



## Try a taste of Maine's best classic ales

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

GORHAM — Inside Sebago Brewing Co.'s warehouse, towering walls of purple-and-white cans signal the release of the season's favorite brew, Slick Nick.

"Our customers love it. They love it when it comes out," says co-founder Kai Adams, taking a slug of his long winter ale.

The days of the longest nights are here and with that come hearty, robust ales in all their diversity. Dark days brightened by crisp notes turn many (even avowed wine and eggnog fans) to crack open a holiday ale under the tree.

In the decades since Harpoon's pioneering Winter Warmer was introduced, New England craft brewers have turned the notion of a cinnamon- and nutmeg-in-

fused seasonal on its head.

"Five or six years ago I would've said a holiday or winter beer is an old ale, typically malty, sweet, a little alcoholic, between 6 and 9 percent alcohol," says Adams.

In the craft beer age, one size no longer fits all.

"The style guidelines have changed. We've stuck to the guns of being a malty, strong and robust beer, but we've changed up the specialty malts, so that there is a more complex caramel and crystal malt, giving the beer more complexity," he says.

For 15 years, Geary's Winter Ale has sated beer fans from November through the first week in March with a medium-bodied, chestnut ale. This year, owner David Geary tweaked his recipe with a new ingredient: blackstrap molasses. Added during fermenta-

tion, the rich syrup gives the Scottish ale a "caramel-like aroma. A mouth feel that's smooth and creamy with hints of chocolate and molasses," says Geary.

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Maine's seminal brewer experimented on his new pilot brewing system and retooled a classic.

"The lightbulb goes off over your head and you say, 'You know what?'" says Geary.

Most brewers agree a winter ale has more alcohol (though Geary's is a modest 5.5, while Funky Bow's Santa's Sack clocks in at 10.5 percent alcohol by volume).

To Greg Sansone, head brewer at Gritty McDuff's, a winter ale is designed to make you feel "a little more jolly. It's stronger, sweeter,



KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

The malty, strong and robust Slick Nick from Sebago is made with complex caramel and crystal malts.

something that will warm you up." Unchanged for more than 20 years, Gritty's Christmas Ale holds the baseline on holiday beer in Maine.

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## Revisiting a risotto recipe

Rain was falling when my kids got on the bus today. It was sleeting when I ran to my son's school this morning to drop off his forgotten lunch. By the time I went for a morning coffee at Giacomo's in downtown Bangor, it was beginning to snow. And now, as I type this, the snow is floating down and covering our city.

Could winter — the snowy, white, cold season I expect from Maine — finally be here (although it technically doesn't arrive until next week, we all know it starts when the temperature dips and snow blankets the land)?

I sure am hoping the answer is yes. My kids — Will is 10 and Paige is 8 — are really hoping for a white Christmas. Heck, I am, too.

With the snow and colder weather comes a change in cuisine in our house. Cool, lean salads are replaced with warm vegetable dishes. The fare becomes a little heartier. It's time for warm dinners, comforting recipes and meals shared with loved ones.

This is a dish perfect for sharing. Arborio rice is slowly cooked with wine and chicken stock until it's creamy and tender. Dotted with sweet sauteed onions, vibrant fresh basil and tasty peas, it's a hearty dish perfect for serving with roasted chicken. You might want to add a salad, too — or perhaps roasted veggies instead.

And then linger. Make this slowly, enjoy it slowly, and share special moments with the most special people in your lives. You won't ever regret that time. It's important.

Now, dear readers, I have something to share: A change is coming to this column, Maine Course. Longtime readers will remember the recipe I am sharing here. In July 2014, we first published a version of this. It was the first illustrated Maine Course column, and it remains very special to me — both because of it being the premiere illustration and it being one of my favorite dishes. This is comfort food for me, both in its preparation and flavoring.

Today I am resharing it, slightly updated to better align with what's available for cooking in December, in sort of a full-circle moment. This marks the final il-



SARAH WALKER CARON

PEA AND BASIL RISOTTO

SERVES 4

1 cup peas

1 small onion, chopped

1/4 cup finely chopped fresh basil

1/2 cup freshly grated parmigiano reggiano cheese

1/2 cup white wine

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 cup arborio rice

4 cups low-sodium chicken stock, warmed

salt and pepper, to taste

1. Heat the olive oil in a Dutch oven set over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened, about 5-6 minutes. Add the rice and toast for one minute.
2. Pour the white wine into the Dutch oven and stir to combine. Let cook until the moisture is absorbed.
3. Add the chicken stock one ladle at a time, allowing it to fully absorb before adding more. This should take about 25 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, boil the peas for 3-4 minutes, until tender. Drain immediately and set aside.
5. Once all the stock has been added to the rice mixture, remove from heat and stir in the parmigiano reggiano cheese. When the cheese is fully combined, stir in the peas and basil. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

SERVE IMMEDIATELY

RECIPE: SARAH WALKER CARON  
ART: ERIC ZELZ  
BDN GRAPHIC

lustrated Maine Course column. Artist Eric Zelz has moved on to pursue other opportunities. While the column will continue — in words and recipes — it will no longer be accompanied by Eric's whimsical, lovely artwork. Please join me in thanking Eric for all

his work in creating this weekly food feature. May his next act be filled with all the things his heart desires.

Sarah Walker Caron is the senior features editor for the Bangor Daily News and author of "Grains

as Mains: Modern Recipes Using Ancient Grains," available at bookstores everywhere including BAM, The Briar Patch and Bull Moose in Bangor. For more delicious recipes, check out Maine Course at mainecourse.bangordailynews.com.

## Buckeye candies bring a taste of home

Jim Roberts, a neighbor of ours here on the island, makes that wonderful sweetened peanut butter and chocolate confection known as buckeyes. In fact, he has been making them for years, and when he was a teacher at York (Maine) High School, he made hundreds of them at Christmas for his students and fellow staff.

So when he showed up at our house with a Christmas-y little tin of them, we greeted them with joy, and I thought that this is the perfect time to get a good recipe for them.

So I asked, and Jim generously shared.

"This recipe," Jim, formerly employed in the steel industry, said, "was given to me 43 years ago by the wife of a brick salesman (he was my supplier when I was running the open hearth furnaces for Armco Steel in Ohio)."

Buckeye candies look just like the variety of horse chestnuts, aesculus glabra, found all over the Midwest, particularly famous in Ohio, where residents and the Ohio State University football team (11-1, second in the East this season so far) are nicknamed buckeyes.

If you like peanut butter cups, you'll like buckeyes. Since they are made with peanut butter, you can make them pretty easily. The only tedious part is allowing plenty of time between steps to let them harden up in the fridge, and dipping them in melted chocolate.

Two things to pay attention to: one is to make sure you acquire peanut butter that has only peanuts (and maybe salt) in it. If you haven't noticed before, you may be amazed to read a peanut butter jar ingredient list and find all kinds of stuff that makes it easy to spread, or a little sweeter. You'll want to find a smooth peanut butter if you want a smooth looking buckeye.

Toby thinks he'd like to try making them with super chunky, and I think I'll let him, but I'll be darned if I want to cope with gnarly bits sticking out here and there.

The other is the old matter of adding paraffin to dipping chocolate. We had this conversation

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SANDY OLIVER  
TASTE BUDS



GRETCHEN MCKAY | PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE | TNS

Cut-out Christmas Sugar Cookies.

## Perfect Christmas cookie cut-outs

BY GRETCHEN MCKAY  
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

Dough for a pie crust isn't the only mixture of flour, sugar and fat that gives home cooks pause during the holiday season.

Cut-out cookie dough also can be a source of baking anxiety, especially when you're pressed for time and have tiny helpers who want to be part of the action.

If you add too much flour during the rolling process, the sugar cookies will turn out tough and dry instead of light and crisp. And if you are rushed and don't chill

it, the dough will stick to the rolling pin in a maddening mess.

But all this dough talk doesn't have to make you go crazy. Here are some tips and tricks on how to roll out the perfect cut-outs.

— Be sure to sift your flour (it will remove any lumps), and use a light hand when spooning it into the measuring cup. If you don't have a sifter, a fine-mesh strainer also works well.

— Make sure the butter is at room temperature (pliable, without being soft and greasy), or it won't cream properly with the sugar.

— Measure ingredients carefully, especially baking soda, too much of which will increase browning.

— When mixing wet ingredients, be sure to scrape down the sides of the bowl at least once to make sure everything is incorporated.

— Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients slowly, on low speed, so there are no flour "explosions."

— Mix dough just until it comes together; there should still be a couple of streaks in the batter. It will be soft and crumbly.

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