

# THE TASTE OF SUMMER

Newport Chefs Harken Back to Simple Summer Tastes with Delicious Dishes Featuring a Crop as American as the 4th of July.

**T**here's no tidy way to eat corn on the cob. It's a special moment, biting into that first batch of freshly-husked sweet corn, even better if it's slathered in butter and maybe some salt — the messier the better! Today, there's more to corn than munching straight from the stalk. It's a staple of American food culture, particularly in Rhode Island where now, more than ever, restaurants and chefs are focusing on locally sourced, fresh ingredients.

"Each place in Rhode Island that grows corn

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Trebor Luke of Newport and Miles Kirchner of Portsmouth enjoy local corn on the cob.

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has a stand out front on the roadside,” says Matt Reilly, head chef at Malt on Broadway in Newport. “When you were a kid, corn season was those hot summer months when you’d pick some up from the stand, and shuck corn on the porch with your mom before dinner.”

Reilly has carried that experience into his career at Malt for the past four years. “Every time I get to use corn in the restaurant, I get to experience those same sights and smells from when I was a kid, and I hope people eating it can experience that too,” he says. “Taste memories are intense memories, and I like to project those, especially if those people you have the memories with are around the table with you. It brings me back to those hot summer days.”

The saying “knee high by the fourth

of July” stemmed from farmers who knew their corn crop would yield a good harvest if it reached this benchmark height by our nation’s Independence Day. These days, the harvest tends to stretch a little earlier, thanks to innovations in agriculture, transportation and food science, but there’s no doubt that summertime is corn’s best season. “The corn is extra sweet when it’s out in the sun over those hot early months, and develops its sugars,” says Reilly. “It’s ready-to-go corn that you don’t need to do much to.”

In Malt’s kitchen, Reilly lets the corn shine in some of his most signature dishes, including a corn succotash side, and featuring mussels and scallops,

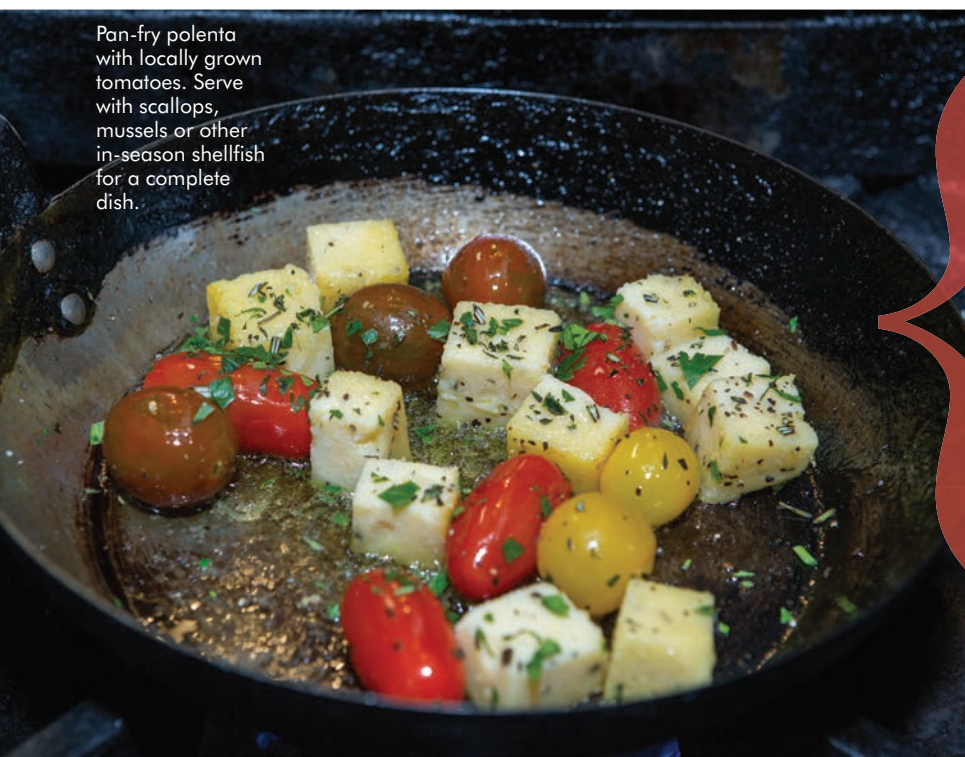
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Malt head chef Matt Reilly presents a scallop, mussel and pan-fried corn polenta dish.

“When you were a kid, corn season was those hot summer months when you’d pick some up from the stand, and shuck corn on the porch with your mom before dinner.”

– Matt Reilly



Pan-fry polenta with locally grown tomatoes. Serve with scallops, mussels or other in-season shellfish for a complete dish.

## CORN POLENTA

From Malt on Broadway

### INGREDIENTS:

1 cup fine grain corn meal (also called dried corn polenta)  
4 cups of lightly salted water (measurements can be more or less, always use ratio of 1 to 4)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Bring water to a rapid boil. Whisk in polenta and bring back up to a moderate boil for three or four minutes. The polenta will begin to come together and soften. When formed together, scoop out or strain and transfer to a baking sheet or cooling tray. Once set at room temperature, slice. Pan-fry slices in butter or oil, and place under a savory dish like coq au vin, or pan-fry smaller pieces in butter until crispy, then serve with pan-fried scallops and steamed mussels, or other in-season shellfish.

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with corn playing a supporting role in the form of polenta. "Polenta is very versatile. It sets well and doesn't absorb flavors around it, so it blends well with a lot of flavors," explains Reilly, who also uses it as a base for coq au vin. "It's also deceptively simple to make." This year, Malt features the summer seafood dish with pieces of pan-fried polenta serving as a stand-in for traditional gnocchi. This crowd-pleasing dish is certainly one worth emulating.

For Binge BBQ's Mark Bryson, his childhood memories of picking corn from those same roadside stands, and enjoying it on the beach in Little Compton, inspired him to incorporate the sweet starch into his summer cooking. "The best corn out there is the corn that was just picked," he says. "When corn is in season in Rhode Island from July onward, we'll have creamed corn on our menu which is one of our favorites." Bryson creates his childhood-favorite by stripping the meat and milk from the corn kernels, using a mandolin-type tool, and sautéing with "a touch" of butter, a pinch of salt and pepper. "It's a taste and a texture that



Trebor Luke of Newport, and Cameron and Miles Kirchner of Portsmouth enjoy the local harvest. Clothing from Groovy Gator; Corn and watermelon from Sweet Berry Farm.

really brings people back. It's absolutely delicious," he says.

No barbeque plate is complete without a side of cornbread, and Binge has perfected its signature recipe. "The more coarse grain of cornmeal gives the best texture," says Bryson. "It's too cakey if the cornmeal is too fine. With barbeque, you want it to have a little texture, and a little sweetness, too." Bryson suggests Kenyon's Grist Mill yellow cornmeal for use in baking this tasty side that pairs beautifully

with chicken, ribs and brisket. Slather with Binge's signature smoked maple butter, made with Vermont syrup, to elevate the corn's naturally sweet taste.

For Bryson, the key is sourcing ingredients from the best, and like many area restaurants, he relies on Will Lord, aka "Farmer Will." Lord, from Rose Hill Heirlooms in South Kingstown, supplies Bryson with fresh produce for his dishes during the season, including the corn base

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## CORNBREAD

From Binge BBQ

### INGREDIENTS:

- 2½ cups cornmeal (Grist Mill coarse yellow cornmeal is best)
- 2¼ cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 tbsp salt
- 2½ tsp baking soda
- ½ cup + 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1½ cups sour cream
- ½ quart (approx. 1½ cups) buttermilk
- ½ cup butter
- 4 eggs

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Combine and sift all dry ingredients.

Combine all wet ingredients.

Slowly add dry ingredients to wet ingredients. Mix fully.

In a 2-inch deep sheet cake pan, bake at 400 degrees for 20-24 minutes. Cornbread will be done when a toothpick inserted into the middle of the pan comes out clean. Bryson also is a fan of the "thumbprint method:" lightly press the center of the bread with your thumb. If the bread springs back, it's done.

Cool in pan to room temperature. Slice and serve with Binge's smoked maple butter.



### SMOKED MAPLE BUTTER

Place maple syrup in a pan or ramekin, then put that into a smoker. After just a few minutes, remove the syrup from the smoker and whip it into softened butter. Adjust ratios of butter to syrup to taste.



Scallops with corn potato puree “succotash” is a customer and staff favorite at Jo’s American Bistro.

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for his creamed corn. It doesn’t get much fresher than that.

Brian Ruffner also highlights the importance of locally sourced, fresh-as-can-be ingredients in his dishes at Jo’s American Bistro in Newport. One dish that stands out is his summery seared scallops, with the mollusks sourced from Foley Fishmongers in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Served over a corn and potatoes puree and with what Ruffner describes as “our take on succotash,” the yellow starch plays an almost as important role as the seafood.

When corn on the cob arrives by the crateful at Jo’s, Ruffner and his kitchen team, including Sous Chef Joe Dumas, roast it to be used in a number of dishes. “The first thing we do is take the stem-end off, roast the corn in the husk until tender, then peel the corn and cut the kernels away from the cob,” says Ruffner. From there, it goes into any number of recipes, including the puree, succotash, into lobster quesadilla, and any other weekly specials. “It’s great to have cross utilization in a kitchen,” explains Ruffner. “It makes it easier on the chef, but it also ties dishes together across the menu. So many great recipes are simple, but don’t confuse simple with boring or easy.”

Interested in emulating Jo’s Bistro’s favorite scallop dish? Starting from the plate up, the scallops sit on a puree that is reminiscent of mashed potatoes, but so much creamier. “I needed something cool, creamy and tasty that is easy to create,” says Ruffner. “I came up with a corn and potato puree, which ended up being great with scallops. Every summer, when we come into corn season, our regulars and our staff always ask to make sure that the scallop dish is coming back.”

For the scallops, Ruffner suggests a quick sear in a cast-iron skillet for the best results (next best is a thick nonstick pan). “The thicker the cooking surface, the better,” he explains. “This is because when you put the cold scallops on to the surface, they’ll steal away less of the even heat than on a thinner surface.” Cook until just beginning to brown on the outside — Ruffner describes it as “just barely cooked through” — to provide a creamy texture to complement the puree. Serve with a side of Ruffner’s corn succotash salad, featuring sweet peas, tomatoes and basil for a sunny taste of summer.

Whether you’re someone who eats your corn on the cob row by row or around and around, these recipes from local chefs will take this summer staple to the next level. 🌽



Chef Brian Ruffner

## SCALLOPS WITH CORN POTATO PUREE AND “SUCCOTASH”

From Jo’s American Bistro | Serves 4

### SCALLOPS

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 dozen large scallops
- 1-2 tsp butter or oil

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

In a cast iron skillet or thick non-stick pan, heat butter/oil. Add scallops, and sear for approximately 90 seconds on each side, until a gentle brown crust is formed, but scallops are still tender.

### PUREE

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups roasted corn
- 4 cups pureed potatoes
- 1 cup of cream
- ½ cup of butter (1 stick), softened
- Dash of salt and pepper

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

In a 350-degree oven, roast corn in husk until tender, approx. 30 minutes

Boil potatoes until fully cooked. Rice them smoothly using a grater.

Blend corn, cream and butter into a liquid using a blender or food processor.

Mix into the potatoes until you get a silky consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Spoon puree onto a plate, and place 4 scallops on top.

### SUCCOTASH

#### INGREDIENTS:

- ½ cup tbsps roasted corn (see above)
- ½ cup cooked shelled peas
- ½ cup halved cherry tomatoes
- ½ cup fresh basil
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- pinch of salt

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

Chiffonade basil by stacking the leaves on top of each other and gently rolling them into a cigar-shape. Using a sharp knife, cut the rolled basil along the width, into thin ribbons. Combine all ingredients. Serve at room temperature or refrigerator-cooled.