

COOKING CONQUESTS



CHEF RANDY SMITH

Include some surprises on your menu

Here it is, my favorite time of the year. The chill is in the air, the snow is on the ground (well almost), and I look forward to spending time with my family and friends. During the holidays, I eagerly anticipate the arrival of out of town guests as much as a child waiting for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve!

This year I volunteered to cook Christmas dinner, and visions of sugar plums are dancing in my head. While the main dishes of our holiday feast will remain the same, my relatives have asked me to prepare a few new special appetizers and rich desserts. The pre- and post-dinner offerings provide the perfect opportunity to try something a bit more adventurous.

Surprise your family with new recipes for a flavorful holiday season that is sure to impress. You might actually surprise yourself and have these become new holiday traditions.

BELGIAN CHOCOLATE JEWEL

Serves 8

For the ganache

- 5 1/4 ounces heavy cream
- 2 1/4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3 1/2 ounces Belgian Bittersweet Chocolate
- 1/2 tablespoon water
- 1 1/2 tablespoons Grand Marnier

Chop the chocolate into small pieces. Bring the cream to a boil. Place the butter and chocolate into a bowl and add in the cream. Whisk until you reach a smooth consistency. Add in the water and liquor. Pour the ganache into an ice tray and freeze until firm. When firm, remove from the ice tray and return to freezer until needed.

For the cake

- 1 1/4 tablespoons unsalted butter at room temperature
- 3 egg yolks
- 6 ounces Belgian bittersweet chocolate
- 4 tablespoons all purpose flour
- 4 tablespoons cornstarch
- 3 egg whites
- 4 1/4 tablespoons, granulated sugar

Cream together yolks and butter in a mixer. Add in the melted chocolate and mix thoroughly. Add in corn starch and almond flour and mix until fully incorporated. Remove to a bowl. In a very clean and dry mixing bowl, whip egg whites to a soft peak adding in all sugar at the end. Fold meringue into cake mixture and let stand.

Cake Assembly

Place cake batter into pastry bag and pipe a bottom layer into a non-stick muffin pan. Place a frozen ganache jewel into the center and pipe more batter around and over the jewel enough to cover completely. Place muffin pan in freezer and let set. Preheat oven to 325°F and place muffin pan on middle rack. Cook until the top begins to crack slightly. Let stand 5 minutes, remove from pan and serve with reserved ganache or ice cream.

ARTICHOKE AND SPINACH DIP

Serves 8

- 1 (10 ounce) can Artichoke Hearts, drained
- 2 cups fresh spinach, chopped
- 2 tablespoons seasoned bread crumbs
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 6 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
- Ground black pepper (to taste)
- 48 melba toast rounds

Thoroughly drain can of artichoke hearts and place in the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade.

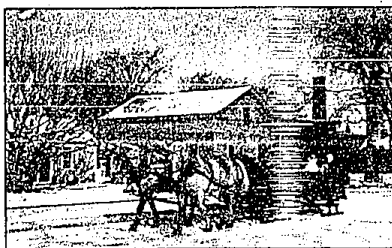
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LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ New Year's Eve alcohol-free drinks

Sleigh ride: Visitors will be able to enjoy a sleigh ride (weather permitting) through Greenfield Village during the holiday season.



Yesteryear: (Below) Turkey for Christmas dinner is one of the "Traditions of the Season" at Greenfield Village & Henry Ford Museum.

Christmas memories

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS...

BY RENÉE SROGLUND
STAFF WRITER

OK, you've got your boots shined, the horse hitched, and the family waiting in the sleigh. It's 1880 in Wayne County and you're on your way to grandma's house for Christmas dinner. What will she serve?

It probably won't be venison, even though grandma lives in the country. "A lot of the game had been driven away," said Jim Johnson, a food historian at Greenfield Village and a member of its special events team.

It may be a fresh cut of pork or beef. "They did butchering at this time of the year so you would have things to eat that you would not normally get," said Johnson. Most likely, grandma will cook a duck, goose or turkey. "We hear over and over again turkey being pushed for Christmas dinner."

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By the late 1800s, the American melting pot was blending cultures, and people were striving toward a national style. Ethnic recipes were reserved for the holidays. If grandma is German, she may stuff that turkey with sauerkraut.

She'll also serve homemade bread and butter and lots of vegetables fresh from her root cellar, like turnips, parsnips and potatoes. Carrots are for dessert, in cakes or puddings.

Don't dare ask grandma to serve anything "medium rare" or "à la mode." Cooks in the late 1800s feared undercooked food would make their guests sick. Only celery, which had its own special dish, was served raw.

By the 1850s, the hermetically sealed canning jar was perfected, said Johnson, so your Christmas dinner will include a variety of canned fruits, pickles and relishes. And if grandma hasn't been touched by the Temperance Movement, there'll be some spirits.

You may wish your family a Merry

Please see MEMORIES, B2



HENRY FORD MUSEUM & GREENFIELD VILLAGE

TRADITIONS OF THE SEASON

WHERE: At Greenfield Village & Henry Ford Museum, Oakwood Boulevard and Village Road in Dearborn, just west of the Southfield Freeway and south of Michigan Avenue.

WHEN: Continues through Sunday, Jan. 3. Museum & Village open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Closed Christmas Day.

ADMISSION: Adults \$12.50; senior citizens 62 and older \$11.50; children 5-12 years old \$7.50; children under five and members admitted free. Call (313) 271-1620 for more information.

HIGHLIGHTS:

■ Take in the aroma of cooking demonstrations at the Edison Homestead where turn-of-the-century favorites like white fruitcake and lemon tarts will be prepared.

■ Warm up at the Martha Mary Chapel and enjoy traditional holiday carols performed by a choir.

■ Visitors will be greeted by a three-story holiday tree in the plaza of Henry Ford Museum. The Museum is also featuring a classic toy exhibit, and 720-square-foot gingerbread town with 32 gingerbread buildings and six toy trains pulling 75 cars over 500 feet of track.

■ While touring the Museum, boys and girls will have a chance to whisper their Christmas list in Santa's ear.

Champagne makes holiday splash complete



For a number of years we've spotlighted a champagne house and domestic sparkling wines at this time of year. To qualify, the wines must be unique, have consistent quality and truly sparkling personality.

Getting top billing from France this year is Champagne Pommery. With Pommery there is not only the great history of a champagne house and Madame Pommery, but several delightful styles.

Pommery was founded in 1857 by Alexandre Louis Pommery. One year later, he died and his widow took over the business and made it a success. Until 1874, champagnes in general had both high levels of sugar and alcohol, thought to be necessary to counterbalance champagne's natural acidity. The clever Madame Pommery knew from her contacts with the English that their tastes were evolving toward drier and lighter (lower alcohol) wine styles.

Therefore, Madame Pommery, together with her cellar master, took the financial risk of technical changes resulting in the creation of the first Brut, or dry-style champagne, most preferred today.



Pommery Brut Royal

Pommery styles

Four Pommery champagnes are readily available in our market: Brut Royal \$36, Brut Royal Apnanage \$42, Brut Rose \$44 and 1991 Brut Millesime (Vintage Brut) \$44. They are all excellent and preference one over the other is a matter of personal taste or what will be served as food accompaniment. In award-winning packaging, Pommery champagnes are gift-wrapped for the holidays.

Each champagne house considers its non-vintage Brut as a house style. Pommery Brut Royal is no exception. To maintain its consistent style, it is made from 40 different top crus in the Champagne region and is a blend of traditional champagne grapes chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier.

Pommery Brut Royal Apnanage has singular charm and finesse. To achieve this consistency, only 12 Champagne crus are chosen for the wine that is 45 percent chardonnay. Aged in Pommery cellars longer than Brut Royal, Apnanage is our personal preference as the perfect aperitif or champagne to be served with a fish course.

Pommery Brut Rose is fuller-bodied and more robust. It makes a perfect pairing with roasted quail, turkey or

Please see CHAMPAGNE, B2

SPARKLING PICKS

In addition to Pommery champagnes, Domaine Carneros Le Reve and Domaine Chandon Cuvée 2000, highlighted in the column, we recommend:

French Champagnes

■ NV Gosset Champagne \$41, but shop around because we've seen it for \$30; 1990 Bollinger Grande Année \$70; 1990 Champagne Deutz Cuvée William Deutz \$85; NV Louis Roederer Brut Premier \$42; and 1990 Moët et Chandon Cuvée Dom Pérignon \$110.

California Sparklers

■ J Wine Company 1994 J Brut \$28. From Schramsberg 1994 Blanc de Blancs \$25; 1992 Blanc de Noirs \$25 (our favorite in this style from California); 1995 Brut Rose \$25. From Iron Horse 1993 Russian Cuvée \$26; 1993 Brut Rose \$28; 1991 Blanc de Blancs \$29 (very delicate); and 1993 Classic Vintage Brut \$28. The best wines for Christmas dinner are very versatile, matching with ethnic specialties, poultry or red meat. We highly recommend: 1996 Kunde Syrah Sonoma Valley about \$18 and 1996 Atlas Peak Reserve Sangiovese, Napa Valley \$30.