

Birds of an apple set a pretty table

Chef and restaurant owner Ben Pearlman begins today to provide helpful hints and recipes for our Shopping Cart readers.

Pearlman has worked in various restaurants and food services for 10 years and was also a chef-instructor in the Detroit and Royal Oak public schools for 15 years. He also served as educational writer for the Michigan Restaurant Association's "Hospitality" magazine.

He is a graduate of professional cooking programs at Los Angeles City College and the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

Pearlman is the chef and owner of Benjie's Family Restaurant, 2650 Orchard Lake Road, Sylvan Lake.

What does spring mean to you? Blossoms, warm winds, longer days — or Mother's Day dinners, graduation buffets and bridal showers.

Much of the worry and work in preparing for these special occasions can be minimized by serving simple, fresh

diabetes enhanced by food sculpture centerpieces.

Eye appeal is so very important in food presentation. Interest and appetites perk up when food is dressed up in its Sunday best.

Most people are familiar with the more elaborate ice carvings, butter sculpture, and salads molded in apple seen at banquets and best prepared by professionals.

Less familiar are food sculptures prepared from common fruits and vegetables and well within the skills of the average person cooking at home for family or friends.

An apple bird is a good choice for the novice and can make a big hit perched on top of a fresh and crisp vegetable platter or soaring above fresh sliced cantalope, peach wedges, mounds of cherries, grapes and bananas.

A step-by-step method for preparing an apple bird follows.

Try to select apples that are longer and cylindrical, in shape. The Red



Ben Pearlman

Washington Delicious is a good choice. Avoid apples that are bruised, as the bruise will show up in the wings, head or neck. To begin with, choose as large an apple as possible to make carving easier. After you've done a dozen or two birds, try a radish bird.

You will need a very sharp, thin-bladed paring knife, round toothpick, one tablespoon of lemon juice mixed into once cup of water and two cloves. Be sure to have several apples on hand for practice.

• Slice $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch off the bottom and save. The apple will now sit flat on your cutting board. The cut slice will be used for the bird's head and neck.

• Next, cut a wedge $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide by $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long (at a 45-degree angle) going lengthwise on the exact center of the apple. Remove the wedge.

• Carefully cut a $\frac{1}{16}$ inch slice on each side of the cut-out wedge and remove the second wedge. Continue this process three more times, a total of 5 wedges.

• Turn the apple on its side, find the center between the top wedge and bottom of the apple and repeat the above steps on both sides.

• Dip all the wing parts in the lemon juice water mixture. (The apple won't discolor for a couple of days if wrapped in a plastic wrap and refrigerated.)

• Now for the head, slice the peeling off the side of the apple slice saved for the head. Score lightly the shape of the neck and head (as shown in the photograph). Then cut out using a sawing action with the point of the knife at right angle to the apple. Trim remainder of the peeling.

Be careful, as apple is fragile at this point. Dip in lemon water solution. Cut a toothpick in half and using it like a drill, insert in the lower part of neck. Cut $\frac{1}{4}$ of the stem off 2 cloves and insert as eyes for bird.

• Cut out a notch in the apple wide enough to fit the neck. Fit neck into notch and secure with the toothpick.

• Assemble wing parts in the same order as cut and place in the same wedge.

The bird is ready for the center of a cheese tray or on top of your favorite pork roast or holiday ham.

To make birds soar, cut a cabbage in half. Insert two wooden shish kabob skewers into bottom of the bird and then in the cabbage.



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