

taste buds

chef Larry Janes



## Secrets of good pie crust

Whenever foodies gather, even during the holidays, you will find them taking subconscious notes about other foodies' creations, presentations and flavors. One of the most-asked questions I get throughout the year has to be "where did you get that?"

Surprisingly, many of the answers revert to suggestions gleaned from reading basic starter cookbooks such as "Betty Crocker's Cookbook" or the proverbial foodie favorite, "Larousse Gastronomique."

All kitchens, regardless of your cooking talent, should include at least one or the other of these two cookbooks.

Take pie crusts for instance. "Betty Crocker's Cookbook" has three full pages devoted just to the basics of making good pie crust. One page includes full-color photographs more than adequately describing the rolling and fluting techniques alone. Ten or so additional pages have in-depth material on making fruit pies, meringue pies, custard pies and lattice tops.

One might ask why I rely on such cookbooks, especially when I have a Momma and friends who can make crusts from scratch without the aid of a Cuisinart, pastry blender or \$75 rolling pins. To this day, Momma still uses the old wooden dowel rolling pin she received for a wedding present 54 years ago, beating out the likes of my ball-bearing rolling pin with eight or nine swift presses of the wrist.

THE ANSWER is simple. When you start with good ingredients, you make a good pie crust. Personally, I need the basic information these books offer with regard to amounts, along with other bits of information such as what happens when you use a self-rising flour instead of an all-purpose variety.

Here are a few examples of just what I'm referring to, compliments of Betty Crocker herself:

To make a perfect pie, use the right bakeware. Choose heat-resistant glass pie plates or dull-finished (anodized) aluminum pans. Never use shiny pans or the pie will take on a soggy bottom crust. Momma never knew why stoneware pie pans were a no-no. She just knew from experience that her Corningware pans made better crusts than stainless.

To cut in shortening evenly, use a pastry blender. If you don't have one, use two knives with the blades almost touching one another. Momma suggests that a small wooden-handled meat fork with larger separated tines works just as well. The food processor creates too much friction, which causes heat from the rapidly turning blades making the possibilities for a tough crust too easy.

If using a self-rising flour, omit the salt. Pastry made with self-rising flour will be mealy and tender instead of flaky and tender from all-purpose flour.

FOR A LESS-floury-tasting crust, use a pastry cloth. Momma disagrees with this one, claiming that anyone who knows his or her way around the kitchen should know you only need to lightly flour the pin and board for optimum results. If using a board, use it only for crusts and bread, never to chop garlic or slice fish. Marble slabs, although pricey, keep a discreet coolness, making the crust easier to roll, although Momma claims she wouldn't know where to keep a big, old marble slab and instead relies on her old wooden board.

The list of suggestions and helpful tips for the world's best pie crust could fill this newspaper section, but if your momma doesn't do pie crusts, it might be a good idea to invest in a good basic cookbook like Betty Crocker's. It makes a great gift idea for a new homeowner or someone who doesn't have a momma to call for help.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/Staff photographer

Bill Hayes — the business executive known as the Candy Man to his family — makes toffee for gift giving, in kitchen of his Birmingham home.

## Gifts from the Candy Man

By Janice Brunson special writer

**H**OMEMADE CANDY, according to Bill Hayes of Birmingham, is the ultimate in gift giving.

Hayes should know. Dubbed the Candy Man by the women in his life — wife Lynn, four adult daughters and a young granddaughter — Hayes draws upon family tradition to turn out batches of delectable fare fit for holiday gifts.

"It's the ultimate compliment," Hayes said of his unique sweet treats. Preparing gifts of homemade candy makes for a personalized effort. You're putting yourself out for someone else. It sends a message, "I like you."

It is a message Hayes has sent countless times to colleagues, friends and family. In an interview over shrimp cocktail and chef's salad served in a private dining room of the stunning Standard Federal building in Troy, where Hayes is a vice-president, Bill and Lynn talked about the Candy Man and candy crafting in traditional family style.

"I've been cooking since I was a youngster. My mother was very ill. I was an only kid. She taught me to cook from her bed."

"I grew up doing many things, but one thing I always enjoyed was cooking," Bill said.

His mother was an excellent cook, according to Lynn, who recalls memorable goodies prepared by her, "wonderful assortments of Christmas cookies, the kind nobody makes anymore because they are so involved."

Reflecting on his youth, Bill also spoke of nightly card games, accompanied by treats of popcorn and homemade fudge.

His choice of preferred recipes today are those of his mother, "Grandma's recipes that she kept on three-by-five cards. She had a lot of them and they go way back. I take them out every once in a while and just look at them."

Lynn continues, "His candy recipes are old standards from his mother, real old times. Some can be improved. Others can't really be improved at all. They're near perfect."

**EACH OF THE HAYES** daughters enjoys cooking and one, Jody Roeder, has Grandma's original cooking book, a leather-bound tome of handwritten recipes that carries "great sentimental value" to the family. Other daughters are Wendy Davis and Katie and Jill Hayes.

Because the entire family enjoys cooking, the kitchen gets crowded during family get-togethers. "With five or six busybodies in the kitchen, I have to muscle my way in," Bill says with a laugh, falling back on an old expression he likely used when the girls were young.

"It can be a real rhubarb."

The real rhubarb for Lynn is simple logistics.

"Candy making is a slow process. Each batch is small. The real problem is it's not possible to make enough. His production line is never-ending," Bill said.

"I'll tell you something else," Bill adds. Making goodies is expensive. "Then he launches into a chaty list of helpful candy crafting hints, based on years of experience.

The big thing is temperature. A thermometer is the key. When candy gets to the cracking stage, you

jump on it instantly and remove it from the flame.

"Use only the best ingredients you can buy. What's the definition of good chocolate? Taste.

"Pans are important. Use good utensils. In cheap aluminum, candy burns instantly.

"Pay strict attention while cooking. When making candy, you better be there all the time. You have

to stay in the kitchen."

Bill's strict adherence to these tips means consistently good results, yummy fare fit for giving.

For "extra pizzazz, expand certain ingredients. If it calls for 1 1/4 cups of chocolate, and you really want to make it great, use 2 cups. If it calls for 8 ounces of nuts, use 10 or 12 ounces." He chops nuts by hand to assure consistency.

### Hayes offers his recipes

Bill Hayes, the Candy Man, shares special recipes culled from his mother's old cookbooks. **CHOCOLATE ALMOND TOFFEE** 1 cup butter

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Hayes (left), wife Lynn, granddaughter Kristen Roeder and daughter Jody Roeder check out the Chocolate Almond Toffee.

## They've got the edge with muffins

By Joan Boram special writer

Let's face it. Folk wisdom to the contrary, it doesn't take much ingenuity to make lemonade out of lemons.

But there's a real scarcity of people who made a financial success out of muffin edges.

In fact, at last count, there were only two muffin-edge moguls in the whole world, and they're in Troy, at the corner of Rochester and Wattles roads.

Cousins Jacquie Ridley and Gale Jacobs, of "Ridley's Baked in Good Taste" are the first to tell you that muffin chips started as a mistake.

"It was before we had the retail shop," says Ridley. "We were still just wholesaling tea breads and muffins. We were renting ovens from a caterer in his off hours. When the muffin dough ran over onto the pans, she help trimmed off the crispy edges and snacked on them."

"Then I started taking them home, and my sister-in-law said, 'Hey, you've got a good thing here. You should market them.' Well, you can't very well go around peddling the edges of muffins, so I didn't give it

serious thought.

"Then we opened the store in Troy, and we started putting muffin edges on the counter as samples. On the beginning he gave us practical customer were so crestfallen that we felt gully. Then we began to think, 'Maybe we really do have a good thing here,' and the rest is history."

**WELL, SORT OF.** It takes a special kind of intelligence to take a scientific approach to muffin edges, but Ridley (with a fine arts background) and Jacobs (a calligrapher) had the right stuff.

"We owe a lot of our success to Frank Farrugia of FAF Co. He not only had confidence in us, but from the beginning he gave us practical advice and helped us find the right equipment," Ridley says.

"Frank found us an old pizza dough roller in a former pizza shop in Southfield. We experimented with muffin dough until we developed one thick enough to accommodate the roller."

"Before that, we had a separate shift at the store, 10 people with rolling pins starting at midnight. Everybody hated the muffin chip shift.

"Why me?" they'd moan."

Muffin chips come in several flavors. The most popular recipe, "Nuts Over You," includes eight kinds of nuts. The treat is sold in four states and has just become available in area Kroger stores. An airline in the South is considering replacing bags of peanuts with bags of muffin chips.

The cousin/partners — they finish one another's sentences and obviously enjoy each other's company — credit Ed Jonna of The Merchant of Vino for much of their success. He was one of the first to carry muffin chips, and he was the prime mover behind their entry into retail.

RIDLEY SAID, "He called us in February and said, 'You're ready to enter the retail market. I found a shop. You have to take it.' Well, it was right next door to his store. To have him want us next door was a real vote of confidence. We looked at the store on Thursday and opened the following Monday."

Opening day at Ridley's Baked in Good Taste was like a scene from Chaplin's "Modern Times." The ovens, carried over from the previ-



Gail Jacob (left) and Jacquie Ridley hold their "fruitcake-halter" fruitcake," which is also in gift basket along with cookies and soft drinks.

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JIM RIDER/Staff photographer