

MONDAY, MAY 8, 1995

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Turn up the heat with sizzling fresh chilies

The James Gang kitchen has been sizzling with Tex-Mex flavors including chilies, and cactus since I returned from a seven day trip in San Antonio, Texas.

A vinaigrette made with the pureed fruit of a prickly pear cactus topped Monday's salad.

Homemade blue corn tortillas wrapped cumin scented black beans for Tuesday night's repast.

Homemade chili spiked with just enough jalapenos to bring a sweat to this balding forehead spearheaded Wednesday's offering.

I fell in love with San Antonio, and up until last week, thought the Mexican sun set and rose solely on places like Leon's Tortillas, Xochomilco and La Jalicenta, Detroit's answer to Mexico cropped between Michigan Avenue, Porter, 12th Street and 24th Street. Not that I wasn't impressed with the talents of Jay McCarthy of Cascabel or Lucinda Hutson, the self-appointed tequila queen of San Antonio, but I knew faster than a straight tequila hangover that Diana Kennedy would be the woman who would lead me through the many tastes that real Tex-Mex had to offer.

Kennedy has devoted more than 35 years to studying the food, character and heritage of Mexico. The author of "The Cuisines of Mexico," "Mexico Regional Cooking," "The Tortilla Book," and the "Art of Mexican Cooking," she is considered, even in Mexico, the leading authority on Mexican food.

When she invited me to sample some of the chiles of Mexico and the great Southwest, I knew I was in for one of the highlights of my culinary career.

I couldn't even begin to list all the different varieties, and just sat there nodding in agreement when Kennedy mentioned a name I was familiar with. My taste buds were tingled, tingled, shocked, ignited, electrified, and then consumed with fire. I didn't think I would be able to eat for weeks, and then as fiercely as the heat attacked, the burn subsided after a few sips of a milk shake.

I literally choked on breathing in the intensity of the fumes while Kennedy sauted a habanero in a little olive oil. I felt protected from the dangers of the seeds and the veins (the hottest part of a chili pepper) after donning rubber gloves only to have my index finger numbed simply while scraping the chopped remnants of a chili off a cutting board and into a brown gravy colored mole.

Lots of choices

Thanks to buyers at local gourmet grocers, and Shopping Center Markets, Farmer Jack, Kroger and Meijer, the proliferation of fresh and dried chiles is getting hotter in metro Detroit.

Five years ago you might have been lucky enough to pick up a few jalapenos. Today, the markets have baskets of poblanos, Anaheim, pasillas, habaneros, serranos and anchos, just to name a few. In addition to fresh, there are dried, crushed, chopped, pickled, marinated and even powdered chiles.

Five years ago, if you chose to make an authentic Chile Rellenos, you had to drive to La Colman/Honey Bee Market, one of Detroit's premier Mexican grocery stores on Bagley, just east of Tiger Stadium for a poblan pepper.

Variety of flavors

I think what scares most of us from enjoying more exotic chiles is the fear of heat. Kennedy made it a point to be sure I knew that chile eating in Mexico is an adventure, chiles are not used just to make food hot, as a condiment, as in many other cuisines. Each variety of chile has a flavor of its own, some more stronger and perfumed than others.

Each is treated in a different way and fills a different role in the cuisine: the fleshy poblanos as a vegetable, poblancas as a condiment, the jalapenos as a pickle, serranos as a sauce, all adding their various colors and flavors.

Most fresh chiles should be charred and peeled and this can be accomplished as easily as spearing with a fork and holding over a gas flame. They also can be split and charred under a broiler.

See Larry James' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Outlay gals "batter up" at Sunshine Treats in Farmington Hills.

■ Don't miss purchasing some French Burgundies from the 1993 vintage.



Treasured dishes pass generation to generation

BY RENEE M. SNOGLAND
SPECIAL WRITER

Paula Gibbons, a Canton mother of two teenagers, comes from a long line of strong-minded women. Her mother, Peggy Windisch, a retired school teacher, likes to travel the Elderhostel trail, combining fun and learning in this country, and abroad. Gibbons' grandmother, Bernadette Chatel, lives alone in her apartment. No small feat at age 96.

This Mother's Day, these three women will celebrate a legacy of strength. They'll get together to laugh, reminisce, plan for the future, and enjoy a good meal. They may even decide to cook pasties. The women are sitting in Paula's family room. Conversation hopscoches comfortably through a variety of topics — values, children, food.

"Our values are very similar," said Peggy, a former Farmington Hills resident who recently moved to South Lyon. Paula nods in agreement, and adds, "we were raised without prejudice. That's the way I'm raising my kids."

Bernadette, who raised four children as a full-time mother says, "I was so anxious for my girls to get an education." She didn't have to worry. Today, the women in her family include teachers, writers, a city planner in Alaska, and a Peace Corps worker in Africa.

When asked if this bond of shared values extends to food preferences, Paula quickly says, yes.

"If I'm going to my mom's, I know I'll like it. We are all real basic meat and potatoes, nothing real fancy."

Bernadette shares two family recipes inside — one for an unusual poultry stuffing known as "fowl" and the other for pasties. "The pasty recipe was given to me by my husband's mother," she said. She tells a story about how the hardy U.P. women wrapped their pasties in newspapers for their men to take down in the mines. She remembers the women — Welsh, French and Swedish — fighting about who made the best pasties.

Has she ever been tempted to change the recipe? "No, not a bit," she says emphatically. Peggy laughs with her mother, and says, "we're not that clever."

Paula, who claims nothing tastes like the family pasty recipe, glances at her mother and grandmother. She has an idea, "we haven't had a pasty party in a long time."

This Sunday, Florence "Sunny" Stratman, daughter Karen Foster, and granddaughter, Katie Foster will celebrate their own special relationship. These Westland residents share several common bonds.

"We like to eat and shop," said Karen. Florence adds, "Karen and I go out a lot, and we do a lot of giggling. We find a lot of things to talk about, and we sew."

Karen who once made a stage costume for her daughter in one day, says, "And we all like to sing. Mom and I sing in the choir at St. Simon & Jude. Sometimes Katie joined us when she was younger."

As with most close families, food and meal-times play important roles. Every Friday, Karen and her mother, who lives alone in a Westland senior citizen complex, share meals. "She cooks one Friday, and I do the other," said Karen. Florence claims two signature dishes — a low-fat minestrone soup and Scotch shortbread. "It started with me," she says of the soup. "It's hardy and delicious. In 20 minutes you're done. If you want you can put meat in it."

Besides a love of talking and eating, the women in these two families share "the look."

We all know it, and we have it. "The look" is recognizable to generations of children tempted to disobey.

"You could tell when I was mad," said Florence Stratman. "Even the dog wanted to leave the house."

"I raised my family with 'my look,'" said Bernadette Chatel. Lucky for them she also raised them on pasties.

See recipes inside.

TAMARA CLAYTON/STAFF ARTIST

She's ready for dinner when life gets hectic

BY SUZANNE L. PARKER
SPECIAL WRITER

As a cook who enjoyed preparing gourmet meals, Sue Prouse of Birmingham was faced with a great challenge when she became a vegetarian five years ago — cooking flavorful meals that adhere to the confines of her new diet.

"I'm a strict vegetarian now — no dairy or anything," said Prouse, who, after a long day running her interior design business, still looks forward to cooking dinner for herself and her husband, Jim.

"What I've tried to do is to create recipes that are vegetarian, but taste as good as the old gourmet I used to cook."

And, as is the case with most two-career families, finding the time to cook, let alone eat, adds to the challenge. And things are likely to get busier for Prouse this weekend.

Since it began in 1986, Prouse has been a volunteer on the organizing committee of the Village Antique Show at Greenfield Village, the annual fund-raiser which benefits the Henry Ford Museum. With the show being held May 12-14 at the



Quick supper: Sue Prouse of Birmingham shares some of her strategies for cooking quick when life gets hectic

museum in Dearborn, Prouse will be busy helping coordinate the event as it takes place. But Prouse said she has a few strategies for cooking quick, but good-tasting meals when life gets that hectic.

Often she'll start soups in the mornings — or create meals on the weekends that will last into the week.

"Gazpacho is one soup I like to make in the spring and summer because it's cool and fresh," she said.

A pantry stocked with the right foodstuffs also goes a long way to preparing fast, yet flavorful meals. Among the must-haves Prouse always keeps on hand are beans and lentils, lots of pasta like angel hair and penne, and saled items including organic tomatoes.

"I like to take foods that are already prepared and improve on them," she said.

A meal she cooked up quickly the other night is a perfect example. Prouse and her husband both had busy days, so on the way home she stopped at the market picked up three kinds of mushrooms — white, shiitake, and portobello.

"When I got home I sauted those with lots of garlic, some onions and fennel," she said. "Then I added marinara sauce and let that simmer while I cooked some penne pasta."

In the meantime, Prouse prepared a big salad, and opened up a package of focaccia bread, adding a touch of rosemary and olive oil and heating it up in the oven.

"It tasted like I made it from scratch."

See recipes and Village Antique Show details inside.