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TASTE

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INSIDE:
Crock-Pot recipes
Family favorites

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TASTE BUDS

CHEF LARRY JANES

Use your slow cooker to make dinner easy

During 1995, I was inundated with books that suggested I "Entertain on the Run," make "To Die For" desserts, Learn "365 Different Ways To Make Pasta," and if all that wasn't enough, share "6001 Food Facts and Chef's Secrets."

I've been prodded to learn "How to Bake," how to "Dine in Grand Style" and even "How to Have my Cake and Eat It, Too." I want to cook something easy. I want to cook something fast. I want the house to smell like I've been working for hours, but all I want to do is dump everything in a pot, plug it in, and eight hours later, I want everyone at the Janes Gang table to sit down and enjoy it together.

I was pressed into service by a friend who needed to borrow my checkerboard cake pan. After searching for hours, I decided to clean the fruit cellar that houses all my eccentric treasures. It was then that I came across the aqua blue Rival box bearing a 23-year-old Crock-Pot we received as a wedding present just as many years ago.

Ever since the Crock-Pot made its way into the American kitchen in the early 1970s, millions of cooks throughout the country have been using a slow cooker or Crock-Pot, best known by the popular Rival trademark name of the same. Crock-Pots were designed for slow, moist heat cooking.

Dreaming of dinner, I headed to the grocery store for a too-tough blade-cut chuck roast, bag of potatoes, some carrots, and triple package of French onion soup mix. That's all you need to prepare a Crock-Pot dinner for four with enough left over for lunch.

Chicken nowadays is just as expensive as beef, so you couldn't cut costs there. Vegetarians will enjoy the slow-baked flavor derived from vegetarian chili or ratatouille.

Types of slow cookers

The most common, and still the best selling, is the basic slow cooker. It is round, with two temperature settings (low at 200 degrees F. and high at 300 degrees F.). The heating coils are encased in the sides of the metal unit that houses the crockery insert. This, in turn, allows for continuous, even heat to avoid scorching and burning. You can't beat it, and at under $20, it continues to be a steal.

Another type of slow cooker is dubbed a multipurpose cooker that steams, fries and roasts in addition to slow cooking. Because the heating element is at the bottom of the pot and cycles on and off during cooking, some long cooking recipes might require stirring and cooking temperature adjustments. Scorching is a problem.

The last type of slow cooker is a removable metal cooking vessel that sits on an electric heating base. Again, uneven cooking, sticking and scorching might be a problem. Since the two latter appliances both sell in excess of the best old-time slow cooker, I suggest you stick with the basics.

Beginning in 1996, the first book I open and use is "The Best Slow Cooker Cookbook Ever" by Natalie Haughton (copyright 1995, Harper Collins, $17.95). It's about time good cookbooks come spiral bound (this one does and lays flat on a counter top). It uses recipes with ingredients like "one 28-ounce can diced tomatoes." The most exotic ingredient in the book is curry powder and with recipe titles like "Turkey Mexicalli," you can be sure that most of the family, including the pickiest 7 year olds, will like them.

Vegans and people looking to increase their dietary intake of rice, grains, fruits and vegetables will also enjoy this book. If I had to complain about one thing, it's simply that the book doesn't contain the nutritional breakdowns that I have come to rely on for a more healthy eating regimen.

Here are a few tips that Haughton suggests when using a slow cooker:

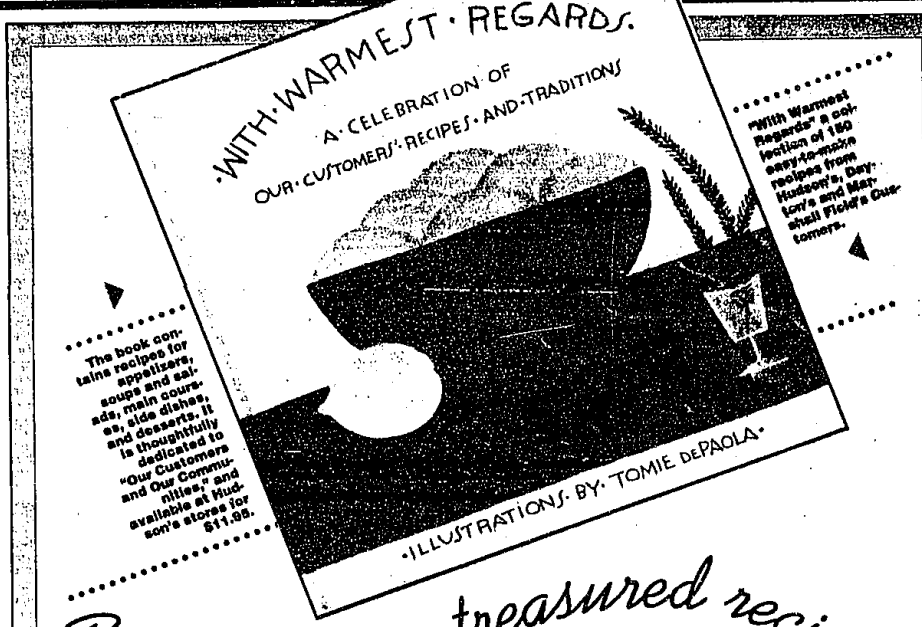
- For best results, fill the slow cooker half to three quarters full.
- Purchase roasts and other large cuts of meats in a size and shape that will conveniently fit into your slow cooker.
- To end up with the least amount of fat in finished dishes, use lean meats well trimmed of fat and skinless poultry.
- To avoid heat loss, refrain from removing the lid during the first three quarters of cooking time. Remove the lid only to stir or to check for doneness.

See Larry Janes' 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:

- Chili for Super Bowl Sunday.
- Vintage vegetables.



The book contains recipes for appetizers, soups and salads, main courses, side dishes, and desserts. It is thoughtfully dedicated to "Our Customers and Our Communities," and available at Hudson's stores for $11.95.

"With Warmest Regards" a collection of 150 easy-to-make recipes from Hudson's, Dayton's and Marshall Field's Customers.

Families share treasured recipes

BY KERLY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

"Life's busy, especially in the winter," said Cathy Dunn of Troy whose recipe for "Best Darn Chili" is featured in "With Warmest Regards" a collection of 150 easy-to-make recipes from Hudson's, Dayton's and Marshall Field's Customers. "Everyone loves my chili. It's easy to make, feeds a lot of people, lasts a few days, and you can freeze it too."

Dunn's recipe was exactly the kind of recipe the Dayton Hudson Corporation was looking for when they decided to publish "With Warmest Regards." The book contains recipes for appetizers, soups and salads, main courses, side dishes, and desserts. It is thoughtfully dedicated to "Our Customers and Our Communities," and available at Hudson's stores for $11.95. All net profits from the book will be donated to United Way. Tomie dePaola, a children's book author and illustrator, created the whimsical illustrations peppered throughout.

Handy features are the space for "Cooks Notes" alongside every recipe, easy-to-read recipe format, and interesting tidbits about the cook behind it.

"I think it's a wonderful idea – traditional cooking, family-oriented recipes," said Dunn. "I sent in my recipe on a day when I was paying bills. I thought what the heck and sent it with my Hudson's bill. Months passed. When they told me my recipe was chosen I said 'you've got to be kidding.' "

Her recipe, like others in the 210-page cookbook, is a family favorite. "My husband loves chili," she said. "When I met him I had my mom's recipe and kept changing it."

Ellen Zehnder of Troy shared her Great Aunt Mary's Nut Rolls recipe. "My aunt died about 16 years ago," said Zehnder. "She made these nut rolls around the holidays. They are wonderful. It's a tribute to her that the recipe is printed in the book. She was a wonderful lady."

Margaret Mourad of West Bloomfield shared a Tabbouleh Salad recipe from her mother's collection. "I have fond, vivid childhood memories of going to our yard and picking fresh mint to add to it," she said. "My mother never had a recipe. If someone needed a recipe you had to have her put the ingredients in a measuring cup and write it down. Tabbouleh is one of my favorite salads."

Amy Gable of White Lake Township, formerly Farmington Hills, made Chicken and Spinach Lasagna Alfredo at her first dinner party. "It went over big," said Gable explaining why she submitted it for consideration in "With Warmest Regards."

Other local cooks featured in the book include: Maria DeLuca, Livonia; Bridget Haubold, Birmingham; Leslie Ward, Bloomfield Hills and Estelle Makrouer, Bloomfield.

The cooks I talked to had much in common. While all of them enjoy cooking, they said they had less time for it, and liked easy, quick recipes.

Zehnder, works part-time and enjoys making big breakfasts for her family on Sundays. She bakes on weekends, and has a tendency to cook lighter meals during the week.

When she was growing up, Dunn said her mom would make a full dinner every night and roast beef on Sundays.

"It seems like we're going out more," said Dunn who enjoys making simple, one pot meals. "We like to grill and use our barbecue year-round. Once in awhile I'll surprise my husband with a gourmet meal."

Mourad's husband Bob is in partnership with his two brothers and owns Elias Brothers Big Boy Restaurants in Union Lake, Romeo, Howell, Port Huron and Marysville.

Their children are grown, and while they enjoy eating out, Mourad said she still cooks quite a bit. "When my husband comes home he likes to relax," she said. "I liked the cookbook. I made a few things in it, and thought it was nice for Hudson's to do it. The recipes aren't real hard, and they don't call for unusual ingredients. I had everything on hand, and didn't have to run to the store."

Gable was an exception to the others. "I cook every day," she said. "My husband Jonathan is pretty spoiled."

• See recipes inside.

Washington's Columbia Crest is a hot brand

COLUMBIA CREST WINERY

Manor house: *The country French manor house of Columbia Crest Winery in Washington receives nearly 50,000 visitors annually.*

Columbia Crest is not a new Washington State winery. Back in the late 1970s, plans were drafted for the country French manor house style winery in Paterson, not far from the Columbia River Gorge.

If you watch TV, you've seen The Frugal Gourmet Jeff Smith commercials talking about the wines of Columbia Crest. Depending on how you're affected by advertising, you may or may not know much about the wines.

But the truth is that Columbia Crest has won recognition from within the wine industry, not just wine competitions in some obscure corner of the world. These wines have been called Hot Brand, Brand Builder and Fast Track. These are wines worth knowing.

Across the country, a baker's dozen quality Columbia Crest wines with a Columbia Valley designation (white label) from every popular varietal retails between $6 and $10 per bottle.

"We're developed a style and we try to stick with it," winemaker Doug Gore said. Chardonnay in the white label series, has an ambitious barrel program for such level-headed pricing. It is barrel fermented in 60 percent new oak that is 2/3 French and 1/3 American.

Columbia Crest also has a Barrel Select series (black label) for four varietals, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, merlot and pinot noir. These bottlings range between $10 and $15. In this series, the chardonnay, selected from an estate vineyard, is barrel fermented in 100 percent new Burgundy-coopered French oak. To enhance this program, a new barrel aging facility has just been completed.

Gore cited two reasons for accelerating quality of Columbia Crest wines. "It's both the vineyard and winery," he said. In addition to his time in the winery, Gore is spending more time in the vineyard. After he makes a batch of wine from a specific grower, he tastes it with the grower. "It has taken time for us to get growers educated about the practices necessary to grow quality fruit in Washington state," Gore continued. Basically, what Gore tells growers is that there are no smoke and mirrors – no tricks. A taste of wine from a well-managed vineyard against wine from a less well-managed block reveals all. The second factor occurred in 1992 when Columbia Crest started barrel fermentation for chardonnay. "This is the taste that people want and it made the greatest impact on both quality and sales," Gore admitted.

Another interesting wine from Columbia Crest is the semillon-chardonnay blend. While semillon is not as popular in other regions as it is in Washington state, the blend of the varietal with chardonnay has a growing number of fans. It's a unique wine in which two unlikely bedfellows gain complexity from each other in a blended wine. In 1989,

See WINE, inside

Wine Selections

In winter, serve chardonnay with exempl. herb-roasted chicken, veal piccata or Fettuccini Alfredo for palate-warming delights.

- 1994 Hogue Cellars Chardonnay $9
- 1993 DeLoach Chardonnay $15
- 1994 Carpe Diem Chardonnay $10
- 1992 Eric Reserve Chardonnay $18

Savory winter wines will harmonize with:

- 1992 Hogue Hill Cabernet Sauvignon $12
- 1991 Columbia Crest Cabernet Sauvignon $15
- 1992 Vichon Merlot $12
- 1993 Clos Pegase Merlot $19

Italian reds are great with rich, tomato-based pasta sauces.

- 1994 Antinori Santa Cristina Sangiovese Toscano $9
- 1990 Brolio Chianti Classico Riserva $13

Wine Tasting and Silent Auction

Where: 7-10 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 27
Where: Henry Ford Estate – Fair Lane in Dearborn to establish an endowed alumni merit scholarship for outstanding University of Michigan-Dearborn students in the College of Arts, Sciences and Letters. Wines selected by the Merchant's Warehouse.
Tickets: Call (313) 436-9126. $25 per person.