

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Forget calories for now

Have you ever started your holiday baking and ended up eating more than you give?

If pre-holiday dieting has control of your destiny, be forewarned. This column is not for the weak-willed. As a matter of fact, it's guaranteed to add a few pounds to both the maker and the recipient.

I'll be the first to admit that when I make cookies, the need to sample each batch has been written in stone. Never mind the cookies. Here's a holiday primer on the things to make in your kitchen that are loaded with sugar, chocolate and all those other things diet mavens have warned us about. I'm talking about popcorn balls, turtles, truffles, sugared nuts and mouth-watering holiday mints that have us joining diet groups and health clubs for our New Year's resolutions. Just about anyone can make cookies but it takes a strong-willed culinary aficionado with a cupboard filled with candy thermometers, marble slabs and asbestos fingertips to make succulent holiday treats. It also takes a guiltless conscience and a certain amount of willpower to put out bowls of popcorn balls, trays of truffles and finger-lickin' good batches of fudge without first having it go literally to your waist, thighs, hips and chin.

WHEN IT COMES to equipment, you can purchase anything and everything at most local gourmet shops and houseware departments in major stores. But is a \$10 candy thermometer really necessary to turn out a \$6 batch of holiday candy? Can you justify its purchase when you know it will be used for only 20 minutes out of the year?

Momma explained the difference between a hardball candy stage and a softball stage by showing how the boiling sugar felt when dropped into ice water. If it sank immediately taking no known structure, it wasn't boiled long enough. If it felt "soft" and squishy in the ice water, it was considered to be in its softball stage (approximately 235 degrees). If it landed in the water and immediately turned into teeth-crunching hardness, it was in its hardball stage (approximately 300 degrees).

Unfortunately, for too many of us novice candy makers, an additional 30 seconds on the stove was all it took to transform something sweet and gooey into a rock-solid ball of hard candy. To answer the above question, yes. Rely on a candy thermometer for optimum results.

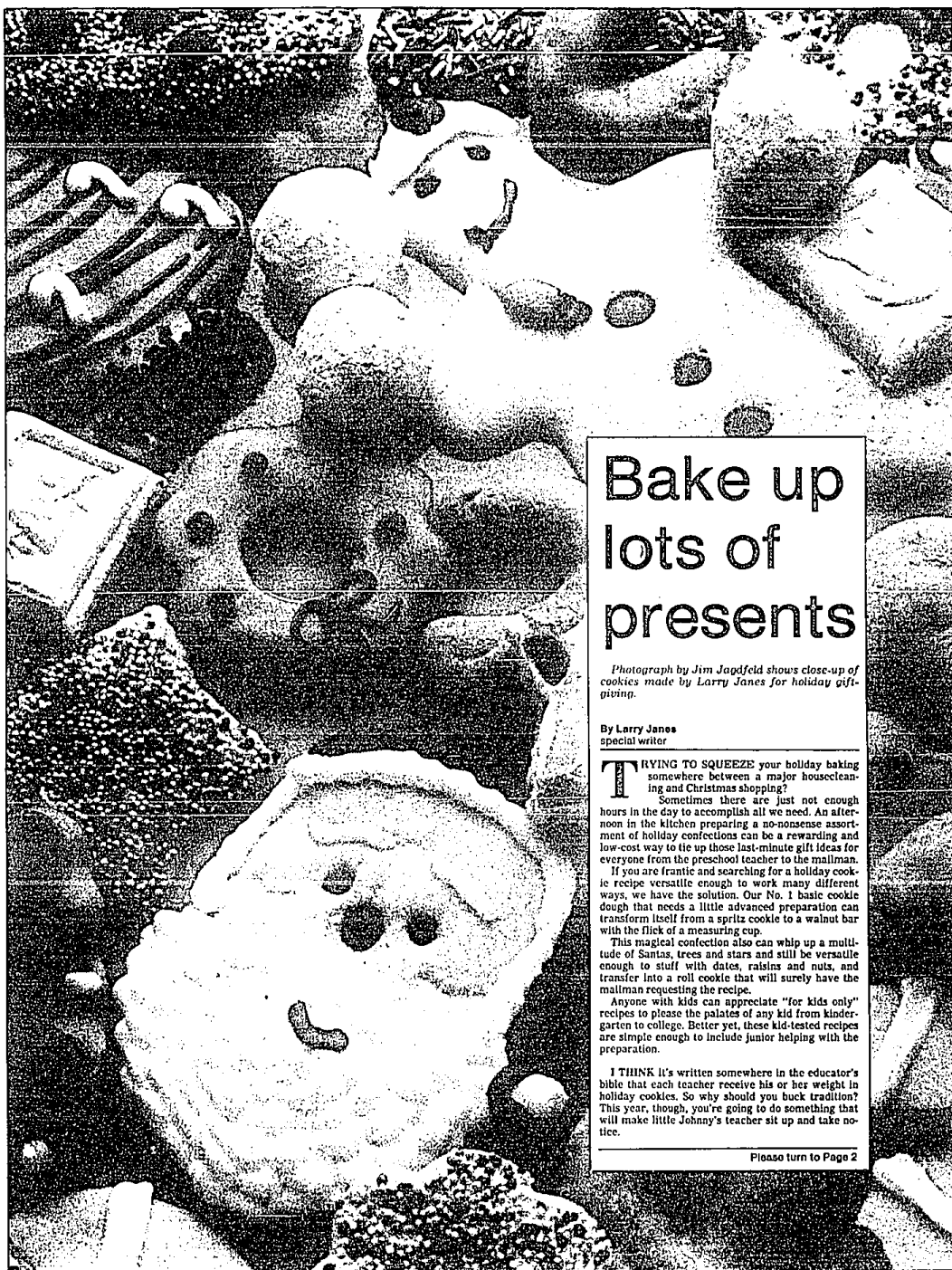
Even more important when preparing holiday candies, however, is the need to use long-handled wooden spoons that don't reek of garlic from last night's stir fry and, more importantly, to have measuring cups and spoons. Always use cookware that is at least four times the volume of the ingredients or a 3-quart capacity for each 1½ pounds of candy being made.

ANYONE WHO has ever made stovetop candy can attest to this reasoning, especially after the first pot boils over and you spend the remainder of the holidays scraping caramelized sugar from the reflector pans and stovetops.

Candymaking in the home kitchen is an art with its secrets lying in following the recipe closely, using the correct equipment, measuring carefully and accurately and making accurate tests for the "doneness" of holiday candies. No "fingertests" or "handfuls" are allowed.

Take it from a pro, if you're interested in pursuing the recipes provided for the best holiday candies, turn the kids out for a few hours, turn on the answering machine and get ready to do nothing more than make candy.

You won't be disappointed in the results, but then again, your stick-skinny friends and relatives who are concerned about their avoirdupois might be. Bon Appetit!



Bake up lots of presents

Photograph by Jim Japfeld shows close-up of cookies made by Larry Janes for holiday gift-giving.

By Larry Janes
special writer

TRYING TO SQUEEZE your holiday baking somewhere between a major housecleaning and Christmas shopping?

Sometimes there are just not enough hours in the day to accomplish all we need. An afternoon in the kitchen preparing a no-nonsense assortment of holiday confections can be a rewarding and low-cost way to tie up those last-minute gift ideas for everyone from the preschool teacher to the mailman.

If you are frantic and searching for a holiday cookie recipe versatile enough to work many different ways, we have the solution. Our No. 1 basic cookie dough that needs a little advanced preparation can transform itself from a spritz cookie to a walnut bar with the flick of a measuring cup.

This magical confection also can whip up a multitude of Santas, trees and stars and still be versatile enough to stuff with dates, raisins and nuts, and transfer into a roll cookie that will surely have the mailman requesting the recipe.

Anyone with kids can appreciate "for kids only" recipes to please the palates of any kid from kindergarten to college. Better yet, these kid-tested recipes are simple enough to include junior helping with the preparation.

I THINK it's written somewhere in the educator's bible that each teacher receive his or her weight in holiday cookies. So why should you buck tradition? This year, though, you're going to do something that will make little Johnny's teacher sit up and take notice.

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Homemade baby foods provide fresh start

By Arlene Funke
staff writer

Fresh Start Foods are packed with love — not preservatives — and delivered to the homes of hungry babies.

Kyle Sipple, a 32-year-old Birmingham native, launched Fresh Start Foods to sell fresh-frozen baby foods without salt, sugar or preservatives. She delivers her products to her customers' homes at the same cost as supermarket baby food.

"A lot of people are looking for this kind of food," said Sipple, a 1975 graduate of Detroit Country Day High School.

The seeds for her company were planted some 15 months ago, when she gave birth to her daughter, Claire. Sipple had spent the last several years working as a television producer-director in several cities, most recently Grand Rapids.

and quality, she began making baby food in her home blender. "I was concerned about nutrition and taste," she said. Sipple explained she had been picking fruits and vegetables at the Eastern Market. Friends began asking her to make baby food for them because they wanted the kinds of food Claire was eating.

Sipple, now living in Dearborn, became convinced there was a market for additive-free baby foods. She and many of her friends were concerned about pesticides, particularly Alar.

"It was what I wanted and what my friends wanted," she said. "I felt there must be other people who feel the same way."

Fresh Start Foods has been in operation for about six months, and Sipple has been making deliveries since September. She has consulted with nutritionists and home economists. She has read books and baby manuals to obtain information about food preparation.

Sipple had hoped to sell her prod-

ucts through supermarket freezers. But she scrapped the plan because of requirements for prolonging the shelf life of the baby foods. "Home delivery isn't a convenient system for me," she said. "The way I'm doing it now I can be pretty sure it will be used quickly."

An admittedly fussy one-woman operation, she personally cooks, packages and delivers each food order in her Westland preparation facility.

IF SHE IS fixing applesauce, Sipple peels, steams-cooks and mashes the fruit in small batches so she won't have to add lemon juice to keep the mixture from turning brown before it can be packaged. No salt, sugar or preservatives — even lemon juice — are added.

Sipple also demands that her supplier show affidavits indicating the apples are Alar-free.



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

At kitchen space she uses in Westland, Kyle Sipple prepares vegetables for Fresh Start baby foods.

CONCERNED ABOUT freshness

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