

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1996

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Readers in a rush for easier holidays

I can tell it's getting close to the holidays! From your calls it's becoming very evident that you're heating up those stoves, and looking for ways to make things a little healthier, and definitely easier during the holidays.

■ Marni Balog, a home economics teacher at Riley Middle School in Livonia, is teaching her class how to make homemade pretzels. Balog wanted a fat-free pretzel recipe.

Like bagels, pretzels should be parboiled before baking. Here's my recipe:

BREAD PRETZELS

- 1 cup water (105-115 degrees F.)
- 1 package active dry yeast (1 tablespoon)
- 2 3/4 cups salted all-purpose flour (divided)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 4 cups water
- 5 teaspoons baking soda
- Coarse salt

In a mixer bowl, combine water and yeast. Beat in 1 1/2 cups flour, 1/2 teaspoon salt and sugar. When combined, slowly mix in remaining 1 1/4 cups flour, 1/4 cup at a time and knead until dough loses its stickiness.

Allow to rise in a covered greased bowl until doubled in bulk. Punch down and divide into 12 pieces. Roll the 12 pieces into 18 inch lengths and loop into a twisted oval. Place on a greased baking sheet, cover and allow to rise until doubled, about 40 minutes.

Preheat oven to 475 degrees F. In a large non-aluminum pan, bring 4 cups of water to a boil. Stir in baking soda. With a slotted spoon, carefully lower the pretzels into the water for about 1 minute or until they float. Remove and return them to the greased baking sheet. Sprinkle with coarse salt and bake for about 12 minutes. Makes 12 pretzels.

■ Mrs. Roy of Troy called, and wanted to know if there was anything that can be done to recover a custard that was scorched or burnt. If I could, I would but unfortunately, you can't.

She also wanted to know the proper technique for freezing cookie dough. For optimum freezing, I recommend that the dough be placed in an airtight (burpable) container or placed in a freezer bag with all the air pushed out. The dough can be frozen whole or shaped into individual servings before freezing. If shaped, freeze dough on parchment paper lined baking pans individually and then combine when frozen in a container or freezer bag.

■ Joyce Cragger of Novi called with a great idea for health conscious, busy, stressed holiday shoppers. We have both discovered the fat-free pizzas at Picasso Pizza, 24545 West 12 Mile Road, Southfield (810) 350-3131. If you're looking for a fat-free way to enjoy a great meal you won't be disappointed.

■ Mrs. Wilson of Canton called and wanted to know more about juniper berries. She has a recipe, and wanted to know where to get them. Juniper berries are best known for their flavor in gin and other spirits and cordials. The berries come from prickly evergreen shrubs. In France, the berries are crushed with salt and garlic and rubbed onto poultry. Combined with allspice, juniper berries can be used for spicing up beef. The are available via mail order or over the counter at Rafal Spice, 2521 Russell in Detroit's Eastern Market, (313) 259-6373. Here's an interesting recipe:

SPICED SCOTCH LIQUEUR

- 1 1/2 cups good Scotch whiskey
- 1/2 cup vodka
- 1/2 cup light corn syrup
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/4 teaspoon fennel seed
- 1 tablespoon whole juniper berries
- 2 dime sized pieces lemon zest

Warm liquor slightly. Add corn syrup and honey and stir to dissolve. Add fennel, juniper berries and lemon zest. Cover and allow to steep for 12 hours. Pour through a fine mesh strainer or cheese-cloth and bottle. Makes about 2 1/2 cups.

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 1866. See more reader-requested recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Morton's pays attention to wine details.
- Recipes for holiday entertaining.

FAMILIES FUEL HANUKKAH CELEBRATION WITH LESS OIL

BY SANDRA DALKA-PRYSBY • SPECIAL WRITER



It is an important part of Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday that refers to the rededication of the ancient temple after it was desecrated by the Syrians. According to the Hebrew story, when a second temple was desecrated and the eternal light burning in it was extinguished, the Maccabees (a family of Jewish patriots) were able to save one small container of oil that was supposed to last for one night.

An amazing thing happened. The oil burned for eight days and nights until more oil could be prepared.

To commemorate this special event, Jewish families prepare and serve foods cooked in oil, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and jelly doughnuts. But for some Jewish individuals, especially those who are watching their fat intake, this custom has been modified to adjust to their healthy lifestyles.

Sue Miller of Novi is one of these individuals. She, along with her husband, Jay, and two daughters, Rebecca, 10, and Elyse, seven, are active members of the growing Temple Bet Chavrim in Canton.

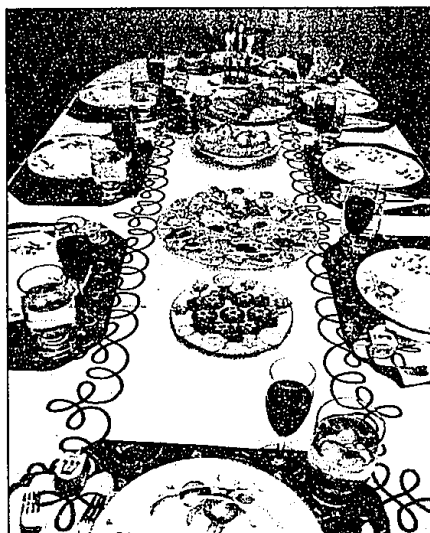
"We participate in all the festivities and activities of our temple, especially because my husband is vice president of the congregation, but I always try to bring foods that are lower in fat and more nutritious, including latkes," said Sue. She has created a recipe that calls for a little oil in the potato mixture ("following tradition"), but instead of frying these potato pancakes in oil, she bakes them.

According to Sue, her latkes may not be as crispy as the fried variety, but they are good and, more importantly, they are less fattening and healthier.

Cooking healthy is an every day part of this dental hygienist's life. She uses no-fat yogurt and fruit-purées in recipes that call for heavy creams and oils, and she uses egg whites for whole eggs.

"My only goal is that whatever I make must taste good. If it doesn't, the family won't eat it and I'll defeat the purpose of cooking/baking nutritious foods," she said.

One thing that has no substitute during the Hanukkah celebration are the jelly-filled doughnuts called "Sufganiyot." According to Sue, "there's no way to make low-fat doughnuts. So the secret to these is to just eat one!"



STAFF PHOTOS BY LAWRENCE IL MCKEE

Festival of Light: (Top photo) Joey Paulisin (left to right), Dave, Karen, Michael and Kelly celebrate Hanukkah with special foods, and by lighting candles on the menorah. (Above) Candlelight flickers across the Paulisin's table set for a very special Hanukkah meal.

In addition to cooking food in oil, this particular Jewish holiday, often called "the Festival of Lights," is marked by the custom of lighting candles for eight nights in a menorah that holds nine candles (one is used for lighting the other candles).

The Paulisin household in

Bloomfield Hills has lots of menorahs. Each of the three Paulisin children, Michael, 14, Joey, 11, and Kelly, 7, take joy in lighting their own menorah during this festive season, but begins this year at sundown Dec. 5. It ends at sundown, Dec. 12. They also take joy in receiving a small gift

each night of Hanukkah ("although this year the children are receiving one large gift," said their mother Karen Blum-Paulisin). Like her friend Sue, Karen also marks the holiday, and every day, with nutritious low-fat and healthful foods.

"I like to cut the fat in my cooking," she said. "That's why I use fat-free Italian dressing when I make the beef brisket, and low-fat chicken broth for my mushroom barley soup for the family's Hanukkah celebration. Just because it's a holiday doesn't mean that you have to discard good eating habits. You can celebrate with healthy foods and still enjoy the occasion."

Rhoda Kutzen of Beverly Hills also believes that a healthy lifestyle can be part of the holidays. She and her husband, Robert, who are parents of two grown children, enjoy filling their home with guests during the holidays, especially children.

"I'm a retired elementary school teacher, and I love being around children. Luckily, we have loads of nieces and nephews who have small children. So we're always around kids."

One of Rhoda's favorite activities during the Hanukkah season is to make sugar cookies cut out in the shapes of menorahs and dreidels (four-cornered tops with Hebrew letters that children use to play a game of chance) and decorated with blue (to represent Israel) and yellow icing (to represent gelt - money or gold covered chocolate coins given as prizes for the dreidel game).

"I make the cookies with my niece, Eve Avadonka, and her three small children. We usually make the traditional recipe that calls for butter. However, we have made a lower fat variety (using light margarine, sugar substitute and egg whites) for those, like myself, who are concerned about fat content."

She also makes sure that there are some healthful choices on her Hanukkah table, such as fruit compote. She uses cans of fruit packed in light syrup, drains the fruit, rinses it in water, drains it again, and adds a sugar substitute.

According to Rhoda, one way to eat healthy during the holidays is to make better selections and to keep portions reasonable.

"One sugar cookie is a much better choice than a jelly doughnut. And half a jelly doughnut is better than a whole one."

See recipes inside.

Swap sweets to multiply holiday treats

Is your holiday treat table filled with Orange Spiced Gingerbread people and Best Ever Butter Cookies? If not, broaden your cookie horizons and host a cookie exchange.

By baking one batch to trade, you and your guests will taste all kinds of holiday flavors.

"Cookie exchanges bring out the best elements of the holidays—baking and sharing," said Lydia Bateman, director of the Land O'Lakes Test Kitchens & Consumer Affairs. "And, what better way to explore a variety of flavors, than to exchange and taste different types of cookies."

A cookie exchange is a gathering designed for the trading of holiday cookies. Friends bake several batches of their favorite cookie recipe—concentrating on the perfection of their one variety. The day of the exchange, everyone meets for a party and swaps batch-for-batch to create an assortment. Each participant brings home a feast of holiday treats.

Here are some tips for planning a successful cookie party:

■ Ask guests to bring one kind of special homemade holiday cookie with copies of the recipe to share.

■ Specify the number of cookies each person must bring (typically three dozen or more).

■ Remind everyone to bring extra containers or plastic bags (to keep the delicate flavors of cookies from mixing together) for the return trip home.

■ Bring the cookies to the party plated and divided for easy swapping.

■ If you don't plan to eat or serve your treats immediately, store them in a sturdy container and freeze them.

■ Serve other refreshments to keep everyone from eating all of the inventory during the cookie exchange. Serve a light meal or brunch. Plan a candlelight buffet of holiday desserts and drinks, or make it potluck to save time and money.

Twice means Tradition

Cookie exchanges all over the world have many traditions. Ask around, borrow ideas or create your own. Here are some ideas to get you started:

■ Turn your annual cookie exchange into a fund-raiser for your favorite charity. Ask guests to bring a gift for a sponsored family or have a charity bake sale.

■ Include winter activities like caroling, sledding, ice-skating or cross-country skiing.

■ Combine a tree-trimming party with your cookie swap.

■ Give each guest a country or region. Have your guests bring a holiday fact or tradition to share and an entree for an international potluck from his/her assigned country.

■ Invite a local chef, baker or home economist to share holiday baking and cooking tips with your guests.

See recipes inside.



LAND O'LAKE

Holiday tradition: Orange Spiced Gingerbread People are fun to make and decorate.