FT COMMUNITY

Local Experts Provide Tips for a Healthy, Happy Juneteenth



Traditional Juneteenth foods include black-eyed peas, collard greens and cornbread.



Hibiscus tea is among the red foods and beverages commonly associated with Juneteenth celebrations.

By: Terrance Turner, Forward Times Staff Writer

Juneteenth celebrates Black liberation. Falling during the same week as the start of summer, it's a day often marked with cookouts and barbecues; smoke rises from neighborhood grills as we prepare dishes that unite our incredible community. Traditionally, Juneteenth cuisine includes red foods like barbecue and watermelon, along with soulful sides such as greens, cornbread and black-eyed peas. But for the health-conscious — or those managing chronic conditions like diabetes or hypertension — is there a way to enjoy these traditional cultural staples while still maintaining healthy habits? We spoke with two experts who say the answer is yes.

Dr. Carla Ferrell is a dietitian and University of Houston graduate who went on to earn her master's degree from Texas Woman's University and a doctorate from Rutgers University. Now, through her private practice, Simply Healthy Living, she focuses largely on telehealth, aiming to meet patients where they are and help them make simple changes that support healthier living.

Chef Shonah P. Jefferson is Executive Chef and CEO of North/Southeast Houston Chefs for Seniors, an organization that helps senior citizens maintain their independence and improve their quality of life through customized meals. Her team of 12 chefs visits seniors' homes to prepare homemade meals using fresh ingredients. Jefferson also presents live cooking demonstrations. She explains her approach with an age-old saying: the chefs "give a man a fish" for a day, while her cooking demonstrations "teach a man to fish" and eat for a lifetime.

Speaking of cooking, what would Chef Jefferson prepare for a Juneteenth spread? Her answer includes barbecue served alongside classic sides like potato salad, greens and green beans.

"I'm probably kind of biased," she admits to Forward Times, "because my dad opened his first BBQ restaurant when I was two."

Biased, perhaps. But she's not wrong.

Barbecued meats are indeed a longtime staple of Juneteenth celebrations, from ribs and chicken to brisket and even spicy hot links, a uniquely Black contribution to barbecue culture, according to food historian Adrian Miller.

Traditionally, Juneteenth features red foods, which symbolize Black bloodshed and sacrifice: barbecue, watermelon, red velvet cake, strawberry soda and hibiscus tea. Also common are "prosperity foods," often served on New Year's Eve, including black-eyed peas (symbolizing wealth and good fortune), collard greens (symbolizing prosperity) and cornbread (representing gold).

These dishes can be challenging for those concerned about salt or sugar intake, but both experts agree that we can still enjoy these cultural classics without sacrificing our health in the process.

"I don't believe in completely cutting out things that are of cultural significance," Dr. Ferrell says.

She adds that watermelon is a good source of hydration during the hot summer months, while black-eyed peas can be heart-healthy, especially when prepared from fresh peas rather than canned varieties. She advocates using fresh greens, which is possible even in food deserts like Acres Homes. The Metallic Sunflower Foundation, located inside the Acres Homes Chamber of Commerce, operates a hydroponic garden that provides fresh produce to those in need.

Both Dr. Ferrell and Chef Jefferson recommend seasoning greens with turkey wings or turkey necks instead of ham hocks. More generally, they advise using garlic, onions and bell peppers in place of excess salt.

Both experts also suggest choosing leaner cuts of meat for the grill. Chef Jefferson notes that pork tenderloin is a leaner option that cooks much faster than ribs. She also advises making barbecue sauce at home rather than relying on store-bought brands that may be high in sugar.

"Use honey or molasses as natural sweeteners," she suggests.

Dr. Ferrell offers a similar tip for cornbread. Homemade mixes can help limit sodium and added sugars. Chef Jefferson says her sister, a baker, began adding psyllium fiber to flour.

"Fiber slows down glucose," she says. "For diabetics, it's important to balance carbs with protein and fiber."

It's also important to get creative.

Some of Chef Jefferson's suggestions — avoiding carcinogenic charcoal grills, using fruit purees as sweeteners for sauces or swapping sweet potatoes into potato salad — may seem unconventional. But she already has a response for those who protest, "It's not how Big Mama made it!"

First of all, she contends, when Grandma and Great-Grandma prepared these meals, "their sourcing was different," meaning they often relied on vegetables from their own gardens rather than produce purchased at the grocery store.

Besides, she adds, "you have to make new traditions, for the sake of your health — and your family's health."

Some of those traditions might be physical.

Dr. Ferrell recalls one Juneteenth celebration where, after the meal, her family played kickball at a nearby park, helping them avoid being sedentary and reducing the risks associated with weight gain, obesity and heart disease.

Of course, health isn't just physical. Mental and emotional health matter, too. For those hosting large holiday gatherings or cooking for family and friends, the stress can be overwhelming. It can be especially challenging when relatives have unique dietary needs or restrictions.

So we asked both experts how to best manage holiday stress.

Dr. Ferrell advises focusing less on perfection and avoiding the temptation to do everything yourself.

"It's OK to allow others to help," she says.

Chef Jefferson agrees and encourages asking for help — or even taking pressure off the host by organizing a potluck.

Ultimately, both women agree that it's important to enjoy the holiday without obsessing over details or diets.

"It's OK to be a little more lenient," Dr. Ferrell says.

"It's just one day," Chef Jefferson concurs, noting that it's perfectly fine to indulge as long as one day's feast doesn't become three days of leftovers.

People often use the holidays as an excuse to overeat, Jefferson adds, and portion control remains important.

"Enjoy the holidays," she says, "but don't be a glutton about it."

After all, Juneteenth isn't just about what's on your plate.

"It's about the fellowship and community."

CLASSIFIEDS

HUB SUBCONTRACTING OPPORTUNITY

Specialized Assessment & Consulting is bidding on Project 26-05-01 for Special Education Services for the Houston Independent School District. We are looking for possible HUB subcontractors to provide the following services: School Psychologists, Educational Diagnosticians, Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Licensed Professional Counselors. If you are interested in the opportunity, please contact our office at (346) 240-1000 and speak with our Talent Acquisition Specialist.

LEGAL NOTICE

Application has been made with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission for a Wine and Malt Beverage Retailer's Permit (BG) by Rebekah Amare, d/b/a WONDERLIKEWANDER INC. (d/b/a KEFITA COFFEE), to be located at 2506 La Branch St., Houston, Harris County, Texas. Officers of said corporation, Rebekah Amare and Addis Debebe, are owners of WONDERLIKEWANDER INC. (d/b/a KEFITA COFFEE).

HELP WANTED

Sr. Dsgn Engr

Dsgn of commercial sites, including site layout & grading, earthwork anlys, storm sewer/storm water design & ADA compliance. Perform dsgn & calculations for detention ponds & channel improvements. Dvlp construction plans & participate in client meetings. Carry out bridge inspection in field & analyze the bridge loading calculations. Obtain the reqd permits from different depts for the prjct. Study & analyze the hydrology & hydraulic design of the commercial sites as well as conduct Hydraulic & Hydrological analysis. Reqs a mstr's in civil engring. Pls mail rsmes to SEK Engineering Corp. 701 Shepherd Dr., Suite 200A, Houston, Tx, 77007.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Enterprise Solutions – HGACBuy/Cooperative Purchasing Program – Modular Buildings, Shelters, and Structures – MB11-26

H-GAC is soliciting responses for selecting qualified manufacturers, distributors, installers and service providers of Modular Buildings, Shelters, and Structures, and to make these types of products and services available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts.

To view the solicitation documents, visit https://www.h-gac.com/procurement or ESBD (txsmartbuy.com).

Response Deadline: July 30, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Community & Environmental – Livable Centers Study: Park Row – RFP-TRN26-03

H-GAC is seeking qualified contractor services to conduct a study and develop a plan to further the goals of the Livable Centers program in Harris County Precinct 4 (referred to as "sponsor" or "local sponsor" in this document). The Contractor will develop a plan that addresses the application of the Livable Centers program goals in the specified study area. Since this project requires a range of research, public engagement, transportation, and planning expertise, a team of specialized firms is permitted.

To view the solicitation documents, visit https://www.h-gac.com/procurement or ESBD (txsmartbuy.com).

Response Deadline: July 23, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT

LEGAL NOTICE

The Houston Independent School District Purchasing Services Department located at 4400 West 18th Street, Houston, TX 77092 is soliciting Request for Proposals (RFP) via the District's electronic bidding portal. Proposers may login to view specifications and submit their responses at the following link https://houstonisd.ionwave.net/Login.aspx until 11:00 a.m. (CST) Monday, June 30, 2026, for the following solicitation:

RFP 26-05-35 Kitchen Manager's HACCP Logbooks

Pre-proposal conferences via Microsoft Teams will be held in conjunction with this RFP. Information regarding dates, times, and instructions to receive a link to join the meeting can be located within the electronic bidding portal under the "Event Details" tab specific to this solicitation.

LEGAL NOTICE

FORM 854 FILE Number: A1359313. ADW Communications is proposing to dismantle and re-construct a 475' self-support Tower located at 122 Preston St., Houston, Harris County, Texas 77002 (29 45 58.1, -95 22 10.77). The tower will be lit by a Medium-Dual Intensity System. Interested persons may review the pending application by going to www.fcc.gov/asr/applications and entering the Form 854 File Number listed above. Interested persons may raise environmental concerns about the proposed structure by filing a Request for Environmental Review with the Federal Communications Commission. The Federal Communications Commission strongly encourages interested parties to file Requests for Environmental Review online. Instructions for making such filings can be found at www.fcc.gov/asr/environmentalrequest Interested parties that would prefer to file a Request for Environmental Review by paper copy can submit to: FCC Requests for Environmental Review, Attn: Ramon Williams, 445 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20554

SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

For information on doing business with San Jac, go to www.sanjac.edu/purchasing to view upcoming and previously awarded solicitations, and register in the College's eBidding system (IonWave) to receive notice of future bid opportunities.

HUB SUPPLIER OPPORTUNITY

Continental Press is bidding on project 26-04-46, Instructional Curriculum Materials, Supplies, and Digital Resources, for the Houston Independent School District. We are seeking potential HUB suppliers to provide line art illustrations for K–12 educational materials. If interested, please contact mbergonzi@continentalpress.com by June 22, 2026.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Pinwheel Therapy is bidding on Project 26-05-01 Addendum 1 - Special Education Services - Independent Education Evaluations (IEE), Evaluation Services, Special Education Service Providers; and Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and Behavior Therapist Services - for the Houston Independent School District. We are looking for possible HUB subcontractors to provide the following services: Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Educational Diagnostics and Behavior services. If you are interested in this opportunity, please contact Morgan Correa - morgan.correa@unisontherapyservices.com / (719) 371-2340 -by July 15th, 2026.