

Going Nuts in Bluffton



By Allyson Jones

Just before the battle, the General hears a row
He says "The Yanks are coming, I hear their rifles row."
He looks down the roadway, and what d'ya think he sees?
The Georgia Militia cracking goober peas.

Peas, peas, peas, peas
Eating goober peas
Goodness, how delicious,
Eating goober peas.

"Goober Peas" by A. Linder excerpted from
The Civil War Songbook (Dover Collection)

Named South Carolina's Official State Snack in 2006, boiled peanuts, a.k.a. "goober peas," have been a fundamental food in Southern states for hundreds of years. While the rest of the country may prefer their peanuts roasted, Southerners—both black and white—have been consuming this briny treat since colonial times.

According to seriouseats.com, "like okra, black-eyed peas, and so many other Southern staples, the peanut came to the region by way of the African diaspora, and for this reason piecing together its history can be challenging." In fact, the website notes the word "goober" is African in origin; a term derived from the Angolan word *nguba*.

Most often praised as the preferred protein source for Confederate soldiers during the Civil War, then later as a party food in small Southern towns and now as a valuable commodity at roadside stands and in gas stations, this seasonal delicacy is made by boiling raw or recently harvested green peanuts in salted water. Today, this humble legume is making headlines as haute cuisine and often served by celebrated chefs in the nation's finest restaurants.

Like the history of boiled peanuts, the Bluffton salute to goober peas had a modest beginning as a cook-off orchestrated by

local boiled peanut aficionados Jared Jester and Hannah Parrish at the Farmers Market of Bluffton.

In 2011, these Bluffton Boilers staged the town's first formal Boiled Peanut Cook-Off "to bring better awareness to the 'Official Snack Food' of South Carolina and to try to generate some money for Bluffton Self Help," says Jester.

"Heavily focused on the actual cook-off and seeing who had the 'Best Nuts in Town,'" the first event attracted approximately 300 people, he adds.

"The World's largest Boiled Peanut," which took about two months for Jester, Parrish and Clayton Collieran to build, was unveiled at the 2nd Annual Bluffton Boiled Peanut Festival. Over 20 feet long and made primarily of plywood, chicken wire and spray foam, this gigantic goober pea had a starring role in an episode of A&E's *Shipping Wars* and can usually be seen perched on its trailer in front of Cahill's Market.

Over time, festival attendance grew from 3,500 to well over 7,000 in 2015, numerous activities were added to the schedule and the venue changed—first to The Promenade and then to Bluffton Village. Production of the annual event was turned over to the Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce a few years ago, although Jester and Parrish are still heavily involved in the annual festivities.

"The popularity is certainly a fantastic thing and it is great to see so many people show appreciation for the next snack food on the planet!" declares Jester. "We only wish the focus was more heavily concentrated on the Cook-Off itself. To have the best peanuts in town should be quite a high accomplishment to hold."

For his part, Jester usually makes at least one batch of boiled peanuts a week, trying out new recipes and flavor combinations; freezing a bushel after the season ends so he

can continue to experiment throughout the winter months. Last year, he and Robbie Cahill (who happens to be the Festival's Cook-Off Coordinator and creator of a custom rig able to cook over 1,000 pounds of peanuts at a time) got up at 3 a.m. to boil a ton—literally—of goober peas for the 2015 event.

Returning to its roots, this year the Bluffton Boiled Peanut Festival kicks off on Thursday, September 8 with the Cracking of the Nut at the Farmers Market of Bluffton. After Jester or Cahill launch the event by breaking open a bottle of beer on the World's largest Boiled Peanut, Lil Miss Peanut and Lil Mr. Goober will be crowned. According to Erin Black of the Chamber, contestants range in age from 18 months to four-years-old and will be judged on cuteness and "peanutness."

Friday night, the party moves to the streets of Old Town for the 2nd Annual Peanut Pub Crawl from 6-9 p.m. Join your nuttiest (adult) buddies for a night of fun, music drinks and free goodies. A limited number of \$25 tickets will be sold, so call the Chamber to reserve your spot.

On Saturday, the family-friendly festival takes place in Bluffton Village from 12-5 p.m. This year's Boiled Peanut Cook-Off features four categories—Most Creative, Most Traditional, Best Overall and Crowd Favorite—with more chances to take home the coveted Golden Peanut Trophy. Those who prefer to feast, rather than cook, can enter the Peanut Eating Contest while listening to the sounds of Mixed Groove and 2016 Taste of Bluffton Battle of the Bands winner, Native. Meanwhile, little goobers can explore the expanded Kids Zone complete with carnival games, a zip line, bungee jumping, rock climbing wall, dunk tank and more.

For details on the 5th Annual Bluffton Boiled Peanut Festival, Pub Crawl tickets and Cook-Off registration, contact the Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce at (843) 757-1010 or visit boiledpeanutfestival.com.

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In a Nutshell:

5th Annual Bluffton Boiled Peanut Festival

Thursday, September 8
Farmers Market of Bluffton, 5:30 p.m.

- Cracking of the Nut
- Lil Miss Peanut & Lil Mr. Goober Competition

Friday, September 9
Old Town Bluffton

- 2nd Annual Peanut Pub Crawl, 6-9 p.m.
- Advance ticket purchase required

Saturday, September 10
Bluffton Boiled Peanut Festival
Bluffton Village, 12-5 p.m.

- Boiled Peanut Cook-Off • Peanut Eating Competition
- Kids Zone • Music from Mixed Groove and Native