

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Salt and pepper are lively duo

Try to imagine cereal without milk, bread without butter, and beer without peanuts. Now try to imagine salt without pepper. Having had my roots implanted solidly in the restaurant business, I frequently notice diners reaching immediately for the salt and pepper and frantically shaking these matched spices — even before trying the food.

So what is it that makes this tasty twosome such a hit, so much so that folks like you and I wouldn't even think of not adding one or the other to everything from soups to Margaritas?

It's been noted that nowadays North Americans are consuming more than 10 times their daily recommended intake of salt and that the market for other types of pepper has grown by more than 75 percent. Why all the commotion?

Salt and pepper enliven simple and elaborate dishes alike without masking their individuality. Salt is a flavor enhancer, and pepper serves as a penetrator, enlivening the dish with a unique aroma and a biting, pungent flavor.

THERE ARE many varieties of salt available on today's market. A trip to the grocers will have you noticing racks filled with everything from ordinary table salt to iodized salt, kosher salt, seasoned salt, pickling salt, popcorn salt, rock salt, sodium-reduced salt and sea salt.

All have special flavors that enliven the dish, with some being utilized in other ways. Plain and iodized table salt are frequently the choice of cooks who use them because they dissolve easily. Kosher salt is used for its flakiness and is used for pickling and many garnishes, especially on crusty breads.

Seasoned salt is interspersed with such notable herbs and spices as garlic, onion, celery and sugar. Pickling salt is a fine-grained salt used expressly for canning, mainly because it is made without additives that cloud the liquid. Popcorn salt is heavily flavored and made extra fine so it will cling well to the warm, popped kernels.

Rock salt is never used for eating because it is the unprocessed product brought straight from the mines. It is usually mixed with ice and used in frozen dessert makers. Sodium-reduced salt contains half the sodium of regular salt and is made by mixing potassium chloride with sodium chloride.

Sea salt is thought by some to taste even better than mined salt. It is more expensive than other types because it is made by dehydrating sea water and cannot be mined.

Pepper, on the other hand, is a berry or peppercorn of a woody, perennial, evergreen, climbing vine. The peppercorn berries grow in spiky clusters four to six inches long, and each cluster contains 50 or more berries. As they ripen, they turn from a green to a yellow and then red. They are fully ripe and ready for harvest after about nine months on the vine.

THE SUPERMARKETS have a lot of catching up to do with marketing pepper varieties compared to salt.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Mychal, 8½, and Erin, 4, light candles on a Menorah handmade by the family members. With their parents, Debi and Hartley Chinsky-Harris,

they celebrate a traditional meal at Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, in their West Bloomfield home.

Memories of Hanukkah

By Anne R. Lehmann
special writer

FOR SOME it's called the Festival of Lights. For others it's called the fattening holiday. For the general public it's Hanukkah.

Blu Greenberg, author of "How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household," writes, "Next to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Hanukkah is celebrated by a broader spectrum of Jews than any other holiday." And why not? This historical holiday, which is rabbinic in origin, is a time for festive family get-togethers and special foods that so commonly mark the various Jewish holidays.

Actually, Hanukkah (which means "dedication" of the temple) commemorates the victory of a few righteous Jews over their Greek religious oppressors. The Jews recaptured the Holy Temple, which had become the site for pagan rituals and cultic rites by their enemies. Yet when the Jewish victors went to rekindle the Menorah (a holy candelabra), all but a single jar of sacred oil had been defiled.

The miracle of Hanukkah was that the small amount of oil, which should have lasted only a day, burned for the entire eight days of the rededication of the temple.

IT IS BECAUSE of the oil's significance that the premier Hanukkah food is pan-fried potato latkes (pancakes). Why potatoes?

Chaya Sara Silberberg of Congregation Bais Chabad of West Bloomfield declares, "They're a staple food that

has always been readily available for the rich as well as the poor."

Debi Chinsky-Harris of West Bloomfield fondly remembers the fragrant and tasty latkes her grandmother prepared each December. "My grandmother lived in Windsor and had the tiniest kitchen. Still, every Hanukkah we would go to her house for our annual latke feast," she says.

Chinsky-Harris recalls the sounds and scents of the browning, grated potatoes frying in oil and how the sizzling latkes would find their way directly from pan to someone's plate. "One of us would always get splattered by the oil or burn our mouths, too eager to wait for the latkes to cool. But it was worth it. Her latkes really were a gold standard."

Today, the latkes Chinsky-Harris prepares for her family and friends are a more precise version of her grandmother's recipe, which called for a little bit of this and a pinch or so of that.

"YOU KNOW, today with food processors, making latkes is really so easy," Chinsky-Harris says. "My grandmother used to hand grate the potatoes for years until the family got together and surprised her with what was then considered a major luxury — a food grinder. It shows you how things have changed."

For her husband Hartley, Hanukkah was a time of

family get-togethers, food and presents. "It was the one time in the year that my relatives came in from out of town," he recalls. "Sure we had the latkes, but, as kids, the focus was definitely on the gifts."

"That's what I like best about Hanukkah," Mychal, their 6½-year-old daughter, pipes in. "Me, too," adds Erin, her sister, three years her junior.

As a family, Debi and Hartley have been working hard creating Hanukkah memories for their children. "We baked special Hanukkah cookies," says Mychal, with Erin making it clear that she too had a role in the delicate and ornamental cookies.

"Frankly," says Chinsky-Harris, "the idea is to create Hanukkah shapes like the Menorah, dreidel (a little top that is traditionally spun during this holiday) and a Star of David." Light blue sprinkles atop the delicate cookies are reminiscent of the colors of the Israeli flag.

IN ISRAEL, the traditional food for Hanukkah is "sofganiot," or what we here in America call doughnuts. These deep-fried morsels are a seasonal treat that Israeli kids look forward to each year. Chinsky-Harris' variation on the theme is to make apple fritters from a recipe she borrowed from the Jennie Grossinger cookbook of hotel fame.

Although Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days, people tend to sample the foods once or twice during the holiday. Hard-core health nuts might forgo the oil altogether and "fry" up their latkes with a non-stick cooking spray. There are also some less fattening alternatives for the health conscious including carrot or cheese latkes.

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Mrs. Fields: no-crunch cookies

By Nechama Bakst
special writer

"The most important thing to me about food is it has to taste great," says 32-year-old Debbi Fields.

"So what?" you say. "What's so unusual about that?"

Ordinarily, not much. But Fields has capitalized on her philosophy to rise from sole proprietor, baker, waitress and chief bottle-washer of a single cookie store in Palo Alto, Calif., to become the president and CEO of a far-flung cookie empire.

Mrs. Fields Cookies now includes 770 cookie stores, with international stores in Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, Canada and England.

Among suburban Detroit stores are ones in Southfield, Rochester Hills and Westland. Last year, the company sold more than 200 million cookies.

Her success has a lot to do with the freshness of her product, said Fields, who was recently interviewed at the Southfield Hilton.

"The cookies taste good because 'We bake them all day,' so they're always 'warm, fresh and wonderful,' she said.

ACTUALLY, what makes Mrs. Fields cookies different from other

cookies is that they're not crunchy. Unlike the supermarket variety, they're meant to be soft and chewy.

That's why from the day Fields opened her first store in 1977, she has insisted on a two-hour holding policy.

After two hours, the cookies become "orphan" and are taken off the shelf and distributed to charitable organizations.

The longer you keep them, the crunchier they'll get, Fields said, but

she has some advice on how to get around that.

"If they get crunchy on you, put them in a plastic bag or a Tupperware container with a piece of bread overnight."

IN SPITE of her success, she firmly believes that "Good Enough Never Is," a philosophy she has made her trademark.

"I really think the cookies are great, but you have to make sure

they're great tomorrow," she said seriously.

If she walks into a store and the cookies don't meet her standards of excellence, she'll personally toss batches of them into the trash can, her employees say.

One ingredient she has made her specialty is the macadamia nut. "She uses 10 percent of the world's supply," said Sally White, the com-

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You can bake her chocolate cake

Here's something sinfully rich that Debbi Fields has concocted so friends and family can share her penchant for macadamia nuts.

CHOCOLATE MACADAMIA CREAM SATIN
Chocolate Cake

1 cup all purpose flour
¼ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ cup cocoa
¼ cup boiling water
¼ cup butter
1 cup buttermilk
1½ teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon vanilla
2 beaten eggs

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Grease, then flour an eight or nine-inch spring-form pan.

Cream the two sugars with the butter. Blend cocoa with enough boiling water to form a smooth paste. Add eggs, vanilla, and cocoa mixture to butter and sugar; blend well. Fold in sifted flour, salt and baking soda, alternating with buttermilk. Pour into prepared pan. Bake 35-40 minutes or until a knife comes out clean when inserted into the middle of the cake.

Remove the sides of the spring-form pan, but leave the cake sitting on the pan base. When cold, cut cake into two thin layers. Replace sides of the pan, leaving the bottom layer of the cake sitting on the base. Set the other layer aside.

Cream Satin Filling
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 egg
14 ounce cream cheese
4½ teaspoon unflavored gelatin
4 teaspoon water
3 tablespoons vanilla

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JOHN STORMZANO

Debbi Fields enjoys one of the soft, chewy cookies she created that are sold in her own stores internationally.