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## MUSCADINES & SCUPPERNONGS

*the secret history of our southern grape*



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## FOOD

## Grape Hull Pie

*Grape skins in a pie? It used to be commonplace, and with good reason. Let's bring it back.*

by Nancie McDermott  
photograph by Lissa Gotwals

Grape hull pie is a dusty heirloom, stuck in the attic when it really deserves a place of honor on our table of worthy and wonderful culinary treasures. Made up by cooks more than a century ago, it expresses a dedication to thrift and flavor on the part of practical women who “shopped” for supper in their gardens, henhouses, and pantries. Who could have seen the possibilities in the tough, mottled hulls that enclose the luscious sweetness of muscadine grape pulp? Creative women with seriously resourceful palates, that's who, and for their insight in lifting up the muscadine hull into pie-worthy status, I am humbled and grateful.

Muscadines can be found in supermarkets in the fall or, better yet, thriving both out in the wild and at home, undulating over sagging but still effective backyard grape arbors throughout the South. You'll find them referred to as slip-skin grapes, as a firm squeeze on a plump, ripe grape causes the juicy, seed-filled fruit to pop right out. Muscadine skins are too tough for most people to chew when eating the grapes out of hand, but those thrifty and flavor-conscious cooks figured out how to make use of them, along with the grape pulp, in the form of a double-crust pie. They separated skins from pulp, then cooked the pulp just enough to squeeze out and discard the big, round seeds. Then pulp and hulls were cooked with

sugar, a bit of flour, and butter to make a thick, juicy pie.

I grew up eating scuppernongs in the Piedmont, and I love the barefoot-summertime, off-duty sensation of devouring these juicy, messy fruits and spitting out seeds and tossing the skins away — outside, of course. But I knew nothing of grape hull pie until I began research for a book on Southern pies, and there it was, in small, older cookbooks and among lists given to me by people who loved and remembered country ways. It's one of my favorite discoveries because of the brilliance of cooks to see it in the cast-offs, because of the counterintuitive choice to make something out of what seemed like nothing to most people. And let me be clear: I also love it because it tastes so very good.

This once ordinary pie has faded from its status as a common Southern home dessert, but muscadines are still out there: This fall, look for them in farmers markets and grocery stores, and at roadside stands. Pick some up. Make a pie. ➡

*Nancie McDermott's cookbooks include Real Thai: The Best of Thailand's Regional Cooking and Southern Cakes: Sweet and Irresistible Recipes for Everyday Celebrations.*

**ONLINE:**  
Find Nancie's  
recipe for grape  
hull pie at  
[ourstate.com](http://ourstate.com).

One of Nancie McDermott's favorite things about fall: Muscadines are in season, and that means pie. She made this one just for us.



## SAME GRAPE, DIFFERENT PIE

### MUSCADINE PIZZA AT CHEF & THE FARMER



Yes, it's pizza — but that isn't tomato sauce. In the kitchen of her restaurant, Chef & the Farmer in Kinston, Chef Vivian Howard spoons plump muscadine preserves onto a pizza crust before adding blue cheese crumbles and bacon. The preserves are a mix of scuppernong and Noble grapes. “Around here everybody has a vine in their yard,” Howard says. “People used to just bring them to me.” Now, her grapes come from eastern North Carolina farmers who harvest the wild fall crop. It's a short window; the pizza is only available in October. As with all of Howard's dishes, it's made with a story in mind: the story of eastern North Carolina. — Andrea Danchi [chefandthefarmer.com](http://chefandthefarmer.com)

## BEVERAGE BAR

**JuVn8 Smoothies** Ron Cottle's new spin on smoothies is the addition of an old fruit — muscadines. The Cottles have been growing fruit since Ron's father, Ned, planted strawberries on their farm in 1964. Ron incorporated muscadines in 2009 at their Rose Hill farm. Now, pairing his organic strawberries and blueberries with North Carolina's sweet muscadines, he's creating delicious, healthy berry-and-grape smoothies: He calls them JuVn8. — Andrea Danchi [juvn8.com](http://juvn8.com)

