



The classic cookbook *Mariner's Menu* can help you turn fresh North Carolina catch into a seafood spread, featuring chopped shrimp salad and Carteret County-style crab cakes.

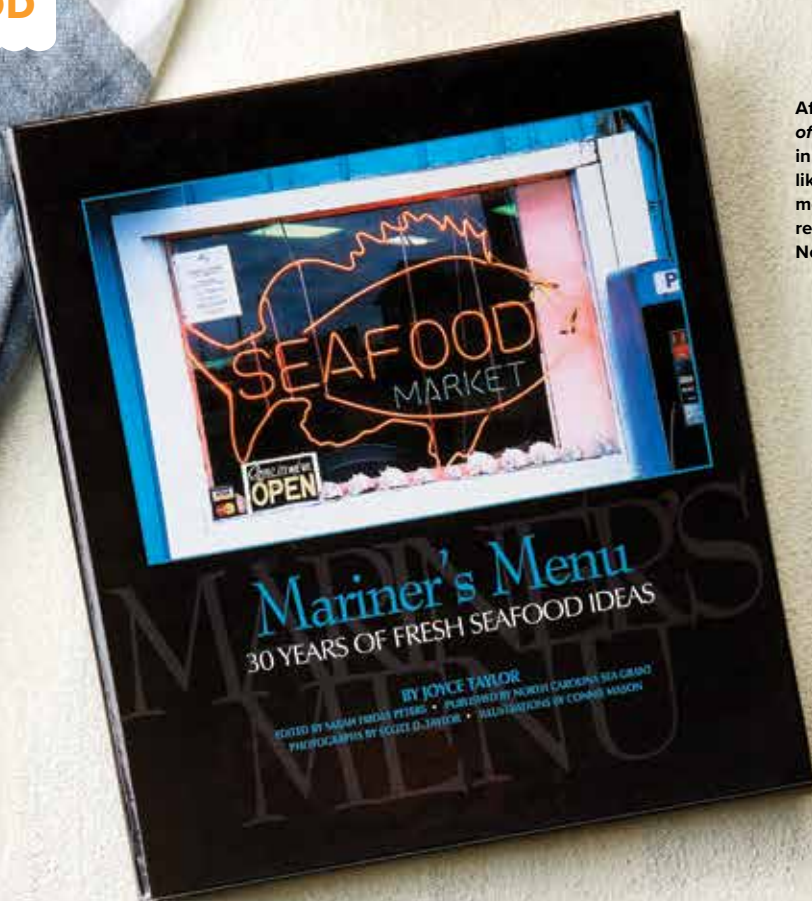
# GALLEY *Gourmet*

Two decades after it was born in Morehead City, *Mariner's Menu* — the ultimate guide to preparing North Carolina seafood — continues to evolve.

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After *Mariner's Menu: 30 Years of Fresh Seafood Ideas* debuted in 2003, author Joyce Taylor liked to remind people that it was more than a cookbook — it was a resource for anyone interested in North Carolina seafood.

**I**N HER SUNNY Harkers Island kitchen, just a few steps from the lapping edge of Back Sound, Vanda Lewis shapes a creamy mixture into perfect scoops. They'll soon emerge from her electric skillet as classic Carteret County-style crab cakes: deep golden and flinty crisp on the outside and meltingly tender on the inside, with only a couple of crushed saltines holding together the chunks of sweet crab.

While the cakes sizzle in the pan, she plunges fresh-caught North Carolina shrimp into a saucepan of simmering water that's as salty as the sea. The shrimp will be part of a salad that, alongside the piping hot crab cakes, will serve as the centerpiece of a seafood feast for her family and friends. Lewis has made these recipes more times than she can count. As the current recipe tester for *Mariner's Menu*, she's the latest steward of a collection that makes the flavors of the coast accessible to everyone.

The *Mariner's Menu* legacy began with Lewis's predecessor, Joyce Taylor, a former Carteret County English teacher who grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains and had always dreamed of living near the ocean; once there, she became one of the state's foremost seafood experts. In 1973, Taylor joined the North Carolina Sea Grant at the NC State

University Seafood Laboratory in Morehead City as a seafood education specialist. Her assignment, and professional passion, was to create a statewide Extension education program to help home cooks feel confident when preparing local seafood. She taught classes, led workshops, and launched a series of pamphlets and newsletters that grew into her magnum opus — *Mariner's Menu: 30 Years of Fresh Seafood Ideas*, published in 2003.

**TAYLOR'S GOAL WAS SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY.** SHE began by writing down common recipes in the community, the best of coastal home cooking. She went on to document and develop hundreds of recipes that were then tested and assessed by her team of volunteers from the Carteret County Extension club. These women, known as "Nutrition Leaders," had grown up around the water and immersed in fishing culture, which gave them firsthand expertise with seafood and coastal traditions. No recipe was deemed worthy of *Mariner's Menu* until it passed muster with them.

Their recipes ranged from weeknight easy to special-occasion sophisticated. The oyster stew, for example, needs little more than briny shucked oysters, hot milk, and 10 minutes on the stove — just right for supper after a long workday on the water.



## A simple shrimp salad tastes like 5-star fare, so long as it's made with fresh North Carolina shrimp.

science and professional expertise associated with NC Cooperative Extension.

After Taylor retired in 1996, she continued to work part-time with Sea Grant and the Seafood Laboratory on special projects. Her 2013 obituary brimmed with professional accolades, but noted, “A mountain native, she belonged to the shore, delighting in the waters of the Crystal Coast, whether sailing, beach walking or fishing. Taylor was known for her dry wit, her outspoken nature, her exacting standards and her deep love for animals. Once asked if she had children, she remarked: ‘Goodness no! I’ve always preferred the company of dogs!’”

Down East native Vanda Lewis has helped bring Joyce Taylor’s work to a modern audience, testing and photographing her predecessor’s recipes for the *Mariner’s Menu* website.

The poached scallops with béarnaise sauce, on the other hand, warrant a skilled cook’s time, deft touch, and knowing eye, and are worthy of a dinner party.

There were 50 or so Nutrition Leaders over the years, but the cookbook project involved a core team of 11, plus Taylor at the helm. They gathered in Morehead City from 9 to noon on the second Tuesday of each month. Taylor would hand out four to six new recipes, and they’d head into the Seafood Lab kitchen, which she stocked with locally sourced seafood and basic groceries. Taylor was a stickler for making as many ingredients from scratch as possible. Teams of two prepared the day’s recipes, and then the entire group would taste and assess them together, rating each dish on a 5-point scale. Anything that didn’t merit at least a 4.5 was sent back for revision and retesting until everyone agreed that it tasted perfect and showcased North Carolina’s best seafood. The result was a cookbook filled with more than 160 recipes put through their paces by talented home cooks and backed by the

**SEA GRANT CONTINUES TAYLOR’S LEGACY BY UPDATING** her recipes and upholding her standards, even as *Mariner’s Menu* evolves to meet the needs of contemporary home cooks. These days, the recipe testing is in Lewis’s able hands. Having retired from an administrative position at Sea Grant and NC State (doing work that earned her induction into the Order of the Long Leaf Pine), Lewis now works part-time on *Mariner’s Menu*. A passion for local seafood recipes apparently isn’t something you can just up and quit all at once.

Lewis took on the role about 10 years ago, when Barry Nash, Sea Grant’s seafood technology and marketing specialist, asked her to validate and photograph Taylor’s 150 or so unpublished recipes, and eventually photograph the cookbook recipes for inclusion on the *Mariner’s Menu* website. As an avid home cook who understood Sea Grant’s missions — and a lifelong coastal resident — Lewis was the perfect choice. She tests and photographs the recipes in the pristine, newly renovated kitchen of the house where her husband, James, grew up.





Taylor believed in letting local seafood shine. Her Deluxe Crab Cakes are long on crab and short on filler, with just 1½ tablespoons of cracker crumbs holding together a pound of North Carolina crabmeat.

She takes meticulous notes (often jotted in the margins at first, with a pencil in one hand and a spoon in the other), and then tracks information across spreadsheets. She's tackled more than 300 recipes, enough for Sea Grant to share a new one each week.

When asked to name her favorites, Lewis quickly rattles off dishes that she often serves on her own dining room table. "Oh mercy, how I love it all, but especially the shrimp, scallops, and clams," she says. "When I was growing up, my family would go down to the water to dig clams for clambakes. We still do." She marvels at how a simple shrimp salad tastes like 5-star fare, so long as it's made with fresh North Carolina shrimp. Her eyes twinkle as she describes Taylor's classic crab cakes, which she tops with her zesty rémoulade sauce — a delicious blending of old and new. James, her most loyal taster, figures all 300-plus are his favorites.

Lewis draws from the original printing of the cookbook, plus stacks of recipes from the archives. Her testing work includes updating and tweaking

recipes to appeal to modern tastes and cooking techniques, plus expanding the collection beyond the original community-based recipes found on traditional Outer Banks family tables. Some coastal traditions will never go out of style, of course, but they aren't the *only* style these days.

Today's home cooks are interested in a wide range of flavors and techniques. They have easier access to grocery stores that carry ingredients from around the world, even as they remain loyal to North Carolina seafood. And their options now include bycatch and lesser-known varieties that rarely made it to market back in the day, like lionfish, triggerfish, and croaker.

The format and reach of *Mariner's Menu* continue to grow and evolve as well. Barry Nash explains that Sea Grant's current readers are just as likely to search online for information as they are to thumb through pages. So *Mariner's Menu* updates now arrive through blog posts, newsletters, apps, cooking videos, and a robust website.

## *Mariner's Menu* helps home cooks prepare the bounty of North Carolina seafood with confidence.

The one thing that will never change is that *Mariner's Menu*, in all its forms, helps home cooks prepare the rich bounty of North Carolina seafood with confidence. It continues to provide reliable, science-based information on seasonal availability, smart shopping, and safe handling of fresh seafood.

Any *Mariner's Menu* recipe, whether from the beloved 20-year-old cookbook pulled from a shelf or a post pulled up on a smartphone, aims to meet the needs of cooks who are hungry for North Carolina seafood knowledge. That's because Taylor — and now Lewis and everyone else involved with *Mariner's Menu* — appreciate not only seafood but also the coastal communities that produce, promote, and protect it. *Mariner's Menu* is cultural stewardship. Taylor would rate that a 5. **Os**

*Sheri Castle is the host of The Key Ingredient on PBS NC.*

To learn more, visit [marinersmenu.org](http://marinersmenu.org).





## Chopped Shrimp Salad

*Contributed by Joyce Taylor*

- 1 pound cooked shrimp, peeled, deveined, and coarsely chopped
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ½ cup celery, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon Tabasco sauce
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon white pepper, freshly ground
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, diced
- Lettuce leaves (optional)
- Tomato wedges (optional)

In a medium bowl, combine mayonnaise, lemon juice, celery, Tabasco, salt, and pepper. Gently stir in eggs and shrimp. Mix thoroughly. Chill several hours or overnight. Serve on lettuce leaves. Garnish with tomato wedges.

With more than 160 recipes, including crab cakes (right) and shrimp salad (above) *Mariner's Menu* has something for everyone.

## Deluxe Crab Cakes

*Contributed by Joyce Taylor*

- 1 pound backfin or claw crabmeat
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- ½ teaspoon dry mustard
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon Tabasco sauce
- ½ teaspoon white pepper, freshly ground
- 3 tablespoons fresh parsley, finely chopped
- 1½ tablespoons fresh cracker crumbs
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- Lemon wedges (optional)

In a medium bowl, combine egg, mayonnaise, mustard, cayenne, Tabasco, and pepper, and whisk until smooth. Add crabmeat, parsley, and crumbs, and toss together lightly with a fork. Shape into 6 to 8 patties. Place patties on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Cover with plastic wrap and chill for 30 minutes.

Fry in hot oil until golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels. Serve with lemon wedges.

## Rémoulade Sauce

*Contributed by Vanda Lewis*

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 1 teaspoon ketchup
- 2 teaspoons water
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ¼ teaspoon hot sauce
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, minced
- ¼ teaspoon Creole seasoning
- ⅛ teaspoon white pepper

Whisk together all ingredients and chill for 1 hour before serving.

