

TASTE

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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1996

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Here's the dirt on successful gardens

Dirt is a good thing. Not dirty clothes, or dirt in houses, but dirt as the soil in which I plant. Dirt's rich perfume greets me after a rain, a hearty sprinkle with the hose. It gives me a bushel or so of candy apple red tomatoes, aromatic basil fronds that fill the air with the scent of anise when brushed by a pant leg. My dirt has been feeding me fruits and vegetables since the end of spring, and now it is time to return the favor.

Organic matter

All summer I have been composting, putting the outside leaves of cabbages, the shucks and cobs from corn, egg shells, coffee grounds and wilted salad greens into a remote corner of my garden.

Whenever I cut grass, the clippings are added to raked leaves, straw and harvested potato plants. I bought a small Rototiller four years ago at Sears during season clearance, and it has suited me just fine.

When the last of the parsley is cut for tabbouleh, the remainder of basil snipped for neighbors Frank & Karen's spaghetti sauce, and the final green tomato made into harvest relish, I will crank up the tiller, and feed my garden as it has fed me for the last four months.

Successful gardening requires planning. Each year I rotate crops and plant a few marigolds and zinnias for color, to help control the bug population and attract bees for pollination.

I could, like many neighbors, feed the soil with plant food containing chemical additives, and spray plants and flowers with a range of insecticides, but I want to leave my dirt and groundwater as clean as they were when I came to them.

I hope my children, and their children, will want to keep gardening this ground. However, I am not naive. I know that we live in a nation where people seem to be in perpetual motion, that chances are slim my grandchildren will be in this house, or even this state when they grow up. Still, even if my garden were to cease to exist, I know I will have fulfilled my covenant with future generations.

Soil is composed of a multitude of chemicals and trace elements along with beneficial bacteria and yeasts. I have only to taste the best of hydroponic vegetables grown in watery chemical solutions to realize that real soil and sunshine give vegetables and fruits the best flavor.

Reaping benefits

"Vine ripened" \$3.49 per pound tomatoes available during the dead of winter don't come close to the taste of a tomato that costs pennies to grow during the summer. Chemicals from a bag cannot replicate the delicious compost breakfast I feed my vegetables, and they quickly leach out into the ground.

Even if gardening were just a second hobby, I could easily open a small roadside bait stand, and sell the worms that are everywhere, especially after the soil has been tilled. Remember when you had to water the lawn after dinner and then head outside with a flashlight to dig worms for the next day's fishing trip? I still do, and they have helped me land many a walleye with my dad in our old family weekend boat.

My small garden is my small statement. My compost bin is a recycled plastic oil drum with holes drilled in the side to help circulate air. It cost me the effort to go pick it up, and has lasted since I started gardening without additives about 10 years ago. I would like to believe my harvests are organic, but I have never purchased anything organic because I can't justify the price.

My early crop of beans have fixed nitrogen in the soil. My tomatoes are odd shaped, but they harm no one, and taste buttery and delicious. I grow just enough for my household, and any animals or birds that can get over or under the fence.

My plants got their health from good soil, and can fight off disease pretty much on their own. I do lose some of what I grow, and have to cope with an occasional gurg or a slug (what a reason to pop open a beer, pour a pie plate full and see the pests die with a buzz o'p).

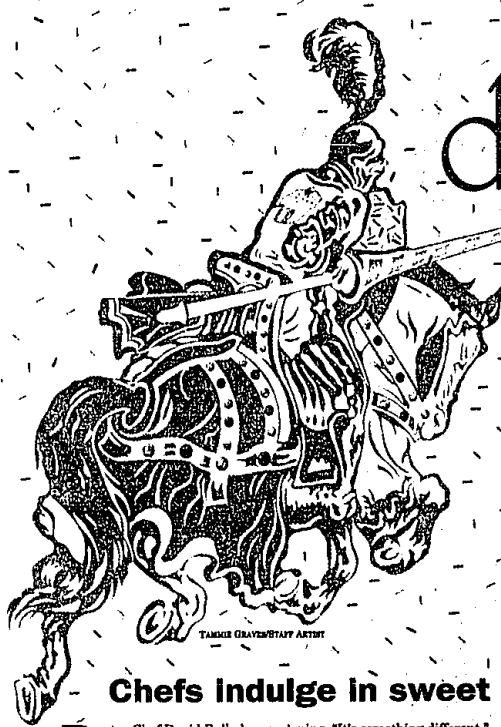
But I'm happy with the rich smell of my dirt after a rain, and with the thought that I'm feeding the land and future. My only hope is that somewhere, sometime, you might be able to do the same.

Chef Larry Janes 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 recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Measure for measure accuracy is important in cooking.



TAMARA GRAVENSTAFF ARTIST

Joust desserts

STORY BY KEELY WYGNONIK
STAFF WRITER

Chefs indulge in sweet temptations

Pastry Chef David Balla has a serious sweet tooth, and believes all meals should begin and end with dessert. Maple Panna Cotta, one of the desserts he is preparing for Tournament of Temptations during "Sweet Endings" weekend at the Michigan Renaissance Festival, Sept. 28-29, was originally made with poached fish, and served as an appetizer.

"The recipe has stayed consistent since the Dark Ages," said Balla, an American Culinary Federation certified pastry chef at Gandy Dancer in Ann Arbor, and graduate of Oakland Community College's culinary arts program. Italian for "cooked cream," panna cotta is a custard dessert. Balla's panna cotta will be flavored with Michigan maple syrup. He's also making a "fancied up" carrot cheesecake, because "carrots have been around since time began."

Balla said he has always been interested in the Renaissance period, and enjoys attending the festival because it's always changing. "They keep the favorites, but are always adding new events and skits," he said.

Mary Danner, owner of Mary Dennis's Cakes Shoppe in Westland, and an instructor in Henry Ford Community College's culinary arts program, is making a royal cake shaped like a castle. Michelle Butler, a former student who works at the shop, is making a chocolate cheesecake with a dragon.

"I like the Renaissance Festival, and it's for a good cause," said Den-

ning. "It's something different." Certified Executive Chef John Zehnder, food and beverage director of Zehnder's of Frankmunth, and president of the American Culinary Federation's Flint/Saginaw Valley Chapter is working with the festival to organize the event.

"I'm real excited about this," said Nancy Lewandowski, festival executive director. "The American Culinary Federation has worked closely with us to make it a fabulous event. We had positive responses from chefs. After the judging, you'll be able to sample the foods by buying 'indulgences' for \$1 per taste."

Event proceeds will be donated to the American Culinary Federation's national charity, the Child and the Chef Foundation, which helps support various nutrition programs that directly affect the nutritional needs of children including Head Start.

"It's great for the festival to have a new event, and it's a good thing for the American Culinary Federation," said Lewandowski.

Tournament of Temptations will be presented in the Castle, a 2,400-square-foot fortress built this year for special events. Pioneer Sugar is the weekend sponsor.

Students will compete Saturday, and professional chefs Sunday. There will also be appetizing and other dessert-related demonstrations. Prizes will be awarded for best of show, first, second, and third place. Best of Show in the professional category will receive

\$1,000, and the student winner a \$1,000 scholarship. Trophies, ribbons and festival merchandise will be awarded to the other winners.

"I'm a Renaissance Festival groupie," said Zehnder, whose family name is synonymous with Frankmunth and family-style chicken dinners. "I was looking for a fall event to raise money, and thought this was a nice fresh approach that could be a combined effort with the eight American Culinary Federation chapters in Michigan. The Renaissance is a unique festival. The costumed performers and individual performers create mystique."

The Castle provided a venue for staging the competition. "It's open, airy, and allows for people to walk around," said Zehnder. "This is one of the few pastry competitions around, and has potential to grow into a major event. Our craft goes back to way before the Renaissance time, and our uniform — tall hat and double breasted coat — is the same."

Also new this year is the "Feast of Folly," to benefit Karmanos Cancer Institute. Tickets quickly sold out, but you can still get tickets for "The Cause and Effect of Wine and Food," seminars 4:30 and 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 21-22.

Mario Cardillo of Beringer Vineyards will host the event in the Castle. You'll learn more about pairing wine with foods by tasting different flavor combinations. Event proceeds benefit Karmanos Cancer Institute. **• See recipes inside.**

Renaissance Palette Pleasers

Where: Michigan Renaissance Festival, one mile north of Mount Holly on Ditle Highway, between Pontiac and Flint in Holly. (I-75 traffic, take Exit 106, Grand Blanc, and follow the signs).

Festival hours: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Sept. 29. Admission: Adults \$12.95, children \$5.95, children ages 4 and under are free.

Highlights:

■ **Feast of Folly** — Sept. 21-22, features charity wine seminar, "The Cause and Effect of Wine and Food," in the Castle 4:30 p.m. and 6 p.m. both days. Hosted by Mario Cardillo of Beringer Vineyards. Festival admission, and a seat at the wine seminar \$22.75 per person, available only in advance, you must be 21 or older, call (800) 603-4848. Proceeds to benefit the Karmanos Cancer Institute of Michigan. To purchase tickets separately, adult festival admission is \$12.95 at the gate, and the wine seminar is \$15 per person at the door.

■ **Sweet Endings** — Sept. 28-29, amateur and professional pastry chefs compete in first Tournament of Temptations, cooking demonstrations. Samples of sweet "indulgences" will be offered for \$1 per taste. Event proceeds to benefit the American Culinary Federation's national charity, the Chef and the Child Foundation.

Hand-picked wines from J.C. Mathes well priced

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

While in London a few weeks ago, we visited some of the city's best wine shops. Wine buyers at such establishments as Berry Bros. & Rudd, Justerini and Brooks or Fortnum and Mason pride themselves on hand-selecting wines from small producers and making them available to their customers. We made an immediate mental Michigan connection.

Right in our own back yard is J.C. Mathes and his J. C. R. Selections Ltd. based in Mount Pleasant. Mathes prides himself on choosing southern Rhone wines, Vin de Pays and Burgundies from select small producers with whom he has done business for several years. He has exclusive import rights to some stellar estates. Perhaps most importantly, his portfolio of hand-crafted wines is exceptionally well priced. Mathes holds a doctorate in Contemporary French Drama and since 1963 has been a University of Michigan professor in the engineering college teaching report writing. He will gain professor emeritus status in January 1997. During his first sabbatical in 1972, Mathes and his wife Rosemary lived in the French regions of Provence and Cotes du Rhone. He went back during the summer of 1976 and lived at the Domaine le Mas des Collines, whose wines he



Wine importer J.C. Mathes, importer of southern Rhone wines, in the Royal Oak studio of his friend, artist Spike Oster. Several of Oster's works were painted on trips to the southern Rhone.

See WINES, 3B

SELECT

- For autumn barbecues it's cabernet sauvignon with beef and merlot with lamb or pork:
- 1993 Sini Cabernet Sauvignon \$16.75 - excellent
- 1993 Napa Ridge Merlot \$10
- 1994 Hogue Merlot \$15
- 1995 Hogue Dry Johannisberg Riesling - for Pan-Asian cuisine
- 1993 Kunde Cabernet Sauvignon \$15
- 1993 Beringer Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon \$13
- Best buys at \$10 and under:
- 1995 Hogue Dry Chenin Blanc \$7 - great alternative to pricey California chardonnays
- 1995 Hogue Dry Johannisberg Riesling - for Pan-Asian cuisine
- 1995 R.H. Phillips Sauvignon Blanc \$8
- 1995 Antinori Galestro \$8
- 1995 Rutino Litalo \$10
- 1994 MontGras Cabernet Sauvignon (Chile) \$8
- 1995 Chateau Dalme Cabernet Sauvignon (Bulgaria) \$8 - very light
- Wines to cellar:
- 1991 Charles Krug Generations (blend of cabernet sauvignon, c Cabernet franc and merlot) \$30
- 1993 Raymond Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve \$17
- 1991 Castello di Volpola Cortisassa (Italy) \$29
- 1991 Castello di Volpola Brunello (Italy) \$29
- 1992 DeLoach Cabernet Sauvignon OPS \$25 - impressive