

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes



Praising Momma's meat pie

The British have a passion for meat pies. Rumor has it that they were invented centuries ago in England, but in all honesty, my mama's meat pies are as hearty and rich as her French-Canadian heritage.

Simmered for what seemed to be hours on end, laced with delicate herbs and spices like sage, rosemary and dill, the meat is served in a crust that's so flaky.

I suppose in a classic French — restaurant, meat pie would be ominously dubbed "pate en croûte." In a British pub, a beefsteak and kidney pie would be gobbled up between pints of beer and ale. Not professing to be without something of a hearty stature, the Italians produce their own version, "torta rustica."

WHETHER YOU choose to use a lean lamb, pork or beef shoulder, or, if truly daring, choose a more exotic concoction of sweetbreads, oysters or kidneys, be creative. While researching this article, I spent the afternoon with Mama, peering over her shoulder and yelling "stop!" before she added that dash of wine to the simmering pot, so I had a chance to measure.

What's my point? If you can prepare a crust (and if you can't, then buy a prepared crust from the frozen food section of the grocery) you can make meat pie. Call it a quiche without eggs and cream. Not into lamb? Try it with hamburger. Fresh out of rosemary? Substitute sage.

Between chasing apron strings and making my measuring spoons sound like castanets, I was able to jot down these easy hints from Mama and a few of the professionals who piled me with samples of extraordinary rumpkins filled with meat, potatoes, herbs and crust.

ALL FOUR of my advisers cautioned, "Roll your crust as thin as possible." Because most of the pies contain potatoes, a heavy, thick crust will obscure the delicate taste of the other ingredients.

But after testing one of the recipes with that new frozen puff pastry dough, I must admit that the results were very tasty indeed. Mama's crust was right out of Loretta Lynn's Crisco ad. To this day, my Cuisinart and I will never be able to duplicate it.

Another hint that I found helpful: Make sure, when simmering your filling, that it's completely covered with liquid at all times. Stir frequently because the filling has a tendency to sink to the bottom of the pot, stick and burn. This was a tad difficult when preparing Mama's because the mixture simmered for almost three hours before it was ready to place in the crust.

YOU know how manas are, folks. "Cook the pork, cook that pork and cook it some more."

Last but not least, remember, meat pies aren't just for dinner anymore. They make excellent additions to a holiday buffet. When chilled for picnics and tailgate parties, the herbs seem to blossom.

For an unusual appetizer, prepare the pie in those cute little one-inch muffin pans. Roll and fold in phyllo dough. I don't know about you, but I'm heading to the kitchen, grabbing my rolling pin... Bon appetit.

GRANDMA LORRY'S MEAT PIE

I'll never understand why Mama makes this only during the holidays. I know what I want for my birthday in August.

2½-3 lbs. pork shoulder, ground once
6 large potatoes, peeled, boiled, then mashed
3 medium onions, chopped
Sage, salt and pepper
2 unbaked pie shells, with top crust aside

Place ground pork in a large kettle (Mama uses cast iron) with the chopped onion and cook, over medium heat, stirring constantly until pork is no longer pink. Stir in potatoes and then about 3-4 cups of water to make mixture thick and easy to boil. Cover and keep on low boil for 1 hour, stir frequently. Remove lid, continue boiling for about 1½ more hours, stirring frequently and adding water, if necessary. (Mama adds a bit of



PETE ROBERTS/photographer

Testing peanut butter requires, time, fortitude and a few good slugs of a favorite soda pop. Identical twins Justin and Sean Touhey of Plymouth do their best to identify the metropolitan area's best peanut butter at the official test site, MacKinnon's in Northville.

Ultimate peanut butter Panelists ponder sticky question

By Larry Janes
special writer

THE RECIPE'S simple. Sprinkle nine kids with a passion for peanut butter and combine with a penchant for voicing their opinions. Stir in the support of parents and older siblings who supplied transportation. Fold in the ambience of one of Detroit's premier gourmet restaurants. Incorporate the flavors of seven of the area's best-known brands of peanut butter. Mix together for 45 minutes of fun, frolic and the freedom to speak their place and what do you get?

The Great Peanut Butter Taste Test. And so it happened. On a gorgeous, crisp fall afternoon while the Michigan State Spartans were creaming the Purdue University Boilermakers, nine self-styled peanut butter junkies rated their favorite brands. All sandwiches were precisely prepared and presented on silver platters by the talented kitchen staff at MacKinnon's Restaurant in Northville. Cameras clicked and VCRs whirled while the kids nosed.

BIG NATIONAL brands of peanut butter, Skippy, Jif and Peter Pan, were represented

in addition to lesser known brands like Arrowhead All-Natural, Smuckers, Town Pride and Velvet. We even included the U.S.D.A. government-issued sticky stuff that appears on sandwiches and other creations in local school cafeterias.

Who better to act as professional taste testers than a smattering of 8-12-year olds from Rochester, Birmingham, Southfield, Plymouth, Westland and Garden City?

The job was simple. Sample various peanut butter sandwiches, rate them on a scale of one to five and cleanse your palate with as much Coca-Cola or Seven-Up as needed.

One indicated "ucky" and five denoted "this is what I want you to buy next time you go grocery shopping."

The panel of judges included Matt Amans from Rochester whose mom reluctantly agreed to attend even though she gets a violent allergic reaction from just smelling the stuff.

GARDEN CITY's representatives Jamie Patterson and Darwu Virant offered mutual agreement while Sean and Justin Touhey, twins from Plymouth, tried to beat each other to see who could eat the most.

Stacey Neece, the youngest judge from Westland frequently climbed up on her chair

Who better to act as taste testers than 8 to 12-year-olds from Rochester, Birmingham, Southfield, Plymouth, Westland and Garden City?

to voice her opinion while brother and sister combo Katie and Jordan Brinker of Birmingham countered with conflicting judgments as to their personal favorite. As the oldest judge, Suzanne Daines 12, of Southfield, offered a more mature opinion.

One thing for certain, our prestigious panel of judges all agreed that what Tom MacKinnon (chef and owner of MacKinnon's of Northville) conjured up as the "perfect recipe" for peanut butter sandwiches couldn't compare with what they could do at home with some bread, a knife and a jar.

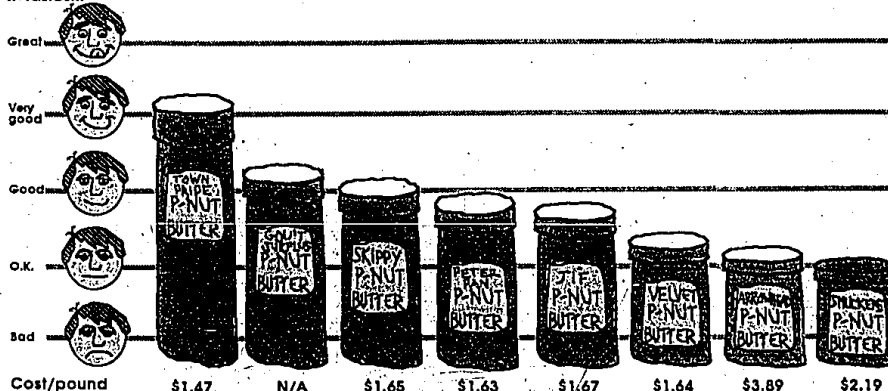
Seems that MacKinnon (and other notable area chefs) feel that the classic peanut butter sandwich should have one slice of the bread lightly slathered with butter before topping the other slice with the sticky stuff. Supposedly, this makes for a richer and smoother creation that lessens the "stick to the roof of your mouth syndrome" which so often accompanies the ritualistic eating of a peanut butter sandwich.

Our judges unanimously disagreed, frequently venting their displeasure over the amount of butter that was used to, as one judge put it, "grease the sandwich." MacKinnon might know the secret to making the world's best Ragout of Wild Boar, but, in our judges' opinion, trust good ol' Betty Crocker when it comes to slinging peanut butter. Ah... from the mouth of babes...

All of the brand names remained hidden from the panel via discreetly made cards known only to this writer and the independent verifying and accounting firm of Bela Antal. As the gardener at MacKinnon's, Antal supervises the preparation of cold dishes. It was natural he'd be the one to prepare our peanut butter sandwiches.

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It tastes...



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