

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Herb lady tells how she began

Occasionally in this business, I cross paths with other foodies who, like myself, enjoy playing in the kitchen. We swap recipes, stories and techniques over the phone, standing in line at the supermarket and in the strangest of places.

I met Diane Steinhauer of Westland one afternoon while she was volunteering as a room mother in her daughter's kindergarten class. Seems that in addition to helping out at school, she also makes time for a family of five while helping out as volunteer for the herb study group at Matthaei Gardens in Ann Arbor. She also has a 10-by-50-foot herb and vegetable garden at home and is involved in countless other activities.

An active member of the American Herb Society, Steinhauer tends to more than 150 assorted herbs in her own backyard. She can also be seen tending to the herb and botanical gardens at Matthaei. This summer, she will attend the national conference for the American Herb Society, which is hosting noted cookbook author and herbologist Sol Gilbert.

Anyone who has more than 150 herbs in a garden is, in my book, a self-appointed herbologist. Steinhauer's garden runs the gamut of her Westland backyard, creeping down the sides of the house, toward the street. She claims her garden is more experimental than functional.

THE PLOTS ARE laid out in Chinese fashion, using raised beds. The herbs are used mainly for culinary purposes, with a few of the more fragrant varieties being raised for craft purposes. Steinhauer claims she became hooked on herbs when she first sampled fresh tomatoes laced with a basil vinaigrette. In addition, many of her herbs end up in favorite soups and stews, salads and homemade vinegars and oils.

The herb lady says she began expanding her herb garden because, "It provokes all of the senses." She likes the texture of the leaves, the smell of the flowers, the assorted tastes, and the sounds of the birds and insects that flock to the garden during the summer growing season.

She has observed wild finches, hummingbird moths and swallowtail butterfly caterpillars, in addition to thousands of butterflies and birds who partake of her herbal delights.

The wildlife is not the only thing to benefit from Steinhauer's green thumb. She and her husband, Curt, spent their honeymoon canning tomatoes for the cellar. The Steinhauer kids, Geoffrey, 13, Maren, 9, and Alexis, 5, notice that Mom has become almost a permanent fixture around Hayes School.

For daughter Alexis' sixth birthday, Mom brought in a Peter Rabbit book and went through all the herbs Peter enjoyed while hopping through the enchanted forest. The class then feasted on parsley dip, fresh vegetables and chamomile tea, just as Peter Rabbit did in the book.

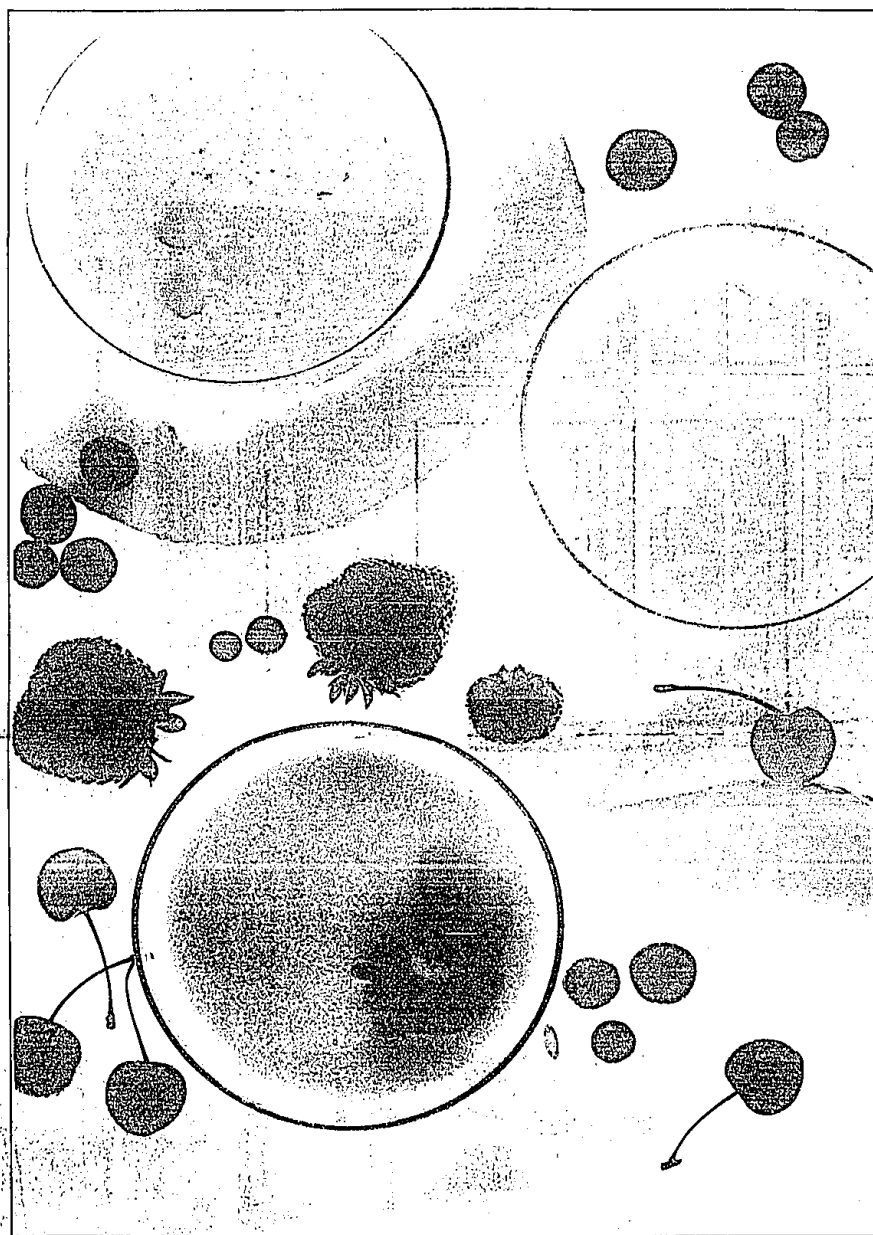
IN ADDITION, the Steinhauer family has successfully planted a pizza and salad garden at Hayes School, consisting of tomatoes, basil, peppers and assorted salad fixings. In all, when harvest time approaches, Steinhauer will find herself tossing pizza, stirring sauce and assembling salads for hungry 4th and 6th graders who, unknowingly, will get a lesson on herbs and vegetables while enjoying the bounty.

Talk about being wrapped up in her hobby, Steinhauer also volunteers and maintains the formal herb gardens at Matthaei Gardens. She assigns study topics to the various coordinators and helps with tours. She is very active in the fall herb and bulb sale and fundraiser at Matthaei.

Steinhauer is quick to point out that this year's sale will feature an amateur flower and plant show, in addition to a kitchen cupboard sale of homemade vinegars, oils and dried wreaths.

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Summer soups a cool choice



Fruit soups are among the cool summer soups, including strawberry soup (clockwise from bottom), blueberry, and chilled cantaloupe and honeydew soup.

JIM JAGDFELD/staff photographer

Easy to do ahead

By Gert Rinschler
special writer

WHETHER YOU'RE picnicking on the patio or cruising down the St. Clair River, chilled summer soups can soothe any appetite.

If you've never attempted to make one, keep this in mind: they're versatile, digestible and so easy to make. Most of them can be made in advance, require little or no cooking and travel well. What more could a good cook ask for?

From its beginning as a mixture of stones and water, soup has evolved into many different forms from France's gorgeous pot-au-feu, a broth enriched with daily leftovers, to an elegant chilled consommé.

It's difficult to document when the first chilled soup appeared since few European cultures embraced the idea. Tracing back through American food history, chilled soups didn't appear in cookbooks until the early 1920s.

Today, cold soups such as the Spanish gazpacho, French chilled cucumber or Hungarian sour cherry, have become standard summer fare. But, if you've tried these and you're yearning for some inspiring new ideas, read on.

Not all hot soups transform nicely into chilled soups. Vegetable purees and fruit-puree-based soups work best. Avoid those made from beef, bacon or those made with a high butyrate content since the fat will harden when chilled and become very unappetizing.

MOST FRUIT SOUPS are a blend of pureed fruit such as blueberry, melon, strawberry or a combination of them mixed with white wine. Generally, a sparkling white grape juice can be substituted for the wine if you wish to make them non-alcoholic. When selecting fruit, choose only ones that are ripe and have a fruity fragrance.

Other than gazpacho, most vegetable purees need to be cooked either in water, vegetable stock or a light chicken stock. Usually, a chicken broth or vegetable broth cube by Knorr-Swits works well because the fat content is very low. For most purees a blender does the best job in rendering a smooth base. Take extra care when pureeing potatoes in a blender. Because of the high gluten content, they will become gooey.

When tasting any pureed or creamy soup after chilling, you will notice the flavor becomes diminished. Spices such as curry, cloves and ginger often become muted when chilled. Other seasonings such as pepper, allspice and coriander intensify when exposed to heat for a long time. It's best to season these soups cautiously, tasting when hot and then tasting again after they have been refrigerated for a few hours.

There are no strict rules to follow.

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Use berries, melons, carrots or avocados

COLD BLUEBERRY SUPREME

Serves 4

3 cups blueberries, washed, trimmed
1 tablespoon orange or lemon test
1 cup cranberry juice cocktail
1 cup fresh apple cider
2 tablespoons crème de cassis liqueur or Chambord
Garnish: 1 cup lemon-flavored yogurt

Puree the berries in a blender until smooth. Add fruit juices, liqueur and zest. If necessary add sugar to taste. Chill for four hours. Serve icy cold with a dollop of the yogurt.

ICY CARROT CREAM SOUP

Serves 4

2 tablespoons unsalted butter or margarine
1 cup carrots, peeled and sliced
3 cups medium, russet potatoes, peeled, sliced
¼ cup diced leeks, white part only

3 cups light chicken or vegetable stock
2 tablespoons whipping or coffee cream
¼ cup fresh orange juice
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
salt and pepper to taste
¼ teaspoon dried basil leaves

In a large heavy saucepan, melt butter or margarine. When hot add leeks and cook, tossing until soft and transparent. Add carrots and toss 5 minutes. Add potatoes and warm stock and basil. Cover and simmer until vegetables are fork tender. Remove from heat. Strain vegetables from soup, reserving the stock, and puree in food processor or blender. Slowly add cream and enough stock to make a smooth creamy soup. Cool. Season and add orange juice. Refrigerate 2-4 hours. Taste and correct seasonings before serving. Garnish with large Italian parsley

leaves or orange slices.

AVOCADO CREAM

Serves 6

3 ripe avocados — 1½ cups diced
¼ cup whipping cream
¼ cup dry white wine
1 cup lightly seasoned chicken stock (fat free)
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
pinch freshly ground nutmeg
salt and white pepper to taste
Garnish: 6 small cooked, chilled, peeled shrimp and 6 sprigs of fresh dill.

Puree avocado using a wire mesh strainer or tamis strainer and wooden spoon. Bring chicken stock to a boil. Add wine and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and add cream and spices, then lime juice. Cool completely, refrigerate 2-4 hours. Taste just before serving. Add more seasonings if needed. Garnish

each individual bowl with a shrimp and a sprig of dill.
This soup is best when made the same day because it will darken when stored longer.

CHILLED CANTALOUPE SOUP

Serves 6

one 3-pound ripe cantaloupe, seeded, peeled and cut into chunks
1 cup fruity white wine or 1 cup sparkling white grape juice
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
Garnish: 6 thin lime slices and 6 tablespoons sour cream

Puree the cantaloupe chunks with the wine or grape juice in a blender. Blend on high speed until smooth. Flavor with lime juice. Refrigerate covered two hours. Serve very cold. At serving time you may need to whisk or re-blend for a few seconds. Garnish each bowl with a dollop of sour cream topped with a slice of lime.

STRAWBERRY ROMANOFF SOUP

Serves 3-4

1 pint fresh strawberries, washed, hulled, cut in slices
½ cup apple cider or apple juice
¼ cup sparkling apple cider
¼ cup low-fat strawberry yogurt
2 tablespoons cassis liqueur
about 1 tablespoon sugar

Garnish: 9-12 small-to-medium-size fresh strawberries; 12 medium, fresh mint leaves, silvered

In a blender or food processor, puree strawberries, cider, sparkling cider, yogurt and cassis. Taste, add sugar if needed.

Refrigerate 3-4 hours. Serve in bowls, adding 3-4 sliced strawberries per bowl and 3-4 silvered mint leaves. Serve chilled.