

SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 1997

TASTE

B

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD



RICK HALBERG

Food inspires simple pleasures

It has been asked before. Do we eat to live — or live to eat? Sadly, not enough of the latter, is my gut response.

Food is so much more than sustenance. A ripe peach, pristinely fresh fish, a simply dressed, perfect green salad. The complete harmony of food and wine. Or what about the family meal? Whatever happened to time spent together at the dinner table? Are we always too busy to take the time for these simple pleasures?

Far too few of us realize the wonder that food can inspire. It's the difference between just eating and dining.

A friend returned from a Buddhist retreat and told me about his experience. One of the exercises was to place a single raisin in one's mouth and hold it there until it softened. Then, the raisin was chewed slowly while the person meditated on the single raisin. This made me think of how wonderful food can be. A simple raisin, a grape, wine, filled grape leaves all flooded into my mind. I could have meditated for hours on that one raisin.

I've been lucky and have done a lot of traveling around the world. In my journeys, I've tried to search out local places and people in order to source the best regional foods. I found these people — whether peasants, restaurateurs or forgers — to be among those few who share my passion for food. These are people whose eyes light up when describing their particular specialty. Some won't let you go without trying their mother's version of the town's special dish. In one of my visits to Italy, I visited with the Crespi family, which produces incredible Italian imported products and had one of the most memorable meals of my life. They live in the small town of Ceriana outside the Riviera town of San Remo.

Memorable meal

After a sunny morning with them at their basil-growing farm sharing talk of our mutual love of food we were ready for a mid-day meal. The youngest son, who was just recovering from major surgery, was given the task of escorting us to a local restaurant. Off we went, up the mountain for what seemed like an eternity. Finally we pulled over in front of what appeared to be a large wooden cabin in the mountains. A stream flowed by, the breeze was refreshing and I was hungry. Inside the cabin we sat down at a small table and before I knew it, food was appearing in front of me. There was no menu, no discussion of what I might like, just course after course.

Fresh cheeses, raw and roasted vegetables, wild mushrooms, fresh trout, rabbit with mountain herbs, simple ripe fruits and local wine and to finish, grappa. By the time we had finished, our host had joined us, and I asked him to bring out the "chef," he laughed and went to the kitchen. He returned with his 85-year-old mother and sister, and, with my limited Italian and lots of help, they shared with me their secrets. They weren't really secrets after all. Everything I had eaten was directly grown, raised or forged for by these people. I've eaten in some of the finest and most expensive restaurants in the world. In terms of taste and love for their own food, this rustic inn rates at the top of my list.

In our country, as great as it is, we have pushed our farmers to only produce more, bigger and faster. Quality is no longer the goal. Some of us in my business are attempting to support our local people in their efforts to grow organic and sensible foodstuffs, but these farmers are hard to find. Unless people begin to better appreciate what they are doing, these farmers will go out of business.

As I got older, my food preparations are becoming simpler and purer. As with all things, certain traditions evolve. The products I source have a naturalness and trust stand on their own. Without good ingredients, my work as a chef becomes difficult. Therefore, I continue to search out the freshest ingredients.

Fresh ingredients

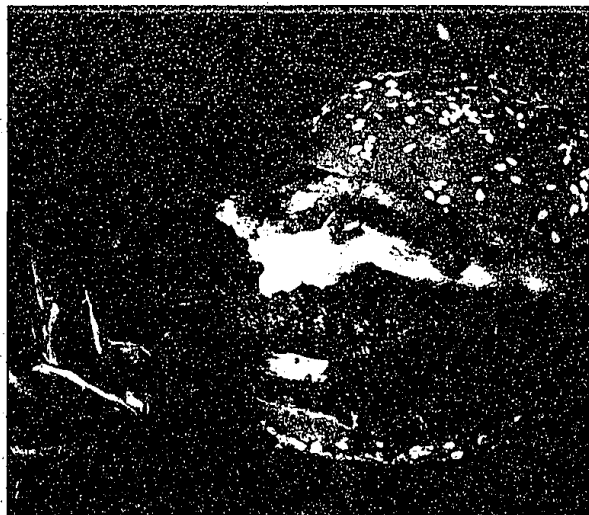
Farmers' markets are cropping up in many towns this summer. These are great places to source out organic growers, and they inevitably will lead me to more of their kind. Vic's Fruit market has a new organic section also. We also have our wonderful Eastern Market, with lots of great places to search. While down at the market, check out R. Hirt for some wonderful cheeses and specialty foods. They carry the products by the Crespi family, like their pesto and

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LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Chilly treats for July 4
- Golden Mushroom — Chef Steven Allen



NATIONAL CATTLEMAN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION

Ranch burger: People come to Mity Nice Grill in Chicago for the burgers. Spicy Ranch Burgers, a house specialty, are topped with ranch salad dressing, crisp golden fried onion rings, lettuce, tomato and pickles. Serve them with coleslaw and French fries.

Burgers

SURE-FIRE SUMMER MEAL

BY KEELY WYGNONIK
STAFF WRITER

Growing up, I used to chart my growth with burgers at A&W. Going there was always a treat. My parents ordered baby burgers for us, but as the eldest of three, I soon graduated to teen, mama, and then papa burgers.

Even now, I spell comfort — b-u-r-g-e-r. For lunch, dinner in a hurry, or backyard barbecue, burgers are hard to beat.

Merchant German sailors crossing the Baltic Sea saw Latvians, Estonians and Finns eating an early version of steak tartare, and wanted some too. They tried it, and liked it so much that they brought it back to Hamburg, Germany. Chefs cooked the meat lightly with chopped onions — Hamburg Steak.

In the 18th century, German immigrants shared this broiled chopped steak with friends and neighbors. Soon it started appearing on restaurant menus. The first documented was 1834 at New York's Delmonico's restaurant.

According to research by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Hamburg Steak made its first cookbook appearance in "Fannie Farmer's Boston Cooking-School Cookbook" in 1896.

Short order cook J. Walter Anderson, later owner and creator of White Castle, created the first hamburger bun in 1916. Prior to that, hamburgers were generally served between two slices of bread.

Burgers are still one of our favorite foods. Steak and burgers are the two most popular beef choices for the grill, and when people eat out, they order burgers more often in the summer — June, July and August.

If you're health conscious, there are plenty of other "burger" choices.

The American Institute for Cancer Research says veggie burgers are a popular alternative to hamburgers. The average vegetarian burger contains little fat, no cholesterol, and substantial fiber. Some are made from vegetables — mushrooms and onions, and others grains — brown rice or rolled oats, beans and soy products.

Check out "Vegetarian Burgers: The Healthy, Delicious Way to Eat America's Favorite Food," by Bharti Kirchner (Harper-Perennial, copyright 1996, \$12.50).

Kirchner serves up recipes for grain and bean burgers, vegetable burgers, nut and seed burgers, tofu and other soy burgers, and stuffed burgers. "Most of the recipes are simple, and the majority of the ingredients are now available in supermarkets," she writes. "Leftover cooked grains, beans, and vegetables can be cleverly be turned into burgers, and many of the steps can be done ahead of time. What's more these low-fat patties can be frozen."

Turkey and chicken burgers are other alternatives to beef. A three-ounce serving of ground turkey breast contains three grams of fat, and ground chicken on two grams.

Melanie Polk, a registered dietitian and director of Nutrition Education for the American Institute of Cancer, recommends consumers ask their butcher to grind turkey and chicken for burgers. "Most pre-prepared ground turkey and chicken includes both white and fattier dark meat," she said. "With so much less fat, chicken and turkey burgers should be cooked differently than ground beef."

Because ground chicken and turkey breast are so lean, they can clump together and dry out on the grill. It's essential to mix in ingredients such as egg or yogurt to keep the meat moist and tender."

- **Aquarius (01/20-02/18)**
The Age of Aquarius
Grilled beef patty, topped with sprouts, fresh tomatoes and cream cheese, served on a wheat bagel
- **Pisces (02/19-03/20)**
The Submarine Burger
Grilled beef patty, topped with sundried tomato tartar sauce, shredded lettuce and pickles, served on a grass sub roll
- **Aries (03/21-04/20)**
Ram Burger
Grilled beef patty, topped with goat cheese, spinach and black pepper macaroni, served on a wheat bun
- **Taurus (04/21-05/20)**
No-Bull Burger
Grilled beef patty, topped with bold BBQ sauce, pepper jack cheese and sweet pickles, served on a Kaiser roll
- **Gemini (05/21-06/21)**
Twin Burger
Double beef patties, grilled and topped with cheddar and jack cheeses, double strength hot pepper mayonnaise, served on a double seeded roll
- **Cancer (06/22-07/22)**
Surf & Turf Burger
Grilled beef patty, topped with lump crab meat that's been tossed in Old Bay seasoning, roasted peppers, and served on a toasted English muffin
- **Leo (07/23-08/22)**
Lionshare Burger
Half pound grilled beef patty topped with spicy chili, jack cheese, shredded lettuce and diced tomatoes — it's a growler!
- **Virgo (08/23-09/22)**
The Goddess
Lean grilled beef patty, topped with white cheddar cheese, Virginia ham and grilled sweet white onions, served on a plain bun
- **Libra (09/23-10/22)**
Sweet & Sour Burger
Grilled beef patty, broiled with sweet and sour sauce, topped with grilled pineapple, onion, lettuce and tomato, served on a sesame seed bun
- **Scorpio (10/23-11/22)**
The Stinger
Grilled beef patty rubbed with Southwestern spices, topped with lettuce salad, sour cream and anchovy chili mayonnaise
- **Sagittarius (11/23-12/21)**
The Sagittarian
Grilled beef patty, topped with sharp cheddar cheese, sliced portobello mushrooms and dill sauce, served on tomato herb bread
- **Capricorn (12/22-01/20)**
The Billy Goat Burger
Grilled beef patty, topped with Wisconsin cheese fondue, grilled portobello cheese on a grass bun

For turkey burgers, beat together 1/3 cup plain, low-fat yogurt and 1 egg. Add 3/4 cup herb seasoned stuffing mix and let stand five minutes, or until moistened. Then stir in 1/2 cup finely chopped onion; 1/2 cup finely chopped parsley; 1/2 teaspoon salt; and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Add this to 1 pound of ground turkey and gently mix. Form into six patties, grill and serve with a tasty relish such as cranberry-orange.

Wendy Bigas of Livonia grills hamburgers for her family once a week, even in the winter. Her Italiano Burger recipe was selected as one of five finalists in the 1997 Michigan Beef Cook Off. "These burgers are really good on the grill," she said.

The recipe was inspired by her four children, ranging in age from two to 15 who "love Italian food." Bigas said she thought of what her kids liked and combined the ingredients to make an Italiano Burger.

She recommends experimenting with what you have on hand to make flavorful burgers such as onion soup mix, chopped onions, and herbs.

See recipes inside.

Home economist offers solutions to cooking jams



LOIS THIELEKE

Michigan State University Extension Oakland County maintains a food and nutrition telephone hotline to answer consumer questions. The questions are interesting, varied and sometimes very complicated.

The following are a few that are asked frequently. Maybe the answers will help you too.

Q. What can I do about soup or stew that is too salty?

A. Cut up a peeled raw potato, tie in cheesecloth, and simmer in the soup or stew. Discard the potato, taste the product, depending on how salty it is, you may have to try again. You can also add a teaspoon of cider vinegar and sugar, or just

sugar. None of these methods are guaranteed, but are worth a try before throwing the food out.

Q. What can I do about brown sugar that is hard as a rock?

A. If possible, try to grate it with a hand grater or place a slice of soft bread or a cut-up apple in the package and close tightly. You can try to soften it in the oven or the microwave. Put the brown sugar in an oven-proof container, set a cup of water in the same container and heat in a low oven or the microwave for a short time. Watch it carefully so the brown sugar does not start melting.

Q. There is a strong odor in my refrigerator. How can I get rid of it?

A. Wash the interior walls with a solution of two tablespoons baking soda to a quart of warm water. Activated charcoal can be spread on a cookie sheet and placed on the refrigerator shelves. Coffee grounds

can be put in shallow pans and placed in the refrigerator, but then you may have to wash the inside again to get rid of the coffee smell. Plain baking soda on a cookie sheet put in the refrigerator will also help remove smells and odors. If the smell has gotten into the insulation, you may have to contact the appliance company for help.

Q. What can I use to tenderize meat?

A. Kiwi fruit is a great natural tenderizer for tough cuts of beef, pork and poultry. The enzyme in kiwi makes the meat tender without the salt that is in many commercial tenderizers. Cut the kiwi in half and rub on the meat about 30 to 45 minutes before cooking. Vinegar is another tenderizer, but may give the meat a different taste later. Of course, there are many commercial types of tenderizers on your grocery's shelf.

Q. What foods are high in beta carotene?

A. Sweet potatoes, winter squash, carrots, pumpkin, kale, cantaloupe, apricots, spinach, broccoli and collard greens all contain beta carotene. Replace up to three-quarters of the fat in muffins, quick breads or cake with canned pumpkin or cooked squash puree to add beta carotene to them. You may want to add some additional cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger or allspice when reducing the fat.

These are just a few of the consumer questions from the hotline, (810) 858-0904. If we are not available, please leave a message, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Lois M. Thieleke of Birmingham is an extension home economist for Michigan State University Extension — Oakland County.