

Peanut butter panelists face sticky dilemma

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But alas, even the best-laid plans of mice and men go awry when two of the judges who will remain anonymous for fear of sticky retaliation, noticed two of the brand names. So much for secrecy.

THE TASTING BEGAN with samples of the "Big Three" brands of peanut butter — Jif, Skippy and Peter Pan. Katie Brinker thought Jif "stuck to the top of the mouth" while Matt Amans agreed and added that it tasted dry.

Dawn Virant and Jamie Patterson both felt that Skippy was too thick

and "plain" tasting while our oldest judge, Suzanne Daines rated Peter Pan with a bland tasting score of 1. All in all, the Big Three scored an average rating of 22 out of a possible 45.

One of the most interesting results came when our panel tested PB number 4, Arrowhead. A natural food product, it sells locally for more than \$3.99 per pound. Justin and Sean Touhey, whose parents advocate natural products, thought this costly variety was "too sweet" for their prized palates. Jordan Brinker piped in the two cents worth and scored this product by slugging down

Coke and issuing an exasperated "too thick" rating of 2.

What turned out to be the most natural and most expensive variety of peanut butter was demoted to an overall score of 18 by our judges who were still hoping to taste something appreciably better. Maybe next time we'll line up some natural food fans with hopes of giving this peanut butter a higher rating.

Granted, with the judges fresh from their negative rating of Arrowhead, it may have been unfair to offer Smuckers next as the sacrificial peanut butter. Slaughtered with low ratings, Smuckers peanut butter was

characterized as "bland" and "tasteless" by judge Dawn Virant. Jordan Brinker was quick to criticize this brand as "the worst of the lot," with a score of 16 points, let's hope Smuckers does better with its jelly.

AFTER REFILLING the goblets with palate cleansers of the their choice, the judges went on to taste a relatively unknown peanut butter, Farmer Jack's house brand, "Town Pride." By far the least expensive of the lot, it was greeted with accolades from the panel. Stacey Neece jumped up from her chair and exclaimed, "This sandwich will be 'just right.'" Kinda like Goldilocks testing

the Three Bears' porridge. The majority of judges agreed.

Matt Amans, one of two dissenters rated it "salty" and gave it a 2. Suzanne Daines disdained its taste altogether and rated it at 1. With an overall rating of 33, the Town Pride brand was leading the peanut butter pack so far.

Next, we offered Velvet peanut butter to the panel. Emerging with an overall score of 19, Velvet should certainly feel proud that they beat out the Big Three. However, our judges thought this brand was too thin and lacked a strong peanut

taste. The final attempt at wooing the judges' taste buds was made with the contents of a five-pound tin stamped with the USDA seal. This peanut butter was secretly accepted as a participant because, although it isn't sold to the general public, it's available to school kitchens. Used to feed the masses, it ends up not only as peanut butter sandwiches but also in school desserts. It fared exceptionally well with our panel, achieving comments like "this is the best" from Justin Touhey while scoring an admirable 26½ points on our taste test meter.

In praise of Momma's meat pie recipe

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wine). Then, stir in 2-4 teaspoons of sage. (I like a lot, Mama uses about 2½ teaspoons.) Taste, correct with seasoning with salt and pepper. Pour into unbaked pie shells, place pastry on top, fold the edges and bake at 350° for 30 minutes or until the crust is golden.

(A note from Mama: If the mixture is too thin, you added too much liquid. Thicken it up with a little flour dissolved in water.)

ENGLISH COTTAGE PIE

Serves 4-6
1 large onion, chopped coarsely
2 tbsp. butter
3 large carrots, finely chopped
1 tsp. fresh parsley

¼ tsp. dried thyme
¼ tsp. sage
3 cups mashed potatoes
½ cup grated parmesan
1 clove garlic, minced
2 lbs. ground beef
2 tsp. tomato paste
1 cup. cervell
1 bay leaf, crumbled
½ cup dry red wine
½ cup grated cheese
Preheat oven to 375°. Sauté onion and garlic in butter until limp. Add the beef and cook, breaking up the meat until browned. Stir in carrots, tomato paste and all the herbs. Add the wine and season with salt and pepper. Simmer gently for 30 minutes. Spoon the mixture into a well-buttered baking dish. Spread the mashed potatoes over the top.

Mix the cheeses together and sprinkle over the potatoes. Bake 10 minutes until cheese is melted and golden. If you wish, you can pop it under the broiler to brown.

BEEFSTEAK, KIDNEY AND OYSTER PIE

1 rolled pie crust
1 dozen oysters or 8 oz. jar
½ lb. veal or beef kidney
2 lb. beef stew meat
½ cup seasoned flour
¼ cup onions, chopped
¼ cup rich beef stock
1 tsp. parsley
dash marjoram
salt and pepper to taste
6 tbsp. butter or beef suet
½ lb. mushrooms, sliced
1 bay leaf

2 tsp. Worcestershire
Dash cloves
Open oysters and place them in a bowl with their liquid. Chill. Clean the kidney, split, remove the fat and large tubes and cut into ¼-inch slices. Cut the beef stew into chunks, roll the kidney and beef in seasoned flour. Melt the suet or butter in a heavy skillet, brown the beef and kidney in the same pan. Add the mushrooms and sauté briefly. Add the beef broth, bay leaf, parsley, Worcestershire, cloves and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and simmer over low heat for one hour. Add oysters with liquid. If sauce is too thick, thicken with little flour dissolved in water, (just like Mama does.) Place the stew in a deep casserole and place the pastry

over the top. Moisten and pinch the edges to seal. Cut a steam hole in the center, glaze the top with egg wash and bake at 450° for 10 minutes, lower the heat to 375° and continue baking till the crust is golden.

CHICKEN POT PIE

5 whole chicken breasts, split, skinned and boned
¼ tsp. salt
2 tbsp. butter
1¼ cups chicken broth
¼ cup frozen carrots, thawed
¼ cup frozen peas, thawed
¼ cup dry sherry or wine
¼ cup cream
salt and pepper to taste
2 tbsp. cornstarch
¼ cup dried tarragon
1 cup grated swiss cheese

Sprinkle the chicken breasts with salt and sauté in butter for one minute on each side. Add the chicken broth, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove the chicken, cut into strips, save the broth for the sauce.

In a small saucepan, bring the broth to a boil, add the sherry. Stir together the cream and the cornstarch and whisk into the boiling mixture. Add the tarragon, salt and pepper to taste. In a prepared uncooked crust, layer chicken, the carrots, then peas, pour the sauce over that and sprinkle with shredded swiss cheese. Cover with top crust, preheat oven to 425°. Bake at 425° for 5 minutes, then lower to 350° for 30 minutes.

Time to mail baked gifts is now

Can the calendar be right? The holidays are just around the corner. Sending a homemade baked gift is a generous expression of your love. To avoid a box full of crumbs or indistinguishable pieces of "whatever," be sure that you package the gift of food properly.

Look over recipes and select foods that travel well. Avoid delicate cookies and cakes, foods that require refrigeration or heavily frosted items. Many drop cookies, bar cookies or fruit filled cookies travel better than

crispy cookies. Sifter cookies such as chocolate chip or sugar cookies are hard to ship. Expect some crumbling and breakage with them. Home-baked cookies have a shelf life of about one week since they have a higher fat and water content than commercial cookies and of course don't contain any preservatives. Freshness will be assured if your cookies are quickly packed and shipped after they have cooled.

When packaging, wrap two cookies together back-to-back in plastic or foil. Bar cookies can be cut and wrapped individually or left in one large piece to be cut later. Wrap all foods in plastic wrap before putting them in a box. If you're sending breads and cakes, bake them in foil pans, remove while cooling, then slip

back in the pan for mailing. Don't pack the food product hot because of moisture condensation.

Choose a sturdy container that is the right size for the quantity of food being mailed. This will help eliminate extra shifting. Avoid glass containers. Make a habit of saving containers that could be used in giving food gifts, such as fresh vegetable trays, coffee or shortening cans, oatmeal and cornmeal tubes and foil pans. (Don't use meat trays unless brand new and meat has never been on them.)

Decorate the container with colored foil, wrapping paper, felt, ribbon or yarn. Cushion the bottom and top of the gift box with shredded tissue paper or newspaper. This will not be a problem since the food is all snugly wrapped in plastic or foil. After filling the container with food, fill in extra space with puffed rice, puffed wheat, popcorn or marshmallows. Place a lid on top of the gift container.

Place the gift container in a strong heavy corrugated box (3-4 inches wider and deeper than gift box). A layer of filler on the bottom of the packing box will act as a cushion. Use additional shredded paper or excelsior for other empty spaces. When sending two (2) or more gift boxes inside one mailing

box, be sure to layer packing material between them.

Wrap with heavy paper and mark "Fragile, Handle with Care" or "Perishable." Mail early. Allow enough time for your package to arrive for the holidays.

It isn't recommended to send homemade sausage and cheese through the mail. It's safer to send these products purchased at a specialty shop. The processing of the sausage and cheese enables the commercially made product to be mailed without refrigeration.

Oatmeal and cornmeal tubes make pretty and practical containers for cookies and candy that can be hand delivered. Cookies and candy will stay fresher if the inside is first lined with foil. Extend several inches above the top and turn down over the lip of tube. A plastic bag may be used as a removable inner lining also.

Consider giving new, useful containers, such as bread on a bread-board or cookies on a cookie sheet or tray. A shiny new cookie sheet would be a welcomed gift for anyone. Cover them with clear plastic wrap and decorate them with a ribbon or bow.

It is always a nice gesture to share your recipe so the recipient can prepare the item. On the card make serving suggestions and storage hints that would be helpful and make the gift complete.

Homemade food gifts, whether sent by mail or given in person, seem to taste especially good because your care and attention haven't been spared. Baking a gift doesn't require knowledge of a proper size or color — just delicious enjoyment for everyone. Special care in wrapping your gift will help assure the food arrives looking good enough to eat. Plan your holiday baking and give your gift of love with pride.

Gumbo pleases palates

AP — What makes a real gumbo — okra or file powder? You can start an argument anywhere in Louisiana with that question. Regardless of which is used, real gumbo is always made with a roux — a mixture of flour and oil cooked until it's toasted a dark red-brown color. To serve gumbo like a Louisiana native, put a big scoop of hot cooked rice in shallow bowl or plate with a rim and spoon the gumbo over it.

SEAFOOD GUMBO

1 pound frozen shellfish shrimp
6-ounce package frozen crabmeat
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup cooking oil
2 cups chopped onion
1 cup chopped green pepper
5 or 6 cloves garlic, minced
6 cups hot water
10-ounce package frozen cut okra,

thawed
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon ground red pepper
1 bay leaf

Thaw seafood. In a heavy 4-quart Dutch oven combine flour and oil. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, 35 minutes or until a dark reddish-brown roux is formed. Add onion, green pepper and garlic; cook and stir over medium heat for 10 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Stir in hot water. Stir in okra, salt, black pepper, red pepper and bay leaf. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cook, simmer 1 hour. Add seafood; simmer, uncovered, 5 minutes or until shrimp turn pink. Remove bay leaf. Serve with hot cooked rice. Makes 6 servings.

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