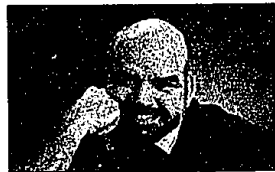


MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 1994

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

## Do something nutty, bake an elegant torte

**E**nough talk about diets, New Year's resolutions, healthy this and good-for-you-that. Sometimes the hustle and bustle of holidays makes us nutcases. Now that it's time to settle down, regroup, chill out, take a deep breath, and yield our lives to a higher power, my inner soul begs to spend an afternoon in the kitchen.

I love making a mess creating, using every utensil, and then sinking into my comfy recliner with a glass of milk and my sinful creation. Cooking is therapy for some, a cross to bear for others.

The soul cried out for something nutty. The pantry had but a sprinkling of flour, the sheer remains from the holiday cookie and bread requests.

The refrigerator was as barren as the checkbook, holding forth to the usual condiments, milk and half tub of diet margarine.

Hidden behind the half-green-speckled chunk of dried-out cream cheese in the butter keeper was nothing more than 3 tablespoons of toast-crumbsprinkled butter. In the vegetable crisper was a bag crammed with hazelnuts. Suddenly I was overcome with an idea—I would make a nut cake.

### Nutty cake

Some people call them tortes, a term that comes from the German word for cake. Like many of Europe's most elegant desserts, these are made primarily of nuts rather than flour.

Versatile and easily adaptable to the meal or the occasion, they are delicious served with or without adornment. Adding fillings and frosting makes them spectacular. Little or no butter is needed—the oil in the nuts takes its place, so to speak, giving the cake a rich texture.

The very richness of the nuts, however, is not a blessing. If not handled properly, they can make a cake heavy. To ensure maximum lightness, a high proportion of eggs should be used in the basic batter. The yolks and whites should be beaten separately to incorporate air into both.

### Cooking tip

A pinch of sugar is beaten into both the yolks and the whites to thicken and ensure stability. The only trick the cook must be aware of is the correct folding technique.

When you are incorporating the beaten whites into the nut batter, incorporate them together in small batches. If the nut batter was added all at once, their weight could cause the entire cake to fall.

Put aside the whisk and dig out the biggest spatula you can find. Swoop into the nut batter with the whites much the same way you would dig into a five-gallon tub of ice cream. Because these cakes contain little or no flour, they are quite fragile. Often the top of the cake settles back down a little when cooling, but this is normal and nothing to worry about.

To help this kind of cake keep its shape, it should cool on top of a wire rack. Invert the cake before serving or frosting so that the flat side becomes the top of the cake. Almost any kind of nut can be used; almonds and hazelnuts are the classic choices. Macadamias, pecans, Brazil nuts and even walnuts can, if you don't mind the pun, "take the cake."

For optimum results, you might be interested in knowing that the best tortes use nuts that are finely ground. Blend, grind or process nuts in small batches, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl occasionally.

For maximum lightness, beat the egg whites last. A little trick I learned in cooking school was to fold the beaten whites in clockwise while turning the bowl counter-clockwise. (Reverse the directions if you are left-handed.) Fold them into the batter as described and immediately transfer them to a prepared pan and place in a preheated oven.

Since these tortes have the benefit of the oil naturally occurring in the nuts, they can be made two to three days ahead. Wrap the torte tightly, and keep it refrigerated. Remove the torte from the refrigerator at least two hours before eating to get the best flavors. When it comes to frostings and toppings, you can whip up a butter cream or blend a coulis. (Coulis is a fruit puree.) By the time the finished torte is removed from my oven, I am ready to add just a dollop of Cool Whip spiced with a little Grand Marnier or even easier, a dusting of powdered sugar flavored with a pinch of cinnamon or cocoa powder. Happy New Year!

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Learn how to prepare easy, low-fat dishes quick in your microwave oven.

■ Wine columnist Eleanor and Ray Heald introduce flavorful new wines.

## Healthy Resolves

Don't feel guilty:

HAVE YOUR  
Cake  
AND EAT IT TOO

■ What they say - "Those who indulge, bulge." Let master baker Susan Purdy show you how to reduce fat not flavor.

By KEELY WYGONIK  
STAFF WRITER



Baking is a lot like chemistry, it's a science. "You cannot just pick up your favorite recipe

and substitute a low-fat item to get the same result without experimentation," said Susan Purdy, author of the newly published "Have Your Cake and Eat It Too," (William Morrow & Co.; Nov. 22, 1993; \$25/hardcover).

"Diet imitation margarine and reduced-fat spreads can contain about 40 percent fat and at least 50 percent water; they, as well as soft tub margarines, are absolutely unreliable for baking," Purdy said. I talked about low-fat baking while she was visiting Detroit on a tour as a spokesperson for Knox Unflavored Gelatine, and to promote her book. Her premise is that low-fat doesn't have to taste bad.

A master baker, Purdy's quest to discover low-fat desserts that taste good, began when her mother Frances Joslin Gold was advised to go on a low-fat diet and couldn't have even the smallest slice of a rich dessert.

"Angel food cake, no matter how we tried to disguise it, became old very quickly," she said.



William Morrow & Co.

Low-fat cake: Susan Purdy proves you can "Have Your Cake and Eat It, Too" with Cocoa Chiffon Cake and other desserts in her newly published cookbook.

She began her work by analyzing the ingredients to learn the function of each. Then started experimenting to reduce the fat, cholesterol, sugar and salt in "traditional" recipes. "I don't use artificial ingredients," she said. "All of the ingredients are available in supermarkets. There's nothing odd about them. You can cut back the sugar and salt and keep a good strong taste. I layer flavors and use lots of spices."

Besides recipes which include a nutritional analysis, Purdy's book contains lots of helpful information. She explains how to calculate fat grams and compares the amount of calories and fat in many baking

products including dairy, chocolate and nuts.

She describes the "Lite Touch" notes at the end of recipes as being an adventure story of how the recipe evolved.

Many of the desserts in Purdy's book can be made ahead of time on weekends when you do have time to cook, and frozen to be enjoyed during the week when you don't have time to cook. There are also recipes for muffins, biscuits and pancakes.

"I like these desserts," she said. "They have become part of my repertoire and I hope they will become part of yours."

Here are some of Purdy's tips for

cutting fat, and controlling the amount of salt and leavening in your baked goods.

■ Make your own cake flour by replacing 2 tablespoons of all-purpose flour with 2 tablespoons cornstarch in every cup. To substitute cake flour for all-purpose flour, use 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons cake flour for every cup of all-purpose.

■ To add nutritional value to baked goods, you can substitute whole wheat pastry flour for one quarter to one third of the all-purpose flour or cake flour called for in a recipe. Note that moisture absorption differs

See CAKE, 2B

## Making dinner team effort for busy family



By KEELY WYGONIK  
STAFF WRITER

It takes dedication and team spirit to juggle family and business responsibilities, the Watts family of Plymouth has it. Mike Watts is president of Watts-Up Inc., the special events marketing company that has managed the Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular for the past three years.

"We all chip in on weekends to clean the house, and work the events," said Sandra. They have three sons—Chris, 16, Nick, 14, and Michael 12.

The Ice Festival draws carvers from all over the world to downtown Plymouth, Jan. 12-17. There's also a gingerbread house and cake decorating contest.

Mike is the executive director of the festival; Sandra is his assistant and "helper extraordinaire." Other events the company has coordinated include the Strawberry Festival in Belleville and the Kidney Foundation's Chili Cook-off in Wayne.

"We create and manage events, and try to come up with new ideas," said Mike. Since Mike and Sandra share the same schedule, dinner is a natural part of their day.

"You have to cook," she said. "I rely on tried and true recipes. Whoever gets home first has to cook. Dinner is something we look forward to at the end of the day."

Tonight, Nick is helping assemble ingredients for chicken stir-fry. The meat was marinated overnight in a resealable bag. "Nick likes to cut up vegetables and cook," said Sandra. With all the ingredients assembled in advance, dinner is very easy.



Bill Bresler/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Family project: Sandy Watts, her husband Mike, and son Nick, talk about the day as they cook a quick chicken stir-fry for dinner.

When they're busy working an event Sandra tries to make dinners ahead of time. Family favorites include roasted chicken, stuffed cabbage and homemade soup.

They shop for groceries every two weeks, and stop for fresh fruit, bread and milk as needed. Having a pantry stocked with rice, noodles, potatoes and other staples, helps save time during busy weeks.

In the freezer are packages of ground beef and turkey, hamburger patties, and Sandra's home made spaghetti sauce.

The Watts try to limit the amount of fat and red meat in their diet. Chris, who is a diver at Catholic Central High School won't eat fat, that includes butter and mayonnaise. Sloppy Joes and chili are made with ground turkey. When the family uses ground beef in a recipe, they use the leanest cut, ground sirloin and drain off all the fat after cooking. Sandra and Mike met and fell in love at Eastern

### ■ I rely on tried and true recipes.

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Michigan University. They share a love of fresh, simple food. Sandra grew up on a farm. Mike grew up in Detroit and remembers shopping at Eastern Market with his grandfather who owned a fresh poultry market.

"When you grow up eating stuff brought from farmers you get used to it," said Mike.

Sandra has a garden every summer. She cans cans tomatoes, pickles, peaches and pears and freezes peas, beans, corn, lima beans, carrots, okra, strawberries and blueberries.

"The boys snack on frozen strawberries and blueberries when they're watching TV. We encourage the kids, they don't need to eat garbage," said Mike.

See recipes inside. If you would like to be featured in our Super-Supper column, or want to nominate a friend, neighbor or relative. Send recipes for consideration to: Keely Wygonik, Taste/Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc. 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. For information, call 953-2105. Look for Super-Supper on the second Monday of the month in Taste.