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Roasted Vidalia onions with herbed bread crumbs (see page 68 for recipe)



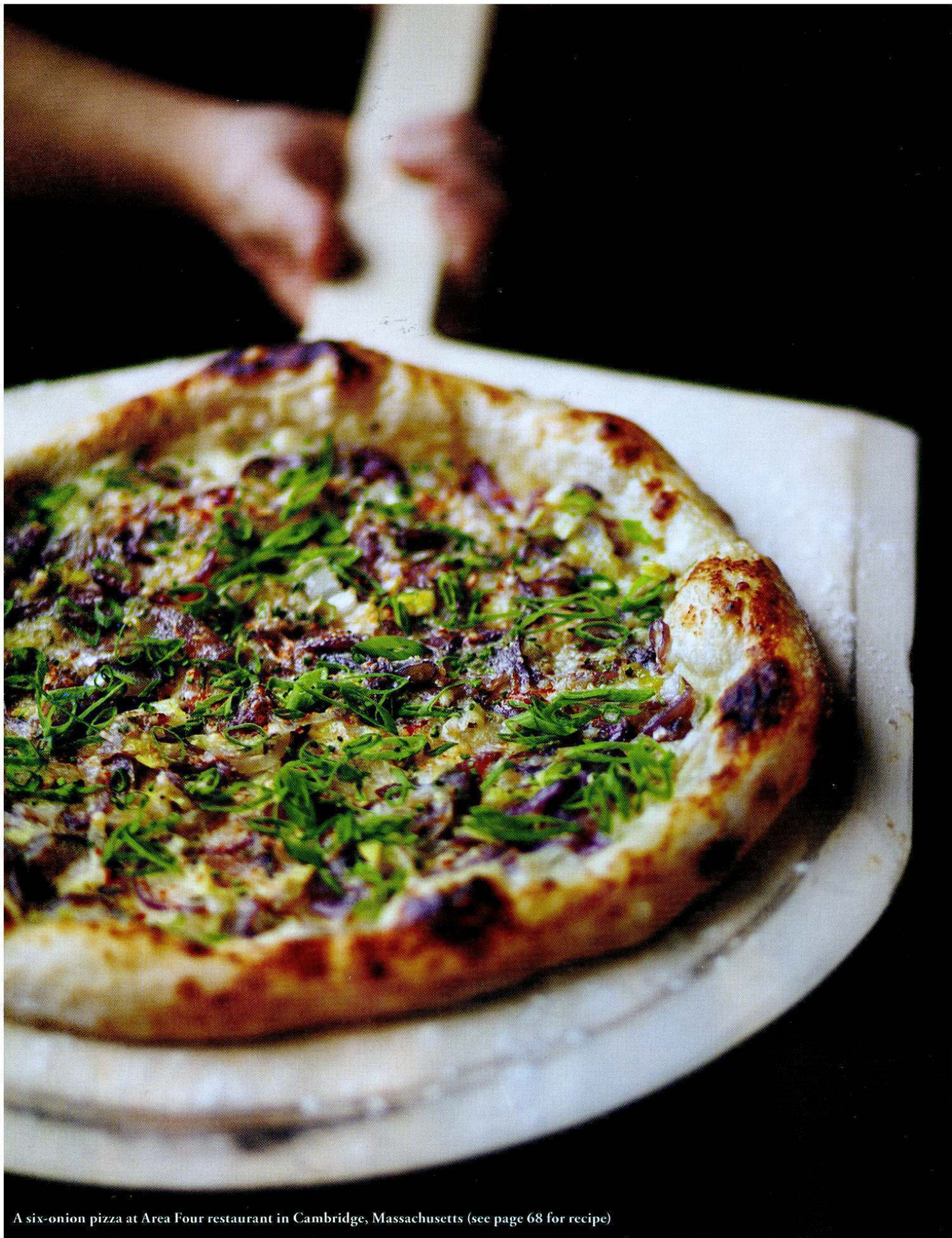
ROOTS

**ONIONS ARE THE MOST VERSATILE AND
INSPIRING VEGETABLE IN OUR KITCHEN**

by DANA BOWEN *photographs by* TODD COLEMAN

of

FLAVOR



A six-onion pizza at Area Four restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts (see page 68 for recipe)



Chicken and onion tagine (see page 66 for recipe)

The Raw Appeal

"I can easily make a whole meal of onion sandwiches," James Beard wrote in his book *Beard on Food* (Bloomsbury USA, 1974), referring to raw sweet Spanish onions on homemade bread, with plenty of butter and salt. Indeed, many sweet varieties of onions are so mild that they are delicious in the raw, tossed into salads, layered atop burgers, and added to anything that can benefit from their bright, juicy crunch. But it's not that sweet onions actually contain more sugar; they just have fewer of the sulfuric compounds that make other varieties sharp and spicy. It's in the vegetable's raw state that the variations between types are most apparent. Onion cells contain sulfuric compounds and store an enzyme called alliinases; when the whole onion's cell structure is disrupted by slicing and chopping, new, highly volatile sulfurous molecules are created, which give raw onions their bite and cause cooks to break out in tears. Some people believe that these harsh compounds can upset stomachs, and will salt and rinse, or simply wash onions before serving them raw or cooking with them. Kitchen scientist Harold McGee, in *On Food and Cooking* (Scribner, 2004), backs up that claim: He urges readers to wash sliced onions to rid them of sulfuric compounds that cling to their surface and become more intense with exposure to air. —D.B.

THERE'S A SMALL TABLE in my kitchen that holds a huge basket of onions: the big, juicy red ones I slice for salads; the amber, satiny supermarket ones, still in their red fishnet bag; a handful of flat cippoline from the farmers' market, each one the size and a shape of a doorknob. There are always purple-tinged shallots in the mix, and if you dig around, you'll probably find a few pearl onions left over from the last time I made *coq au vin*.

Just looking at this basket makes me feel like cooking. A roast chicken, one with lots of quartered onions to catch the drippings; or burgers, pan-fried into a heap of slivered onions that have turned crisp and brown. Or those cippoline, caramelized in a curry until their insides are like butter. As long as this basket is full, there is always something delicious to eat.

I recently encountered one of the prettiest onions I've ever seen on my friend Shannon's kitchen counter in upstate New York: It was pale yellow, about the size of a grapefruit, but tapered at the top and covered with a thin sheath of papery skin. It felt great in my hand—heavy and solid—and when she sliced into it, it nearly burst with sweet, spicy juice. Shannon, a fantastic cook from South Carolina, had the good sense to drench those slices with olive oil and throw them on the grill as she was cooking steak; when they came off, they were glossy tangles, creamy and luscious, the perfect accompaniment to the grilled meat.

It occurred to me, eating that exquisite onion, just how much I take these bulbs for granted. I can name a dozen different heirloom tomatoes or apples I've sought out over the years, and I can tell you which ones are best for what recipes, but not so when it comes to this ingredient that works so hard in my kitchen. Aside from the sweet Spanish onions you find at any supermarket, and the Vidalias from Georgia and mild Walla Wallas from Washington State that make a seasonal appearance each summer, I don't know much about onion varieties, their season, or how they're grown and stored. Why was this onion, which Shannon received in her CSA box from a local farm, as juicy as the young, waxy-skinned onions with

green tops that I buy at the farmers' market each spring? What made it so unbelievably delicious?

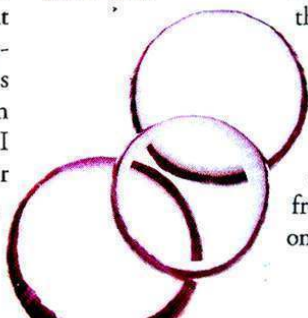
A FEW WEEKS AFTER THAT late summer dinner at Shannon's, I was standing in Andy Szymanowicz's greenhouse on a farm in the hills of Ancramdale, in New York's Hudson Valley. I had tracked the 32-year-old farmer down through Sol Flower Farm, where Shannon gets her produce, and through chefs in the area who swore by Szymanowicz's organically raised onions. Two long tables set up on cinder blocks were covered with thousands upon thousands of them, skins caked with dirt and stems shriveled dry. The air was heavy with wet earth and raw onion.

"Onions aren't easy," the farmer told me. "They're slow growing, so I plant different varieties to be ready at different stages of the season." Early in the spring, he sells

AS LONG AS THERE ARE ONIONS IN THE HOUSE, THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING DELICIOUS TO EAT

varieties that are pulled when their stems are still green and their bulbs are glossy and white. Come summer, he harvests sweet varieties that have developed a tougher skin and can be stored for short periods, like the ones I fell in love with at Shannon's house, an heirloom called Ailsa Craig. By the time I made it to his farm, those were gone, and he was curing onions, drying them out in that greenhouse so they will last through the winter without getting moldy or soft—standard practice for storing onions. Still, these looked nothing like the small red or yellow ones you get in two-pound bags at the supermarket, the kind that dominates the onion industry in this country. "These are Red Bulls," he said, pulling off a few purple leaves from a specimen that could have easily weighed a pound on its own. "They're my best red storage onion."

If you take a look at any seed (continued on page 60)





Creamed onion gratin (see page 66 for recipe)



Global Flavor

Onions are one of the world's most ubiquitous vegetables: The species *Allium cepa*, which belongs to the vast amaryllis family, is cultivated everywhere from China to Africa (at left, a farmer waters onion plants in Mauritius) to the United States. In the U.S., some 1.3 billion pounds are harvested each year; California ranks as the country's largest producer (Idaho, Oregon, Washington, New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin are runners-up). Different varieties of bulb onions date back to ancient times; in fact, Alan Davidson's *Oxford Companion to Food* notes that it was a particularly mild white variety called unio, meaning a single white pearl, that gave rise to the word *onion*. Though shoppers can find different varieties of onions year round, they are a seasonal crop. Onions planted in the fall are the first to arrive in late spring; they're sold with green stems and should be eaten within a few days of buying. During the summer, varieties with a longer shelf life and a thin skin start coming to market, though they should still be eaten as soon as possible because they have a high water content. It isn't until late summer that low-moisture varieties that are cured—placed in a dry, airy space until their skin turns hard, which traps in their juices—come to market. Storage onions last around eight months, just in time for the next batch of spring onions to arrive. —D.B.



Yucatecan pickled red onions (see page 66 for recipe)



Onion and poppy seed bialys (see page 66 for recipe)



Onion and bacon tart (see page 68 for recipe)



Lamb and onion curry (see page 66 for recipe)



Pearl onions come in many colors and varieties; great for boiling and pickling.



Bianco di maggio are Italian heirloom cipolline with white, sweet flesh.



More demure than European varieties, Thai shallots are great for spice pastes.



Spicy yellow storage onions, or common onions, are workhorses of the kitchen.



Italy's famed, zesty Tropea lunga turn fragrant and luscious when grilled.



Grill or pickle tender, fresh torpedo onions, which have a concentrated sweetness.



Teardrop-shaped owas are slightly spicy and excellent for sauce bases.



Baby red Creole onions are so named because of their surprising spice.



Mayan sweets are fresh, juicy mild onions available in the States in fall and winter.



Texas sweets are descendants of Bermuda onions, brought here in 1898.



Cipolline onions are flat Italian varieties that turn buttery when roasted.

The supersweet candy hybrid is the ideal dried onion for caramelizing.



Large Red Bull onions keep longer than most dry onions and have a muted spice.



Inca sweet is a mellow variety from Peru sold fresh in the States during the winter.



French gray shallots are coveted by chefs for their creamy texture and refined flavor. Use them in vinaigrettes.



Insanely sweet Walla Wallas are available in the summer from Washington State; you can eat them like apples.



The sweet Siskiyou onion is harvested in the Pacific Northwest, sold fresh in summer, and is best raw.



Small, spicy turbo onions are a new storage variety with great heat.

Stuttgarters are classic dried yellow cooking onions often grown as pearls.



Late-season copras are surprisingly juicy and large for storage onions.



Heirloom red Wethersfields were grown by Thomas Jefferson, who loved their sweetness.



White Granex is a cousin of Vidalia, a popular sweet onion from the South.



Since the 1880s, Australian Browns have been prized for their pungent flesh, which is flavorful cooked.



Red Baron is a smallish, popular red storage onion with pronounced sharpness.



Maui onions grow on the dormant Haleakala volcano; they're ideal raw.



Red Zeppelin are intensely oniony for reds; a popular hybrid for storage.



Red Burgermeisters were bred to be sandwich onions. Sweet, with great crunch.



Often harvested young, Paris Silverskins are white, crisp, mild, and great for pickling.



French shallots have more spice and heat than Asian varieties. Excellent for sauces.



Crystal White Wax is a mild, common pearl that retains its shape when cooked.



Jet Set is a spicy small yellow onion that arrives early in the season.



Flat of Italy are heirloom Italian cipolline, ideal for roasting agrodolce, in a sweet-sour glaze.



Giant Red Hamburger is an aptly named variety that's sweet and juicy and big as a bun.



The Sweet Spot

Cooking an onion transforms the vegetable's chemical composition; slowly cooking it in fat until it is a rich golden brown renders it far sweeter than when raw. "New compounds are formed," writes Shirley Corriher in *CookWise* (William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997). "Some of the compounds that form in onions are even sweeter than sugars." It's all part of the process of caramelization, which is actually quite a complex one. Starches are breaking down into sugars, and the sugars themselves are breaking down, with disaccharides splitting into simpler, sweeter monosaccharides. The onions' moisture evaporates, too, concentrating its newfound sweetness. Cell walls break down and the vegetable loses its shape, collapsing into a soft, jam-like consistency. Another of the many processes at work while onions sauté is the Maillard reaction, wherein the onion's carbohydrates and proteins interact with the sugars to create a deep brown color and rich, umami-packed, almost meaty flavor. (Butter is the medium of choice for caramelizing onions, since its own proteins facilitate the process.) The goal is to caramelize gradually, at a low enough heat and stirring often, so that the sugars don't brown too much, which would result in a toasty, roasted, or grilled onion flavor rather than a concentrated sweetness. —D.B.

(continued from page 54) catalog, you'll notice lots of onion varieties you've probably seen but never heard of—Australian brown, Tropeana lunga, red Welsh, copra, and these Ailsa Craigs, a variety developed in the late 19th century by a Scottish farmer to compete with the sweet Bermuda onion, which was all the rage at the time. Until the seeds of Bermuda onions were shipped to the States in 1898, and until hybridizing technology in the 1920s allowed for botanists to develop sweeter varieties of onions that could grow in cool climes, the bulb onions most Americans knew were the sharper-flavored ones that grew in the Northeast, which were descendants of varieties brought over from the Old World by early colonists.

The kind of onions we're talking about here are bulb onions belonging to *Allium cepa*, a species that's been cultivated since ancient times and now is grown around the world. *Allium cepa* includes scallions, also called green onions; they're essentially onions that have not yet developed their bulbs. The same species also includes pearl, boiling, and baby onions, which, interestingly, aren't just smaller varieties (though some have been selected not to get too big) or ones harvested before they've matured. They're *Allium cepa* sowed in densely planted patches, so that they don't have room to grow any bigger than large gum balls. Shallots, which can resemble garlic but contain just a couple cloves, are a variety of *Allium cepa* called *ascalonicum*; there's a larger, sharp flavored variety popular in French cooking and a smaller, sweeter one that's the allium of choice in southeast Asia. Garlic, leeks, chives, and ramps all belong to different branches of the *Allium* family tree.

What distinguishes *Allium cepa* from those other types are their bulbs—essentially swollen leaf bases containing energy in the form of sugars, which help the plant shoot up a stalk for a new plant the next season. It's what's inside those leaves that make onions so important in the kitchen: They contain volatile compounds that drastically change when the bulb is sliced and exposed to air, heat, and other elements. "The key to the onion family's appeal is a strong, often pungent, sulfury flavor whose original purpose was to deter animals from eating the plants," writes Harold McGee in *On Food and Cooking* (Scribner, 2004). In one of the best descriptions of the science of onions written for

cooks, McGee explains that the onion takes up sulfur from the soil, and the sulphuric compounds it forms float in the cell fluid until they are, via cutting and cooking, unlocked by the cook (whose first response may be shedding tears, a reaction to sulfur gasses, which can be reduced by chilling the onions for 30 minutes before slicing them).

The fact that onions take their sulfur from the soil explains why certain regions produce sweeter, or milder, onions than others. Vidalias, Texas 1015s, and Mauis do not refer to specific cultivars; they're all white or red grano or granex types, sweet onion varieties that are grown in, and often named for, regions where the sulfur content of the soil is low. Sweet onions are usually sold fresh for short-term storage; the spicier ones, which tend to contain less juice and therefore have a longer shelf life, are cured and stored.

Nowadays, there are thousands of cultivars that range in

TO ME, NO ACT OF COOKING IS AS PLEASURABLE AS CARAMELIZING ONIONS TO SWEETNESS

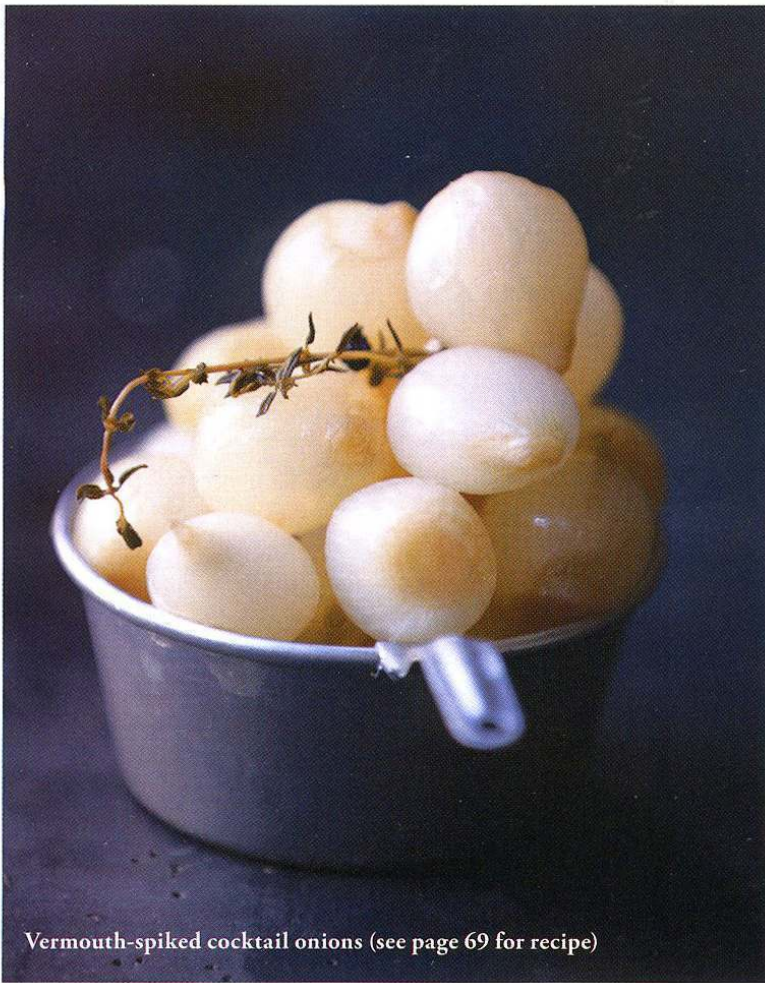
color (brown, yellow, red, white), flavor (sweet, spicy, mild), shape (globes, teardrops, torpedos), and adaptability to different growing conditions (see "Global Flavor," page 56). Every region has its onions; every onion, its terroir.

ONCE YOU REALIZE THAT ONIONS contain such a complex mix of sugars and aromatic compounds, it's easy to see why they provide the foundation of flavor to so many of the world's cuisines. It's the transformative nature of these elements in onions that makes them among the most versatile, and inspiring, ingredients in the kitchen.

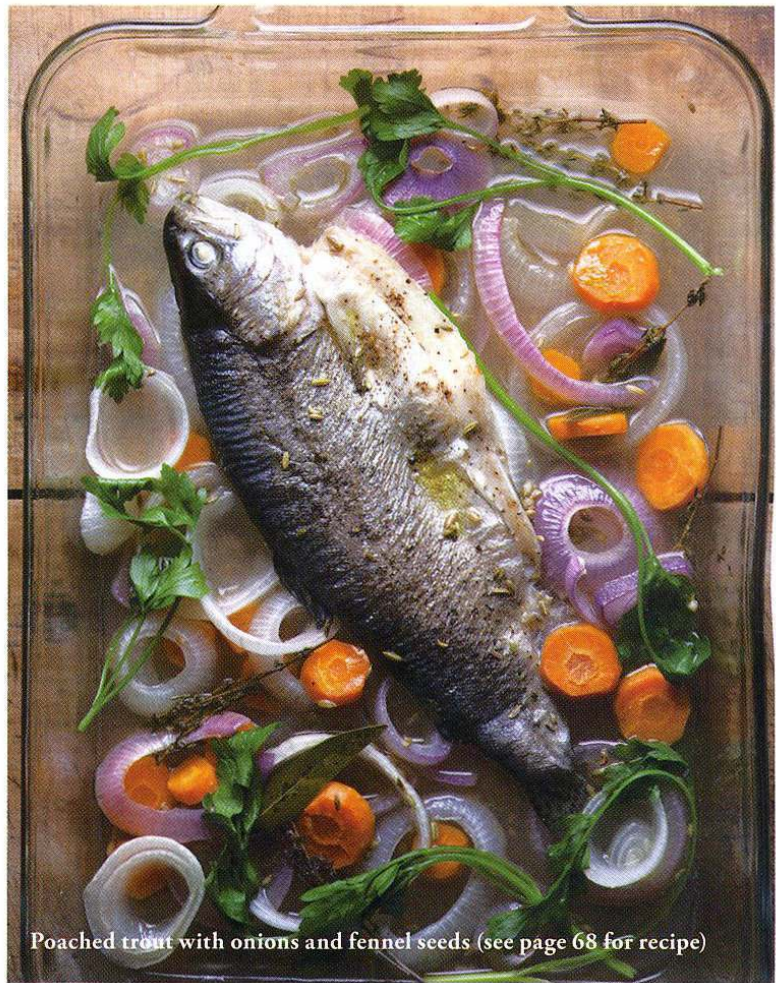
When I was learning to cook in my Italian-American family, dinner always began with onions (and often garlic) sweating, or cooking over low heat, in olive oil. Back then, I never thought about what was happening on a chemical level—that the sugars in (continued on page 64)



Beer-battered onion rings (see page 66 for recipe)



Vermouth-spiked cocktail onions (see page 69 for recipe)



Poached trout with onions and fennel seeds (see page 68 for recipe)



Parsley and onion salad (see page 68 for recipe)



Homemade French onion dip (see page 68 for recipe)

Fried Perfection

All around the world, cooks fry sliced onions or shallots to a crisp to use as an intensely flavorful condiment. In Egypt, the national dish, *koshary*—a mix of rice, lentils, pasta, and vegetables—is topped with a layer of fried onions, and in traditional Eastern Europe Jewish cookery, onions fried in chicken fat are beloved in everything from *kasha varnishkes* to potato latkes. Across Asia, it's shallots that tend to be fried; they have a milder flavor than onions, and less juice, so they crisp up easily. In Vietnam, for example, fried shallots are sprinkled into soups and rice dishes. What's happening with fried onions isn't simply caramelization taken to the next step; cooking at a higher heat, the sugars on the outside are browning, leaving some of the flavor and juice inside the onion. "You want to slice them thinly, but not so thin that they cook too quickly and run the risk of them being bitter," says Serge Madikians, the chef and owner of Serevan restaurant in Armenia, New York. An Armenian raised in Tehran, he grew up eating fried onions sprinkled over the classic Iranian soup *ash reshteh*. He makes an important point: Whether it's shallots or onions you're frying, remove them from the oil as soon as they turn golden, as they continue to cook and crisp after they're pulled from the oil.—D.B.

(continued from page 60) the onions were turning even sweeter because of the heat; that the oil would carry the flavor of the onions throughout the rest of the dish—but as I started reading cookbooks, it became clear that cooks take pains to describe exactly how onions should be cooked: translucent, or golden, or browned. When I was working on a cookbook with the Venetian chef Mara Martin years ago, she would correct me while I was translating her recipes. "Browned is too much!" she insisted—but gold was not enough. "Abbronzate," she'd say in Italian. Bronzed. It's the difference between what the Italians call a *battuto*—a base of onions, with celery, carrots, and other seasonings that's briefly cooked in the beginning stages of a soup, a sauce, a risotto—and a *soffritto*, where the onions are taken to a deeper level of gold. All across the globe, cooks start dishes this way: There's the French *mirepoix* of onions, celery, and carrots; the Cajun trinity of onions, peppers, and celery; the way southeast Asian cooks start curries and other dishes by slowly cooking a spice paste made with aromatics and lots of minced shallots; or how Middle Eastern cooks sweat onions in fat and then add dry spices. When I was in Morocco I learned to start a tagine by cooking onions with saffron in a pan and then transfer them to the oven, where their flavors mingled as they stewed with other ingredients, like chicken and olives and lemons.

Sweating is only one way that cooks manipulate onions. When I was working in restaurants, it was always someone's job to come in early in the morning to slice a huge bagful of onions and stir them over low heat with lots of butter until they were caramelized. Again, I didn't know then that the sugars were intensifying and the cell walls were breaking down, but I knew some sort of magic was happening, causing these sharp, raw onions to turn into a kind of luscious onion essence we stirred into risottos, dolloped into soups, slathered onto bruschetta and pizza and more. This was the '90s, when caramelized onions were in everything—for good reason, I'd argue. To this day, they are the secret weapon in my kitchen, and I often make them without any particular recipe in mind. To me, caramelizing onions is one of the most pleasurable acts of cooking, the standing and stirring and staring into the pot, inhaling the subtle changes in aroma from sweet to sweeter. When I've

finished, I'm not far from onion soup, onion-topped bialys, French onion dip, or any number of delicious things.

The way different cultures work with onions is a testament to the bulb's overwhelming versatility, not to mention the creativity of cooks. Onions have a history of being pickled, or added to pickles, because the flavonoid compounds they contain are natural preservatives, which may explain why dishes like *escabeche*, the marinated fried fish dish that originated in the Mediterranean, is literally swimming in onions. When onions themselves are pickled, the flavor of the brine penetrates the bulb, which is why I love making my own cocktail onions with fresh thyme and vermouth.

Raw onions are an altogether different pleasure. When I get lunch at my favorite Punjabi place in Manhattan, called Minar, I love that I'm handed a tinfoil-wrapped square of onion slices; they're a refreshing foil to the spicy, stewed foods. That burst of bright flavor is the same thing that makes onions in salads and tacos and gyros so fantastic.

On the other end of the spectrum are fried onions. One of the best culinary lessons I've picked up from our editor-in-chief, James Oseland, is crisp-frying shallots until they take on an almost meaty sweetness to make a condiment called *bawang goreng* in Indonesia. In the office, we sprinkle them into soups, curries, stir-fries, and bowls of rice. I am a sucker for good onions rings, too, though they have a cushion of batter, so the onion itself has a lighter flavor, more akin to how it tastes when boiled or braised.

WHEN I SAID GOOD-BYE to Andy Szymanowicz at Sol Flower Farm, he handed me a bunch of heavy Red Bull onions by their stalks and told me to enjoy. I felt compelled to find the right dish for these beautiful onions, and asked the farmer what he liked to do with them. "I love them caramelized and sautéed with kale," was his answer.

In the past, I would never have thought to caramelize red onions: roasting with a topping of bread crumbs, yes; sautéing with zucchini, sure. But if I have learned anything about onions it is this: While I might not want to put a sharp supermarket onion on my sandwich, when it comes to cooking, it doesn't much matter which you use. Onions rarely let you down, especially the good ones. And my dinner that night was fantastic. 🍷



Beer-Battered Onion Rings

SERVES 6-8

A flavorful batter infused with honey, paprika, and lager beer is the secret to these crunchy onion rings (pictured on page 62).

- 1 3/4 cups flour
- 1/2 cup cornstarch
- 1 1/2 tbsp. hot paprika
- 1 tbsp. dry mustard
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 2 tsp. honey
- 1 12-oz. lager beer
- Canola oil, for frying
- 2 large yellow onions, cut crosswise into 1/2"-thick slices and separated into rings

1 In a large bowl, whisk together flour, cornstarch, paprika, mustard, baking powder, and salt. Add honey and beer, and whisk until smooth; let sit for 10 minutes.

2 Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 375°. Working in batches, dip onion rings into batter, shaking off excess, and lower into oil; fry, flipping once, until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain briefly and season with more salt; serve immediately.

Onion and Poppy Seed Bialys

MAKES ABOUT 1 1/2 DOZEN

These soft and chewy cousins of bagels are a stalwart of Polish bakeries, where their hole-less centers are filled with caramelized onions and poppy seeds (pictured on page 57).

- 1 tbsp. barley malt syrup (see page 111)
- 1 1/4-oz. package active dry yeast
- 5 cups bread flour
- 2 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 small yellow onions, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp. poppy seeds
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Make the dough: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a hook, stir together syrup, yeast, and 1 1/2 cups water heated to 115°; let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Add flour and salt, and mix on low speed until dough forms; increase speed to medium, and knead dough until

smooth, about 8 minutes. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and let sit until doubled in size, about 1 1/2 hours.

2 Meanwhile, make the filling: Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat; add garlic and onions, and cook, stirring occasionally, until deeply caramelized, about 30 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in poppy seeds and salt and pepper; set aside to cool.

3 Uncover and punch down dough; cover again and let sit until doubled in size again, about 1 hour. Uncover dough and transfer to a clean work surface; portion and shape into about eighteen 2-oz. balls. Place 6 balls each on 3 parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced evenly apart; cover with plastic wrap and let sit until puffed, about 30 minutes. Uncover balls, and using the palm of your hand, gently flatten each into a disk; cover again and let sit until puffed, about 30 minutes.

4 Heat oven to 450°. Uncover balls, and, using your fingers, press the center of each to indent; continue pressing and stretching center of each dough ball until you're left with a thin center membrane surrounded by a thick ring of dough on the outer edge. Fill centers of each dough round with about 1 tsp. onion-poppy seed filling. Working with one baking sheet at a time, place in oven, and spray bialys with water until completely coated. Bake until lightly browned and still soft, about 16 minutes.

Creamed Onion Gratin

SERVES 6-8

Sweet, translucent roasted onions marry beautifully with the bechamel and Gorgonzola in this rich casserole (pictured on page 55).

- 2 medium yellow onions, cored and quartered lengthwise
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp. flour
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste
- 1/2 cup finely grated parmesan
- 3 oz. Gorgonzola, crumbled
- 1/4 tsp. paprika

1 Heat oven to 350°. Toss onions with oil in a 9" x 11" baking dish

and season with salt and pepper. Bake, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly browned, about 1 hour; set aside. Heat oven to broil.

2 Heat butter in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; add flour, and cook, stirring, until smooth, about 1 minute. Add cream and wine, and cook, stirring, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Season sauce with salt, pepper, and nutmeg.

3 Pour sauce evenly over onions. Sprinkle with parmesan, dot with Gorgonzola, and sprinkle with paprika; broil until cheese is melted and golden brown on top, about 2 minutes.

Djej Besla

(Chicken and Onion Tagine)

SERVES 4-6

Onions stew until soft and sweet in this satisfying one-pot chicken dish flavored with saffron, turmeric, lemon, and olives (pictured on page 53).

- 1 tbsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 6 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 tsp. cumin seeds, crushed
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. ground turmeric
- 5 tbsp. olive oil
- 4 skinless bone-in chicken thighs
- 4 skinless bone-in chicken drumsticks
- 1 tsp. crushed saffron threads
- 4 medium yellow onions, cut into 12 wedges each
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced crosswise, seeds removed
- 1 1/4 cups pitted green olives
- 1/2 cup finely chopped cilantro
- Cooked white rice, for serving

1 Make a spice paste: Using the flat side of your knife, chop and mash salt and garlic together on a cutting board into a smooth paste; transfer paste to a large bowl and stir in cumin, paprika, and turmeric. Stir in 3 tbsp. oil, and then add chicken thighs and drumsticks; toss until evenly coated. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and marinate in the refrigerator for 4 hours.

2 Heat remaining oil in an 8-qt. Dutch oven or large tagine over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add chicken pieces, and cook, turning once, until golden

brown on both sides, about 10 minutes; transfer to a plate and set aside. Add saffron and onions to pot, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 15 minutes. Return chicken to pot along with lemon slices and 1 cup water, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered, until chicken is cooked through, about 40 minutes. Remove from heat, and scatter olives and cilantro over chicken; serve with rice.

Escabeche de Cebolla

(Yucatecan Pickled Red Onions)

MAKES ABOUT 1 1/4 CUPS

Red onions soak up the flavors of oregano and cumin in this classic pickle relish (pictured on page 57), served with fresh seafood in Yucatán, Mexico.

- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 large red onion, thinly sliced lengthwise
- 1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. cumin seeds
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and halved lengthwise
- 1 1/2 cups red wine vinegar

In a bowl, toss salt and onion together; let sit until onion releases some of its liquid, about 15 minutes. Transfer to jar along with peppercorns, oregano, cumin, and garlic, and pour over vinegar; seal with lid and let cool to room temperature. Refrigerate at least 4 hours before using.

Gosht Dopiazza

(Lamb and Onion Curry)

SERVES 6-8

Caramelized onions, infused with cardamom, fennel, and cumin, form the basis for this classic Indian curry (pictured on page 57), made here with lamb and small, flat cipolline onions, and topped with crispy fried onions.

- 1 tbsp. paprika
- 1 tbsp. garam masala
- 4 tsp. ground turmeric
- 2 tsp. dried mint
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 12 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 4" piece ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 lb. lamb shoulder, cut into 1 1/2" cubes
- 1/4 cup Greek yogurt
- 12 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp. coriander seeds
- 2 tsp. cumin seeds

- 1 tsp. fennel seeds
- 6 green cardamom pods, crushed
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 2 large yellow onions, thinly sliced lengthwise
- 1 16-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes with juice, crushed by hand
- 12 cipolline or large pearl onions, peeled
- Fried onions, to garnish
- Cooked white rice, for serving

1 Make the spice paste: Combine paprika, garam masala, 2 tsp. turmeric, mint, salt, garlic, ginger, jalapeño, and ¼ cup water in a small food processor and puree until smooth. Transfer half the spice paste to a bowl and add lamb and yogurt; toss until evenly coated. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and marinate in the refrigerator for 4 hours.

2 Heat 8 tbsp. butter in an 8-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add coriander, cumin, fennel, cardamom, and cinnamon; cook, stirring, until cinnamon stick unfurls and spices are fragrant and lightly roasted, about 5 minutes. Add yellow onions, and cook, stirring often, until deeply caramelized, about 25 minutes (add up to 4 tbsp. water, if necessary, to keep onions from sticking to bottom of pot). Add remaining spice paste, and continue cooking until no longer raw, about 2 minutes. Add lamb along with any marinade, and cook, stirring, until marinade is no longer raw, about 2 minutes. Add tomatoes and 3 cups water, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until lamb is tender, about 1 hour.

3 Meanwhile, bring a 2-qt. saucepan of water to a boil over high heat. Add cipollines, and cook until just tender, about 5 minutes; drain. Heat remaining turmeric and butter in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat; add cipollines, and cook, stirring, until caramelized all over, about 10 minutes.

4 Remove curry from heat and stir in cipollines. Sprinkle with fried onions; serve with rice.

Homemade French Onion Dip

MAKES ABOUT ¾ CUPS

Our favorite recipe for this classic dip (pictured on page 63) showcases onions three ways: fried, roasted, and fresh.

- 4 medium yellow onions (2 quartered lengthwise, 2 finely chopped)
- 1 cup olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- Hot sauce, such as Tabasco, to taste
- 4 scallions, minced
- Cut raw vegetables, such as cucumber, carrot, and cauliflower, for serving

1 Heat oven to 425°. Toss quartered onions with 2 tbsp. oil on a foil-lined baking sheet, and season with salt and pepper. Roast, turning occasionally, until soft and slightly caramelized, about 45 minutes; set roasted onions aside to cool.

2 Place roasted onions in a food processor and puree until smooth; add mayonnaise, cream cheese, sour cream, juice, Worcestershire, hot sauce, and salt and pepper, and puree until smooth. Transfer to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until set, at least 4 hours or overnight.

3 Heat remaining oil in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat; add finely chopped onions, and cook, stirring, until beginning to brown, about 10 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until deep golden brown, about 16 minutes more. Transfer onions to a strainer set over a bowl to drain; discard oil or reserve for another use. Transfer fried onions to paper towels to drain; set aside.

4 To serve, stir ⅔ of the fried onions and the scallions into dip, and transfer to a serving bowl; top with remaining fried onions and serve with fresh vegetables.

Onion and Bacon Tart

SERVES 6-8

The custardy batter for dish (pictured on page 57), a cousin of Yorkshire pudding, puffs like an enormous popover in the oven.

- 6 oz. slab bacon, cut into ¼" matchsticks
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 medium yellow onions, thinly sliced lengthwise
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

- 1½ cups flour
- 2 tsp. dry mustard
- 1¼ cups milk
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten

1 Heat bacon in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring occasionally, until fat renders and bacon is crisp, about 12 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towels to drain; pour bacon fat into a 9" x 11" baking dish and set aside. Return skillet to medium-high heat, and add butter; add onions, salt, and pepper, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

2 Heat oven to 425°. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, mustard, and pepper; add milk and eggs, and stir until smooth. Let batter rest for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, place baking dish with bacon fat in oven and let heat for 10 minutes. Remove baking dish from oven, pour in batter, and sprinkle with rendered bacon and caramelized onions; return to oven and bake until puffed and golden brown, about 30 minutes.

Parsley and Onion Salad

SERVES 4

Fresh onions add cool spice to this simple parsley salad (pictured on page 63) from *Jeremiah Cooks* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2002) by Jeremiah Tower.

- 2 tbsp. finely chopped mint
- 1 large red onion, halved and thinly sliced lengthwise
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 cups lightly packed flat-leaf parsley leaves
- ¼ cup salt-packed capers, rinsed and drained
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tbsp. lemon zest
- Grilled country white bread, to serve

In a medium bowl, toss together mint, onion, and salt and pepper; let sit until onion softens, about 10 minutes. Add parsley, capers, oil, juice, and zest, and toss until evenly combined. Serve immediately with grilled bread.

Poached Trout With Onions and Fennel Seeds

SERVES 2-4

In this recipe, trout is poached in a court bouillon, a fragrant broth of white wine, fennel seeds, and lots of onions (pictured on page 63).

- 5 sprigs thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 large yellow onion, cut crosswise into ½"-thick slices, separated into rings
- 1 large red onion, cut crosswise into ½"-thick slices, separated into rings
- 1 medium carrot, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1 2-lb. whole trout, cleaned
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 cups white wine
- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp. fennel seeds
- 5 sprigs flat-leaf parsley

Heat oven to 350°. Place thyme, bay leaves, onions, and carrot in a 9" x 13" baking dish. Season inside of trout with salt and pepper, and place over onions; season with salt and pepper and set aside. Bring wine, oil, and fennel seeds to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over high heat; pour over trout and onions. Scatter parsley over top, and bake until trout is just cooked through and vegetables are soft, about 40 minutes.

Roasted Vidalia Onions With Herbed Bread Crumbs

SERVES 4-6

Sweet Vidalia onions, grown in and around the namesake Georgia city, turn even sweeter when roasted with a savory herbed bread crumb topping (pictured on page 50).

- 2 large Vidalia onions, cut crosswise into ½"-thick slices
- 4 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 tbsp. bread crumbs
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- 1 tsp. finely chopped oregano
- 1 tsp. finely chopped thyme
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

1 Heat oven to 450°. On a foil-lined baking sheet, coat onion slices in oil, keeping them as intact as possible; season with salt and pepper. Bake, turning once, until soft and lightly caramelized, about 15 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, stir together bread crumbs, butter, parsley, oregano, thyme, garlic, and salt and pepper in a small bowl; sprinkle evenly over onion slices. Continue baking until topping is golden brown, about 15 minutes more.

Six-Onion Pizza

MAKES FOUR 12" PIZZAS

This sweet and savory pizza (pic-

tured on page 52), adapted from a recipe by Michael Leviton, chef and co-owner of Area Four in Cambridge, Massachusetts, showcases the flavor of four kinds of onion.

For the dough:

- 1 tsp. honey
- 1 ¼-oz. package active dry yeast
- ¾ cup warm beer
- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 cups bread flour, plus more as needed
- 1 tsp. kosher salt

For the onion puree and compote:

- 5 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 12 sprigs thyme
- 2 large white onions, very thinly sliced lengthwise
- 1 bay leaf
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 8 oz. leeks, white part only, halved lengthwise, cut into ¼"-thick slices
- 8 oz. shallots, very thinly sliced lengthwise
- 8 oz. red onions, very thinly sliced lengthwise
- 8 oz. finely grated pecorino
- 5 scallions, very thinly sliced
- 1 bunch chives, thinly sliced

1 In a large bowl, stir together honey, yeast, and ¼ cup water, heated to 115°; let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Stir in beer and oil until smooth. Add flour and salt; stir with a wooden spoon until dough forms. Transfer to a lightly floured work surface and knead until smooth, about 8 minutes. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit in a warm spot until doubled in size, about 1½–2 hours.

2 Meanwhile, make the onion puree: Heat 2 tbsp. oil, thyme, white onions, bay leaf, and salt and pepper in a 12" skillet over medium-low heat, and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are very soft but not browned, about 30 minutes. Remove and discard thyme stems and bay leaf. Transfer onions to a food processor or blender and puree until smooth; set aside.

3 Make the onion compote: Heat 1 tbsp. oil in a 12" skillet over medium heat; add leeks, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until very soft but not browned, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside. Heat remaining oil in skillet, add shallots and red onions, and season with salt and pepper; cook, stirring

occasionally, until very tender and lightly browned, about 18 minutes. Transfer to bowl with leeks, and stir to combine; set aside.

4 Uncover dough and cut into quarters; shape each quarter into a smooth ball. Lightly flour dough balls and transfer to a floured 9" x 13" baking pan; cover with plastic wrap. Let sit in a warm spot until doubled in size, about 1½–2 hours. Heat oven to 500°.

5 Place 1 piece dough on a lightly floured work surface and flatten with your fingertips. Pick up dough circle and gently feed edges of dough between your thumbs and forefingers, letting the weight of the dough stretch edges until the circle of dough is 12" in diameter. Place dough circle on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, and working quickly, spread about 2 tbsp. onion puree over dough, leaving a ¾" border around edge; sprinkle evenly with about ¼ cup onion compote. Sprinkle one-quarter of the pecorino over onions, and transfer to oven. Bake until browned and crisp at the edges, about 12 minutes. Repeat with remaining dough balls, puree, compote, and

pecorino. Sprinkle each pizza with one-quarter each of the scallions and chives before serving.

Vermouth-Spiked Cocktail Onions

MAKES ABOUT 2½ CUPS

Vermouth adds sweet depth to these bar essentials (pictured on page 63), the key to a classic Gibson martini.

- 1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
- ⅛ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- 3 sprigs thyme
- 2 cups dry vermouth
- 1 cup white wine vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tbsp. kosher salt
- 10 oz. white pearl onions, peeled

Place peppercorns, nutmeg, and thyme in a 1-qt. sterilized glass jar; set aside. Bring vermouth, vinegar, sugar, salt, and 1/2 cup water to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over high heat, stirring until sugar and salt dissolve; add onions, and cook for 1 minute. Transfer onions and brine to jar and seal with lid; let cool to room temperature. Refrigerate at least 4 hours before using.