

taste buds

chef Larry Janes



Custard is always soothing

I love comfort foods. Foods that remind me of Sycamore Street, Sunday chicken dinners and Momma's custard.

Beloved by children of all ages, custard is a mixture of milk, sugar, salt and a smidgen of flavoring. It can be either gently cooked on a stovetop or slowly baked until firm, which is how Momma did it, in heavy ramekins that resembled silvery Frisbees with handles.

Stirred custard, also known as creme anglaise, is the slow-cooked stovetop version that doubles as a sauce, pastry filling and base for many chilled and frozen desserts. Baked custard is a more simple product, especially when garnished with fresh fruit or whipped cream or bathed in a caramelized sugar syrup as in the famous French dessert creme caramel and its Latin counterpart, flan.

Made properly, custard is creamy and tender. As it so often happens in the Janes Gang kitchen, it turns into a curdled, weepy mess. Last week was the last straw. After a third attempt using Momma's trusted recipe of which she says she never varies, I found myself looking to the compost heap with something that was a cross between soiled milk and cold, yellow gravy.

Now I have to dial 1-313 to get Momma's Kitchen hot line, but the long-distance charges are definitely worth it, especially when all my other reference books give me recipes but can't tell me what I'm doing wrong.

DON'T YOU JUST love moms who start out the conversation with, "Don't worry, I'll make you something right now and have your father drive it up for dinner tonight?"

"Sorry, Ma, you're missing the point here," I interrupted. "Why can you make it so good and I can't?" was the \$3.00 question of the day. Sounding almost like a Certified Executive Chef from Scofield College's famed culinary arts department, she went into a monologue about how, when preparing her custards, she makes sure time is of little consequence. Seems that she, too, once experienced problems because she tried to cook the custard too quickly at too high a temperature. "You have to do it slow, with a gentle heat" was her professional opinion.

"But, Ma, I want to eat it now," I whined. "You can't," she retorted.

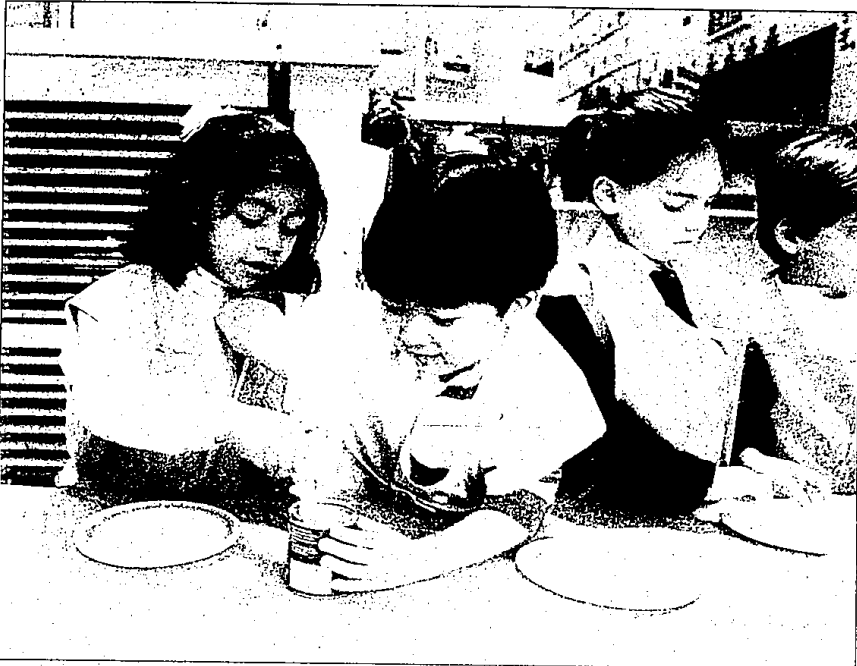
Three again, all my years of schooling, coupled with about a million pages from cookbooks slowly crumpled into oblivion followed by the simple line, "Just do it, slow."

Yes, there are other tricks to making a good custard. Most important, however, is knowing that the line between a thickened custard and a curdled one is often only a few degrees of heat. Double boilers over hot, but never boiling, water are a must. Warm up that stirring arm because, like Momma always says, keep stirring so a velvety custard is made instead of a lumpy one. Also remember that a custard has thickened sufficiently when it leaves a velvety coating on the back of a spoon and if a track made by running a finger down the coated spoon stays clear.

BAKED CUSTARDS aren't as delicate as stirred custards. They need to cook in a moderate oven but should be set in a pan of hot water to keep from getting too hot. The custard is done if, when touched, the finger comes away clean.

Here's a trick I taught Momma. When she makes her great baked custard, top it with some granulated sugar and then use a blow torch to crystallize the top. Now, even Momma keeps a blow torch under the sink, just for this purpose.

So if you're looking for a great comfort food, a cool, creamy custard may be just what will fill the bill.



(Left) Senior Kindergarten children learn how to make their own after-school snacks at a special session at Brookside School Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills. (Below, left) Naina Gulati bites into burrito with honey and banana.

Kids in the Kitchen



By Jennifer L. Hill special writer

AFTER-SCHOOL SNACKS and children go hand in hand like peanut butter and jelly. Cooking with kids is just as natural a pairing. What better way to get children involved in the kitchen than to have them prepare their own snacks.

The kitchen is a perfect place for learning and trying different foods. What can kids do in the kitchen? Recipes that entail simple steps such as measuring, stirring, rolling or kneading are perfect for little ones. Even the tiniest hands can tear greens, pour milk or sift flour. Two to 4 year olds can perform the simplest of tasks such as washing fruits and vegetables.

With the help of a few experts, from Brookside School Cranbrook's Senior Kindergarten, I was able to put a few of these cooking skills to use when trying a few of the following snacks. These snacks are comprised of simple steps and need little supervision.

The crew washed hands, donned smocks and went to work. They prepared two special treats, Peanut Butter Burritos and Cereal Snack Mix. For the burritos, they peeled, sliced and chopped the fruit that was to top the peanut butter-covered flour tortillas. A choice of assorted fillings, ranging from bananas and

canned fruit to raisins and shredded coconut, was offered to my assistants for their snack burritos.

EVEN MARSHMALLOWs found their way into a burrito or two at the suggestion of one student. This snack is so versatile it lends itself to many creative combinations. There even was talk of topping a burrito with Cheerios from the snack mix. After pecking and choosing their burrito fillings, the most popular being banana and honey, each youngster rolled his or her tortilla in a burrito fashion.

Naina Gulati was the first to try her burrito. With a little hesitation she tasted the flour tortilla alone. Then, without any hesitation, she bit into her little bundle, which contained honey and banana. There were many approving faces with this snack.

The Cereal Snack Mix has something for everyone. My assistants helped to measure and pour the ingredients into a bowl. After dumping and mixing the ingredients, some children peeked out the Cheerios, others the marshmallows. A few boys and girls found the combination to be "just" great. Matthew Shan liked the chocolate-covered raisins so much that he came away from the mix with a handful.

Although there was not enough time for my helpers to cook everything, the cheesecake was there for them to sample. Many of them found

the light, airy cream cheese ricotta cake to their liking without any of the toppings. Imagine what they would think of this cheesecake if it were adorned with chopped maraschino cherries and shaved chocolate or any of the other toppings.

The cheesecake is so simple to make and only requires your assistance when whipping the cream, beating the cheese and melting the butter. The kids can crumble their own cookies for the crust. What could be as much fun as crushing cookies in a plastic bag with a rolling pin or simply pounding the cookies with a fist. The rest of the recipe is just as easy.

WHEN MAKING the recipes Peanut Butter Burrito, Easy Cheesecake, Cereal Snack Mix and Quesadillas, only the quesadillas require assistance at the stove. Quesadillas are simple to make and can be cooked either on the stove or in the oven. This Mexican specialty is a great alternative to pizza or grilled cheese sandwiches.

There is no snack every child will like, but if you try these you are sure to get many approving faces. Make the recipes at home with your children and give them a chance to work in the kitchen. You may have tomorrow's chef at your side.

Specialties Page 21

Brady's burgers light up Irish eyes



Good hamburger — Brady's burgers, especially the Charlie Brown version with cheese and bacon, are the main reason people go to his tavern on Southfield Road in Beverly Hills. Some customers are followers of his father, better known as Diamond Jim Brady, whose restaurant on W. Seventh Mile Road in Detroit was a popular spot for years.

Matt Brady and his brother Patrick kept that great tradition with its trademark swinging doors and murals of New York, going for years after his father died and after the neighborhood got rough. It wasn't until late 1988 that Brady closed the Detroit spot and brought the "famous one," as the burger is called, to the suburbs.

Thomasol Jim's name lives on through his son, Tom, who operated a restaurant by that name in Southfield for several years and now is in the process of moving to Novi. The burgers, and the characteristic warm, casual, light-hearted atmosphere lives on at Matt's place.

There are murals on the wall here, too, but they are of Detroit classics, such as the Olympia and Blessed Sacrament Cathedral, and today's Detroit riverfront. The bar itself is a conversation piece — made as it is to include 23,000 shiny 1989 copper pennies all carefully lined up — with one flipped over.

Find the one, and you will see the proprietor's admiration, and may be a free glass of pop. This is a great place for families, even a single child, are welcome and friends to gather. Even women find comfortable to stop in alone for a burger and a beer.

Although the Charlie Brown is always crisp, the "famous one" with bleu cheese is good, too. Other variations include adding grilled onions and mushrooms or the "Pancho" (\$1.95 too) with its Swiss cheese, chili, onions and Parmesan cheese.

Add a cup of chili and an order of the seasoned curly fries or the chili fries, and you have a good meal. The chili is respectable, not ferri-ferri but mildly seasoned, and thick with meat and kidney beans. The curly fries are very good and milder than seasoned fries we have tried elsewhere.

About a third of the burgers he serves these days are made of ground turkey, predominantly



white meat turkey. Brady says no one was more surprised than he that the turkey burger, topped with onion and cheese, tastes so much like the chicken beef version.

SALES OF SALADS are picking up here, too, and again Brady's has more than produce good hamburgers. The meat pie on Wednesdays is quite popular, and hermit bread is said to be great. Better than his mother's, according to Brady.

Good choices for kids are the grilled cheese sandwiches and grilled chicken strips listed on the menu as an appetizer but easily a meal for a child.

Details: Matt Brady's Tavern, 4124 Southfield Road, north of 13 Mile Road, Beverly Hills, 642-6422. Hours: Monday-Saturday, 11:30

Owner Matt Brady shows off hamburger that brings most customers to his tavern.

and 2 am. Sunday 12 noon - 2 am.

Prices: Burgers, sandwiches and salads, \$3.95-\$5.95. Beer, \$2.95. All import credit cards.

Value: can't be beat for a casual place.

Rating: ★★

RATING GUIDE:

- ★ Average: lots of places with similar quality
★★ Good
★★★ Very good
★★★★ Excellent
★★★★★ Consistently superb — a rare honor