



A Question of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

Grated carrots in a savory quiche

The true meaning of the expression "the carrot on the stick" must be lost on a lot of people. Rather than representing two distinct alternatives, it must seem redundant; the only difference being one of degree between two instruments of torture.

High in nutrition, available year-round and low in price (12 cents a pound at a local supermarket recently), the carrot is a victim of its own best features. Generations of mothers have urged their children to eat their carrots because, "They're good for you."

Since it is a rule of human nature that resistance increases in direct proportion to urgings in matters of this type, generations of children have reached adulthood with an anti-carrot bias.

This is unfortunate because carrots are good for you. Their deep orange color is due to a rich supply of carotene, which is converted to Vitamin A by the liver. They are relatively low in calories; an average carrot has about 20 calories. A less scientific but more interesting claim was made for the carrot by the ancient Greeks, who considered it to be an aphrodisiac. Perhaps this endorsement might succeed in making converts of those who never succumbed to mothers' urgings.

IN ADDITION to being a victim of its own good reputation, carrots have suffered at the hands of food processors. Canned carrots, like most other canned vegetables, lose much of their nutritional value, texture, color and flavor. With watered-down flavor and a mushy texture, there is little to recommend them. Although many vegetables survive freezing with little loss of texture, this is, unfortunately, not true of carrots. Freezing damages the tissue of

carrots; the thawed ice crystals leave gaps between the fibers, giving the cooked carrot a spongy texture again reinforcing the prejudices of those with a bias against carrots.

This is unfortunate because carrots have a deliciously sweet flavor and crisp texture when properly prepared. This preparation starts with careful selection. Carrots should be, of course, as fresh as possible and slender. Large, old carrots tend to be woody in texture. Carrots fresh from the garden are ideal. You might, in fact, want to do nothing more than wash and eat these out of hand. If, however, your yield is large enough, you might want a greater variety of presentations.

The following recipes offer this variety; carrots served raw in a refreshing salad, grated into a savory quiche that makes a substantial first course or vegetarian entrée, or baked with an unusual sauce that would particularly complement fish, but would make an interesting side dish for non-sauced meat.

To preserve all that the carrot has to offer, just keep in mind a few reminders. Much of the nutrition in a carrot lies directly under the skin and is lost when peeled. Whenever possible, scrub carrots instead. If being served raw, carrots should be prepared as close to serving time as possible since exposure to the air results in discoloration and loss of nutrients. If cooked, as little water as possible should be used — perhaps one-quarter inch in the bottom of a pan (enough to create steam and prevent sticking), and the carrots should be cooked until just crisp-tender.

Shredded carrots need only be cooked 4 to 5 minutes; sliced carrots, 10 to 12 minutes; and whole carrots, 15 to 20 minutes.

FRESH CARROT-PEA SALAD
4 medium carrots, scrubbed
1 cup frozen peas
2 tsp. sunflower seeds
1 ripe avocado, peeled and sliced
Creamy herb dressing

Coarsely grate carrots. Divide evenly among four individual salad bowls. Place peas in a colander. Run hot tap water over the peas until just thawed. Shake gently to remove excess water. Divide the peas among the salad bowls, atop the grated carrots. Sprinkle with the sunflower seeds. Top with the avocado slices. Spoon dressing onto salads. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

CREAMY HERB DRESSING
½ cup buttermilk
½ cup mayonnaise
¼ tsp. salt
2 tsp. minced parsley
2 tsp. minced onion
1 small clove garlic, crushed
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Stir all ingredients together in a medium bowl. Chill at least 30 minutes before serving.

CARROT QUICHE
1 unbaked 9-inch pie shell
3 egg yolks (divided)
Dijon mustard
4 to 5 carrots, shredded
4 tsp. melted butter
Pinch of marjoram or oregano
2 tsp. chopped parsley
1 tsp. lemon juice
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 eggs
½ cup heavy cream
½ cup plain yogurt

Place a piece of foil in the pastry

shell and weigh it down with raw rice or dried beans. Bake for 15 minutes in a 425-degree oven. Remove the foil and the beans or rice. Brush the shell with one of the egg yolks and return it to the oven for 2 minutes to set the yolk. Brush the bottom of the baked pastry shell with a thick coating of Dijon mustard.

Blanch the shredded carrots for 1 minute in boiling salted water. Drain thoroughly. Mix with the melted butter, salt, marjoram or oregano, parsley and lemon juice. Spread mixture over the bottom of the pastry shell. Top with the Parmesan cheese.

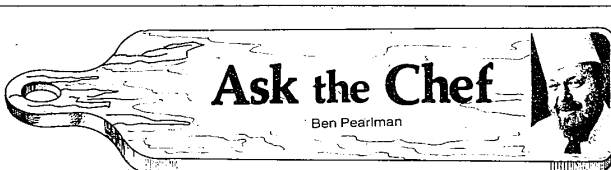
Beat together the two eggs, the remaining two egg yolks, heavy cream and yogurt. Pour over the carrot mixture. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until just set. 4 to 6 servings

COMPANY CARROTS

2½ lbs. carrots
½ cup mayonnaise
1 tsp. minced onion
1 tsp. horseradish
Salt and pepper to taste
¼ cup finely-chopped crushed saltine crackers
Chopped parsley
Paprika

Cook carrots in a small amount of boiling salted water until fork-tender. Reserve ½ cup cooking liquid. Cut carrots lengthwise into narrow strips. Arrange in a 9-inch square baking dish. Set aside.

Combine reserved cooking liquid with the mayonnaise, onion, horseradish, salt and pepper. Pour over the carrots. Sprinkle cracker crumbs on top. Sprinkle with parsley and paprika. Bake in a preheated 375 degree oven for 20 minutes. Makes 8 servings.



Ask the Chef

Ben Pearlman

How about a vegetarian sandwich?

Dear Chef:

I am a vegetarian and love eating this way. However, my menus lack variety. I would especially like some suggestions for sandwiches. Can you help me?

Yes, here is an open-faced sandwich, a prize winner, called the Garden Sandwich: Yield: Six sandwiches
2 10-oz. packages spinach, frozen, thawed
½ cup green onions, minced
1 tsp. green pepper, minced
1 tsp. mayonnaise
1 tsp. lemon juice

½ tsp. salt
12 pumpernickel bread slices, lightly toasted and buttered
6 1-oz. slices of Provelone cheese
6 1-oz. slices of Swiss cheese
6 ½-oz. slices of Cheddar cheese
2 tsp. roasted sunflower seeds

¾ cup mushrooms, raw or sautéed
1 cup alfalfa sprouts

Method: Squeeze excess moisture from spinach in a large mixing bowl. Combine the first six ingredients, toss and mix. On six bread slices, place one slice of each cheese. On the other six slices, spread about ½ cup spinach mixture. Sprinkle with 1 tsp. sunflower seeds, 1 tsp. mushrooms, and 2 tsp. alfalfa sprouts. Arrange open-faced on a serving plate. Garnish with cherry tomatoes.

Dear Chef:

I can solve a "too thick sauce" problem — add a little liquid, but what do I do with a "too thin sauce"?

The remedy is to use a flour-fat roux called beurre manie. A beurre manie is a paste of half flour, half butter blend-

ed together. Add a little at a time and blend with a wire whisk to proper thickness. Oh, yes, make sure your sauce is hot — not boiling.

Dear Chef:

Do you have a recipe for Teriyaki sauce?

Buy a good teriyaki sauce at your local food store as a base. Add the following: ¾ cup Teriyaki sauce
¾ cup soy sauce
3 cloves garlic, crushed
1 green onion, diced
1 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. brown sugar
2 tsp. sherry wine

Now marinate a few steaks for three or four hours, or even overnight.

Dear Chef:

Aren't Roquefort and Bleu Cheese

the same? What kinds of milk are they made of?

No, they are not the same, but similar. As to your second question, in accordance with a French law which dates back to 1866, cheese called Roquefort has to be made in the area of Roquefort, France, and must be made from sheep's milk.

Cheese of the same type but made elsewhere in France is called blue cheese. In other countries, including the United States, similar cheese may be labeled bleu and is usually made from cow's milk. The mold powder used in these cheeses is made by inoculating bread with penicillium Roqueforti. The bread, after a few weeks, is ground and sprinkled over the cheese. The flavor of the cheese is attributed not only to the blue-green mold, but also to heavy salting and fatty milk acids.

Wedding cakes are traditionally romantic

Everyone, young and old, seems to experience the same excitement at a wedding reception, especially when it's time to cut the cake.

Wedding cakes have a long history. The Romans broke salty meal cakes over the bride's head at the end of the ceremony and the crumbs were gathered by guests as good luck tokens. In medieval England, guests brought small cakes and piled them in the center of the table. The bride and groom then attempted to kiss over them without knocking the whole pile over.

A traveling baker from France conceived the idea of icing all the small cakes together into one large cake, to make this easier, and the modern tiered cake was born.

Whether your wedding is large or small, the cake is a focal point. According to Frances Hopkins, special order manager at Sanders, the white frosted, tiered cake is still the favorite, with the bride choosing from round, square or heart shapes.

While traditions reign, many new offerings include water fountain cakes, messages decorated on sheet cakes or pictures painted of the bride and groom. Toppers include tiny figurines,

a bride and groom, or wedding bells. Prices and time requirements vary from baker to baker, so it's wise to shop around.

Some will even give cutting instructions. Hand-over-hand (an old tradition

to assure happiness), they cut from the bottom layer, feeding each other first, and their parents next.

At a tea or cocktail reception, cutting time comes an hour after the receiving line; at a dinner, just before

dessert. The band or a friend signals, attendants gather and guests follow.

And, of course, the top layer is saved for the first anniversary. It should be wrapped carefully in heavy freezer paper and taped securely.

Making most of microwave

Microwave ovens can be great time- and energy-savers for busy cooks. Improvements in recent years include temperature probes that cook food by temperature instead of time; defrost, simmer, and hold cycles; and even microwave ovens that can be installed over the range in place of the vent hood.

But many people still rely on their microwave ovens only for occasional baked potatoes or reheated leftovers. With a little advance planning and the use of built-in or accessory shelves, entire meals can be prepared in the microwave oven, in less time and with less clean-up than in the conventional oven.

Home economist Diana Hansen suggests that the easiest menus include

foods that need the same cooking time. Foods that cook at different rates should be added at different times. Generally, meat or larger amounts of food should be placed on the right side of the oven when cooking complete meals.

A quick microwave lunch could include a sandwich or hot dog and soup in its serving bowl heated at the same time. Hamburgs and baked beans can also share a microwave oven.

NEXT TIME you bake potatoes, Ms. Hansen suggests baking a meatloaf in the microwave oven also. Chicken or fish can be cooked in microwave at the same time as the vegetables for dinner. And since baked apples are a natural for the microwave oven, include them

next time you cook a pre-cooked ham. Don't forget breakfast. A hot, filling breakfast is only minutes away when you microwave scrambled eggs and bacon at the same time. Or try hot cereal and cocoa — a warm way to start the day without a lot of dishes to clean up.

To plan meals that cook well in microwave ovens, Ms. Hansen says you should keep in mind what doesn't cook efficiently or satisfactorily with microwave energy.

FOODS REQUIRING a large quantity of boiling water, such as spaghetti or rice, cook more efficiently on the range top. Casseroles to be heated in a microwave should be made with pre-cooked rice or pasta.

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