

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Nonedible goodies deck halls

'Tis the season for just about every kind of food.

Momma has started the semi-weekly brushing of her famed holiday fruitcakes with a clean cotton dish towel dipped in rum.

MaryLea, my twin sister, has had to remake her holiday cookies three times because the tin mysteriously ends up half empty during a midweek checking.

The gingerbread that filled the kitchen with holiday smells has been cut and is now "drying" for use in the Janes gang annual gingerbread house.

THE HOLIDAYS around my house always have the refrigerator, cupboards and cookie jars brimming with waist-expanding goodies.

But isn't it nice to know that there are recipes for non-edible holiday goodies?

These traditional recipes have the ability to transform plain flour, water and salt into a plethora of ornaments, table decorations and culinary gifts.

DID YOU ever make snowflake clay when you were a kid? It shimmers and shines and easily transforms basic kitchen cupboard ingredients into holiday treasures that will last for years.

Last year, the Janes gang got together to make non-edible holiday gifts, and ended up with a mini zoo full of dinosaurs, merry Santas and wreaths that will again find their way to the family tree after being safely packed away with the other ornaments.

We even have a door wreath bedecked in green flowers that unfortunately never made the ornament box because it fell and broke into smithereens while exiting with the Christmas tree.

Were we crushed? Hardly. We just spent the last 11 months occasionally dreaming of how to make this year's even more beautiful.

IF YOU'RE thinking that this process involves the purchase of \$16 worth of colored play-dough, think again.

Many "Taste Buds" readers remember when yours truly owned and operated a gourmet shop in beautiful downtown Plymouth.

Loretta Mirro, home economist and now president of Intro-Marketing in Birmingham, would now class members during the holidays with her non-edible holiday decor creations using simple flour, cornstarch and salt.

IT WASN'T until a trek to the archived file cabinet in the basement that I once again discovered these treasured recipes that will surely bring a smile to avoid foodies who enjoy "playing" in the kitchen.

And that's exactly what these recipes are for — playing.

After the measuring, there is little to do except spend an afternoon or evening creating holiday treasures that will keep even a 4-year-old busy for at least a couple of hours.

AND, THE best part about it, you're left with lasting creations and cutesy gifts that have that look, touch and feel of something made from the heart as well as the hands.

A simple prink of a fork line and your creation can be an ornament.

Add a paper clip or ornament hanger or just a swatch of red ribbon and watch the smiles emerge. The recipient will hardly be able to wait to hang it on a Christmas tree.

So, if you find yourself with just a little holiday baking flour left over and want to enthrall the likes of any participant from 8 to 80, simply follow the directions and behold!

BAKERS CLAY

4 cups sifted flour
1 cup salt
1 1/2 cups water
Combine flour and salt together, add water until a soft dough forms. Shape the dough into free-form shapes and place gently on kitchen parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake at 225 degrees for 1 1/2-2 hours or until firm and dry. Creations can then be painted with food coloring, if desired.



(Left) Chef Elwin Greenwald shows how to make some different Hanukkah latkes, in classroom at Kitchen Glamour. He says its the method, not the specific ingredients, that provides "Yiddish Taam" (good Jewish taste). (Below) Carrots go into Carrot-Corn Latkes.

A twist on tradition

Variations of Hanukkah latkes

By Anne R. Lehmann
special writer

ABOUT 50 men and women recently assembled at Kitchen Glamour in West Bloomfield to learn new ways of making an old traditional favorite — Hanukkah latkes.

The teacher, Elwin Greenwald, former chef at Van Dyke Place and currently chef-proprietor of Elwin's Tu-Go, is a back-to-basics guy who believes that there are as many recipes for latkes as there are people who ask, "Tradition with a twist" is how this 32-year-old describes the recipes he has devised to help celebrate the Jewish holiday.

Hanukkah commemorates the victory of a small band of Jews over its religious oppressors. Wanting to recede the Holy Temple which had become the site for pagan rituals and cultic rites by its enemies, the group needed untainted oil to light the Temple's Menorah (a holy candelabra). A single untouched jar of oil was found, enough to last a day, but miraculously the Menorah remained aglow for eight days, the time needed to properly prepare more pure oil to keep the Menorah kindled. It is for this reason that foods fried in oil are a mainstay during this eight-day holiday.

THE KEY TO a latke with "Yiddish Taam" (good Jewish taste), according to Greenwald, is method. "You can use virtually any combination of ingredi-

ents if you use proper cooking technique," he says.

Greenwald became interested in the fine art of cooking 10 years ago while working as the advertising director for Meyers Jewelry. Jimmy Schmidt suggested Greenwald train with Madeline Kamman in France, which he did for a year, and returned to Detroit to work at Van Dyke Place as executive chef. Four months ago he opened the doors to Elwin's Tu-Go, a casual walk-in eatery in Royal Oak which secures as a catering business. Now that he has his own place, this upbeat, high-energy and friendly chef is always experimenting and developing new food sensations.

Potato, matzo meal and egg are basic to his latke recipes, which include potato, mushroom, leek and carrot-corn, and offer a variety of colors, textures and tastes. For example, his carrot corn, or what he calls his Tex-Mex, latkes are great for a mixed crowd with Christmas-minded individuals, who will appreciate the red and green peppers coloring the latkes.

He prefers to leave all vegetables unpeeled. "Besides peeling away the vitamins," he says, "you eliminate color and texture." A good scrubbing with a soft brush is more than adequate to remove dirt and debris.

Greenwald favors hand grating his vegetables for the sake of uniformity. "When you hand grate, you have 100 percent control," he says. Whether a hash-brown or pudding-like latke is what you're after, the bottom line is in the coarseness of the grating.

STILL, GREENWALD acknowledges the virtues of a food processor when cooking for a large crowd, something he, as caterer, does often. He recommends using the pulse function, again in order to produce grated vegetables which are identical in size.

As for preparing latkes for a large crowd, Greenwald has several recommendations, including grating the potato and the onion last. By grating the potato close to frying time, discoloration is kept to a minimum and by grating the onion at the end, the vegetable's high liquid content serves as a wash between batches.

After frying and draining these savory morsels, Greenwald suggests layering them in baking pans lined with paper toweling and keeping them heated at 225 degrees for up to two hours.

"When I fry my latkes," he explains, "I sear them in hot oil, peanut oil preferably, on both sides, drain them on toweling and then put them on lined baking pans."

In this way they are partially cooked, crispy outside, and the remaining cooking time is spent in the oven. When dinner is served you have hot, well-cooked crispy latkes.

WITH THE GUESTS arriving and the smell of warming latkes in the oven, what does one serve besides the usual applesauce or sour cream on the side? How about a Sour Cream Chive or Horseradish Mustard Topping? And if latkes as a main or side dish aren't



what you had in mind, what about latkes for dessert? Cherry Walnut, Spiced Sweet Potato Raisin or Ricotta Orange Latkes, with side dipping sauces of Grand Marnier Applesauce or Cranberry and Pineapple, are a few more of Greenwald's creations.

The possibilities are endless. All you need is imagination, a grater and, of course, a good appetite.

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No match for original



Thirteen years ago, Trini & Carmen's cantina in Pontiac was hit with the restaurant equivalent of a neutron bomb: as the result of a faulty canning process, its famous home-produced hot sauce gave a few of its customers — oh, say, 59 — a dose of botulism.

That upsetting run of bad luck might have closed a normal restaurant forever. Not Trini & Carmen's. Thanks to an immensely loyal following, Trini & Carmen's closed for a few days and then picked up where it had left off, as a landmark on Woodward Avenue.

The restaurant changed its name to La Familia Martinez, but to its many, many fans that harmless coverup was unnecessary. The restaurant was always known as Trini & Carmen's.

The original Pontiac bar has been lost to progress, wiped out by the expansion of the adjacent St. Joseph's Hospital, forcing the Martinez family to move south to a new home in Clawson.

Unfortunately, it appears that a little more loyalty is going to be required from the Trini & Carmen's faithful, which includes us. On several recent visits, the Clawson reincarnation of Trini & Carmen's has been uneven.

THE NACHOS are still outstanding, but we found other entrees borderline — and even burned. The chicken enchiladas that we remember as stuffed with chicken and topped with plenty of melted cheese must have been microwaved — and a bit too

long at that. The cheese was singed, ruining a sad entree.

We can't say much more for the flautas, which were too crusty, had too little beef (especially when we had ordered chicken) and were blandly seasoned.

The enchiladas, on the other hand, were at least interesting. This entree features chorizo and beans baked in a tortilla and topped with cheese and black olives. The taste was strong — and a little strange, almost chocolatey. Still, with fewer beans and more sausage, we would give it another try.

The menu isn't extensive. It never has been. And it's the same for lunch as for dinner. A few specials are added weekly. We loved the black bean soup featured recently. The seasoning was about medium strength and cooled a bit with a dollop of guacamole.

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Joe Martinez of Trini & Carmen's with Mexican dishes including Chili Rellenos, Fiesta Sampler and Mexican Lasagna.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer