

## taste buds

chef Larry Janes

## Memories of Mama's hot soups

I knew the minute I walked in the house. There was this incredible aroma, wafting through the rooms, an aroma intense with herbs, onion, garlic and the faint detection of wine.

No, we weren't being visited by a stashed farmer. Mama was in the mood to make soup. And make soup she did.

I'll never forget that half of the freezer that was set aside for baggies and Tupperware, filled with salvaged vegetables and loads of meat trimmings and bones. What seemed to be a witch's cauldron that must have made about five gallons was brought up from the fruit cellar. It was a heavy cast-iron pot with a hinged handle that had seen many a day of hearty chilis, thick sauces, medicinal chicken soups and nutritious stews.

Delicious soups rich in vitamins and minerals can be made by imitating the French, famous for their soups. Before fresh vegetables are added, stock rich in flavor should be prepared.

The more vegetables and bones you use in making stock, the more delicious the soup will be. By the way, after making the stock, strain the bones and vegetables and discard. The vegetables become very mushy and watery. I always keep an extra bag of onions, celery and carrots for making soup.

**YOU CAN MAKE** stock from just about anything. All vegetable trimmings, tops of green onions, wilted and outer leaves of lettuce and cabbage and even the seeds from squash and peppers can be thrown in the pot for added flavor. Unless your final product must be of one identity (like beef stock) just throw in a mishmash of chicken bones, beef bones, veal bones, even the trimmings from blade cuts and roasts. Ham bones and hocks are additional treasures that can speak for themselves.

The purpose in making soup is to break down the connective tissues in the bones and thereby extract minerals, flavors and unrefined gelatin. All well-made soup stocks are rich in calcium. A healthy splash of vinegar added to the boiling mixture will increase the calcium levels and hasten the breakdown of tissue and even aid in the withdrawal of more flavor from the bones in a shorter cooking time.

Don't worry about the taste because as the stock is boiled, the calcium will combine with the acid and the taste of vinegar will dissipate.

A frequent question that always pops up at my soup-making seminars is what causes the stock to turn a rich brown color. To achieve this, first dredge the bones and meat with flour and then sear in hot oil until brown.

Speaking of adding meat, it is desirable to add meat when making stock but this will usually result in meat that becomes stringy and lacks flavor.

**SCRAPS** and trimmings go into my stock and they are strained out the end, then if needed, additional stew meat, pre-baked chicken or veal can be added about 30 minutes before serving. I can then add my herbs like a bay leaf and crushed peppercorns. Be on the watch for the bay leaf. Safety shorts are out because people have been known to swallow them and lacerate their throats.

Fresh chopped parsley and pinches of marjoram, thyme, basil and savory make the final product even tastier and more aromatic. Just before the traditional ladling of the hot brew into the crocks, an optional splash of vermouth, burgundy or chianti adds a subtle richness that smells as good as it tastes.

Whatever your mood, soup can warm, nourish, soothe, fortify and add a loving touch to an afternoon of sledding, skating, shopping and frivolity. Pass the animal crackers, please.

## NAVY BEAN SOUP

makes 2 quarts  
2 ham hocks or ham bone with plenty of meat  
2 quarts water  
2 cups white navy beans  
½ tsp. crushed peppercorns  
¼ cup flour mixed with 1 cup water or white wine  
1 crushed bay leaf  
¼ tsp. marjoram, savory and basil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 small hot pepper, pierced with a toothpick

Place ham in pot, cover with water and bring to a boil. Add beans (washed but not soaked). Cover, reduce heat and simmer for two hours. Add remaining ingredients, simmer 20 minutes longer or until beans are tender. Mash, taste for salt and add more if needed. Discard bone, skin, pepper. Add ham scraps and more chopped ham if needed. Enjoy.

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## HERBS

## She grows her own

By C.L. Rugenstein  
special writer

If variety is the spice of life, herbs can give a new twist to the foods that sustain it, believes Linda Wells.

Wells, who frequently demonstrates and gives lectures about the use of herbs through Michigan State University's Master Gardener extension program, is enthusiastic about growing, preserving and using culinary herbs.

Though she took cooking courses for recreation from the time she was 12 years old, "I got into herbs in college," Wells said. "One of my minors was history, and in European history and literature the botanical references caught my attention."

Visits to famous gardens in Europe during the course of her studies further piqued her interest. "They'd talk about the use of these herbs and why they were in those gardens, and I began to study them myself." Realizing that a lot of the things the poets and historians were talking about were culinary plants — "and liking food as much as I do," she declared — the two naturally went together. Wells taught English and social studies in Detroit schools for 14 years while she experimented with growing herbs in the yard of her Birmingham home. Some of the herbs are unfamiliar to most cooks, but Wells believes they add a special something to culinary efforts.

"THERE ARE a couple that I just love," she said. Salad burnet is one of them.

"The leaves have a light cucumber-y taste. You can add a little cucumber flavor to a dish without the gastric problems of that vegetable." The bright green leaves are a visual enhancer to whatever it's used in.

"It's also a pretty plant to grow," Wells added, "especially as a border plant. It's green early, low growing, a little rounded mound, and a self-sowing perennial."

Lovage is another of her favorites.

"It's celery for people who have families who don't like celery," she said. "The flavor is excellent, especially in soup stocks."

It grows in stalks like celery but, unlike burnet, can get out of hand, with a flower stalk that could grow to six or eight feet tall.

"Most herbs are not fussy. They'll grow as long as you give them sunshine, adequate water and a little bit of fertilizer," Wells said.

Wells preserves her herbs by drying, freezing and storing them in oil. Oil is her favorite method, and she prefers olive but said any good cooking oil could be used. "Most people don't use olive oil because it has a strong flavor, but I like it," she said. And by using oil she gets two products — the herb, preserved as freshly as possible, and the flavored oil to

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— Linda Wells

use for cooking or salad dressings.

SHE OPENED a glass jar of basil to demonstrate. The leaves were still bright green, and the aroma sharp and fresh enough to almost taste.

Wells packs the herbs as whole as possible (in glass-topped mason jars with metal ball closures), then pours in oil to cover.

"Make sure nothing sticks up through the oil or it will spoil," she advised. "The herbs have to be completely covered."

Herb-drying can be done naturally, or in an oven heated to its lowest setting (100 degrees for an electric, the pilot light for a gas oven) and turned off.

To air dry, "Wash and hang the herbs in small bunches till dry in a dark cool place like a closet — if you're fortunate to have one that's not overflowing," Wells said. She stressed thorough drying. "Herbs, like sage, if dried in large bunches, can develop problems in the center where moisture gets trapped."

The same holds true for freezing. Washed herbs should be dried thoroughly, especially chives.

"If you get water in the hollow stems of chives, they expand and explode," Wells pointed out. "So when you thaw them, all you'll have is green mush."

WELLS STRESSED keeping the herbs as whole as possible when storing. "Heat and pressure (crushing or breaking) release the volatile oils in herbs," she explained.

Wells mixes her homegrown herbs to use as everything from seasoning mixes to hostesses gifts (in small plastic bags tied with ribbon), to room deodorizers when their culinary purposes are exhausted. Following are two recipes for herb mixes, which she blends in large batches and stores till the flavors meld like a potpourri. "Each herb gives up something to the whole and makes it better," she said.



JOHN STORMZAND

Linda Wells of Birmingham has studied the history of the culinary plants she uses in cooking.

## HERB MIX FOR POULTRY

(Yield: 4 cups)

- ¼ cup sage leaves
- ¼ cup Italian parsley (the flat-leaved kind; commercially available dried parsley is Italian)
- ¼ cup lovage leaves (celery flakes can be substituted)
- 1 cup sweet marjoram
- 1 cup lemon thyme (or regular thyme)
- 1 cup French tarragon leaves

Toss or stir lightly in a bowl. Put in a glass jar and seal tightly. Let set for a month or so till flavors meld.

To use, take one tablespoon per two- or three-pound chicken and rub it on. (Sliding some under the skin is good, too.) Let set a while before baking. To flour chicken for frying or baking, combine one tablespoon of finely crushed herb mix with one cup of flour.

There's a fine line between herbs and

spices, so Wells included a very versatile cider mull as a seasonal chili chaser. (LINDA WELLS' MULTIPURPOSE CIDER MULL)

- 1 cup dried orange peel in small chunks (home-made is good)
- 2 cups cinnamon sticks, broken into halves
- ¼ cup whole allspice berries (available at bulk food stores)
- ¼ cup nutmeg, coarsely broken
- ¼ cup whole cloves

If using the mull, mix in wine, ¼ cup coarsely chopped dried ginger root can be added. Note: Wells recommends cutting the tough root with garden shears.

Combine and let set. Add ¼ cup of the mix (tied in a cheesecloth bag if preferred) to one gallon of cider or wine and heat till barely simmering, for 30 minutes. Serves hot or cold.

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## Give English tea party for elegant afternoon

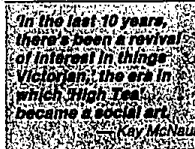
By C.L. Rugenstein  
special writer

Afternoon tea, that bastion of British tradition, is enjoying a cool popularity on this side of the Atlantic.

"In the last 10 years, there's been a revival of interest in things Victorian," the era in which "High Tea" became a social art, said Kay McNaul. "Women are looking for ways of entertaining that are different — a little more elegant and exquisite than cake and coffee."

A native Oklahoman, McNaul was in Birmingham recently to speak at the Southern Michigan Unit of the Herb Society of America's "Tea with a Twist." She talked a little about the history of tea in Britain and gave some ideas for those who'd like to have a tea party.

Tea time was a flexible period,



McNaul pointed out, not always set for four in the afternoon. There was also a cream — or lemon — tea, which was your basic English-Irish-Scottish breakfast. It took its name from the heavy, clotted cream that would be spooned over the butter and jam on scones eaten with a late-morning 11 o'clock breakfast.

This was also the only time of day it was proper to put milk in your tea. "If you used it later than this, shame on you!" McNaul told the audience. "That was a social gaff."

HIGH TEA was a very formal event, actually a light supper for which only the best tea service, linens and silver were used. The Victorians had the routine down to a science including the proper number of sandwich varieties (three), and sweets (generally five). "Victorians were notable for their 'sweet tooth,'" McNaul said with a laugh.

It's this elegance Americans aim for, McNaul believes, by taking the idea of tea and making it distinctly their own with the use of themes. She gave some suggestion about where to find these.

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