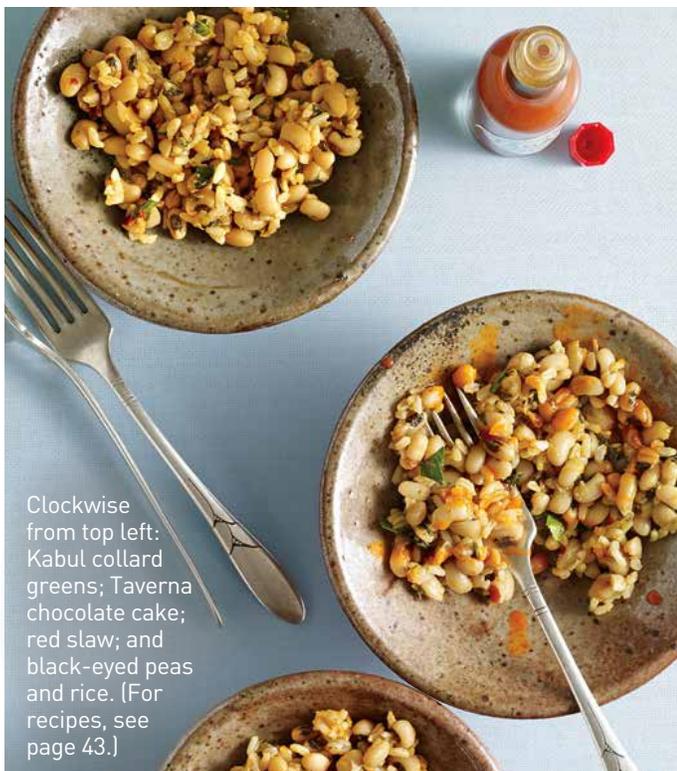


# Food

## The Heart of Soul Food

*A vegan chef serves up Southern home cooking in Afghanistan*

BY TINA L. SINGLETON



Clockwise from top left: Kabut collard greens; Taverna chocolate cake; red slaw; and black-eyed peas and rice. (For recipes, see page 43.)

PENNY DE LOS SANTOS; FOOD STYLIST: BETSY ANDREWS



*It didn't matter that I was a black American woman and they were Afghans. We were humans sharing a meal*

Farmer and cook Tina L. Singleton with her beloved collard greens.

I went to Afghanistan in 2006 to work for an NGO that supported people with disabilities. In that war-torn country, I found a love of growing, cooking, and sharing fresh food with others.

It didn't happen overnight. The organization I was with isolated its staff. After an attack, officials would take us back to our compound, leaving our Afghan colleagues behind. That was hard for me. I kept thinking, Is my life more valuable than theirs?

But Afghanistan got under my skin, and I kept going back until I found a job with less restrictions. I got to meet Afghans, eat in their homes. We spoke different languages, but to sit down, smile, and show appreciation for food goes a long way. It didn't matter that I was a black American woman. We were just humans sharing a meal.

I rented a house where I took the sharing further. My yard had mulberry and apricot trees—all this beauty amid the conflict. I couldn't live without collards, so I grew those and other vegetables, all organic. I was already vegan, but my garden made my diet more delicious. I had such a bumper crop that I started to make meals for friends. Melding my heritage and the flavors of Kabul, I'd season collards with Afghan cardamom, ginger, cinnamon. The meals got so popular, I expanded them. Once a month, I'd set up for 20 under my pergola and charge a small fee. I found myself running a vegan pop-up with a soul-food flavor in Kabul. My makeshift cafe connected me to guests from all over the globe.

These days, I'm training to be a farmer. In Charleston, South Carolina, where I now live, I plan to re-create my pop-up. A meatless take on my mother's black-eyed peas and rice; a crisp slaw; a raw but rich chocolate cake in tribute to Taverna du Liban, my favorite Kabul restaurant, tragically bombed—these dishes are simple but necessary. There is so much fear now of “the other” that it breaks my heart, but Afghanistan taught me that food can bring us together.

JAMES ROFFER

**BLACK-EYED PEAS AND RICE**

Serves 6-8  
 1½ cups (10 oz.) dried black-eyed peas, rinsed and soaked in water overnight  
 3 cups vegetable stock  
 1 tsp. red pepper flakes  
 2 cloves of garlic, minced  
 1 medium yellow onion, diced  
 1 bay leaf  
 1½ cups brown rice  
 2 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley  
 1½ tsp. fresh thyme  
 2 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste

1. Drain peas and rinse in fresh water.
2. In a medium saucepan over high heat, combine the stock, pepper flakes, garlic, onion, and bay leaf. Bring to a simmer. Add the peas and reduce heat to medium-low. Let simmer until tender, 45-60 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, rinse and drain the rice and place in a medium saucepan with 3 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook until tender, about 40 minutes.
4. Remove the bay leaf from the peas. Add parsley, thyme, and salt; cook 5 minutes. Season with salt. Serve over rice.

**KABUL COLLARD GREENS**

Serves 4  
 2 large bunches of collard greens (about 1 lb.), stemmed  
 1 tbsp. plus ½ tsp. kosher salt, divided  
 ½ cup fresh-squeezed orange juice  
 ½ tsp. ground coriander  
 ½ tsp. ground ginger  
 ½ tsp. ground cardamom  
 ½ tsp. ground cinnamon  
 1 tbsp. olive oil  
 2 cloves of garlic, minced  
 ½ cup raisins

1. Stack 4-5 collard leaves on top of each other, roll lengthwise tightly like a cigar, and slice crosswise into 1"-thick strips. Repeat with remaining collards.
2. In a large pot over high heat, bring 3 quarts water to a boil. Add 1 tbsp. salt and the collards and cook, uncovered, until softened, 8-10 minutes. Drain in a colander.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together the orange juice, coriander, ginger, cardamom, and cinnamon. Set dressing aside.
4. In a medium skillet, warm the oil over medium. Add the garlic and stir until fragrant, 1 minute. Add the collard greens and ½ tsp. salt. Cook, stirring frequently, 3 minutes. Add the juice mixture and raisins; toss to coat. Remove from heat and serve immediately.

**RED SLAW**

Serves 8  
 1 small red cabbage (about 2 lb.), quartered, cored, and thinly sliced  
 1 tbsp. plus ½ tsp. kosher salt, divided, plus more to taste  
 ¼ cup red wine vinegar  
 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice  
 1 clove of garlic, minced  
 ¾ tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
 ½ tsp. cayenne  
 ¾ cup olive oil

1. Place the cabbage in a large bowl and add 1 tbsp. salt. Massage the cabbage with your hands until wilted, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a colander, place a plate on top of the cabbage to weight it, and let it sit for 1 hour. Rinse the cabbage in cold water, squeezing the liquid out. Return cabbage to a clean bowl.
2. In a small bowl, whisk

together the vinegar, lemon juice, garlic, pepper, cayenne, and ½ tsp. salt. While whisking, slowly add the oil until smooth. Season with more salt, to taste.

3. Pour enough dressing onto the cabbage to coat. Toss and add more dressing to taste, reserving any remainder for another use. Cover and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour.

**TAVERNA CHOCOLATE CAKE WITH CHOCOLATE GANACHE**

Serves 10-12  
 For the cake:  
 3 cups shelled pecans  
 3 cups shelled walnuts  
 32 medjool dates, pitted and cut in quarters  
 1½ cups cocoa powder  
 3 tsp. vanilla extract

For the ganache:  
 1½ cups cocoa powder  
 1½ cups maple syrup  
 ¾ cup coconut oil, melted  
 ¼ tsp. plus a pinch of salt

1. Make the cake: Process pecans and walnuts in a food processor until finely ground. Add dates and process until mixture begins to stick together. Add cocoa powder and vanilla and process to combine. Add 4 tsp. water and process to combine.
2. Transfer mixture to an 8-inch springform pan and distribute evenly, pressing it with your hands. Chill while making the ganache.
3. Make the ganache: Place cocoa powder, maple syrup, coconut oil, and salt in a blender; blend until smooth.
4. Release the sides of the pan from the cake. Using an offset spatula, frost the top and sides of the cake with the ganache and chill at least 30 minutes before serving.