

with a bit of butter as she works. Then she puts them on a round board and pounds the dough even flatter with rhythmic thumps from her palm: *bam-bam-bam-bam*. Rotate. *Bam-bam-bam-bam*.

Becker reaches underneath the table and pulls out a wooden rolling pin, asking Sharma in Hindi if she's ever tried using one. Sharma waves her away and replies (via Becker's translation), "A long time ago—it doesn't come out right."

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*A fine hoecake—in any cultural translation—is an increasing rarity in Atlanta restaurants.*



She tosses these rounds on the griddle, par-cooks them, lets them cool, and wraps them tightly in plastic. During meal service, she'll finish cooking the flatbreads in butter. I ate both a freshly made *roti* and a reheated one and could barely discern the difference.

Mustard greens may be a seasonal dish at Bhojanic, but the restaurant serves the *rotis* year-round, typically alongside a roasted eggplant relish. A fine hoecake—in any cultural translation—is an increasing rarity in Atlanta restaurants. (I'm thinking particularly of the recent closing of Son's Place, a venerable Atlanta soul food joint that could work a hoecake.)

The universal appeal of cornbread makes *makki ki roti* one of the most requested dishes on Bhojanic's menu. No surprise, then, that Bhojanic has such a diverse customer mix. Folks from all backgrounds munch on flatbread, listen to live jazz at night or recorded blues during lunch, sip a sweet lassi (a yogurt drink comparable to buttermilk), and savor the intertwining of worlds, culinary and otherwise.

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*Bill Addison is the food editor of Atlanta magazine. Indian roti photo also by Bill Addison.*

# WEDNESDAY GREENS AND SUNDAY GREENS

By Eugene Walter

Greens! A humble and constant presence. Not many collect "fence corner greens" any more, save in truly rural Alabama: dandelions, wild sorrel, pokeweed, all that. But in the everlasting returning cycles of life, dandelion greens have begun to turn up in the snobbiest salads at yuppie, with-it, and trendsetting tables. But turnip, collard, and mustard, along with cabbage, go on forever.

Nothing irritates me more than the phrase "soul food," a catchall label for simpler and more traditional Southern dishes. In the late '40s and '50s, the big record companies began to divide black music into two categories: dance bands and show music on the one hand, and blues, gospel, and ballads on the other. Pop music and soul music. Nightclub music and revival tent music. Later, some smart aleck or other, with imprecise reasoning, decided to split Southern food into rural, po' folks (mostly black) cooking and fancy, citified (mostly white) cooking. All wrong!

There are as many social classes and degrees of culinary sophistication among blacks as among whites in the Deep South, and what I was served in a soul food restaurant in New York makes me gag even in recollection. I mean soggy, thick cornbread, probably made with Wesson Oil, and dreary long-dead greens so swimming in pork fat that the teeth and tongue were wearing thick silk pajamas after one spoonful. No flushes of beer made it possible to taste the other dishes that followed.

I remember two delightful messes of greens. Once I went with a hunting party to Mt. Vernon, Alabama. I was after wild flowers; they were out to shoot Bambi. The midday meal was prepared by a black

woman who served up a grand repast on a table covered with comic sections from the Sunday paper.

The food had been cooked in the fireplace, whether in pots hanging from hooks or sitting in the embers. The steaming mixed greens (mostly turnip and mustard) were flavored with cubes of lean bacon, onions, and one or two not-so-hot red peppers. They were delicate, not at all greasy, and infinitely satisfying. They had simmered on the hearth all morning and were tender but had not disintegrated.

Years later I was invited by the Conrad Aikens to a private club in Savannah where a silver tureen of turnip greens was served in triumph. This time, with bits of ham and ham fat. The dish, most delicate, could have been brought forth at a Paris table with Tabasco on the side. I asked the chef how he had cooked it, and he replied, "Low fire, slow cookin'." And that's the title of a cookbook I have in progress.

Well, greens, ah, yes. So many Alabama dishes have a double personality. Simple for everyday or homefolks, fancy for guests or on Sundays and holidays. For instance, a great many serious eaters feel strongly that the turnip leaf and the turnip root are two different items and should be prepared separately even if you are serving them in the same bowl. And feelings run strong about whether the roots should be served on top of the greens, or alongside the greens, or in a separate dish.

Let's look at two versions of such:

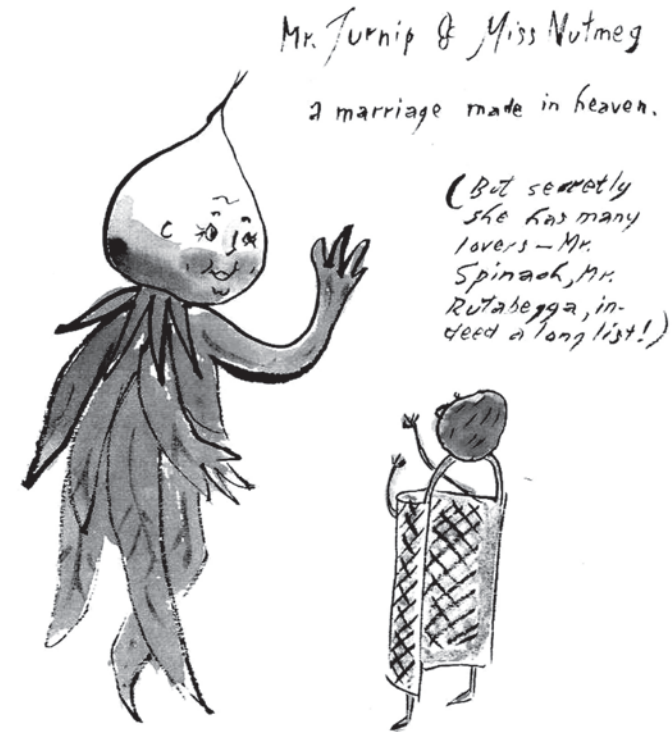
#### Wednesday Greens And Sunday Greens

In your big pot, brown as much bacon or fatback as you like. Pour off all but a tablespoon of fat (save it, naturally!) then put in your turnip or mixed green leaves which have been washed many times then torn up, not cut. Put a pinch of salt, a bit of red pepper, and some finely chopped onion. Add a little water, and let this simmer forever. Boil your turnip roots with a pinch of sugar and a pinch of salt. When fork will just pierce, drain, peel, slice or cube, then keep hot until you serve them on top of greens.

Now the Sunday version. Put a small piece of fatback or bacon in the big pot. In this case, brown your chopped onions, put in some ham hocks and the torn up greens, flavoring with salt, cayenne, and a few chopped green onions. Almost cover with water, and cook over low flame, stirring occasionally. Simmer the turnip roots in water with pinch of sugar and pinch of salt just until fork will pierce. Peel and cube, butter well, add a couple of tablespoons of heavy cream and

flavor with a grating of nutmeg or a good pinch of powdered mace. Serve alongside the cooked greens.

In North Alabama greens are often served with a good handful of sippets over them. These cubes of stale bread, fried in bacon fat with a couple of unpeeled garlic toes, are usually known by their French name of croutons, but the ancient English name is sippets. Very fine they are with any dish of greens or any clear soup.



*Eugene Walter (1921-1998) was the author of American Cooking: Southern Style in the Time-Life Foods of the World series. "Greens" written in the 1980s, is an excerpt from the forthcoming book The Happy Table of Eugene Walter, edited by Donald Goodman and Thomas Head. Used by permission of Donald Goodman. Drawing Courtesy Estate of Eugene Walter.*