



A Question of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

Ah, Michigan! Enjoy its bounty

This past winter my husband and I — along with the rest of Michigan — gave serious consideration to moving to Houston. The primary motivation was, of course, economic. An additional lure, however, was weather. We would enjoy summer weather 12 months a year. Michigan winters would be only a bad memory.

Now that summer has arrived in Michigan, I'm not sure I could take 12 months of this either. There remains a lot to be said for that old saw about Michigan weather: If you don't like it, just wait — it will change in a moment. In the sweltering heat of July, the anticipation of winter becomes sweet.

A scene that keeps running through my mind is a late-night walk with my husband in the biting cold of mid-winter. Under street lamps the snow sparkles like diamonds. No matter how trite, it resembles nothing less and its beauty is breathtaking. The cold is so intense that the snow crusts underfoot with a squeaking noise. The cold envelops us, creating a sense of unreality and isolation that is comfortable when shared. Houston has nothing like this.

SUMMER HEAT saps strength while the cold invigorates and challenges. There is a sense of accomplishment in meeting the weather on its own terms.

People marvel that I run in the winter. Except for a few icy days, it is actually more conducive to running. Five minutes of exertion finds you warmer than is comfortable, even in frigid weather. Five minutes of similar exertion in heat finds you sick — hot, churning the stomach and taxing the heart. The fumes of Houston would be an unrelieved curse for a runner.

Its very briefness makes a Michigan summer a welcome respite. There is a desperate desire to embrace all the summer has to offer before it fades

into autumn. An especially sweet part of Michigan summer is its produce. Those of us who live in a large metropolitan area sometimes lose sight of the fact that Michigan is basically farm land. We have not only the rich soil but the abundant water supply so sorely lacking in other parts of the country.

MICHIGAN'S growing season may be relatively short, but the harvest is bounteous.

Home gardeners and visitors to local farmers' markets find themselves awash in fragrant red tomatoes, milky corn, sweet melons, tart cherries, and fat strawberries. Roadside stands are crowded with jewel-like fruits, Michigan summer's answer to winter's glittering snow and its soft gift to those who have endured its winter.

Our whole style of eating changes to accommodate the harvest. Melons appear on breakfast tables, corn is roasted at cook-outs, strawberry shortcake makes a peerless dessert, cherries appear in pies and are frozen in anticipation of the winter to come, cucumbers are pickled so that they, too, can preserve summer pleasures for the cold months ahead.

In the first flush of the harvest, it is enough to enjoy these fruits and vegetables unadorned. Nothing can improve on the taste of a tomato eaten out of hand, fresh from the garden and still warm from the sun. As the weeks go on, however, it can provide a welcome break to serve fresh produce in a new guise.

A NEW DISH can not only help us up a super-abundance of fresh produce but may stimulate heat-withered appetites.

The following recipes — one first course and one entree — make use of some of the best a Michigan summer

has to offer. The stuffed melon recipe alone took me about three years to try. I would mark it in my cookbook early in summer and pull the marker out what seemed weeks later — in mid-January. Although it was well worth waiting for, you won't want to wait that long.

Enjoy these recipes now while these foods are at their peak. A Michigan summer won't wait.

Both recipes are from "The Vegetarian Epicure Book Two" by Anna Thomas. The appeal of this book, along with its predecessor, "The Vegetarian Epicure," is not limited to vegetarians. Anyone who appreciates good food would enjoy both the superb recipes and the fascinating cultural and culinary commentaries which they contain. Either would make a splendid gift — even to yourself — to be used 12 months a year. Her whole approach is one worthy of Michigan's bounty.

FILLED CANTALOUPE SALAD
(Serve as a first course with thin, buttered slices of bread or crisp Cheese Pastries)

- 1 large cucumber
- 1 medium-sized avocado
- 2 cups sliced fresh strawberries
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 2 tsp. vegetable oil
- 4 tsp. sugar
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 2 medium-sized cantaloupes

Peel the cucumber, quarter it lengthwise, remove the seeds with a small spoon and discard, and slice the cucumber quarters thinly. Cut the avocado in half and remove the pit. Peel it and cut it in medium dice. Combine the cucumber, avocado, and strawberries in a bowl and sprinkle them with the lemon juice, oil, sugar, and salt. Toss gently until everything is evenly coated with the dressing and refrigerate for an

hour or so. Cut the cantaloupes in half crosswise with a zigzag pattern: Using a sharp, pointed knife, push the point of the knife into the center of the cantaloupe, making an angled cut slightly less than 1-inch long. Pull the knife out and make another cut next to it at about a 90-degree angle. Continue around the center of the cantaloupe this way, making the cuts as even as possible, until you come all the way around. Pull the two halves apart and scoop out the seeds.

Fill the cantaloupe halves with the marinated fruit-and-vegetable mixture and chill them briefly before serving. Serves 4.

CORN AND CHEESE PUDDING
Serves 4-6

- 2 eggs
- 3 tbsp. flour
- ½ cup cream
- 1 cup milk
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. white pepper
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 1½ cups fresh-scrapped corn (about 3 ears)
- 3 tbsp. butter, melted
- ¾ cup finely chopped California green chilis

Beat the eggs and flour together to make a smooth paste, then beat in the cream, milk, salt, pepper, and sugar. Add the corn, melted butter, grated cheese, and chopped chilis, and stir the mixture together thoroughly.

Pour the mixture into a buttered medium-sized casserole, and place the casserole in a pan or larger casserole which is about ¾ full of water. Bake the pudding for 50 to 55 minutes in a preheated oven at 350 degrees. It should be slightly puffed and golden on top. Serve hot.

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