

Is it something in human nature?

People all over the world seem to have a penchant for organizing annual festivals that revolve around a community's collective admiration of some locally-grown food.



Southerners are not any different.

Wild about watermelon? Let's have a Watermelon Festival!

Sweet on shrimp? Shrimp Festival!

Revved up about rice? Rice Festival!

Full of oyster joy? Oyster Festival!

Crazy about okra? Okra Strut! (those people in Irmo, SC, like to be different.)

Now another place is getting in on the act.

Palmetto Bluff, like any southern community worth its salt, has decided to host its own annual food festival. It's a private, master-planned community, so it really doesn't have a food-producing tradition to speak of. But that's not gonna stop them from throwing a big party!

When it comes to the food, they may not actually grow it or catch it – but they sure as heck can cook it. And serve it up in a magical, music-filled setting that conjures up the incandescent spirit of the New South.

They call it the Lowcountry Festival, and it is now in its third year. It starts on Wednesday, November 18, and ends on Sunday, November 22. But most of the action takes place Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Chefs come from all areas of the south and beyond, and are joined by vintners and brewers and beekeepers and Lord knows who else for five food-filled days of Lowcountry living. Count on quantities of spirits and samplings and and be forewarned: after eating your way through the tasty temptations laid before you at Palmetto Bluff, you may decide to skip Thanksgiving.

The main event is the **Culinary Festival**, Saturday, November 21, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., on the Village Green. Kind of like an exquisite farmer's market, albeit with a steep admission price: \$200 a head. For that much money you really have to expect it will be nice. And speaking of nice, \$25 of the ticket price goes to Second Helpings, a food pantry. So it's actually nice on several different levels.

Despite the price, there is value to be had. The festival organizers did a lot of homework and a lot of legwork to bring this carefully chosen array of edibles specialists to the Lowcountry. So even though the price is high, you're paying for something special to happen that would never, ever happen on its own.

It's not as if a bunch of talented, internationally-recognized chefs and winemakers from all over the country would, just by chance, run into each other on the banks of the May River and spontaneously start planning meals.

Plus there is live entertainment by The Bushels, an acoustic quartet. Also -- cooking demonstrations (and tastings) with Chef Tyler Florence.

Here's a look at the rest of the event schedule. Keep in mind that availability is limited for some of the events, and some are available only as part of a package.

Wine Dinner, Wednesday, November 18, 7-10 pm. Delia Viader presents her Napa Valley estates' wines paired with a four-course meal. In addition to being a successful viticulturist and business person, Viader holds a doctorate in philosophy from the Sorbonne. Chef Chris Nason of Savannah's [Sapphire Grill](#) is in charge of the meal, "an eclectic interpretation of Savannah's antebellum culinary heritage, featuring local and regional day-gathered, organic ingredients."

May River Midday Cruise, two excursions available: Thursday, November 19, 12-2 pm; and Friday, November 20, 12-2 pm. Sail aboard an antique yacht, sip some fine wines, and relish a luscious lunch prepared by one of the festival's guest chefs.

Cooking Class, Thursday, November 19, 3-4 pm. Chef Chris Hastings of Birmingham partners with a local farmer for a “farm to table epicurean experience.”

Wine Dinner, Thursday, November 19, 6-9 pm. This progressive dinner features the wines of Darioush Khaledi, a civil engineer and winemaker who originally hales from the Shiraz region, but now makes his home in the United States. Darioush’s limited-production wines benefit from his systematic, detail-oriented Old World methods. He will be joined by Chef Ford Fry of Atlanta’s JCT Kitchen.

Wine & Cheese Tasting, Friday, November 20, 3-4 pm. Join a regional cheese-maker and winemaker for a pairing created especially for this event.

Coastal Living Welcome Reception, Friday, November 20, 3-5 pm. An intimate porch party with good company -- the editors of Coastal Living. Includes light snacks and tea.

House Party with Tyler Florence, Friday, November 20, 6-9 pm. Chef Tyler Florence and the chefs of Palmetto Bluff create a one-of-a-kind progressive Lowcountry dinner. Includes live entertainment by Shrimp City Slim and the wines of Domaine Serene and Gruet Winery.

May River Moonlight Dessert Party, available on two evenings: Friday, November 20, 9-11 pm; and Saturday, November 21, 9-11 pm. Coffee, drinks and dessert overlooking the May River. Entertainment by Jim Davidson and Tim Austin.

“Hair of the Dog” Road Race, Saturday, November 21, 8 am. A leisurely race set amidst the beauty of Palmetto Bluff’s nature trails and neighborhoods. When you reach the finish line, enjoy a Bloody Mary.

Oyster Roast, Saturday, November 21, 7-10 pm. May River oysters served along the banks of the May River. How local is that? The oyster roast pavilion features a custom-built oyster pit and tables, hand-crafted furniture and a five-story tree house.

For more information about the Lowcountry Festival, visit www.musictoyourmouth.com .

I only wish that there were an opportunity for a more diverse audience to enjoy the festivities. It may be called a festival, but somehow the exclusivity of the location, and the exclusionary pricing, set it apart from the South's traditional community-based food festivals.

I guess that is New South for you – community events that are magnificent and market-driven, but marginalizing some of us. As opposed to Old South, where community events had a cozy home-spun character, and free or low-cost admission – but some people were made to feel unwelcome, or even excluded outright.

What I'm trying to say is that it's not better or worse, just different. And Palmetto Bluff – which is a member of the Southern Foodways Alliance – is doing us proud by celebrating the Lowcountry's food producers and practitioners of edible arts.

[Read More My Lowcountry](#)