

Comfortable eating

4 winners give soothing recipes

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

COMFORT FOODS — those foods that remind you of warm childhood memories and/or soothe you when you're down — inspired a lot of readers of the Taste pages.

Nearly 100 recipes were submitted to our contest for readers' favorite comfort foods, after an article by Larry Jones appeared in Taste, describing his own choices in comfort foods.

The panel of judges decided that because of the great variety of recipes offered, a winner would be chosen in each of four categories: soup, main course, vegetable and dessert. The four winners will be awarded \$20 gift certificates to Kitchen Glamor.

You probably won't want to eat all these comfort foods at the same meal because, if you did, you might not feel too comfortable. But each recipe should tempt you when you, your family and friends need a little pampering. Comfort foods are especially good for those cold winter days when you might be suffering from the midwinter doldrums, otherwise known as the February blahs.

Entries came from the 12 readership areas of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. These were the recipes chosen for prizes: Italian Sausage Soup, from Rae Bruder of Redford; Mom's Meat Loaf, from Robin L. Womack of Farmington Hills; Scalloped Potatoes from Katherine M. Pokorny of Plymouth; and the Best Rice Pudding from Marian Bilznik of Farmington Hills.

ALTHOUGH the readers' comments weren't taken into account in the judging, many of the writers seemed to take great pleasure in recalling early memories, or describing reasons they favor particular comfort foods.

One of the winners, Robin Womack, wrote, "After reading your article on comfort food, I thought of my mom's meat loaf. As a child it seemed as though we had it for dinner about every week. My sister Si-



JIM JAGOFELD/staff photographer

Rae Bruder of Redford with Italian Sausage Soup.

san and I sort of made it a family joke.

"When I married many moons ago, I swore to my husband I would never make meat loaf. But, a couple of years ago, with two little girls of my own now, I figured what the heck, I'll make some meat loaf for dinner.

"I was so tired of making all the 'latest' trendy foods. It was a bit. And it tasted so good. It brought back a lot of memories... Thank you, Mom!"

Reached by phone, Womack said of the meat loaf, "I had it quite often as a youngster growing up — that and tuna casserole." She hastened to add, "My mom's a good cook. She didn't always make meat loaf."

Womack herself is "a full-time mom." She said she used to teach home economics and that the family moved to the Farmington Hills area from Chicago 2½ years ago.

HUSBAND RICK is a district sales manager for Tektronix in Farmington Hills. Their children are Caroline, 6½, who attends Gill School, and Kelly, 2½, whom she takes to Mom and Tot class at Alameda children's center.

More than one reader submitted a recipe for rice pudding, but the judges and a tasting panel decided that Marian Bilznik's the Best Rice Pudding was indeed the best.

Bilznik wrote that her recipe "is soothing and reminds me of times past. It takes a little bit of nurturing to make — feels good going down and afterwards. Satisfying and comforting!"

Bilznik teaches third grade elementary school in Milford. Husband Richard is a real estate broker who owns a Century 21 office in downtown Farmington.

Informed she was a winner, Bilznik said by phone, "I love to cook. I cook a lot. I have a wonderful collection of cookbooks. It's a real creative outlet for me."

Please turn to Page 3



BILL DRESLER/staff photographer

Katherine M. Pokorny of Plymouth and daughter Vanessa, 5, with scalloped potatoes, one of the four recipes that was awarded a prize in the comfort foods contest.

ITALIAN SAUSAGE SOUP

1 1/2 pounds mild Italian sausage
2 cloves garlic
2 large onions, chopped
1 large can tomatoes
1 1/2 cups burgundy
1/2 teaspoon basil
3 tablespoons parsley
1 green pepper, chopped
2 or 3 small zucchini
5 cups beef broth
2 cups uncooked bow-tie or other wide noodles
Parmesan cheese
2 teaspoons sugar

Slice sausage into 1/2 inch slices and cook. Pour off the fat. Add the onions and garlic and saute till wilted. Add tomatoes, wine broth, basil and parsley. Simmer uncovered for 30 minutes. Slice the zucchini into 1/4 inch slices. Add the zucchini and the rest of the ingredients and simmer covered for 30 minutes. Add 2 teaspoons sugar. Salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on each serving.
-Rae Bruder, Redford

MOM'S MEAT LOAF

1 1/2 pounds ground round
1/2 medium green pepper, chopped
1 medium potato skinned and cubed (small cubes)
1/4 medium yellow onion, diced
1 large egg
10 unsalted soda crackers (crumbled)
1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)
1 1/6 ounce can stewed tomatoes
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
8 ounces water

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Work all ingredients together and shape into a loaf. Place loaf in a 9x12 inch covered casserole. Pour stewed tomatoes on top. Sprinkle ground pepper over the tomatoes. Pour the water around the loaf. Microwave on high for 8 minutes. Bake in conventional oven for 1 1/4 hours.
-Robin L. Womack, Farmington Hills

SCALLOPED POTATOES

8 medium potatoes
1 large onion
8 green onions
1 pint cream
8 ounces fresh Parmesan cheese
8 ounces Gouda cheese
12 ounces bacon
1/2 cup salted butter
salt and pepper to taste

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Cut bacon into 1/4 inch pieces and fry until crisp. Set aside on paper towels. Peel potatoes and thinly slice.

Chop the onion and the green onions. Grate the Parmesan and Gouda cheeses. Cut butter stick into thin pats. In oblong baking dish, layer potato slices, sprinkle with bacon onion, green onion, and grated cheeses. Place 6 - 8 butter pats and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Repeat for layers 2 and 3. Pour the cream over entire baking dish. Bake 1 hour.
-Katherine M. Pokorny, Plymouth

THE BEST RICE PUDDING

1 quart half and half
1 quart water
1 cup sugar
1 cup long grain rice
1/2 stick butter or margarine
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 eggs
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
cinnamon
1/2 to 3/4 cup raisins

Mix the first 6 ingredients together in a 4 quart kettle. Bring to a boil, then simmer, stirring frequently for 40 minutes. Add raisins and remove from heat. Beat the 2 eggs with enough water to make 1 cup. Add to rice mixture and beat in quickly with a spoon. Add the vanilla. Return to the stove and bring to a boil. Refrigerate. Top with cinnamon before serving.
-Marian Bilznik, Farmington Hills



RANDY BORST/staff photographer



Robin L. Womack (left) of Farmington Hills with Mom's Meat Loaf. Marian Bilznik of Farmington Hills with the Best Rice Pudding.

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes

Already, he dotes on oats

Pick up just about any journal of medicine or health-style magazine nowadays and you will undoubtedly notice much is being touted about the benefits of oats.

New cereals are "sprouting" (excuse the pun) weekly on supermarket shelves, telling the consumers these are toasted, cracked, puffed, flaked, and all really taste great.

Give me a break. Oats are oats (and those doats...)

There isn't much out there, barring the use of tons of sugar, honey and assorted nuts that will make me respect oats anymore.

As far as I'm concerned, oats as in oatmeal is one of those breakfasts you eat on a sub-zero morning when you finally realize you promised to take the kids tobogganing. In all fairness, I must admit that I use oats in other circumstances that really taste good. It's what I mix with them that makes them taste so good.

SUCH AS MY recipe for Corny Banana Oat Muffins. Include in that list meatloaf. (I love meatloaf, especially cold on a sandwich, and when you raid the fridge at 2 a.m. for a sandwich, isn't it great knowing you're eating something healthy?)

In 1989 more than three billion bushels of oats were produced in the world. That's a lot of oats. Oats belong to the grass family. They have a fibrous root and stalk that can grow from two to five feet. At the top of the stalk, there's something called a panicle which contains about 10 to 75 little things called grains (oat kernels).

Interestingly enough, almost 50 percent of the worldwide oat crop is used not for grain but for straw and/or pasture. Now if life wasn't confusing enough, were you aware there are more than six different types of oats? There are common oats, common wild oats, cultivated red oats, large naked oats (hullless), side oats and wild red oats. Remember this at your next trivia convention: Like wheat, common oats (those most produced in North America) are broadly classified into spring and winter types.

The oat kernel itself has a very fibrous hull, which is inedible to humans. The goal in milling oats is to remove the outer hull and any extraneous matter that might affect the flavor in processing. First, when milling, the oat kernels are cleaned, then they are dried and roasted. This process develops flavor, improves quality and facilitates the separation of the hull from the grain.

After roasting, they are cooled before the hulling procedure begins. The hulling machine separates the great kernel from the hull. The groats, flour and unhusked oats are separated by air aspiration and screening. The choicest and plumpest groats are then used to make packaged rolled oats while the less choice groats make bulk or feed oats. All broken kernels are used for livestock feed.

AFTER THE HULLING process, the groats are then cut which produces uniform granules. After the cut, the granules are then flaked between large steel rollers to produce simple dried oatmeal.

I guess the main reason folks like oatmeal is that it is palatable, can be quite filling and is generally low in calories (it's the brown sugar and honey that make it a killer calorie-laden breakfast) with only about 130 calories per cup. Oats are also loaded with

Please turn to Page 3