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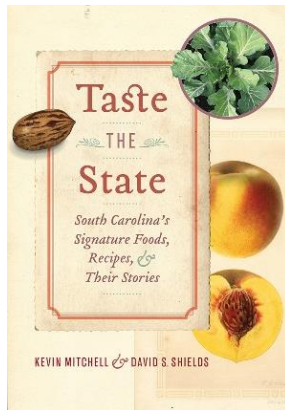
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Book Review: Taste the State: South Carolina's Signature Foods, Recipes, and Their Stories

Keywords

book review, south carolina, food

Taste the State: South Carolina's Signature Foods, Recipes, and Their Stories

Kevin Mitchell and David S. Shields
University of South Carolina Press, August 2021, \$34.99
Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-64336-196-3
E-book ISBN: 978-1-64336-197-0

Authors Kevin Mitchell and David S. Shields have cooked up something special with *Taste the State: South Carolina's Signature Foods, Recipes, and Their Stories*, an exploration of South Carolina food. This book offers a tasty look at beloved (and sometimes bygone) dishes. With the authors' culinary and research backgrounds and a shared interest in food and foodways, it's no wonder the University of South Carolina Press requested they write this guide. The resulting book is steeped in history and optimistic in its outlook, and it showcases the passion and creativity of Carolina cuisine.

Each chapter in *Taste the State* explores an individual dish or ingredient, lauding its flavor and history. Collards, for example, are a type of cabbage that didn't grow quite as expected, sprouting loose and leafy. Blackberries, which ramble along sun-soaked ditches, were used to make homemade wines and cordials, some of which were defended as "remedies" during Prohibition. The variety of foods included in the book make for a broad menu, ranging from Duke's Mayonnaise to shrimp and grits to tomato pie.

In the preface, the authors eschew “fakelore” commonly shared as truth, such as the apocryphal inclusion of pine bark in Pine Bark Stew. Instead, they follow the breadcrumbs of each ingredient’s story. Given the authors’ combined knowledge—and evidenced by the lengthy list of sources at the back of the book—readers can feel confident that each chapter is well-researched. As *Taste the State* was written for chefs and laypersons alike, this title would do well in both public and academic library collections. That said, academic libraries, in particular, will resonate with the authors’ evidence-driven ethos, which is reflected in asides that acknowledge folk beliefs while gently contradicting them.

South Carolina cuisine is a stewpot of cultures, and Mitchell and Shields acknowledge the forebears of each culinary tradition—how boiled peanuts connect to West African cooking, how Europeans used Native American ingredients in ways suited to their tastes, how Gullah-Geechee chefs innovated Lowcountry cuisine. *Taste the State* honors foods’ origins, tracing foodways along their entire paths into the present day. Mitchell and Shields also note agricultural efforts to revive once-common ingredients, such as breeding blight-resistant chinquapins, a type of small chestnut once sold in towns like Pickens and Union.

Taste the State doesn’t just share bite-sized histories; it’s a feast for the eyes. Chapters are peppered with ephemera and recipes written by cooks from centuries ago, including old labels and advertisements. Some chapters include illustrations or photographs, showcasing ingredients that even longtime residents might find unfamiliar. The book itself is designed to be easy to read, with text displayed in clean columns and modern recipes set apart with colored pages.

Overall, *Taste the State* is not only an informative read—it’s an enjoyable one. It’s suitable for all foodies, professional or otherwise, and is written with warmth and humor that serves to highlight the respect that Mitchell and Shields feel for South Carolina food. This is a book to savor, both in short reads and through in-depth perusal.

Jesika Brooks is the Educational Technology Librarian at Columbia College. She's fascinated by language and technology. She can be found curled up with a book and a cup of her favorite tea.