

SEASONAL SENSATIONS



DIANE REYNOLDS

Cooking eggs: It's easy if you don't boil over

Traditionally, eggs symbolize life and rebirth in Passover and Easter celebrations. The coloring and decorating of hard-cooked eggs is deeply rooted in cultural and ethnic origins across the country.

Eggs can be decorated as hard-cooked or empty shells. When children are involved, hard-cooked eggs are a bit sturdier to handle. If decorated eggs are to be consumed at family gatherings, it's important to cook, store and handle them with food safety in mind.

The perfect hard-cooked egg
If your Easter eggs end up with a green ring around the yolk and a rubbery texture, your family won't enjoy them. Instead of overcooking them, try this method. Place eggs in a single layer in a saucepan (preferably not iron). Add about 1-inch of tap water and cover the pan. Bring the water just to boiling and quickly turn off the heat.

■ If the kids pitch in now to decorate, make sure they wash hands for at least 20 seconds before they start. Eggshells have tiny pores that bacteria can enter through.

Let eggs stand covered about 15 minutes for large eggs. Adjust time up or down by 3 minutes for each size larger or smaller. (For example, 12 minutes for medium eggs and 18 minutes for extra large.) Drain and immediately run cold water over the eggs, adding ice to the pan. Keep changing the water and add more ice as it melts. Once the eggs are completely cooled, drain off water and proceed to decorate or refrigerate.

If the kids pitch in now to decorate, make sure they wash hands for at least 20 seconds before they start. Eggshells have tiny pores that bacteria can enter through.

No yolk around

Only a portion of reported salmonella associated with foodborne illness originates from eggs. In fact, with today's egg industry methods, the average consumer would only encounter a contaminated egg once every 64 years.

Nonetheless, it still remains critical to handle eggs correctly. They are a perishable high-protein food. Refrigerate raw eggs immediately after purchase. Before preparing eggs, wash your hands with running water and soap for a full 20 seconds. Use only clean eggs with unbroken shells. Discard any that are cracked, broken or leaking.

Egg Salad Week starts

After Easter Sunday, you may have refrigerated an abundance of hard-cooked Easter eggs. If you peeled the shells off, they must be used immediately. Shell-on hard-cooked eggs must be kept refrigerated and used within one week.

If you prepared eggs on the Friday or Saturday before Easter, you just have a few days left. (Hence, the reason that Egg Salad Week was "hatched!") It serves as a timely reminder to use up our eggs during the week following Easter. No need for it to become boring sandwich week! Try the tasty recipes that follow for a change.

Diane Reynolds of Farmington Hills is a registered dietitian for the Kroger Co. of Michigan. You can reach her for answers to your food, nutrition and food safety questions at the Kroger Nutrition Help Line 1-800-KROGERS (select 3 twice on the automated menu) or e-mail her at nutrition@kroger.com. See inside Taste for recipes.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Tiramisu
- Main Dish Miracle

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A BALANCING ACT



Add produce to your diet to help prevent cancer

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

Healthy eating and exercise are not only a way to stay fit and trim, they also can help in the fight against cancer.

One out of two men and one of three women run the risk of developing some form of cancer in their lifetime. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States. Many types of cancer are preventable, so cancer prevention applies to everyone.

Nearly one third of U.S. cancer-related deaths are due to dietary factors, according to the American Cancer Society. While you can't change your heritage and have only limited control over your environment, you can change your diet and lifestyle to help prevent this potentially fatal disease.

Barb Xenakis of Canton plans meals with health in mind. Cancer has become too commonplace, Xenakis said. "Too many friends and family have been diagnosed," said Xenakis.

"I do what I can to stay healthy: eating a healthy diet, exercising and, of course, using sunscreen when I'm outdoors."

Eating for health

Healthy eating is an important aspect of cancer prevention, regardless of your family history. Many fruits and vegetables contain potent cancer-fighting components that pack the "one-two-punch" of antioxidants and phytochemicals. Antioxidants help to protect our cells from damage by cancer-causing agents and phytochemicals may stunt the growth of cancer cells.

Judith Simmons of Farmington Hills finds that making healthy choices of food does not have to be limiting. "Now that I eat more fruits and vegetables, I find myself heading to the produce aisle every time I stop at the grocery store," said Simmons.

Recommendations

The American Institute for Cancer Research devised these diet and health recommendations for cancer prevention. Reshape diets: Choose predominantly plant-based diets rich in a variety of vegetables and fruits, legumes and minimally processed starchy staple foods.

Hold the line: Avoid being underweight or overweight and limit weight gain during adulthood to less than 11 pounds. Stay active: If your occupational activity is low or moderate, take an hour's brisk walk or similar exercise daily, and also exercise vigorously for a total of at least an hour each week.

Food: Eat five or more servings a day of a variety of vegetables and fruits, all year round. Fill up: Eat more than seven servings a day of a variety of grains, legumes, roots, tubers and plantains, limiting your intake of processed foods and refined sugar.

No booze: Alcohol consumption is not recommended. If consumed, limit alcohol to less than two drinks a day for men and one for women.

Move from the center: If eaten at all, limit intake of red meat to less than three ounces daily. It is preferable to choose fish, poultry or meat from non-domesticated animals in place of red meat.

Get factors: Limit consumption of fatty food, particularly those of animal origin. Choose modest amounts of appropriate vegetable oils. Shake lightly: Limit consumption of salted foods and use of cooking and table salt. Use herbs and spices to season foods.

Dietary supplements: For those who follow all dietary recommendations, dietary supplements are probably unnecessary and potentially harmful for reducing cancer risk. No tobacco: There is no place for tobacco in a healthy lifestyle. Do not smoke or chew tobacco.

mons. "These days, you can find almost every fruit and vegetable throughout the year, which makes eating and meal planning more enjoyable."

Citrus fruits, berries and tomatoes all are rich in Vitamin C and strong antioxidants, with blueberries providing more antioxidants than any other food. High levels of antioxidants also can be found in dark green leafy and deep orange vegetables such as greens, red peppers, pumpkin and carrots.

The next time you sit down for a meal, look at your plate. A general rule of thumb is that about two-thirds of your plate should consist of plant-based foods and move meat from the "center of the plate" to eating it as a side dish.

Peter Kelley of Berkley finds that vegetarian cookbooks are a great resource. "Even though I'm not a vegetarian, I try to eat some vegetarian dishes," said Kelley. "They tend to be tasty and healthy, a bonus for those of us who don't like to count calories or fat grams."

Many plant foods are rich in dietary fiber, which also is linked to prevention of colon cancer. Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, turnips, Swiss chard, bok choy and kale offer cancer-inhibiting compounds.

It is best to get your cancer-fighting nutrients from food rather than supplements. If you do take supplements, take multivitamins rather than large doses of a single agent. Scientific research has not yet proven that mega doses of individual supplements are helpful in the fight against cancer and other diseases.

Jodi Friedman of West Bloomfield takes vitamins to supplement, but not to substitute, a healthy diet. "I've made multivitamins a part of my daily regimen," said Friedman. "It's one of the steps I take for healthy living. I've read enough to know that exercise also is a big part of staying fit and, hopefully, feeling healthy."

Some tips to follow

Here are tips to help you translate a plant-based diet into everyday eating and cooking:

■ Start your day off right with a breakfast that includes hot or cold cereal, pancakes or waffles with berry topping, or fruits such as grapefruit, bananas or orange juice.

■ Eat power-packed lunches like vegetable-filled pasta, vegetable noodle soup, bean burritos or a tomato and sprout sandwich on crusty whole grain bread. Try Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Mexican restaurants which offer a multitude of vegetable and grain selections.

■ Enjoy salads by keeping it interesting. Add broccoli, cauliflower, bell peppers, carrots and other fruits and vegetables for added crunch, flavor and nourishment. A fresh tomato and mozzarella salad is a delicious treat that doesn't skimp on nutrition.

■ Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day. Choose those that are the most nutrient

dense and offer the greatest cancer-protective compounds. Cancer-fighting vegetables with phytochemicals include garlic, leeks and onions. Whole grains, legumes, roots, tubers and plantains and soy products, such as tofu, contain important cancer-inhibiting antioxidants.

■ Plan dinners with pasta, rice, couscous or potatoes as the foundation. Layer on steamed, sautéed or stir-fried vegetables. Add a small amount of chicken, seafood, beans, low-fat cheese or nuts to provide all of the protein your family needs. Serve fresh fruit for dessert.

■ Drink plenty of water and other fluids to aid digestion.

These strategies can help you successfully eat your way to better health. While these tips cannot prevent cancer, they can significantly reduce your chances of being diagnosed with the disease.

Peggy Martinelli-Everts, of Clarkston, is a registered dietitian and director of clinical operations for HDS Services, a 35-year-old Farmington Hills-based food service and hospitality management and consulting company, specializing in food service management for hospitals, long-term care facilities, businesses, private clubs and private schools. HDS Services has approximately 250 management accounts throughout the United States and Japan.

FRESH TOMATO MOZZARELLA SALAD

- 5 ripe tomatoes, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 8 ounces mozzarella cheese, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1/2 cup black olives, pitted and sliced
- Black pepper to taste
- 4 tablespoons sweet fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Toss all ingredients together with olive oil. Chill for 30 minutes. Makes six 1/2 cup servings.

Nutritional information: 285 calories, 10 g protein, 16 g fat, 8 g carbohydrate, 21 mg cholesterol, 185 mg sodium

BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH CHESTNUTS

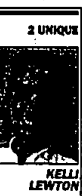
- 1 pound, 8 ounces brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 1 pound chestnuts, whole, canned, blanched, drained, rinsed
- 5 tablespoons margarine
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 cup half and half
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh parsley, minced

Boil brussels sprouts in a quart of water until almost tender. Drain and combine brussels sprouts in a pan with margarine, rinsed chestnuts, black pepper and nutmeg. Cook until brussels sprouts are tender, stirring gently. Remove from heat, add cream and stir gently to cover. Place in serving bowl and sprinkle with minced parsley. Makes six 1/2 cup servings.

Nutritional information: 323 calories, 7 g protein, 12 g fat, 50 g carbohydrate, 4 mg cholesterol, 194 mg sodium.

Recipes courtesy of HDS Services.

Let your foods blossom with edible flowers



KELLI LEWTON

Finally at last the snow has melted and spring is here! For chefs, spring is especially exciting as many produce items will be distributed to local farmers markets by the bushel full.

Being an avid gardener and a chef, one of my favorite spring arrivals are all the beautiful edible flowers that will be popping up soon! With trend-setting chefs such as Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck creating and premiering California nouvelle cuisine, it is commonly believed that the popularity of edible flowers grew from there.

Most of us may have eaten some variety of pretty edible flowers without even knowing it. For example, paeonia incorporates saffron, the stigma of the crocus flower. Capers, often found in cold sauces and a variety of dishes, are

an unopened flower bud of a bush native to the Mediterranean. The French liqueur Chartreuse has carnation petals on its special ingredient list.

But edible flowers are not new. People have eaten flowers and used them in presentations since ancient times.

Many recipes even date back to the Romans, where they used flowers in everything from meals to meat. In the 17th century, edible flowers began to play a more important role in food preparation. English households would hang bunches of flowers to dry for use in dishes and desserts through the fall and winter. Fresh and preserved edible flowers were found in cakes, tarts, custards, puddings, creams, as decorations for fish and meat dishes, and were even brewed into numerous wines and liqueurs. Orange and rose waters are used today in all sorts of candy and pastry applications.

Historically, flowers have been used in countless ways - crystallized in decorative, ground into sugar for flavoring, made into syrups, preserved in

jams and jellies, and used in sauces. As far back as the 1600s, fresh flowers were used in salads and scattered through stews and soups.

Today edible flowers find their way into everything! They add a magical touch, distinctive color and taste to salads, cakes, and pastries and are certainly a fabulous garnish for special blended beverage concoctions.

One of my favorite vinegrettes is made from my backyard edibles. There are so many varieties and colors of flowers from which you can choose to fit so many menus and garnishes. Try putting a little spring fever in your dishes this spring as well as throughout the year with a sprinkle of edible flowers!

Here are edible flower suggestions:

■ Edibles will make any salad the showstopper with the addition of flowers such as viola, chive, and rocket blossoms. Freshness is an essential element in a spring salad, so keep your choice of dressing light and tone just before serving as to ensure greens and

flowers will not wilt.

■ Try a festive flower compound butter on top of your next grilled fish, tossed into your next pasta, or on fresh morning muffins or breads.

■ Rose petals make a wonderful flower jelly. You can also make flower jelly with anise hyssop, basil, bergamot, elder, lilac, pineapple-sage and scented geraniums.

■ Flower-scented sugars, using sweeter aromatic flowers such as anise hyssop, lavender, lilac, rose, scented geraniums and violets, can be made easily. Then that base can be used to create special cakes, cookies, custards and whipping cream. Candied or crystallized flowers are a wonderful delicate decoration addition to tarts, cakes and pastries.

■ Try infusing chamomile, hibiscus, jasmine, marigold and rose into your next steeped tea.

Kelli Lewton is owner of 2 Unique Caterers and Event Planners in Bloomfield Hills and Aunt Olive's Good Food 2 Go in Birmingham. See recipes inside.

kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net

Ken Abramczyk, Editor 734.953.2112