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SEPT/OCT 2023 VOLUME 9, ISSUE 5



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SWEET POTATO
SPICE CAKE WITH
TOASTED MERINGUE
page 79

+ FEATURING

Origin of a Classic: **Sticky Toffee Pudding**



BY MORGAN CRAWFORD SCOTT
SCENIC PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELEY, DREW BALFOUR,
AND GABRIEL HANWAY



Putt and His PECANS

A NEW CHAPTER IN THE SCHERMER STORY FOR THIS SOUTHERN-BASED PECAN PURVEYOR

As we wind through row after row of flowering trees in a pecan orchard just south of Albany, Georgia, Francis Putney “Putt” Wetherbee III—whose namesake is philanthropist and planter Francis Flagg Putney—proceeds to shimmy his truck up next to a branch that’s extending just shy of the dirt road. A fifth-generation grower, second-generation owner, and the president of Georgia-based Schermer Pecans, Putt shows me the “flowers” or “nutlets” starting to open on the pecan tree, a marker for a full-fledged pecan come fall.

As we make our way through the 3,600-acre property, we take in the solitude the orchard provides on a balmy day in late spring. Arriving at a small fishpond scattered with bass and speckled perch, Putt recalls the fond memories it holds, from his own childhood as well as for his daughters, Frannie, Berkeley, and Sims, with wife Margaret, and to present day. Putt notices a bass spawning toward the bank, and I can sense his excitement as he daydreams about afternoons to come by the water.



We continue to tour the seemingly never-ending property when we spot an old well nearby. “I remember when we put the well over here,” Putt says. “I was little, and, of course, if there was water anywhere, I was in it. When they were pumping it off to make sure it was in good shape, I kept getting stuck in the mud, and the farm manager had to pull me out of the mud—I lost my boots.”

Next to the well is an old farm shack whose beauty has faded. It had once belonged to Putt’s grandmother, serving as her luncheon cabin during hunting season; not far from there, Putt’s own retrofitted deer stand is disguised. Moments later, we lay eyes on a herd of wild deer delicately prancing among the trees and then a large fox squirrel quickly scaling a tree trunk. Though I have little hunting experience myself, I spot a large gobbler (a wild male turkey) carefully weaving through the brush of Italian ryegrass and clover. Putt, pleasantly surprised by my sighting, starts “calling” the turkey in perfect pitch, sharing an anecdote about how his daughters were always amused by it. It’s evident that spotting these animals in their natural habitat ignites a spark in Putt, and he chats at length about his love of hunting—especially here—with childlike wonder.

It dawns on me then that to speak of the pecan orchards only as a means of producing perfectly packaged bags of delicious Schermer pecans would be an injustice to the understated grandeur the orchards possess. They’re more than just a place to grow millions of pounds of a prized nut in the South—they’re countless hours of tending to crop, lessons learned while gaining knowledge on pecan farming, little moments shared between parents and children, and a stockpile of memories that spans generations and, Putt hopes, for generations to come.

More than seven decades have passed since Schermer’s founding in 1946. Frank Wetherbee, Putt’s father, started Nut Tree Pecan Company in the 1960s, after being gifted a piece of the orchard to farm as a wedding present in the late 1950s. Frank, a natural innovator, owned only the second automated nut harvester (called a Ramacher) in Georgia, which would pick up the pecans and transfer them to a conveyor belt into a buggy. “I was captivated with it [the Ramacher],” Putt says, who knew, even as a little boy, that he wanted to take over the company one day.



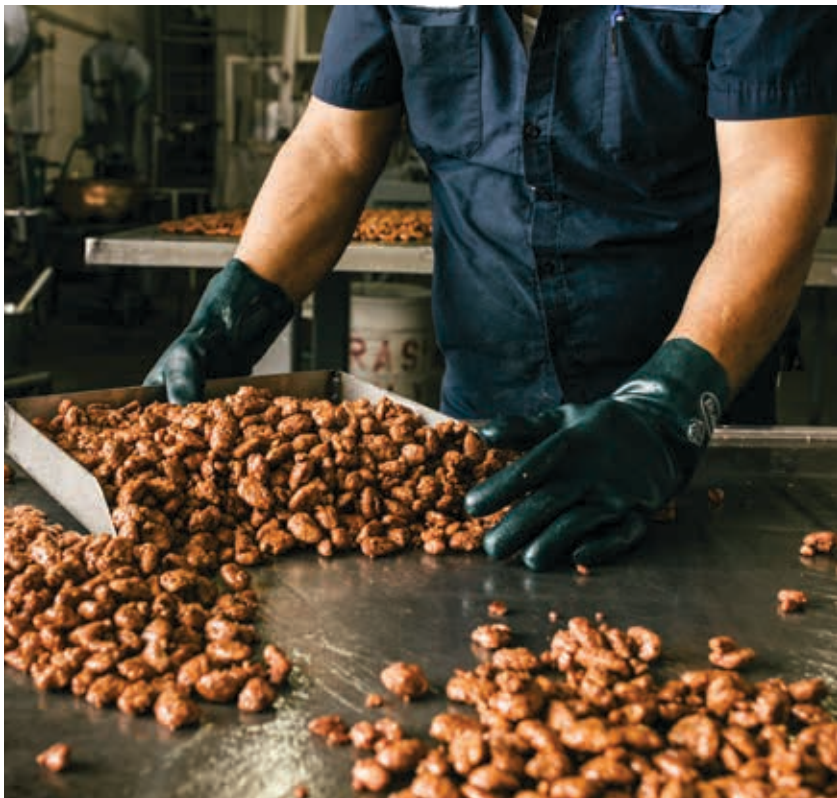
Impressively, to this day, Schermer is one of just a few family-run pecan companies that still has a hand in every step of the process—from planting trees to harvesting to the moment they reach the customer’s table. The orchards—which feature five varieties of pecans: Cape Fear, Stuart, Kiowa, Elliot, and their best-selling and oldest variety, Desirable—are located throughout three locations in Georgia. At this one near Albany, Putt recalls how he “can remember almost every phase of this particular orchard being planted.”

While pecans are, of course, an integral part of Putt’s story, they aren’t the entirety. “I’m getting better at telling certain parts of my personal story,” Putt admits. “Now, I’m at a place where I want to tell a different story than I have before.”

In 2017, he endured an incident that would forever change life as he knew it. While home alone on his hunting property, Putt was attacked by a group of people who were attempting to steal shotguns and money out of his safe, and their brutal assault left him paralyzed from the chest down. Despite all odds, he persisted, making it his mission not to let this senseless act of violence alter his life in a negative way. “The world today is overloaded with victims,” Putt says. “I don’t want to add to that negativity. This is a part of my life’s story, and I will embrace it and get past it in the best way I can.”

His new way of living is just that: new. He reflects on how fortunate he is to possess an earnest and deep-rooted faith and to have the financial means to accommodate his new lifestyle, whether that’s through a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, rehabilitation and physical therapy classes, or modified ways of running the farm, including a specialized machine that allows him to navigate the rugged terrain of the orchards solo.

Putt’s approach to pecan-farming has had to change, but it certainly hasn’t stopped him, nor has it affected his quality of work. “The people around me who have stepped up after the incident are so valuable. It’s not me who makes this entire thing go round. My team is proactive and committed, and Schermer wouldn’t be the success that it is without everyone working collaboratively.”



“I want to be a good steward of the land and be seen from the outside world as a good citizen of sustainability.”



PECAN-MAPLE-BOURBON STICKY BUNS

Makes 12 buns

Fresh, crunchy pecans are the perfect addition to these pillowy swirls, and your home will be filled with a buttery, spiced, mouthwatering aroma while they bake!

Dough:

- 1 cup (240 grams) warm whole milk (110°F/43°C to 115°F/46°C)
- 5 tablespoons (60 grams) granulated sugar, divided
- 2¼ teaspoons (7 grams) active dry yeast
- 3¾ cups (468 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon (9 grams) kosher salt
- 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, cubed and room temperature

Topping:

- ½ cup (110 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup (170 grams) maple syrup
- 6 tablespoons (84 grams) unsalted butter
- 5 tablespoons (75 grams) bourbon
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
- 1 cup (100 grams) Schermer Pecan Halves
- ½ cup (57 grams) chopped Schermer Pecans

Filling:

- ⅔ cup (145 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon (6 grams) ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
- 1 cup (113 grams) finely chopped Schermer Pecans

1. For dough: In a small bowl, stir together warm milk, 1 tablespoon (12 grams) granulated sugar, and yeast. Let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer, whisk together 2 cups (250 grams) flour, salt, and remaining 4 tablespoons (48 grams) granulated sugar. Add yeast mixture, eggs, and vanilla; using the paddle attachment, beat at low speed until combined, about 1 minute; scrape sides of bowl. With mixer on low speed, gradually add remaining 1¾ cups (219 grams) flour, beating until a shaggy dough forms; scrape sides of bowl.



3. Switch to the dough hook attachment. Beat at medium-low speed until dough is smooth, elastic, and slightly tacky, 7 to 9 minutes. With mixer on medium-low speed, add butter, 1 tablespoon (14 grams) at a time, beating until combined after each addition (about 8 minutes total). Beat until a smooth, elastic dough forms, 6 to 8 minutes. (Dough will be tacky but should clean sides of the bowl.) Turn out dough onto a very lightly floured surface, and knead 5 to 8 times. Shape dough into a smooth round.
4. Lightly oil a large bowl. Place dough in bowl, turning to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until doubled in size, 45 minutes to 1 hour. (Alternatively, cover and refrigerate overnight; punch down dough and let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before shaping.)
5. Lightly spray a 13x9-inch baking dish with baking spray with flour.
6. For topping: In a medium saucepan, bring brown sugar, maple syrup, butter, bourbon, and salt to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until

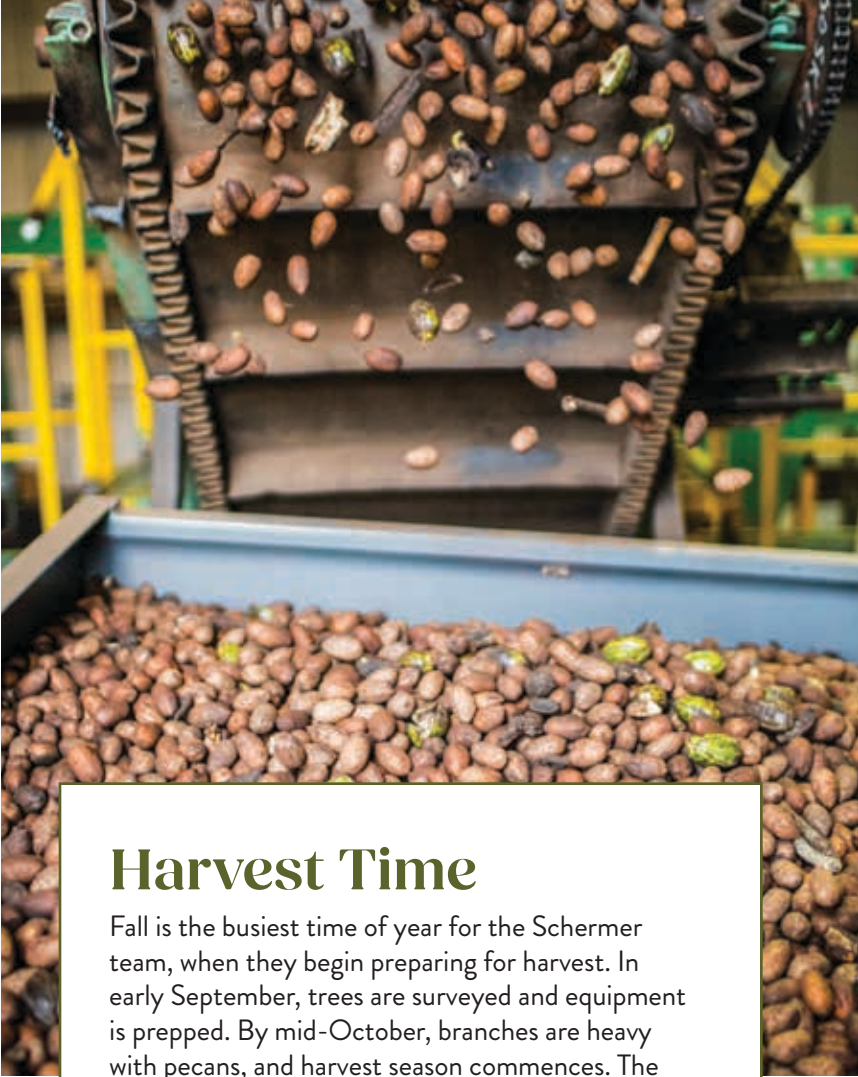
- sugar dissolves. Cook, stirring frequently, until slightly thickened, 4 to 5 minutes. Pour mixture into prepared pan, lightly spreading to edges. Sprinkle pecan halves and chopped pecans on top.
7. For filling: In a small bowl, stir together brown sugar, butter, cinnamon, and salt.
 8. Lightly punch down dough. Cover and let stand for 5 minutes. Turn out dough onto a lightly floured surface, and roll into an 18x12-inch rectangle. Spread filling mixture over dough, leaving a ¼-inch border on one long side. Sprinkle finely chopped pecans on top. Starting with side opposite border, roll dough into a 19-inch log. Trim ½ inch off each end. Cut into 12 slices (about 1½ inches each). Place in prepared pan on top of pecans. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until doubled in size, 45 minutes to 1 hour.
 9. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).
 10. Bake until golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes. Invert buns onto a rimmed serving dish. Serve warm or at room temperature. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

With his eyes set on the future, Putt plans to focus more on regenerative and sustainable farming. The company has established a five-year plan to improve the soil-plant relationship by leaning more on biology, such as beneficial bacteria and fungi, rather than traditional chemistry methods, such as herbicides and synthetic fertilizers. This new way of thinking—understanding the microbial community and the soil and how those interact with the trees—will also enable them to use less water. “It’s a big learning curve,” Putt says. “However, I want to be a good steward of the land and be seen from the outside world as a good citizen of sustainability.”

Though he’s quick to dismiss words like “inspirational” and “heroic,” his grit, innovation, and uncrackable spirit in the face of setback are unmistakable, and it’s these traits that will surely empower Putt to leave a legacy that honors his family’s rich heritage in this industry.



“The harvest process is fascinating, and there are thousands of moving parts.”



Harvest Time

Fall is the busiest time of year for the Schermer team, when they begin preparing for harvest. In early September, trees are surveyed and equipment is prepped. By mid-October, branches are heavy with pecans, and harvest season commences. The company typically has a team of 25, but they hire up to 80 people during the fall.

“The harvest process is fascinating, and there are thousands of moving parts,” Putt says. “First, we have to assess the trees to determine if the pecans are ready to come off by looking to see if the shuck that surrounds the nut is split open and pulled back from the nut. Once we determine the trees are ready, we begin shaking them.”

To shake each tree, a specialized piece of equipment is fixed to the trunk, vibrating it so that the pecans fall to the ground. Other equipment is used to rake and blow the nuts across the orchard floor into what is called a windrow: a pile of pecans about 3 feet wide. Then, a harvester machine picks up the windrows and separates the sticks, leaves, and dirt from the nuts. Once the nuts have gone through the harvester, they’re dumped into a cart that empties them into a trailer to be transported to a plant to be cleaned, dried, graded, and bagged for market.

Visit schermerpecans.com/pages/bake-from-scratch-readers to receive 10% off your first purchase.





DEEP-DISH PECAN-PUMPKIN
PIE

Makes 1 (9-inch) deep-dish pie

With a sturdy and rustic crust that envelops a generous amount of fragrant filling and a crunchy candied nut topping, this pie has plenty of personality.

- All-Butter Piecrust (recipe on page 62)
- 2 large egg whites (30 grams), divided and lightly beaten
 - $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (147 grams) plus 3 tablespoons (42 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar, divided
 - 1 teaspoon (2 grams) ground cinnamon
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger
 - 1 (15-ounce) can (425 grams) pumpkin (see Note)
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (180 grams) evaporated milk
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60 grams) heavy whipping cream
 - 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature
 - 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract
 - 1 tablespoon (14 grams) unsalted butter, melted
 - 1 cup (100 gram) Schermer Pecan Halves

1. Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C).
2. On a lightly floured surface, roll All-Butter Piecrust to $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thickness (about 13 inches). Transfer dough to a 9-inch springform pan, pressing into bottom and up sides. (Do not trim or fold any excess crust; let it extend fully up sides of pan.) Dock bottom of crust with a fork. Top with foil, letting excess extend over sides of pan. Add pie weights. Freeze until firm, about 15 minutes.
3. Bake until edges are set, 10 to 15 minutes. Carefully remove foil and weights; brush surface of crust with 1 egg white (30 grams). Bake until center is dry, about 5 minutes more. Let cool completely in pan. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F (180°C).
4. In a large bowl, whisk together $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (147 grams) brown sugar, cinnamon, salt, nutmeg, and ginger. Add pumpkin, evaporated milk, cream, eggs, and vanilla, whisking until combined. Pour filling into prepared crust. Using small pieces of foil, making sure not to cover or touch filling, fold foil over top edges of crust and pan, and lightly pinch and secure foil to hold crust to springform. (This will prevent shrinking and excess browning.)
5. Bake until filling slightly wobbles when pan is gently shaken, about 40 minutes.
6. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk together remaining 1 egg white (30 grams) and remaining 3 tablespoons (42 grams) brown sugar until foamy, about 1 minute. Whisk in melted butter. Add pecans, and toss to coat.
7. Arrange pecans on surface of pie, leaving any excess liquid in bowl.
8. Bake until pecans are browned, edges of filling are set but center slightly wobbles when pan is gently shaken, and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center of pie registers 180°F (82°C), 10 to 15 minutes. Carefully remove foil pieces, and let pie cool completely in pan on a wire rack.
9. Carefully remove sides of pan, and transfer pie to a serving plate. Refrigerate until cold and firm, at least 2 hours. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days. 📦

Note: Do not use pumpkin pie filling, as it has added sweeteners.

Quick Facts

50,000+
trees

IN THEIR ORCHARDS

2.5 million
pounds

OF PECANS PRODUCED
ANNUALLY

5
varieties

OF PECANS

1,800
acres

OF FULLY DEVELOPED
PECAN ORCHARDS

60
acres

OF PECAN NURSERIES
WITH GROWING TREES

2,000
acres

OF TIMBERLAND UNDER
PECAN DEVELOPMENT