

Hildens prefer informal

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A main meal party might consist of a big pot of beef stroganoff, served with noodles, a special blend and a huge salad bar. Dessert usually comes from the bakery because, "I'm not into baking," Hilden said.

OR HILDEN might set up a make-your-own sundae bar, offering ice cream and several toppings.

"If people are having a good time, nobody cares as much what they are eating," Hilden said.

Finger foods, too, are innovative. For example, Hilden likes to deep-fry thin strips of boneless chicken breast and serve it with several sauces for dipping. Or she serves small wedges of spinach pie, miniature quiches or mini reuben sandwiches.

Hilden also likes to stuff fresh mushroom caps with bread crumbs mixed with Parmesan cheese, garlic salt and onion salt. She tops off the stuffing with mozzarella cheese and bakes the mushrooms until the cheese is melted.

Mushrooms are taken in stride. They go into the emergency bank and provide laughs at a later time.

Once Hilden popped a turkey into the oven but forgot to turn on the heat. When she discovered her goof, she rushed the bird to a neighbor's microwave oven for a faster heatup.

Hilden said, "Too many people want everything to be perfect."

"Yes, I'm always nervous, to some degree," she added. "I think maybe it's more anticipation. The key is to

let the party take its own direction. And have a nice group of friends."

PARTIES HAVE given the Hildens many hours of pleasure. But equally important to Sue Hilden is the effect entertaining has had on her children, ages 18, 22 and 23 years. "They learned to relate to older people at an earlier age."

Although Hilden enjoys relaxing at other people's parties, she can't escape her hostess instincts. She often finds herself reaching out to help other guests feel comfortable.

"I wouldn't have as many parties if I didn't like my friends so much," Hilden said. "I feel sorry for people who can't enjoy themselves. They are too afraid to be themselves."

STUFFED MUSHROOMS

Recipe from Susan Hilden

24-28 fresh mushrooms (large)
8 slices bread
1/2 cup fresh grated parmesan cheese
1/2 teaspoon onion salt
1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
1/2 teaspoon parsley flakes
4 ounces grated mozzarella cheese
1 stick butter or margarine

Remove stems from mushrooms and discard. Wash mushrooms, caps thoroughly. Set aside. In medium saucepan melt butter on low. Add garlic salt, onion salt, parsley flakes

and parmesan cheese. Toast bread. Dice toasted bread and add to butter mixture. (Keep butter warm while adding toasted bread.) Remove from heat. Hold each mushroom over saucepan. Fill center with bread mixture. Pack firmly (slightly heaping). Place stuffed mushrooms in a 9x13-inch pan. Top each with mozzarella cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 12-15 minutes until hot and cheese is melted. Serve immediately.

FRIED CAULIFLOWER

Vegetable or side dish. May also be used as an hors d'oeuvre.

1 medium-size head cauliflower
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups bread crumbs
1/2 cup garlic salt
1/2 to 1/4 cup olive oil

Thoroughly wash the cauliflower and break into florets. Boil until done. Mix together bread crumbs and garlic salt. Drain and cool cauliflower. Dip into beaten egg. Roll into bread crumb mixture. Fry in olive oil on medium-high heat until brown, turning constantly, about 5 minutes. Drain on paper towel and serve immediately.

Katzes' parties formal

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"You eat with your eyes," she said. "There are always little tricks in cooking and it's the tricks that make the difference. How you cut things is as important as how you cook them."

FOR A RECENT Passover dinner, Katz planned a special entrée of baked chicken breast stuffed with mushrooms and unleavened matzoh.

With the chicken she served Idaho potatoes, which she peeled and sliced, three-quarters through, at an angle. The potatoes were seasoned with onion powder and garlic powder and paprika, rolled in olive oil and sprinkled with either sesame or cumin seeds. They were baked uncovered one hour at 350 to 375 degrees in a baking dish greased with olive oil.

"Don't slice it all the way

through," Katz said. "It fans out after it bakes and becomes brown and crispy."

Katz cooks her vegetables in bouillon until they are still slightly firm — al dente. For example, she might combine fresh green beans and toss them with angle-cut drained cooked carrots and sautéed mushrooms. The vegetables are glazed with sautéed margarine and topped with blanched almonds.

"I always try to come up with something that looks elegant," Katz said. "If it doesn't come out, I can camouflage it."

A favorite dessert is fresh pears, topped with margarine and cinnamon, then baked. She tops it with a sauce of hot fudge or fresh strawberries.

One of the most elaborate parties Katz planned was her daughter's

wedding last year. Katz used an oriental theme and transformed the reception hall into a Japanese pagoda, with special trees, flowers and lights.

ALTHOUGH KATZ did not cook for that large gathering, she worked very closely with the caterers. Katz also arranged to have oriental hostesses with authentic robes, hairstyle and makeup to carry through the theme.

An upcoming gala will be a "fantasy night" mystery trip that Katz promises will "freak out" her guests. She plans to have her party guests transported by bus to an undisclosed location.

"No one will know where they are going," Katz said. "They may wind up back here (at the Katz home) for a wonderfully unusual dessert."

cooking calendar

NUTRITION PROGRAM

Joan Kaye Klun and L.E. Smith, authors of the cookbook "Menu for Life," will present a program on nutrition and the effects of cholesterol at 6 p.m. Sunday, May 7, at Borders Book Shop in the Novi Town Center

off Novi Road, just south of I-96. Participants will be able to taste some of the dishes from the book and ask questions about nutrition and cholesterol. The program is free, but registration is required; call 947-0780 before Monday, May 1, to register.

SANDERS TOURS

Free tours of the Sanders Plant in Highland Park are conducted by appointment Tuesdays-Thursdays. Call 868-5700 for more information. The tour provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse of candy making.

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