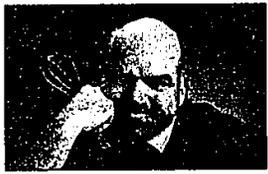


# TASTE

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MONDAY, AUGUST 31, 1992

**TASTE BUDS**



**CHEF LARRY JANES**

## Chef gets in a pickle trying to copy recipe

Anyone who's ever stopped by Getzie's Pub in beautiful downtown Northville has probably, at one time or another, sunk their teeth into one of Dorothy's incredible bread and butter pickles. I've been going to Getzie's now for way past a dozen years or so and every year the fall harvest brings the taste of what I consider to be the best pickles I have ever tasted.

When asked her secret, diminutive Dorothy just blushes a little and says: "It's the same I've been doing for 25 years and it's nothing but a standard pickle recipe."

Standard recipe, my foot. Dorothy's pickles crunch and have just the perfect balance of what pickle fanciers call "tooth." I liken it to the snap, crackle and pop of my favorite breakfast cereal.

**Pickle secrets**

So every year when I ask Dorothy for her secret pickle recipe, every year I get in return a jar of pickled nirvana. Certainly not a bad trade-off. So this year, I checked out everything I could about the secret to great pickles. The Ball Blue Book, long the canner's bible has more pages on pickling than any other topic.

The Farm Journal's Canning Cookbook lists secret upon secret. I tried them all and have come up with the following information. Although my pickles have yet to come close to Dorothy's, I'm right on the fringes of your apron hem, so watch out!

Both of the canning bibles mentioned above agree that in order to make great pickles, you have to start out with great pickles. Consultant upon consultant say that it's best to grow your own.

**Growing pickles**

Grow pickles? I ask? Secret number one for the best pickles start with growing your own cucumbers. Not that you want to grow cucumbers here folks, but rumor has it that the best pickles start with the immature cucumbers. Slicing cukes do not make good pickles, as don't the ones from stores. You need immature pickling cukes. Preferably, fresh, immature pickling cukes that have been picked no more than two hours before.

If that sounds like a pain, it is. It meant a trip down to the Eastern Market at 5 a.m. while farmers laughed when I asked if anyone had picked the cukes during the full light of the moon. I finally found an old babushka clad lady who assured me her pickling cukes came in late Friday afternoon. I trusted and believed. How could you not? Experts agree that it's a waste of time pickling after the cukes are more than 24 hours old. Sappidly, it makes them tough.

Dorothy uses the fresh pack method for her bread and butters and they do require refrigeration. The brine curel or fermented pickles are a bit softer and have a more pronounced pickle taste. Whatever method you use, the pros again say that just as important the pickles is equally as important the vinegar.

**Vinegar recommendations**

Pros use clear vinegar with a specified (on the label) acid strength of 5 percent or 50 grains. Some of the clear vinegars from the grocery store are lighter. White vinegar gives pickles their best color while cider vinegar gives off the best aroma and flavor. Yours truly used a 60-40 blend of white to cider.

Last, but certainly not least, I search the metropolitan area for fresh herbs. It would have been a lot easier had I purchased the bulbous onions and fresh shall and mustard seed from another bib-cen Oklahoma farmer just a few stands down from the cucumber lady, but I went to an herb farm, paid three times the price and got a written guarantee that there were no insecticides on my precious bunch of herbs. After all, I was going to spare nothing in my quest for an acceptable alternative to Dorothy's bread and butter pickles.

I cleaned, I boiled, I blanched, I experimented. I made two pints at a time, alternating the blends, changing the yields and switching the times of processing.

My reward was what I consider to be a challenging batch of bread and butters that came as close to Dorothy's as I'll ever get.

Would you believe that while entering my car with a jar to exchange with my pickle gene it slipped from my fingers and smashed in a sea of glass shards, only to be tested and appreciated by the Rubberman trash container?

Here is the effort of my slavery. I like it, you might not. But when it comes to bread and butters, the only thing Dorothy at Getzie's has on me is experience.

*See recipe inside.*



JIM JAGHILL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Green tomatoes: The movie "Fried Green Tomatoes" sparked an interest in green tomatoes. People who previously wouldn't look twice at a green tomato, are discovering them.

## Relish green tomatoes

BY JOAN BORAN  
Special Writer

It's commonplace that movies inspire trends in fashions and furnishings, but seldom does a movie focus on a particular food.



The movie "Fried Green Tomatoes" sparked an interest in this fleeting summer delicacy. Green tomato dishes are often thought of as regional. Southern cooks lay claim to fried green tomatoes, while British cooks relish piccalilli. Whether fried or made into chutneys and pickles, green tomatoes are a treat.

The movie, "Fried Green Tomatoes," brought to public attention a dish that a good many people had never heard of. A lot of people thought they were a manufactured product that just never had an organic green stage.

But there are more cooks out there than you might expect who not only fry green tomatoes, but also make pickles, relishes, and even a variety of mincemeat. Interestingly, green tomato dishes are often thought of as regional, according to the area of the country the cook grew up in.

A spot check of customers at Western Market on Nine Mile Road west of Woodward in Ferndale, including Dee Dee Jervase of Birmingham, revealed that Southern cooks think of fried green tomatoes as a Southern dish.

But Jervase said she learned how to fry green tomatoes years ago from an Italian neighbor in Southfield.

"We've carried green tomatoes for

years," said Western Market co-owner Tony Salvaggio. "We sell about 150 pounds a week when they're in season."

"This year, because of the movie, we've sold a few more, and a lot of people who wouldn't look twice at a green tomato are stopping in front of the display and saying, 'Oh, look, there really are green tomatoes!'"

British cookbooks offer several recipes for green tomato chutneys and relishes, although none mention frying.

Frances Gibson of Farmington Hills said that green tomato recipes are common in Providence, R.I. where they don't have time to ripen.

"In Rhode Island, green tomatoes are readily available at the market," said Gibson.

"My mother, Lois Oliver Weeden, made green tomato pickles and mincemeat until she was in her 80s. She

always served green tomato pickles on Saturday night with baked beans. The tartness of the pickle complimented the blandness of the beans."

"I still enjoy fried green tomatoes, although I don't cook them as often as I used to."

Gibson, a mechanical engineer who has co-authored several books and articles on reinforced concrete, recently compiled a book of family recipes for the family's grandchildren. For this article, she was kind enough to reach into her computer and draw forth her mother's recipe for green tomato mincemeat pie filling. (See recipe inside).

Renilda Tomlinson of Plymouth said she never really liked fried green tomatoes much.

"My husband and children like them, and I still fry green tomatoes when my children visit, or when I visit them,"



JIM JAGHILL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Green thumb: Dave Sviantek of Garden City stakes claim to these plump, green tomatoes that he grew in his garden.

she said.

"In southeastern Ohio where I come from, we made a variety of pickles and relishes such as piccalilli, out of green tomatoes.

*See recipes inside.*

## Company sips success with El Tesoro tequila

BY KEELY WYGONIK  
Staff Writer

At Robert Denton & Company in Birmingham, the motto is — "If you say it can't be done, then stand aside for someone who is doing it."

The company that imports superpremium agitas from Mexico and El Tesoro is gaining national attention for El Tesoro de Don Felipe tequila, a "pure" tequila made from a fleshy, green succulent plant called an agave, which is part of the aloe and lily family.

There are more than 350 varieties of agave, but tequila can only be made from the Weber blue agave, said Robert Denton, company president.

The search for a "product that was honest, and what it said it was," took more than two years, said company vice president Marilyn Smith.

Finally, they found the La Altesa distillery in the Los Altos Mountains, near the town of Arandas, Jalisco in Mexico.

The three generation, family-owned distillery produces tequila using the same methods that were used in the 1800s. Don Felipe Camarena, son of the founder, Don Felipe, is handing over the control, little by little, to his son, Carlos Camarena.

"I have found the finest tequila I could possibly find," said Smith. "There is a family behind this product. Someone made it that loves it."

El Tesoro, made from 100 percent blue agave, is not for everyone. Like fine wine, it's a product you grow into. "It is a style of tequila," said Smith. "It is distilled to 80 proof without the usual dilution with water. The less expensive tequilas add up to 49 percent sugar water to dilute, and use smaller amounts of immature agave."

Fully mature blue agave plants are harvested at the end of a very long, eight to 12-year growing cycle, said Smith. This is much costlier and more time consuming.

Robert Denton & Company imports two styles of tequila that are distributed by its selling agent, The Elite Spirits Company.

Plata (silver) or white El Tesoro which costs about \$26 a bottle, is bottled fresh, within 24 hours after distillation.

"It's clean, fresh and mixes beautifully," said Smith. "The nose and palate begin with a hint of black pepper and then turn to a wonderful fruitiness."

Muy Anejo, (gold) is aged two or more



STEPHEN CASTELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

years in Don Felipe's stone cellars in inspector-sealed oak bourbon barrels, and costs about \$31 a bottle. Smith compares the flavor to cognac or Scotch whisky.

"It is an elegant spirit with a great balance of fruitiness and oak-derived vanilla. It is refined enough to serve neat in snifter glasses."

Although tequila has gone upscale, some myths remain. "Unlike whisky or cognac with long age, tequila gets decidedly worse after five or six years," said Denton. "It reaches its peak, depending on the region, in two to four years."

*See recipes inside.*

El Tesoro: Charles Davison, Sherri Janson, and Rebecca Wohlfel (top), Marilyn Smith and Robert Denton (bottom) show off the company's restored 1951 Chevrolet pickup.