

taste buds

chef Larry
JanosPretzels
add twist
to picnic

If you are planning a German-style picnic, besides rolling out the barrel and having a barrel of fun, add to the festivities with homemade pretzels.

Who in the heck makes homemade pretzels in the middle of summer? I do, and I learned from my momma.

Every now and then, during summer vacation, the heat and humidity have a tendency to clash with good-knowledge and produce a day of rain.

Not just any rain, mind you, but a mini-gully-washer day that has a tendency to freshen the air, water the grass and cool down the environment. If all but for very short time.

Having six kids, Momma was a pro at keeping us busy on those rainy days.

I don't remember mails or video arcades, so if we had already seen the movie at the neighborhood theater and didn't have enough money to go bowling, Momma would get out the flour, yeast and herbaceous seeds for a fun afternoon of pretzel making.

The only thermometer we had was the one outside the kitchen window that told Dad how well to dress for the day at work.

Nowadays, equipment-shocked cooks wouldn't think of proofing the yeast without just the right (103 degree) temperature water for optimum results.

Momma's thermometer: her pinky finger and the line, "That feels just about right."

I REMEMBER that wait for the yeast to proof was as long as the intermission on a double-featured Saturday afternoon.

If it didn't start bubbling within 10 minutes, we would try again.

While the yeast was proofing, the argument about hand washing was always prevalent.

After Sissy and I had already washed once, we were instructed to do it again and "this time with soap."

It was then that Momma would get down on her hands and knees and search the bottom cupboards for two equal-sized pans and cookie sheets.

Momma knew that if Sissy's bowl was slightly bigger than mine, a battle would take place that could never be resolved.

After sifting the flour and salt with our hands, of course, we would scream in unison,

"Eeeeeuuuuuuuuuu!" as Momma poured in the lukewarm water, oil and yeast mixture. No wooden spoons here. "That's why the Lord gave you hands" was all we remember.

After combining the mixture and being sure to "clean the sides," we turned the dough onto a homemade kneading board that Dad assembled out in the garage.

This was the classic breadboard, for it even had a little lip that wrapped precisely around the dining room table so as not to slip while working the dough. Dad made two. I still have mine. I wonder if Sis still has hers?

As kids, we never knew the meaning of "knead until smooth and elastic." For some odd reason, Momma could tell with the pinch of a finger. We divided the dough into 24 pieces each, then proceeded to roll each piece into strips, about a foot long, give or take a few inches.

I MUST HAVE been 17 before I realized how to twist the dough into pretzel shapes. Now I will never forget and someday hope to teach my kids the same.

Before baking, a fight always ensued about what to cover the pretzels with.

Our favorite was salt. Momma like poppy seeds while Dad always loved caraway, especially with his beer. Speaking of beer, that was one of the few times I ever recall Momma sitting down with a can of Pabst, us with our Kool-Aid, all sinking our teeth into pretzels hot from the oven.

That was one lesson that could never be repeated in a culinary arts classroom.

Party hearty
with
German foodBy Geri Rinschler
special writer

JUST ABOUT this time every year I begin to plan our annual, summer, backyard party for family and friends.

The menu usually features a variety of cold appetizers made up of vegetables, a platter of chilled poached or smoked fish fillets, grilled veal bratwurst (which is then steamed in dark beer), a noodle or spätzle salad, assorted vegetable and mixed green salads, a baked fruit tart and traditional German spice cookies.

You may think the menu was inspired after a pleasure trip through Germany, a few years ago, and you're right. It was during that trip, when I became reacquainted with the fact that German food is healthy, fun and quite diverse.

Although most of us think of German food as one continuous sausage and schnitzel feast, German cuisine is nearly as diverse as our own. In the same way many tourists keep a journal of their travels through museums, galleries and historic monuments, a food writer records the elements of every meal accompanied by little sketches of the placement or arrangement of food presentation, along with comments about the flavors, visits to food markets and names of wines, beer and other beverages.

WHILE REVIEWING and reminiscing

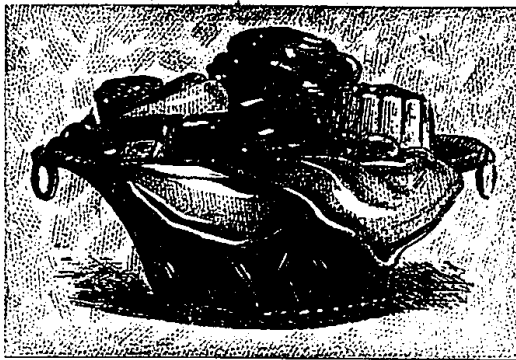
through my gourmet journal it was as if I was sampling the splendid cuisine of Baden and Württemberg all over again. On this particular trip, my culinary adventures began in Frankfurt, then south to Rothenburg on the Tauber River, Hildesheim and then to Stuttgart.

Rothenburg oder Tauber, which is just a leisurely drive from Frankfurt, is one great array of breads, cakes and other sweet, buttery pastries.

At the Goldener Hirsch Hotel, an old inn built in 1500, with a spectacular view of the Tauber Valley, one finds Kalbssteak Zurich a veal steak served with fried potatoes and steak cordon bleu, wiener schnitzel, masthühnchen (pullet chicken), rebhuhn (partridge) and reh-rucken (saddle of venison).

Later I ventured through the town to sample and ogle the many elegant pastries in the numerous konditorei. These offerings still constitute the most interesting part, by far, of German cuisine: tortes, marzipan candies, fruit tarts, and trays of pfefferkuchen (lebkuchen) (gingerbread) hearts and springerle.

At the Baumeisterhaus Cafe, a most picturesque building near Marketplatz in Rothenburg, supper began with a semolina soup made with a light, velvety broth. This was followed by bratwurst, a grilled pork and veal sausage cooked over an open wood-fired grill.



MEMORIES OF these and other specialties of Rothenburg and my other travels along the Rhine River encouraged me to cook up all sorts of German delights when I returned home.

Grilled bratwurst and weisswurst can be a great focus for a backyard barbecue menu. Any accompanying chilled vegetable salads can be made in advance, as well as most desserts. The only challenge you may face will be locating top-quality German sausages.

Bratwurst is a specialty of Nurnberg, is made of pork and veal. The filling is ground and flavored with nutmeg, caraway, marjoram, salt and pepper. Caraway and marjoram are commonly used in flavoring vegetable dishes, as well as sausages in and around Baden.

If you are traveling to Frankenmuth, Kern's Sausage shop on Main Street almost always has freshly made bratwurst and other traditional German sausages. Just remember to bring along an ice chest to keep the sausage cold.

Locally, there are a number of butcher shops in the Detroit area. Here are my personal favorites: Hans Delicatessen, 1049 E. Long Lake Road, Troy, an authentic German food shop, which carries both pre-cooked bratwurst and weisswurst, along with lots of imported German goodies such as Westphalian ham, traditional German hard rolls, smoked meats, desserts and Rittersport chocolates.

FOR AN UNCOOKED bratwurst made with 85 percent veal and 15 percent pork meat, try Torpey's Meat Market, 3326 Rochester Road, Troy. Torpey's makes bratwurst and other sausages fresh daily.

Conrad's Sausage Co., 28974 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington, and at 27470 Schoolcraft, Livonia, makes a pre-cooked bratwurst, which is mostly veal with a bit of pork. Whether you choose the uncooked or the precooked bratwurst, it's a matter of personal taste. I generally buy some of both to add a bit of interest to the meal.

See Recipes, Page 2B.

Beer lover makes
own home brewBy Larry Janos
special writer

What used to be "A loaf of bread, jug of wine and thou" has taken a turn, not necessarily for the worse.

Cutting-edge culinarians are hopping on the micro-brew rage with homemade lagers, ales, stouts and pilsners in record numbers threatening to change the jugs of wine into barrels of brew.

Brian Hassell of Livonia was so impressed with his first batch of homemade dark amber ale that a second batch of Canadian ale is brewing as you read this. Hassell is even beginning to ask friends and neighbors to start saving the brown long-neck bottles for next month's batch. A senior this year at Eastern Michigan University, majoring in Food Systems Management, Hassell is a night sous chef at MacKinnon's Restaurant in Northville.

When asked what prompted him to get into home microbrewing, Hassell claims that it's simply his "love for the stuff." Working as a chef in a few Washtenaw County watering holes exposed Hassell to different brews from around the world and began kindling his interest in making homemade brew. Hassell's fellow chef, Steve Shaughnessy, told him about Mark George, owner of the Wine Barrel in Bedford, a beer/wine/deli operation that offers an extensive assortment of home brew kits.

It was here that Chef Hassell picked up a home brewing kit consisting of a fermenter, air lock, syphon, hydrometer, capper, sanitizer, thermometer and all the necessities to begin bottling his personal favorite, a dark amber ale.

A quick trip over to the Wine Barrel turned into an afternoon discussion with owner Mark George, who seemed to know (and stock) just about everything the home brewer would need to get started. George stocks kits that allow the home micro-brewer to invest as little as \$13.99, plus starters, to get brewing. "After a recent PBS special on home brewing, requests for brewing supplies shot off like a rocket," said George, who answered the call with his own board, brewing kit, sell, self-assembled, consisting of all the professional equipment for \$65 and change.

But what about the taste, you ask? I've been known to tip a few brews in my day and have tasted various restaurant micro-brews from the Traffic Jam and even coerced a taste from master brewers George and Hassell. The home brews I sampled were very tasty, with little aftertaste, some sediment and what seemed to be a little more fizz. I found that pouring the home brew into a pre-chilled beer mug and allowing it to sit for a few minutes before tasting improved its character tenfold.

But before you set off with cash in hand, and dreams of owning your own Clydesdales, you should know a Federal statute states, "Any individual head of household is allowed to brew a maximum of 200 gallons per year." If your visions of brewing include Clydesdales, you first must be qualified as a micro-brewery from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

For additional information on home brewing, write Mark George at the Wine Barrel, 25303 Plymouth Road, Bedford 48229, or call him at 533-1216.

See Recipes inside.

