

THE FRUIT OF THE SEA

GEORGIA'S WHITE SHRIMP ARE AMONG THE MOST
COVETED VARIETIES IN THE WORLD.

BY SARAH GLEIM

the white shrimp caught off the coast of Georgia are considered some of the best tasting on the planet, with chefs worldwide prizing them for their texture and flavor. Shrimpers have fished around the coast of Georgia in search of these crustaceans for years. The industry runs deep and encompasses whole generations of families, like Native Seafood owner and shrimper Timmy Stubbs' clan. His grandfather, Capt. Darcy Elton Stubbs, was the harbormaster in Brunswick, Ga., until he passed away in 1995 at age 75.



Fried shrimp from Southern Tide

His five sons and two daughters are all shrimp and tug boat captains, and now his grandson, Timmy Stubbs, provides chefs and restaurants in Atlanta and Georgia's Golden Isles with fresh shrimp.

But the legacy of the Stubbs family extends past the harbor. Some speculate that Stubbs' uncle, Bobby, created the first mongoose fishing net, featuring an improved design that allowed fishermen to bring in bigger hauls. *National Fisherman* even took a picture of him for its magazine.

"Commercial shrimping ... started here in Brunswick," Stubbs explains. "But it really kicked off when the fisherman made changes to the nets that allowed them to catch a ton more shrimp. Legend says my uncle Bobby made the new custom net, but the net builder got the credit."

By the mid-1970s, a modified net system had changed the shrimping industry completely. White shrimp are still being harvested the same way today from the waters of Georgia's barrier islands, thanks in large part to the appeal of their sweet flavor. In fact, sweetness is one of the qualities that make them so unique.

"Two things stand out about white shrimp: their sweetness and texture," says Jason Russell, executive chef at Sea Island's Beach Club. "That's why they lend themselves to so many different foods, especially dishes like shrimp and grits, where you have creamy grits and crispy bacon."

Frying is another classic way to prepare them. Russell's are lightly breaded and flash fried at several Sea Island restaurants. And of course, shrimp and grits are always on the menu. "Both are so abundant in this area—we focus on eating local and organic, and texturally and flavor-wise, shrimp and grits just go together," Russell says.

Russell also says he loves pairing white shrimp with salty foods. "Because they are so sweet, they go great when prepared with things like bacon," he says. But he also experiments with more unusual flavor combinations, like his bread and butter pickled shrimp, which is a favorite among guests at Sea Island. "You lightly cook the shrimp in water first, and then toss it in pickling liquid," he explains. "I use leftover bread and butter pickling juice. It's a delicious way to prepare them in the heat of the summer."

While summer is a popular season for enjoying this particular seafood, both Russell and Stubbs say the best time of the year for Georgia's white shrimp is actually in the autumn months. "Wild Georgia white shrimp hasn't been successfully pond raised," Stubbs



Sea Island's bread and butter pickled shrimp

explains. "... So in spring we will get a decent crop, but it depends on the weather. The fall crop is more plentiful and ... the best."

Russell says he enjoys cooking the white shrimp in the fall the most because the season is the ideal time for firing up the grill and cooking the seafood delicacies outside

at the resort in true Southern fashion. Sea Island guests can enjoy the low-country boil out in the fresh air. "We use the shrimp in our low-country boil, and do the dinner outside where we can just dump everything out on the table," he says. "I just peel and eat the shrimp—that's what I love the most." ○

SHRIMP SQUARE OFF

White and brown shrimp are both common in Georgia, but the two have distinctly different characteristics.

WHITE SHRIMP

Flavor:

Mild with a natural sweetness

Texture:

Tender and crunchy

Color:

Light gray body with dark coloration on the tail, and yellow band on part of the abdomen

Harvest:

Spring and fall

Best dishes:

Paired with grits, used in a low-country boil

BROWN SHRIMP

Flavor:

Strong and somewhat salty

Texture:

Firm, never stringy or mushy

Color:

Tail usually has a reddish band, and body has a slightly red hue

Harvest:

July and August

Best dishes:

Stuffing, shrimp étouffée and thick stews

