

MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1996

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Homemade bread sticks, that's Italian

My introduction to making Italian-style bread sticks occurred a few years ago when Nick Malgieri, the man who wrote the book on "How To Bake," (copyright 1996, Harper-Collins Publishers, \$37.50) appeared at a national food conference that I attended.

Nick told the assembled group of foodies about watching a baker in the Piedmont region of Italy make bread sticks. The Grissini were so good that Nick solicited a rudimentary recipe on the spot. He then shared the recipe with the group. I recently found the recipe while purging my desk of mounds of recipes, publications and press releases that have gathered dust through the years. You get the idea. It's all those clippings of things that you say to yourself "gee, this sounds too good to pass up, I must make it," and seldom do, or find the time, or make the effort, or whatever. Until now.

The best reason to make homemade bread sticks is the assumption that bread stick recipes are rather easy to follow, somewhat forgiving, and that bread sticks are many things to many people. Everyone who loves bread sticks thinks of his or her favorite version — thick or thin, tender or crisp, seasoned, salty or plain — as their own personal favorite.

Lack of recipes

When I began my search for information to write this article, I was surprised by the lack of recipes available in cookbooks. Malgieri's book doesn't even contain one, and most of the recipes I did stumble across in other publications were nothing more than a basic white bread cut down to thin strips. After searching through about 20 different bread and baking books, here's what I discovered:

Some of the most basic differences among bread sticks stem from the type of fat that is used in the recipe. Olive oil, butter and lard all impart a different and distinctive flavor and texture. Olive oil will contribute a deep, fruity flavor and is an excellent choice when making herb bread sticks.

Butter is rich and delicate, and helps make the perfect plain, yet sweet bread stick, the kind that lends itself to a veil in slices of Prosciutto wrapped around its exterior.

Lard, perhaps the best fat for crisp bread sticks, offers an assertive, rustic taste.

As with any good bread recipe, it is always best to use an unleached all purpose flour or better yet, a standard bread flour. Standard all purpose bleached flour has been chemically bleached and is sold mainly because it also contains bromates which have a tendency to bake light and airy breads.

Whole grains, especially those that are naturally stone ground will produce a more robust, textured bread stick with a chewier texture. Bread flour is made from hard winter wheat with a higher protein level. Bread flour should not be used for quick breads, cakes and pastry crusts because it will make for a heavier dough.

Yeast

It was once said by an old philosopher that "yeast, like man, luxuriates in warmer temperatures."

When it comes to making bread sticks, you're only as good as the yeast. Whereas, many moons ago when I was young and naive, I thought that packets of quick active dry yeast available in tri-packs in the cool dairy section was the only way to go. Any baker knows that the yeast you use is critical, and it is the yeast that is the spark that ignites the fire that fuels the engine of fermentation. Pros suggest purchasing dry bakers yeast that is sold in 4 ounce jars, or airtight bags. It is free of preservatives and rapid rise agents.

Bread sticks, like good bread, should never be rushed. Fermentation with fast rising, double powered yeast robs bread and bread sticks of good texture and flavor. Don't confuse bakers yeast with nutritional or brewers yeast.

Last, but certainly not least, use the best ingredients money can buy. Garlic powder will never replace fresh garlic and never purchased caraway seeds will fare much better than those that have been sitting in your spice rack for the past 11 years.

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 1896. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Oregon's King Estate wines here at last

TASTE

KOSHER FOODS ARE 'SOUPER'

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
REGISTERED DIETITIAN

To many, kosher foods and kosher cooking mean good, pure, healthy food. The word "kosher" is a derivation of the Hebrew word "kasher" meaning "proper" or "pure."

In recent years, kosher food has enjoyed a surge in popularity as we all — regardless of our religious or ethnic background — look for healthy, wholesome food products. Matzo ball soup is a wonderful comfort food, bagels are so mainstream now that bagel factories pop up almost as fast as coffee shops and it's difficult to resist some of those fabulous pastries that come fresh from local Jewish bakeries.

A food is deemed kosher if it conforms to strict Jewish biblical laws pertaining not only to the type of food that may be eaten, but to the kinds of food that can be combined at one meal. But there are misconceptions associated with kosher products.

So what exactly is kosher food and what separates these food items from other non-kosher foods? Within the Jewish dietary law, kosher usually refers to food that is fit to be eaten, as opposed to food that is "tref," or forbidden.

Forbidden foods include pork, horse flesh, shrimp, crabs and oysters. Kosher fish are those that have scales and fins.

Kosher dietary laws require that the slaughtering of animals and fowl be done in a manner that prevents unnecessary suffering. Meat must be soaked and salted to remove all blood. Milk and dairy products must not be eaten with meat. This means that some meals Jews that keep kosher are lactovovo/parve (dairy/egg/vegetarian).

Some foods are labeled "parve" or "parv," which means that they are neutral foods. The term describes food made without animal or dairy ingredients. According to kosher dietary laws, animal food cannot be consumed at the same meal as dairy food, but a parve food may be combined or eaten with either. In other words, parve breads or cakes must be made with vegetable oils and not with butter or other animal fat.

According to Franklin Claire, vice president of sales for B. Manischewitz Co., a kosher food manufacturer, "In order for packaged goods to receive the kosher certification, they must be produced under the strict supervision of a rabbi. He adds that a rabbi must be present at the production facility to supervise and certify that all ingredients, equipment and the manufacturing process are within the strict requirements of Jewish dietary law. This involves insuring that pure ingredients are used in the clean environment with strictly enforced quality control in place."

Because kosher products must pass these

strictly monitored standards, many people believe that kosher foods are healthier than non-kosher fare. Please remember that whether a food is kosher or not, you must still read the nutritional content label to be sure it fits into your daily dietary requirements. As with most any eating pattern, if you make good choices, you can be assured a healthy diet.

Here are some guidelines to follow if you choose kosher foods:

■ Foods prepared with added fat, whether it's butter (for a dairy meal) or margarine/oil (for a meat meal) should be eaten in limited amounts.

■ Fatty cuts of meat such as beef ribs, fish packed in oil or sour cream, whole fat dairy products, egg yolks and organ meats will contain significant amounts of saturated fat and cholesterol and should be eaten in limited amounts.

■ Meat-based soups should have the fat skimmed off. Cream soups should be prepared with the lowest fat dairy product available. Soups made with barley, peas, lentils and vegetables such as cabbage or beets can be a fully satisfying meal if served with fresh, crusty bread.

■ Individuals monitoring their salt intake may want to limit pickled or smoked meats or fish such as salmon or haddock, or pickled vegetables such as cucumbers and cabbage.

■ Traditional cooking techniques of meat, poultry, fish or eggs such as boiling, baking, grilling or steaming, are lower fat alternatives to frying or preparation in a cream sauce.

■ Enjoy desserts and pastries in limited amounts and look for those made with the lowest fat ingredients such as meringues, fruit-tarts, skim milk puddings, plain cakes and baked fruits.

■ Baked products such as bread, rolls and bagels fresh from one of the many local kosher bakeries are wonderful. However, they can be high in calories so enjoy them in limited amounts.

■ Eggs are a basic ingredient in many kosher food products. An egg is an excellent source of high-quality protein, but also contains more than 200 milligrams of cholesterol and up to 7 grams of fat. Watch for eggs in the ingredients list and adjust your diet accordingly.

So go ahead and enjoy the wonderful variety of wholesome kosher foods, but just remember to use good judgment.

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 management company. See recipes inside.

PUMPKIN BREAD (ORIGINAL VERSION)

3 1/3 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
2 teaspoons baking soda
2 2/3 cups sugar
1 cup oil
4 whole eggs
2 cups canned pumpkin
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
2/3 cup water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Sift flour, baking powder, baking soda and sugar together. Blend in remaining ingredients. Mix well. Divide between two loaf pans. Bake for 1 hour or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Makes 20 servings (10 per loaf).

Nutrition Information: Calories 299.2 kcal, Fat 12.3 grams, Protein 3.7 grams, Cholesterol 43 mg, Carbohydrates 44.9 grams, Sodium 160 mg. Percent calories from fat - 36.1%

PUMPKIN BREAD (LOW FAT VERSION)

3 1/3 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
2 teaspoons baking soda
2 2/3 cups sugar
6 ounces non-fat vanilla yogurt
8 egg whites
2 cups canned pumpkin
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/3 cup water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Sift flour, baking powder, baking soda and sugar together. Blend in remaining ingredients. Mix well. Divide equally between two non-stick loaf pans. Bake for one hour or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Makes 20 servings (10 per loaf).

Nutrition Information: Calories 202.8 kcal, Fat 0.3 grams, Protein 4.3 grams, Cholesterol 0 mg, Carbohydrates 46.3 grams, Sodium 165 mg. Percent calories from fat - 1.3%

See BREAD, 31

Learn more about kosher foods at fair

If you're interested in learning what kosher food is all about, and you enjoy trying new foods, visit The Neighborhood Project and Jewish Community Center's fifth Kosher Food Fair 1-4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 20, at the Jewish Community Center's Jimmy Prentiss Morris Building, 16110 W. 10 Mile Road, Oak Park. Admission is one kosher food item or a cash donation to Yad Ezra Kosher Food Pantry, an organization that feeds the hungry. For more information, call (810) 997-1112.

Fair coordinator Marion Freedman said the fair offers something for everyone whether you're Jewish or not.

Kosher cooking demonstrations by chef and cooking instructor, Annabel Cohen and Matt Prentiss of Unique Restaurant Corp., and a display of holiday and Sabbath table settings provide glimpses into Jewish traditions and food preparation. The fair also features storytelling and activities for children, and healthful eating tips provided by the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute and Weight Watchers.

A soup contest will be the highlight of the "souper" fair. All soup cook-off entries must be made with kosher ingredients, and recipes must adhere to kosher dietary laws. Judging will take place at 2 p.m. There's no charge to enter the contest, and first, second and third place prizes will be awarded. For contest information, call the Neighborhood Project Office (810) 997-1112.

According to Freedman, the biggest draw of the Kosher Food Fair is the food sampling area. She expects 2,000 to 3,000 people will sample the kosher cuisine from 23 different booths. There will be kosher candy, nuts, pizza, stir-fry chicken, herring, kugels, brownies, rolls, and a host of other specialties.

The fair is sponsored by The Neighborhood Project, the Jewish Community Center, Franklin Bank, and B. Manischewitz Co.