

MONDAY, JUNE 10, 1996

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CHEF LARRY JAMES

Pig roast is tasty way to entertain

With summer looming just around the corner, I've already attended my first pig roast (Memorial Day Weekend) and there are three scheduled for the month of June.

I think it has something to do with the uniqueness of it all. Think about it, what better reason to stand around in awe, than to watch a 150 pound roast pig twirl around on a rotisserie? It's a built in conversation starter, there's always someone who "knows" and has experienced it and the kids — well, what can I say — kids ask (and think of) the craziest questions. Of course, let's not forget the real reason for a pig roast.

There's nothing like fresh roasted pig: from the juiciest tenderloin to the most succulent roast fresh ham you've ever sunk your teeth into, it's a definite show stopper!

Getting ready

There are a few rules that should be strictly adhered to before the festivities begin.

You should not have a problem finding a pig. Most butcher shops can order one for you, but you'll get the best price at a wholesale market like Allied Provision in the Eastern Market.

Expect the pig to weigh around 125 pounds (smaller pigs are available through your butcher and, as a general rule of thumb, you should allow at least 2 pounds of dressed pig (head on) per person. If you're planning on doing this during a major holiday or graduation weekend, you might have a problem locating a rotating spit device or a covered roaster. Contact your rental agency as soon as possible and expect to pay from \$60 for an uncovered open pit barbecue to around \$100 for a covered rotating spit. Of course, these prices are for charcoal type grills and not assured, you'll need at least 100-120 pounds of good hardwood charcoal to do the job. Propane grills are also available at a much higher price.

The variance in thickness of muscle groups will certainly result in differences in speed of cooking. Loins and side areas will cook much faster than ham or shoulder. Cooks in the know have a much lower fire under the middle of the pig and elevate the coals to help insure proper cooking of the ham and shoulder areas. It is imperative that someone have an instant read thermometer and to be sure that the internal temperature reaches at least 170 degrees F. for fresh pork.

Cooking method

The last time I roasted a whole pig, I built the hot coals up on both ends of the grill and kept drip pans available for the center to catch dripping fat. This could result in a disaster as fat dripping into a hot fire can cause a burst of flame. On an open grill, I retained heat by constructing a reflecting hood using corrugated steel roofing material or heavy foil over chicken wire. Professional pig roasters keep an oven thermometer handy as the optimum roasting temperature should remain constant between 225-250 degrees F.

Because of variances in sizes, shapes, weights, methods of cooking and other factors, it is difficult to offer a rule of thumb for cooking times. Again, the experienced pig roaster will suggest that a 125 pound pig, kept roasting and turning at about 225 degrees F., will take about 7 hours to cook.

I can attest to the fact that sometimes it's taken much longer, (especially on colder, windier days) and wholeheartedly agree that dinner should not be a set, planned time, but approximated, giving at least a 2 hour time spread.

One may want to bathe the roast during cooking, and a good sized pig during its cooking will char its skin, therefore basting in which the juices basting would accommodate for. I find it necessary to bathe only when a lean portion is exposed due to the skin cracking or breaking off.

Hosting a pig roast sounds difficult, but it really isn't, especially if you do it with friends, and family. I have in my possession a small packet of information from the National Pork Producers and would be happy to offer it to you.

Just send a self-addressed stamped envelope to me, Chef Larry c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48150. Sorry, phone orders will not be accepted, and only self-addressed stamped envelopes will be returned.

Chef Larry James is a free-lance writer. He welcomes your calls and comments. To leave a message for him, dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1886. See barbecue sauce recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Oakland Community College hosts Culinary Classic.

Summer fare:
Mediterranean-style food is delicious, and easy to prepare. Our menu includes Provencal Pear Caesar Salad, Moorish Fruit Baskets, Catalan Peach-Berry Tart, and One-Pot Lebanese Supper.

Vegetables

Inspire easy Mediterranean-style menus

The Mediterranean diet: You've probably heard about it, particularly with regards to its disease-preventative benefits. This eating style encompasses the cuisines of regions and countries as diverse as Spain, Israel, Southern France, Italy, Greece, and Morocco, to name a few. The diet is rich in grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, as well as moderate amounts of fish, meat and poultry, nuts, olive oil, and wine. Researchers believe that a combination of low amounts of saturated fat, high fiber, plenty of antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, and a wealth of potentially cancer-inhibiting substances known as phytochemicals make this one of the healthiest diets in the world.

Recent news stories have seized on wine consumption and olive oil as the keys to the healthfulness of the Mediterranean diet, but there is no consensus in the scientific community on either issue. Nearly all nutrition and medical authorities agree that the abundance of fruits and vegetables in the Mediterranean diet gives these cuisines of the sun a healthy edge. Reasons? Fruits and vegetables are both

excellent sources of antioxidants and phytochemicals.

You don't have to spend hours in the kitchen or even be a particularly skillful cook to feed your family delicious and produce-rich Mediterranean-style food. If you use a few "value-added products," such as quick-cooking grains, pre-prepared doughs, pre-washed and pre-cut produce, and dried, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables, you can create tasty and even low-fat Mediterranean meals easily and quickly.

The ever-inventive cooks along the Mediterranean Sea often combine canned fruit with fresh and dried produce — that's one of the reasons the foods are so varied and plant-rich. Frozen produce is used less, only because refrigerators in most homes are quite small and freezers minute to non-existent.

For a comforting family meal, try the One-Pot Lebanese Supper. This recipe features a base of easy-to-cook bulgur wheat, an ingredient in many Lebanese foods — including their famous Tabbouleh Salad. Frozen mixed vegetables, canned chunky mixed fruit, and a hint of lemon give this casserole plenty of color and flavor.

Dates were a staple of ancient Mediter-

ranean diets and remain favorites today. Bake up a batch of Moorish Fruit Baskets this weekend — the frozen dinner roll dough makes them a snap to prepare. The Moors were Islamic North Africans that invaded Spain in the eighth century; their influence is still evident in modern Spanish cuisine.

For a simple starter, toss together pre-washed and pre-cut romaine lettuce with canned pears and croutons for Provencal Pear Caesar Salad. Pears are a great favorite in Southern France, where the region of Provence is located. Romaine lettuce is a popular green throughout France and Italy (the Caesar dressing is an American addition).

For a fabulous finale, you can't go wrong with a Catalan Peach-Berry Tart. Strawberries are prized in this Spanish region that borders Southern France. Don't be put off by the inclusion of filo dough (another North African/Arab influence). It's readily available in most supermarket freezer sections, and it's quite easy to manage with a little practice.

So as they say in Marseille, "Bon appetit!" You really can't go wrong with easy, healthy Mediterranean foods on the menu.

• See recipes inside.

Balanced diet vital to good health

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

It happens every year about this time. As the warm weather approaches, new diet fads emerge. This year the big trend seems to be diets centered around protein foods. "The Zone," "The Carbhydrate Addict's Diet," "Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution," and "Protein Power," are a few of the books that have hit the best-seller lists of late. All these plans restrict the intake of carbohydrates and preach the benefits of protein. While this may work for a while, I still maintain that a balanced diet is vital to one's health.

The hallmark of a healthy lifestyle — specifically healthful eating, is based on three foundation principles: Balance, Variety, and Moderation. Upon reviewing these hot new diet books, I found that they miss the mark on one or all of these foundation principles.

BALANCE: is a state of harmony or proportion. A healthy diet does not focus on one specific nutrient, such as protein. Rather, a healthy diet contains reasonable amounts of all six required nutrients — protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins, minerals and water. These nutrients are balanced in quantities throughout the day to

ensure the body has a steady supply. More importantly, the balance issue is addressed by focusing on foods rather than nutrients. We need to speak of a healthy diet in relation to the intake of grains, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, meat, poultry, seafood and fluids.

VARIETY: is the state of being diverse or different. Healthy eating habits require that we select multiple kinds of foods and prepare them in different ways. For example, rather than mandate that you eat only certain types of foods (high protein) at certain meals, variety allows you to include all types of foods at every meal. Additionally, diet books that require you to radically change your normal eating habits to conform to their meal plan are too extreme for most people to follow. This is not to say that some people really have lousy eating habits and need an overhaul. However, this overhaul comes through a personalized assessment of your current eating style and suggestions for step-wise changes to improve food choices.

MODERATION: is the avoidance of extremes or excesses. Remember, for most people, all foods can fit into a healthy diet. The key is understanding which foods to

choose more often and which to choose less often. Any diet that proclaims you can "eat all you want" of certain foods but forbids others, is extreme. Plus, some diet books confuse the issue by using scientific sounding biochemical explanations for metabolic processes to support their theory of why you should or should not eat certain foods. They go on to "prove" these theories based on interviews or testimonials, often with only one "type" of people, rather than research.

It is important to remember that body weight maintenance is not just a simple, "calories in equals calories out" issue. Our bodies have a strong urge to maintain the status quo and, unless you are ill, pounds do not just "melt off." Body weight is influenced by numerous factors including genetic background, body frame size, percentage of lean muscle to fat tissue, body fat distribution patterns, socioeconomic conditions as well as food intake and exercise output.

The main point is that weight loss is not found by using a single diet approach. It is a multi-faceted, life long, body and soul issue. Many diet books proclaim, "this is it... this is the way." If this is true, why are there so many diet books out there? Remember, there are no "revolution-

Foundation for a healthy lifestyle

- Focus on foods, not vitamins. Follow the Food Guide Pyramid for amounts and types of foods.
- Remember balance, variety and moderation.
- Enjoy movement in your day. Use your body and keep your muscles, joints, limbs and heart working.
- If you need help with weight control, seek out a registered dietitian (at your local hospital), for an individual nutrition prescription.

ary secrets" or "amazingly simple guarantees" with weight control.

Being a registered dietitian, I will admit that nutrition research data is confusing. One day, the results show this, the next day, it is different. However, major shifts in the understanding of human nutrition have not occurred in several decades. Researchers still believe in the value of a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet for Americans. Research still shows evidence of the benefits of high fiber foods, lots of fluids and limited amounts of highly processed meats. And for those with certain diseases, such as high blood pressure, moderate salt intake and weight control is still advised.

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



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