

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Don't let the dog days get you down

These are the dog days of summer. Days when it's so hot outside, you could fry... well, you get the picture. Not being a big fan of central air, the James Casa looks like one of those sultry homes in New Orleans with ceiling fans swirling the warm night air through open windows and billowing curtains. Now I know where the saying "Slaving over a hot stove" came from. When it gets this hot, I don't want to cook, and my main philosophy is simply just trying to stay cool. A nice cool, air-conditioned restaurant would be just the ticket but unfortunately, the Visa bill just came in from last month's vacation and I'm already pushing the limit. The fridge is doing everything it can just trying to keep the milk cold and I'm hungry. The grill you say? It's far too hot to eat something hot. It's about all I can do to muster the strength to make it to the pantry.

Kitchen cupboard

Ah, the pantry. We called it a cupboard growing up in Wyandotte. I guess when the top shelf is stocked with the likes of fruit vinegars, exotic mustards, anchovies and Snack Wells, yuppie-dom calls it a pantry. Our cupboard in Wyandotte was stocked with Stukley's canned green beans, canned corn, Campbell's Chicken Noodle soup, a box of Creamette macaroni and a jar of peanut butter. Every now and then a large can of Dinty Moore Beef Stew would find its way in, but we knew that was going to be a dinner when momma had an early bingo game to hit. We grew up on meat and potatoes and the only vegetable we ever ate was canned corn. The green beans were always mixed with cream of something or other soup and topped with canned onion rings and served only during the holidays. Those were some of the best meals I can remember.

Now, back to my dinner. Something filling, something healthy, something I can make a lot of and eat within the next two days. Something I don't have to cook. Something out of a can. My eye slipped away for a moment and landed on that bag of yellow onions, just beginning to poke through the mesh with lime green sprouts. "Well, whatever I choose better have a good chop of onion" I said to myself. Let's see, canned pate,

See CHEF LARRY, 2B

See Larry James' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eclectic Newspapers. To leave a comment or message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a Touch-Tone phone, then mailbox number 1860.

Rhapsody in blue



BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

It's almost impossible not to love a blueberry. They're attractive - one of the very few blue foods that nature provides - and they come with their own protective covering. The silvery sheen on the blueberry's dark blue skin is actually a natural wax coating. Native Americans called these summer sweets "star berries" because of the star-shaped calyx on top of each berry. Blueberries are tasty, and they allow you to indulge with a clear conscience. They're loaded with vitamin C, they provide some vitamin A, iron, potassium and magnesium. They're a good source of fiber and carbohydrates, they're low in sodium and have no cholesterol. They're low in calories (42 calories per half cup), and very reasonably priced.

And, above all, blueberries are versatile. They can be eaten directly out of their plastic "juice-box" carton (they don't even drip!), they can be sprinkled on cereal, ice cream or yogurt, used in salads, muffins, pancakes, pies, cakes, and sauces. Our colonial ancestors found wild blueberries waiting for them, and made them the basis for dishes with names like "grunt," "buckle," "slump," and "flummery."

And, if all that isn't enough, we Michiganians are fortunate to live in the number-one blueberry-pro-

ducing state. Michigan produces 60 million pounds of blueberries annually. There are many "u-pick" opportunities, if you want to freeze or otherwise preserve the sweet little nuggets, or if you just want a pleasant outing and a couple of blueberry pies.

If handled properly, blueberries will keep fresh longer than any other summer berry. Sort the berries, discarding any that show signs of mold or soft spots, and store them chilled, covered and dry, for up to two weeks. Do not rinse before storing!

"There should be a good crop in 1995," said Margaret Agius, who, with her husband Joseph, owns and operates Sandy Acres Blueberry Farm, in Belleville. "But they're going to be a little later than usual, because we had a late spring. Usually, our U-Pick operation starts around July 4, but this year it's going to be mid-July."

It's always advisable to call before coming out, cautions Agius. For one thing, there are several varieties of blueberries, and there may be a time lapse between their availability.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday are busy days, and Sandy Acres is closed on Monday, to give the plants, and the Agiuses, a rest. "Tuesday is a good day," Agius said. "We get a lot of rednecks on Tuesday."

The average pick is six or seven

pounds, but there are those who pick as much as 30 or 40 pounds. "These are people who can or freeze the blueberries, and some people make wine," Agius said. "But the average person just wants to make some pies, muffins or jam, and maybe freeze some blueberries for their cereal in January."

Blueberries are so easy to freeze it's a wonder we don't all have a big bagful in our freezer compartment. "You can freeze blueberries with or without sugar," said Chris Venema, Wayne County MSU Cooperative Extension Home Economist. "If using sugar, make a simple syrup of 50 percent water and 50 percent granulated sugar. Heat until the sugar is dissolved and pour the solution over the berries in a freezer container, then freeze."

"To freeze blueberries without sugar, lay washed berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and quick-freeze in the freezer compartment of your refrigerator, or freezer. When frozen, pack the blueberries in a moisture-proof bag."

"We've all seen dried blueberries in gourmet stores; can't we just dehydrate them like Native Americans did? "Not in Michigan," Venema said. "To dehydrate successfully, you need a temperature of at least 85 degrees and zero to 10 percent humidity, and 10 percent is really pushing it."

See recipes inside.



ILLUSTRATION BY PHOTODISC

U-Pick Blueberries

- INOHAM COUNTY**
- Bird Strawberry Farm (517) 339-2034
 - Don Gibbs Farm (517) 628-2663

- LIVINGSTON COUNTY**
- Art Hazen (517) 542-1841
 - Spicer Orchards (810) 632-7692

- MACOMB COUNTY**
- Blake's Orchard and Cedar Mill (810) 784-5343

- SAGINAW COUNTY**
- Blueberry Acres (517) 642-8403
 - Blueberries Galore Farm (517) 781-4763
 - Russell Blueberry Farm (517) 781-2859

- ST. CLAIR COUNTY**
- Blueidge Blueberry Farm (810) 335-2245
 - Jeffrey's Blueberries (810) 324-2874

- WAYNE COUNTY**
- Sandy Acres Blueberry Farm (313) 753-9969

What to keep, toss after power outage

Summer storms have left residents with spotty power outages during the past week and has 223 people like Georgia Clark of Ironia scratching their heads about what they can salvage from their refrigerators and freezer.

Clark, who lives in the Six Hills-Farmington Road area, found herself without power Thursday until Sunday and a refrigerator full of fresh produce and a freezer full of butter she had found on sale.

Luckily, a friend had some spare room for frozen meats in her freezer so Clark wasn't left

with a bunch of spoiled meat. Home economist Sylvia Treitman of the Michigan State University Extension Service offers some advice as summer storms are likely to recur.

"The best thing to do right away is to try to get some indication from the power company on how long the outage is expected to last," Treitman said. "Don't just sit back and watch your food go bad."

If it appears the power is off for the long haul, Treitman suggests calling friends to see if you can move some items into their freezer. If this isn't an option, go out and buy ice to pack into your freezer and into ice chests for refrigerated items. Dry ice works well, but be sure to follow handling directions as it can be dangerous. Use a thermometer to make sure the temperature remains at about 40 degrees or less. Once the refrigerator, ice chests or freezer are packed, try not to open the doors of these appliances as the cold air will be released.

"Generally, refrigerated items are only good for about four hours," Treitman said. "Condiments like mustard, ketchup, relishes and salad dressings will keep longer."

Lunch meats, hot dogs, milk, yogurt, and some leftovers should be tossed after four hours.

In a deep freezer, separate from your refrigerator, food will

See POWER, 2B

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Where to call for help

The Michigan State University Extension Service offers a food and nutrition hot line. Home economists are available to answer your questions.

Westland County
(313) 953-0204
21 S.W. 10th St. Westland, MI 48186

Wayne County
(313) 261-3071
30 S.W. 10th St. Dearborn, MI 48126

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