

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1994

TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Easy preserves capture fresh flavors of summer

Photographs can evoke images of summers gone by, but cooks have their own ways of capturing seasonal delights. Succulent blueberries, the sensuous charm of warm field-ripened tomatoes and wafty scents of basil are gastronomic memories we can resuscitate, even in the dredges of winter.

A pantry lined with rows of jars and bottles capturing summer's kaleidoscopic bounty may be the cook's only brush with mortality since most of their products (even masterpieces) are consumed within minutes of creation. One of the most gratifying aspects of cookery - preserving - allows you to have something to crow about for months instead of minutes.

Even if you don't garden, farmer's markets are bursting with the flavors of a glorious Michigan summer. But who wants to spend a beautiful fall day slaving over a canning pot and contemplating the perfect seal on a jar of tomatoes?

Saving basil

Drying is the most common way of preserving herbs, and this method has certainly withstood the test of time. However, the bunches of basil I fastidiously hung in front of the basement window to dry has simply evaporated the flavor of what still grows gangbusters in my garden. I found an old Farmer's Almanac that suggested an alternative to drying bunches of basil. They said to rinse it, parboil for 5 seconds, plunge into cold water and grind it into a pulp with 1 cup of olive oil and a heaping teaspoon of coarse salt. The bright green color of basil remains appetizing, and the herb, when packed into small jars and tightly sealed, has found a place in the fruit cellar.

With still an abundant crop of basil growing heavily in the garden, I plan to make herb wine next week by simply packing any freshly picked herb into a scrupulously clean jar and topping it off with a pleasant, inexpensive dry red or white wine that has been heated to almost boiling. The bottles will be stored in a dark cupboard and will be used in the dead of winter to highlight a spaghetti sauce.

The most difficult aspect of preparing this is making sure the bottles and/or jars with their lids were first simmered to near death in a large soup kettle of water. For safety's sake, they were lifted from the sanitary bath with tongs and placed on a clean towel to drain. The jars were filled while still hot to the touch, sealed and allowed to cool before they were placed in the pantry or refrigerator.

Last winter I picked up a box of elegant old bottles and hid them away in the basement for next week's culinary job. I plan to stir up a quick simple syrup with sugar and water to pour over freshly picked fruit from the market (I hope to find blueberries and raspberries). Then I'll top off the fruity mixture with a quart of domestic cheap vodka that will in turn, remake itself into a countrified version of framboise or blueberry eau-de-vie for sipping in front of the fireplace on a snowy winter's day. If nothing else, I'll be sure to have an ample supply of homemade host and hostess gifts for holiday gift giving.

Saving tomatoes

Having experimented with the preparation of drying tomatoes in a food dehydrator (with outstanding results, I might add) but not relishing the 14 hours it took to accomplish, I will finish harvesting my tomatoes about now and then pack them into an elegant tomato coulis or sauce that will end up being ladled into freezer bags for a long winter storage.

Any kind of tomato sauce, puree or pulp can be easily frozen in freezer bags and, when left to freeze in 10-inch cake pans, will stack conveniently in the rear of the freezer. Layers of apples can make up a batch of sauce and conveniently store it this way also. The old almanac even suggested that anyone could freeze their finely chopped herbs in water in ice cube trays for later winter use.

Any leftover berries that don't make their way into cordials or preserves will be frozen on a parchment-lined baking sheet and then be packed away in freezer bags for a short sleep, only to find their way into fresh muffins (without defrosting, I might add) in January or February.

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1994.

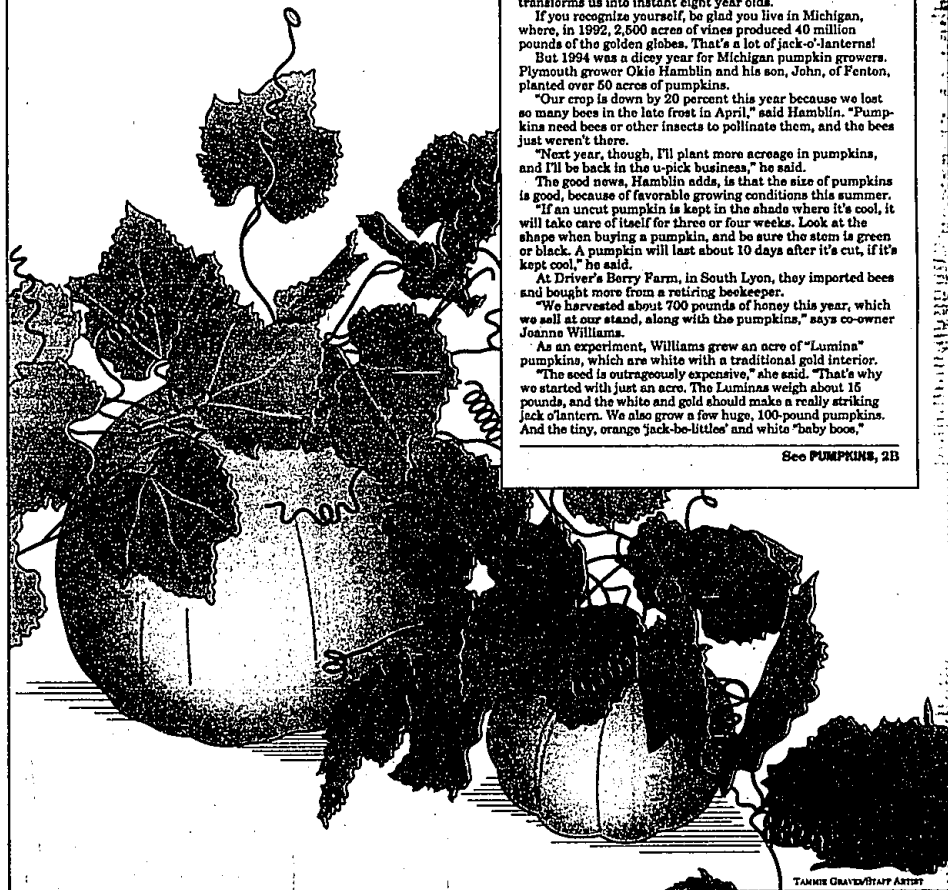
LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

Oct. 13 is World Food Day. Learn how local chefs help feed the hungry in Michigan.

The busy Barton family of Troy shares recipes in our Super Supper column.

CARVE OUT SOME TIME for pumpkins



See PUMPKINS, 2B



Get ready for Halloween, plan to attend the Pumpkinfest Oct. 7-9 in South Lyon.

BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

We may outgrow "trick-or-treating," but we're never too old to enjoy carving a "punkin" to guide the way for little beggars with big pillow cases.

In South Lyon, they're serious about enjoying pumpkins. The 10th annual South Lyon Area Pumpkinfest will take place Oct. 7-9.

Last year, 25,000 people flocked to South Lyon to watch or participate in a pumpkin pie-eating contest, a scarecrow contest and free cider, doughnuts and pumpkin painting contest for kids under 12.

The festivities begin 9 a.m. Friday, Oct. 7, when the Farmer's Market opens downtown. It ends 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 9, with the Jaycoes diaper derby (for crawlers only). The highlight of the weekend is the parade, which starts 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 8.

For information and a complete listing of events, call the Pumpkinfest Hotline at (810) 437-5046.

Carving a grotesque smile with crooked teeth and squinty eyes, or an old-fashioned grin with pyramid eyes and nose, transforms us into instant eight year olds.

If you recognize yourself, be glad you live in Michigan, where, in 1992, 2,500 acres of vines produced 40 million pounds of the golden globes. That's a lot of jack-o'-lanterns! But 1994 was a dicey year for Michigan pumpkin growers. Plymouth grower Okie Hamblin and his son, John, of Fenton, planted over 50 acres of pumpkins.

"Our crop is down by 20 percent this year because we lost so many bees in the late frost in April," said Hamblin. "Pumpkins need bees or other insects to pollinate them, and the bees just weren't there."

"Next year, though, I'll plant more acreage in pumpkins, and I'll be back in the u-pick business," he said.

The good news, Hamblin adds, is that the size of pumpkins is good, because of favorable growing conditions this summer.

"If an uncut pumpkin is kept in the shade where it's cool, it will take care of itself for three or four weeks. Look at the shape when buying a pumpkin, and be sure the stem is green or black. A pumpkin will last about 10 days after it's cut, if it's kept cool," he said.

At Driver's Berry Farm, in South Lyon, they imported bees and bought more from a retiring beekeeper.

"We harvested about 700 pounds of honey this year, which we sell at our stand, along with the pumpkins," says co-owner Joanne Williams.

As an experiment, Williams grew an acre of "Lumina" pumpkins, which are white with a traditional gold interior.

"The seed is outrageously expensive," she said. "That's why we started with just an acre. The Lumina weigh about 15 pounds, and the white and gold should make a really striking jack-o'-lantern. We also grow a few huge, 100-pound pumpkins. And the tiny, orange jack-be-littles' and white 'baby boos'."

Tasty wines from southern France are affordable

BY ELEANOR AND RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Languedoc-Roussillon - a southern France region spanning a vast arc along the Mediterranean from the Rhone River to the Spanish border is a wash in sun and vineyards. A few years ago the region was rejected in a serious French wine discussion. This is no longer true. If you're looking to expand your wine tasting experience, there are new grape varieties to learn for new taste sensations at very affordable prices.

In Corbieres, grapegrowing dates to Roman times, but the area has emerged as a serious competitor in the production of high quality wines. Cotes du Roussillon, is promising for soft, round red wines reminiscent of Chateaufort-du-Pape. From Cotes du Roussillon, set in the Pyrenean foothills and bordering the Mediterranean, there are pours with refinement and elegance.

A broad spectrum of wines carry the Minervois appellation, from early-thinking examples to

Wine Selections of the Week

The people spoke at "The Great Wine Shootout" sponsored by Dennis Walsh, proprietor of Ye Olde Wine Shoppe in Rochester Hills.

The two most popular red wines were the 1991 Pine Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon, Stags Leap District (\$28) and 1991 Willamette Valley Vineyard Pinot Noir "OV" (\$23).

The most popular whites were 1991 Ferrari-Carano Chardonnay Reserve (\$33) and 1993 Jade Mountain Marsanne-Viognier (\$14).

The 1989 Roederer Estate Brut l'Ermitage (\$40) was the most popular sparkling wine.

The people's choices were excellent. New releases from Pine Ridge, Ferrari-Carano and Jade Mountain have been selected by us as wine selections of the week on several occasions. Willamette Valley Vineyard is a new and welcomed entry into our market.

In addition, we liked the 1992 Jade Mountain Merlot (\$20), 1991 Ridge Merlot, York Creek (\$22), 1991 Redwood Syrah (\$19) and 1992 Havens Merlot (\$17).

See WINE, 2B