

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Saffron precious as gold

Good King Midas would have loved saffron: Everything this spice touches turns to gold. Rusty-bud when dried, saffron pours fourth brilliant yellow dye when mixed with liquids and sauces. The tint-color of the saffron bud is so intense that one cup of the magical buds could vividly color 10,000 gallons of water.

SAFFRON IS neither an herb nor a spice, but a hybrid "herb-spice" which comes from the stamen or stigma of the *Crocus sativus*, cultivated principally in Spain. The spice (if I may so blatantly call it) has a distinctive and elusive flavor.

It is filling that saffron imparts such a dramatic color of gold, since the spice is almost as precious as the glittering metal. In the U.S., pure saffron threads sell for about \$1,500 a pound. Not willing to cash in the family jewels just yet, I guess I should be pleased that anyone can buy the pungent spice for about \$4 to \$5 a gram. That's per GRAM, about enough to flavor and color four main courses. (At that price, I will keep my experimentation to a minimum.)

WHY THE Tiffany price you ask? To get at the tiny strands, workers must harvest the *Crocus* by hand, plucking an astounding 75,000 blossoms to produce a single pound of dried saffron filaments.

There are substitutes: turmeric, for example, but beware as Middle Age spice merchants who "extended" their saffron with Marigold petals paid for the deception with their lives. There is no substitute.

The coloring properties of saffron have long been appreciated by many. Hindu monks used the seasoning to dye their robes and wealthy Romans crumbled it into their baths for what began the tanning process to healthier looking skin.

But color is only half of the saffron story.

The spice has a somewhat bittersweet flavor, and an inclusive aroma that makes it an exciting addition to cooked foods. Saffron lends personality to rice without overpowering it. It is used widely around the world.

THE FRENCH use it in their *Bouillabaisse*, the cooks of Spain make an unbelievable *paella*. India's curry devotees add a tiny amount to their curry powder to intertwine all the delicate flavors.

Sweeds use the spice to mark Santa Lucia Day with their remarkable saffron buns. The Portuguese use it frequently with their fish dishes.

Mama of Wyandotte used it to make a flavorful chicken and rice casserole found in many Mexican kitchens called *Arroz Con Pollo*.

The very best saffron hails from Spain; however, you might find some domestic saffron threads at a much more deflated price here or there. Buyers, beware.

There is no substitute for the authentic Spanish variety. When buying, buy only the strands of Saffron. The powdered variety might have been on the shelf too long and lost a great deal of its potency.

Saffron is available locally at gourmet and natural food stores. If you are thinking of waiting until the first day of spring and the opportunity to harvest a *Crocus* stigma yourself, forget it.

The peculiar combination of sun, soil and climate gives saffron from Spain its unique pungency that can never be copied here.

Need a holiday gift for a friend who enjoys gourmet cooking? Purchase a gram of saffron and clip your favorite saffron recipe with a few of the harder to find ingredients. Who knows, maybe you'll be invited over for the taste treat.

See recipes inside.



By Keely Wygonik
staff writer

YOU DON'T have to dig too deep to find a good source of vitamin A. Give three cheers for the team — beet greens, carrots, sweet potatoes, and turnip greens — they're vegetables certainly worth rooting for.

"Studies have shown that food containing vitamin A may lower the risk of cancers of the larynx, esophagus, lung and bladder," said Monalee Prange, director of public education for American Cancer Society, Wayne County.

MOM WAS right. Carrots are good for your eyes. They're an excellent source of vitamin A, which aids in the ability to see, especially in dim light.

"Vitamin A also promotes tooth and bone development and assists in the formation and maintenance of healthy skin, hair and builds resistance to respiratory infections," said Linda Millard, a registered dietitian at St. Mary Hospital in Livonia.

"The vegetables highest in vitamin A are the darkest green or

darkest yellow — like carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach and broccoli," said Lois Thieleke, home economist for the Michigan Cooperative Extension Service, Oakland County. "They contain beta-carotene, a compound that converts to vitamin A in the body."

A carrot a day will give you all the vitamin A your body needs, said Millard. One whole fresh carrot contains 1,025 RE (retinol equivalent, a measure of vitamin A activity), the amount of retinol that vitamin A will yield after conversion in the body. One medium carrot contains 31 to 40 calories. The Recommended Dietary Allowance is 1,000 RE for adult men and 800 RE for adult women.

When selecting carrots, look for those that are firm and clean, with a smooth texture and good color. Deep orange carrots contain more vitamin A than paler ones. If they become wilted, they can be crisped in cold water.

Vegetables — to —

ROOT

— for —

Vitamin A rich
veggies keep
you fit

tough. Avoid heavy stems and yellowed leaves.

WRAP THE greens in damp towels, then a plastic bag and keep in the vegetable crisper or bottom of the refrigerator. Or freeze them by blanching a few minutes in boiling water. Cool well in ice water, drain, then chop and pack into freezer containers. Freeze for about six months. Turnip greens are low in calories, with only 30 per cup, cooked. Besides vitamin A, one cup cooked contains 792 RE. Turnip greens are a very good source of vitamin C and contribute small amounts of calcium, iron and riboflavin.

Treat harder to find beet greens gently. They too are high in vitamins A and C. One cup cooked contains about 734 RE vitamin A. Beet greens contain about 25 calories per one cup serving.

The American Cancer Society has a number of free pamphlets on eating smart and cancer prevention. For information, call 425-6830, or 1-800-4-CANCER.

See RECIPES inside.

Dinner perfect for busy schedules

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While watching the news last week I was practically prostrated by an acute anxiety attack when the announcer mentioned there were only 75 shopping days left before Christmas.

As each day passes, the number is, of course, reduced, and like it or not, and ready or not, the lights, festivities and pressure of the season are about to be turned on.

NOW, BEFORE you start to hyperventilate, read on as this week's Winner Dinner Winner, Lisa Fieselmann Gleeson, is co-chairing an event that will help you get a head start on your holiday shopping.

The 21st annual Kingswood Giftorama will take place Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 9-10 at Kingswood School Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills.

Featuring over 40 retail merchants from around the country, you will be able to find something for everyone on your shopping list.

The proceeds from this popular event takes a full year to plan, and the help of over 300 volunteers, restoration and renovation projects, and faculty enrichment.

This the third, and last year that Gleeson will be chairing this event, put on annually by the Kingswood Alumnae Association of which she is past president.

GLEESON AND her husband Kevin are the happy and doting parents of their newly adopted son,



JIM RIDER/staff photographer

Lisa Gleeson serves Provincial Beef Stew on days when she doesn't have time to cook. This hearty stew can be made ahead and frozen for a future dinner.

Brendan. Upon the welcomed arrival of a new baby, Gleeson quit her job as vice president of a sales and marketing for a small computer company and is now enjoying being home.

She recently submitted a menu for a dinner that is a family favorite, and one that she often makes ahead and freezes, pulling it out on nights that she doesn't have time to cook.

Featuring recipes for Provincial Beef Stew served on a bed of egg noodles, a tossed green salad, served with your choice of dressing, crusty French bread or rolls, and Strawberry Orange Ice, this is a delicious meal that will save you on those upcoming days when you've

been everywhere except the kitchen. Thank you, Lisa Gleeson, for sharing your recipes with us, and congratulations on being selected this week's Winner Dinner Winner.

If you have a favorite low-cal, low fat, or ethnic meal, I encourage you to please send recipes my way.

Submit your recipes to be considered for publication in this column or elsewhere, to: Winner Dinner Winner, P.O. Box 3503 Birmingham, MI 48912. All submissions become the property of the Observer & Eccentric newspapers. Each winner receives an apron with the words "Winner Dinner Winner" on it.

WINNER DINNER

Recipes

PROVINCIAL BEEF STEW

Tasty, filling and easy to put together, this meal is great for those busy days we all have.

A tossed green salad, served with your choice of dressing, crusty French bread or rolls, and Strawberry-Orange Ice completes this Winner Dinner. Provincial Beef Stew can also be made ahead, and frozen for a future dinner when you don't have time to cook. This recipe serves 6.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil or salad oil
- 1 1/2 pounds lean beef (flank steak), cut into 1/2 inch by 3/4 inch strips
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons wine vinegar
- 3/4 cup dry red wine
- 3/4 cup regular-strength beef broth
- 1 large onion
- 1 1/2 pounds fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 bag egg noodles

Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a frying pan. Add the beef and cook over medium high heat, stirring until the juices evaporate. Add the sugar and vinegar and cook until the meat is well browned. Transfer the beef to a 2-quart casserole. In the drippings left in the frying pan, add the wine, broth, salt and pepper.

Bring to a boil, scraping up the drippings mixture and pour into a casserole.

Add the remaining oil to the frying pan and saute the onion until it is translucent. Stir the onions into the casserole and bake, covered, at 375 degrees for 50 minutes.

Saute the mushrooms in butter,

stirring until the juices evaporate. Blend the water with the cornstarch. Stir it into the casserole along with the mushrooms. Bake 20 minutes longer covered and serve over egg noodles.

STRAWBERRY ORANGE ICE

This recipe makes 10 cups or enough for 20 servings. Be sure to double check before you pour the mixture into a baking dish that it will fit into your freezer. This recipe can also be cut in half.

- 1 1/2 cups orange juice (if desired, you may substitute 1/2 cup orange-flavored liqueur for 1/2 cup of the orange juice)
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 3 pints strawberries, frozen (fresh, hulled strawberries can also be used)
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

In a covered blender or food processor at high speed, blend all ingredients until smooth, blending about half at a time.

Pour the mixture into a 13-inch by 9-inch baking pan and mix well. Cover the pan with foil or plastic wrap and freeze until partially frozen (frozen firm to 1 inch from the edge of the pan), about 4 hours, stirring occasionally.

Spoon the mixture into a chilled large bowl and, with mixer at medium speed, beat until smooth but still frozen. Return the mixture to baking pan. Cover with foil or plastic wrap and freeze until firm, about 2 hours.

To serve, remove the baking dish from the freezer and let stand at room temperature for 10 minutes for easier scooping.

Draw a large spoon across the surface to form ribbons. Slip a spoonful of the mixture into a dessert glass bowl, tilting slightly and overlapping the ribbons for a pretty effect.