

MONDAY, JANUARY 17, 1994

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Give salt, pepper
a shake for flavor

Try to imagine cereal without milk, bread without butter, and beer without pretzels. Now try to imagine salt without pepper. What is it that makes this tasty twosome such a hit? Salt and pepper enliven simple and elaborate dishes without masking their individuality. Salt is a flavor enhancer, and pepper serves as a penetrator enlivening dishes with a peppery aroma and biting, pungent flavor.

Grain of salt

There are many varieties of salt available on today's market. A trip to the grocers will have you noticing racks jammed with table salt, iodized salt, kosher salt, pickling salt, seasoned salt, popcorn salt, rock salt, sodium-reduced salt and even sea salt. All have special flavors that enliven dishes.

Table salt is a frequent choice of cooks who use it because it dissolves easily. Kosher salt is used for its flakiness, pickling, and many garnishes. It's especially tasty as a coating for bread. Seasoned salt is fine grained and interspersed with such notable herbs and spices as garlic, onion, celery and tarragon. Pickling salt is usually a fine grained salt made expressly for canning mainly because it is made without additives that can cloud the liquid used in canning. Popcorn salt is heavily flavored and made extra fine so that it will cling well to popcorn kernels.

Rock salt is usually unprocessed and mainly used for making ice cream. Local super chef Jimmy Schmidt bakes whole pears in rock salt while yours truly enjoys Yukon Gold potatoes covered in rock salt then baked to absolute fluffiness.

Sodium-reduced salt contains half the sodium of regular salt. It is made by chemically reducing the sodium content of the salt crystal. Sea salt is sought out by cooking professionals for its flavor-enhancing capabilities without the saltiness of taste. It is usually more expensive than regular salt because it is made by dehydrating sea water and cannot be mined.

Peppery flavors

Pepper, on the other hand, is a berry or peppercorn of a woody perennial evergreen climbing vine. Pepper berries grow in spike-like clusters four to six inches long. Each cluster contains 50 or more berries. As they ripen, the berries change color from a green to a yellow and then to a red. They are fully ripened and ready for harvest after about nine months on the vine.

Supermarkets have a lot of catching up to do with the marketing of pepper varieties as compared to salt.

Sure, there's the traditional black pepper, white pepper and cayenne pepper, but a trip to a good gourmet shop or store specializing in spices will offer Tellicherry pepper, Lumpung pepper, Sarawak, Malabar, Brazilian, Chinese and Celanese, just to name a few.

Personal favorites are the jins blended with the multicolor peppercorns that offer a well rounded aroma and pungency.

Pepper is one of the few spices that can be stored almost indefinitely (under proper conditions). Store them in a tightly closed jar, and whole peppercorns will outlast just about any spice on the rack.

If you have yet to acquire a pepper mill, run, do not walk, to your local store and buy a pepper mill. Throw away the pepper shaker. The flavor derived from fresh ground pepper compared to that which shakes from a jar is like the difference between night and day. Good pepper mills will set you back about \$18 to \$25, but a good mill will last, as mine has, going on 20 years.

When it comes to cooking with salt and pepper remember that real cooks will salt their foods only after cooking and tasting. Never salt meat before cooking as salt has a tendency to draw out the natural juices, making for a dryer, tougher piece of meat.

Pepper, on the other hand, can be added during the cooking process to enhance the flavor and aroma. Folks on a restricted salt program will certainly enjoy the taste of Morton's Nature's Seasonings and the Mrs. Dash varieties of salt substitutes. These are really herbal blends that heighten the flavor without the added sodium. But when it comes to using the real thing, dollar for dollar, you just can't beat the added flavor and aromas derived from the use of something as basic as salt and pepper.

See Larry Janes' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Entertain your low-fat options with delicious dishes guests will love.

■ Laura Letobar gives Beef Stroganoff a Recipe Make over.

■ Norma Schonwetter takes the mystery out of microwave cooking in her new cookbook "Microwave To Your Heart's Content."

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Lots of people have microwave ovens, over 80 percent of Americans, according to the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, but I don't know anyone who cooks dinner in them. Norma Schonwetter, author of the newly published "Microwave To Your Heart's Content: A Heart-Healthy Cookbook," has two microwave ovens, and hardly ever uses her stove.

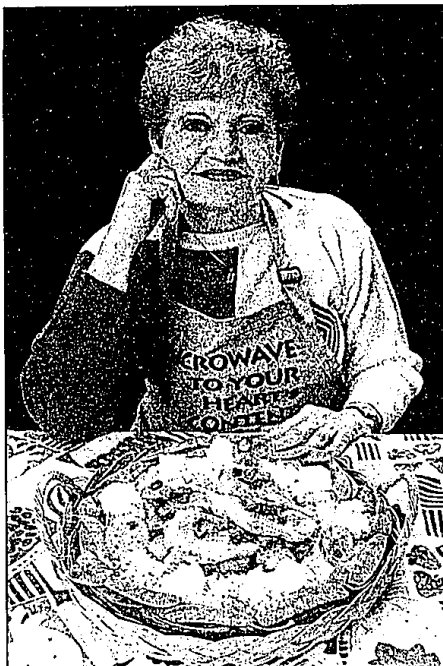
"You can cook in the microwave without any added fat, you don't have to grease pans, foods don't stick, and you can cook and serve in the same dish," said Schonwetter explaining some of the reasons she prefers microwave cooking.

Until I met Norma, I used my microwave for reheating, defrosting, and cooking vegetables. One rubber chicken is enough I told her explaining why I never cooked in my microwave.

"Overcooking is one of the biggest mistakes people make," said Schonwetter. "It's better to undercook foods in the microwave, you can always put them back in to continue cooking. Food continues to cook after the microwave is turned off. By allowing the food to stand or rest a few minutes, the heat that is built up in the food is distributed throughout. Standing time is usually about 1/4 of the cooking time."

If your microwaved dish comes out dry, tough, rubbery or brittle, Schonwetter says it's overcooked.

I wasn't easily convinced. I wanted proof. Norma's Chicken Lanai made a believer out of me. This Polynesian chicken dish, photographed in our Livonia studio, is ready to serve after seven minutes



Festive dish: Norma Schonwetter presents Chicken Lanai, a sunny Polynesian chicken dish with chunks of pineapple that's ready to serve after seven minutes of microwave cooking.

of microwave cooking. The chicken was moist, and flavored with fresh ginger. "How long did you marinate this chicken to make it so moist?" I wanted to know. She didn't.

A home economist, and mother of two grown children, Schonwetter said she had a feeling microwave cooking would really take off in the late 1970s, and started learning all she could about it. She worked for Amana and Sears doing microwave cooking demonstrations, and

teaching classes to people who purchased microwave ovens.

Later she taught classes in Oak Park, Southfield, and Troy, and has written a syndicated column "Micro Magic" for 18 years. Writing a book was a logical next step.

"I try to make things as healthy as possible," said Schonwetter. "The recipes are easy-to-prepare, and use easy-to-find recipes. I don't like to complicate things." Nutritional analysis for recipes

in "Microwave To Your Heart's Content," was provided by Karen Jackson, a registered dietitian and nutritionist for Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn. Symbols printed with each recipe tell cooks at a glance if the recipe is low calorie, extra low in fat, or extra low in cholesterol. It also contains healthy substitutions and microwave cooking guidelines.

The book is \$12.95 and available at Bookpeople in West Bloomfield, Borders Book Shop in Birmingham, and Book Beat in Oak Park. To order by phone, call 1-800-43-MICRO or send check or money order to "Microwave To Your Heart's Content," 23600 Cloverlawn, Oak Park, MI 48237. Make check for \$12.95, plus \$2 for postage and handling, payable to Micro Magic.

Now let's get cooking:

The American Heart Association recommends using the microwave for cooking foods that cook well in moist heat - chicken, fish, ground meat, vegetables, sauces and soups.

Here are some tips for checking foods for "doneness" from the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers.

■ Food steams throughout, not just around the edges.

■ Center bottom of dish is very hot to the touch.

■ Poultry thigh joints move easily.

■ Meat and poultry show no signs of pinkness and meat juices run clear when meat is cut close to the bone.

■ Fish is opaque and flakes easily with a fork.

One crisp coated chicken parts, Schonwetter removes the skin, brushes the chicken with melted margarine or combines 1/4 cup egg substitute and 2 tablespoons of skim milk; dip chicken parts in seasoned bread, cornflake or cracker crumbs.

Keely Wygonik is editor of the Taste and Entertainment sections of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She welcomes your calls and comments, 953-2105, fax 591-7279, or write: Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc. 36951 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. See recipes inside.

Fruity Newlan, Armida wines tasty sips

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

Vineyards. He is responsible for the delicious merlots that put Markham on the wine map. After increasing Markham's wine production and building a new winery, Foley decided that he wanted to return to making hand-crafted wines. In 1992, he joined Bruce Newlan at Newlan Vineyards and began making some flavorful wines we think you should know about.

Like so many people in the wine business, Bruce Newlan came from another business. Lockheed Aviation. In 1967, Newlan and his wife bought 13 acres of Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon and sold the grapes to wineries like Inglenook, Robert Mondavi and Silver Oak. In 1974, Newlan decided to leave Lockheed to become a full-time grower. He bought another 16 acres of pinot noir vineyards and began to experiment with winemaking.

Newlan Vineyards pinot noir is so special that Robert Mondavi bought most of it for his Reserve Pinot Noir. Today, Foley gets first pick of the pinot noir vineyard to make Newlan pinot noir. "Fruit this good is very special to the Napa Valley," said Foley. "Pinot noir at Newlan

Bob Foley is a talented musician, speaks six languages, lives in Napa Valley and makes great wines. We first met Foley when he made wine for Markham



Taste test: Winemaker Bob Foley (left) and vineyard owner Bruce Newlan, sample wines at Newlan Vineyards in California's Napa Valley.

Wine Selections

Value wines from Newlan Vineyards are labeled Napa Villages (\$9 each) and include a Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, a red wine that is a blend of Rhone varietals and a white that is 80 percent semillon and 20 percent chardonnay.

Under the Newlan Vineyards label, we recommend the 1991 Newlan Chardonnay (\$14), 100 percent barrel fermented in 60 percent new French oak barrels, the 1989 Newlan Pinot Noir (\$15 reviewed above), the 1987 Newlan Cabernet Sauvignon (\$14.50), a silky wine that was bottled aged at the winery, and the 1991 Newlan Zinfandel (\$13), a premier release.

Armida wines available in this area include: 1992 Armida Chardonnay (\$10), 1991 Armida Pinot Noir (\$12) and 1991 Armida Merlot (\$12) - all exceptional values.

