



a legacy of soulful fo

Charla Draper learned much more than cooking from her mother and grandmothers. As a Mother's Day tribute, she lightens her family's favorite recipes.

Charla Draper is the rare baby boomer who never tasted a frozen TV dinner as a child. The fine from-scratch cooking of her mother and grandmothers is as much a part of her as her sweet-as-molasses voice and sharply honed sense of humor. She also benefits from the emotional strength and independent thinking these women handed down.

"My mom taught me to have confidence in myself and be willing to take risks," Draper says. "She said if I had a goal that I believed in, I should be willing to take a risk to achieve it."

Draper has done just that in a career that spans more than 20 years. And her heritage also has led to her current mission: spreading

recognition of the historical contributions of African American cooks, while also working to create and popularize lighter versions of their traditional dishes. "The signature soul foods evolved from foodstuffs that we were allotted as slaves or sharecroppers," Draper says. "It's fine to reserve these dishes for special occasions, but we need to take elements of these dishes and make them into something new—and more healthful." The Field Greens with Mississippi Caviar on page 126, which transforms the often-heavy Southern staple of black-eyed peas into a light salad, is an example of how Draper reinterprets beloved meals.

"African Americans are more at risk for heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes," she notes, "but we can all reduce those risks by making healthful lifestyle

By Sharon Sanders | Portraits by Jeff Kauck | Food photography by Randy Mayor | Styling by Jan Gautro



Bayou Catfish Fillets
(recipe on page 263)

choices." To help achieve this goal, Draper works as a food consultant for major food companies and commodity associations. She also teaches cooking classes, is developing a cookbook, and has appeared on NBC's *Today* show and other media spreading the gospel of enlightened soul food. As a history buff and member of the Culinary Historians of Chicago, she helped launch and expand the group's annual "Grits and Greens" conference, which explores the myriad influences of African American foodways.

Respecting Tradition

The oldest of three children, Draper grew up on the south side of Chicago in a family that cooked together and took food seriously. Her mother, Alberta, was a bank executive, and her father, Charles, worked for an electric utility and ran a private transportation service. Draper's grandmother, Alice Walker, lived with the family and often started dinner preparations that Alberta would complete when she got home from work. Draper's other grandmother, Fredonia "Big Mama" Mickens, lived nearby. Big Mama spoiled

Charla Draper and her mother, Alberta



Draper says, "My family knows good food."

the family with meals from her native Louisiana: oyster soup and gumbo with crab, oysters, shrimp, and filé powder. "She also made the most wonderful pear preserves," Draper recalls.

"Fredonia was a wonderful scratch cook," Alberta Draper says. "Holiday dinners included turkey with corn bread—oyster stuffing, greens, sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, ambrosia, several pies, and cakes. This was not slimmed-down soul food."

Her grandmother Alice's recipe for lemon pound cake was one of Draper's strongest influences. The cake nourished a community for a generation. "When I was little, we always had lemon pound cake," Draper says. "If there was a new family in the neighborhood, we'd send pound cake. If someone passed away, we'd send pound cake. If there was a Missionary Society dinner at the Liberty Baptist Church, we'd send pound cake. The house always smelled fabulous."

Having grown up surrounded by such wonderful food, it comes as little surprise that after earning her undergraduate degree in home economics from Bradley University, Draper completed stints at several major food corporation test kitchens and became an influential food editor at *Ebony* magazine. Yet by the late 1980s, Draper was ready for work that was more personally meaningful. So she launched It's Food Biz!, a food-consulting business.

"I admire Charla so much for what she has achieved in her career," says Alberta Draper, who these days follows healthful cooking cues from her daughter. The feeling is mutual, Draper says. "I'm blessed to be from a family that knows good food. If it weren't for that heritage, I wouldn't be who I am today."

As a Mother's Day gift to Alberta, Draper created (with a light touch) the following irresistible Southern-style recipes.

Island Rice ►

This slightly sweet, risotto-like dish is a soothing side for the spicy Jerk-Style Chicken. It also goes well with other highly seasoned dishes, such as barbecued pork or blackened fish.

- 2½ cups water
- 1 cup uncooked long-grain rice
- ½ cup chopped dried pineapple
- 2 teaspoons butter
- ½ teaspoon grated lime rind
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped green onions
- 2½ tablespoons fresh lime juice

1. Bring 2½ cups water to a boil in a medium saucepan; add rice and next 4 ingredients (rice through salt). Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 20 minutes or until liquid is absorbed. Remove from heat; stir in cilantro, onions, and juice. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: ½ cup).

CALORIES 171 (9% from fat); FAT 1.8g (sat 0.8g, mono 0.4g, poly 0.1g); PROTEIN 2.7g; CARB 35.4g; FIBER 0.5g; CHOL 3mg; IRON 1.6mg; SODIUM 117mg; CALC 26mg

Jerk-Style Chicken ▼

A Draper family friend from Haiti inspired this version of Caribbean jerk-style chicken. The chicken marinates quickly and is loaded with flavor.

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| 1 teaspoon grated lime rind | 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon |
| ¼ cup fresh lime juice | ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg |
| 1 tablespoon ground allspice | 3 garlic cloves, chopped |
| 1 tablespoon brown sugar | ½ cup chopped onion |
| 1 to 2 tablespoons finely
chopped jalapeño pepper | 6 skinless, boneless chicken
thighs (about 1 pound) |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil | 3 (6-ounce) skinless, boneless
chicken breast halves |
| 1 teaspoon salt | Cooking spray |
| 1 teaspoon coarsely ground
black pepper | Parsley sprigs (optional) |
| 1 teaspoon dried thyme | Lime slices (optional) |

1. Combine first 12 ingredients in a blender; process until well blended. Pour mixture into a large heavy-duty zip-top plastic bag; add onion and chicken. Seal bag; marinate in refrigerator 1 to 2 hours, turning bag occasionally.

2. Prepare grill.

3. Remove chicken from bag; discard marinade. Place chicken on grill rack coated with cooking spray. Grill chicken, covered, 5 minutes on each side or until done. Garnish with parsley and lime slices, if desired. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 2 thighs or 1 breast half).

CALORIES 169 (29% from fat); FAT 5.4g (sat 1.1g, mono 2.5g, poly 0.9g); PROTEIN 26.1g; CARB 2.6g; FIBER 0.8g; CHOL 84mg; IRON 1.3mg; SODIUM 287mg; CALC 25mg



Field Greens with Mississippi Caviar ▼

Nutritious, inexpensive black-eyed peas have been a Southern kitchen staple for three centuries, but too often were cooked with loads of pork fat. This salad is typical of Draper's recipe makeover approach: She heightens the seasoning profile and uses little added fat.

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| ¾ cup water | 1 cup chopped tomato |
| 1 garlic clove, minced | ½ cup bottled reduced-calorie Italian dressing |
| Dash of black pepper | ⅓ cup chopped fresh parsley |
| 4 cups fresh or frozen black-eyed peas | ¼ cup chopped red onion |
| 1 cup (1-inch) julienne-cut yellow bell pepper | ¼ teaspoon salt |
| | 6 cups mixed salad greens |

1. Combine water, garlic, and black pepper in a large saucepan; bring to a boil. Add peas; cover and cook over medium-low heat 30 minutes or until tender. Drain.

2. Combine peas, bell pepper, and next 5 ingredients (bell pepper through salt) in a large bowl; toss gently to combine. Cover and chill 3 hours to overnight. Serve over salad greens.

Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 cup pea mixture and 1 cup greens).

CALORIES 197 (14% from fat); FAT 3g (sat 0.5g, mono 0.5g, poly 1.7g); PROTEIN 11.2g; CARB 33.5g; FIBER 9.3g; CHOL 1mg; IRON 3.7mg; SODIUM 281mg; CALC 68mg



Lemon Pound Cake with Mixed Berries ▼

Draper says she will *never* reveal the original recipe for her grandmother Alice Walker's lemon pound cake, but her lighter variation pays tribute to it. Use any combination of berries you like for the topping.

CAKE:

- Cooking spray
- 2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- ⅔ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup butter, softened
- 2 large egg whites
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon rind
- 1 teaspoon lemon extract
- ¼ cup vanilla low-fat yogurt

TOPPING:

- 1 cup sliced strawberries
- ½ cup fresh blueberries or blackberries
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen raspberries in light syrup, thawed and undrained
- 1 cup vanilla low-fat yogurt

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Coat an 8 x 4-inch loaf pan with cooking spray; dust with 2 teaspoons flour.
3. Lightly spoon 1 cup flour into a dry measuring cup; level with a knife. Combine 1 cup flour and baking powder, stirring with a whisk; set aside.
4. Place sugar and butter in a large bowl; beat with a mixer at high speed until fluffy (about 2 minutes). Add egg whites and egg, beating well after each addition. Beat in rind and extract. Add flour mixture and ¼ cup yogurt alternately to sugar mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture; mix well after each addition. Spoon batter into prepared pan. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan 10 minutes on wire rack; remove from pan. Cool completely on wire rack.
5. To prepare topping, combine berries, tossing well. Cut cake into 8 slices. Top each cake slice with ¼ cup berry mixture and 2 tablespoons yogurt. Yield: 8 servings.

CALORIES 286 (28% from fat); FAT 9g (sat 5.3g, mono 2.6g, poly 0.5g); PROTEIN 5.8g; CARB 46.7g; FIBER 2.8g; CHOL 49mg; IRON 1.2mg; SODIUM 141mg; CALC 92mg

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Soulful Food FROM PAGE 128

Dry-Rub Chicken with Honey Barbecue Sauce

Draper and her family often celebrate Mother's Day—and the return of warm weather—with a backyard cookout. The star of the meal is this succulent, spicy chicken with an irresistible sweet-and-sour barbecue sauce.

CHICKEN:

- 1 (3-pound) whole chicken
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 2 teaspoons lemon pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon seasoned salt
- Cooking spray

SAUCE:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ketchup
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper

1. To prepare chicken, remove and discard giblets and neck from chicken.

Rinse chicken with cold water; pat dry. Trim excess fat. Place chicken, breast side down, on a cutting surface. Cut chicken in half lengthwise along backbone (do not cut through breastbone). Turn chicken over. Starting at neck cavity, loosen skin from the breast and drumsticks by inserting fingers, gently pushing between skin and meat.

2. Combine paprika and next 4 ingredients (paprika through seasoned salt). Rub paprika mixture under loosened skin, and rub over breast and drumsticks. Gently press skin to secure. Cut a 1-inch slit in skin at the bottom of each breast half; insert tips of drum-

sticks into slits.

3. To prepare grill for indirect grilling, place a disposable aluminum foil pan in grill; pour water in pan. Arrange charcoal around pan; heat to medium. Coat grill rack with cooking spray; place rack on grill. Place chicken, breast side down, on grill rack over foil pan. Cover and grill 1 hour and 30 minutes or until a thermometer registers 180°. Remove chicken from grill; place on a clean cutting surface. Cover with foil, and let stand 5 minutes.

4. To prepare sauce, combine ketchup and the remaining ingredients in a small saucepan. Bring the sauce to a simmer

Kitchen shears are better at cutting down the backbone than a knife.



Once the chicken is cut, it will open up and lie flat on the grill for even cooking.



over medium-low heat; cook 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove skin from the chicken, and brush with $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sauce. Serve the remaining sauce with the chicken. Yield: 4 servings (serving size: about 4 ounces chicken and about 4 teaspoons sauce).

CALORIES 265 (26% from fat); FAT 7.8g (sat 2.1g, mono 2.9g, poly 1.9g); PROTEIN 29.3g; CARB 20.3g; FIBER 1g; CHOL 85mg; IRON 2.2mg; SODIUM 650mg; CALC 27mg

Bayou Catfish Fillets

Draper honors her mother Alberta's fondness for baked fish with this recipe. The spicy cornmeal breading stays crispy when the fish is baked on a ventilated broiler pan. You can also use yellow cornmeal. Try this breading on other white fish fillets.

- 2 tablespoons white cornmeal
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons seasoned salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder

- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground red pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon chili powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper
- 6 (6-ounce) catfish fillets
- Cooking spray
- 6 lemon wedges (optional)

1. Preheat broiler.
2. Combine first 9 ingredients in a zip-top plastic bag. Add 1 catfish fillet. Seal bag, and shake well. Remove fillet from bag, and place on a broiler pan coated with cooking spray. Repeat procedure with the remaining fillets and cornmeal mixture. Broil 6 inches from heat for 6 minutes. Carefully turn fillets over, and broil 6 minutes or until the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Serve with lemon wedges, if desired. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: 1 fillet and 1 lemon wedge).

CALORIES 247 (48% from fat); FAT 13.2g (sat 3.1g, mono 6.1g, poly 2.8g); PROTEIN 27g; CARB 3.8g; FIBER 0.8g; CHOL 80mg; IRON 1.3mg; SODIUM 474mg; CALC 27mg

Cajun Garlic Pork Roast

Draper created this much-loved recipe for the National Pork Board.

- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons minced fresh garlic
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1 (2-pound) boneless pork loin roast, trimmed

Cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Rub first 7 ingredients over roast; place on a broiler pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 1 hour and 30 minutes or until a thermometer registers 155°. Let stand 10 minutes. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: 3 ounces).

CALORIES 168 (33% from fat); FAT 6.2g (sat 2.1g, mono 2.8g, poly 0.7g); PROTEIN 25.1g; CARB 1.7g; FIBER 0.7g; CHOL 62mg; IRON 1.5mg; SODIUM 246mg; CALC 42mg



Honor Mom this Mother's Day with a meal she's sure to remember. Find delicious brunch and dinner menus, plus table-decorating tips, at [CookingLight.com/features](https://www.cookinglight.com/features).

Sharon Sanders is the author of *Cooking Up an Italian Life*.