

SQUASH TEMPTATION

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes

Kids love pumpkins each fall

Ask any kid this time of year what his or her favorite vegetable is and there's a good chance the answer will be "pumpkins."

I can remember hopping into the '65 Chevy BelAir with Mom and Dad and hearing the immortal words spoken by all parents at one time or another: "Be good. No fighting. We'll be at the apple orchard within the hour and you can each pick out your own pumpkin."

Of course, at that age, I could never really understand why someone would go to an apple orchard to get a pumpkin. Upon arrival, however, and before we were treated to cider and warm cinnamon-sprinkled doughnuts, we would climb over what sure could have been a zillion tons of pumpkins, ranging in size from minuscule gourds to bigger than a Dixie Cup, all the way up to one that would have required a U-Haul to haul away.

Pumpkins belong to the gourd and melon family, which also includes squash and cucumbers. Although there is some confusion between the terms pumpkin and squash, pumpkins are generally considered to be the large, orange fruits that have a coarse, stringy, strong-flavored flesh.

PUMPKINS WERE never served at the James Gang kitchen as table vegetables but instead mainly were used for pie making and table decorations. In other cultures, however, pumpkins are used extensively. The farmers of Manchuria dried strips of pumpkin in the sun, and the Italians still eat deep-fried, batter-dipped covered pumpkin flowers. With nouvelle cuisine, the resurgence of pumpkin in soups and sauces has taken the old jack-o-lanterns to new culinary heights.

With fresh pumpkin easily accessible during the fall harvest, many cooks rely on using canned pumpkin products throughout the year. Be wary of canned pumpkin products, however, if you're looking for "real" pumpkin, as some processors actually resort to using winter squash instead of real pumpkin.

My sources report that one major canner prefers the use of winter squash over pumpkin because they believe the flavor of the squash is superior. When I mentioned this to Momma, she replied, "Heck, by the time you add the brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice, you probably wouldn't be able to tell the difference anyway."

If you're interested in using pumpkin in other ways than the proverbial pie, you can cut the shells into small sections with the rind, seeds and stringy material removed and drop into a boiling cauldron of lightly salted water.

After the boiling, the meat can be pureed in a blender or processor until smooth and then mixed with your favorite spices, a little butter and brown sugar. Occasional Sunday dinners at Momma's always brought requests for her baked pumpkin casserole topped with marshmallows that melt down and add a gooey, Sanders sweetness to the otherwise bland vegetable.

PUMPKIN SEEDS can be prepared by first parboiling for a few minutes and then roasting with a little salt in a 350-degree oven, tossing frequently to prevent over-browning. About 30 minutes will do, when spread evenly over a non-stick cookie sheet.

Be warned that there is a difference between actual pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns that are used primarily for Halloween. Pie pumpkins are smaller and have a more rusty-orange color. Squash pumpkins have meatier insides than jack-o-lanterns but still have the same size and color characteristics. Jack-o-lanterns have thicker rinds and much less flesh and should be used only for decorative purposes.

So if you can't load the family into a '65 Chevy BelAir, buckle them into the minivan for a fun trip to a pumpkin patch.

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Colorful, plentiful and tasty

By Larry Janes
special writer

VISIT ANY farmers market or roadside stand between now and late October and you will be inundated with sights of squash. Long ones resembling warped baseball bats, giant ones that would fill the gullets of Goliath, and a multitude of other shapes, sizes and colors.

This summer, which will go down in record books as being pretty darned near perfect for area farmers, is certainly proving to be a boom year for those of us who love squash. My sources near the fields have voiced just one minor complaint, that the extended rainy period in this region the last week of August might curb the harvest of a James Gang favorite, pattypan squash. But other than that, look for bigger yields and giant-sized nature creations being picked as you read this.

Southeastern Michigan is home to an abundant array of various squash. A stroll through the Eastern Market reveals bushels of zucchini, barrels of spaghetti squash, battalions of acorns and bags of buttercups.

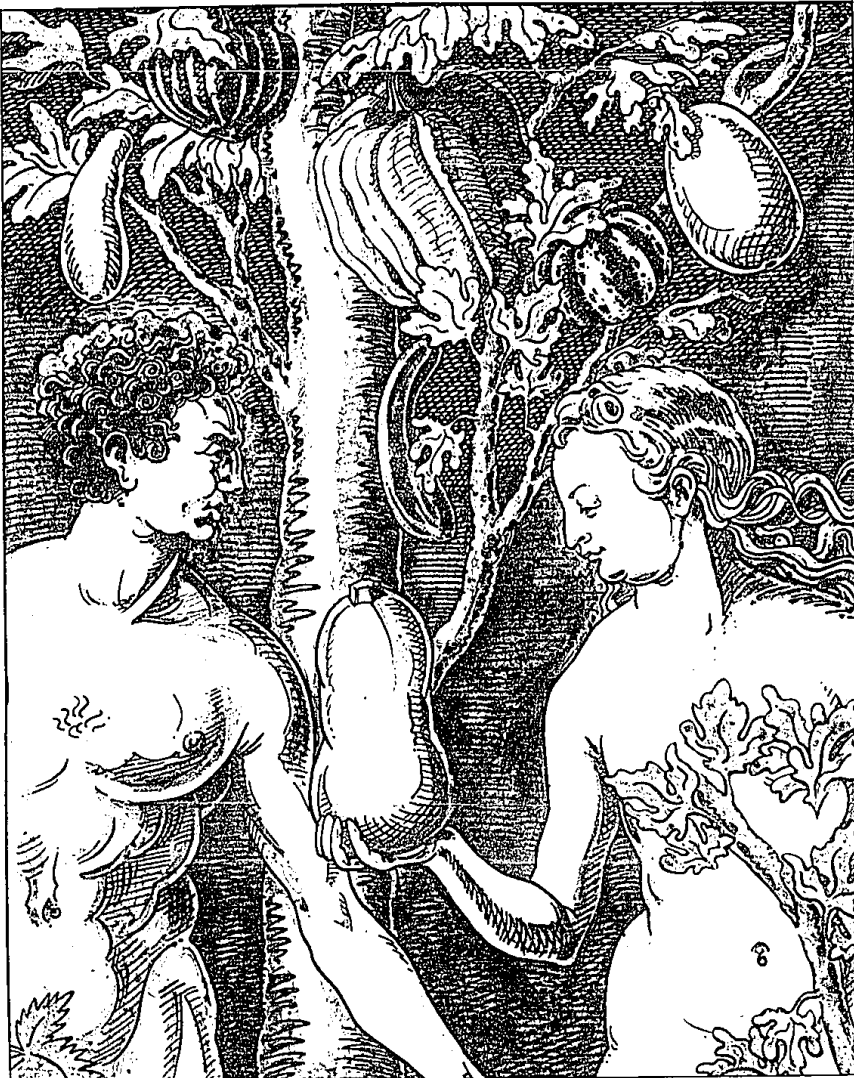
In addition, you will notice delicate, pale pattypan that resemble small flying saucers, crooknecks that could be classified as a dangerous weapon, hubbards that will easily feed the entire block, turbans so colorful they could double as crowns for royalty and butternuts that beg to be baked with a little brown sugar, orange juice and cinnamon.

SQUASHES ARE generally divided into two broad classifications, summer and winter. Both groups are actually edible gourds and, as with most other vegetables, made their way to the Americas with the early settlers. The basic difference between the two groups is that summer squashes are picked and eaten when young and immature, while winter squashes are allowed to harden, thus developing resistant skins and mature seeds.

It has been said that of the two, the summer squashes are more delicate in flavor, texture and keeping quality.

The most common summer squashes include green and yellow zucchini, straight-neck and crookneck, pattypan and chayote. Zucchini is by far the most popular of the lot, mainly because of its year-round

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Squash comes in both summer and winter varieties to enjoy.

Dough balls make dough at Marty's

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

In the few short months that Marty's Cookie Company in Birmingham has been selling dough balls, the unique idea has caught on like... well, like a ball of dough, with customers scooping up the mixed-and-measured offerings for baking at home.

"You know, if you're running behind schedule and need something quick," said owner Marty Herman, suggesting an explanation for brisk sales from the very beginning of the rich, round offerings.

Actually, all sales at Herman's shop are brisk — 12,000 cookies baked and sold each week — popular chocolate chip, luscious butter pecan, mouth-watering white chocolate with cashews, oatmeal with nuggets of raisin, creamy peanut butter and much more.

Because weekly sales of baked goods have always been good, it is only reasonable to assume that sales of the uncooked product should also be good.

Tastiness is a reasonable explanation why.

"WE SEEK OUT the best quality ingredients. If a recipe calls for butter, we only use the highest quality, sweet creamy butter scored 83. We only use double grade AA eggs," said

Herman, a huge bear of man born in Hungary and raised in Israel. He came to the U.S. in 1957.

Herman never purchases ingredients in bulk, and dough is prepared fresh daily, today's batch mixed for baking tomorrow. "We never mix and bake at the same time. It's too chaotic."

Recipes are finely tuned, refined over and over until "we find we can't make it any better." To ensure a plump cookie baked through and through, baking is slow at 285 degrees.

Dough is regularly taste-tested, samples from any given day set aside in the freezer for baking and tasting months later.

"It's our own quality control, a self-evaluation. We like to see just what's happening with our work."

A dozen varieties of cookies are always available at any one time, varieties that are regularly changed at customer request to accommodate varying tastes.

Also available at customer request are cookie bouquets, featuring fresh flowers and cookies of choice. One containing a dozen cookies costs \$40.

COOKIES FIRST CAUGHT Herman's fancy a decade ago, huge creations called Springwater's and

solid from large glass jars. At the time, Herman was up to his elbows in pizza, chicken and ribs, specialties of his then-eatery, Marty's Place in Orchard Lake where he continues to live.

Diners like Doug Hoffman urged Herman to relocate in Birmingham where Hoffman then operated a clothing store for men. After considerable consideration, Herman responded to the requests, making the move in 1982 and settling on cookies as a mainstay.

"I didn't have pies, cakes, flans or tortes. So why not cookies? I knew I could do it better (than Springwater's who has since ceased production)."

The small shop in Birmingham was specially designed to accommodate cookie baking and babies. A small nursery was built in the front of the shop for Miché, now 7, who was born shortly after Marty and wife Joyce launched the cookie shop. Jerusha, 6, and Norah, 4, also used the nursery that is now a storage and office room.

Assisting Herman in the cookie operation are "John who bakes, Ed who bakes, Roger who bakes and Joseph who bakes." Another dozen or so employees package and sell cookies, both in Birmingham and in a second shop in Detroit, opened two years ago.

Large cookies baked from a ball of dough the size of a small baseball sell for \$1 each. Dough balls the size of golf balls are \$3.50 a dozen.

In addition to cookies, Marty's features luncheon salads, unique croissants stuffed with such delicacies as bacon and broccoli, muffins and julecs.

Marty's is at 310 E. Maple, Birmingham.



Marty Herman has been selling dough balls to make his popular cookies.