

Folklore rates onions as medical cure-all

When the Biblical writer wanted to graphically display the ingratitude of the Jews who had been led out of captivity in Egypt, he related that they cried out against God and longed for the onions in Egypt.

An odd culinary recommendation, the reference to onions is a tribute to their universal appeal.

It is significant that the food the wanderers longed for was one with little nutritional value to recommend it. The longing was simply for a sensual indulgence.

I wish I could highly recommend onions for the vitamins and minerals they contain, but this would belie the results of nutritional analysis.

Mature onions contain only small amounts of iron and vitamins A and C. The best we can do is to ignore the dismal scientific findings and turn instead to the rich field of folk lore and folk medicines, which often contain great deal of truth, unexplainable in scientific terms.

Historically, onions have been credited with the ability to absorb germs (at least in effect — even before the germ theory was accepted).

In some European countries, sliced onions were placed throughout the house if any sort of an epidemic was feared. The onions were replaced twice a day and the contaminated slices burned.

SLICED ONIONS were frequently



A Of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

bound to the chest of anyone suffering from a respiratory infection. This poultice was thought to draw the infection out of the body.

A common practice among Italians was to line the bottoms of a pair of wool socks with onions. Victims of fevers wore these socks to bed and, again, the onions acted to draw the fever out of the body. It was theorized

that the heat of the fever would cook the onions rather than the patient.

Onions have also traditionally been taken internally to relieve various symptoms. They often were simmered with other vegetables or herbs to create potent elixirs.

One cold remedy, for example, was an infusion of cayenne pepper and onion. The question of whether the treatment or the disease was worse apparently did not originate with modern medical techniques.

Onions have been used, at one time or another, to treat virtually all common ailments — from bee stings to burns and baldness. Eating an onion a day has even been claimed as one of the secrets of a group of Bulgarian villagers, many of whom lead active lives past 100 years of age.

IF YOU NEED any inspiration for a variety of presentations for your daily onion, the following recipes should provide it.

If you prefer your onion for breakfast, try the Hot Onion Omelet with Vinegar. The vinegar adds an unusual, piquant taste which seems to bring out the sweet flavor of the golden onions.

At lunch or dinner, Greek Salad makes a delicious addition to almost any menu. The combination of onions with vitamin C-rich sweet peppers and tomatoes should ward off any winter infections.

The final recipe, Spaghetti e cipolle, is simply an onion-lover's delight. The harshness of red onions is mellowed with slow cooking and then blends perfectly with ripe tomatoes, red wine and the traditional spaghetti herbs — certainly a culinary advance over cooking the onions in wool socks.

HOT ONION OMELET WITH VINEGAR

3 large sweet onions (about 12 oz.),
halved and finely sliced
¼ cup butter
3 eggs
Salt, pepper
1 tbsp. wine vinegar

Choose a relatively small, heavy pan in which to cook the onions so as to have a thick layer of onions scattered loosely over a large surface. Even with the tiniest of flames, they color too rapidly, their moisture being immediately evaporated. Cook them for at least ½ hour in 2 tbsp. butter over very low flame, stirring occasionally. The onions should be yellowed and very soft but not browned.

Beat the eggs lightly with the seasonings, stir in the onions and prepare the omelet (beat pan, pour in the mixture when the butter stops foaming, stir a couple of times, lift the edges to let the liquid run beneath, toss, and a couple of seconds later, slip it onto a warm plate. It should be just done). Add a tbsp. of butter to the pan, return to the heat, and, when the butter has stopped foaming and starts to turn brown, pour it over the omelet. Add the vinegar to the pan, swirl it around, and drizzle it over the omelet.

GREEK SALAD

6 small fresh sweet green peppers
4 small fresh sweet red peppers
6 medium-size firm ripe tomatoes
4 medium-size Bermuda onions
¼ cup pure olive oil
2 tbsp. tarragon vinegar
2 tsp. granulated sugar
1 tsp. dry mustard
Salt
Freshly cracked white pepper

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Chill a salad bowl in the refrigerator. Wrap the green and red peppers individually in aluminum foil, and bake until just soft. Remove the foil, cut them into eighths, and remove all the seeds. Core and skin tomatoes and cut them into slices ½ inch thick. Cut the Bermuda onions into thin rings and separate them. Warm the olive oil in a

saute pan over low heat. Add the peppers, tomatoes and onions, and simmer gently 5 to 6 minutes. In a small bowl, mix the vinegar, lemon juice, sugar, dry mustard and a little salt and pepper, and stir the mixture into the salad. Chill the salad thoroughly. Serve it in the chilled salad bowl. Makes 4 servings.

SPAGHETTI E CIPOLLE (Spaghetti and Onions)

2½ lbs. red onions
¼ cup butter
2 large bay leaves
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. paprika
½ tsp. salt, and more to taste
1 cup good dry red wine
¼ tsp. thyme
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
¼ tsp. dried basil, crushed
¼ tsp. dried oregano, crushed
1 tsp. chopped fresh sage, or ½ tsp. dried
2 cups peeled, chopped tomatoes (with liquid)
¼ cup brandy
1 tsp. lemon juice
2 tsp. leonville wine vinegar
fresh-ground black pepper to taste
1½ to 1½ lbs. thin spaghetti

Peel the onions, halve them, and slice them rather thickly. Melt the butter in a large pot and add the bay leaves and the garlic and cook them stirring constantly, for about 1 minute. Add the sliced onions and saute them over fairly high heat, stirring almost constantly, for at least 30 minutes. The onions should be evenly light brown in color. Add the paprika and the salt and stir for another few minutes. Add the wine, herbs, tomatoes, brandy, lemon juice, vinegar and pepper. Lower the heat and simmer the sauce, stirring occasionally, for 45 minutes to 1 hour. It should be thick but not pasty.

Taste the sauce and correct the seasoning if necessary.

Boil the spaghetti in 6 or 7 quarts of salted water until it is just al dente, and drain it immediately. Pour the hot sauce over the spaghetti, toss them together quickly, and serve. Serves 6 to 8.



Byrd's Kitchen

by Vivian Byrd

Friends said farewells with a lavish banquet

The departure of a friend, whether to a new job, different neighborhood or a move out of state, is an event frequently marked by the sharing of a goody lunch or dinner.

A recent send-off, with a minimum of planning, turned into a banquet. One woman, part of a group that had worked together for some time, was moving on to a new involvement with her family in a business she and her husband had started.

To mark the event, everyone arrived at an early-evening get-together carrying food. There were four kinds of cheese, artichokes filled with an herb mayonnaise, crab quiche tarts, salmon savori (a piquant mixture of salmon, sour cream and dill) a platter of fresh fruit including pineapple, pomegranate, kiwi fruit, pears and apples, accompanied by a curried cheese dip, homemade peanut brittle, boxes of toffee candy, fresh cider and doughnuts, and fresh, homemade chocolate eclairs.

Someone even remembered to bring a red and white checked table cloth, which we promptly decided to spread on the carpet and proceed to picnic lavishly on the living room floor.

As I mentioned before, it was a banquet.

For any of you who might have a banquet in the future, here are two of the recipes — the Curried Cheese dip and the Crab Quiche Tarts.

CURRIED CHEESE DIP

1 to 1½ ounces fresh coconut cut in one-inch pieces or, ½ cup flaked coconut
1 pkg. (8 ounces) cream cheese, cubed
3 tbsp. raisins or currants
2 tbsp. salted peanuts
2 tbsp. milk (more, if needed)
¼ to ½ tsp. curry powder
Fresh fruit

Shred the coconut with the shredding blade of the food processor, then toast by spreading on a baking sheet and baking in a 375-degree oven until just golden. Set aside.

Put the cream cheese, raisins, peanuts, milk and curry powder in food processor or blender container. Turn the motor on and off quickly, just until the raisins and nuts are chopped and mixture is combined. Stir in the reserved coconut. Cover the dip and chill to blend the flavors. If necessary, before serving, stir in additional milk, one tablespoonful at a time, until it is of dipping consistency. Serve with apple or pear wedges, banana chunks or other fresh fruits. Makes about 1½ cups.

CRAB QUICHE TARTS

Shells:
1 pkg. (11 ounces) pie crust mix
3 tsp. water
Filling:
4 ounces Swiss cheese, chilled

1 pkg. (6 ounces) frozen crabmeat thawed, drained and coarsely flaked
6 eggs
1 cup mayonnaise
¼ cup light cream or half and half
2 green onions, cut into short lengths
¼ tsp. mustard
Dash of pepper

Place the pie crust mix, water and egg in the food processor or mixer. Turn the processor on and off quickly or beat with the mixer until the dough forms a ball on the mixer. (Or mix by hand.) Using two rounded teaspoons of pastry for each tart, press onto the bottom and sides of 24 muffin cups that are 2½ inches in diameter (or use three teaspoons for each of 16 muffin cups 2½ inches in diameter). Shred the cheese and sprinkle two teaspoons into each tart shell (three into larger size).

Place remaining ingredients, except crab, in blender and blend until the onion is chopped. Divide crab meat equally in shells. Spoon about 2 tablespoons of mixture into each tart shell over the cheese and crab (3 tablespoons for the larger size). Bake the tarts in a pre-heated 400 degree oven for 25 to 30 minutes. For the larger size, bake 30 to 35 minutes or until puffed and brown. A knife inserted near the center will come out clean. Cool the tarts on a wire rack for 5 minutes before serving. Leftovers can be refrigerated and reheated.



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