconut-Cauliflower Fried "Rice" is low in carbs. Cauliflower is nutritious and easy to cook. COURTESY OF DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN

### CURRIED COCONUT-CAULIFLOWER FRIED 'RICE'

In addition to being low in carbs, cauliflower is nutritious and easy to cook, Keng says. This curry recipe doesn't use curry powder — instead, it uses scratch ingredients and fresh turmeric, available at most international markets, to get a fresher, richer seasoning. Using cauliflower instead of rice makes it a good post-workout protein-rich meal.

- 1 large head cauliflower (about 2 pounds)
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil, divided
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- ½ cup chopped green onions
- ¼ cup chopped celery stalks, leaves removed
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger
- ½ teaspoon grated turmeric
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon mirin
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup cooked or canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- ½ cup steamed edamame
- ¼ cup roasted peanuts or roasted cashews, for garnish

#### Hot sauce

Using a large-holed grater or a food processor with a grating disc, finely chop the cauliflower. The texture should approximate rice grains (don't worry if the size isn't uniform). Set aside.

In a large pan over medium heat, melt 1 tablespoon of coconut oil. Using a spatula or chopsticks, scramble and break the eggs in small pieces until cooked. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside. Wipe out the pan with a paper towel and return it to medium heat.

Melt the remaining 1 tablespoon of coconut oil in the pan. Add the onions, celery, garlic, ginger and turmeric. Stir-fry about 3 minutes, until softened and fragrant. Add the rice cauliflower, soy sauce, mirin, lime juice and salt. Stir-fry about 2 minutes. Stop stirring for 30 seconds to let the cauliflower brown a bit. Mix in the chickpeas, cooked edamame and cooked eggs. Let stand for 30 seconds, then stir-fry 2 minutes more, until the cauliflower is al dente and the chickpeas are heated through. Garnish with the nuts and serve with hot sauce to taste.

Serves 4.

Per serving: 310 calories (percent of calories from fat, 53), 16 grams protein, 2 grams carbohydrates, 7 grams total sugars, 8 grams fiber, 19 grams total fat (8 grams saturated), 93 milligrams cholesterol, 938 milligrams sodium.

### JAPCHAE-INSPIRED GLASS NOODLES WITH SWISS CHARD

Keng uses mung bean thread noodles, also called cellophane or glass noodles, because they were easier to find in small-town international grocery outposts when she grew up. Mung bean noodles are a refreshing, less filling and gluten-free alternative to traditional flour noodles.

- 4 cups boiling water
- 3 small bundles (4 ounces each) bean thread or glass noodles
- 4 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon black vinegar or balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons roasted sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- ½ cup thinly sliced yellow onion
- 1 cup julienned carrot
- ½ cup thinly sliced red bell pepper
- 4 shiitake mushrooms, stems removed and thinly sliced
- 2 cups chard or spinach leaves, sliced
- 1 tablespoon roasted sesame seeds, for garnishing
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro, for garnishing
- 1 teaspoon hot chile paste or hot sesame oil, for garnishing (optional)

Prepare the bean thread noodles by pouring the hot water over the noodles in a large bowl. Let noodles stand 15 to 20 minutes or until al dente.

While waiting for the noodles to soften, make a sauce by mixing together the soy sauce, brown sugar, honey, vinegar and sesame oil in a small bowl.

Drain and rinse the noodles under cold water for 1 minute to cool them off and prevent them from sticking.

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet or wok over medium heat. Add the green onions, garlic and ginger and stir-fry for 30 seconds to season the oil. The ingredients should sizzle and be fragrant but not brown. Add the yellow onion, carrot, bell pepper, mushrooms and chard and stir-fry 1 to 2 minutes, until the vegetables are al dente and the greens are slightly wilted. Add the noodles



Natalie Keng, author of "Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea: Asian Inspired, Southern Style," uses mung bean noodles in her Japchae-Inspired Glass Noodles with Swiss Chard. COURTESY OF DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN

and sauce. Mix everything together and toss for another minute in the hot pan so that the noodles are evenly coated with the sauce. Garnish with the seeds, cilantro and chile paste (if using). Serve hot or cold — it's delicious both ways.

Serves 2.

Per serving: 1,012 calories (percent of calories from fat, 26), 6 grams protein, 185 grams carbohydrates, 14 grams total sugars, 14 grams fiber, 30 grams total fat (4 grams saturated), no cholesterol, 1,779 milligrams sodium.

### HOT HOT HUNAN FRESH CHILE SAMBAL

Keng's sambal sauce is inspired by Southern hot pepper sauce. "This is a spicy, tangy, umami sauce for a zingy lemony vinaigrette that conjures the taste of chow-chow. It's to-die-for on dumplings, including gyoza, pot stickers and xiao long bao, not to mention, naked ravioli, matzo balls and pierogies. Also, fish 'n' chips, grilled seafood, and omelets, plus, of course, fried chicken."

If not serving the whole batch right away, spoon out the desired amount of the chile base, add some of the cider-citrus liquid, and refrigerate the remaining sambal mixture in a sealed glass jar for up to three weeks.

- ½ cup fresh chiles (about 3 large cayenne or Anaheim chiles)
- 3 tablespoons light rice vinegar
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- Juice of 1 lemon (about 2



Hot Hot Hunan Fresh Chile Sambal is a Keng family favorite. COURTESY OF DEBORAH WHITLAW LLEWELLYN

- tablespoons)
- Juice of 1 lime (about 2 tablespoons)
- 5 peeled ginger slices (½-inch thick and 1 inch in diameter)
- ½ teaspoon honey
- ½ teaspoon fish sauce
- 3 tablespoons muscadine cider, or any fruit cider, including apple cider

To make the chile base, put the chopped chiles in a glass bowl and pour the vinegar over the chiles.

Add the garlic and stir gently with chopsticks to coat and blend. Be careful not to break apart the chile pieces. Set aside.

In a 4-cup glass measuring cup, make the citrus mixture by combining the lemon juice, lime juice and ginger. Set aside.

In a separate small bowl, make the cider mixture by stirring the honey into the fish sauce until dissolved, then add the cider and stir to combine.

Pour the cider mixture into the citrus mixture, stirring to combine. Carefully pour or spoon the chile base into the glass measuring cup. Use chopsticks to gently combine all the sambal ingredients, then transfer to a serving bowl.

Makes about 1 cup.

Per tablespoon: 9 calories (percent of calories from fat, 3), trace protein, 2 grams carbohydrates, trace total sugars, trace fiber, trace total fat (trace saturated fat), no cholesterol, 15 milligrams sodium.