

TASTE

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1995

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Readers want to cut fat in favorite holiday recipes

Julia Patrazano of Redford called for a healthy version of pumpkin pie. Here's a fat-free pumpkin pie recipe from Nick Malgieri author of "How To Bake," (copyright, 1995 Harper Collins Publishers, \$35).

FAT-FREE PUMPKIN PIE

- Vegetable cooking spray
- 1 cup dry bread crumbs
- 1 small (about 2 pounds) pie pumpkin or 1 1/2 cups canned pumpkin
- 1/2 cup water
- 4 egg whites
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger or 1 teaspoon fresh grated ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg
- 1 1/2 cups evaporated skim milk

Set rack in the middle of the oven and preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Spray a 9-inch Pyrex pie pan generously with vegetable cooking spray. Press bread crumbs against the pan. Chill.

Rinse, stem and halve the fresh pumpkin. Scrape away the seeds and filaments and cut the pumpkin into 2-inch chunks. Use a paring knife to remove the rind and place pumpkin in a large baking dish.

Add the water, cover and bake for 1 hour or until soft. Cool the pumpkin and puree in a blender or processor. Lower the rack in the oven to its lowest level. Scrape the pumpkin into a bowl and whisk in egg whites. Whisk in remaining ingredients. Pour the prepared filling into the prepared crust. Bake for about 1 hour or until the filling is set. Cool on a pie rack. Makes about 8 servings.

Marshall Beitman of Canton wanted a low-cal scalloped potato recipe.

SUM SCALLOPED POTATOES

- 2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and sliced 1/8-inch thick
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme leaves, crumbled
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 3 tablespoons all purpose flour
- 2 cups skim milk
- 1/2 cup shredded light Swiss cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Coat a 13 by 9-inch baking dish with vegetable oil cooking spray. Arrange the potato slices slightly overlapping in a single layer in the dish. In a medium-sized saucepan, melt the butter or the margarine over medium low heat.

Stir in the onion, thyme, salt and pepper. Cook 4-5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onion is softened. Stir in the flour until frothy. Let the mixture bubble for 2 minutes, stirring to prevent browning. Gradually stir in the milk until well blended. Increase the heat to medium and simmer until sauce is thick, stirring constantly. Spread the sauce over the potatoes. Cover the dish with foil. Bake for 45 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Sprinkle cheese over the top, continue baking for 10 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving. Serves 8.

"The Woman's Day Cookbook" by the editors of Woman's Day, (Copyright 1995, Viking Publishers, \$24.95).

Maria Martinuzzi of Redford wanted a "white" gingerbread recipe.

CONSTRUCTION GINGERBREAD

- 1 cup solid white shortening
- 2 cups old-fashioned molasses
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 7 cups all purpose flour
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 3 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon salt

Melt shortening and stir in molasses and 1/2 cup warm water. Mix in dry ingredients until smooth. If necessary, knead last of flour into dough until flexible and smooth. Chill for at least 2 hours or overnight, tightly wrapped.

To use: roll dough to about 1/8-inch thick on cookie sheets. Cut out patterns and transfer to a baking sheet covered with parchment paper. Bake at 350 degrees F. for 12 minutes. Makes a medium-sized house. Can also be used to make cookies or ornaments.

"The Gingerbread Book by Allen D. Dragon," (Copyright 1995 Smithsonian Books, \$15.95).

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

Amateurs are a fun way to buy wine.



Naturally decorated: Margaret Dildilian makes use of what she has to decorate for the holidays. She adds fresh fruits for a festive and natural look.

Decorate with gifts from NATURE

BY SANDRA DALKA-PRYDE
SPECIAL WRITER

When it comes to decorating for the holidays, Margaret Dildilian of Birmingham just looks around her home and makes use of what she has, then adds a few more things, including fresh fruits. The result is a festive and natural look.

Dildilian, who is co-chairing "The Birmingham Holiday Antiques Show" at The Community House with her sister-in-law, Marlowe Marderosian of Franklin, is an avid collector of period American furniture pieces and accessories.

"My husband and I have an interest in New England furniture dating from the early 18th century through approximately 1830. These pieces are primarily constructed of American pine and in their original state, some finished in the red and black paints popular at that time," said the mother of three grown children.

In addition to the furniture, the Dildilians have accessorized their home with china, porcelain, pewter and wood pieces, and lighting fixtures from this early American period. It's these pieces that form the basis for holiday decorations.

"I take my various bowls and fill them with apples that I have polished to a bright sheen, add a few natural greens, such as boxwood, and place them on the table," Dildilian said. "I also fill bowls with boughs of pine, pine cones, berries and other fruits to create natural decorations."

With a belief in simplicity ("less is better," she said), Dildilian has created festive and eye-catching centerpieces for her holiday tables using lemons, boxwood and a pineapple ("a traditional symbol of hospitality," she added).

Another addition to her holiday table is candles, lots of candles. "In early America, New

The Birmingham Holiday Antiques Show

Where? Begins with a preview 6-9 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 5. Admission \$20. Other show dates are 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 6; and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 7. Where? At The Community House, 380 South Bates, Birmingham. Admission is \$5 and includes two hours of valid parking. For information, call (810) 644-5832.

Englanders burned lots of candles to create a festive mood. Often times, whole families would work together and make the candles, which were naturally cream-colored, for their tables, windows and mantels for the holidays," she said.

Patricia Higgins, a mother of six who lives in Southfield, also uses an abundance of candles for her holiday decor. And she

uses a wealth of natural items with them. "I make a slit in the top of apples, place a candle in them and maybe a cinnamon stick, tie a bow around the base of the candle and use them either in a group in the center of the table or at each place setting," she said.

"Green Granny Smith apples look especially good with red candles, and I use white candles with red apples. The great thing about this decor is that I use the apples later in pies or in apple cake."

Higgins does not believe in being wasteful when it comes to decorating. "Also, I try not to spend a lot on money on decorations, nor do I like having an abundance of things that need to be stored."

Higgins is so successful with her flair for decorating that she is often asked to create table centerpieces and other decorations for her church, St. Ives in Southfield, and for her children's schools, Marcy High School in Farmington Hills and U of D High School in Detroit.

"Creating things is both a hobby and avocation - something I have been doing since I was a young girl," she said. "Over the years I have picked up various ideas that have worked out well."

One idea that has proved both economical as well as attractive is her use of the old stemware that she's acquired through garage sale visits. "I put a little water in these glasses then add a votive candle. I place all of these (and you can use as many as you have) on a cloth runner down the center of my table. They're all different sizes and shapes and once the candles are lit, they create an elegant table," she said. Sometimes she'll add greens from the overgrown trees outside her door, put bows on the base of the stemware and sprinkle cranberries on the greens.

Higgins often uses other fruits on the greens to create a natural look, including grapes or orange slices. But she sugar coats them first.

It is an easy process. "Using a small paint brush, I coat the fruit with a thin coat of egg whites that have been diluted with a small amount of water," she said. "Then I sprinkle the fruit with super fine refined sugar. I let the fruit air dry or I place them in a slow oven overnight."

"The nice thing about these sugar-coated fruits is that they make a nice sweet treat after I'm done using them for decoration."

Her other decorating ideas include using circular candy canes - found in many stores during the holiday season - for napkin rings. Or she ties a bow with a few artificial greens and berries around the napkins.

A favorite decor of the Higgins children, who range in age from 11 to 23, is the gingerbread cookie place cards. "I make gingerbread people - but these can be purchased - and then I put each family member or guest's name on one of them with frosting. These I place at each table setting."

Start your day with hot, hearty oatmeal



QUAKER OATS

Winter warm-ups: Nothing warms up a tummy on a cold morning better than a bowl of oatmeal. For a tasty flavor twist, these two bowls of oatmeal start with quick or old-fashioned oats cooked in fruit juice.

If you greet most chilly mornings with a steaming bowl of oatmeal, you're in good company. According to a recent Gallup poll, oatmeal ranked number one as the breakfast that makes us feel good, especially on a cold morning.

Two-thirds of those surveyed said oatmeal makes them more productive and satisfies their hunger until lunchtime better than cold cereal, toast, bagels and other breakfasts. And of all breakfast choices, respondents chose oatmeal as the best and healthiest breakfast.

So how much oatmeal do we eat? The average American eats 27 bowls of oatmeal a year, and the majority of those bowls are eaten during the four coldest months of the year - November through February. Kids 12 and under eat 48 bowls per year while adults age 65 and over eat a whopping 68 bowls of oatmeal each year.

Oats are good for your heart and brain. In her book, "Superfoods 800 recipes for foods that heal body and mind," (copyright 1992, Warner Books, \$26.95), Dolores Riccio writes, "a good-sized bowl of oatmeal at breakfast lowers the artery-clogging LDL cholesterol shortly after eating and, later on, raises the artery-cleaning HDL cholesterol."

Oatmeal is a good source of choline, a chemical precursor of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, which plays an important role in memory function.

Oatmeal stabilizes blood sugar and insulin, which makes it a good choice for diabetics.

Riccio recommends storing oatmeal in the original container for a month or more on the pantry shelf, or in the refrigerator in a tightly closed jar for up to a year.

Tops among oatmeal toppers are sugar, brown sugar, milk and cream, followed by fruit, maple syrup and honey. Raisins win hands down for the most popular dried fruit topper; bananas take top banana in the fresh fruit category.

Beyond the basics, oatmeal provides plenty of delicious opportunities for creativity. Replace water with apple juice for a fruity flavor. Add fresh or dried apples. Try Granny Smith for a tart-sweet flavor. Red or Golden Delicious for the sweetest flavor. Orange juice used in place of some water adds a citrus tang, and mashed banana contributes creaminess. Go for the quick oats for the smoothest texture; the old-fashioned cooks up into a heartier cereal.

See recipes inside.

Smart Reasons to Eat Breakfast

- Breakfast eaters tend to have higher intakes overall of fiber and vitamins and minerals, especially calcium, vitamin C and folic acid.
- Eating breakfast can improve concentration and performance while reducing fatigue and irritability in the late morning hours.
- Preliminary research suggests that breakfast eaters burn more calories throughout the day. Breakfast eaters have a metabolic rate that is 4 percent to 5 percent below normal which can result in a weight gain of one pound every seven weeks (about 6 pounds a year) even if it's the same number of calories are consumed.
- Eating breakfast may help with weight control by reducing overall fat intake and minimizing impulse snacking and overeating at other meals.
- Preliminary studies have shown the overall intake of cholesterol, saturated fat and total fat to be lower among those who ate a ready-to-eat cereal for breakfast than those who did not eat cereal or skipped breakfast entirely.

Information supplied by the Quaker Oats Co.