

taste buds  
chef Larry  
Janes

## Real beats wimpy

America is being inundated by wimpy food. You know what I'm talking about, wimpy food that has any connection to terms like "lite," "light," "tossed with," "sprinkled with," "marinated," or the worst — "delicately seasoned."

You've heard me talk many a time about Momma and growing up in a culturally rich German-French Canadian-Polish family. Up until a few years ago, before the introduction of wimpy foods like quiche and chocolate mousse, the foods that warmed my heart and soul were made with names like bacon and eggs and chocolate ice cream.

Real men (and women) drink "real" beer, and if they occasionally overdid it, they certainly wouldn't stick the freezer with Leon Quisino and Weight Watcher mousse-on-a-stick.

It's time to separate the men from the boys and the women from the girls. You don't have to be a cigar-chompin' big-bellied pork-lover to know that foods like "pasta" (especially those tossed with squash blossoms) should be banned from the "real" food list.

I DON'T KNOW about you, but I was raised on spaghetti. Occasionally, when Momma ran out of spaghetti, we had macaroni and then it was slathered with so much stick-to-your-ribs meat sauce that it was all you could do to use a half loaf of bread just wiping up the leftover sauce on your plate. As of today, say goodbye to pasta primavera, fettuccine Alfredo and shark-tooth-stuffed ravioli. Real men (and women) eat spaghetti with a real meat sauce.

When I was growing up, we ate real cereal. That stuff loaded with germs, buds, bran, apples and honey was made for folks like Euell Gibbons and Mrs. Slatewater, and she had the reputation of having all the lights on but never home.

I want corn flakes with whole milk. Save the 2 percent for the folks at Vic Tanny's. And when the weekend comes, skip the Belgian waffles with strawberries and cream. Give me bacon and eggs and a side of country fries.

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## Contest calls for comfort

Don't forget to include your phone number when you submit a recipe to the contest on comfort food. Call the Taste department at 591-2300, ext. 305, to add your phone number if you submitted your entry without one.

What's a comfort food? Maybe it's the food that makes you feel like a kid again, that reminds you of home. It probably makes you feel all snuggly and happy, even when you're downcast — like on a cold winter's day.

Recipes for the most appealing comfort foods will be published in Taste during February. Try them to pull yourself out of the doldrums.

Letters should be postmarked by Monday, Jan. 16, and addressed to: Comfort Food — Taste, The Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48105. Prizes will be awarded to readers whose recipes are chosen for publication.

# NOODLES

## Dive into dishes with dough strips

By Wendy Rubin  
special writer

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**N**OODLES DATE BACK as early as 5000 B.C., when the Chinese were making a primitive form by grinding wheat into meal and flour. And in 700 B.C., historians believe that the Etruscans (people who settled the upper Western coast of the Italian peninsula) were preparing pasta similar to gnocci — little balls of dough cooked in boiling water.

Explorer Marco Polo helped the Italians become the masters of pasta production in 1295 when he brought the Chinese version back home with him to Italy.

A noodle is simply a long strip of dough that is cut into any one of a wide variety of lengths, widths and shapes. The word noodle is derived from the German word "noodle," and dough usually consists of flour, eggs and water.

German-style noodles use ordinary wheat flour and must contain 5 percent egg solids.

The Chinese or Asian-style noodles have a large and unusual selection of main ingredients. There are rice, soy and mung bean, potato and seaweed noodles, which are prepared and

used in a variety of ways. While many of the varieties are boiled, Asian noodles are often pan or, deep fried.

The Italians largely influenced all Western noodles. Pastas are usually made from hard drum wheat flour and water and do not necessarily contain egg.

**THE HARD DRUM** flour is made from hard winter wheat and contains more protein than the other commonly used flours. Pastas are more firm, have better color and taste better than other noodles. A good hard drum wheat pasta has less ash in it. Ash is the substance that comes off a noodle when it is cooked, turning the water milky white. A good pasta product will leave the water with little or no ash. The clearer the water after cooking, the better-quality product you have.

Pasta use has grown steadily in the years since World War II. Over the last five years, pasta consumption and production in the United States has more than doubled.

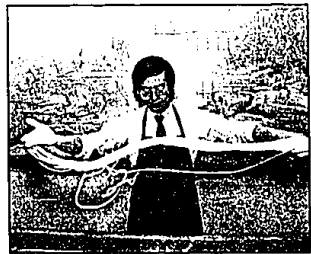
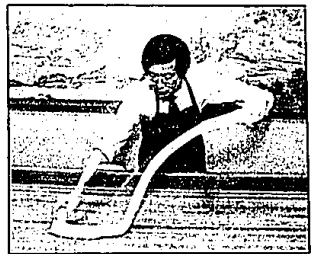
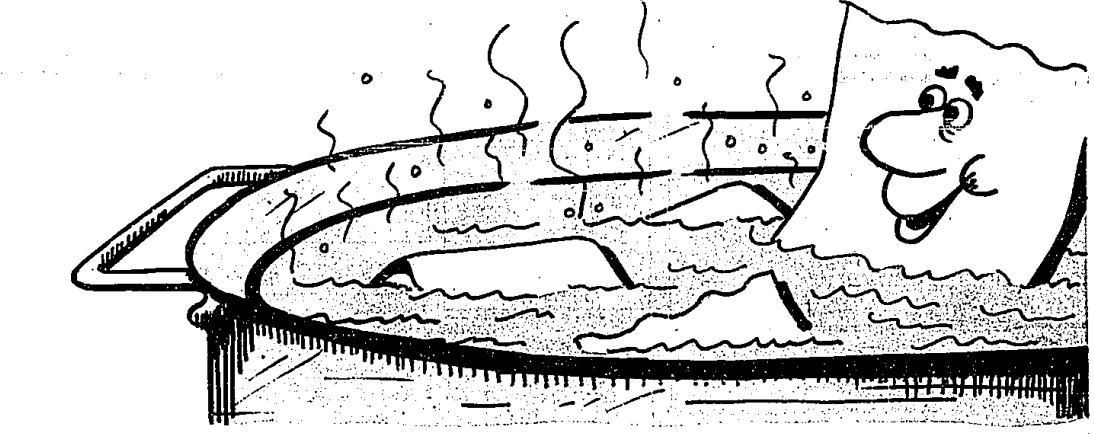
Our fascination with weight con-

trol and nutrition are largely responsible for the increasing popularity of pasta. For many years pasta or noodles were perceived as a fattening, high-calorie food. Actually, one cup of cooked noodles contains only 220 calories. In addition, you'll find one cup of noodles contains 7.5 grams protein, 7 grams fat, 16 mg calcium and 1.5 mg sodium. Many of the newest pastas on the market today are being made with no egg and contain no cholesterol.

Lining the shelves of grocery stores and gourmet shops you'll find the newest rage, flavored pastas. These are the fastest-growing segment of the noodle industry, according to Peter MacLazek, plant manager of Schmidt Noodle Co. and Herb's Homestyle Pasta in Detroit.

Flavored pastas come in an exciting and unusual selection of flavors. MacLazek said the most popular are parsley/garlic, bell pepper/basil, mixed vegetable ribbons and spinach ribbons. For the weight and health conscious, MacLazek recommends another popular seller — whole wheat pasta. Made without any egg, this type has no cholesterol and has fewer calories than other varieties.

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Charles Liu demonstrates making Chinese noodles at his restaurant, the Ching Tao Palace, in Southfield. The restaurant serves the noodles in some special dishes.

JERRY ZOLYNSKY/retail photographer

## In the stretch, Chinese noodles emerge

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

Charles Liu can transform a three-pound hunk of dough into 4,000 delicate Chinese noodles in much less time than it takes to heat a can of Campbell's chicken noodle soup.

Using the age-old technique of stretch and throw, Liu is master of a culinary art that originated in ancient China some 3,000 years ago. Marco Polo stumbled onto the long, thin noodles and carried them back to Italy where they were dubbed spaghetti during the 13th century.

Liu, owner of Charles Liu's Ching Tao Palace in Southfield and Clinton Township, first learned the ancient art as a lad of 13 in Shantung Province in China where his parents, Chi-

ang-ki and Yun-to Liu, owned and operated the very restaurant in which Liu was born in 1948.

It took the young Liu three years to master the craft.

"It's definitely a skill, an art," he said, in flawless English learned after arriving in the United States as a 22-year-old student in 1970.

"It takes a lot of patience. It's almost like meditation. You have to go with the dough, feel how the dough flows and then flow with it," Liu explained, as he stretched and threw a hunk into a series of configurations that moments later produced fine noodles ready for cooking.

**THE KEY** to a confident success is the flour. Each sack works differently. When Liu encounters a consistency particularly adept for nood-

le making, he buys a year's supply. This lot is Pillsbury all purpose.

Customers in his Southfield eatery are enraptured as Liu skillfully stretches and throws the dough that he has kneaded earlier.

Liu opened the Southfield palace, the second of two restaurants, in April. He has learned from experience that one way to build a thriving business is by displaying his unique culinary art and then serving the delicate noodles in special entrees. A special menu lists some 25 exotic noodle offerings, including a stir fry soup and noodles with specially spiced jumbo shrimp.

"It's the original pasta. If you like pasta, you'll like these. I like them all," he said, referring to the special menu.

It is this kind of attention to detail that assured Liu success in his first restaurant, opened in Clinton Township in 1982. Liu's father, also a master in noodle making who taught his only son, now manages the first palace where he is the primary chef.

Both eateries feature specialties on the regular menu that are changed annually in January, following trips to the Orient where Liu searches out new and unique Asian fare for inclusion in a menu that features Mandarin, Szechuan and Hunan cuisine.

**FAT, JUICY** scallops imported from Canada and mixed with vegetables selected for visual appeal, crispy chicken prepared in a flower pepper coating and orange beef,

featuring succulent slivers of the fruit are among this year's specialties.

The chicken and beef dishes are as good cold as hot, said Liu, referring to them as "finger foods." He has "del-ized" them. "Most people think Chinese food cannot be del-ized. But we have developed a whole line."

A mouth-watering hot and sour soup and a unique ice cream feature "Chinese meat" or tofu. The soup is made more spicy by a special sauce prepared by Liu's father who combines 13 ingredients from scratch.

The homemade sauce is also tasty on Liu's pot stickers, fragrant Chinese dumplings fried in a minimum of oil that causes them to stick to the pot in which they are cooking.

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