

MAIL TO THE CHEF



RANDY EMERI

Make chili a family event

Snow, and cold winds chilling us to the bone, are good reasons to make a big pot of chili. Cooking chili should be a family event. The kids can help by washing vegetables and opening cans of beans and broth, and that is about it, unless your kids are like mine. My 3-year-old son Nathan is already trying to tell me what to do in the kitchen.

If your children are a little older, you can have them gather the mise en place (all the ingredients and equipment needed to successfully execute the recipe).

Make it a fun event, turn on the radio and sing along to your favorite songs while you cut vegetables. It doesn't matter who is listening, just sing and cook.

It really does make the food taste better.

Things to remember when making chili

- Stir often to prevent scorching.
- Allow plenty of cooking time, the more the chili reduces the better it tastes.
- Always sauté vegetables until translucent before adding broth. This makes a huge difference in flavor.
- If your chili recipe includes meat, evenly brown the meat, and drain off all fat, before adding broth. If you're using fish, add the gently cooked fish to each serving to prevent over-cooking.
- Add spices in moderation; you can always add more but it is impossible to take them out. Always add seasonings and spices at the end so they don't get bitter.
- Use a pinch of sugar at the end of cooking time to help neutralize the acid in the chili.
- Skim the foam that comes to the top of the chili as it cooks. We call this procedure "skimming the skum" in the food service business, and it prevents food from getting an undesirable aftertaste.
- Be creative when making chili. Recipes are only a list of estimates and you can interchange ingredients to fit your own tastes.
- I have a good chili recipe that my family and I enjoy, and I hope you and your family will enjoy it as well.

DUCK AND KIDNEY BEAN CHILI

- 1 1/4 pound ground duck leg meat (turkey or chicken can be substituted)
 - 2 1/4 pound dark kidney beans, cooked
 - 1 medium jalapeno, minced
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 1 large onion, small diced
 - 4 stalks celery, small diced
 - 2 green peppers, small diced
 - 2 tablespoons fresh garlic, minced
 - 1 tablespoon fresh oregano, chopped fine, or 1 teaspoon dry
 - 3 tablespoons ground cumin seed
 - 1 cup chili powder
 - 5 cups chicken broth
 - 1 (12 ounce can) peeled, seeded and diced tomatoes
 - 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
 - salt and pepper to taste
- Heat olive oil over medium heat; render meat with onions, celery, peppers, jalapenos and garlic. Cook until vegetables are tender.
- Add chicken broth, beans and tomatoes, bring to a boil and simmer. Simmer on low heat 25-30 minutes.
- Add all sugar and seasonings and simmer an additional 45 minutes or until the liquid is reduced enough to coat a spoon.
- Adjust seasoning and enjoy with your favorite bread and fresh grated cheese on top. Serves 12.

Chef Randy Emeri was a Michigan Culinary Team captain, and lives in Clarkston. He is a certified Chef de Cuisine and works at the Great Oaks Country Club in Rochester.

See more recipes inside.

Oh so sweet

Local company satisfies appetite for mild onions

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Not so long ago, sweet onions were a spring and autumn treat. Now, however, Saven Corporation in Waterford, importers of OSO (oh-so) Sweet Onions, is proud to say they're bringing the first sweet onions of the new year to area markets.

Available through March, sweet onions can be purchased "loose" at area Hiller's markets, Bush's, Spartan stores and at Costco (in five-pound bags only).

Sweet onions represent more than 15 percent of all onions consumed in the U.S. That's about 250 million pounds and growing. About a decade ago, in a Troy think tank, produce experts Jim Huston, John Battle and Mark Breimeister pondered how they could satisfy the escalating demand for mild sweet onions and bring the first sweet onions of the year to markets during winter months.

They scoured the globe for the right place to grow an outstanding sweet onion that would ship well and retain a reasonable shelf life. Their search ended in Chile and led to the creation of the corporation name Saven, an acronym for South American Venture. Chile's rich, low-sulfur volcanic soil, arid climate with warm days and cool nights, and pure water, sourced from Andes Mountains snow-melt, proved ideal. Such conditions help OSO Sweet Onions retain a high sugar content and crisp texture.

Volcanic soil properties promote a mild onion flavor. On average, low pungency OSO Sweet Onions contain up to one-third more sugar than other sweet onions.

According to Saven, OSO Sweet Onions maintain their texture, shape, and rich onion flavor in cooking better than other sweet onions available later in the year.

In a decade, Saven has increased production from one million to 12 million pounds and imports sweet onions to 50 states, 14 European countries, Mexico, Canada and Japan.

Sweet onion advantages

Sweet onions are sometimes referred to as "short day" onions because their growing season occurs during autumn and winter. With harvest usually in spring and summer, they are fresh onions, picked and cured for a short time, then rushed to market. Storage or regular globe onions, are harvested in late summer and autumn, stored in warehouses, and delivered to markets throughout most of the year.

Although there is no official industry standard, it's generally accepted that an onion should contain at least 6 percent sugar to be in the "sweet" category.

Some, like OSO Sweet Onions, have recorded sugar levels of up to 15 percent. Storage onions usually range from 3 to 5 percent sugar content. They also have high levels of sulfur-containing pyruvic acid that causes a person to shed tears while slicing or chopping them.

GOLDEN GOURMET

Creative, simple dishes bring relief from the cold

Fifty years ago, grocery stores offered a limited selection of fresh fruits and vegetables. Getting an orange or tangerine in your Christmas stocking was a luxury. In the winter, families enjoyed the fruits of their labor — foods canned in the spring and summer, and stocked in root cellars.

More choices

Modern trucking and air freight has changed this. Your local supermarket carries products from all over the world. We have year-round access to foods grown in warmer climates.

Florida will soon be sending its crop of goodies which includes oranges, strawberries, avocados, oysters and sea bass.

Clementines, cantaloupes and sweet onions will be coming from South America, and the southern United States will soon be netting shrimp.

Don't forget locally grown and preserved foods like dried cherries, nuts, and apples.

Add these foodstuffs together and we truly have ingredients for creating wonderful winter meals.

One pot supper

One pot dishes are great in the win-

Guide to seasonal sweet onion choices

■ **OSO Sweets** — First sweet onion of the new year on market shelves. Origin: Chile. Availability: January through March.

■ **SpringSweet & 1015 Super-Sweets** — SpringSweet is the first spring sweet onion in the market. The 1015 is named for its suggested planting date, Oct. 15. Origin: Texas. Availability: March to mid-June.

■ **Vidalia** — Named for a town in Georgia and grown in 20 specific counties, mandated by a Federal Marketing Order, it is the first sweet onion to be promoted and distributed nationally. Origin: Georgia. Availability: April to late June.

■ **Walla Walla** — Named for Walla Walla County in southeastern Washington state, it comes from a seed originating in Italy that made its way to

Washington in the late 1800s. Because this onion does not travel well and has a very short shelf life, it is rarely found in Michigan stores. Origin: counties in southeastern Washington state and northeastern Oregon. Availability: mid-June to mid-August.

■ **AmeriSweet** — Globe shaped and jumbo sized, they have a thicker, deeper-colored skin than spring and summer sweets. They are also a specialty of Saven Corporation in Waterford. Origin: Grand Rapids area farms. Availability: September through October.

■ **Maul** — They became well known because tourists to Hawaii brought them back by the bag. Akin to Vidalias, they originated from varieties developed in Texas, but are the most expensive at \$3 per pound. Origin: Maui, Hawaii. Availability: April to late December.

ping them.

Storage onions are harsher and may induce indigestion. This is the reason why the best sweet onions are always grown in low sulfur content soils. Typically, sweet onions have pyruvic acid levels that measure below 5 percent. Storage onions usually run 10 to 13 percent. Fresh, sweet onions have high water content, which further dilutes the effect of pyruvic acid and increases mildness.

"The best sweet onions taste like an onion, but are much sweeter and milder," said Fabrizio Casini,



MICHAEL TROMBLEY

I particularly like Michigan Navy Bean Soup. Meals don't have to be complex to be good.

Sometimes simple things like broiled king crab legs served with a little whole butter can be very satisfying.

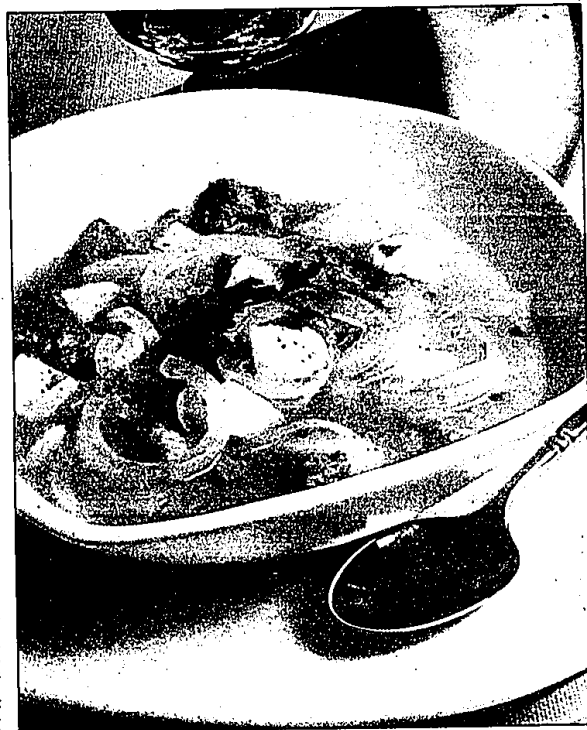
Risotto served with shrimp, crab or duck is a quick, hearty meal this time of year.

European foods such as potato pancakes can be used with many entrees. I like to serve them with pan-seared scallops and a red pepper coulis.

Winter is also the perfect time of year for bread pudding with caramel sauce.

Exercise some creativity with your menu, but make them simple; it will help you enjoy Michigan winters.

A resident of Northville, Golden Mushroom Chef Michael Trombley is a Certified Executive Chef. Located on 10 Mile Road at Southfield Road in Southfield, the Golden Mushroom is one of Michigan's oldest fine dining restaurants.



Savory Chowder: Warm up with a bowl of Sweet Onion Fish Chowder.

Director of Produce and Floral Operations for Hiller's markets (in Broomfield, West Bloomfield, Walled Lake, Northville, Ann Arbor and Plymouth). "They have a thinner, lighter-color skin than storage onions and tend to be more fragile because they are so fresh." He also noted that since OSO Sweet Onions are a premium product, the regular price ranges from \$1.29 to \$1.69 per pound.

They can be used in any recipe calling for onions. Try them in savory, comfort foods such as chunky chowders. Among hot foods served in bowls, chowders, because they have great texture and flavor, are becoming the American "bowl food" of choice. The pleasant onion taste and crisp texture, similar to a celery stock or apple, make sweet onions the perfect chowder ingredient.

If you're counting calories, here's the skinny. One medium sweet onion weighing about 1/3 pound is the normal serving size. It contains 60 calories, but none from fat.

Storing sweet onions

Because sweet onions have both high water and sugar content, they require more care when storing. Under the proper conditions, they will keep from 4 to 6 weeks. Store them away from potatoes which will absorb water from the onions.

In a refrigerator, they can be stored in a single layer in the vegetable bin on paper towels. For longer storage, wrap them in foil. Another way is to

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One pot warmers chase chills away

MICHIGAN NAVY BEAN SOUP

Serves 12

2 pounds dry navy beans (soaked in chicken stock overnight. Use enough stock to cover beans)

- 1 ounce butter
 - 1 onion, sliced
 - 2 ribs celery, sliced
 - 2 carrots, sliced
 - 1 tablespoon crushed garlic
 - 1 teaspoon marjoram
 - 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
 - Pinch thyme
 - 1 bay leaf
 - 1 gallon ham stock
- Garnish:
- 1/2 pound ham, diced 1/3-inch
 - 3 carrots, sliced 1/3-inch
 - 2 onions, sliced 1/3-inch
 - 4 ribs of celery, sliced 1/3 inch
 - Salt to taste

Simmer beans in chicken stock until tender (about 60 minutes). Reserve 1/3 of beans for garnish.

In a large, heavy-gauge pot, sweat onions, celery and carrots in butter. Add herbs and garlic; allow to foam. Add ham stock; simmer 20 minutes. Strain ham stock into the beans and chicken stock and puree until smooth.

Place back on fire. Sauté garnish until vegetables are tender but not brown and add to soup. Let cook 10 minutes to develop flavor.

Taste and correct seasonings.

Editor's note: Look for ham soup base at your favorite market and mix for soup.

SPATZLE

- 4 jumbo or 5 small eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 cups flour (1/2 semolina, 1/2 all-purpose)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- pinch of nutmeg
- 1/3 cups chopped parsley

Please see CHILLS, B2