

Pasta! That's the stuff

By Michele MacWilliams
special writer

SOMETIMES I think I should write a book titled "Ten Thousand and One Ways to prepare Pasta," says John Salvatore, executive chef at the Roman Terrace in Farmington Hills. Salvatore believes that pasta dough lends itself to many creative uses, going way beyond the spaghetti and macaroni and cheese of yesterday. Because traditional pasta has a rather nondescript flavor, it lends itself to a variety of different dishes, tastes and textures. Last year Americans ate almost four billion pounds of spaghetti, rigatoni, ravioli and other shapes of pasta. That's 16 pounds per person. Even if you know that pasta is more than spaghetti or macaroni, you may be surprised that it comes in approximately 600 different shapes. Here in Michigan, we are learning that pasta isn't the fattening dish we believed it to be years ago. Depending on the ingredients, pasta noodles actually can be an important part of a balanced diet.

PASTA is a complex carbohydrate. A half-cup serving provides approximately 80 to 90 calories and is a good source of B vitamins, iron and protein. Still, many of us just don't use our noodles when it comes to envisioning this food's incredible versatility.

The sauce accompanying pasta, or the ingredients used as a stuffing can make the dish healthy, fattening, light or heavy. Making pasta from scratch and filling it with different ingredients is becoming popular with restaurants and home cooks across the United States.

Master Chef Milos Chelka of the Golden Mushroom in Southfield says the possibilities for pasta stuffings are limitless.

"As people become more willing to experiment with different tastes, we use pasta increasingly in more and more creative ways," the chef says.

He notes that people no longer think of pasta as just spaghetti or ravioli with a tomato sauce. Today many different sauces are incorporated in his recipes.

"We use stuffed pasta as a warm appetizer or as a main course. We stuff it with everything from lobster to wild mushrooms to just about any type of meat, poultry or wild game," Chef Milos adds.

He says that although pasta has been a staple food item for centuries, generally speaking, hot Italy's pasta has become available in supermarkets and specialty stores.

IN A QUICK check at the local Great Scott, an assortment of traditional ravioli stuffed with either meat or cheese was found, plus a number of other refrigerated pastas with different stuffings. Agnolotti, a pesto-stuffed pasta, and tortelloni pasta, filled with either chicken or prosciutto, are available in the dairy case, ready to pop in boiling water and use with your favorite sauce.

But if you want to get more creative, you can make pasta from scratch and fill it with just about anything your heart desires.

Keith Farnie, chef/proprietor of Les Auteurs, an American bistro, in Royal Oak, changes the look of his ravioli dishes by changing the color of the pasta.

Using beets and squid ink, he created a black- and red-striped ravioli filled with lobster for the recent national Gold Cup competition in Chicago. The recipe for his "Grilled Maine Lobster with Chevre Sauce" will appear

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JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Master Chef Milos Chelka shows two of the ravioli specialties he prepares at Southfield's Golden Mushroom restaurant — Wild Mushroom and Spinach Ravioli and Lobster Ravioli.

Start out basic and get fancy

CHEF JEFF SEGAN'S
BASIC PASTA RECIPE
5 large eggs
1 pound all purpose flour

Measure flour into a large bowl. Make a well in the flour and crack eggs into the well. With the back of a wooden spoon, gradually mix the eggs into the flour. Knead dough with hands for approximately 5 minutes. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and let the dough rest, at

room temperature, for about one hour. Roll out dough. If it is too wet, let it stand for a few minutes so air circulates on both sides. Pasta is then ready to fill with your favorite stuffing. After pasta is filled, drop into boiling water and cook for 2 to 4 minutes, or until done.

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Bugs Bunny was right — always keep carrot handy

With all the talk about the great drought of '88, all it takes is a simple trip to the market to show us the financial impact we are now being faced with during harvest time.

Fresh red raspberries are going for a whopping \$2.99 for what would seem to be just a little over a cup. Whatever happened to the 39-cent head of lettuce? Thank goodness the good old carrot has made it through with just a slight decrease in size (less water) but almost the same price.

A visit last weekend to the Eastern Market had carrots brimming from every other stall, sweet baby carrots, fresh-picked bunches with stalks still crisp and intact and giant mothers that could be used by Darrell Evans and the entire Tiger team.

The James gang is known for its somewhat hefty consumption of the orange edible root. There always seems to be a platter of carrots with the usual celery and broccoli sitting around a bowl of what Sis says is homemade dip but which everyone knows is store bought and plopped it into a clean coffee cup.

OPEN UP your truly's refrigerator, and the first thing you will see is a glass jug brimming with

taste buds
chef Larry
James



strips of orange. (My philosophy is to make sure you always have an alternate choice when opening the fridge.) Mamma is known for her canned carrots that the entire family enjoys them year round. Speaking of canning, did you know carrots were among the first vegetable ever to be canned commercially after development of this process in the early 1800s?

During World War II, the British actually developed some high-carotene carrots so that their aviators might see better at night. Since then, plant breeders have sought to make carrots sweeter and more tender.

So why do carrots remain the cheaper food source, especially after a "hard" summer? First off, carrot plants are resistant to frost. Therefore, seeds can be planted in the soil as soon as the soil can be worked. Carrots can be harvested from two to three months after planting.

If you have seen carrots that

resemble baseball bats at the market, these are varieties that are grown in loose, fertile soil. The softer the soil, the more the roots bury themselves and, hence, the longer they become.

A LITTLE LESS than half of the North American carrot crop is processed, with the remainder being purchased as fresh. The leading type of processing is freezing, followed by canning. However, there is a steady growth toward processing carrots for juice production, dehydration and in the use of canned soups, stews and cakes.

Most forms of carrots are very high in water content (about 90 percent) and low in calories (about 30 calories per three ounces). They are the best source of Vitamin A, with one large carrot giving more than double the Recommended Dietary Allowance for adults. Let's face it, folks. Bugs Bunny knew what he was talking about when he began his trademark of always having a fresh carrot nearby.

While researching this story, I brought the old juicer up from the floor cellar and decided to make some fresh carrot juice. Having never tried it before, I was skeptical, but for the sake of journalism

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Oat bran craze is healthy

By Geri Rinschler
special writer

Who would have imagined two years ago that oat bran muffins would be a leading food trend in the fall of '88.

Recent medical studies — such as those reported in the Journal of the American Dietetic Medical Association (June 1988) and more recently similar findings published in the best seller, "The 8-Week Cholesterol Cure" by Robert Kowalski — conclude that adding two to three ounces of oat bran a day to a low-fat diet can result in a reduction of cholesterol levels.

The upshot of these studies and others like them is a number of new food products attacking the shelves in supermarkets and health food stores. It's a revolution of oat bran cookie, cereal, bread and muffin makers. The Broadway Bagel Shop in Birmingham has even introduced an oat bran bagel.

Among the trendy new muffin shops sprouting up in the metropolitan area is Muffins and More, an oat bran muffin shop, which has just opened its doors in Birmingham.

OWNER AND FOUNDER Sharon Masselink loves making muffins as much as she loves eating healthy. As a matter of fact her motto is, "When you want to feel healthy ask for More . . ." oat bran muffins, of course.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Sharon Masselink of Muffins and More in Birmingham took over a former pizza shop to make oat bran muffins instead. She still tests each batch with a toothpick to make sure they're done.

Even though Masselink's mother and grandmother made homemade muffins on a regular basis, it wasn't until her children were grown that she began her experimentation.

"It was after visiting a friend who made raisin bran muffins that I began putting in the kitchen," she said. "After working with a variety of oat bran and wheat flour and pureed fruit I was pleased with the results."

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