

taste buds

chef Larry Janes



Savor the rewards of gardening

I'm feeling a little "déjà vu" here as I sit and once again, ponder the abundance of zucchini and tomatoes overpowering my garden.

This year, because of composting all of last year's leaves, clippings and food waste, the garden has sprouted forth like never before, while the jar of Miracle Gro sits lonely and untouched on the garage shelf.

I really thought I had planned it a little differently this time. In addition to my one-sized plot of fresh herbs, a single tomato plant coupled with a single zucchini would suffice.

What I didn't plan for were the sprouting of virtually hundreds of pumpkin and spaghetti squash plants inadvertently tossed in the compost pile and tilled into the rich soil from last fall. On returning from a two-week vacation, I found my entire rear yard enmeshed in diabolical looking fronds and blossoms. I pulled at least 60 or so plants and left but a few.

As of this writing, I already have pumpkins the size of three gallon stock pots, enough spaghetti squash to half fill a Michigan basement and yes, 5-foot tall tomato plants and zucchini that seems to grow virtually overnight.

As the pumpkins begin to turn a hazy orange and the spaghetti squash flatten with every morning shower, I focus most of my attention on the zucchini, tomatoes and fresh herbs.

This year I have discovered pesto. Having always been a fan of the basil, pine nut, garlic and oil concoction, this year's abundant basil crop has spurred me on to making pesto pasta sauces, not to mention canning herbaceous tomato sauces.

One of the best finds of the summer, however, was locating Alcamo's Market. This old time Italian market on Shaefer just south of Michigan Avenue in Dearborn stocks everything Italian. I could easily drop a paycheck picking up their outstanding imported Mozzarella (that tastes so good layered between thin slices of ripe tomatoes) and Prosciutto de Parma.

On hot summers eves, I wrap paper thin prosciutto around hunks of honeycrack melon with just a twist of cracked black pepper. The taste is nothing short of "dying and going to heaven."

This summer, the Janes Gang has enjoyed baby zucchini, zucchini blossoms dipped in tempura batter, zucchini bread, zucchini and potato pancakes and ratatouille up the kazoo. All this from just one plant.

Momma used to make a dish of sliced cucumbers with buttermilk, sour cream and dill that always tasted so good. I compromised and took some baby zucchini, sliced them as thin as Momma's cucumbers and did the same. Simply out of this world.

Next week, I get out the old Foley Food Mill and begin the annual Janes' "puttin' up the salsa" week. About 5 pounds of onions, equal amounts of tomatoes and peppers, not to mention a basket of garlic gets simmered and jarred for those snowy winters eves when you need a little warming up.

If you have a garden, no matter what size, and you still haven't discovered the joys of finding free pay dirt every spring, now is as good a time as any to begin composting. The library has loads of information, as do all the environmental chapters in the area.

This is my first year reaping the rewards of last year's leaves. And if my pumpkins, spaghetti squash, tomatoes, zucchini and herbs are any indication, you just can't beat what you make yourself!

SPICE up the SLICE

Herbs and spices lend flavor and scent to bread recipes

By Marty Figley
special writer

BREADY! JUST the word suggests a picture of bread baking in the oven and the aroma wafting throughout the house! With herbs, fresh or dry in the mixture there is a provocative aroma, and the flavor is exquisite.

Bread has been a staple food for centuries; grains used for this purpose have been found dating back 25,000 years. Most every country has a bread suitable for their cuisine, culture and climate.

Wheat, rye, bran, buckwheat, rice, amaranth and others, or a combination of these grains, are used for bread-making. Whole-grain breads are gaining in popularity because they are healthy and give such unique texture and taste.

Of all the grains commonly used, wheat contains the highest amount of gluten (a protein) which, when mixed with water, forms an elastic network to help the dough rise. Many bakers prefer unbleached flour to bleached.

YEAST is a key ingredient in bread-making and is activated when it is mixed with a sweetener such as sugar, honey or molasses. When it is then mixed with the flour a fermentation process begins.

It isn't clear whether the Chinese or Egyptians first used yeast, but it is the most common leavening agent for bread. Others are eggs, baking powder, baking soda and starters, mixes that were kept for years by the homemaker for this purpose.

On the other hand, salt slows down this action. It also brings out the flavor of the bread. Fat, whether butter, lard, oil or margarine, or a combination, lubricates the gluten in the dough and facilitates rising. It also adds flavor, richness and tenderness. When milk (buttermilk or sweet) is used, the loaf is softer than bread made without it.

Kneading develops the gluten and incorporates air into the dough, causing carbon dioxide to form. This makes the dough rise. After the first rising, it is sometimes necessary to punch the dough down to redistribute the yeast and let it work again before baking.

One grain, amaranth, is new to me. It is very high in protein and is available as an un-hulled whole-grain, a finely-ground flour and in pasta. Substitute ¼ cup of this flour for all-purpose flour for a fresh



and unusual flavor. Look for it in health food stores.

Just about anything can be added to bread dough. Fruits, nuts, meats, cheeses, vegetables and wine enhance the flavor, as do many herbs.

TRY ONE or more of the following: basil, chives, dill, garlic, mar-



joram, parsley, rosemary, saffron, sage, savory, tarragon or thyme. Herb seeds also add their special pizzazz. Anise, caraway, cumin, dill, fennel, poppy and sesame are possibilities. Ground spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg, and coriander also change the taste and are fun to try.

There is no set way to incorporate

Garden fresh herb bread surrounded by dill, sage, parsley, thyme, wheat flour and dry sprigs of wheat and rye.

JERRY ZOLYNSKY
staff photographer

herbs into breads. Dried herbs can be mixed with the dry ingredients; fresh or dried herbs can be mixed with the liquid or infused in the oil before they are mixed with the dough.

Kneading herbs into the dough will also work. A pinwheel effect can be achieved by sprinkling them over the dough when it is flattened and rolled, before it is put into the pan.

As a general rule, use a tablespoon of dried herbs or ¼ cup of fresh for each loaf. Used alone or in combination with others, herbs can help you make a bread to suit your own palate.

Here are some combinations to get you started: equal parts sage (or garlic chips, oregano) and parmesan; equal parts basil and chives; one-fourth teaspoon nutmeg with a half-tablespoon of thyme; or plain parsley added to the dough. . . all are good. A quarter cup of rosemary is also recommended.

BECKY, of Becky's Oven in Royal Oak serves the wholesale and retail trade. She told me that when onions are put in bread a bit of garlic will sweeten the flavor. For two loaves, use less than ¼ teaspoon garlic and ¼ cup of dehydrated onion flakes, or ¼ cup fresh onion.

Dave Auer, of Baking by the Auers in Southfield (also wholesale and retail), uses only fresh herbs and ingredients. He makes bread using rosemary, basil and red and yellow peppers.

Jim Maier, Executive Chef, Henry Ford Museum, Greenfield Village, suggests sprinkling the herbs used in the bread on top of the loaf before baking. If the top is lightly brushed with water or egg and water, the herbs or seeds will adhere better. To add crunch to some breads, cornmeal is sprinkled on the bottom of the pan.

Breads can be made quickly using one bowl, or at a more leisurely pace (especially when yeast is used). Whether you begin with frozen dough or a box mix or start from scratch, experiment and enjoy. Bread making has been around for a long, long time, and many wonderful meals can be planned around this simple food.

Chill out with pasta

By Arlene Funks
special writer

What could be more "summer" than a refreshing plateful of chilled pasta salad?

"It's good, healthy food and fairly inexpensive," said Frank Blair, 30, who sings the praises of the versatile pasta salad.

Blair and his partner, 31-year-old Janet Bondar, operate a Farmington Hills restaurant called Francois' Gourmet To Go. The pair have made pasta salads the centerpiece of their summer lineup.

A PASTA salad can be made with any kind of noodle, cooked al dente — until it offers slight resistance to the bite. Once cooled, it can be garnished with carrot slivers or broccoli, olives, sweet onions or any desired vegetable. Toss in some diced meat, cheese or seafood, if you wish.

The crowning touch is a coat of glistening, zesty vinaigrette dressing. The result is an easy, tasty summer meal or tempting side dish.

Blair likes to combine fresh herbs and special ingredients such as pea pods and shitake mushrooms, along with the pasta and dressing.

"People want something fresh and something different," Blair said.

Francois' Gourmet To Go, which opened almost 1½ years ago, is in Muirwood Square, at Grand River and Drake. Although there is seating for around 20 people, the bulk of the business is in carryouts.

BLAIR TAGGED his restaurant with the name Francois to reflect his upscale goals. Francois is the French equivalent for Frank.

Bondar, 31, of Farmington Hills, is a former banquet sales manager for a local hotel.

Blair is a former maître 'd for several hotel dining rooms. He also worked as

manager for a catering firm and prepared sauces at a local restaurant, now closed.

Blair's style is "fusion cooking," which he defines as blending regional spices and ingredients to create exciting new combinations.

"If something looks good and smells good, chances are it tastes good," Blair said.

The restaurant's popular shrimp salad Oriental combines linguini or angel hair pasta with cooked shrimp, pea pods, red onions, chunk pineapple, shitake mushrooms, toasted almonds and baby corn ears.

The dressing is a spicy mixture of fresh ginger, garlic, teriyaki sauce, pepper, curry powder, lemon juice and oil.

Blair uses fresh pasta. He often mixes two kinds of oil for a richer blend. Potato salads are made with redskins. His Caesar pasta has sun-dried tomatoes, capers, red onions and parmesan cheese.

A NEW, chilled bean salad, which provides protein and fiber, is a nutritional powerhouse.

"If you are taking the meat out, you have to put in some protein," Blair said.

"That comes from the beans."

The salads range in price from around \$3 to \$3.75 for a half-order and from \$5.50 to around \$7 for a full order.

The restaurant features a number of other specialties, including several hot pasta dishes, grilled chicken, and spicy blackened meat.

Catering also is available, and the restaurant has served a variety of functions, especially office parties and business meetings.

Francois' Gourmet To Go is in Muirwood Square, Grand River Ave. and Drake, Farmington Hills. Hours are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Mon.-Sat., and 3 to 8 p.m., Sun. For information, call 471-6618.

Sometimes Janet Bondar and Frank Blair got a little too involved in their work. The two are owners of Francois' Gourmet To Go in Farmington Hills.

SHARON LAMLEY
staff photographer

