

Her first Thanksgiving dinner A tale of panic, heroism and mints?

The writer of the following guest column is a Southfield resident. She has previously written for publications in Philadelphia. This is her first appearance in the Observer.
 By Michele Myers
 special writer
 So, you're in a Thanksgiving panic as I was last year.
 Sometime in July you thought,

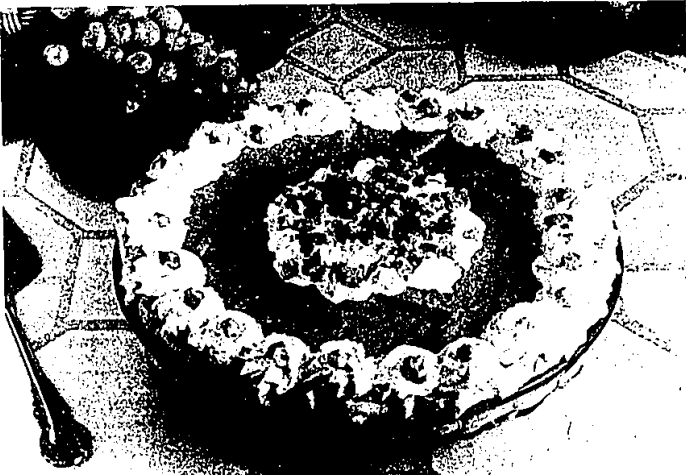
"We're moving into our first home next month. His mom always cooks the holiday meals. Why not cook Thanksgiving dinner for the family this year?" And before you have a chance to reconsider, you invite the whole crew. Your husband and his mom, enthusiastically agree and for a moment you bask in the glow of their approval.
 A few months go by. Occasionally you remember your promise but try not to dwell on it. Suddenly, it's Veterans Day and you are frantic. It does not help that your mother-in-law was just laid off and now has more time than you to prepare holiday dinners. It does not help that your mother-in-law used her time to send something to add to the meal: a set of ceramic, hand-painted turkey napkin rings which don't match the navy tablecloth you planned to use.
 As for your own mother, well, she gave up on you ever getting married

and moved to Florida a few years ago. The only thing your mother ever taught you to do in the kitchen was how to wash dishes. When you tell her you're cooking Thanksgiving dinner for your husband's family she wistfully says she wishes she could be there and then laughs herself silly.
 BY NOW YOU HAVE eaten half of those chocolate mint wafers you planned to offer after the meal. It just doesn't pay to buy holiday sweets far in advance.
 You assess your situation. You know how to cook just four good meals, only two of which your husband likes and none of which are turkey. You have never cooked a turkey, stuffing or sweet potatoes. You have never planned a meal for more than four people.
 You do know how to bake an apple pie but now your mother-in-law volunteers to handle the one food about which you could feel confident. And, at this point, you're too desperate to refuse any offer. Before the big day you try roasting a chicken and making stuffing. You shouldn't have bothered. Fighting with the chicken only makes you realize how much bigger the turkey will be. Also, that stuffing recipe your mom gave you — you know, the one that was always so delicious when she made it — turns out only blah for you.
 You don't panic. Calmly you ask the advice of a friend who has already handled several Thanksgiving dinners for her own. "I make stuffing using day-old bread. But it has to be just right or else it falls apart. You sort of have to judge yourself how much liquid to add — I learned from practice."
 OK, forget that. How about the sweet potatoes? "Oh, I never could get the sweet potatoes to come out right. I don't have a recipe. Try the frozen ones." Time for another chocolate mint.

SUDDENLY IT occurs to you that dinner isn't your only worry. Since your husband's family lives two and a half hours away, you must also prepare something for them to munch on when they arrive.
 Next comes what you think will be the easy part — going to the supermarket. You always assumed turkeys went on sale for Thanksgiving. Sure, but those pounds add up, and it's \$20 just for the bird. Worst yet, who knows if you've picked a good one.
 You don't just have to cook. You must have the proper surroundings. And remember, most of your husband's family haven't seen the house so you're

going to have to clean all the rooms for their grand tour. No junk room or closet stuffing this time. Have a chocolate mint. After all, you need strength to empty all those boxes you ignored after the trauma of moving.
 THANKSGIVING EVE approaches too quickly. In a last spurt of optimism, you figure you can get a good night's sleep, wake up early and finish all the remaining cooking and cleaning. That is, once you get the bird in the oven.
 All thoughts of single-handed heroics vanish when you actually face the turkey. Your husband is drafted into service and soon you are able to close the oven door in triumph. Only to discover that the real challenge in serving turkey is figuring out when it, and your company, will be simultaneously ready.
 Lacking ability in both math and ESP you look to the clock for an answer. Panic engulfs you. Math ability or not, you know there is no way everything will be done on time. You decide to settle for getting yourself dressed and tastefully arranging the fresh box of chocolate mint wafers.
 By the time the doorbell rings you've come up with a new plan. You resolve that all offers of assistance from guests

will be accepted. And, if there are no offers, you'll lure unsuspecting helpers into the kitchen. After that, whatever goes wrong with dinner can't be all your fault.
 Somehow, you survive. You survive your brother-in-law's girl friend who, in addition to studying for her master's degree in nutrition (quick, hide the chocolate mints), is a strict vegetarian.
 You survive baking a birthday cake from scratch for your favorite nephew. That confectionary sugar which covered everything within a two-foot radius of your mixer was just added incentive to clean the kitchen for company. You survive because of your one and only skill at entertaining. What ever goes wrong, you know to pretend that you planned it that way.
 Yet, some questions remain to haunt you after the last guest has gone. How can you ever serve turkey hot when it must be cooled before carving? How can you slice cranberry sauce without it falling into blobs? How can you stop your other sister-in-law from forcing her children to eat peas — since it means you'll find peas throughout your house for the next week? And, how can you stop your company from leaving just when you start to relax and enjoy yourself?



It may be well to wait awhile after dinner before serving this appetizing praline pumpkin mousse pie. Who would want to be too full to eat something as appealing-looking as this?

Spice up your dessert with praline pumpkin pie

Thanksgiving is a time for all the warm and wonderful traditions — family and friends and plump roasted turkey, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie! This year, start a new tradition with your family by serving Praline Pumpkin Mousse Pie.

1 tsp. ground cinnamon
 1/2 tsp. salt
 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
 4 egg whites
 1/4 tsp. cream of tartar
 Pinch of salt
 1/2 cup whipping cream, whipped
 Pecan Nut Topping (below)

Soften gelatin in praline liqueur; set aside.
 Heat pumpkin, egg yolks, brown sugar, sugar, butter, cinnamon, salt and cloves in saucepan over medium heat, stirring constantly, until slightly boiling and thickened. Remove from heat. Beat in gelatin mixture until gelatin is dissolved, about 1 minute. Cool.
 Beat egg whites, cream of tartar and salt until stiff peaks form. Fold beaten egg whites and whipped cream into pumpkin mixture. Pour into pie shell, mounding slightly in center. Chill 8 hours. Garnish with additional whipped cream and crushed Pecan Nut Topping.

PRALINE PUMPKIN MOUSSE PIE
 1 9-inch baked pie shell
 1 envelope Knox unflavored gelatin
 1/4 cup praline liqueur
 1 can (16 oz.) pumpkin
 4 egg yolks, slightly beaten
 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
 1/2 cup sugar
 1/2 cup butter or margarine, melted

PECAN NUT TOPPING
 1/2 cup sugar
 2 tbsp. water
 Pinch of cream of tartar
 1/2 cup pecans, coarsely chopped
 Butter, baking sheet.
 Heat sugar, water and cream of tartar in skillet over medium heat, stirring constantly, until color becomes light caramel. Stir in nuts.

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