

MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 1996

# TASTE

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## TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

## August brings harvest requests

Your calls and comments reflect the seasons. Last month's requests leaned toward outdoor cooking while this month's requests concern gardens, and fresh Michigan fruits and vegetables.

My tomato plants are skyrocketing, and loaded with reddening globes, and my basil has bushed out beyond belief. I hope you too are enjoying the fruits of your garden labors.

Linda Rice of Plymouth called and raved about the fruited melon soup she recently enjoyed while dining at Matt Proctor's rave new restaurant, Relish in Farmington Hills. She was hoping I might have a good recipe. Well Linda, I do have a favorite recipe, and it came from a very old cookbook. We make it all the time in the James Gang kitchen, especially during summer when melons are sweet, ripe and plentiful. You can use honey, cassava, Crenshaw or any other firm melon (not watermelon) or combine two for an even better, complex flavor.

### CANTALOUPE SOUP

- 1 large cantaloupe, skinned, seeded and diced
- 5 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon fresh grated lemon rind
- dash powdered ginger
- pinch salt
- 2 1/2 cups half and half, heavy cream or milk
- Sprigs of mint, for garnish, optional

Saute cantaloupe in hot butter with sugar, lemon rind, ginger and salt until soft and tender, about 5 minutes over medium heat. Add half and half, bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer and simmer for 10 minutes.

Transfer contents to a blender or food processor and process until smooth and pureed. Cool and chill. Adjust seasonings with lemon juice or even a splash of dry white wine. Garnish with sprigs of mint. Serves 4.

Recipe from "SOUP" by Coralie Castle, (Copyright 1974 by 101 Productions).

Another anonymous reader called and reported that she is concerned about eating potatoes to skins.

Seems her sources have told her to be cautious because the skins might be toxic because of chemicals and sprays being used in the fields. I contacted my sources at the Michigan State University Extension Service and their word is that anytime you prepare fruits, vegetables and potatoes purchased from a grocer or farm market, they should always be cleaned or scrubbed before cooking. If your food is properly cleaned before cooking, there should be no problem. Look for Citri-Spray at health food stores — you spray on, and it cleans and reduces the wax shipping coating on many fruits and vegetables. It retails for about \$7.99.

Speaking of potato skins, here's a healthy recipe that tastes as good as the real thing!

### CRISPY POTATO SKINS

Starting with leftover baked potatoes is a real timesaver.

- 2 cooked large baking potatoes (about 8 ounces each)
- 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon salt free lemon herb seasoning blend
- 1 teaspoon butter flavored sprinkles
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1 tablespoon fresh grated Provonele cheese

Preheat the broiler. Cut potatoes lengthwise into quarters. Scoop out potatoes, leaving about 1/4 inch shell of skin. Reserve insides of potatoes for another use. In a small bowl, combine oil, garlic, seasoning blend, butter sprinkles, paprika and salt. Brush over both sides of potato shells. Place potato skin side down on a large baking sheet. Sprinkle cheese evenly over the skins. Broil 3-5 minutes or until browned and crispy. Serves 4.

Each serving equals 181 calories; 6 grams total fat (1 gram saturated); 1 mg. cholesterol. Percentage of calories from fat: 28%. Recipe from "Low Fat in Nothing Flat" by Linda Rosenau, copyright 1996, Harper-Collins Publishers, \$18.50.

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

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

Focus on Wine.

# PEARS

For centuries, people have sung the praises of pears. The ancient Greek poet Homer, for instance, held the pear in the highest esteem, calling it "the gift of the gods."

According to John F. Mariani, author of "The Dictionary of American Food and Drink," (William Morrow and Co. Inc., copyright 1994), Pears originated in Asia, possibly China, and have been cultivated at least since 2000 B.C., with more than 15 thousand species having since been developed from either the "Chinese pear" or the "European pear."

Most American varieties developed from the European pear, which was brought to the Colonies in the 17th century by Jesuit missionaries, English settlers in Massachusetts, and the Dutch in Amsterdam. In the West the pear was introduced by Spanish missionaries by the "49ers" heading for the Great California Gold Rush in covered wagons.

In his book Mariani writes, "by far the most widely cultivated variety in the United States is the 'Bartlett,' first mentioned in print in 1831."

The Bartlett pear variety originated in Berkshire, England, in the 17th century by a schoolmaster named John Stair.

Stair sold some of his pear tree cuttings to a horticulturist named Williams who further developed the variety. The pear is still called the Stair-Williams pear in some parts of England, but according to Mariani, acquired its American name thanks to Enoch Bartlett of Dorchester, Mass., who promoted the variety in the United States. The Bartlett now accounts for three quarters of U.S. pear production.

Today, the Bartlett is America's favorite pear for both eating and canning.

Now — as the bright, sunny days of summer begin to give way to autumn's cooler temperatures — is a perfect time to enjoy pears.

The largest producers of pears are California, Washington, Oregon, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

California produces 80 percent of the nation's crop. Michigan pears are available at farm markets and stands through October. California Bartlett pears are also available



CALIFORNIA PEAR ADVISORY BOARD

**Pear salad:** For a salad that's a step beyond extraordinary, try warm, breaded California Bartlett pear quarters with prosciutto, mixed baby field greens and a tangy lemon vinaigrette.

through October.

A medium-size Bartlett pear provides healthful amounts of dietary fiber (4 grams), vitamin C and potassium, at only 100 calories each. Pears contain no cholesterol or sodium and are virtually fat-free.

To pick the perfect pear, look for relatively smooth, unblemished skin. Degree of ripeness is subject to personal preference. Some people like the crunchy texture and taste of green pears; others want them tender, juicy and golden yellow.

Pears are picked mature (green and firm) because they develop an undesirable mealy texture if they are left to ripen on the tree. Green pears may take four to six days to ripen.

If you purchase Bartlett that

are "breaking" or green tinged with yellow, they will fully ripen in two to three days. If you prefer eating pears that are more firm, this is the perfect stage.

Always ripen pears by placing them in a fruit bowl at room temperature. Once they reach your desired ripeness or turn yellow, place them in the refrigerator to slow further ripening. Depending on ripeness, they can hold for almost a week.

To help cut or sliced Bartlett pears retain their color, dip them into a mixture of 1 tablespoon lemon juice and 1 cup water.

A slightly under-ripe pear is perfect for poaching or baking. An overripe pear makes a great base for a blended drink.

• See recipes inside.

## A Pick of the Pears

### SUMMER PEARS

Bartlett pears, are bell-shaped and the most familiar of the summer varieties. The new crop becomes available in August and continues into early winter. Bartletts change color from green to yellow as they ripen; ripe Red Bartletts have spectacular crimson-colored skins; both have white, juicy flesh and superb flavor.

### WINTER PEARS

Anjou and Red Anjou pears are almost egg-shaped with a slight "shoulder" and short stem. They are wonderfully juicy when ripe and have a mild, spicy taste. Anjous are the most abundant of the varieties, excellent for salads and for juicing; available from October to June.

Bosc pears are symmetrical with a long tapering neck and slightly rough, golden-brown skin, which does not change color when ripe. Their creamy taste and attractive shape makes them ideal for poaching, baking or preserving; good for eating fresh too. Available from August through May.

Comice pears are greenish yellow with sometimes a rosy blush. They have a short neck and stem and are superbly sweet. Harvest starts in October so these are the pears frequently seen in holiday gift boxes, perfect for their abundant juice.

Hells pears are small with brown russeting over a light green skin. They are sweet, flavorful and firm enough for cooking and canning; available from October onward.

Forelle pears are small and bell-shaped with sweet, juicy flesh and crimson "flecks" that develop as the fruit ripens. The season lasts from February to September.

Seckel pears, the smallest variety, have a dark red blush, particularly sweet taste, and are delicious eaten fresh. Available August to January.

\* Information for this chart from: "The Great Food Almanac: A Feast of Facts from A to Z" by Irma Chalmers, (Collins Publishers San Francisco, 1994).



## Family favorite pizza crosses cuisines

It's a popular thing these days to blend cuisines. And pizza is a perfect place to do it!

Cheese "Steak" Pizza combines the favorite flavors of a Philly-style pizza presentation. So simple, so delicious and 30 minutes quick — the whole family will love it.

Top a handy ready-made Italian

bread shell with a cooked ground beef, onion and bell pepper mixture, sprinkle with convenient pre-shredded mozzarella and bake just to heat through. Cut into wedges and serve with a green salad.

Recipes like this one made with readily available, on-hand ingredients are the key to the quick-cook repertoire. Keeping the pantry,

refrigerator and freezer stocked with staples such as bread shells or pizza crusts, ground beef, pre-shredded and sliced cheeses, pasta sauces, frozen vegetables, spices and seasonings, and "good-keepers" like onions and garlic provides the makings for all kinds of delicious, quick meals.

Ground beef, frozen in meal-sized

packages, can be the basis for many a weeknight main dish — from burgers to burritos, meatballs to tacos to pizza.

Freeze ground beef three to four months at 0 degrees F. or lower. Defrost it overnight in the refrigerator, never at room temperature. Always cook ground beef until it's no longer pink.

### CHEESE "STEAK" PIZZA

Total preparation and cooking time: 30 minutes

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 small green or red bell pepper, cut into thin strips
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced, separated into rings
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 large (16 ounce) Italian bread shell (approximately 12-inch diameter)
- 2 cups shredded low-moisture part-skim mozzarella cheese

Heat oven to 400 degrees F. In large skillet, brown ground beef over medium heat 6 minutes. Add bell pepper and onion; cook 3 to 4 minutes or until beef is no longer pink and vegetables are crisp-tender, stirring occasionally. Season with salt and pepper.

Place bread shell on baking sheet. Remove beef and vegetables from skillet with slotted spoon; arrange on top of bread shell. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake in 400 degree F. oven 6 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted; cut into 8 wedges. Makes 4 servings.

Recipe from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association



NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION