

**Colin Moody**  
The Happy Palate



**THOSE PECULIAR PERSIMMONS**

I often get a funny response from people, when I mention persimmons in a recipe or dish that I am preparing. Probably because many people have bitten into and unripe Hachiya variety that will suck all the moisture out of your mouth and leave you looking like you have to drink your meals through a straw. This has happened to me too, but only once. Since then, I have been well educated by farmers as to the particulars on those peculiar persimmons (say that three times fast).

These yummy fruits are in season from October through December. There are only two commonly available types of persimmons, even though there are hundreds of varieties throughout the world. The Fuyu, which has a pale orange color, is round and slightly flat on the bottom. The Hachiya, which has a red-orange color, is more pointed at the bottom.

The majority of persimmons on the market today originated in China and Japan, and were brought to California in the mid-1800s. But the name we get from the many Native American tribes of the northeast, where a smaller grape-size version of the persimmon grows. They called it "pasimanan" to the early settlers of Jamestown. They would make breads from it, or eat it out of hand, but only after the first frost, because they do not become ripe until October. The pilgrims then began using it to help ferment and distill their spirits, because of its sweet and pleasant taste. Capt. John Smith of Pocahontas fame was quoted as saying, "If it be not ripe it will draw a mans mouth awrie with much torment; but when it is ripe, it is as delicious as an apricot."

Even though both have the "persimmon" name, they must not be treated equally. The Hachiya can only be enjoyed when soft and ripe, where the Fuyu is enjoyed firm. One farmer I worked with would call them "fool-you's," instead of Fuyu's, because they fool you, and are nice and sweet when firm. And that is how I always have remembered which persimmon is which.

On a nutritional level, both varieties have a good profile of B vitamins and fiber. The Fuyu has an amazing 3,641 IU of vitamin A. I could not find good figures on the Hachiya, but the orange color of it indicates a plentiful supply of at least one type of vitamin A, beta carotene. Some differences: Fuyu has 118 calories, compared to Hachiya's 32. The Hachiya has 16 mg of vitamin C, while the Fuyu has none. But the Fuyu makes up for that with 270 mg of potassium and 1 gram of protein, while the Hachiya only gives you 70 mg. of potassium and .02 grams of protein.

Savor the season and go try some of these wonderfully peculiar persimmons!

**Some fun tips**

- Add mashed Hachiya's to waffle or pancake batter for more flavor and moisture.
- Slice Fuyu's sideways (like a lemon wheel) and it reveals a beautiful star pattern. Use it to decorate your morning fruit plates, or as a seasonal garnish on desserts.

**Recipes**

Here are two persimmon recipes, one for each variety, and both with a holiday twist. Remember to try and create fun dishes that inspire and make your whole tongue happy.

Please see Moody page D6



SPECIAL TO THE HERALD  
**Persimmon cranberry muffins.**

**Monterey County Taste**

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The Panamanian islands of Bocas del Toro offer laid-back, carefree lifestyle



**CRIOLLO PARADISE**

MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ/Special to The Herald

By **MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ** and **JULIO RAMIREZ**  
*Herald Correspondents*

Flying low over the cloud-crowned Panamanian forest, our small plane cut through the cumulous cotton balls — and suddenly below us were the islands of Bocas del Toro floating green in the turquoise sea. We landed on the dirt runway of Bocas Island in the sultry heat of a Caribbean afternoon.



MARIE PERUCCA-RAMIREZ/Special to The Herald  
**Guaymí children paddle on an island river; with few roads on the whole archipelago, water provides the main mode of transportation.**

Bocas del Toro is an old town: sweaty, salty and humid. Wooden buildings are built out over the water, and many houses stand on stilts, bordered by rain-puddled streets. The legacy of pirates and slaves, banana company workers, East Indians, West Indians and Guaymí Indians, Bocas is a polyglot and evolving community, exuberant and laid back at the same time.

Transportation is mainly provided by cayucos — motorized dugout canoes that serve as water taxis, busily running people between the many nearby islands. A paved road cuts through the interior of the island, past farms hewn out of the rainforest; another travels part way around the shore where big waves break on shallow coral bottoms. The island has become a magnet for surfers as well as scuba divers, birdwatchers, backpackers and

**Food Wranglers**  
Back Roads, Good Food



sailboat crews — but it's still a backwater town of small cafes, locals' bars, funky dockside restaurants and bougainvillea-covered guesthouses catering to those independent travelers who find their way here from all over the world. Bocas town is quiet during the afternoon siesta — but as the temperature drops with the sun, the streets come alive. Local boys on bicycles practice their moves on the empty dirt runway, neighbors sit gossiping on their verandas, chickens pick at bugs in grassy front yards and groups of animated men play serious dominoes. Couples out for a stroll, laughing and gesturing,

call out to friends sitting on porches. Bands of girls in tight jeans, looping around the town center, flirt with young men cruising the streets, their rap music pulsing.

As the evening progresses, Bocas fills with travelers eating in the small open-air cafes, the aromas of island cooking — the criollo curries and spicy jerks — as lively as the music on the street. Friends meet with friends over beers to talk about the waves they caught, the fish they didn't, or the next island they're heading for. Street vendors lay out their wares — handmade jewelry, crystals and tie-dyed shirts. Travelers in shorts and dreadlocks, chakra tattoos and pierced navels make plans to party later on as reggae music from local bars begins to fill the air.

Hearing about a remote hotel on the far side of Bastimentos Island, we decided to spend a few days there; but we were told a storm had damaged the pier and the hotel was closed — no one but the old caretaker was there. Explaining that we traveled light and could swim ashore if we had to, our stay was arranged.

Please see Bocas page D4



**A whole fried fish topped with a criollo sauce, served with coconut lentil rice and cabbage slaw. Top: Bocas Island (Isla Colón) as viewed from the air.**

**Cherished holiday treats from Norway**

By **ALETA WATSON**  
*San Jose Mercury News*

Krumkake, brun brod, piparkakut and sandbakelser. The holiday season doesn't begin at Karen Karpen and Glenn Krasner's Los Altos Hills home until the traditional Scandinavian cookies with tongue-twisting names emerge from the oven, filling the kitchen with the sweet aroma of butter, sugar and spice.

Others may mark the season with a day of baking, but Karpen goes all out. To the quartet of standards, she usually adds several more varieties of buttery cookies to round out her annual production. Baking is a cherished tradition in Norway, her grandparents' homeland, where

custom dictates seven varieties of cookies be served at Christmas. "We always make too many," she says. "We give them away and eat a lot of them, too." Most of the recipes date back to Karpen's childhood in Oregon, where she learned to bake from her mother. The crisp, almond-accented sandbakelser, often called sand tarts, are straight out of a much-loved 1963 Betty Crocker cookbook, the spine broken and the pages interleaved with recipe clippings. More recently, the retired lawyer has baked her cookies with schoolchildren and volunteered to teach her recipes to adults as part of

Please see Norway page D6



LIPO CHING/San Jose Mercury News  
**Karen Karpen bakes a wide variety of Scandinavian cookies each year, including the Brun Brod, center, the Sandbakelser, foreground, and the Krumkake.**

**Inside**

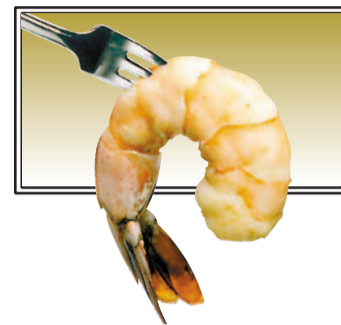
Barbara Quinn reveals a reasonable way to enjoy holiday treats. Page D5



**D**

**Good to know**

What's cooking?



**Quick fix**

**Salsa shrimp and broccoli rice**  
(Serves 2)

Olive oil spray  
¾ lb. shelled shrimp  
1 cup tomato salsa  
3 T. pine nuts  
Salt and freshly ground pepper  
**Steps:** Heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Spray with olive oil. Add shrimp and salsa. Cook 2 to 3 minutes or until the shrimp turn pink. Sprinkle with pine nuts, salt and pepper.  
**Per serving:** 313 calories (32 percent from fat), 11.2 g fat (1.8 g saturated, 2.9 g monounsaturated), 258 mg cholesterol, 39.5 g protein, 12.5 g carbohydrates, 2.4 g fiber, 809 mg sodium.

**Broccoli rice**

½ cup 10-minute brown rice  
8 oz. frozen broccoli  
1 T. olive oil  
Salt and freshly ground pepper  
**Steps:** Bring a large saucepan filled with water to a boil. Add brown rice and boil 5 minutes. Add broccoli and continue to boil 5 minutes. Drain and toss with olive oil and salt and pepper to taste.  
**Per serving:** 249 calories (23 percent from fat), 6.3 g fat (1 g saturated, 3.8 g monounsaturated), 0 cholesterol, 7.6 g protein, 42.6 g carbohydrates, 5.5 g fiber, 39 mg sodium.  
— From Linda Gassenheimer at [www.DinnerInMinutes.com](http://www.DinnerInMinutes.com).

**Q&A**

**Q:** Can you tell me the proper way to use panko breadcrumbs? When I make chicken cutlets, I dip the cutlets in egg, then in panko breadcrumbs (dressed with seasonings). I try to pat them on chicken but alas a lot of the breadcrumbs fall off.  
**A:** Panko crumbs are lighter, flakier, and bigger than regular breadcrumbs, but they can essentially be treated the same way. What might be happening to your cutlets, though, might not be related to the panko. Before you dredge your cutlets in egg, you should give them a quick (and light) dusting with flour, so that the egg has something to grip on to and doesn't slide off. That should keep your breadcrumbs on.  
— Food Network

**Tips**

**Gentle technique**  
For delicate foods such as fish, fruit or out-of-shell eggs, you can't beat poaching (cooking in liquid over low heat, generally around 170 degrees, or slightly lower than a simmer). When you're poaching something, you want small bubbles to appear around the outside of the pan, but they shouldn't be breaking violently. It's a great technique for foods that you wouldn't want to boil, as the rapid heat of boiling would make them tough and unpleasant to eat. You can poach in anything from water to broth to wine to butter. One of the major rewards of poaching is the gently-flavored broth that results from longer poaches; once the food is removed, the broth can either be reduced and used for sauces, or used as-is as a base for soup.  
— Food Network

**All about wine**

Our online wine expert George Edwards of WineMarket in Pacific Grove writes about his personal favorites. Read Edwards' columns or ask him a wine-related question of your own. Go to [www.montereyherald.com](http://www.montereyherald.com), click on columnists and find "All About Wine."  
— Herald staff reports and wire services





**TASTE**

**About the authors**

Julio Ramirez and Marie Perucca-Ramirez, creators of the Fishwife Seafood Restaurants and Turtle Bay Taquerias on the Peninsula, sold their restaurants to start The Food Wranglers Inc., a restaurant consultant group.

Julio is certified as an executive chef by the American Culinary Federation and in 1999 was inducted into the prestigious American Academy of Chefs. Marie is a writer with a degree in history and sociology and a master's in applied linguistics.

The couple have always enjoyed traveling the back roads of the world; they are interested in seeing what other ethnic groups grow, what they eat, how they prepare their food — what their various cultures "taste like."

During their travels they have met many remarkable individuals, had a number of unusual experiences, eaten a variety of unfamiliar foods — and collected some great recipes they have adapted for home use.

Once a month they will share their experiences — through words and photos — with Herald readers. Write to them at marie@foodwranglers.com.



**Travelers stop for ham and egg sandwiches at a street-side food stand in Bocas town.**

the white "heads" chopped and set aside (about ¼ cup), the green stems chopped and set aside (about ¼ cup) for use in chicken preparation above

- 1 tsp. peanut oil
- 1 T. butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (about 2 tsp.)
- ½ serrano chile, minced (about 1 tsp.)
- ¼ green bell pepper, diced (about ¼ cup)
- ¼ red bell pepper, diced (about ¼ cup)
- 1 T. good-quality curry powder (if you like your food spicy use the Madras variety)
- 1 13-oz. can coconut milk (not cream)
- 1 T. sugar
- ¼ tsp. salt

**Steps:** Put the oil and butter into a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the scallion whites, garlic, chile, green and red bell pepper and cook for 2 minutes until the vegetables sweat. Add the curry powder and continue cooking for 1 more minute. Add the coconut milk, stir, and allow the mixture to come to simmer; add the sugar and the salt, stir, then reduce heat to low.

**Note:** If you are making the sauce ahead and not planning to cook the chicken at this time, remove the coconut curry sauce from the heat. When you are ready to proceed with the chicken, warm the sauce over medium heat, bringing it to simmer.

**Bocas ham and egg sandwiches**  
(Serves 4)

These sandwiches are sold on the streets of Bocas town from small, open-air kitchens — made to order and wrapped in aluminum foil. How can something seemingly so common taste so good? The secret is in the bread — a soft,

slightly sweet, fresh-baked roll that complements the ham and eggs. For an informal meal, serve the sandwiches with a tropical fresh-fruit smoothie and chips.

- 4 fresh sandwich rolls, (Cuban rolls, if you can get them, egg bread (challah) sandwich rolls, or Kaiser rolls from a bakery). Large, round rolls hold the ingredients best.
- Mayonnaise
- Yellow mustard
- 2 tomatoes, sliced thin (12 slices)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 T. and 1 tsp. peanut oil
- 1 ham steak, approximately 1 lb., ¼-inch thick (or use smoked ham)
- 4 large or extra large eggs
- Optional: ½ very thinly sliced habanero chile

**Steps:** Slice open the buns; spread a generous amount of mayonnaise on the bun bottoms, add mustard and blend it in. Spread a small amount of mustard on top halves; salt and pepper both halves. Place 3 slices of tomato on the bun bottoms, sprinkle salt and pepper, and set aside. In a large 12-inch Teflon sauté pan, heat 1 tsp. oil over medium heat and fry the ham for 2 minutes on each side, remove from pan, and cut into 4 approximately equal pieces. Place ham on top of the tomatoes. Wipe the pan; add 1 T. oil to the Teflon pan, heat over medium heat, and cook the eggs for 2 minutes on one side; carefully turn, cook 30 seconds, then place eggs on top of ham. (Note: eggs are placed on top so the bun will absorb the yolk when eating.)

Salt and pepper the eggs — and, if you like, add a few very thin slices of habanero chile for some "kick." Cover with bun tops and serve.

**Croustades**

From page D3

loosely crumple the dough into a circle and lay it into the pastry ring. Sprinkle it with about one-fifth of the almonds. Repeat this procedure three more times, until you have four buttered, sugared and almond-sprinkled sheets of filo layered in the ring. Do not press them together — let them keep some height.

Spoon the apples into the center of the croustade, leaving a 1-inch border bare. Working as you did before, butter, sugar and crumple a sheet of filo, fitting it over the apples. Sprinkle this layer with the remaining almonds, and cover this with another crumpled sheet of buttered and sugared filo. Do a little styling and draping; arrange the filo so it looks good.

Slide the croustade into the oven and bake for about 10 to 12 minutes, watching the top of the tart carefully to make certain it doesn't brown too much. The top should be just lightly browned. Remove the croustade from the oven.

Increase the oven temperature to 400 degrees. Butter and sugar another sheet of filo, loosely crumple it and place it on the last layer to make a light, airy crown. Bake the tart for 5 to 10 minutes, or until lightly browned, then remove it from the oven again.

Butter the last sheet of filo and, once again, crumple it to make a crown. Place it on top of the croustade and dust it heavily with the remaining powdered sugar. Return the tart to the oven and bake until the top layer caramelizes evenly, about 5 to 10 minutes. Check the progress of the sugar frequently because it can go from brown to burned in a flash. Pull the croustade from the oven as soon as the top is a golden caramel color and allow it to cool for 5 to 10 minutes.

To serve, lift off the tart ring and, using two large, wide metal spatulas, transfer the croustade to a serving plate. Serve the tart warm or at room temperature the day it is made, with crème fraiche, whipped cream (or even better, crème fraiche lightened with whipped cream) or vanilla ice cream.

**Steps:** Each serving: 363 calories; 3 grams protein; 46 grams carbohydrates; 5 grams fiber; 18 grams fat; 10 grams saturated fat; 38 milligrams cholesterol; 95 milligrams sodium.

— Adapted from a recipe for apple and Armagnac croustade in the "Cafe Boulud Cookbook" by Daniel Boulud and Dorie Greenspan.

**Barbara Quinn**

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**On Nutrition**



**SAVORING HOLIDAY JOY**

Two of my most cherished Christmas decorations are cutouts in red, white and green felt of the letters J-O-Y — made by our young daughters several years ago. In the middle of the "O" is a tiny bell. I smile each year when I unpack them with the rest of our Christmas treasures.

Even the recipes I pull out for this season are filled with memories . . . and food stains from years of use. My sister-in-law Molly's praline pecan cookies remind me of holidays back in New Mexico. And a year doesn't go by that I simply *must* make a batch of my sister Cheryl's chocolate peanut butter cookies.

Let I get too gooey in my holiday reflections, let us not forget that holiday food is loaded with more than just memories. Is there a reasonable way to enjoy the foods of this season without asking Santa to send us a bigger size for 2008? Here are some ideas to help match up healthful habits with traditional times:

► Take the emphasis off the cookie and put it on the "exchange." Prior to our cookie exchange at work, a co-worker from another department said to me, "You dietitians will probably make something healthy, huh?"

► Uh . . . no. In fact, we

brought goodies made from tried and true family recipes. What we did do, however, was avoid eating all four dozen cookies at once. In fact, one of the best reasons to do a cookie exchange is to have food gifts to pass on to friends and neighbors.

► Don't even think about changing beloved family traditions. It's a custom in my friend Michael's family to eat cookies on Christmas morning. This one day of the year, that's important. Oatmeal and fruit will return soon enough.

► Enjoy special food occasions. Every year, my friend Michelle and I plan a Christmas "tea time" together. And not because tea is rich in polyphenolic compounds that protect our health. We take this time over tea and scones to nourish our friendship during this special season.

► Be sensible with serving sizes. We can automatically cut in half the calories in any food or beverage if we eat half our usual portion.

► Slooowww down. Taste and smell the wonderful foods of the season. Savor each bite. It's one of the best ways to enjoy more with less.

► Remember that Christmas is more than food. The original Christmas story gives no mention of what Mary and Joseph ate to sustain themselves on their way to Bethlehem. And even the wise men showed up without Christmas cookies.

We won't be in New Mexico for Christmas this year but you can bet that we'll have our family's traditional egggnog on Christmas Eve . . . with a little sprinkle of nutmeg.

May this Christmas season bring you comfort . . . and joy.

Barbara Quinn is a registered dietitian at the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula. E-mail her at bquinn@chomp.org.

**Bocas**

From page D4

(recipe below)

- 2 T. fresh cilantro, minced
- 4 T. shredded coconut, toasted (spread on baking sheet, heat in 350-degree oven for 2-3 minutes until golden brown — don't burn!)

**Steps:** Add oil to a 12-inch sauté pan, heat for two minutes over medium heat; Add the chicken, sprinkle with 1 tsp. salt and ½ tsp. pepper; cook for 3 minutes. Turn chicken, sprinkle with remaining salt and pepper; cook for 3 minutes. Add diced tomatoes, stir; add the scallion greens, stir; add the coconut curry sauce, and stir well. Simmer for 4 minutes. Remove from heat; garnish each serving with ½ T. of the cilantro and 1 T. of toasted shredded coconut, and serve immediately.

**Coconut curry sauce**  
(Makes about 2 cups)

- 1 bunch scallions (green onions),

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