

Your First Sunday Dinner

One full Southern table, planned out to the hour, so your first Sunday out of this book is a triumph.

You do not have to read the whole book before you cook from it. This plan walks you through one real Sunday dinner, the same spread my family has eaten for fifty years, with every step placed on the clock. Cook it once and the rhythm is yours for good.

The menu, serves 8

- Sunday fried chicken
- Collard greens with ham hock
- Baked macaroni and cheese
- Skillet cornbread
- Sweet potato pie

Saturday: the quiet work

About one hour of hands-on work, spread over the day.

1. **Morning:** shop the list on the next page. Pick up the ham hock and the chicken first, they matter most.
2. **Afternoon:** bake the sweet potato pie. Pie is always better the next day, and Sunday's oven belongs to the macaroni.
3. **Evening:** lay the chicken down in its buttermilk bath, season it well, and let the icebox do the night shift. Wash and cut your greens, and grate the cheese.

Why it works: everything that needs time gets it while you sleep, and Sunday holds nothing but the cooking that has to happen Sunday.

Full methods in the book: The Buttermilk Bath, and the sweet potato pie in Sweets and Preserves.

Sunday morning: the pots that take time

Start about four hours before you want to sit down.

1. Put the greens on first, with the ham hock and a whole peeled onion in the pot. They will drink up three hours on a low simmer and get better every minute.
2. Boil and drain the macaroni, stir the custard together, and set the dish in the icebox, ready for the oven.

3. Mix your cornbread batter dry-to-wet and set the skillet in the oven to heat when the macaroni goes in.

Full methods in the book: Collard Greens with Ham Hock, Baked Macaroni and Cheese.

The last hour: the fry

Chicken comes last, so it lands on the table hot and crisp.

1. Pull the chicken from the buttermilk, flour it twice, and let it rest while the grease heats.
2. Drop a crumb of bread in the fat. When it sings straight to the top, start frying, and do not crowd the pan.
3. Rest every piece on a rack, never a plate. Pour the batter into the hot skillet for the cornbread when the last chicken goes in.

Why it works: the rack keeps the crust you worked for, and cornbread baked in a screaming-hot skillet comes out with the crust that made your grandmother famous.

Full methods in the book: Flour It Twice, The Bread Knows When the Grease Is Ready, and the cornbread chapter.

The shopping list

MEAT AND DAIRY

1 whole chicken, cut up, or 8 pieces
1 smoked ham hock
1 quart buttermilk
1 pound sharp cheddar
Butter, eggs, whole milk

PRODUCE AND DRY GOODS

2 big bunches collard greens
2 yellow onions
3 pounds sweet potatoes
Cornmeal, flour, elbow macaroni
Sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, hot sauce

Most of this you buy once and use for weeks, the cornmeal and the spices among them. The whole table costs less than carry-out for two, and it feeds eight with leftovers for Monday.

Cook it once and it is yours. That is how it was given to me. Mama Odessa