

A Taste of Charleston Sercy

A *sercy* is a small, unexpected gift given with no expectation of anything in return. It's one of my favorite Lowcountry traditions. The spelling and etymology are unknown and hotly debated, which makes it even more charming.

Benne Wafers are thin sesame seed cookies and a classic Charleston treat. "Benne" is the Bantu word for "sesame", a seed brought to the southern U.S. from West Africa during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Enslaved Africans introduced many ingredients to the region, including sesame seeds, sweet potatoes, and black-eyed peas—staples of southern cuisine.

Charleston Tea Garden is the only large-scale tea farm in the United States and produces the official tea of the White House.

Firefly Sweet Tea Vodka is my go-to for a refreshing John Daly—the cheeky cousin of the Arnold Palmer, made with sweet tea vodka and lemonade. Firefly was the first distillery in the U.S. to produce sweet tea vodka, and it remains my favorite.

Pecan Pralines are a Charleston staple. We "praline" everything—bacon, peaches, even bread. The original recipe was brought to New Orleans by French settlers and, as Chanda Nunez says, "evolved thanks to the culinary genius of African-American women."

Palmetto Moon is a nickname for our state flag, which features a palmetto tree and crescent on indigo blue. Its roots go back to a Revolutionary War flag first flown at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island. The crescent came from patriot guards' uniform badges, and the palmetto from the fort's softwood logs that withstood British cannon fire.

Palmetto Roses are handcrafted from palmetto fronds and often linked to Gullah culture along the South Carolina coast. These roses are traditionally given as symbols of love, protection, and good luck.

Charleston Coffee Exchange is a local coffee roaster—and home to one of my favorite spots for coffee and pastries.



Charleston is a city of beauty, history, and unforgettable food. It's also a place still reckoning with its past. Many of us are committed to learning from history and honoring the significant contributions of the African-American community—whose influence is deeply embedded in everything we call "southern," especially our food.

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