

PEANUTS



Photo by Jim Pile

Nansmond River Soft Shell Crabs with Scallions, Suffolk Peanuts and Country Ham

Peanuts have been around for 2,000 years, but it wasn't until the early 1840s that the first commercial peanut crop was planted in Waverly, just northwest of Hampton Roads. Originally consumed by the poor and used as feed for livestock, the lowly goober didn't gain popular appeal until the Civil War, when it was seen as a portable, compact source of protein.

Perhaps one thing that more closely aligns Hampton Roads with the peanut more than any

other locale is the Planters Peanut Company, which traces its roots to Suffolk as early as 1912. In fact, a Suffolk High School boy drew Mr. Peanut as a contest entry some 90 years ago.

Around Hampton Roads, a popular use is peanut soup; also look for chefs to use peanuts as a dredging ingredient. Peanut-encrusted chicken or peanut-encrusted flounder (or other fish) can often be found on menus.

Peanuts make their way to the dessert cart too, with many

restaurants featuring peanut pie—similar to pecan, but with the substitution of peanuts.

Sam McGann, a chef/owner of Vintage Tavern in Suffolk, uses peanuts and other area ingredients extensively in his cuisine.

“‘Seasonally Southern’ is not just our slogan, it is our philosophy of food,” says the chef.

That extends to his use of local food finds in his Nansmond River Soft Shell Crabs with Scallions, Suffolk Peanuts and

Country Ham entrée.

“This dish came about many years ago as I began to see the originality that our own local ingredients could have when combined in a different way,” he says.

“Nuts offer a distinctive texture that adds both a mouth feel and flavor to the soft shells,” the chef notes. “And what better flavor profiles to match together than local ham, soft shells and Suffolk peanuts.”

—PEH

VINTAGETAVERN

Executive Chef:
Sam McGann

Sous Chef:
Eric Nelson

Sous Chef:
Kenny Reynolds

Sous Chef:
Harper Bradshaw

Although Vintage Tavern has only been open since early 2006, chef Sam McGann has been known in Hampton Roads for some 20 years for his creative approach to cuisine.

A Norfolk native, McGann attended Johnson & Wales University and has honed his skills at such restaurants as The Trellis in Williamsburg. In 1989, he opened The Blue Point in Duck, N.C., which he still operates.

Vintage Tavern gives McGann a Hampton Roads platform to showcase his culinary prowess. The eatery is operated with his wife, Cindy, the executive director of the Chesapeake Bay Wine Classic.

Although Southern at heart, the flavors at Vintage Tavern are peppered with experience from McGann's travels in pursuit of noshing nirvana—the Oriental Thai Cooking School in Bangkok, Thailand; the Perrier Jout House in Champagne, France; and the Inn at Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tenn.

When dining at Vintage Tavern, don't miss an appetizer that showcases the regional flair of McGann. The Taste of Southern Goodness features country ham biscuits, deviled eggs with house-smoked salmon, chicken liver mousse, pickled watermelon rind and Bennett's Creek sausage. **LR**



Sam McGann

RSVP

Vintage Tavern
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Pointe Dr.,
Suffolk
757-238-8808
vintagetavernvirginia.com

NANSEMOND RIVER SOFT SHELL CRABS WITH SCALLIONS, SUFFOLK PEANUTS AND COUNTRY HAM

Soft Shell Ingredients

8 jumbo soft shell crabs, cleaned
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon Old Bay Seasoning
Peanut oil, vegetable oil or clarified butter

Soft Shell Method

Preheat oven to 300F. Prepare seasoned flour by mixing flour, salt, pepper and seafood seasoning completely. Over medium-high heat, add 2–3 tablespoons oil in two sauté pans. Dust four crabs in the seasoned flour. Place two, shell side down, into one sauté pan. Then place two more into the second pan. Cook two minutes and turn. Repeat with second pan. When browned nicely, remove from sauté pan to a cooling rack. Wipe pans clean and repeat with the other four crabs. When all are browned, place on a sheet pan in the oven to allow soft shells to heat through and remain crisp, approximately four or five minutes.

Peanut Garnish Ingredients

2 cups jumbo Suffolk peanuts, unsalted, lightly roasted
1 cup Edwards Surry ham, sliced and julienne
1 cup scallions, cut very thin
4 tablespoons whole butter
1/2 lemon or lime
Salt and pepper to taste
4 slices French bread for plating

Peanut Garnish Method

In a 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat, sauté the ham and peanuts in the butter. Continue to cook, stirring carefully until butter begins to brown but not burn. When the aroma of the butter is nutty, remove from heat and squeeze in the lemon or lime. Add the scallions.

To Serve

Place the bread in the center of each plate. Place the crabs on the bread. Spoon the warm peanut garnish over the top.

Yields 4

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HAVANA, American,
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