

taste buds

chef Larry Janes



Simplify holiday cooking

Meatloaf recipes: 3B

Every now and then, we foodies need to be kneaded down a little. Must be all that yeast, flour, good food and wine that so often "goes to our heads."

At one of my favorite restaurants last weekend, I ran into a faithful reader who commented on the fact that all I ever write about are "elaborate" foods and ideas that few working people have the time or energy to create.

Well, you asked for it. Just when you needed it the most, here are some basic holiday tips the Janes Gang uses to make life in the kitchen just a little more comfortable and less hectic.

First, never underestimate the qualities of a good meatloaf. Most folks look at this recession staple as a Tuesday night dinner. At my house, we use a basic meat loaf recipe and use it to stuff mushroom caps, wrap in puff pastry or phyllo dough (precooked) or make meatballs, which are mixed with equal parts of grape jelly and chili sauce for a tasty hot appetizer.

IF THERE'S ever any left, we crush it up and mix it with taco seasoning for a topping on nachos. Never has one food item served to be so versatile. It's freezable, microwavable, but most of all, inexpensively easy. Everyone has their 15 minutes of fame and adulation, or so Andy Warhol says. But as for me, I'm just waiting for some fancy food magazine to ask me to name three ingredients in my cupboards.

Because so much of our entertaining is the non-planned kind, open up my cupboard and you'll find at least two cans of "exotic" vegetables along with an expense of different oils.

The vegetables are kept for foodie emergencies like the time when, out of desperation, I opened a can of artichoke hearts, drained them and mixed with equal parts of mayonnaise and Parmesan cheese.

The mixture was then plopped into a small pie plate and baked at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. A hot, aromatic and thoroughly pleasing hot dip that was at home with french toast points or Ritz crackers.

Ditto for that can of garbanzo beans that can be blended or finely chopped and mixed with some finely chopped onion, a little oil, salt and pepper for a humus-type cold spread that when dipped with pita from the freezer and heated in the oven can be a godsend for the busy homemaker.

SPEAKING OF freezers, mine has never made it through the holidays without a constant supply of unsliced French-type bread. This is the stuff that can be taken from the freezer still frozen, sliced lengthwise and brushed with either olive oil, vegetable oil or nut oil and sprinkled with dried basil (fresh chopped is even better but not mandatory).

Add some Parmesan and, if available, paper-thin slices of tomato for a homemade hot bruschetta that can be sliced into wafers, plated and passed as a hot appetizer that will warm anyone's heart.

Sitting next to the Campbell's Cream of Mushroom soup that, when heated and mixed with two cups shredded cheese, turns into a hearty cheese fondue is the ever-present can of refried beans.

Either one can be spread onto a large heat-proof platter and then ringed with shredded cheese, chopped onion, chopped and drained canned tomatoes and a sprinkling of cumin and garlic powder for a nacho-type dip calling for more.

So if you think that entertaining has to be planned out with ample dollar and time outlays, think again. The holidays should be a time of fun and only you can make them that way.



STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

By Larry Janes
special writer

WHILE RADIO personality J. P. McCarthy might wear the "cans" (headphones) in this family, but when it comes time to set the table for New Year's Eve, his wife Judy knows just what to do to make the New Year come in with a bang!

This year, as in years past, Judy and J.P., of Bloomfield Hills, will usher in the New Year enjoying the sun and sunsets at their winter home on Hope Sound, just north of Jupiter, Florida. Judy arrived and began holiday preparations the week before Christmas, anticipating J.P.'s arrival after his last WJR morning show program on Dec. 21.

Christmas was spent with 13 relatives — sons, daughters and their spouses — who flew in from around the country to spend the holidays with Mom and Dad.

For New Year's Eve, the McCarthy family will join with other friends, making a combined guest list of almost 60 for a ritual that will begin with cocktails at 9 p.m. and lead up to a midnight supper complete with hats, noisemakers, confetti and plenty of great food and drink.

Dining in Style on New Year's Eve

Setting the holiday table for a feast of this size is no simple undertaking. J.P. says Judy "almost makes herself crazy" concocting new ways to set the holiday table. This year, Judy was asked to join in with the Cranbrook House and Garden Auxiliary and do a complete holiday table set-up to benefit Cranbrook House in Bloomfield Hills.

WHILE SOME of the other guest table-setters chose a Christmas motif, Judy came up with the idea of doing something totally elaborate and fun for New Year's. Clutching a gold moire teddy bear that was received as a gift last

year from a special friend, she set out with china pattern in tow to a Calico Corners fabric shop, where she located a delicate red, green and gold material easily cut and hemmed for a tablecloth.

Then it was off to a costume shop in search of a shiny top hat that perfectly fit the stuffed bear. Coupling the hat with some mylar confetti, some shiny brass candlesticks and her newfound tablecloth, Judy was ready to put it all together with the McCarthy's own china, crystal and silver.

The centerpiece will add a touch of whimsy, while the tableware will add that certain "je ne sais quel" to the elegant meal that Judy

will help cook and serve along with friends.

Not knowing what her friends are preparing for New Year's Eve, Judy will spend a few hours in the kitchen, probably preparing individual lamb chops, planked potatoes and a traditional New Year's favorite of the McCarthy clan, a Chocolate Angel Pie that, as Judy puts it herself, "simply melts in your mouth."

When questioned about how she pulls all this off with minimal stress, Judy claims that cooking, along with table setting and flower arranging, just comes "naturally easy."

She readily admits that she

adores fresh flowers. And even though there is no formal education in design in her background, the challenge to create something is one that is taken on with gusto.

OF COURSE, with the additional help of the McCarthy children and their spouses, the "work" part of it is completed in no time, as their assistance is used to the fullest.

In addition to doing the holiday table settings for the family, Judy keeps herself busy throughout the year, assisting many local auxiliaries and charities.

She was chosen this year as one of the table-setters for the Cranbrook House and Garden Auxiliary because, in addition to being the wife of J.P., she frequently donates her time and talents to the community.

The Holiday Tables fund-raiser, the largest of the fund-raisers organized by the auxiliary, raises money for the restoration and preservation of the historic Cranbrook House.

For more information on the Cranbrook House and Garden Auxiliary and their many efforts, including tours of the historic Cranbrook House, call the auxiliary at 645-3149.

Fondue: old favorite with a new twist

By Jennifer L. Hill
special writer

Good Food, Good Fun and Good Company for New Year's Eve. Why not try a dessert fondue party to ring in the New Year?

What better way to greet the new year than with a good glass of champagne accompanied by dessert in the form of fondue. It is fun, informal and can be done on the spur of the moment for those last-minute parties or when surprise guests drop by.

A fondue party is a great way to entertain. It is a perfect opportunity to get together and renew old friendships as well as make new ones.

Fondue is simple to prepare and can be done in advance, allowing you to get out of the kitchen and enjoy both your guests and their conversation. Your friends can also join in the preparation by dividing these tasks among the group.

The Swiss classic fondue, made of melted cheese, was the rage in the 1840s and early 1970s in many American households.

Fondue pots were also filled with melted chocolate in which pound cake and strawberries were dipped

for dessert. As the novelty wore off, fondue sets took a back seat on kitchen shelves, only to come out once in a while for nostalgia's sake.

We are beginning to see the fondue set once again because of its convenience. More new and different recipes, ranging from appetizers to desserts, are being created.

IMAGINE NEW twists on the classic fondue. For instance, instead of plunging a juicy ripe strawberry into a pot of melted chocolate, a moist cube of chocolate cake can be dipped into a warmed fruited sauce. The classic chocolate fondue will remain the granddaddy of dessert fondue with more and more accompaniments for dipping — for example, peppermint sticks, festive for the holiday season.

Fresh fruits, such as apples, strawberries and bananas, are usually served along with pound cake for a dessert fondue. But to make it special, try such serving suggestions as whole dried fruit, or one of the "new" fruits: carabola stars, kiwi and mango. You can also use meringue, macaroons, brownies, mini cupcakes and sponge cake to dip in the warmed sauces.

Try strips of puffed pastry lightly sprinkled with sugar to serve as an alternative. I also suggest cutting up that fruit cake you received as a gift and those holiday cookies, sugar or gingerbread men will do, to make it a little more festive for this holiday season. Place them next to the fondue pot and watch them disappear, along with the other accompaniments.

Try some condiments such as chopped nuts and toasted coconut for rolling your dipped fruit or confections in. This adds a different texture and treat to your fondue.

WHILE FONDUES are simple to make, here are a few general hints you might want to keep in mind when preparing your dessert fondue. Be sure that the temperature, or flame, is set low so that the sauce is warm enough without burning the fondue.

Also, when making the fondue that calls for egg yolk, be sure that you continue to whisk the mixture while on the stove so that the yolks do not scramble while heating. (The egg white may be used to make meringue for dipping.)

Try limiting your party to a small

number so it remains intimate and more informal. Fondue is conducive to small numbers (4-6 people per pot allowing enough room for the forks in each pot).

What my friends and I do is use more than one fondue pot so that we are able to have more than one type of fondue at our gatherings. Offer your guests coffee, a nice dessert wine or cordials when the festivities

begin, and, of course, a glass of champagne when the clock strikes midnight.

As the clock chimes in the New Year, raise a glass and toast to good health, good fortune and that you find yourself in the company of good friends for the new year. Happy New Year!

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