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Hitting the mother lode: on one of the busiest dining days of the year, chefs honor moms with inventive dishes[Nation's Restaurant News](#), [April 19, 2004](#) by [Paul Frumkin](#)

Ask a chef to map the trajectory of his career, and he probably will point to his family kitchen as the launching pad, where most of his early culinary memories were shaped as he watched his mother prepare food for the household.

Then ask the same chef to fast-forward to the present day and identify one of the traditionally busier days at his restaurant. He likely will name Mother's Day, an American holiday originally designed to express gratitude to moms for spending the other 364 days a year in the kitchen.

However you slice it, mothers tend to loom large in the restaurant business. According to the National Restaurant Association, in fact, the second Sunday in May--the official date for Mother's Day--is the most popular holiday for dining out in the country, ranking ahead of even Valentine's Day. In terms of important dining-out occasions Mother's Day is surpassed only by birthdays.

Some 38 percent of all Americans celebrate Mother's Day by going out to a restaurant, the NRA says, compared with 32 percent who dine out on Valentine's Day. As would be expected, Mother's Day tends to be a family-oriented holiday as well. Forty-three percent of adults in households of three or more individuals take their moms out to restaurants on Mother's Day, compared with 24 percent of those individuals who live by themselves.

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In addition, the NRA indicates that families with children younger than 18 are more likely to visit a restaurant than those without them.

It is not surprising that some chefs develop special dishes for the Mother's Day menu by reaching back for inspiration into their own family traditions. Suzanne Tobias, executive pastry chef at New York's Cite restaurant, grew up on the New Jersey shore surrounded by farm stands and fresh produce markets and says she plans to offer a variation on her mother's peach tart as a Mother's Day dessert.

Tobias first prepares and prebakes a pate sucee shell, spreading raspberry jam on the bottom. Next she pipes on about half an inch of almond cream made from almond flour, butter, sugar, eggs and Meyer's rum. After that she arranges in concentric circles peach quarters that have been dipped in melted butter. She sprinkles them with cinnamon and places the tart in the oven until it browns on top.

Tobias also plans to offer a variation on her grandmother's bread pudding that includes challah bread. At the end of the meal all women dining at Cite on Mother's Day are presented with a small box filled with four jumbo long-stemmed strawberries that have been dipped in bittersweet chocolate. "They've been very popular," Tobias says.

At The Post House, a New York restaurant, which like Cite, is operated by the Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group, executive chef Hossein Khanloo also gives out chocolate presents. For Mother's Day all ladies are presented with a small chocolate box filled with pralines following the meal.

Khanloo also is planning to add a special seafood dish to the steakhouse's menu for the occasion. While halibut or cod remain a possibility, he says he is leaning toward serving red snapper with a risotto.

He says the 140-seat restaurant expects to serve about 300 diners on Mother's Day. "Mother's Day and Valentine's Day are both very busy for the restaurant," he adds.

Some restaurants do so much traffic on Mother's Day that they find the best way to handle the volume is to offer a buffet. Potowmack Landing, a 400-seat restaurant run by Guest Services Inc. on Daingerfield Island in Alexandria, Va., has served as many as 2,000 people on Mother's Day, according to executive chef Duane Keller. While the operation's floor-to-ceiling windows offer views of nearby Washington, D.C., Keller says, he and his staff have created a \$29.95 buffet menu that helps to attract a steady stream of diners.

Since Potowmack Landing specializes in American seafood dishes, the Mother's Day buffet menu showcases a number of fish selections. Buffet items include salmon and wild mushroom crepes; poached eggs with crab hollandaise and farm tomatoes; poached whole salmon; blackened Chesapeake rockfish with tomato-and-corn relish; paella; shrimp and bay scallop Alfredo with gemelli pasta and sun-dried tomatoes; and crab-stuffed flounder in dill sauce.

In addition, the buffet has an omelet station with 20 different ingredients as well as a station preparing Belgian waffles. Potowmack Landing's food has received strong reviews by the local press, Keller says, adding, "We also give great value."

Richard Vellante, executive chef and senior vice president of food operations at Legal Sea Foods, says Mother's Day is a "very busy day" for the Boston-based seafood chain. In particular, the 29-unit chain's Charles Square location in Boston tends to attract crowds throughout the day with its brunch menu, he says.

The restaurant offers a range of brunch dishes at reasonable prices, Vellante continues. For example, guests can start with a fresh fruit parfait, which features such produce as mango, raspberries and apples, layered with yogurt and topped with house-made granola, for \$8.95. The restaurant also offers several varieties of French toast for \$9.95, including French toast served with almonds and apples, as well as French toast made from cherry chocolate bread.

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