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TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Author spells out spicy differences

Long before people learned to cook, fish, or even hunt, when food was gathered from what grew around them, herbs and spices were prevalent.

Archaeological discoveries have shown that pre-cavemen who wandered the African land survived on a diet of vegetation. They knew what kind of reaction to expect when they ate a certain plant. Consequently, they learned to avoid certain plants that made them sick, and, if they did get sick, knew which plants to eat to feel better again.

Spicy read

"This was heralded as the earliest use of spices," claims Julie Sahni, author of "Savoring Spices and Herbs," (copyright 1996, Morrow Publishers). The author continues to explain that "as man raised livestock, cultivated crops, and formed organized societies, the pleasurable aspects of plants (fragrance, flavor, color and bite) also became important. Thus began the use of spices and herbs as aromatics."

Spices and herbs can best be described as aromatic plants whose qualities are perceived through our sense of smell.

Spices are the dried aromatic parts of woody plants grown primarily in hot and dry climates (eastern Mediterranean) and hot and humid climates (Central America and South Asia).

Herbs, on the other hand, are the highly fragrant leaves and tender stems of plants that never develop hard bark-covered trunks. They grow mostly in temperate climates. In order to bring out their true floral bouquet, herbs should be fresh and added only at the very end of cooking. Heat not only reduces their aroma but also deadens their bright color.

I teach many a cooking class throughout metropolitan Detroit, and it always amazes me that the majority of people in class really don't know the difference between a spice and an herb and even more important, how to use them properly. People are so anxious to learn, and I feel that the inventive use of spices and herbs is one way to create truly imaginative recipes. Even healthy recipes that are nutritionally sound can always benefit from the creative use of herbs and spices that make them taste "gourmet."

In her book, Sahni does an extraordinary job in really identifying and spelling out in plain English everything you ever wanted to know about herbs and spices. This is one book that belongs on the shelf right next to "The Joy of Cooking," especially if the cook has little or no understanding about the rituals of using herbs and spices.

The first thirty pages of the book are devoted exclusively to identifying each and every basic spice and herb common in everyday kitchens. If you ever wondered about the difference between real vanilla, vanilla flavoring and vanilla extract, this is just one spice the book reveals in great detail. The next twenty or so pages delve even further into uncommon (some even exotic) spices and herbs such as juniper, wasabi, cardamom and various types of peppercorns.

Tasty revelations

Just last week, I was lunching with my best friend over a jerk chicken salad purchased from the deli at Zingerman's in Ann Arbor. My friend was curious about the flavors, and my only knowledge was that jerk was a Caribbean seasoning. Had I known about Sahni's book, I could have easily found that jerk is a blend of allspice, black peppercorns, cinnamon, red pepper, Hungarian paprika, thyme and nutmeg.

I found the first 100 pages great rainy-day reading material (I really learned a few things, i.e. like how celery seed helps round out flavors), and the remainder of the book is stuffed with her own personal collection of recipes that uses all of the herbs and spices mentioned. Sahni works her culinary alchemy into exhilarating, inspired recipes for everything from appetizers to vegetables. Each recipe is a revelation in taste.

I've long been a fan of Rodale's "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs" (the book that I used to call my herb bible), but it's been relegated to the library after reading Sahni's book. I can imagine this book offered as a gift (perhaps a wedding shower or housewarming) along with a small collection of basic herbs and spices. I'll be taking it on vacation and "reading" it like a steamy sultry summer romance novel, if anything, just for information it shares.

Chef Larry Jones 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 1836. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Laura's Fat Free Kitchen

Jazz it up with Juice!



DOLE PACKAGED FOODS CUP AND ART

Summery entrees: Quick and easy Polynesian Salad, Heartland Chicken, San Francisco-Style Tomato Beef, Beef Skewers with Peanut Sauce, Fiesta Chicken, and Pineapple Charlotte, get their fruity flavor from canned pineapple juice.

Canned pineapple juice makes an intriguing replacement for traditional cooking liquids, as it enhances everything from salad dressings to main dishes and desserts.

When substituted for wine or chicken broth in a savory sauce, pineapple juice adds a subtle nuance of fruit flavor. Far from overpowering, it blends smoothly with savory herbs, sweet spices and meats to impart a light, tangy-sweet quality. In a salad dressing it replaces vinegar to add a refreshing, clean taste. In desserts and sweet sauces, its characteristic tart fruity flavor may be more bold as it tempers very sweet ingredients.

Canned pineapple juice is a pantry staple every cook should have on hand. It's low in calories, full of vitamin C, convenient and ready-to-use, and best of all, it's versatile—as the following array of luscious recipes illustrates. Taste for yourself!

Here are some recipes that put canned pineapple juice in a whole new light as a cooking ingredient.

POLYNESIAN SALAD

- 1 pound cooked medium shrimp or sliced chicken breast
- Salad greens
- 4 cups assorted sliced fruit such as papaya, kiwi, grapes, melon
- 2 pounds green beans or asparagus, steamed
- Salad Dressing:

- 1/2 cup reduced calorie mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup nonfat plain yogurt
- 3/4 cup canned pineapple juice
- 3 tablespoons each: honey, Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon basil, crumbled
- 1/2 teaspoon thyme, crumbled
- 1/8 teaspoon each: salt, pepper

Serves 4.
Prep time: 20 minutes.

Arrange shrimp on 4 salad plates lined with salad greens. Arrange fruit and green beans on same plates. Serve with dressing. Salad Dressing: Combine all ingredients until blended.

HEARTLAND CHICKEN

- 4 chicken thighs, skinned
- 4 chicken legs, skinned
- Salt to taste
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 cup canned pineapple juice
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 4 green onions, sliced
- 1/3 cup raisins
- 4 cups hot cooked rice

Serves 4.
Prep time: 20 minutes.
Cook time: 30 minutes.

Season chicken with salt. Coat chicken with flour. Heat oil in non-stick skillet; brown chicken 10 minutes on each side. Remove from pan. Add garlic to pan; cook, stirring 1 minute. Stir in pineapple juice, chili powder, brown sugar, salt, cinnamon, onions and raisins. Bring to a boil; reduce heat. Add chicken. Cover, cook 10 minutes or until chicken is cooked through. Serve over rice.

SAN FRANCISCO-STYLE TOMATO BEEF

- 1 pound beef flank steak
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 onion, cut into wedges
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1 1/4 cups canned pineapple juice
- 1/4 cup tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons Worcestershire Sauce
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 2 tomatoes, cut into wedges
- 1 cup sliced carrots
- 1 cup sliced celery
- 2 cups hot cooked noodles or rice

Serves 4.
Prep time: 20 minutes.
Cook time: 10 minutes.

Cut steak diagonally across the grain into 3/4 inch thick strips. In a non-stick skillet, brown steak with garlic and onion in oil. Combine next 7 ingredients in a small bowl until well blended. Add to skillet with steak, stirring to mix. Add tomatoes and carrots; cook 5 minutes. Add celery; cook 1 minute. Remove from heat. Serve over noodles.

BEEF SKEWERS WITH PEANUT SAUCE

- 1 cup canned pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup finely chopped onion
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 pound flank steak, boneless pork, or chicken breast, cut across grain in thin strips
- Peanut Sauce:
- 3/4 cup canned pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup chunky peanut butter
- 1/4 cup lowfat milk
- 1 tablespoon each: brown sugar, soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons minced cilantro or 2 tablespoons minced green onion
- 1 1/2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Makes 16 appetizer servings.
Prep time: 25 minutes. Marinate: 1 hour.
Cook time: 6 minutes.

Combine pineapple juice, onion and garlic in shallow glass casserole. Add steak. Cover, marinate 1 hour in refrigerator. Remove steak from marinade; thread on 16 appetizer skewers. Broil 6 inches from heat source 6 to 8 minutes. Serve with Peanut Sauce. Peanut Sauce: Combine all ingredients in saucepan. Cook, stirring, 3 minutes. Makes 1 1/2 cups.

• See more recipes inside

Rediscover flavorful petite sirah

American wine drinkers have developed a fondness for red wines. Many of the best merlots and cabernet sauvignons are on allocation in this market. They are hard to come by and the prices are rising due to the law of supply and demand. It's time to discover another flavorful red — petite sirah!

It's not a new varietal. In fact, it has faced some rocky times. Over the last 100 years, its stock with vintners and drinkers has risen and fallen, leading to both booms and busts. In the California wine boom of the 1970s bent on blockbuster reds, petite sirah was sought after and saw vigorous planting — but in many unsuitable areas, some too hot, others

too cool. These wines were often brassy, astringent, tannic, overbearing and difficult to drink. By the end of the decade, the variety began an era of decline that has existed until now.



Even in its years of decline, wineries devoted to petite sirah such as Cannon, David Bruce, Foppiano, Stage Leap and Ridge made magnificent wines, a tradition that continues today. These wineries have older vineyards planted in the correct soils and climate. And, at last, the wine has been rediscovered. Foppiano, celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, has witnessed

See SIRAH, 2B

■ The citrus, lemon grass and melony fruit of sauvignon blanc make it a perfect summertime pour with any seafood dish.

- 1994 Beringer Sauvignon blanc \$8.50
- 1995 St. Supéry Sauvignon blanc \$9
- 1996 Ferrari-Carano Fume Blanc \$11

■ Serve the following wines with grilled meats, veal or chicken Parmesan, pasta tossed with fresh herbs or char-broiled steaks.

- 1993 Piedra Blanca Cabernet Sauvignon Monte Fay Vineyard \$13
- 1992 Chateau Yumbel (Aconcagua) Cabernet Sauvignon \$14
- 1992 Iron Horse Cabernet \$16
- 1993 Davis Symon Eclipse \$19
- 1992 Ferrari-Carano Cabernet Sauvignon \$21
- 1993 Joseph Phelps Cabernet Sauvignon \$22
- 1993 Chateau Yumbel Cabernet Sauvignon \$20
- 1994 Bonville Vineyard Sauvignon \$25
- 1992 Silver Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon \$40 — a quantum leap in price, but an equal leap in concentration and richness.

■ Best buys at \$10 and under:

- 1994 Bel Air Merlot \$7 — certain food items are stipulated in pop singer Mariah Carey's contract and one of them is Del Arroyo red wine!
- 1994 CH Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon \$8
- 1994 Father Valley Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon \$8