

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes



Pumpkins once used for brew

'Tis the season for pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns. Having just visited the local pumpkin patch for the ritualistic purchase of an assorted family of jack-o-lanterns and a few (undersized) pie pumpkins, I thought a trip down memory lane about how we discovered these beauties was in order.

It is believed that the wild ancestors of the pumpkins originated in the region that is now Mexico and Guatemala. The ancient Aztec, Inca and Mayan Indians used pumpkin seeds as food, but they probably discarded the pulp because the wild fruits contained only small amounts of bitter-tasting flesh. Most likely, the wilder varieties with an abundantly sweeter flesh arose when the Indians used mutant varieties for cultivation.

The European explorers of the New World thought that pumpkins were giant species of melons. By that time, these fruits were seen growing throughout Mexico, North America and the West Indies, from as far north as Canada and as far south as Mexico City. They were soon brought back to the Old World to be grown from Western Europe to Asia.

Sometimes the Indians' ways of utilizing the crops were adopted and modified by Asians and Europeans. For example, the farmers of Manchuria dried strips of pumpkin flesh in the sun and the Italians ate deep-fried, batter-covered pumpkin flowers. Both practices have been passed down through the ages and are still utilized. Of course, after this early wintry weather we've been experiencing, you won't have much luck finding pumpkin flowers.

SO IF EATING dried pumpkin flesh and fried pumpkin flowers sounds a little unappealing, were you aware that the early settlers made beer from pumpkins, maple sugar and persimmons? Can't imagine gulping a few "pumpkin brews" with my redhots at Tiger Stadium.

Pumpkins require four months to reach maturity. They can be picked after the rind has hardened, but they may be left on the plant until after the first light frost or when the vines begin to wither. A light frost will make the pumpkins sweeter. However, the fruits should be picked before they are likely to be damaged by a heavy frost.

Pumpkins are processed by removal of the rinds and the seeds, followed by the cooking of the pulp prior to canning, freezing or baking into cakes, custards or pies. If you're looking for real pumpkin pies and pie fillings, read the label because many of the pie fillings and mass-produced pies often contain winter squash in lieu of pumpkin. This isn't all that bad, however, because some folks actually believe winter squash has a better flavor than real pumpkin.

Now, taking you back to Home Ec 101, you are aware, of course, that when I refer to cooking pumpkins, we are using what is normally called a pie pumpkin and not the jack-o-lantern variety? In order to prepare your own homemade, frosty pumpkin, remove the seed and scoop out the "guts" of the pumpkin. Cut the pumpkin into halves or small sections and peel off the rind.

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Norman Scheck of Canton, manager of Byrd's Market in Livonia, shows a few of the cold cuts and sausages he recommends for a tailgate picnic with German food.

STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Warm potato salad, sauerkraut, other dishes can go to the game

WARM GERMAN POTATO SALAD

6 potatoes (boiled in jackets)
6 slices bacon
¾ cup chopped onion
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. sugar

dash pepper
½ tsp. celery seed
¼ cup vinegar
¼ cup beef broth

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German tailgate picnics hearty

By Wendy Rubin
special writer

SATURDAY IS ON its way. That means a lot of different things to different people. But for thousands of us, Saturday means getting up, packing the cooler, filling the thermos, heading for Ann Arbor, East Lansing or wherever the tailgate party is happening. If you have grown tired of the same old tailgate party foods, why not try a tailgate party with a German theme?

We all know that the German cuisine includes some wonderful dark beers and white wines, but the meats, cheeses, mustards, breads and specialty items are good tasting, healthy and fun to pronounce.

German meats come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They have good flavors and are not known to be overly spicy. The cheeses typically are firmer with stronger flavors, and there is nothing sweet about those tangy, lively tasting German mustards.

THE GERMAN breads are, to put it bluntly, the best. Once a few of the varieties are tried, white and whole wheat just can't match up. German breads are a mixture of ryes, sourdoughs and pumpernickels. All the breads are nutritious. They use no preservatives, have loads of fiber, and many of the variations leave the rye or pumpernickel seeds whole.

"I crave the bread. I would pay a fortune for the bread (if necessary) to get it. I need it and want it," exclaims Farmington Hills resident Vail Byrd, owner of Byrd's Meats in Livonia.

Byrd's Meats is one of two German specialty stores that carry a genuine selection of German foods in the suburban Detroit area. Byrd's is managed by Norman Scheck of Canton, whose grandfather was German.

Byrd's stocks all 20 varieties of Dimpflmeier Bread, a German bakery in Toronto, the best resource around for German breads. Its selection includes Munich rye, hunter, pumpernickel, linseed rye and the customer favorite, schinkenbrot. Dimpflmeier bakes bread for the Detroit area Mondays and Thursdays, loads the loaves on trucks so that it arrives here fresh and tasty the next morning.

"All honest ingredients, no preservatives or additives to keep (the breads) fresh," promises Scheck.

STAHL'S AND Chamberlin Bakeries, both in Detroit, daily bake and deliver to Byrd's sour dough rye bread, a German specialty, along with cookies, rolls and strudel.

Selecting meats for a tailgate party may prove to be more difficult than first imagined. After all, what could be involved in selecting a few cold cuts?

There is a small, cozy, wonderful place on Long Lake Road in Troy where this task will become a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Han's Delicatessen is true German.

Han's is owned by Bloomfield Hills resident Inge Hosp, who bought the store years ago from retired founder Inge Lickli. Hosp, who has a love of specialty foods, began working at Han's after she arrived in the Detroit area years ago.

"Ninety percent of our customers are German," says Hosp, who welcomes visitors to the delicatessen as if they were in her home. Han's carries a full line of authentic German goods, including soaps, toiletries, video movies, staples, and fresh, canned and frozen foods.

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Get started now making holiday hors d'oeuvres

By Nechama Bakst
special writer

Now is the time to get busy cooking and fill up your freezer. "Then when the holidays come around, you can 'share good times and good food with good friends,'" said Marcia Sikarskie, in an informal introduction to her make-ahead hors d'oeuvres class.

Some 120 men and women who squeezed into the back section of Kitchen Glamor in West Bloomfield on a recent afternoon got a lot more than a simple demonstration of recipes.

Sikarskie, 51, of Okemos, has been giving cooking classes for about 15 years. At the store and cooking instruction center owned by Chris and Toulia Patsalis, Sikarskie crammed nearly two hours with a running stream of invaluable tips, cunning techniques and useful information.

She believes a cook should be flexible. "Life is full of alternatives, compromises and substitutes," Sikarskie said. In cooking, "people have to learn how to do in these situations, just like you do in life."

OF COURSE, there are some things you just can't change, such as measurements in cakes, cookies, and especially tortes," she continued. In those recipes you need to use exact quantities.

Recipes like the ones she demonstrated for hors d'oeuvres are "designed to be like parts of a wardrobe. You mix and match 'em," she said.

For instance, a veal filling made with sautéed ground veal, mushrooms, onions and herbs is meant to fill a turnover.

But as Sikarskie pointed out, you can also use it to fill cherry tomatoes or



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Marcia Sikarskie pours salmon strudel mixture into fish-shaped pan lined with phyllo dough, during demonstration of make-ahead hors d'oeuvres, at Kitchen Glamor in West Bloomfield.

mushrooms, thereby creating a variety of interesting hors d'oeuvres. If you don't like veal, she said, substitute ground turkey, ground beef or lamb, anything that fits the bill.

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Cheese, walnut pate suits ginger crackers

GINGER CRACKERS

¾ cup milk
¼ cup vegetable oil
1 ½ cup whole wheat flour
1 ½ cup all purpose flour
3 tablespoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons sugar
2 tsp. ground ginger
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking powder
additional milk to brush tops

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine milk with vegetable oil and set aside. Sift together into a large bowl, the whole wheat flour, white flour, cornstarch, sugar, ginger, salt and baking powder. Make a well in center and stir liquid into dry mixture starting from center until you obtain a crumbly dough that holds together when squeezed.

Divide dough into two parts. Roll one portion at a time between two sheets of lightly floured parchment paper into a rectangle ¼ inch thick. Cut into 2-inch rectangles with fluted pastry wheel and transfer to baking sheets. Prick crackers with a fork and brush with a bit of additional milk. Bake at 350 degrees for 15-18 minutes or until light golden brown. Cool on wire racks. Store in airtight containers or freeze.

For the Parmesan Cream Cheese Pastry

8 ounces (2 sticks) butter or margarine, softened
8 ounces cream cheese, softened
¼ cup Parmesan cheese
2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon paprika

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