

# New Mexico

DECEMBER 2024



## HOLIDAY FLAVORS

**HOT SPOT**  
JEMEZ SPRINGS  
OVERFLOWS WITH  
HISTORY AND  
FRESH ENERGY

Savor the season with festive food traditions, gifts for your favorite gourmand, and stylish celebrations!

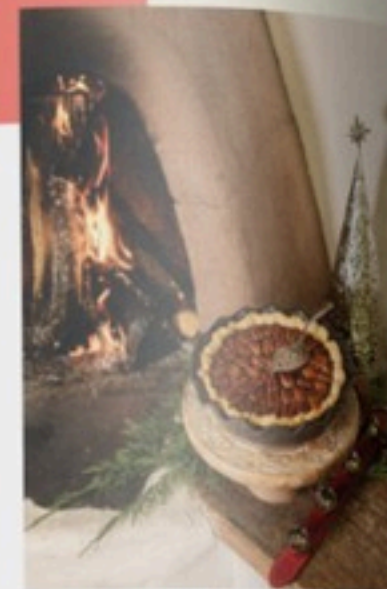
Clockwise from left: Posole, pecan pie, and a chile wreath are seasonal staples at Cheryl Alters Jamison's home.



## 1980,

brought me to northern New Mexico, where I was lucky to find my love of skiing with an arts-related job in Santa Fe. But I knew nada about the holiday season in this snowy mountain town or how the traditions associated with it would change my life. I know a little something about New Mexican food. As a teenager in a small Illinois town in the 1960s, I had a chance encounter with a cookbook that included then Congressman Manuel Lujan's recipe for green chile chicken enchilada casserole. The dream of owning a restaurant in Santa Fe helped me find my way here. But it was discovering local, home-cooked Christmas specialties that eventually sparked a new career. Call it my own personal Christmas miracle.

Not long after my arrival, I found myself bundled up on a crisp winter night, wandering Santa Fe's old Agua Fria neighborhood and participating in a pageant called Las Posadas. I was only vaguely aware of the unique holiday tradition that reenacts the Holy Family's search for lodging before the birth of Christ. A group of neighbors and



friends trailed behind actors portraying Mary and Joseph. After rejection at several households, we came to a home where everyone was invited in.

I remember the lilting guitar music accompanied by strong voices singing carols and alabados (Spanish hymns preserved by the Penitente brotherhood of northern New Mexico). Having been somewhat bored with the Swedish-meats-dominated holiday cuisine of my childhood, I was enchanted by the bounty laid out before us: vats of posole, pots of red chile, and tamales that looked like little holiday gifts wrapped in corn husks. I took my first taste of bizcochitos, flaky from lard, scented with anise and cinnamon, and served with steaming cider. The welcome for

our entire entourage was as warm as the night was chilly.

My friend Lenore Tapia, whose family goes back generations in northern New Mexico, was a high schooler when she invited me to be a part of Las Posadas. She still remembers her own joy and wonder at the tradition. "That was such a special time for recognizing the real meaning of Christmas, with our church parish and other friends and family," she says. "And that food. While we eat some of those dishes during the year, they seem at their best and most magical when shared at the holidays."

A few nights later, I took a ramble up Canyon Road to see it aglow in the soft flickering light of thousands of farolitos (the paper-bag lanterns that folks in southern New Mexico call luminarias). The annual stroll led to another feast in a different home, where warming piñon fires blazed with their enchanting scent. Those back-to-back encounters convinced me that there was no place more special for Christmas anywhere in the world.

The unique holiday experiences kept coming, as I observed the local blending of traditional Native and Christian beliefs. Christmas Eve at ancient Taos Pueblo filled me with awe, with its towering oote (local pine) bonfires, the shooting of rifles, and the sacred procession between San Geronimo church and the plaza, led by dancers and a



"While we eat some of those dishes during the year, they seem at their best and most magical when shared at the holidays." —LENORE TAPIA

statue of the Virgin Mary. Here, the singing was in Tiwa, Spanish, and English. Another year, I spent Christmas Day at Acoma Pueblo's Sky City, high on a mesa top where the elaborate dances filled the San Esteban del Rey Mission Church. Afterward, my family and I were invited into the Suazo home, where an endless line of acquaintances, new and old, savored matriarch "Tweety" Suazo's posole and prune pies in shifts at the dining room table.

Eventually, *New Mexico Magazine* asked me to write about Santa Fe's Delgado family: former mayor Larry; his wife, Angie; and their children, Cynthia and David, and their spouses. Their holiday celebration includes whipping up hundreds of pork tamales together, along with vats of posole and chile con queso and scores of bizcochitos. I loved the family camaraderie involved in the preparation of

these dishes and vowed to myself that I would start a similar tradition. My stepdaughter, Heather; her husband, JB; and my grandchildren, Riley, Bronwyn, and Chloe, now help me carry on our family's legacy of holiday foods.

Cynthia reminisces about her mom "watching the grocery ads for when pork would go on sale, then gathering us to make the traditional foods, including my dad grinding all of the corn for the tamale masa." The Delgado tamalada was the first time I had experienced the home grinding of nixtamalized corn (treated with the mineral lime and hulled to form a dough) for fresh masa. Soon I went out and bought the same kind of hand grinder from Sears that Larry had used that day so I could

From top: Pair bizcochitos and hot cocoa for a winter warmer. Cheryl Alters Jamison in her kitchen.







# PECAN PIE

Serves 8

## INGREDIENTS:

### FLAKY SINGLE PIE CRUST

- 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut in small cubes, well chilled
- 6 tablespoons lard, well chilled
- 4 to 6 tablespoons ice water

### FILLING

- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons light corn syrup
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- 4 tablespoons (¼ cup) unsalted butter
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons bourbon
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons whole milk
- 2 cups pecan pieces Pecan halves, about 1 cup

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Grease a 9- to 10-inch deep-dish pie pan. Prepare pie crust. In a food processor, pulse together flour and salt, then scatter butter over it and quickly pulse several times just to submerge butter in flour. Scoop lard into small spoonfuls and scatter them over flour-butter mixture; pulse again quickly several more times until it disappears into flour too. Sprinkle 4 tablespoons of water over mixture and pulse again quickly, just until water disappears.
2. Dump mixture into a large bowl or onto a pastry board. Lightly rub dough with your fingers. Add more water a tablespoon at a time as you rub. When dough holds together if compacted with your fingers, stop. It's ready. Pat dough into a disk about 1 inch thick. Wrap dough in plastic and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.
3. On a floured board or counter, use a rolling pin to roll out dough into a thin round about 2 inches larger than pie pan. Lift crust carefully and arrange it in pie pan, avoiding stretching it. Crimp edge decoratively, then refrigerate crust for at least 15 additional minutes.
4. Preheat oven to 375° F. Form a drip pan for the oven's lower shelf, turning up the sides of a large sheet of aluminum foil.
5. Prepare filling, first combining brown sugar, corn syrup, molasses, butter, and salt in a large, heavy saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat and leave at a rolling boil for 30 seconds (give it 1 minute if cooking above 5,000 feet altitude), stirring constantly. Remove pan from heat and stir in bourbon and vanilla extract. Let mixture cool to warm room temperature, stirring occasionally.
6. Whisk eggs with milk, then whisk into cooled syrup mixture. Stir in pecan pieces. Pour filling into pie crust. Top entire surface with a neat layer of pecan halves, in concentric circles if you like.
7. Bake pie for 10 minutes, then reduce oven temperature to 350° F. Cook for 30 to 35 additional minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean and crust is lightly browned. Let pie sit for at least 2 hours before slicing into wedges and serving.