



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

Yucca: a bit of the desert at home

Yucca has many alternative names — Adam’s Needle, soap plant, flannel leaf, among others.

The yucca is an impressive desert succulent plant. It’s evergreen, so it doesn’t die during the winter. The ones native to the desert southwest are used to very cold winters and winter snow.

Yucca filamentosa can be gray-green or variegated green and cream. The plants are impressive, being at least 3 feet wide, often with many offsets growing beside them.

Yucca spines are toxic, so allow a lot of space for them in the garden. If you back into their spines by mistake you’ll remember it quite awhile as the punctures heal slowly. The spines contain toxins of saponin and euphorbia.

From the roots, native Americans would make a very effective soap for clothing, and shampoo for their hair.

To grow yucca as a houseplant use loose, well-draining potting mix, or mix two or three parts sand to one part of fine peat moss. Full sun or partial sun is required. The yucca will get spindly and sick without enough light.

Many medicinal uses have been found for yucca and yucca root. Used for osteo arthritis, high blood pressure, migraines, colitis, diabetes, liver and gall bladder ailments.

In the tropics, yuccas are a major source of protein. The roots must be cooked because their peeling contains cyanide. Cooking detoxifies it, though, and it tastes somewhat nutty with a texture like potatoes.

Keeping a yucca as a houseplants is a rather recent trend.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write to greengarden column@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!



Christian Gooden/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Classic New Orleans bread pudding with a bourbon sauce is an appropriate Mardi Gras dish.

Mmmm ... MARDI GRAS

Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The woman eyed me not with suspicion but with curiosity, or perhaps amusement.

We were at a grocery store. We were first looking for sausage at the same time, and then we were standing together in front of the shrimp.

“Are we here for the same reason?” she said. “Are you making jambalaya, too?”

Of course I was. It was Carnival. Mardi Gras was fast approaching (it’s Feb. 16).

Carnival, and especially Mardi Gras, are like a last fling, one final chance at debauchery — or at least gluttony and perhaps drunkenness — before the religious austerity and meditation of Lent.

Mardi Gras is celebrated around the world,

but in America it is inextricably linked to New Orleans — despite the best efforts of Soulard. Even those of us who are less likely to partake of the general licentiousness look to New Orleans for inspiration in cooking Mardi Gras food.

For my own celebration, I cooked four and a half dishes that represent some of the Big Easy’s best-known foods. The half-dish is just rice, but it is unusually good rice. And you can’t have red beans and rice without rice.

In some respects, red beans and rice is the blood that flows through the veins of New Orleans. Louis Armstrong, perhaps the most New Orleanian of all New Orleanians, used to sign his letters “Red beans and ricely yours.” For that reason alone, I

knew I had to make it.

Also, I happen to love red beans and rice.

The secret to making it is time; this is a dish that takes a while to cook. You could speed it up by starting with canned beans instead of dry, but you would miss out on the near-miraculous blending of flavors that comes with a two-hour simmer on the stove. You don’t even soak the beans first; that would shorten the cooking time.

Like so much New Orleans cooking, Red Beans and Rice begins with what is known as the trinity: onions, celery and green bell pepper. Ham hocks and bay leaves add their contributions, with chopped green onions providing a pungent edge just before serving.

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Exploring the surprising versatility of the sweet potato

Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

There is no mistaking a sweet potato.

You can’t eat one and wonder whether it is, perhaps, a zucchini. No one has ever sampled one and confused it with a turnip. It is impossible to take one for broccoli, or even a regular potato.

Sweet potato is a sweet

potato is a sweet potato.

Its uniqueness is both its curse and its charm. Nothing else is quite like it, but that also means its utility is limited. It is not something you would ever want to use as a substitute for another ingredient. It is, as they say, what it is.

One thing it isn’t, incidentally, is a yam. Though

both are root vegetables, they are unrelated (for that matter, sweet potatoes are only distantly related to our common potatoes). They don’t even look alike — yams resemble horseradish roots, and can grow to be more than 50 pounds — and yams are much less sweet, drier and starchier.

True yams are almost

never sold in America, though you can sometimes find them in international markets. In general, if it is labeled either a yam or a sweet potato, it’s a sweet potato.

And that is fortunate, because I just cooked five dishes featuring sweet potatoes, and they were all delicious, down to the last orange crumb.

I started with chili, which

is a good place to start in all circumstances. A friend had recommended a vegan sweet potato chili recipe that he likes, and he recommended it so strenuously that I decided to give it a try.

I don’t always see eye-to-eye with this friend, though we have been close for nearly 50 years. But I’ll give him this: He knows his

vegan sweet potato chili.

Sweet and hot flavors always go well together, as long as they are not too sweet and not too hot. In this chili they are a perfect blend, with the mild natural sweetness of the sweet potato bringing out the best in the mild heat of the chili powder, and vice versa.

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Caviness Building preserves legacy of a local leader

By Ginny Mammen

Our next building as we continue east is 1116 Adams Ave., known as the Caviness Building on the National Historic Register, and currently the home of the Golden Crown restaurant. It was constructed in 1892 by John Caviness to house his meat market, and the building is identified as such on the 1893 Sanborn Map.

A February 1893 edition of the La Grande Weekly Gazette reported that “John Caviness’ new butcher shop is completed and ready for occupancy. It is the best and most conveniently arranged shop in eastern Oregon.” Over the next few decades it remained a meat market and was home to both the City Meat Market and the Grande Ronde Meat Market.

John Lafayette Caviness was born on Dec. 7, 1839, in Morgan County, Indiana, to Fredrick Caviness and his wife Zerilda. Like many other families they heard the call of the West. In 1852, when John was only 13, Fredrick and Zerilda with their four children crossed the plains and arrived in Linn County, Oregon,



Richard Hermens and John Turner collection

The Caviness Building at 1116 Adams Ave. is named for John Caviness, a pioneer of the Grande Ronde Valley.

south of Salem. They settled into a communal type of living with Fredrick working as a carpenter. Between 1852 and 1860 Fredrick and Zerilda added five more children to their family. John was still living at home in 1860 while working as a farm laborer. However wherever there was work, there was

John ready to take it on. He had no formal education, but while driving cattle through Eastern Oregon he studied his first books. He was close to Salmon, Idaho, when the first gold rush was on there and he hired out to a freighting company hauling supplies for the miners. Saving his wages, he bought a freighting outfit of his own and hauled the first steam boiler from Umatilla Landing to Walla Walla.

Finally at the ripe old age of 22, John Caviness arrived in the Grande Ronde Valley and set up his homestead in what is now Island City. The year was 1862. A year later he married Cassandra (Cassie) Stotts, who had also come to the valley in 1862 by wagon train from Iowa, her birth state. Her stepfather was the captain of the wagon train and was wounded in a battle with the Indians. It was said that Cassie drove one of her stepfather’s four-horse teams most of the distance. Cassandra’s mother had married John Stott in 1836 and after his death married John K. Kennedy in 1849, when Cassie was about 5 years old.

John Caviness and his wife were

not what you would call socialites. Cassie kept the home and raised five children — three daughters and two sons. John was a man of many interests. It was said of him that he became the busiest man east of the Cascade Mountains. He was a prominent farmer, businessman and civic leader.

John sold his first crop of wheat for \$1.50 a bushel to John Wilkinson, who in 1863 had built the first mill in the Grande Ronde Valley above La Grande in Mill Creek Canyon. In 1871 John Caviness harnessed the waters of the Grande Ronde for his own mill. He constructed a flouring mill and operated five farms in the valley plus a 1,000-acre ranch near Joseph. He constructed the first schoolhouse in Island City and provided the salary for the teacher as well as other expenses for the school. He also constructed a church in Island City. He owned the first telephone company in this area, was a director of Island City Bank, director of the United States National Bank of La Grande, president of the County Fair Association for 10 years, operated two sawmills and

had interest in the Minam Lumber Company. He also had mining interests in the Malheur Gold Mining Co.

In 1902 he was looked to be the nominee of the Republican Convention for “joint Senator from Morrow, Umatilla and Union counties.” The Observer reported on March 21, 1902: “He has shown by his industry, and intelligent application to his own business that he will be a safe representative to send to Salem.”

Caviness was a leader and his actions caused other farmers to follow suit. As a farmer in 1904, he constructed three silos 9 feet in diameter and 22 feet high to store feed for not less than 20 cows to be able to furnish the La Grande Creamery “with product.” This resulted in many other silos being built in the area.

John and Cassie Caviness were true pioneers in the Grande Ronde Valley, coming when it was just a wilderness and staying to see it grow into a thriving and prosperous city. They were married for 60 years. Cassie died in 1923 and John in 1925.