

# TASTE

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MONDAY, MARCH 21, 1994

## TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

## Chewy, nutty grain worth the extra cost

It has been called the "caviar of grain." French explorers who first came across it in the upper Great Lakes region had no idea that it was not a grain but an aquatic grass seed. They named it crazy oats.

But for American Indians who lived in the area, it was much more. They called it manomin after the Menominee tribe.

It was something that seldom graced the Jones Gang family table. When it did, it usually came in an Uncle Ben's box.

Give up? We're talking about wild rice here folks, and the Uncle Ben's box should have given the answer away. It wasn't the taste that kept wild rice off our family dinner table, it was certainly the cost.

Compared to other varieties of rice, wild rice is fairly expensive. Graduate your taste buds into the premium category of wild rice, and you can expect to pay up to \$10 per pound.

### Old-fashioned harvest

The reason wild rice is so expensive is that much of the harvesting is done the old-fashioned way during what is known as the American Indian "rice moon" in September. As it was with American Indians hundreds of years ago, two people in a canoe harvest an allotted section of a flooded lake, one pushing the boat with a long pole, the other pulling plants down over the gunwale beating out the grain with cedar sticks. The grain that falls back into the water becomes seed for next year's crop.

As if harvesting weren't time consuming and expensive enough, preparing wild rice for the market is also a tedious and expensive job. It takes about three pounds of seed to get one pound of rice.

When you get down to the nitty gritty, wild rice might be expensive at the check-out, but when you cook it, you'll notice that when properly prepared, the rice can triple in volume.

One pound of wild rice can actually yield more than 30 one-half-cup servings! Nutrition-conscious folks will please to note that wild rice is high in fiber, rich in protein with not a drop of fat. Ah, but what makes this writer a lover of wild rice is the only one measure of judgment - the flavor.

### Delicious flavor

Wild rice has a chewy, nutty smoky flavor that makes it perfect as a side dish as well as for salads, soups and stuffings. Any time poultry is served, wild rice will elevate it to new heights.

Yours truly recently fired up the gas grill and grilled a turkey breast and natural skin. Nothing more than serve it with some heated red raspberry preserves and a healthy shake of curry. Nestled on each side of the turkey was a healthy scoop of wild rice and a smidgen of steamed cauliflower. Upon finishing dinner, we were satiated and felt healthy, not stuffed and tired, as a big dinner normally makes you feel.

The best wild rice you can get, the most expensive is the giant long grain. Each grain is nearly an inch long, and because of its price, I recommend that it be reserved for special dishes.

### Cooking method

To properly cook wild rice, start with about 6 ounces (1 1/2 cups) rice. Bring 4 cups of water to a boil and if desired, lightly salt the water. Stir the rice into the boiling water, stir, return to a boil, cover and lower the heat to a simmer. In 50-60 minutes, drain off any excess water and cover and allow the rice to stand for 10 minutes before serving. This procedure will yield a little over 3 cups of cooked wild rice. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

The most popular grade of wild rice is the extra fancy medium. Clean and unbroken, this is what you see in the market for \$4 to \$5 per pound. The select or short grain is wild rice not uniform in length and possibly broken, so if appearance doesn't pose a problem, this would suffice. Avoid wild rice that are parboiled, precooked or processed, unless you really like the flavor of a five-minute rice, which, in my opinion, is almost tasteless.

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 1898.

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Dr. Robert Majewski of Livonia shares his family recipe for Polish Easter bread.

■ Laura Letobar gives Louisiana Chicken Stew a recipe make over.



Festive dishes: Marcy Palmer Kass and her sons, Ryan and Evan, present some of their family's favorite Passover dishes. The Seder plate contains six symbolic foods.

# PASSOVER

■ Busy moms prepare to celebrate Passover with families and friends by cleaning, cooking and shopping for special foods.

BY KEELY WYGONIK  
STAFF WRITER



When Marcy Palmer Kass was growing up, her mother strictly observed Jewish laws concerning the festival of Passover, which commemorates the exodus of Jews from Egyptian slavery to freedom.

"She had four daughters and wanted them to understand the rituals so they could pass them

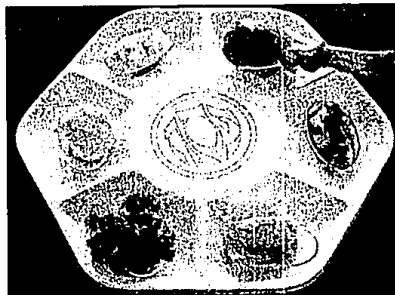
on to their families," said Kass of Bloomfield Hills, the busy mother of two sons - Ryan 10 and Evan 6.

Passover is observed for eight days each year beginning with the 15th day of the month of Nisan on the Hebrew calendar. This year from sundown on Saturday, March 26, to sundown, Sunday, April 3.

The first two nights are celebrated with family and friends at a feast called the Seder, marked by the retelling of the

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Families blend old, new traditions



## Merlot from St. Francis, soft and rich

### FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

enormous appeal and is seducing avowed white-wine enthusiasts. They are attracted to the round and generous, oil-times fleshy, richly fruity, easily understood and long-lived characteristics of merlot. St. Francis winery in Kenwood, Calif., is a key player in production of this popular red wine.

"I'm striving to make a merlot, which, like the wines of Pomerol, accentuates the body of a cabernet, but with the floral character, softness and richness of a red Burgundy," said St. Francis winemaker Tom Mackey. "Our merlot is not blended with another varietal. We want the grape to display its own unique character."

With St. Francis wines, merlot should not be a consumer's only focus. Every wine in the portfolio is delicious. St. Francis winery is not a new kid on the block. It was formally founded in 1978, but its history dates from 1971, when Joe Martin bought a 100-acre property in the Sonoma County community of Kenwood. Martin's first in-

tention was to grow grapes, not to make wine. And according to the master plan, for the first eight years, Martin sold his grapes to neighboring wineries with the renowned names of Jordan, Chateau St. Jean, Kenwood, Matanzas Creek and Ravenswood.

"When a grower sells grapes rather than making wine, control ends with the transaction," Martin said. "By selling grapes, I lost control over my identity and reputation as a grower. In 1979, therefore, I decided to build a winery. Tom Mackey has been my winemaker since 1980."

Today, Martin owns 100 acres of prime vineyard land, buys grapes under long-term contract from 10 to 20 growers, and produces 50,000 to 55,000 cases annually, which includes 10,000 cases of merlot. In the wine portfolio, in addition to merlot are gewurztraminer, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon and 1,200 cases of a delicious old vines zinfandel. Additionally, St. Francis bottles reserve chardonnay, merlot and cabernet sauvignon.

In 1989, St. Francis took the problem of corked wines literally by the neck and began bottling its wines with synthetic cork. "Problems arising from bottling wine with natural wood-bark cork have plagued winemakers for centuries, and recently the situation has worsened," Martin said. "The accepted industry figure is that somewhere between percent to 6 percent of wine is spoiled by cork tainting. But many people in the wine industry would put it even higher than this."



ST. FRANCIS WINERY

Winery: This sign welcomes visitors to St. Francis Winery in Kenwood, Calif., Sonoma Valley. St. Francis is a key player in the production of merlot.

Without going into a chemistry lesson on this problem, we'll summarize by stating that natural cork is not inert. It contains volatile substances that can be passed to the wine, significantly altering both aroma and taste. The new synthetic closure adopted by St. Francis has the look, feel and traditional appeal of a natural

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