

MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1995

TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Farm-raised catfish is utterly delicious

I'll admit that I'm a bit prejudiced about Great Lakes fish. I grew up in Wyandotte, and when we didn't have tuna noodle casserole on Fridays, Momma either pan-fried fresh Lake Erie perch or we piled into the 1962 Chevy Nova and headed for the perch fish fry at the local Dom Polski hall.

When perch wasn't on the dia, there was always a large fillet of walleye, or a couple of pounds of bass or lake trout buried in the freezer. All of the fish was caught in an old 13-foot fiberglass boat that was originally aqua, and now painted red. If memory serves me correctly, Dad won the boat in an all night card game at Uncle Johnnie's house.

Many an early morning five a.m. alarm sounded to wake me so that I was ready and waiting to help Dad hook up the boat to the car for the five minute drive to the Wyandotte boat docks. Then there was a 20 minute boat ride to where the Detroit River opens its mouth and empties into Lake Erie. When we caught an occasional channel catfish or carp, it was immediately thrown back with absolutely no desire to eat. My, how times have changed.

Aqua culture

With the advent of aqua culture (the science of raising water-based animals in a controlled environment) every time I walk into my local fish market or grocery store, I'm noticing a bigger space being afforded catfish. Rightfully so, I guess, because the U.S. government calls aqua culture "the fastest growing segment of U.S. agriculture."

None of this is more evident than seeing millions of acres upon acres of catfish ponds viewable from 20,000 feet while flying over Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama. More catfish is produced in the United States on a yearly basis than all other farm-raised fish combined. Furthermore, catfish consumption has more than doubled since 1985 with the average man, woman and child consuming more than a pound per person, per year. I'll admit to the fact that I ate (with the emphasis on "ate" and not "enjoyed") a channel catfish on my last fishing expedition with the boys. But up until recently, the thought of purchasing catfish for dinner from my local fish monger never really crossed my mind.

Mike McNamara, owner of the Plymouth Fish Market, sells 25-40 pounds of catfish per week and claims that his western-suburban market is beginning to prefer catfish over cod, mainly for the light flavor, no smell and excellent pricing.

"Cod and scrod are getting more difficult to obtain and when I do get my hands on them, the price is getting higher and higher," said McNamara who was frying up a batch of catfish for a waiting Unysis employee on his lunch hour when I called. McNamara also said "the secret to preparing good catfish is not to overcook it."

The Plymouth Fish Market suggests customers quickly pan-fry catfish fillets that have been lightly dusted with bread crumbs or seasoned flour in a little butter or oil.

Dietary differences

So what is it that makes farm-raised catfish the preferred choice of fish consumers? One of the main differences between farm-raised catfish and wild catfish is their living conditions.

Farm-raised cats are raised in a quality controlled environment of clay based ponds filled with fresh water pumped from underground wells. Farm-raised cats are fed a "gourmet diet" of puffed, high protein food pellets (a mixture of soybean, corn, wheat, vitamins and minerals) that give the fish a very mild, almost sweet taste. Because the food pellets are "puffed" they float, giving farm-raised catfish a cleaner food source, unlike their distant cousins, notoriously known as "bottom feeders."

After 18 months from hatchery to pond, the fish are harvested with seine nets and loading baskets and are transported alive to processing plants in aerated tank trucks. Once they reach the processing plants, the whole production takes less than 30 minutes from start to finish. Approximately 80 percent of the crop is frozen for agricultural export while the remaining is packed on ice and air freighted to your nearest wholesaler who then distributes his catch to local markets and fish mongers.

See Larry Jones' 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) 965-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Fifty nifty things to do with apples.
- Chef Larry Jones shares family tested recipes.

BUSY MOM BRINGS HOME LIGHT



STORY BY KEELY WYGONIK • STAFF WRITER

Rush - that's what most of us do. And after we've survived the rush hour - there's another rush - making dinner.

"Pasta is a good choice for busy families," said Rose Reisman, author of "Rose Reisman Brings Home Light Pasta," (Robert Rose, Inc.; September 1995; \$16.95). "It's economical and versatile."

Married, and the mother of four children ages 4, 7, 9 and 11, Reisman takes readers beyond spaghetti and lasagna with healthy dishes that can be prepared in 30 minutes or less.

"You can make the pasta the night before," she said during a visit to the Observer & Eccentric offices in Livonia. "But rinse it in cold water. Coat it with three tablespoons of cooking water or sauce. You can store it at room temperature, or put it in the refrigerator. After work, cover the bowl with Saran wrap and microwave on high for one minute. If you put the pasta in the refrigerator the night before, it could take a little longer to reheat. Heat the sauce and toss with the pasta."

Generous servings of tips make Reisman's book even more appealing. Every chapter and recipe has them.

There are tips for stocking a pasta pantry, preparing soup, salads, fish, chicken, meat, and vegetables. Very busy cooks will appreciate the make ahead recipe suggestions.

"One of the mistakes people make when they cook pasta is they don't use enough water, and they don't wait until the water boils to add the pasta," she said. "Cook pasta in a large pot of boiling water. Use 12-16 cups water for each pound. Cook pasta 'al dente,' or firm to the bite. Do not add sauce to pasta until just



ART: EMILY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Pasta light: Cookbook author Rose Reisman presents some of the pasta dishes featured in "Rose Reisman Brings Home Light Pasta."

ready to serve, or pasta will absorb the sauce, leaving the appearance of not enough."

Reisman also encourages readers to try different shapes of pasta. "They taste differently," she said.

These recipes are low in fat, but yet many contain a sprinkling of cheese. "They're allowed," she said. "I don't use diet cheese in my recipes. I find that people who use diet products are not satisfied and they're binging somewhere

else. It's OK to keep fat in your diet, but keep it to a minimum."

Her suggestions include sauteing chicken in a non-stick pan sprayed with vegetable oil. Using Cheddar, feta, goat, Swiss and other strong cheeses in recipes. "Most Greek salads have eight ounces of feta cheese on them. Two ounces is plenty," she said. "In light pasta cooking, the key is lowering the amount of cheese used, not eliminating it."

Her passion for light cooking

REISMAN TAKES READERS BEYOND SPAGHETTI AND LASAGNA WITH HEALTHY DISHES THAT CAN BE PREPARED IN 30 MINUTES OR LESS.

stems from her belief that lifestyle and eating habits play significant roles in health for all ages.

"My children eat very little meat, and they'll be a lot healthier," she said.

"Enlightened," is the word Reisman prefers to use when talking about low fat cooking. "Everyone is so used to hearing low fat and light. This is about substituting great flavor for fat."

A portion of proceeds from the sale of "Light Pasta" will go to the Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization, a Chicago based non-profit organization whose patient advocacy programs have provided information and support for breast cancer patients and their families for 15 years. Call 1-(800)-221-2141 for more information.

A resident of Toronto, Reisman holds masters of fine arts and business administration degrees. In 1991 she launched the "Rose Reisman Brings Home" series which includes "Spa Desserts," "Pasta Dishes," and "Light Cooking," and began raising money for the fight against breast cancer. Through the "Rose Reisman Brings Home" series, North American breast cancer groups have received more than \$275,000 in funding to raise awareness, support women with cancer and aid in research. See recipes inside.

COOKING TIPS

- Prepare the sauce while the pasta is cooking. Plan ahead so the sauce will be completed at the same time the pasta is cooked.
- If reheating leftover pasta, add more stock or tomato sauce to provide extra moisture.
- Use meat sauce with larger, heavier pastas, such as rigatoni, large shell pasta or tortellini.
- If vegetables are to be cooked in advance for a pasta dish, they can be steamed, microwaved, blanched or boiled. Stop cooking vegetables when they are tender-crisp and still retain their color. Drain and rinse with cold water to prevent overcooking. Add to pasta. Overcooked vegetables are dull and soft, and most of the nutrients are lost.
- After cooking manicotti or cannelloni pasta shells, drain, rinse with cold water and cover until ready to use. To stuff easily, slice shell to open and lay flat. Place some filling over top shell, close and place seam side down in baking dish. These shells can be refrigerated up to 1 day ahead, then baked.
- Cook tomato sauces, covered, on low-medium heat, to avoid letting the liquid evaporate. If the sauce appears too thick when reheating, add more stock, water or puréed canned tomatoes.
- Plum tomatoes are the best tomatoes for making a fresh tomato sauce. They are drier and meatier and make a denser, more flavorful sauce.

Source: "Rose Reisman Brings Home Light Pasta"



Spanish wine myths need to be dispelled

Spain, one of the world's great wine regions, has remained in hiding due to ethno-centric traditions, lack of capital and bulk wine production. A Civil War II was beginning in Europe, destroyed the Spanish economy. Low yielding wine grapes, those that made the best wines, were ripped out in favor of lesser varieties with higher yields. Only a decade ago, Spain was Third World status with its wine industry dominated by co-ops and negotiators. But much has changed. Prized estate wines are being recognized and myths about Spanish wines need to be dispelled.

Images of Spain's and sun make you think that Spain is hot. Actually, more than half of Spain falls within Continental and Atlantic climatic influences and is cool. Vineyard altitudes average over 2,000 feet. Great grapes are grown at cooler, higher elevations.

Much of what the world knows about the best Spanish wine comes through the efforts of Steve Meteler and his Seattle-based company Classical Wines of Spain. His internationally known wine portfolio is recognized for integrity. We caught up with Meteler recently, and were

impressed by the wines he currently represents.

Brand names, grape varietals and regions may be unfamiliar, but a taste of the well-priced wines will be reassuring. Enjoy the dry whites in place of sauvignon blanc and the reds as a change from merlot or cabernet sauvignon.

Sherry is making a comeback as an aperitif. Hidalgo La Gitana Manzanilla \$10 is the standard of excellence. In Seville, it outells all other dry sherries. Manzanilla should be fresh. The newest lot has arrived from Spain. Look at the lot number on the label. If it says 12/5 this means it



STEPHEN H. MERTZMAN

Tending grapes: Alejandro Fernandez in one of his vineyards within the village of Pesquera de Duero, Spain.

Wine Selections

- **Interesting new wines from Italy**
 - 1993 San Gregorio Greco di Tufo \$16
 - 1993 Argiolas Bianco di Sardinia \$11
 - 1993 Capezzone Conti Conti, Sangiovese di Toscana \$9
 - 1994 Mastroberardino Mastro Rosso \$10
 - 1992 Librandi Ciro Rosso \$9
- **California specialties**
 - 1994 Murphy-Goods Fume \$10
 - 1993 Chalk Hill Sauvignon blanc \$17
 - 1994 Murphy-Goods Pinot Blanc \$12.50
 - 1992 Beringer Howell Mountain Merlot, Bancroft Ranch \$20
 - 1993 Atlas Peak Sangiovese \$16
- **Best buys at/w under \$10**
 - 1994 Marquis de Chasse, Bordeaux white \$7
 - 1994 Dry Creek Vineyard Chonin Blanc \$7
 - 1994 Hogue Dry Chonin Blanc \$3
 - 1994 Hogue Johannisberg Riesling \$6
 - 1993 Hickory Ridge Merlot \$5
 - 1993 MC Vallejo Merlot \$6
 - 1993 Fezzer Barrel Select Zinfandel \$9
 - 1992 Beringer Zinfandel \$10

WINE continued inside