

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Starter
cookbook
great gift

For some odd reason, the Janes Gang is experiencing a bumper crop of graduation, wedding and shower invitations this summer.

To date, the tally is at 12. Knowing the strain this puts on the old checkbook, not to mention the sleepless nights wondering if that check ever cleared, has prompted us to exercise other options for gift giving.

One of those options has given rise to new and innovative gift ideas — and helps us save money in return. Any graduate getting ready to leave the nest, or young couple embarking on a new life together will undoubtedly someday benefit from using a cookbook. Whether it be wondering how long to roast a 12-pound turkey or learning to make a basic white sauce for scalloped potatoes, a good basic starter cookbook has been referenced many a day at our house.

When mentioning starter cookbooks, I'm not speaking of the Wilton Cake Decorating series nor, for that matter, Diana Kennedy's "Art of Mexican Cooking." All kitchens should have at least one copy of either "Joy of Cooking," "The New York Times Cook Book" or "Betty Crocker's Cookbook." There are a few others like "The Fanny Farmer Cookbook" and the epic "Gastronomie," but by far, "Joy," the "Times" and "Betty" have the basics market all sewn up.

IF THERE was one book that by far exceeds its price in sheer use, it would have to be "Joy of Cooking." Billed as "The American household classic all-purpose cookbook," this 915-page collection of recipes, illustrations and cooking tips started out in 1931, is in its 14th printing and is considered "the Bible" among many culinary wizards. This book is, by far, my most referenced cookbook. Everything you ever wanted to cook, from avocados to zucchini, is in this tome, most with very simple directions and easy-to-understand lingo.

"The New York Times Cook Book" by Craig Claiborne is a classic gourmet cookbook that goes one step beyond "Joy of Cooking." It lists more than 1,500 recipes, mostly based on basic gourmet cooking principles. No classy pictures or illustrations, just great gourmet recipes like couscous, seafood gumbo, and a personal favorite gleaned from a local Szechuan restaurant, kung pao chicken.

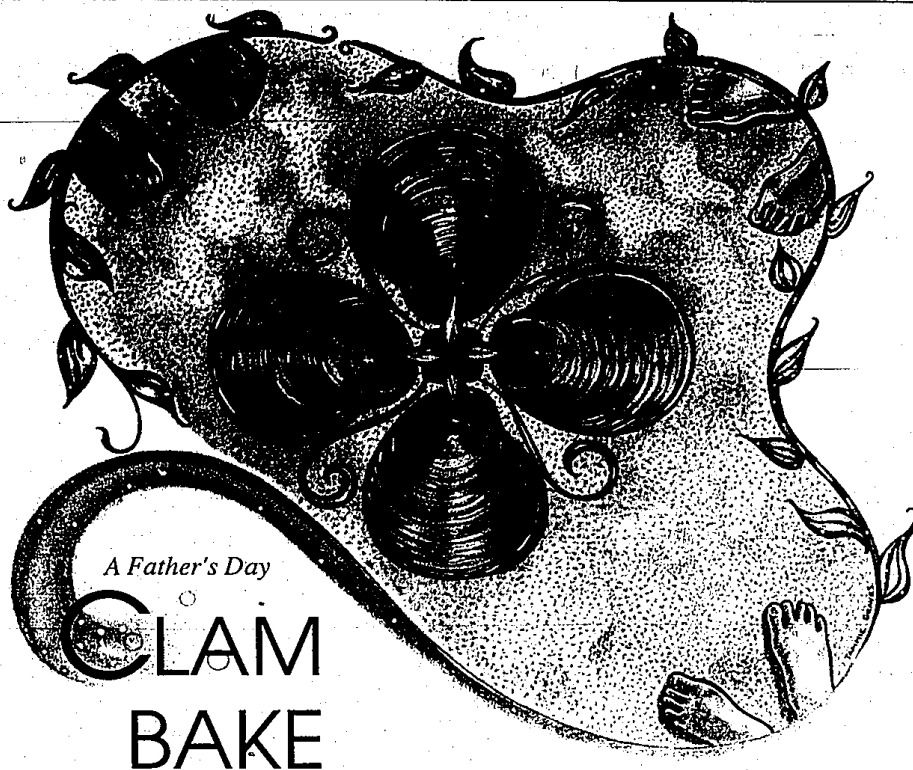
Claiborne covers every angle from aspic to classic sabaglione. Anyone who learned the basics from Momma will appreciate this revised classic.

Last but certainly not least is "Betty Crocker's Cookbook." First printed in 1939, this loose-leaf, hard-bound book is chock-full of all the basic recipes anyone could ever want. You want a great meatloaf recipe? This book gives you that and five more variations. The how-tos on vegetable soup? It's in here, in addition to tons of nutritional information and simple, easy-to-follow directions. Don't let the basics fool you, though. Just last week I culled the recipe for fried chicken right from page 242 and garnered raves from the Janes Gang.

All these books are available from local bookshelves and cost between \$20-\$30 each. But smart, pennywise shoppers know the books also are available from mail-order book clubs. That's how I got mine, and they didn't cost me a cent.

MANY BOOK clubs are offering freebies with minimal purchase requirements. Interested in joining a book club? Pick up any food magazine and the advertisements almost jump out at you. Sure, you're inundated with requests to buy more books throughout the year but anyone who is a foodie can appreciate saving 20-30 percent on basic cookbooks.

If you are interested in classic gifts that never go out of style, as much as you like the idea of saving money, then book clubs may be just what you need.

By Jennifer L. Hill
special writer

WHEN YOU think of Father's Day dinner, the first thing that comes to mind is a nice thick, juicy steak cooking on the grill accompanied by a piping hot baked potato filled with sour cream and chives.

Why not surprise Dad with a non-traditional Father's Day meal — a clam bake — and still keep most of the cooking outdoors?

This New England tradition of steaming fresh seafood in seaweed is usually done over hot rocks in a pit dug in the sand at the seashore.

However, many of us in Michigan do not have access to sandy beaches, ocean beaches for that matter, and local park authorities may not allow for open fires on the beach to prepare this seaside supper.

Here is a clam bake that can be done in most coal-burning grills. This method of cooking is so informal that everyone can take part in the preparation.

THERE is a lot to do, ranging from the most tedious chore to the simplest of tasks. Everything from shopping to prep work and

the actual cooking can be divided among all members of the family.

Those tasks that require little or no supervision can be done by the youngest members of the family, ages 2-6. Small hands are perfect for:

- Scrubbing clams and potatoes, removing the alk from the corn, leaving the husk, and peeling the onions.
- Assembling the cheesecloth bundles with vegetables and shellfish.
- Watching the lobsters. What child is not fascinated by a live lobster?

Mid-size helpers, ages 7-10, can perform tasks with minimal supervision. These tasks include:

- Cutting cheesecloth squares to make bundles.
- Helping to assemble the bundles.
- Lining the bottom of the grill rack with aluminum foil, assisted by little hands.
- Lining the rack with the seaweed or well-soaked corn husks to lay the foundation of the clam bake.

Arranging the cheesecloth bundles and corn atop the seaweed or well-soaked corn husks to lay the foundation of the clam bake.

Arranging the cheesecloth bundles and corn atop the seaweed, leaving enough room in the center of the grill to place the lobster. The remaining seaweed can then be spread over top.

Setting the table with newspaper and plenty of paper towels.

Teens and adults should provide supervision of younger children and handle all of the actual grilling such as:

- Building and lighting the coals for the bake.
- Placing the foil-lined rack into the grill over hot coals.
- Opening the vents halfway.
- Removing the finished product.

ONCE THE lid is closed, the bake begins, leaving plenty of time to prepare the remainder of the meal.

Little ones can make sun tea in a large covered pitcher once their tasks are completed and while the main course cooks. Coleslaw is a great accompaniment for a clam bake. Younger ones can help to prepare this.

A CLAMBAKE traditionally is made up of

an assortment of shellfish, but for those who are not fond of shellfish include some alternatives such as chicken or smoked sausage. Just make a cheesecloth bundle for these alternatives and place it on the bed of seaweed.

To complete your clam bake, be sure to serve plenty of melted butter for dipping your lobster, clams, corn and potatoes. Lemon and hot pepper sauces also add flavor to the seafood.

Provide nutcrackers for your diners to get into the lobster shells, and have bowls for discarded shells.

Cap off the meal with a fruit pizza, made with fresh seasonal fruit — a dessert I'm sure Dad will love.

With organization and preparation, this Father's Day will be remembered for a long time to come, and isn't Dad worth it?

Note: Ask your local fishmonger, such as Superior Fish Market in Royal Oak, to supply seaweed for clambakes. If the market doesn't have seaweed, corn husks may be used as an alternative.

See Recipes, Page 2B.

Elegance and fun: enjoying American cuisine

Brian Polcyn,
chef at the
Pike Street
Restaurant,
with soft-shell
crab.

JIM FROEDER
staff photographerDISHING
IT OUT

that leans more toward the fun than the stuffy.

Where else can you go to get spring-fresh morel mushrooms in abundance on appetizers and entrees, while sharing dessert and a decidedly off-key rendition of happy birthday with the chef and his family? Pike Street.

The open, airy dining room is the perfect backdrop for Chef Brian Polcyn's American cuisine. A quiet charm underscores the restaurant setting, but the feeling is one of a well-run establishment that doesn't need showiness to present excellent food in a thoroughly enjoyable setting.

Polcyn said his aim is to provide the customer with high-quality service and food and let the dining experience take care of itself. He meets his goal superbly.

THE WELL-SPACED tables allow diners the privacy that so many restaurants lack. The starched-shirtdied tuxedo-clad waiters are knowledgeable, attentive and agreeable, with no sense of rushing diners. They also lack the condescending manner so in vogue in many expensive restaurants today.

At Pontiac's Pike Street Restaurant, a dinner out is a refreshingly elegant experience for those who prefer well-prepared, well-served food in an atmosphere

that leans more toward the fun than the stuffy. Where else can you go to get spring-fresh morel mushrooms in abundance on appetizers and entrees, while sharing dessert and a decidedly off-key rendition of happy birthday with the chef and his family? Pike Street.

The open, airy dining room is the perfect backdrop for Chef Brian Polcyn's American cuisine. A quiet charm underscores the restaurant setting, but the feeling is one of a well-run establishment that doesn't need showiness to present excellent food in a thoroughly enjoyable setting.

Polcyn said his aim is to provide the customer with high-quality service and food and let the dining experience take care of itself. He meets his goal superbly.

THE WELL-SPACED tables allow diners the privacy that so many restaurants lack. The starched-shirtdied tuxedo-clad waiters are knowledgeable, attentive and agreeable, with no sense of rushing diners. They also lack the condescending manner so in vogue in many expensive restaurants today.

SALADS ARE crisp and

appropriately sized to complement, not overwhelm the dinner.

A recent visit found a char-broiled halibut with red pepper broth and broiled saffron rice to be one of the freshest fish dishes tasted in a long time. The pliant quality of the sauce and the tender, flaky white fish was a creative change.

According to Polcyn, this special was one of the restaurant's "Cuisine Naturales." Each day at lunch and dinner, the chef prepares a special dish that uses no salt, butter, cream and a limited wine reduction method.

"This is a great challenge for a chef," Polcyn said. "To create something that really sparkles using none of these items is a challenge."

For those willing to let a little beef cross the palate, a special of beef tournedos with a morel mushroom sauce melted in the mouth. This was served with a fettuccine side dish featuring a fresh summer truffles sauce.

Special note must be paid to the superb wine list offered at Pike Street. Wines range in price from around \$25 on up and offer some of the best and least pedestrian selections in the area.

Restaurant reviews are written by four staff members on a rotating basis. Any questions or reviews should be directed to Ethel Simmons, food and entertainment editor, Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or call 953-2105.

PIKE STREET RESTAURANT ★★★★★

18 W. Pike St., Pontiac, 334-7878

HOURS: Lunch, Monday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.;

Dinner, Tuesday-Thursday, 5-10 p.m.;

Friday-Saturday, 5-11 p.m.; Closed Sunday;

Bar open 3-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday.

Reservations accepted lunch and dinner.

PRICES: Appetizers, \$6.50-\$7.95; sandwiches

Lunch main courses, \$7.50-\$10.75; sandwiches

\$5.50-\$7.95. Dinner main courses, \$17.50-\$25.50

(includes house salad). MasterCard, Visa, American

Express, Diners Club accepted.

RESTAURANT
RATING GUIDE

★ Average

★★ Good

★★★ Very Good

★★★★ Excellent

★★★★★ Superb