

TASTE

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MONDAY, MAY 6, 1996

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Let's rap about homemade tamales

I belong to the Julia Child School of Cooking and believe to a degree, that butter, cream and lard are not taboo. They should not be banished from the kitchen because of their seemingly unhealthy aftereffects.

But sometimes it's fun to toss nutrition to the wind, and treat yourself to something decadent that tastes oh so good. It is with that notion that I finally learned how to make great tamales.

My favorite place to buy tamales is Tamaleria Nuevo Leon, 2659 W. Vernor, Detroit. (313) 952-8066. Called Leon's for short, you can buy a dozen homemade tamales there for \$6. I like to eat them on the ride home while sipping a diet Coke.

Ingredients

Tamales are a Mexican tradition, and may consist of almost anything that is wrapped in a leaf and steamed. However, the primary ingredient is usually masa, a dough made from dried corn that has been boiled briefly with lime, hulled, and then coarsely ground. Made with fresh corn on the cob, corn tamales can be a vegetarian delight. Add some taco-seasoning laced cooked ground or chopped beef and you can make them at home for half of what they cost at Leon's with all the taste.

Of course, in order to make a batch, you might be lucky enough to find dried corn husks and masa at an upscale grocer, but why not visit Detroit's very own, *the Mexican grocery store*, La Colomera Honey Bee Market, 2443 Bagley (at 17th) Street, (313) 237-0295. If you've never been there, it's worth the trip, then, stop at Zochomilco for lunch or dinner. Leon's is just a few blocks away.

When summer is upon us, and fresh corn husks are available, they are unbeatable, but dried corn husks, (which are more consistent in size) are almost as good and really can't be beat.

Worth the work

Rick Bayless, co-owner of the Frontera Grill and Topolobambino in Chicago (widely regarded as one of the best Mexican restaurants in the U.S.) said making tamales is a fair amount of work.

"In Mexico, people make them only on special occasions," explained Bayless. Fortunately, the prepared dough and finished tamales have a tendency to keep very well. After having made them in a class with Diana Kennedy, the maven of Mexican cookbooks, I found that they are no more difficult to make than a cake from scratch. I would however suggest that the recipe be doubled because why make only 12 when you can get the family involved and make them for a special occasion, gourmet appetizer or just for the family.

Tamales have many regional variations. So varied are their shapes, wrappings, ingredients, taste and texture that a homemade tamale is nothing short of a gastronomic delight. The word tamal covers a lot more than one would suspect.

Fresh from the steamer

In fact, the word tamal refers to anything wrapped and cooked in a corn husk. Tamales can be filled with ground beef, shredded pork, chili peppers, beans, bananas and just about everything in between. Once prepared and steamed, they can be refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 3 months. The best way to enjoy a tamale right from the steamer, but they can be easily reheated in a microwave oven.

It's always fun to watch uninitiated guests try to eat a tamale. If you've never enjoyed one, try unwrapping the filling from the wrapper and eat it with your fingers.

A word of advice though, compliments of Diana Kennedy's *The Art of Mexican Cooking* (copyright 1989, Bantam Books, \$24.95).

"There are no substitutions for masa, lard, corn husks, authentic chili peppers and the best, freshest spices," writes Kennedy in her book. "It is the combination of all those specialty ingredients that gives a homemade tamale a special quality and a pure Mexican flavor."

The recipes took a tad complicated, but can be made relatively easily, once you feel comfortable with the wrapping technique. Bon Appétit!

Chef Larry Janes is a freelance writer. To leave him a voice mail message, call (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1886. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

■ May is National Egg Month. Discover new ways to prepare eggs.

■ Punch up grilled pork chops with mighty marinades and show-stopping toppings.



Pamper mom: With a little imagination, plus some kid-friendly recipes and foods, children can treat mom on her special day. Jennifer Coleman, 6, is making Fruity Kabob Salad with HoneyBaked Ham.

Make mom's meal child's play

By Keely Wygonik

Staff Writer

With supervision, kids can help prepare a special meal for mom on Mother's Day.

"Kids can do a lot of stuff," said

Mary Denning of Garden City, owner of Mary Denning's Cafe

Shoppe in Westland. "My daughter, Jennifer, started helping when she was two. Kids always like to help."

They like to stir pots, taste, put

pepperoni on pizza, grease pans,

and scoop cookies. For Mother's Day they can decorate cookies and cakes, or make a salad. Be patient with them. Know that they're going to drop stuff. It's a chance to spend quality time with your child.

With a little imagination, and some kid-friendly recipes, you and your child can make Mother's Day a day to remember. Spending time with your kids in the kitchen can be fun and gratifying — for both the kids and their parents, said Jerry Wallen, master chef with The HoneyBaked Ham Company, which is based in Troy. "The key is to make cooking enjoyable with easy-to-prepare recipes that don't require a lot of parental supervision. That way, children gain cooking skills, have fun and a sense of accomplishment."

Cooking is also a great way to teach children about nutrition, weight and measures, and stove top safety, said Wallen.

Remember, a meal doesn't have

Tips for kidding around in kitchen

- Choose a good time — when you don't have to rush
- Plan meals and do the grocery shopping together. Show children pictures of foods from cookbooks or magazines to help them choose recipes.
- Set up all the utensils and ingredients, and help children pick a task that fits their age and skill level.
- Teach children where the ingredients come from and how the cooking process works.
- Let older kids take turns being "head chef," while you act as the assistant who helps out when needed.
- Practice common safety tips.
- Expect spills, and be prepared for clean-up.
- Don't expect a culinary masterpiece. Let kids enjoy the process, don't worry about how the finished product should look.
- Let the child be the first to taste the finished product. Children can be involved in many of the simple day-to-day kitchen tasks, including:
- Opening or closing the refrigerator and cupboards.
- Taking out pots, pans and ingredients.
- Washing and preparing vegetables.
- Measuring ingredients.
- Pouring ingredients into the pan.
- Stirring or mixing ingredients.
- Setting the table.
- Cleaning up.

Information from Land O Lakes.

to be fancy to be memorable. Frost mom, grandma, aunts and sisters to an afternoon tea party. In addition to tea, serve sparkling punch, garnished with fresh fruit, and a variety of sandwiches.

"You want something quick and easy to prepare, and that will also depend on your child's skill level in the kitchen," said Christine Venema of Westland, an extension home economist for the Wayne County Michi-

gan State University Extension Service.

"Make miniature sandwiches with pita pockets. You can fill them with different meats and vegetables, shredded cheese, and bean sprouts. Serve a snack such as apple slices with peanut butter

or vegetables with ranch dressing. Children ages three to four can help scrub vegetables and fruits. Children ages 4 to 6 and older can

set the table. I just taught my seven-year-old son Matthew how to peel carrots and potatoes with a potato peeler."

Make mom's favorite breakfast. Decorate a breakfast tray with paper cutouts in the shape of butterflies, flowers, and hearts. Include a homemade card, a single rose in a vase, a book by one of mom's favorite authors, or the morning paper. Then leave her alone to rest and enjoy the morning.

For an easy lunch or dinner, consider using pre-sliced fully cooked meats like hams and boneless turkey breasts. Carry-out items such as chicken and ribs are other options.

Dad and the kids can make side dishes to go with the meat. "Younger kids can open a package of brown and serve rolls and put them on the tray. Dad or an older sister or brother can put them in the oven," said Venema.

For a special dessert, stop by Mary Denning's Cafe Shoppe, 8030 Wayne Road, Westland, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 11. For \$3.50 you can buy a five-inch heart shaped cake, and Denning's staff will help your child decorate it for mom. Children ages two and older are welcome. They'll also receive a pencil and button. Reservations are not necessary; call (313) 281-3880 for information.

See recipes inside.

FOCUS ON WINE

BY RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

FROM ITALY'S PIEDMONT

Barbera is a 'people's wine'

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Challenged only by Sangiovese from Italy's Tuscany region in red wine versatility, Barbera from Italy's Piedmont, offers palate excitement. With mouth-filling fruit with spicy flavors, Barbera connects well with highly seasoned dishes. The Piedmontese refer to it as a "people's wine" because it does not require long aging for full enjoyment. The Piedmont region needs such a wine because its two dominant wines, Barbera and Barolo, require long cellaring time for maximum enjoyment. In any vintage, Barbera accounts for more than 50 percent of the region's red wine.

Because Barbera has caught up in the wave of Italian varietals enjoying production popularity in California, interest in its Italian heritage has escalated. By California standards, some producers, such as Louis Martini, are old hands at making Barbera, but newcomers have added it to their growing portfolio of Italian varietals.

Barbera from Italy's Piedmont is bottled in a

broad spectrum of styles from young and fruity, almost like the region's Dolcetto, to dark, intense, extracted versions with bold aromas. Many wines, particularly those labeled Barbera d'Alba, originate from minute family vineyard holdings dating back 100 to 200 years. One also finds Barbera d'Asti from the Asti area. Differences among wines from the two regions stem from variances among soil type and microclimates, but cellar aging practices are also a contributing factor. Not all Italian Barbera is oak aged.

Following its Italian heritage to America, it can be said that California has an equally broad range of styles for Barbera, but as a general rule, all California Barbera has seen some barrel aging, even if it's older, more neutral cooperage.

Like Piedmontese, some California wineries are making Barbera for early drinkability.

Italian Barberas you should know:

• **Batasiolo Barbera d'Alba** is produced from one of the oldest vineyards in the Piedmont. In youth, its purple color stains the glass.

Aromas are typically those of red fruits. Flavors mirror aromas and the wine finishes mellow.

• Luigi Cappo e figli produces two wines of differing style. Camp du Rouss Barbera d'Asti is bright red-garnet in the glass with berry and violet aromas. Flavors are intense, but the wine finishes smooth. The other Cappo wine, Pomoroso Barbera d'Asti, comes across lighter in the mouth, but has a surprising aftertaste.

• Angelo Gaja Sityori is a blend from three estate vineyards reflecting their soil and microclimate. It is a gutsy, flavorful wine from start to finish.

• **Pio Cesari Barbera d'Alba** is made from estate fruit averaging 70 years old and from vineyards managed by the winery.

• Prunotto Pian Romualdo and the Fiuoli Barbera d'Alba make great counterpoints. Compared in the same vintage, Pian Romualdo is a wine needing some cellar aging while Fiuoli has immediate approachability.

See more wine selections inside.