

MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1996

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Vintage root veggies are never out of style

Aculinary injustice has taken place. The produce aisles of our supermarkets and specialty food markets have relegated potatoes, carrots, onions and white mushrooms to discreet corners while allowing Belgian endive, purple potatoes and packaged fresh herb blends to take their once-cherished place.

Trendy root vegetables like daikon can be seen along with plain old radishes. Onions are available in many varieties — yellow, white, red, green, purple, pearl, pickled and puréed.

I can remember being sent to the market to buy potatoes without questioning whether they were Michigan, Idaho, Yukon gold, or Pillsbury. Imprisoned by their stodgy images, plain old dependables languish in vegetable bins while everyone talks about chic new ways of preparing the latest imports.

The fact that the "old-fashioned" vegetables are easily grown, available year-round, and readily stored — in a word, sturdy — made them standard fare in early American cooking. Unfortunately, this has caused these basic vegetables to be relegated to the domain of home cooking, while the new and exotic gain favor with trend-setting restaurant chefs.

But a curious change is afoot: professional chefs are beginning to rediscover that vintage vegetables can be used in imaginative ways.

Mashed potatoes have resurfaced as the ultimate comfort food and are now served with roasted garlic, peas and even their skins. Whole onions are being roasted, butter-fried and cooked to bring out their natural sweetness, which is perfect for roast chicken, beef, pork or duck.

Carrots, once the bane of children everywhere, are cooked into a fricassee, thin cut and fried like potatoes, or angle cut to adorn platters of hummus. Even potatoes, both standard fare and trendy now, are now being stripped of their tin foil jackets and baked in rock salt à la Jimmy Schmidt. What has impressed me most about this movement is that you don't have to be a professional chef to get the same great tastes at home. No new special gadget is needed.

Roasted gems

I recently brought my dented 9-by-12-inch cake pan up from the fruit cellar and tossed some scrubbed, but not peeled, carrots, quartered yellow onions, a few cracked ribs of celery in with a little olive oil that had been infused with some rosemary sprigs left over from my garden. After about 30 minutes of roasting, uncovered, in a 350 degree F oven, I added a handful of plain white mushrooms, gave the mixture another toss and finished cooking it for another 30 minutes. It was sweet, succulent, tender and everyone in the Janes Gang had seconds, something that doesn't always happen.

Flavor boosters

Last week while visiting friends in Rochester, I had lunch at one of the tonier places in town and enjoyed a cream of celery soup enhanced with a hefty portion of Bûche (bleu) cheese. The celery soup was elevated to new heights with a little crumbled cheese.

I love being on the cutting edge; last year, I entertained the Rochester Newcomers club with an elegant appetizer of caramelized onions, walnuts and bleu cheese served atop warmed focaccia. Who would have thought that fried onions could be so elegant?

I was invited to dinner at a friend's home in Birmingham; he constantly raved about his recipe for meatloaf. It was good meatloaf, but the mashed potatoes were the hit of the party. They were mashed with their jackets and a hefty handful of pre-roasted garlic cloves, then topped with pesto. My taste buds went ballistic. But again, I remind you that these were nothing more than plain old white potatoes, elevated to new sensations.

By using vintage vegetables in more imaginative ways, you can still benefit from the hardiness that endeared them to earlier generations of cooks. And if nothing more, you can still satisfy the taste of today's diner.

You know the importance of eating vegetables. Your mother told you to eat them.

See Larry Janes' family-tested recipes inside. *Chef Larry is a freelance writer for The Observer & Eclectic Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.*

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Comfort foods.

■ Chef Larry Janes answers reader requests.



Fuel football fans: Chick 'n' Sausage SuperChili, a mix of chicken breast, smoked sausage, vegetables and savory seasonings is sure to please fans on Super Bowl Sunday.

Host a 'fan'-tastic Super Bowl party

BY KEELY WYGONIK

You'll score big with football fans if you plan a "Grab and Go" menu for Super Bowl Sunday, Jan. 28. TV's in metro Detroit will be tuned to NBC — WDIV Channel 4 for the 3:30 p.m. program.

Game coverage of the contest between the Dallas Cowboys and Pittsburgh Steelers begins at 6 p.m.

"The game is long, there are children around, and people like to get up and walk around," Diane M. Meakin of Livonia who is planning a party for about 15 family members and close friends.

Her "Super Bowl Beans" a hearty combination of hamburger, bacon, seasonings, and beans gets rave reviews. "I like it better than plain baked beans," she said. "It's thicker than chili, and you can serve it in cups with fresh bread and rolls, or as a side dish."

Meakin has her "Grab and Go" party strategy all mapped out. "I'll have food in different rooms," she said. "I tried it on New Year's Eve, and it worked out good. People walked around, and socialized more."

She plans to put pretzels with mustard dip and other munchies in the family room where the TV will be turned to the big game. Her "Super Bowl Beans," dips with vegetables, a fruit tray and other finger foods will be in the dining room where guests can desert while being set up in the kitchen.

Meakin, who is married, and has an 8-year-old son, said she's not really a big football fan, but figures that since the guys would get together anyway on Super Bowl Sunday, it's a good opportunity to get everyone together. "Otherwise the ladies and kids would just be home," she said.

Mark Elsholz of Berkley, a chef at Norman's Eton Street Station in Birmingham, served lots of finger foods at his Super Bowl Party last year.

"I set up a kitchen buffet so people could munch when they felt like it, and had a small TV by the food so when they were eating they didn't miss a play in the game."

Elsholz recommends dusting off your Crock-Pot and fondue pot. "Make chili or meatballs. You can let them simmer all day in the pot and guests can help themselves." Serve an assortment of meats, vegetables and fruits for dunking in a fondue pot. Focus on foods that are simple to serve, eat and clean up.

Everybody loves chili. Chick 'n' Sausage SuperChili, a recipe from the Pace Picante Sauce Test Kitchens, combines quick-cooking boneless chicken breasts with fully-cooked smoked sausage.

Team the chili with corn bread, tortillas or other favorite bread for a winning combination. Chili can be prepared a day or two in advance, and is one of those foods that improves with age.

Buy a whole boneless pork loin. Place roast in a shallow pan in a 350 degree F oven. Roast for an hour and 16 minutes or until the internal temperature (measured with a meat thermometer) reaches 155 degrees F. Remove from the oven and let sit 10 minutes (temperature will rise about five degrees upon resting). Once cool, chop, slice or shred the meat for burritos or sandwiches.

You can also cut the roast into cubes to use in a favorite soup, stew or chili recipe.

"Roasting is so easy," said Anne Roberts, a home economist and director of marketing and education for the Michigan Pork

Producers Association. "It's an effortless way to cook, and since you'll be using the roast in different ways, you can cook it the day before. Because pork marries well with so many flavors, it's a perfect addition to a minestrone, onion soup, lentil soup or chili."

Make a sandwich buffet with an assortment of cold cuts, cheeses, condiments, rolls and breads. Let guests assemble their own sandwiches. Boost the flavor of condiments.

"Add freshly snipped dill to mayonnaise," suggests Elsholz. "Mix stone ground mustard with regular mustard, add Cajun spice to Ranch salad dressing."

Handle foods with care. Keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold.

"Get a kiddie pool and fill it with ice. Put the food in containers and set it on top of the ice to keep cool. You could also put beverages in the pool," said Elsholz. "It makes a nice presentation."

Be sure to include dishes made with low-fat ingredients.

"We're snacking today as much as ever," said Roberts. "But many parties now include more healthful dishes and foods."

Set out bowls of low-fat baked versions of your favorite chips and crackers. Cut up veggies and serve with salsa and dip. In addition to the standard celery, carrots, green pepper and radishes, try cherry tomatoes, yellow, red and purple bell peppers, and even green beans, which are crispy and crunchy.

Include low-fat or no-fat snacking items — dried fruit, such as apricots and figs, and pretzels make a sweet-and-salty counterpart.

• See recipes inside.

Party tips

Super Bowl Sunday can send the host or hostess into a funk. Here are some strategies to make the party fun for you:

• **The Lucky Leader** — Have one of your guests serve as "team captain" for arriving guests to free you for last-minute, pre-game kitchen duties.

• **Headle at Home** — Assign seating sections for opposing teams. As fans arrive, teams can assemble and form their own cheering sections. Let guests who are there for the food and fun pick a team to root for out of a hat. Award gag prizes for the loudest or loudest cheering section.

• **No Party Fools** — Protect your players' lips by using big cloth napkins. Try 18-inch squares that can be tucked into shirt collars for a "bib" effect. This will offer more security when snacking soups or sloppy sandwiches, slowing total concentration on the game.

• **The Perfect Equipment** — Wrap the silverware in napkins so guests can grab it all in one play. Create a menu that requires only a fork or a spoon.

• **The First Quarter Snack** — Plan on feeding folks almost immediately after they arrive. Make snacks available during all four quarters, and save the main dish for halftime. Serve bite-sized portions.

• **Keep the Flow** — Stimulate traffic flow, keeping time-outs to a minimum by dividing the food into serving stations, in different rooms or at different times. Put the appetizers in one place, the soups and sandwiches in another.

• **Keep It Simple** — One great dish like a knockout stew or chili with basic "fixes" like bread and relish gives the chef plenty of time to cheer.

• **Ice It Down** — Fill a large plastic tub (or your bathtub) with ice and cold drinks, leaving refrigerator space and allowing easy access for guests.

• **Mix & Mingle** — Put the kids to work on the sidelines to help restock cold drinks and replenish snacks.

Information supplied by the Michigan Pork Producers Association.

Chiliheads thaw 'Winter Freeze' at cookoff

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Chili cooks from as far as Colorado participated in the Winter Freeze Regional Cookoff in Allen Park Jan. 13.

Because this year's cookoff was upgraded from "district" to "regional" status by the International Chili Society, the winner, Chuck Hoff of Columbus, Ohio, qualifies for the World Chili Cookoff in Reno, Nevada, Oct. 2. He also won \$500, and a first-place trophy.

Hoff has his eye on the \$25,000 first prize. He has qualified to cook at the World Chili Cookoff several times, and in 1995 made the final judging table.

Trophies were awarded to the four runners-up: Al Henry of Colorado, who grew up in Wyandotte, (second); Ron Cubberly, Manchester, Mich., formerly Belleville

(third); Heidi Hoover, Columbus, Ohio, (fourth); and her husband Tom Hoover Jr. (fifth). They were one of four married couples competing against one another, and among the 44 cooks from six states — Michigan, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Ohio who participated.

Local cooks included: Ray Frederick (Farmington Hills); Jim Weller (Bloomfield Hills); Ken Brundage (Livonia); Gary Ray (Livonia); Dennis Adamski (Redford); Larry Strauss (Troy); Paul Huyck (Farmington Hills); and Walt Hunt (Plymouth).

There were 12 chili containers on the final judging table. Those from Michigan included (in no particular order): John Beadle (Ada); Larry Strauss, Gary Ray, Wes Aben, (Allen Park); and Joe Janes (Wyandotte). Finishing out the final table

See CHILI, inside

"DRAGON'S BREATH" CHILI

8 pounds beef (chuck or brisket) cut into small cubes
12 pounds mild pork sausage
Weinberg oil
1 (8 ounce) can tomato sauce
1 (14 1/2 ounce) can chicken broth
1 (14 1/2 ounce) can beef broth
4 ounces can mild green chilies (seeded and finely diced)
1 large onion (finely chopped)
8 cloves fresh garlic (finely minced)
4 tablespoons Gochujang chili powder
4 tablespoons mild California chili powder
1 tablespoon New Mexico hot chili powder
1 tablespoon cumin
1 teaspoon paprika
2 teaspoons brown sugar
1 teaspoon Tabasco brand pepper sauce (optional)

Go to taste
1. Sauté onion in oil
2. Brown beef and sausage in oil
3. Drain well and transfer to your favorite chili pot. Fry sausage, onion well and add to chili pot.
4. Add onion, garlic, tomato sauce, green chilies, and broth.
5. Bring to a slow boil, cover and cook for about 90 minutes. Add cumin, onion, and chili powder, reduce heat and simmer 1 1/2 hours or until meat becomes tender.
6. Add brown sugar, Tabasco sauce and salt to taste. Add additional broth or water if chili becomes too thick. After 1 1/2 hours, simmer an additional 10 minutes. Ladle into bowls, and if you like, top with chopped fresh onion and shredded cheese. Serve with a side of pinto or red beans.
First place Winter Freeze Regional Cookoff — Chuck Hoff, Columbus, Ohio.