

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Add flavor with your own herbs

You're reading someone who firmly believes that there should be 30 hours in every day because you can't accomplish everything in just 24.

As if I didn't have enough to do, I have discovered a new hobby: herbology. Granted, I've known about, and cooked with, herbs for many a day; but lately, more and more little pots have been popping up on my eastern-exposure kitchen window.

Now when I stroll into Kmart, I head for the garden center instead of the toothpaste aisle. I even want a pitchfork for my birthday.

Every day I venture into the garden, praying that this day might be the day I find the soil crumbly and ready to be tilled. The compost heap is filled with last summer's grass clippings, fall leaves and winter's old foodstuffs and compostable garbage. Soon a rich, moist humus will be opened and worked into the ground, enriching the soil.

My garden has always sprouted parsley, basil, chives and tarragon; but this year, tiny pea pots will blossom with oregano, opal basil, watercress, dill, chervil, thyme and marjoram. Instead of paying the grocery store \$1.69 for a minuscule bunch of cilantro, my black bean burritos will be garnished with cilantro picked fresh from my garden.

INSTEAD OF a jar of dried Spice Islands dill, the dill butter for my panfried walleye will be as fresh as the walleye itself. I can close my eyes and imagine the thirst-quenching properties of a pitcher of homemade lemonade delicately flavored with fresh mint leaves and a handful of lemon balm.

Last summer's favorite cold vichyssoise will be bumped and replaced with intriguing new flavors of sorrel and savory in a cool chicken stock with heavy cream.

If all of this has you thinking how to transform a small corner of your garden into a herb patch, waste no time starting little pots on a sunny windowsill.

Come May, the fruit, flower and vegetable plant stands all have parsley and chives, but few have the more exotic herbs that can transform a piece of broiled codfish into an aromatic and incredibly tasty culinary creation.

No room for a garden, you say? Even apartment or condo patios that get the nurturing sun's rays can grow an admirable herb garden using window boxes or large planter boxes.

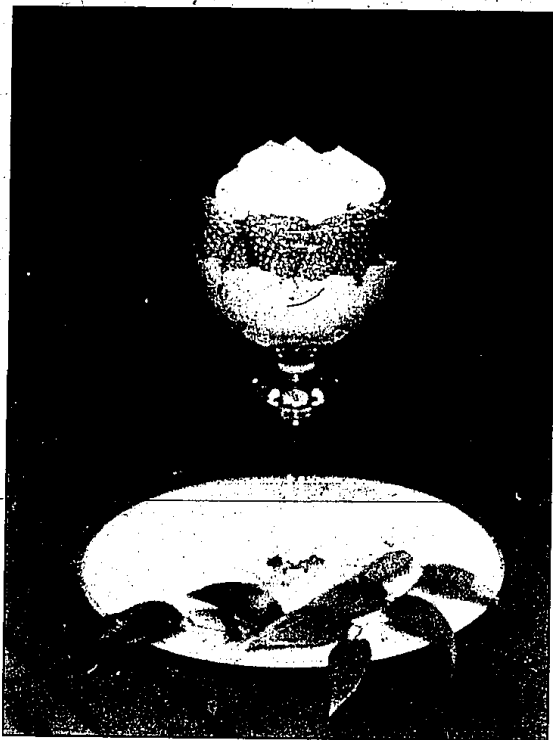
MANY OF the more exotic herbs are available through seed catalogs, but a surprising majority can be picked up locally at Frank's Nurseries and any upscale lawn and garden center. There are also a multitude of books available at a local bookseller on herbs.

When I think of herbs, I think food. A trip to the local bookstore, however, will show that when other folks talk herbs, they can be used for healing, flowering, decorative and aromatic purposes, not to mention for essential oils and arts and crafts.

If you are interested in furthering your knowledge about herbs, you can subscribe to a quarterly titled "The Joy of Herbs" by dropping them a line at P.O. Box 530317, Birmingham, Ala. 35253-0317.

I was handed a copy of the Summer 1990 issue and found it chock full of ideas for using herbs when grilling, herb projects for children and using herbs for fundraising, not to mention the planting of numerous herb gardens and suppliers.

Start it now, and you'll thank me come July.



Shown here are a raspberry fruit fool covered with fresh strawberries (above) and Squire's Coffee Raspberry Trifle (right), an English custard dessert with layers of spongecake, coffee cream and fresh raspberries.



STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

Foolin' around with berry fools

By Gail Rinschler
Special writer

YOU PROBABLY don't associate April Fool's Day with the English dessert, berry fool and, until recently, neither did I. Like most creative cooks, I'm always looking for a new dish or inspiration to be the focus of a luncheon or dinner party.

Although April Fool's Day celebrations have never been established as an American tradition, there's no time like the present to start. Looking back through old English cookbooks for fruit fool recipes left me in a state of confusion at first. According to Jane Garney, author of "Great British Cooking," a fruit fool was originally a synonym for trifle, meaning something that was trifling — a thing of little consequence. Evidently, a fruit or berry puree mixed with clotted cream was considered by cooks to be a mere trifle, during the 15th century.

Now this is where it gets confusing. During the 17th century, the fruit fool evolved into a dessert which resembled a trifle. The cream was enriched with eggs to make a custard, which was then layered over Savoy biscuits or strips of cake, which were first soaked in wine or sherry. The custard was covered with cream and garnished with almonds and glazed cherries.

AT SOME point before the 18th century, the English cooks realized that enriching the delicate flavors of fresh berries was unnecessary and the traditional fool returned back to its original form.

If you're wondering what happened to the trifle, it developed its own distinction. The Edwardians are given credit for the trifle as we know it today. A trifle is a pudding made of a split spongecake spread with a berry jam and liberally doused with sherry or brandy in a dish to which berries are often added.

The whole is then smothered in an English custard, topped with whipped cream and decorated with more berries or cherries and slivered almonds.

Although the fruit fool was considered to be a light, airy dessert in the 15th century, it fits into the high-fat, high-cholesterol

category of the 1990s, but no one should live by frozen yogurt alone.

So to justify enjoying the richness of a raspberry trifle or strawberry fool, complement the menu with low-fat, low-calorie entrees such as poached fillets of fish, simple or baked chicken and lots of fresh, steamed colorful vegetables.

The best season for serving berry fools and trifles is late spring and throughout the summer when local raspberries and strawberries are in season.

But during April and May the supply of imported berries becomes more affordable than winter berries. The fruit puree for a berry fool can be made with frozen berries and then garnished with a few fresh ones.

BOTH THE berry fool and berry trifle can be made in advance. Neither recipe is difficult to prepare.

The secret to making a fabulous trifle lies in the cooking of the English custard. It's quite simple to make a perfect custard without trauma or trepidation.

Beat the egg yolks and sugar well with a wire whisk or mixer until it is light colored and the sugar begins to dissolve. To prevent the eggs from curdling, you must very slowly add the hot milk to the beaten yolk mixture, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon.

To avoid over-cooking the custard, set a candy thermometer into the pan. Remove the custard from the heat when the thermometer reaches 165 degrees. Continue to stir or whisk vigorously to cool, then add desired flavorings.

Although it may not be essential, berry fools and trifles are most attractive when served in clear glass or white cups or bowls. When preparing both desserts in advance, refrigerate them directly in their serving bowls and garnish with the whipped cream just before serving.

MANY VARIATIONS of both berry fools and trifles appear throughout history. The 17th and 18th century writers describe fruit fools made with blackberries, raspberries, gooseberries and more.

See recipes: 2B

Happiness Garden uses seasonings with style



DISHING IT OUT By K.C.

The name conjures up images of quiet, peacefulness, contentment. And while Happiness Garden restaurant provides all of that, it also has a spark of excitement.

This Southfield restaurant promises Korean, Szechuan and Hunan dishes — but these are far from the expected entrees.

Each of several entrees we've tried over the past few weeks has had a special zip, a flavor or a seasoning or a treatment that turns what could be an average meal into a memorable experience.

TAKE THE Szechuan Hot Orange Beef, an exciting dish with very lightly battered strips of beef cooked with slices of orange-peel and heavily coated with a hot sauce.

It was terrific, with the coolness of the orange tempered by the hot seasoning of the hoisin sauce. The restaurant features an extraordinary array of sauces with its entrees — and just like the hoisin sauce, they seem to have a little special treatment.

One entree called "Three Star Chili Garlic Sauce" is prepared with scallops, shrimp and chicken along with onions and green and red peppers.

Although the menu presented to guests lists Chinese dishes, a Korean menu with the Seoul House name imprinted on it will be provided upon request.

This menu features entrees ranging from cold noodles with skate fish and a cucumber sauce to squid, octopus and an entree with the unusual combination of squid and beef.

Prices are in the \$6.95-\$15.95 range, whereas in the Chinese menu the prices top out more around \$8.95 for a complete dinner.

THE RESTAURANT itself is unpretentious, fairly bland in decor —

except that the grayish walls are set off by strips of burgundy and blue-green trim. The closest it gets to a garden is the strip of plants along the half-wall that divides the dining room.

A tip for those who are cautious about seasonings: In the entrees we tried, the "mild" was not enough, probably medium-hot by most restaurant standards.

Details: Happiness Garden, 29295 Southfield Road, in Southfield Commons strip center just north of I-24, Southfield 48064-3720.

Hours: Monday-Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Friday-Saturday,

11:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.; and Sunday, 1-8:30 p.m. Carryout available.

Prices: Lunch \$3.95-\$5.95, Dinner \$6.50-\$9.95. Visa, MasterCard, American Express.

Value: Expect an exciting meal and very reasonable price.

Rating: ***

* Average (lots of places with similar quality)
** Good
*** Very good
**** Excellent
***** Consistently superb — a rare honor



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Ki Kim of Happiness Garden shows two of her restaurant's specialties (left), Hot Tung Ting Chicken, a Chinese dish, and Yang Jang Pi, a Korean seafood and vegetable plate. The seafood plate is also shown above.