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## TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Brides say 'I do'  
to homemade cake

A wedding cake should be a creation of dreams, a delicious fantasy to sweeten the event and delight memories. So why would hundreds of really talented cooks trust their memories (and their pocketbooks) to a handful of bakers when they themselves can create the wedding cake of their dreams? Some bakers and catering locations offer wedding cake as part of the "total package" and, in my opinion, it would probably be best to stay with a package.

However, with more affordable weddings taking place these days in fields, on decks, in backyards and other economical locations, it makes perfectly good financial sense to make your own wedding cake.

## Plan ahead

First off, and probably most important, you'll need a plan for making and assembling the cake. You need to know how many guests the cake will serve, the choice of batter, and whether or not the frosting is conducive to the weather (I wouldn't recommend fancy butter cream frosting on a 103 F. day with 88 percent humidity). Should the cake be sheet-style, layered, or presented in tiers? Can the cake be transported and assembled at the reception? Try and think of all the "what ifs," because the more prepared you are, the better the cake will be.

Cake bakers and professional decorators abound and rely mainly on a bevy of support personnel here in the metropolitan area. You can save money by baking the cake and then having it professionally decorated. Your best bet is word-of-mouth recommendations; but many shops that sell cake and decorating equipment usually have a suggested reference list. The most venerable of cake and baking shops, which stocks a multitude of pans and equipment, is Kitchen Glamour with stores in Bedford, Novi, West Bloomfield and Rochester.

Another is the Bakers Acre, 34918 Michigan Avenue, downtown Wayne, (313) 722-4110. Owners Jim and Linda Pratt own this notable cake decorating store, which in addition to selling a multitude of equipment, offers classes in everything from basic to advanced cake baking and decorating.

Linda Pratt, a professional cake baker and decorator herself, offers these tips for making a homemade wedding cake.

## Tips for success

"First timers should begin by preparing cakes as simple as possible," said Pratt. "You'd be surprised how a basic cake can be made gourmet with a layer of mousse, fresh fruit puree, or a good soaking of liqueur." She also recommends "that regardless of how simple or extravagant the cake will be, it must be level or the entire cake will look crooked, no matter how elegantly decorated." Pratt uses a sharp serrated knife or a fine string to lop off those "bulges" every baker experiences. The professional baker also recommends that after the cake is removed from the baking pans, place the layers immediately on cake rounds (cardboard) and place them individually in plastic garbage bags. Pratt added "this will not only keep the layers incredibly moist with lesser crumbs for longer periods, but also allow the preparer an opportunity to clean up the area before decorating begins."

Budding wedding cake bakers and decorators can also take advantage of the many cake decorating videos that are available to rent or purchase anywhere good equipment and supplies are sold. Many highly touted equipment manufacturers such as Wilton Industries have cake decorating videos for the beginner, intermediate and advanced home baker. Videos include many state-of-the-art, and up to the minute tips, and techniques for making flowers, borders and decorating the perfect wedding cake.

As far as supplies are concerned, most wedding type cake pans can be rented. You will also need a good mixer, preferably heavy duty (Take it from this baker, nothing does it better than a Kitchen Aid). Basic equipment should include an icing spatula, cake boards, pastry bags, tips, couplers, revolving stand and food colors. Professional bakers use baker's quality cloth decorating bags but disposable parchment paper bags can easily suffice for the beginner to help defray costs.

The industry average is about \$2.50 per person for a purchased wedding cake. Having made three for family and friends, I easily kept costs at no more than seventy-five cents per person, and not being a decorator, used fresh flowers. Needless to say - quite a savings, especially with the cost of weddings these days!

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ New cookbook offers vegetarian burger recipes.

# TASTE

## Mushrooms

### Hunting for fungi

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS  
SPECIAL WRITER

"Hunt mushrooms," that phrase sounds like an oxymoron to me. After all, mushrooms don't run away and they won't attack you. They just sit there. You don't have to sneak up on them, use a special whistle, or a weapon. However, "hunting" is quite an accurate description, for after a long, cold winter and wet spring, these fungi shyly make their appearance. And although wild mushrooms look quite passive, as their caps peek through dried leaves and grass, they can be very dangerous - even fatal.

The Mushroom Council urges the public to be cautious when foraging for wild mushrooms in fields or forests because of potential health dangers that can be caused by some wild varieties. This caution is in response to a situation in Northern California where a mother and three children became seriously ill after they ate a poisonous wild variety they had picked while foraging.

Spring is the time of year when thousands of people head out in search of the elusive Morel mushroom, with its distinctive pitted cap. However, the Food and Drug Administration says there are two mushroom species that can be easily mistaken for Morels.

The edible Bell Morel "Verpa conica" and half-free morel "Morchella semilibra," and the poisonous early "false morel" "Verpa bohemica" all have caps that look like a partially closed parasol with vertical ridges and striations. The three can easily be confused by an inexperienced harvester, as their distinguishing features are not conspicuous.

So how do we satisfy our cravings for wild mushrooms? Hunt for your favorite varieties in specialty food stores and at restaurants. FDA regulates commercially grown and harvested mushrooms, which are cultivated in concrete buildings or caves. We are also fortunate here in Michigan, as wild mushroom growers and marketers, which supply the retail trade, must be licensed.

Over the past two decades, various species of mushrooms have literally "mushroomed" in popularity. The Golden Mushroom restaurant in Southfield began serving Shiitake, Portabella, Oyster and other "exotic" mushrooms over 20 years ago. "At first, people viewed them tentatively," said Reid Ashton, owner of the Golden Mushroom. "Now our customers are very knowledgeable about different mushroom varieties and expect them on our dishes." The Golden Mushroom serves over 20,000 pounds of wild mushrooms each year.

Don Schneider of Plymouth, whose family has operated a stall at the Eastern Market in Detroit for 85 years, deals extensively in wild mushrooms. Actually, the Portabella, Oyster, Shiitake, Crimini, Wood Ear and Porcini varieties he sells are not really wild, they are usually cultivated in caves.

"Ten years ago people were very skeptical. Today, they are much more accepting," said Schneider. He said Morels purchased from commercial suppliers can cost from \$15 to \$50 per pound depending on their quality, and whether they were picked from the wild or cultivated, which is a very expensive process. It is no wonder mushrooms are so popular.

Their delicate flavor and texture complements many different dishes and cuisines. From a nutritional standpoint, fresh mushrooms fare pretty well. A one-half cup serving contains only 10 calories and is a fair source of potassium and riboflavin. They are also fat free, cholesterol free and sodium free.

Many times the low fat, low calorie aspect of mushrooms is negated in the cooking process. Because they are dry and tend to absorb liquid, mushrooms are often cooked in oil or butter and finished with a cream sauce. Although the taste is great, the added calories and fat are not.

As an alternative to cooking mushrooms in heavy sauces and oils, Steve Allen, Golden Mushroom Executive Chef, suggests grilling. He uses Shiitake or Portabella mushrooms, brushes them with a little olive oil, seasons them lightly with salt and pepper, and then grills them.

"It's the plainest, simplest cooking method, but it's also a great way to enjoy the natural flavor of the mushroom," he said. The seasonings accentuate the mushroom's delicate flavor instead of masking it.

So I wish you good luck in your pursuit of the elusive mushroom, whether the hunt leads you: through the woods and meadows, or if you're like me, to your local grocery store or favorite restaurant.

Peggy Martinelli-Everts of Clarkston, is a registered dietitian, and director of clinical services for HDS Services, a Farmington-Hills based food service and hospitality management company.

## Fungi Facts

- Choose your texture: Short cooking time yields a more delicately textured mushroom; longer cooking time actually renders them denser and chewier.
- Rinse mushrooms quickly and thoroughly to remove dirt and debris. Never soak mushrooms in water or they will become waterlogged. Gently dry them with a cloth or paper towel.
- Refrigerate immediately at home. Fresh mushrooms should be used as soon as possible.
- You can eliminate fat and calories by microwaving mushrooms. Put eight ounces thickly sliced mushrooms in a microwaveable bowl. Cover and cook on high for two to three minutes, stirring once.
- One pound of fresh mushrooms yields about four servings.



## Mushroom 101

Here are some varieties you'll find in stores and restaurants:

## Agaricus (white mushrooms)

Our most widely available mushroom - this is the white mushroom with the smooth, round cap.

- Color: Ranges from creamy white to beige
- Flavor: Mild and woody when raw; delicately flavored when cooked
- Usage: Extremely versatile, raw or cooked. Used raw in salads and with dips. Cooked Agaricus are common as a vegetable, in sauces, soups, on pizzas and in just about any other kind of dish.

## Crimini (Also known as Italian Brown)

These are closely related and similar in shape to the white mushroom, but with a naturally darker color.

- Color: Ranges from tan to rich brown
- Flavor: Deeper, denser, earthier than that of the white variety
- Usage: Use as you would the white mushroom, or in combination with them to add variety and color to a dish.

## Portabella (Also known as Portobello)

The large-capped relative of the white and Crimini. Portabella caps can range up to six inches in diameter.

- Color: Tan to dark brown
- Flavor: A longer growing period gives Portabella

ins a very rich flavor

- Texture: Dense and meaty
- Usage: Serve whole or sliced; grilled, baked, fried, stuffed and in side dishes or stir-fry

## Enoki

These are the mushrooms with the tiny button caps and long, thin stems. They grow in clusters joined at the base.

- Color: Creamy white
- Flavor: Mild, light
- Texture: Slightly crunchy
- Usage: Best enjoyed raw in salads and sandwiches or as a garnish

## Oyster (Also known as Pleurotus)

Unique oyster shell shape, fluted and graceful

- Color: Soft brown to smoky gray
- Flavor: Delicate and briny
- Texture: Velvety
- Usage: Use as you would white mushrooms. Adds a uniqueness in appearance, flavor and texture to dishes.

## Shiitake (Also known as Oak, Chinese or Black Forest)

These mushrooms are characterized by broad, umbrella-shaped caps, wide open veils and tan gills.

- Color: Ranging from tan to dark brown
- Flavor: Rich and woody
- Texture: Meaty when cooked
- Usage: Best when sautéed or grilled

## Casa Lapostolle is best wine from Chile

BY ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

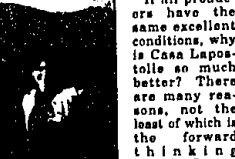
Santa Cruz, Chile - Impressions after a week visiting wineries in Chile are numerous, but if you ask me as many have - what are the best wines you tasted? My answer's the same, Casa Lapostolle.

Chile is a country of geographical contrasts and multiple landscapes - all different, all beautiful. It is geographically isolated with the magnificence of the Andes rising to the east and a coastal mountain range encountered to the west before arriving at the Pacific Ocean. Driving north from Santiago, there's semi-arid land, gateway to the Atacama Desert further north. The Central Valley, south of Santiago, is home to most of the country's wine industry and in just about any wine shop you can find Chilean wine with regional designations Maipo Valley, Maule Valley and Rapel Valley. Slightly northwest of Santiago in the Casablanca Valley, one of the finest homes for chardonnay in Chile. Currently, there is much for-

geographical interest in this region, especially by some large California wineries. In Chile's desert south, close to Antarctica, one cool - just the ticket to ripen grapes slowly to maturity with full flavor profiles.

If all producers have the same excellent conditions, why is Casa Lapostolle so much better? There are many reasons, not the least of which is the forward thinking Marnier-Lapostolle family from France and a marketing plan targeting U.S. consumers just like you, dear readers, who have come to expect high

quality wines every time a cork is pulled. The Marnier-Lapostolle family makes the world-renowned liqueur Grand Marnier. They produce handcrafted, Cognac Marnier and Armagnac Lapostolle. They are well known for their wine from Chateau de Sancerre in the Loire Valley. Seeking to expand their wine portfolio, they handed Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle the challenge of locating a region of her choice and establishing a winery. After researching several years with her winemaker consultant Michel Rolland, owner of Chateau Le Bon Pasteur in Pomerol, she chose vineyard sites in the Rapel Valley, near Santa Cruz, about 100 miles south of Santiago.



MICHEL ROLLAND

Vineyard: Michel Rolland, winemaker and consultant at Casa Lapostolle and owner Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle in the Quartel cabernet sauvignon and merlot vineyard near Santa Cruz, Chile.

pesticides are required to maintain vine health. Throughout the growing season, October to April, days are warm and sunny and nights are cool - just the ticket to ripen grapes slowly to maturity with full flavor profiles.

In partnership with Chilean Jose Rabat, once sole owner of the vineyard and winery, Alexandra sought to upgrade the winery to state of the art with a multi-million dollar investment. The expenditure for 2,500 mostly French barrels, at a