

taste buds chef Larry Janos

A treat so sweet is corn

Mention summertime cooking and immediately, you conjure up thoughts about corn. Fluffy, juicy sweet corn, dripping with butter. Whether it be steamed, boiled or grilled, you just can't enjoy summer without corn.

Corn is indigenous to America. When it comes to culinary heritage, corn belongs right up there next to Old Glory. During the 13th century in the southwestern United States and in Mexico, corn or maize meant life itself, and the cultivation of corn was an act of worship. From birth through death, the economic, social and religious activities of the Hopi Indians of Arizona were bound to the growing of corn. No child could be born with security and survive the first 20 hazardous days of life without corn. For this reason, a special ear of corn was dedicated to each newborn baby as his "corn mother."

No one in Europe knew about corn until Columbus sailed to America in 1492. On Nov. 5, 1492, two Spaniards whom Columbus dispatched to explore the interior of Cuba returned with a report of "a sort of grain called maize, which is very well tasted when boiled, roasted, or made into a porridge."

Later explorers to the New World found corn being grown by the Indians in all parts of America, from Canada to Chile. The Indians grew all the major types of corn that are raised today. They prized corn with colorful kernels — red, blue, pink and black — with bands, stripes or spots. The kernels ranged in size from as small as a grain of wheat to as large as a quarter.

THE INDIANS frequently used corn patterns to decorate pottery, sculpture and other works of art.

The colonists used corn as money. With it, they paid their rent, taxes and debts. They even traded corn for marriage licenses. In many settlements, corn kept people from starving in difficult times.

Although corn is grown throughout the United States, the greatest production is an area of the Midwest called the corn belt, consisting of the seven states of Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Ohio. This year, almost five billion bushels will be grown in this area alone.

If this sounds like more corn than one could handle, figure that of the 84 assorted supermarket items that go into most grocery carts, more than a quarter contain one or more ingredients from the corn processing industry. Not to mention the corn-derived feed ingredients that are so important to our animal economy. Add to that the fact that many industrial products ranging from cast metals to automobile tires depend on the use of specially designed cornstarches.

The James Gang alone is a frequent user of corn and its products. A week doesn't slide by without utilizing cornmeal, canned or frozen corn, corn syrup, corn flakes, cornstarch or corn oil in our culinary regime. In addition, corn is used as the major fermenting ingredient when processing whiskey.

With summer winding down and corn prices dwindling as local markets reap locally grown products, you will be seeing corn soon at the typical dollar-per-dozen price. It would behoove the price-watching cook to take advantage of this pricing boom and to put some up, whether it be canned or frozen, to enjoy throughout the coming winter months.

Don't forget to use the husks and cobs in the compost heap.

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HOT vegetables

Sizzling side dishes for meals from grill

By Larry Janos
special writer

ALL TOGETHER now, "Summertime — and the livin' is easy. Summertime, and the grillin' is fun!"

If you can't remember that one, how about "Roll out those, lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer. Those days of soda and pretzels and beer."

Who in their right mind would enjoy spending a humid summer afternoon or evening slaving over a hot stove, cooking entrees and vegetables? Especially when the grill is hot and the coals are just beginning to turn from an amber-colored red to a molten white.

If the thought of cooking hot dogs, burgers, fish or whatever on the grill for dinner seems like a cooling alternative, why not toss on a few of summer's great bounty of vegetables and really keep the kitchen cool. It's not as difficult as you might think, and the flavors imparted into grilled vegetables can turn a plain old zucchini into a gourmet vegetable delight. Or, for that matter, corn, onions, peppers, eggplant or potatoes.

COOKING VEGETABLES on the grill requires the backyard barbecue enthusiast to have on hand an ample supply of cool water.

Period. The garden hose will do nicely, as would a sprinkler for those times when the beads of a good summer sweat roll down the back and begin saturating a T-shirt. A clean spray bottle filled with H₂O, or maybe a blend of your favorite vinegar and oil combination, will only increase the amount of raves received by those partaking of the meal.

In order to garner raves, simple kitchen logic must prevail. If those wily zucchinis have grown to gargantuan lengths, rule numero uno requires the backyard chef to slice or cube said vegetables into the same size and thickness. This will keep little Bobby's vegetables just as crisp and thoroughly cooked as little Annie's.

After a short soaking to help keep them moist over the intense heat, you can add vegetables directly on the grids or, if steaming is more in your line, a simple wrap in foil will suffice.

One of the James Gang summer vegetable favorites is baked onions, which are first poached, then dotted with butter and sprinkled with a twist of fresh ground pepper. They are then wrapped in foil and added to the grill, about 25 minutes before the entree is served.

Smaller yellow cooking onions work best, especially for such a short cooking time. Larger onions (especially Vidalias) can be done the same way but for a longer cooking period. How

can you tell when the vegetables are done? Simply pierce them with a long-handled barbecue fork, and when they are tender and the fork inserts and pulls out easily, dinner is served.

IF YOU ARE planning on grilling smaller or cubed vegetables, skewer them first, on just about any kind of bamboo or metal skewer. To keep veggies from sliding off the skewer while grilling, your truly utilizes two skewers set side by side like railroad ties.

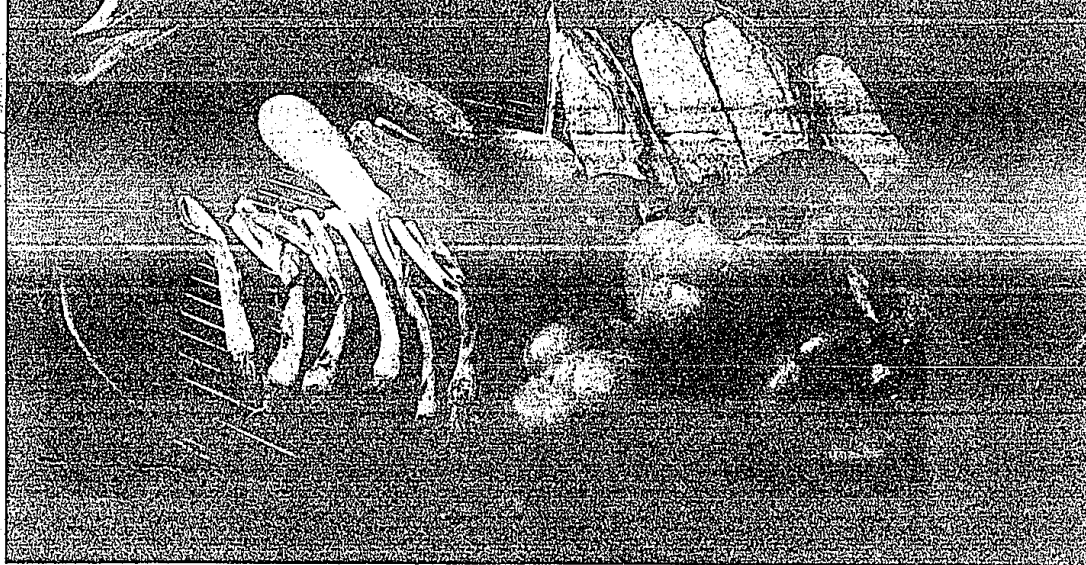
When the vegetables are impaled, even the most slippery mushrooms will stay intact during the grilling process. You can try this with just about any cubed vegetable, but experience has shown that mushrooms, peapods, zucchini and eggplant slices work best.

For added-dimensional flavors, baste with a wide assortment of herb butters or margarines. If you're trying to keep on the slim side, a generous splash of wine, lemon juice, broth or bouillon can suffice.

If the thought of cooking vegetables on the barbecue has piqued your interest, you also can soak assorted vegetables in a marinade before grilling. Again, the old standby vinaigrette can be used, but for an intense flavor that will cook through a simple blend of olive oil, sesame oil and a generous splash of lemon juice works nicely.

Never underestimate what the flavor of a few fresh herbs does to an outdoor vegetable-grilling session. Wrapping zucchini in a large sprig of fresh basil or a sliver of dill can do wonders for the ordinary. Contrary to popular belief, adding fresh herbs to the hot coals does

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Healthy appetites at Italian Cucina

Tim Coyne loves healthy food — and it shows in the entrees at the Italian Cucina (Kitchen) restaurant.

There's no microwave in the kitchen. No deep-fried foods. No heavy sauces. Only olive oil for sautéing and salad dressings.

"I'm concerned about good, clean eating," says the graduate of School-

craft College's culinary arts program who has worked in several area restaurants.

In December, he and his wife, Libby Eaton, opened their Italian kitchen in a modern, new building on Ann Arbor Trail, just east of I-275, in Plymouth Township. It has been serving healthy foods ever since.



Tim Coyne, executive chef and part owner of Italian Cucina in Plymouth Township, shows salad with radicchio, calamari, artichokes and pasta (left) and chicken stir fry with pea pods and wontons

LIKE THE chargrilled salmon (\$13.50) covered with toasted almonds and raspberries, one of the special seafoods offered recently. The fruit was a refreshing alternative to sauces, and it added an interesting, sweet flavor to the salmon. It was served with delicious tortellini with a light coating of tomato sauce and a mixture of crisp, lightly cooked pea pods and zucchini.

Everything is prepared on site, from the pastas and breads, to the sauces, sausages and desserts. The breadsticks, which are more like rectangles of deliciously fresh bread, are reason enough to stop in. The pastas are reason to keep returning. We found the pasta fresh and cooked to perfection, the sauce delicate and light. The baked pasta shells (\$9.25) stuffed with ricotta and mozzarella cheese were delicious.

The veal scallopini, sautéed with wild forest mushrooms and artichoke hearts, sounded wonderful. We expected allivers of veal and a touch of the Marsala wine sauce. Instead, the veal was a thicker cut, a little tough and smothered in sauce. The heavy hand with the sauce left the veal and redskins tasting like wine too. At \$14.95, this was the most expensive item on the menu — and disappointing.



All the main entrees come with a great house salad, made of various greens, olives, peppers, onions, mushrooms and sprouts, lightly coated with a good Italian dressing. You could easily make a meal of the award-winning minestrone soup, a house salad and the breadsticks.

The desserts are good, but not as special as the breadsticks and pasta. The carrot cake was tasty but lacking in texture. The chocolate flan was very good and topped with blueberries and raspberries that almost

melted in your mouth.

IF FAMILIES and Sunday dinners are synonymous to you — or even if they aren't — try the seven-course family-style dinner. That's all that is offered Sundays, but the entrees vary enough each week to keep you coming. You can count on delicious bread, salad, a chicken entree, a beef or pork entree, potatoes and vegetables. Cost: \$9.95 for adults and \$4.95 for children age 10 or younger.

The restaurant is large — it presently seats 200 in two rooms, though one room will become a small cafe in September, where guests can go after their main meal for coffee, dessert, after-dinner drinks and a little piano music. The main dining room is sectioned off by lattice-covered planters, making the room (even smaller despite its cathedral ceilings).

Details: The Italian Cucina, 35500 Ann Arbor Trail, Plymouth, 426-1444.

Hours: Lunch, Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Dinner, Tuesday-Thursday, 4-10 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 4-11 p.m.; Sunday noon to 8 p.m. Carryout available.

Prices: Lunch, \$4.25-\$8.95; Dinner, \$8.25-\$14.25. Value: Very good, particularly for pasta dishes.