

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

ABC's of turkey cookery

Anyone in the food business has heard all there is to hear about the tragedies involved with preparing the traditional holiday turkey. The stories of cooking the bird with the bag of giblets and neck intact abound.

Today, this space will be devoted to the simple basics of turkey cookery. If you need recipes for "caper-basted turkey with lingonberry stuffing" look elsewhere.

During this time of year, turkeys are available two ways: frozen and fresh. If you're just starting out, you'll probably be buying a frozen bird because they are the least expensive. Be prepared to pay from 69 cents to upwards of \$1.59 per pound for a basic frozen turkey. Prices start at \$1.59 per pound for a fresh turkey, and the more organic and naturally fed, the higher in price they are.

BEFORE COOKING, you will have to defrost a frozen turkey. The safest way to defrost a frozen bird is to remove it from the freezer 3 days before cooking and allow it to defrost slowly in the bottom of the refrigerator. Countertop or sink defrosting is not recommended because bacteria loves room-temperature food. Contrary to popular belief, microwave defrosting is not defrosting but actually "cooking" at a lower power, so last-minute nuking is not advised.

After the turkey has been defrosted, remove it from the package. This is a feat in itself, especially when trying to wrestle with a 30-pound dead-weight bird. Using your best ingenuity, remove that metal bracket that holds the leg tips close to the body cavity. It's very difficult but should be done. Now reach inside the cavity and search the crevice for any bones you can reach, looking for a plastic or paper baggie filled with the giblets and neck. Remove this bag and rinse the bird under cold running water.

Now check the entire skin on the outside of the bird, looking for misplucked pinfeathers. Remove them with a knife or tweezers if necessary. If the bird is to be stuffed, it does not need to be seasoned before roasting. If you wish to cook an unstuffed bird, lightly salt and pepper the inside of the cavity. Do not stuff the bird until ready to roast.

If the bird is to be stuffed, pack the stuffing loosely into the bird, as the stuffing will expand during roasting.

When it comes to roasting the bird, momma always recommends placing the bird on a rack in a roasting pan. You can purchase poultry racks, but I have found that a cheap stainless steel cake rack works just as well.

PLACE THE bird breast side up on the rack and brush with butter, margarine, vegetable oil or shortening or a combination of any and all. Do not add water and most of all, do not cover. This is a highly debatable point, as momma covers and I don't. I think the bird tastes "steamy" rather than "roasty" when covered. Roast the bird in a 325-degree oven. You can, if desired, place a tent of foil over the bird when it begins to turn golden to keep from over-browning it.

After about one hour of cooking, baste the bird with the pan drippings or continue to brush with fat mixture or a very rich chicken broth. Continue basting bird every 30 minutes until cooked.

The most accurate method for doneness is checking with a meat thermometer inserted in the most meaty part of the bird, away from a bone. When it reaches 185 degrees, the turkey is done. Cooking times are: 6-8 pounds, 3-3 1/2 hours; 8-12 pounds, 3 1/2-4 1/2 hours; 12-16 pounds, 4 1/2-5 1/2 hours; 16-20 pounds, 5 1/2-6 1/2 hours; 20-24 pounds, 6 1/2-7 hours; 24-28 pounds, 7 1/2-8 hours. Subtract 30-45 minutes for unstuffed birds.

See recipes inside.

Maltese relish home-cooked, varied cuisine

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

THE CUISINE of Malta is as varied, adventurous and colorful as the history of the Mediterranean nation itself.



Like the people of Malta, Maltese food is straightforward and inviting. Since the sixth century, the archipelago 58 miles south of Sicily has been occupied by the Phoenicians; Romans; Arabs; a military order of the Roman Catholic Church; the French; and from 1814 to 1984, the British.

MALTESE COOKS have capitalized on the best of each culture, excelling with the most plentiful foodstuffs — dishes such as rabbit, octopus and fish.

Mainstays include homemade soups, vegetables like stuffed artichoke and eggplants; pastas; meat pies; pastry; and desserts made with cheeses, custard, dates and macaroons.

An accomplished cook, Lijonia's Michelle Pisaní lived in Malta from the age of 5 until she moved back to the United States with her family a few years ago at the age of 20.

In a recent interview, she didn't disagree with a reporter who opined that Maltese food is delicious. "That's why everyone in Malta is overweight," said Pisaní with a laugh. "The Maltese love to eat. I've been on a diet most of my life."

It's no accident that the Maltese relish their cuisine and spend a large amount of time preparing three home-cooked meals a day. Food wasn't always as bountiful as it is now.

"During the war (World War II), people had to eat dogs and cats, or they would have starved," said Pisaní, adding that Malta was one of the most heavily bombed targets in the war. "Our sugar, flour and eggs were rationed until 1975 when the English finally left."

Years ago the Maltese weren't as

Upcoming events, dinners

One of the largest Maltese communities in the country took root in Detroit's Corktown near Trumbull and 12th Street, eventually branching out to surrounding suburbs.

The Maltese-American Benevolent Society still thrives in Corktown, the city's oldest neighborhood, at 1832 Michigan Ave.

The club is a favorite gathering place for pool, card and bingo-playing retirees, and on the first Friday of every month, the society serves a dinner preceded by a Mass.

For more information, call 961-8392.

Members of the American Maltese Community Club of Dearborn at 5221 Oakman Blvd. in Dearborn also gather the first Friday of every month for a 7 p.m. Mass and a meal.

Upcoming events at the club include the Miss Malta Contest Nov. 30, a Children's Christmas Party Dec. 22 and a New Year's Eve Party Dec. 31.

For more information, call 946-7077.

concerned about their sugar or cholesterol intake.

"A lot of people my dad's age are experiencing heart trouble. There were years they didn't eat balanced meals. People now are getting to be more conscientious about healthful eating," said Pisaní, who in Malta worked as a secretary for the man who is currently prime minister.

Pisaní now buys her octopus and rabbit at Kroger or Meijer. In Malta, it was much simpler. "My brother would fish for octopus, knock it against a stone, clean it and barbecue it. We would add tomato sauce, bay leaf, and red wine. You can't get any fresher than that," said Pisaní, whose Maltese-born parents met in Detroit.



DILL DRESLER/staff photographer

Mary Ann Alcila learned how to make baked macaroni, a family favorite, at her mother's side.

Pisaní learned not to narm or play with the rabbits and chickens her dad raised in the backyard. "My brother-in-law would come over, kill them and skin them, and we wouldn't talk to him for a week," she said, admitting that rabbit is more

tender and flavorful than chicken.

At John Hancock in Farmington Hills where she works, Pisaní's Maltese "timpana" is a hit on ethnic food days.

"They always want that, and pastizzis," Pisaní said of her co-workers

at Hancock. Timpana is baked macaroni (see accompanying recipe) covered with a layer of pastry crust.

IN THE NEARBY KITCHEN of

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OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC WINNER DINNER

Recipes

SPINACH LASAGNE

This is a tasty, meatless dinner that can be made in advance and only takes minutes to assemble as the noodles do not have to be pre-cooked.

This recipe makes about 12 pieces with about 7.5 grams of fat per piece, 5 grams if non-fat cottage cheese is used.

15 ounces low-fat ricotta cheese or non-fat cottage cheese
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided
1 egg
1 package frozen, chopped spinach, thawed and drained, 10-ounce size
1 teaspoon oregano
salt and pepper to taste
1 package lasagne noodles, uncooked, 16-ounce size
1 cup water
1 jar spaghetti sauce, 28-ounce size (Ragu Fine Italian Sauce has a lower fat content than others)

In a large bowl, mix the ricotta and 1 cup mozzarella cheese, egg, spinach, salt, pepper and oregano. In a 13-by-9-by-2-inch greased baking dish, layer 1/2 cup of the sauce, a layer of the noodles and 1/2 of the cheese mixture. Repeat and top with noodles and sauce and the remaining mozzarella to make three layers. Pour the water around the edges. Cover tightly with foil and bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour 15 minutes. Let stand for 15 minutes before serving.

TOSSED SALAD

1/2 head iceberg lettuce

1 head red leaf lettuce
1/2 pound mushrooms
1 green pepper, cut into thin strips
1 tomato, cut into wedges
1 red onion, cut into rings
Wash and drain lettuce. Cut up mushrooms, green pepper, onion and tomato, mix with lettuce.

Red lettuce adds color to the salad. You also might want to try radicchio or grated red cabbage.

ITALIAN DRESSING

1/2 cup oil
1/2 cup red wine vinegar, or part lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 small clove garlic, finely minced
1 scallion, minced
1/2 teaspoon oregano
salt and pepper to taste

Place all ingredients in a jar with tight-fitting lid, or salad dressing cruet. Shake well before serving. Makes 1 cup.

For variety, try olive oil or different flavors of vinegar like white wine vinegar or balsamic vinegar. Different kinds of mustard, and seasonings like red pepper flakes, also add zip.

SWEDISH CREME WITH RASPBERRIES (or your favorite fruit)

Totally fat free, this easy dessert can be whipped up in minutes.

1 small package sugar free vanilla pudding
1 cup skim milk
1 cup non-fat sour cream substitute
1 cup non-fat plain yogurt
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
Combine all ingredients and beat at high speed for 2 minutes. Chill for 3-4 hours and serve with fresh fruit sprinkled on top.

family tested winner dinner

Betsy Brethen

kitchen — vending machines.

Just think of the possibilities, no fuss, and best of all, no complaints as each family member would be able to simply press a button and get exactly what he or she wanted to eat. Now before you start ripping out your kitchen cupboards to accommodate a bank of machines, read on, as this week's Winner Dinner is an easy to make, delicious meal that is sure to be enjoyed by all.

SUBMITTED BY Nanine Savoie Flechaig of Birmingham, this week's menu includes recipes for Spinach Lasagne served with a tossed salad and garlic bread and Swedish Creme with raspberries.

The mother of two young children, Flechaig and her husband, Peter, have lived in Birmingham all of their lives. Flechaig assists her husband at home with some of the paper work generated from his company, Peerless Painting and Improvements, a building and contracting company that he started more than five years ago.

He recently added a second story to their bungalow which took over seven months to complete. Flechaig laughingly commented that while he built a house, she built a baby and they were thrilled to be able to complete both projects about the same time.



STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

Nanine Savoie Flechaig, the busy mother of Jack, 4 months, and Leigh, 4, presents Spinach Lasagne, a meatless entree.

IN THE SUMMER, they enjoy boating and often take their speed boat to her husband's family cottage on Anchor Bay.

Thank you, Nanine Flechaig, for sharing your recipes with us, and congratulations on being selected this week's Winner Dinner Winner.

Until next time, have a happy Thanksgiving, and please keep those Winner Dinners coming.

Submit recipes to be considered for publication, to Winner Dinner, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham, MI 48012.