

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1996

TASTE

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TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Give up diets and start eating better

You've probably recognized the changed photograph, but couldn't quite put your finger on what was different. No beard? Less hair? Bigger smile? If you guessed all of the above, you're correct.

But the best change is that I'm still losing a pound or two here and there, and my double chin has vanished. I'm now wearing jeans the size of which I have not worn since early high school. My stomach is actually getting flatter, and I've yet to even pick up something called an "Ab laser."

When I was about 17 years old, I embarked on my first serious diet. Although it was a bore, I counted calories with one of those tiny little books you pick up at the check-out lane in a grocery store. I basked in the warm compliments of friends and neighbors as the results became evident. Of course, having jumped "on" the diet bandwagon, it wasn't long before I got "off."

Since those days when I had a full head of hair, I've been on countless diets, have lost in my estimation at least 2,700 pounds, and it wasn't until almost two years ago that I finally realized that I loved to eat - too much. I realized that I needed to change from a diet mentality to a healthy eating regimen.

I have memories of the depression that followed each diet, growing especially worse when the pounds returned faster, and in more excess when I returned to my unhealthy eating regimen. All my life I've worked in the food industry, which has wreaked havoc on my waistline. I vaguely remember the days when I desired a milk shake, and put a handful of ice cubes and a cup of skim milk in a blender with a teaspoon of chocolate extract. As I drank it, I tried to remind myself how good it was. But it tasted as bad as it looked.

That's my number one beef with the diet industry. Being in the food business, why couldn't I prepare food that was flavorful, satisfying and attractive? At one time I liked the taste of diet food with that of a bread-and-water ritual once used to envision in prison.

I sit here right now looking at page 193 of one of the first diet cookbooks ever printed, and find someone suggesting that I actually puree a slice of bread in a blender with an egg and pour it into an unseasoned, ungreased, cheap non-stick frypan. Then flip "it" over and in 2 minutes you can sit down to a satisfying healthy pancake with a protein and bread exchange.

Did they really pay someone to sit down and come up with these ghastly ideas? Certainly, if you, too, have ever dieted, you know of what I speak.

Creating a healthy regimen

If you are interested in creating a healthy eating regimen, it is important to remember that you need to create dishes that look as good and taste as good as what you were eating. Restaurants and chefs know that contrasts of texture and taste play a great part in appetite satisfaction. Tell that to a mother of three who plans her only night out during the week around her diet group class meeting. A healthy meal with contrasting colors and textures? Looks like a meatloaf-and-mashed-potato night to me with carrot sticks for added color. That idea might be fine for chefs and restaurateurs, but one of the secrets that they use is to make the food taste good. Broiled cod is a healthy entrée for sure, but if it tastes fishy and even the family cat shuns it, it's a waste of time and effort.

If, on the other hand, I boil a pound of pasta, while the pasta cooks I can take carrot sticks and broccoli and saute them in a little garlic. Then stir in 1 tablespoon of flour into a cup of chicken broth and pour that onto the vegetables. I drain the pasta and toss the vegetable mixture on top, sprinkle with a little fresh ground pepper and some Parmesan, and I have a meal that looks great, tastes even better, is nearly fat free, nutritious and, when paired with some microwaved meatballs for the kids, is something the entire family can enjoy.

The essential thing I agree with Susan Fowler on is the fact that we must all stop the insanity and start cooking food with a reduced fat content that looks as good as it tastes.

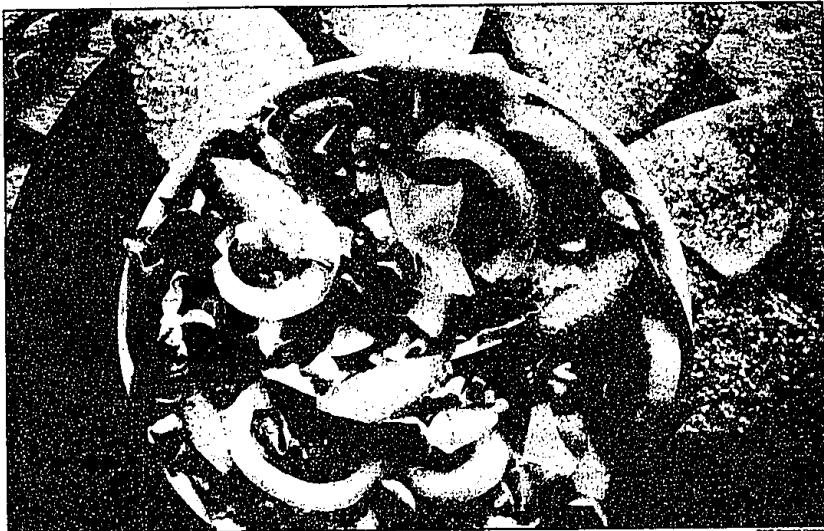
Begin using herbs and spices, spice mixes and dried seasonings. Drain off all the fat after browning meats and burgers. If you eat chicken, remove the skin. Instead of milk and butter, use chicken broth in your mashed potatoes. See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Economic Newspaper. 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:

■ Fast, flavorful after work dinner.

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Winter salad: OSO Sweet Onion Salad with Orange-Onion Vinaigrette is a delightful winter salad that takes advantage of fresh oranges and OSO Sweet onions, both in season this time of year.

Onions

FROM CHILE ARE 'OH-SO' SWEET!

BY KELLY WYONIK
STAFF WRITER

Onions are sweet, chocolate is sweet, but onions?

Yes - they're grown in the rich, volcanic soil at the foothills of the Andes Mountains in Chile, and are "Oh-So Sweet."

Savon Corporation in Southfield is the importer, and former Rochester resident John Battle owner of Battle Produce Exchange in Traverse City, is the exclusive sales agent for the U.S.

"They're the only fresh, sweet onion that's available in the winter," said Battle. "That's because of the opposite growing season. It's summer now in Chile. What makes OSO Sweet onions different is their very high sugar content. They are grown in hand-picked locations, and on average contain up to one-third more sugar than other sweet onions."

OSO Sweets are available Dec. 12 through March at Spartan stores, Shopping Center Markets, Papa Joe's and other specialty markets. Prices range from 99 cents to \$1.49 per pound.

They were developed and perfected in 1988, and the first OSO Sweets were imported to the U.S. in 1989 - 5,000 forty-pound cartons. Over 400,000 forty-pound cartons will reach

North America this season.

Rodger Holwig, director of communications for OSO Sweets, said sweet onions represent 15 percent (nearly 250 million pounds) of all onions consumed in the U.S. - 250 million pounds and growing.

A specialty item a decade ago, fresh, sweet onions now represent 15 percent (nearly 250 million pounds) of U.S. onion consumption. Onions represent the third largest vegetable category in volume in supermarkets, along with potatoes and lettuce.

According to the National Onion Association, onion consumption in the U.S. leaped 60 percent in the last 12 years to about 17 pounds per person annually.

Called "sweet spring onions" or "spring/summer sweets," because of their harvest time, sweet onions contain more sugar and less sulfur than ordinary, yellow onions, which are available all year, explained Holwig.

The pyruvic acid in the sulfur makes regular onions cause tears and taste sharp, sometimes creating gas or indigestion.

Because sweet onions have a higher water content than regular onions, the sulfur is further diluted. They have a thinner, lighter color skin, are

milder, less pungent, and tend to be more fragile.

OSO Sweets have a crisp texture that will remind you of a celery stalk or an apple. They have a mild, subtle aroma, and sweet, fruity flavor with a pleasant onion taste. Serve them raw on sandwiches, in salads or dips. OSO Sweets retain their texture, shape and flavor in cooking.

There are lots of reasons to love OSO Sweets. They are fat- and cholesterol-free, low in sodium, a good source of Vitamin C and contain several B vitamins. OSO Sweets are also a source of fiber and important minerals including calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and copper. There are 60 calories per medium (3 ounce) onion.

Look for OSO Sweets with outer skins that are thin, papery, free of bruises, heavy for their size and firm.

Store them in the vegetable bin of your refrigerator. In single layers on paper towels. Cut onions should be wrapped tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerated.

For freezing, chop onions and freeze on a cookie sheet, then store in freezer weight bags or containers. Whole peeled onions can be frozen, but their texture changes so they should be used only for cooking.

See recipes inside.



In addition to OSO Sweet, other sweet onion varieties include:

Madrid (Florida) - Which are available in limited quantities on the West Coast and Hawaii.

Vidalia (Georgia) - The first sweet onion to be promoted and distributed nationally. Vidalia onions were named for a town in Georgia, and are grown in 20 specific counties mandated by a Federal Marketing Order.

They first appeared in 1931 when Georgia farmer Mose Coleman discovered that the onions he planted were not hot, as he expected, but actually sweet. They are available from late April to early June, but this year because of the freeze they may not be available until early May in large quantities.

Sweet Imperial and Italian Red (California) - Dessert grown Sweet Imperials come from the Imperial Valley of Southern California. The Italian Red is grown in the San Joaquin Valley and available in limited quantities in Michigan from mid-April to early June.

Texas 1916 (Texas) - Were introduced in 1905, and developed in the early 1900s by Dr. Leonard Pike, professor of horticulture at Texas A & M University. They're named for the suggested planting date, Oct. 15, and available from mid-May through June.

Walla Walla (Washington) - Are grown in Walla Walla County in southeastern Washington and a part of Umatilla County in northeastern Oregon. The seed originated in Italy and was transplanted to the Washington Island of Cortes where a French soldier, Peter Pier, named after the onion's sweet taste, carried some of the seeds with him to the Walla Walla Valley in the late 1800s. Pier's fellow immigrants soon began raising the onions too, and established the Walla Walla Gardeners' Association (a cooperative of local onion growers in 1916). Walla Walla onions are available from mid-July to late August.

Source: Produce Merchandising Magazine



New beverage splashes to pour in your glass

About this time of year, beverage shops have odd bins of specials. This column is rather like that - some items may interest you and others may not. It's full of odds and ends.

■ If you're interested in single malt scotch whisky, you may want to try the new Glenmorangie 12-year-old Port Wood Finish Malt Whisky. Glenmorangie prides itself not only on quality, but innovation and has released the first commercial bottling of a malt matured partly in port wood barrels, not just bourbon casks. Glenmorangie engages in intensive research into the elements and processes which shape the character of malt whisky. The new Port Wood Finish Malt originates directly from analysis of the influence of wood on whisky character

with the intention of improving the quality of the distiller's core product, Glenmorangie 10-Year Old.

The 12-year-old Port Wood Finish Malt is an aged malt matured for at least 12 years in bourbon casks followed by a minimum of two years "finishing" in port barrels. The complementary characters added from the port wood are noticeable in the color, aromas, taste and finish of the whisky. Its bright copper color in the glass is punctuated by hints of port in the aroma and a sweet-oak nuance in the ultra-smooth finish. Developing with a drop or so of water, are layers of complexity, from a butterscotch-like flavor to rich nuttiness in the finish. The product offers a new option in the spectrum of after-dinner drinks.

■ The classic martini is making a comeback. But innovations on this standard continue to generate excitement. The newest of these comes from Holland's Ketel One Vodka, a product with a 300-year history. A triple distillation makes this vodka incredibly smooth without any alcoholic bite. "It has the cleanest flavor of any vodka," said Royal Oak's Merchants Warehouse partner John Loesle. "I like it best because that's when you can detect its delicacy. It's also good over ice where you can discover a hint of refreshing menthol."

See BEVERAGE, inside



Quality pour:
Glenmorangie
12-year-old
Port Wood
Finish Malt is
a new product
for scotch
lovers.