

MONDAY, JULY 10, 1995

# TASTE

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## TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

### Meringue won't weep if you cook pie filling

**B**onnie Malings of Garden City has problems with her cream pies. They become syrupy, and her meringue pies constantly "weep."

Cream pies become syrupy when the cornstarch is overcooked, or over beaten, or when there is too high a proportion of sugar in a recipe. For better success with cream pies, use only the amount of sugar called for, and dissolve cornstarch in a cold liquid called for in the recipe before adding it to the filling mixture. For best results, I recommend cooking the pie filling in a double boiler or very heavy saucepan to prevent over cooking. Liquid accumulates between meringue and a pie filling when the meringue does not reach a high enough temperature during baking to "set" the layer of meringue directly above the filling. Make sure the pie filling is very warm when the meringue is put on top, use the freshest egg whites, and a pinch of cream of tartar. Most importantly, make sure the meringue covers the pie to the crust to make a good "seal."

Mary Lou Fitzgerald of Westland wants a recipe for Fattoush salad. Fattoush is a Middle Eastern bread salad. Make the base in advance so that the flavors have a chance to mingle. Toss in the toasted pita bread and tomatoes just before serving.

#### FATTOUSH SALAD

- 1 small green pepper
- 1/2 cucumber, peeled, halved, seeded and diced
- 1 cup chopped scallions
- 3/4 cup parsley, chopped
- 1/4 cup mint leaves, chopped
- 1 cup arugula leaves
- 1 cup pears, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground sumac
- Salt and fresh ground black pepper to taste
- 3 medium ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 2 large pitas, split, toasted and broken into pieces

In a large salad bowl, combine the pepper, cucumber, scallions, parsley, mint, arugula and pears. In a small bowl, combine the garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, sumac, salt and pepper. Toss with the ingredients in the salad bowl, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to 3 hours.

Two minutes before serving, add the tomatoes and the pitas. Toss to coat. Season with additional salt and pepper. You can substitute romaine lettuce for arugula and pears.

Recipe from: "The Cooking of The Eastern Mediterranean" by Paula Wolfert.

Speaking of argula, when was the last time you ventured out to the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market on Saturday morning? Exotic foodies will go crazy over their assortment of organic greens including argula, frisee, and edible blossoms.

If you can find the Amtrak train station on Plymouth Road, you're just two blocks away from the Ann Arbor market. While you're there, join the masses who profess Zingerman's to be "The Best Deli in the Midwest," and I couldn't agree more! Try the no. 13 - Sherman's Sure Choice for a corned beef sandwich you'll never forget!

Jim Mandelson of Troy really enjoys strawberry pie, but can't stand the sickening sweet red glaze from processed cartons. It took a lot of searching Jim, but here's a recipe from momma's files. She claims it's close to Big Boy's topping.

#### STRAWBERRY PIE TOPPING

- 1 small box (3 ounces) strawberry Jell-O
- 1 cup boiling water
- 1/2 cup strawberry jam
- 1/2 cup cold water
- 4 tablespoons cornstarch

Dissolve strawberry gelatin into 1 cup boiling water. Stir over low heat for 1 minute. Stir in strawberry jam. In a small jar with a lid, place 1/2 cup cold water and cornstarch. Shake until dissolved. Whisk into simmering strawberry filling. Whisk until mixture is thick and clear, about 4-5 minutes. Chill.

To make into a pie: spoon 1/2 of this mixture into a prebaked and cooled pie shell. Fill shell with fresh strawberries and top with remaining topping. Chill several hours or overnight.

See more reader-requested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 833-3047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Grilling techniques for vegetables.
- Napa Valley's Beaulieu Vineyard back on the fast track.



Made with pride  
in Michigan



Gourmet products: Sam and Victoria Sommer display Victoria's Gourmet Apple Sauce and syrups, made without preservatives.

## Fruity syrups in a jar

### Taking the lid off sweet success

BY CHEF LARRY JAMES • SPECIAL WRITER

**F**or the past 15 years, Virginia Sommer's friends and relatives have been telling her that her chunky applesauce and apple syrup was just too good to be true. "Bottle it!" they said. Year after year Sommer, who lives in Oak Park, would "put up" a few jars, and give them away as gifts to friends and relatives.

Then in December, 1984, she and Sam, her husband of 14 years, decided that everything friends and relatives were saying about Virginia's sauce and syrups was true and they were in the gourmet food manufacturing business.

Virginia Sommer is CEO, owner, chief cook, bottle washer, label maker, purchasing agent, recipe tester, banker and spokesperson, just to mention a few titles. Of V. Victoria's, Inc. Gourmet Syrups and Apple Products.

If you want to know how it's done folks, Virginia and hubby

Sam pick the raspberries and blueberries, cook syrups, prepare bottles, fill jars, label everything, box it and then take it around town doing all their own marketing. The product is made in the gourmet kitchens of Mucky Duck Mustards in Sylvan Lake under the auspices of mom and pop Sommer's starched aprons, stainless steel spoons and commercial rockware.

"We do it all because we want to make the best tasting, freshest, purest product money can buy without preservatives or anything artificial," said Sommer, who had just returned from a product demonstration at Rocky Peanut Company in the Eastern Market area of Detroit.

V. Victoria's Gourmet Syrups, available in apple, raspberry and apple blueberry are to commercial syrup what Ben and Jerry's is to ice cream.

I bought a three pack recently at the Merchant of Vito in Birmingham and thought they were

great on pancakes, waffles and French toast.

Then I talked with Sommer who informed me that the syrups make great glazes for pork, chicken, turkey and duck, not to mention as a topping for ice cream.

In addition to the Merchant of Vito, V. Victoria's is also available at Papa Joe's in Rochester, Nino Salvaggio's Strawberry Hill in Farmington Hills, Westborn Markets and even Frank's Market. Suggested retail is about \$5.50 per jar, but trust me folks, it's worth every penny. Sommer's Gourmet Chunky Applesauce is reminiscent of homemade, rich tasting applesauce, perfectly spiced. It was like eating an apple pie from a jar. And should you enjoy the chunky applesauce as natural, substituted in a muffin or quick bread recipe in place of half the recommended oil, and you'll think you've died and gone to heaven.

To date, Sommer has manufactured about 1,500 jars of her

homemade product. Total start up costs hovered around \$7,000, and although she's not seeing any profits yet, Sommer is confident that once folks try her gourmet syrups and sauces, they'll be hooked.

"Sure, the profit is a motivating factor," said Sommer, "but where else can you work along side your best friend (husband Sam) and make what you know is the best tasting product around?"

You might also find Sommer's product in some gift gourmet baskets making their way around northern Michigan, especially in the Traverse City area.

"And the syrups and apple sauce make perfect hostess and shower gifts," said Sommer, "especially when coupled with a favorite recipe and ingredients for homemade pancakes or waffles."

One thing for sure, Sommer's marketing skills are as sweet as her syrups.

See recipes inside.

## SUPPER

BY RENEE SNOGLUND  
SPECIAL WRITER

The only thing Lynn Fortin's home is missing is a banging screen door. She already has eight kids, a dog, two cats, two lizards, and a python named Jazz. "We had a hamster, but he recently passed on," she said.

To say the least, the Fortin household of Canton is a busy one. Especially in the summer. That's when her four youngest children, ages 10-13, play endless tag between the pool and the kitchen. That's also when her four oldest, ages 22 to 28, drop by with their own children hoping something good is cooking on the grill.

**Family favorite:**  
Lynn Fortin, surrounded by her large family, holds a platter of Jerk Chicken, a family favorite, especially in the summer.



"Most of the time we do eat outside," said Lynn. "With the pool, lots of times the older kids will just come over for dinner, and they will bring a dish to pass. We do a lot of that."

Served outside or inside, dinner is usually casual - and vocal. "It's always loud. We're a loud family," said daughter, Jenny, 13. And, as in most true-to-life large families, dinner is not always the result of community effort.

Lynn describes her husband, Gary, a millwright leader at Ford's Livonia transmission plant, as a "drive-through" guy whose culinary expertise peaks at grilled cheese. As for Jenny, Justin, Josh and Jared, their cooperation "depends on what

they have in mind for their cash flow for the weekend."

Lynn, who teaches prenatal, childbirth and newborn care classes at Garden City Hospital, is an efficient shopper, hunting down sales and limiting trips to the grocery store to no more than once a week. She plans a family meal at least five times a week, but occasionally takes shortcuts. "Once a week we usually do have pizza on one of the nights I'm working," she said.

Her Jerk Chicken recipe resulted from a dream vacation to Jamaica over Easter. "It was a trip after 29 years of never leaving the children other than a trip to go have a child," she said laughing. "We were in a very remote part of Jamaica, so the recipes we got were kind of hard to decipher. They said a pinch of this, a pinch of that. That's why I purchased a cookbook, and the cooks helped me. We were in a private villa."

Lynn has since made the spicy chicken dish three times. It has become a family favorite, especially with 10-year-old Jared. "It tastes good when it's spicy," he said. Jared also said his mom is considerate of those with more timid taste buds. "It isn't that spicy when we have nieces and nephews over."

Jenny also has made the Jerk Chicken, although she admits her results were far different than her mom's. At 11 p.m. one night a few weeks ago, she was faced with some hungry younger brothers. She had lost the pizza money. She removed some frozen chicken breasts from the freezer and covered them with tenderizer, believing that would help them thaw.

"The sauce was great, but the chicken didn't turn out too good," she said. She may try making Jerk Chicken again. Or she may just keep better track of the pizza money.

See recipes inside.