

taste buds
chef Larry
Jaffee

Farmers markets are fun

There's still time to take the last roller coaster ride of summer. If you're like the James Gang, this summer will certainly rank up there with the best but, believe it or not, we can't wait for what fall brings.

In addition to school, the regaining of supposedly regular schedules and crisp days coupled with blowing leaves, now the harvest begins.

What a great time of year to experience our colorful outdoor markets.

The Detroit area has some of the best pickings when it comes to farmer-type marketplaces. Aisles are brimming with squashes that could easily be contenders for the Guinness Book of Records. Mums ablaze with all the colors of the rainbow stuffed in institutional pickle buckets jockey for space between bushels of apples, baskets of corn and rows upon rows of sugar-sweet melons. Pumpkins will be appearing soon, heralding the harvest moon. If you haven't visited an outdoor farmers market, circle a date today and be prepared for what easily could be the greatest show on earth.

Granddaddy of them all, the Eastern Market, at the intersection of old Gratiot avenue and the I-75 freeway, beckons suburbanites from all over the area, ready to sample the wares of some of the oldest farmers around.

IN ADDITION to having just about everything you could ask for in the fruit and vegetable line, small shops abound on the perimeter of the market area and are reeking with the smell of olives, spices, fresh roasted peanuts, cheeses, meats and poultry — not to mention bagels and fresh-squeezed orange juice.

Eastern Market has a color and flavor all its own. Folks from all walks of life ply the aisles in search of \$4-per-flat strawberries, \$5-per-bushel canning tomatoes and \$6-per-50-pound sack of potatoes. One could easily pass the day just people watching. Bring the kids, a wagon and lots of dollar bills because, as they say in the advertisements, they don't take American Express, and checks are virtually unheard of.

Another fun, old-time market, not quite as big as the Eastern Market but still filled with loads of farmers selling right from the backs of their pick-up trucks, is the faded Chene-Ferry Market. Just off the I-94 freeway in one of the oldest parts of town, this is the market where the women still wear babushkas and the men congregate at corner bars for a two-bit shot and a beer. Prices are a little more reasonable because the rents are so low; but this part of old Detroit still blossoms with color and smells, especially during harvest time.

For a more upscale approach, check out the sights, sounds and smells at the Royal Oak Farmers Market. Just about two blocks west of old downtown Royal Oak, this is a yuppie-style suburban market in a big, old shed just a tad smaller than the State Fair Coliseum. Makeshift tables are set upon wooden saw horses topped with plywood and covered from one end to the other with fresh fruits and vegetables. This market is the northern suburbs' mini Eastern Market.

Not to be outdone, and sprouting a whole new look, is the Ann Arbor Farmers Market in Kerrytown, just two blocks north and one block east of downtown Ann Arbor. Here, you will find farmers from the western outskirts of sleepy little towns like Dabob, Saline, Milan, Dexter and Chelsea. With a little luck, you will come across a few kids with a large cardboard box of puppies or kittens that can be had for a song. Add to that a few bakers who offer loaves of oat bread, baskets of bran muffins and some of the best (and coldest) cider in town.

CLOSER and still in its infancy is the Ypsilanti Farmers Market nestled on the banks of the

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Daring to grill fish

COMBINE THE WORDS "grill" and "fish" and you immediately conjure up thoughts of Garfield, Felix and all the neighborhood felines perched vulturally on the deck rail.

On a more human side, mention fish on the grill and most backyard chefs will conjure up thoughts of raging fires, fish falling between the grids and a never-ending battle with flies. Let's face it, no one wants to spend an afternoon marinating \$18 worth of fish only to see it burn, or worse, fall through the grids and be swallowed by red-ember-coated swarms of charcoal.

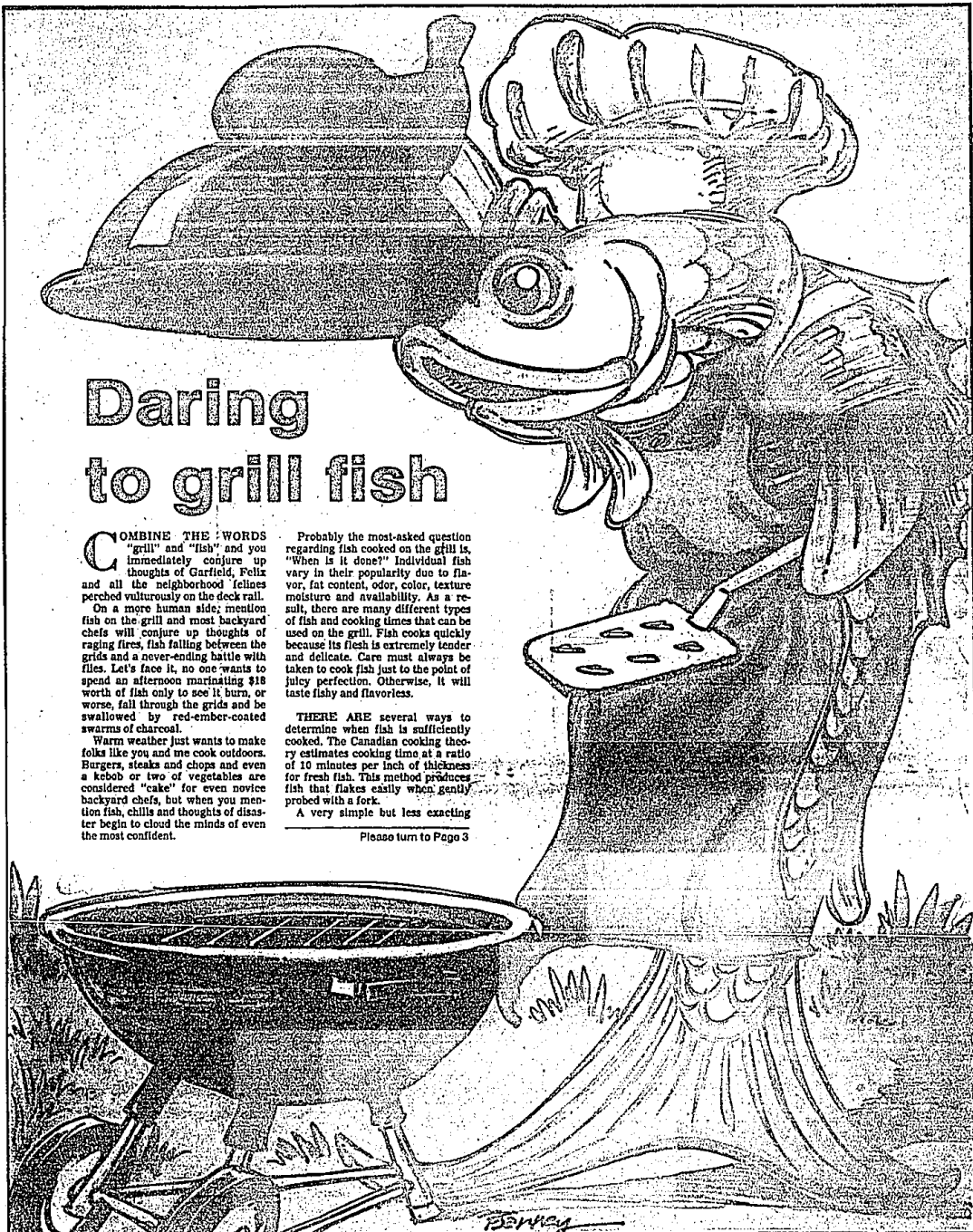
Warm weather just wants to make folks like you and me cook outdoors. Burgers, steaks and chops and even a kebab or two of vegetables are considered "cake" for even novice backyard chefs, but when you mention fish, chills and thoughts of disaster begin to cloud the minds of even the most confident.

Probably the most-asked question regarding fish cooked on the grill is, "When is it done?" Individual fish vary in their popularity due to flavor, fat content, odor, color, texture moisture and availability. As a result, there are many different types of fish and cooking times that can be used on the grill. Fish cooks quickly because its flesh is extremely tender and delicate. Care must always be taken to cook fish just to the point of juicy perfection. Otherwise, it will taste fishy and flavorless.

THERE ARE several ways to determine when fish is sufficiently cooked. The Canadian cooking theory estimates cooking time at a ratio of 10 minutes per inch of thickness for fresh fish. This method produces fish that flakes easily when gently probed with a fork.

A very simple but less exacting

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Wedding cakes can be surprising

By C.L. Rugenstein
staff writer

Once upon a time choosing a wedding cake was a simple matter. Tradition decreed that it had to be a white cake or a fruitcake — with all-white decorations.

Now, anything goes. Cakes can be chocolate, chocolate or cherry nut. Cake-top brides and grooms can be mice, bears or bikini-clad water-skiers. Black is even acceptable for frosting and decorations.

But the most unusual wedding cake decoration Ruby Marcel, owner and chief decorator, ever did for Thomas Wedding Cakes in Livonia was probably the miniature potatoes.

"The groom was from Idaho," Marcel said, then laughed. "I made the potatoes from marzipan and put the eyes in with toothpicks."

That cake also had the cowboy groom figurine, with a "girl off a softball trophy" for the bride, Marcel said.

In their busiest season, Easter to October, Marcel estimated they av-

erage 20-30 wedding cakes per week. That's not counting the approximately 100 specialty cheesecakes they also turn out each week.

SINCE EVERYTHING is baked fresh from scratch (no mixes or preservatives are used, Marcel said, and none of the cakes are frozen), that's a lot of baking and decorating.

Marcel bakes most of the wedding cakes early in the week and puts one coat of icing on them to keep them fresh.

"A cake will stay fresh for a week or two if it's not cut into," she said.

Marcel adds a second layer of icing when she's ready to decorate.

All the wedding cakes are decorated by Thursday with the flowers she has made up ahead of time. Two part-time helpers assist with the decorating, but otherwise Marcel does most of the work herself.

Her husband, Roy, who owned a service station before getting into the cake business, takes orders and delivers the cakes.

her husband have been meeting the challenge of their customers' unusual requests for 13 years. When they bought the little white building at Five Mile and Middlebelt roads, it was already a Livonia landmark.

Roy Thomas began the business more than 60 years before, with his own special recipes. Before he moved to the "park and peek" shop where customers could check out the cakes in the window after hours, and call to order them the next day — he had a shop in Redford. It was right on the way to Redford High School for then-teenaged Roy Marcel.

"I used to walk by the shop every day and wonder how he did things like that," Marcel said.

Now he knows.

HE AND Ruby, who worked as a cook at the old Huck's Bavarian Village, heard about the shop from a former employee of Thomas, Emma Stankov. She bought it when Thomas decided to retire, but had to sell it

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Ruby Marcel puts silk flowers on a wedding cake ordered by a customer.