

2 UNIQUE



KELLI LEWTON

Hybrids sprout in produce aisles at local markets

In today's restaurants, vegetables provide more than just an accompaniment to meat.

So many people eat far less meat today for health or moral reasons — or they have basic desire to eat lighter — that new hybrids have sprouted at our local farmers markets, the produce aisles at supermarkets and in many restaurants.

Varied colors, textures

Apples once arrived in red, green and pink colors, raspberries were predictably red, there were only a few varieties of bell peppers to fuss over and almost everything had a name that sounded familiar. Today our produce kingdom buzzes with new peppy veggies possessing unique names as well as shapes, colors and textures. Ever since broccoli first gave cauliflower a tint, chefs and consumers hunt for the unusual.

Since the beginning of time natural gene swaps have occurred. A bee blows into a neighboring field, or a bee extracts nectar from a previously virgin pasture, and presto, a white raspberry is created or an orange may blush pink.

Hybrids differ from open-pollinated plants in that they result from the cross-mating of two different parents of the same plant species. In the broadest sense, most vegetables are hybrids, the only exceptions, plants, such as beans, peas, lettuce and tomatoes, that cross-pollinate only through great difficulty.

But today's hybrid has a narrower legal definition of two different parents of the same plant species. The parents must be identified and pollination controlled.

Pollinating seeds

The conventional open-pollination can happen in two ways: cross-pollination between two plants via wind, insects or water; or self-pollination between male and female flower parts contained within the same flower, or separate parts, but on the same plant.

When you hear the commonly used term heirlooms — which are always always huzzing in the trendy cooking magazines — it is referring to older strains of open-pollinated fruits and vegetables not modified by nature or science. Up until the early 1900s, almost all cross-pollinating O.P. varieties represented this old gene pool-based produce population.

As plant breeders learned new techniques to create more varieties of uniform and good tasting plants, fruits and vegetables, purposeful crossbreeding was born. Today biologists and farmers are culling seeds from the brightest, strongest, juiciest and most beautiful, flavorful crops and crossing them with other plant varieties producing some zany fruits and vegetables with foreign names like "Blue Gusto Pluots" (also called Dinosaur eggs).

If you began genetic engineering (a hotly debated topic of the past few years), you could come up with a doughnut peach or slicing up a zebra tomato. I must admit vegetables bearing animal names do not do much to inspire ideas for a salad course.

There is most certainly an occasional quirk of nature that will produce a new species. Yellow and seedless watermelon, eggplant in a range of color palettes, thin skinned cucumbers, golden Kiwi and purple potatoes to name but a few. However they originated, new and old produce hybrids from near

Please see HYBRIDS, D2



LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Schoolcraft Salon Team
- Peaches



Mexican rice: Cumin seed and garlic with a cilantro and jalapeno pepper garnish help flavor this dish of Mexican rice. See recipe inside Taste.

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

Our culture is infused with international cuisines. For most of us, the most common ones originate from south of the border, namely Mexico and Latin America.

The region's vast geography and history make it impossible to disentangle the cuisines of antiquity of the Aztecs, Mayans and Incas from that of the European explorers and conquerors who established permanent settlements.

Food of distinction

Mexican cooking, like that of other countries, has distinctive herbs, seasonings and spices typical of its dishes. Properly used, herbs and spices enhance the flavors of foods rather than overpower them.

The most distinctive herb of Mexican cuisine is cilantro, also called Chinese parsley. Mexican parsley or fresh coriander. It is an herb with a low, soapy taste and flat serrated leaf. It can be used as a garnish or as a seasoning and is highly aromatic with a strong, distinctive, smoky flavor. It does not store well and does not like to be stored wet.

Farmington Hills resident Louise Genovese knows cilantro well. When Genovese lived in Arizona, she grew cilantro in her backyard. There is no replacement for cilantro, Genovese said. "If you don't have it, the recipe will never taste the same." She advises to use the leaves and tender top stems in recipes, and discard the tough lower stems.

Genovese has an Italian heritage with strong exposure to Mexican cuisine through her daughter-in-law.

Genovese also uses chilies when making Mexican dishes. An important ingredient in Mexican cooking, chilies are used as both a seasoning and a vegetable and can be used dried, fresh or canned. There are more than 60 varieties of them.

They vary in shape and size and range in flavor from fiery hot to sweet and mild. A substance in a pepper's veins called capsaicin determines the degree of heat.

The heat is on

The seeds of the chilies contribute to the high level of seasoning because of their close contact with the veins. The seeds have a hot taste and unpleasant texture and can be removed for a milder flavor. (Generally they are, but fans of hot foods may eat the seeds.)

Before use, the skin of the chilies is removed, usually by roasting the pod. Genovese recommends using disposable plastic gloves when handling fresh chilies to avoid getting capsaicin's "heat" on your skin and possibly into your eyes.

It also is important to use separate kitchen utensils and wash them immediately after use before using with any other foods. Genovese places all cutting boards and knives in her dishwasher after chopping chilies.

Roasted chilies have a wonderful, smoky flavor. To roast a chili, hold the pepper with tongs or a long skewer directly in a high flame above the stove. Cook until the skin blackens uniformly all the way around.

Place in a paper bag and fold closed for 5 minutes to allow the pepper to steam in the bag. Remove the pepper from the bag.

Use a small paring knife to gently peel away the burnt skin. Slice the pepper from the seedpod to the tip, cutting on one side only. Reach in the pepper and squeeze the seeds out of the pod with fingers. Rinse the pepper to remove all of the seeds and let the pepper dry thoroughly.

Salsas are versatile

The Mexican word "salsa" means sauce, and sauces play an important role in Mexican cuisine. Sauces are used not only as ingredients but also as accompaniments, dips and garnishes. Some sauces are cooked and others are prepared from raw ingredients.

Louise Genovese has experimented with many different kinds of sauces. "I like to make my own fresh salsas, but there are such good ones in the refrigerator section at the grocery stores," Genovese said. "I can use them and still get an authentic, fresh taste." Occasionally, Genovese adds ingredients to store bought salsas, such as cilantro or even orange marmalade, to give the dish a more unusual flavor.

Mexican desserts tend to be simple with few ingredients. Fresh fruit such as pineapple, oranges, strawberries, mangoes, papaya, bananas and melons all played a part in original Mexican desserts. With the introduction of sugar cane came a variety of puddings, custards and flans

flavored with cinnamon, almond, caramel, fruit or cheese. Other desserts are deep-fried pastries served with Mexican coffee. Mexican food is highly distinctive, simple, nutritious and varied. It requires simple

You'll yell 'Buen Apetito' for



cooking

CHICKEN ENCHILADA BLANCO

- 1 can cream of chicken or mushroom soup
- 1/2 cup skim milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream, low fat
- 1/4 cup green onions, chopped
- 2 tablespoons mild green chiles, chopped
- 2 teaspoons garlic, minced
- 4 (6-inch) corn tortillas
- 1/2 pound chicken, cooked and diced
- 1 1/2 cups cheese, Mexican blend
- 3 tablespoons lowfat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 tablespoon black olives, sliced
- 2 teaspoons fresh cilantro, chopped

Whip a sauce of the soup, milk, sour cream, onions, chilies, and garlic together in a large bowl until it is smooth. Set aside. Cook chicken and dice into 1-inch pieces. Cut corn tortillas into 1-inch wide strips. Spray the bottom of 8 x 8 baking pan with pan coating. Spread 1/2 cup of the sauce on the bottom of the pan. Layer about half of the corn tortilla strips on top, then cover with half of the diced chicken.

Next, add half of the shredded Mexican cheese mix on top, add half of the remaining sauce over the cheese, spread to the edges. Layer on the remaining corn strips, chicken, cheese and sauce. Sprinkle top with cheddar cheese and black olives. Cover with foil and bake at 375° F for 35-40 minutes until internal temperature is 165° F. Let stand 20 minutes before cutting.

Garnish with fresh cilantro.
Nutritional information per 7 ounces serving: 458 calories, 38 grams protein, 28 grams fat, 35 grams carbohydrate, 479 mg sodium, 87 mg cholesterol.

cooking utensils and only a few special ingredients. So get out your pottery bowls, put on some guitar music and enjoy the flavors of Mexico.

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Chicken salad gets healthy makeover

Chicken salad is a classic entree for summer luncheons, picnics and informal weddings.

But what we think of as a heart healthy choice is really high fat because of all the mayonnaise. It adds 30 grams of fat and 270 calories to the average individual portion.

If the usual chicken salad sounds boring or you want to lower your calorie and fat intake, try these versions. The "Unfried" Chicken Salad is a bowlful of healthy antioxidants disguised as an interesting and flavorful summer salad. The second is one of my five-minute wonders. When I described it to my food tasters for my newsletter, I was met with a chorus of doubts — until they tasted it. Now

it's a staple on their summer menu, as well as mine. See what you think!

UNFRIED CHICKEN SALAD

- Chicken Ingredients:
- 1 pound skinless and boneless chicken breasts cut in 2 inch chunks
 - 3 tablespoons Kraft "Mayo" (fat free)
 - 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
 - 1/2 cup Italian style bread crumbs

- Salad Ingredients:
- 1/2 cup Hellmann's fat free ranch dressing
 - 1/2 cup chopped parsley
 - 8 cups mixed lettuce (Bliss, Boston, Romaine, Leaf, etc.)
 - 1 Hass avocado (dark, rough skin), peeled and sliced

- 1 bunch green onions, silvered
- 1 cup cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- 1/2 cup cooked or canned whole kernel corn
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese

Rinse chicken and dry well. Preheat oven to 425° F. Spray baking sheet. Mix mayo and mustard. Cook chicken pieces. Place bread crumbs in a plastic bag. Shake chicken in bag until well coated. Place in single layer on prepared pan. Bake until cooked thoroughly and browned (about 15 minutes). Toss salad ingredients with dressing. Top with warm chicken. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Serves 4.

Nutritional information per serving: Calories, 361; fat, 12.8 g.; sat. fat, 2.9 g.; cholesterol, 74 mg.; and sodium, 577 mg.

Food Exchanges: 4 lean meat, 3 vegetables, 1/2 bread

Please see MIRACLE D2

MAIN DISH MIRACLE



MURIEL WAGNER