

Local chefs go coastal for Thanksgiving

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Photos by Kevin Cox

Chef Laurence Weddel prepared Seared Diver Scallops on Roasted Pumpkin Risotto as a Thanksgiving recipe with a coastal twist at Claudio & Mattia's Trattoria Piano Bar in League City.

Add some seaside flavor to your holiday table this Thanksgiving. Five area chefs agree traditional fare can be mixed with a variety of other dishes to offer guests a taste of the Gulf. So, get creative and serve some of these delectable delights along with the turkey.

Chef Laurence Weddel, of Claudio & Mattia's Trattoria Piano Bar in League City, enjoys living coastal, especially in the Clear Lake area with all the sailboats and maritime culture. He likes working with seafood because it's so versatile, he said. Plus, with all the hidden treasures in the Gulf, he likes to serve things you don't normally see on the menu.

Seared Diver Scallops on Roasted Pumpkin Risotto

1 medium pumpkin
1 cup Arborio rice
2½ cups chicken stock
1 small onion, finely minced
Sea salt to taste
2 sprigs fresh thyme
3 tablespoons olive oil
1/8 cup grated Parmesan
6 to 8 diver scallops

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Peel and dice pumpkin into 1- to 2-inch squares. Toss half of the pumpkin in a little olive oil and salt and roast in oven for about 20-25 minutes. Steam the other half until soft. (Weddel likes to put all the pumpkin through a blender or food mill and set aside to be folded in later.)

For the risotto, sauté minced onion in olive oil and sweat for about a minute; add rice. Toast rice for a bit and add one 3-ounce ladle of stock, stir until rice has absorbed all the liquid. Add another ladle and continue until the rice is al dente and creamy. Take pumpkin purée, fresh thyme and fold into risotto, top with Parmesan.



Dry scallops with paper towel. Put enough oil (Weddel prefers canola/olive oil blend) to barely cover bottom of pan. When oil starts to smoke, add scallops with sea salt and sear until golden brown being careful not to overcook. Scoop some of the risotto on a dish, top with scallops, garnish with shaved Parmesan.

Chef Urs Schmid, of Moody Gardens Hotel in Galveston, said we're very fortunate to have fresh seafood in our own backyard — the Gulf of Mexico. He likes cooking seafood because it's easy to prepare and a healthy option.

Jumbo Lump Crab Cakes over Smoked Tomato Bacon Compote

Crab Cakes

- 3 large eggs
- 2 ounces butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped
- Juice of 2 fresh lemons
- ¼ cup sour cream

Mix all of the above together and gently fold in 1 pound jumbo lump crab meat with all shells removed. Add one cup plain breadcrumbs. Place parchment paper on baking sheet and dust with cornmeal. Scoop mixture using a 1 ounce ice cream scoop. Dust formed cakes with additional cornmeal and press down gently. Pan sauté in nonstick skillet using small amount of vegetable oil. Cook over medium heat until golden brown on both sides for about 2 minutes each side. Makes 20-22 crabcakes.

Smoked Tomato Bacon Compote

- 2 slices of bacon, finely diced
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon shallots, finely minced
- 1 tablespoon garlic, finely minced
- 15-ounce can diced tomatoes, drained; reserve juice
- 1 pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- 3 leaves of fresh basil, chiffonade
- 1 pinch of dried oregano
- Salt to taste
- Sugar to taste to remove acidity from tomatoes

Cook bacon in 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil over low heat until crisp, drain and set aside. Sauté the shallots and garlic in the olive oil over medium heat. Add rendered bacon, diced tomatoes and seasonings; simmer for 5 minutes, adding reserved tomato juice as needed. Serve sauce on the side or plated with crabcakes atop.

Chef Roland Kyburz, of South Shore Harbour Resort in League City, has worked most of his career near the coast (Israel, England, Puerto Rico, Clear Lake). He enjoys the various ways to create great tasting, eye-pleasing seafood dishes, and with most local seafood available year round, it can be incorporated in any seasonal celebration.



Chipotle Shrimp and Grits

Grits

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 4 cloves garlic, minced
 ½ tablespoon dried thyme
 1 cup stone-ground grits
 1 cup water
 1 cup chicken stock
 1 cup heavy cream
 ½ cup grated cheddar cheese

Melt butter and olive oil in a sauce pan. Add garlic and thyme and cook until fragrant. Add water, broth and cream. Stir well and bring to low boil over medium-high heat. Slowly add grits, stirring entire time with whisk. Reduce heat to medium-low and continue to stir, cooking for about 10-15 minutes, stirring on

occasion.

Shrimp

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
 1 cup small diced apple-smoked bacon
 ¼ cup shallots, diced
 1 cup dry white wine
 1½ cup heavy cream
 1 tablespoon chipotle paste
 ½ teaspoon chopped chives
 Barbecue spice, salt and pepper to taste



Sauté bacon in large, hot skillet until crispy. Add 2 tablespoons of butter; toss in shallots until wilted. Add shrimp, season with barbecue spice, salt and pepper. Cook shrimp until opaque, remove from skillet and set aside. Turn up heat and pour in white wine. Cook for 5-8 minutes or until wine reduces. Add cream and reduce to creamy consistency. Add chipotle paste, salt and pepper. Stir. Add remaining two tablespoons of butter and chives. Stir in shrimp. Add cheddar cheese to the grits and spoon into the center of a pasta plate. Place shrimp atop grits and ladle sauce over the shrimp and around grits.



Named in honor of the late Rev. John LaBauve, **Chef Clary Milburn**, of Clary's Seafood Restaurant in Galveston, concocted this recipe especially for the beloved Galveston Catholic priest who once lived in Leonville, La. LaBauve often asked Clary why he didn't have Creole like they had in Leonville, so Clary did his magic.

Leonville Creole

1 tablespoon oil or butter (high flame oil, low flame butter)
 1 pound ground beef
 1 pound sausage (beef and pork mixture)

1 bell pepper chopped
 1 onion chopped
 2 teaspoons minced garlic
 3 ounces chopped mushrooms
 3 pounds small shrimp
 3-4 medium tomatoes, quartered
 1 small can tomato sauce
 Salt and pepper to taste
 Add water as needed



Heat oil or butter in skillet. Add ground beef and sausage and cook over medium flame till done. Add garlic, onion, green pepper and mushrooms; simmer. Add shrimp, tomatoes, tomato sauce and water. Cook slowly over medium flame for 15-20 minutes. Serve with 4 cups of cooked rice.

Chef Brian Robertson, of the San Luis Resort in Galveston, is an avid fisherman who said some of the best seafood in the nation is right here on the Texas Coast. During the holidays, he often roasts an entire red snapper atop a mirepoix (carrots, celery, onions) instead of turkey.

Gulf Oyster Stuffing

6 stalks celery, diced
 1½ cups chopped onion
 4 cups crumbled cornbread
 ½ cup chopped, cooked turkey giblets
 12 ounces shucked Gulf oysters
 ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
 1 teaspoon dried basil

1½ teaspoons salt
 2 teaspoons paprika
 1 teaspoon dried sage
 1 teaspoon fresh thyme
 ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 3 eggs, beaten
 2 cups chicken stock

In a skillet, sauté celery and onions until onions are translucent. In large bowl combine the crumbled cornbread, cooked celery and onions, giblets, oysters, parsley, basil, salt, paprika, dried sage, fresh thyme and nutmeg. Toss well. Add the beaten eggs and chicken stock to the stuffing mixture.

Loosely pack stuffing in bird's cavity, removing stuffing promptly once bird is cooked. You also can bake the stuffing separately from the bird in a large casserole dish at 350 degrees for 1 hour and 20 minutes.