

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1992

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Szechwan food sizzles with red chili peppers

Forget the chop suey. We're talking potency here. Anyone who has ventured into realm of the food characteristics from the culinary regions of China knows that Szechwan cooking is not for the faint of tongue.

Chinese restaurants are a dime a dozen and can be found on just about every block in most major cities. Szechwan cooking, on the other hand, is a regional specialty that demands its participants to sit up and take notice.

Prepared in local restaurants that can be counted on one hand, the hot, spicy recipes have a tendency to throw the tasteless, bland basic stir-frys that are so much staple of "Westernized" palates out with last night's rice.

After a visit to one of my favorite Szechwan eateries, I decided to do a little research and find out just what it is that makes these unique additions to Chinese cuisine sizzle. And I do mean sizzle.

Szechwan history

Szechwan cuisine comes from a region in China, the name meaning "four streams" and "high on the mountain."

Because of the abundance of water and the area being classified as "wet," the local folks began intensifying their basic Chinese foods with hot and spicy dishes to rid the "wet" from their bodies. And did you of sweat it does.

Of course, that's not to say that all Szechwan foods are hot and spicy. If you choose to dine at any local Szechwan restaurant, you will notice that the menu includes foods from just about every province of China, with the hot and spicy dishes noticeably marked with an asterisk to denote their spiciness.

In addition, you can order any spicy dish four different ways, from the basic but tasty "spicy but not hot" all the way to the incendiary "full strength" that in my opinion, should be served with a side of bicent.

Cooking principals

Most specialty restaurants utilize two main cooking principals when preparing their cuisine, the ever-present wok and the steamer.

Next time you're in and the place isn't packed, ask to see the state-of-the-art Chinese kitchen, which incorporates the use of six woks and various steamers.

Don't be surprised to see the chef chopping up what seems to be a hundred pounds of green onions, or if your timing is perfect, you might be able to observe the traditional "blowing up" of the Peking Duck.

This dish, a culinary feast to enjoy as well as behold, is a house specialty and incorporates the blowing up a balloon inside the duck's cavity to "press out" as much of the duck fat as possible, making for a crispier and less fatty product. Yes, the balloon is removed before cooking and serving.

All the sauces used to garnish and flavor the spicy dishes are prepared by Oriental chefs trained mainly in China.

Favorite dishes

One of my favorites is the dramatic spiciness of the Champagne sauce used to flavor crispy shrimps.

Another personal favorite is the General's Chicken with chunks of incendiary hot red peppers floating amid a sea of spicy sauce and chunks of chicken bits.

Looking for something a little out of the ordinary? Most kitchen crews are very adaptable to preparing specialty dishes not normally seen on the menu, but requested by patrons who frequent the establishments.

Vegetarian choices

Vegetarians can easily choose from a wide assortment of flavorful dishes and luscious soups. With MSG still being widely used, many restaurants will cater to a requesting customer by offering a "no MSG" entree.

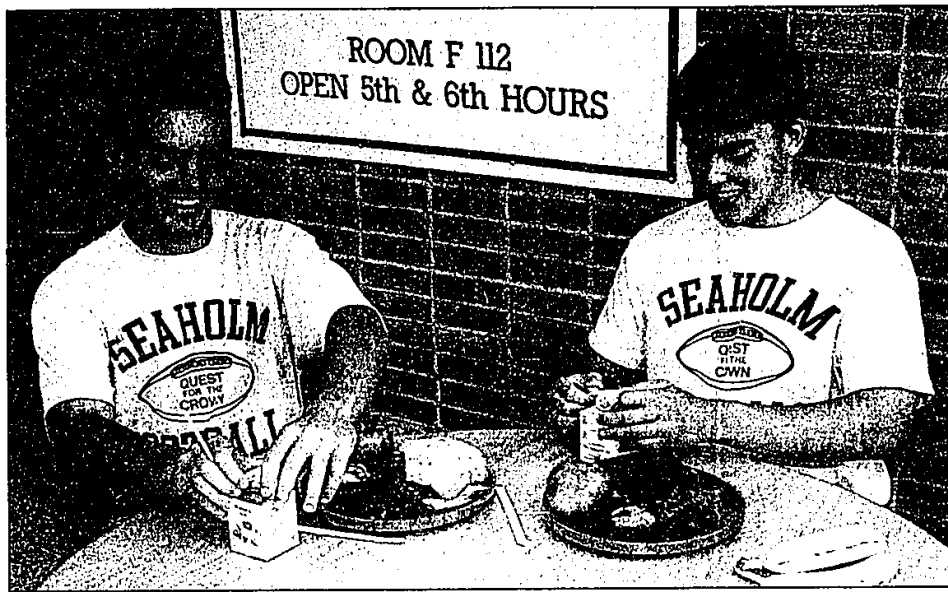
For the home cook interested in preparing great spicy dishes, many supermarkets are expanding their selections of Oriental foods while competing with Oriental grocery stores that stock flaming hot pepper oils, heated-beyond-belief hot garlic chili sauces by the jar and low-sodium and mushy-om-flavored soy sauce.

Many area grocers are stocking a great assortment of fresh and canned exotic vegetables like ginger-root, bok choy, (a Chinese cabbage) egg roll wrappers, and daikon, (a Chinese radish).

A favorite accompaniment frequently enjoyed by the Jones Gang is simply stir-fried broccoli tossed with a tablespoon of hot garlic chili sauce.

You can toss in a few shrimps and serve with rice for a made-to-order dish that can be made in minutes, using anything from a non-stick skillet to a wok.

See Jones Gang tested-recipes for mushrooms with oyster sauce and Kung Pao Chicken inside.



Healthy kickoff: Matt Warnick and Mark Bouchard enjoy a healthy pre-game lunch at Birmingham Seaholm High School. Both are on the football team.

Don't fumble student athlete diet

BY GERRI HINSCHLER
SPECIAL WRITER

Marc Bouchard and Matt Warnick are varsity football players who train intensely year round. Their training includes not just the physical and motivational aspects of football, but also the nutritional aspects according to coach Doug Fraser at Birmingham's Seaholm High School.

During the off season, Fraser spends lots of time talking to his team about eating right, every day.

"Athletes have gotten a lot of confusing advice in the past, and some still do. The steak and eggs, high protein menus for pre-games have been replaced with complex carbohydrate foods such as pasta, vegetables, beans and bagels," he said.

"Many students think that muscles are made of protein, and think they need to eat lots of protein. The body can only use so much protein, the rest is converted to fat."



Student athletes are fed a lot of confusing information about nutrition, but Birmingham Seaholm High School coach Doug Fraser and Sally Van Cise, a registered dietitian and exercise physiologist, help set the record straight.

Foods high in carbohydrates and low in fat are ideal for pre-game meals. Fraser also recommends eating foods that are easily digestible and contain enough calories to prevent hunger during the game. He also suggests that the meal be accompanied by two to three glasses of liquid to provide hydration.

Sally Van Cise, a registered dietitian and exercise physiologist at Beaumont Hospital's Nutritional Medicine Clinic in Birmingham agrees that athletes need to eat well daily — three meals a day, and three healthy snacks.

"Athletes need more calories than non-athletes," she said. The average number of calories a teen-age athlete needs will vary from 2,000 to 4,000 de-

pending on the sport they play, the number of hours they practice, and their personal growth and development.

Van Cise recommends including fresh vegetables, fruits, breads and grains with most meals.

"They should be low in fat and low in added sugar as added sugars can cause fatigue."

She also said drinking eight glasses of water a day is essential for the athlete. Van Cise advises them to not wait until they're feeling thirsty. Water is the best choice when you're thirsty, but if the student prefers something sweet, Van Cise recommends diluting fruit juice or sports drinks with water especially for pre-game practices.

Mix one cup of Kool-Aid or Gatorade with three cups of water, or one cup of fruit juice with six cups of water to avoid stomach cramps.

Nancy McClenaghan of Healthways, a health food shop in Plymouth, said sports drinks such as Recharge, Ultra Fuel and Hydrosol are very popular.

"Mostly I sell them to body builders as opposed to marathon runners or team athletes," she said.

McClenaghan recommends reading the labels before buying these sports drinks because the ingredients can vary. Some contain natural fruit juices and some have natural flavoring, some contain sea salt and others may have no salt or sodium.

As a dietitian, Van Cise is very aware that teens skip breakfast. When they're on the go or just can't eat in the morning, she suggests packing a bagel or dry cereal in a sealable bag to eat while

See DIET, 2B

School nurse practices good nutrition at home



BETSY BRETHEN

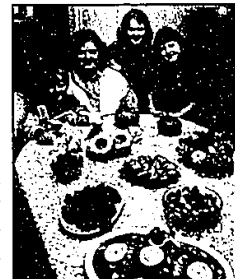
Despite all the evidence that continues to be accumulated about the connection between good nutrition and behavior, mothers today are facing still competition from the junk food and fast food industries. However, a recently published book, "Eating for A's" by Alexander Schauss, Barbara and Arnold Meyer, offers a helpful plan for parents who want to get their children off to a good start as this school year gets under way.

Featuring recipes and a 12 week nutrition plan, the program specifically aims at improving a child's academic and athletic performance.

This week's Winner Dinner Winner, Cindy McCreary of Bloomfield Hills, practices what she preaches about good nutrition to the many students she encounters in her role as the Kingswood campus nurse at Cranbrook Schools.

She said she loves having the opportunity to interact in and out of the classroom with students from all over the world. As their "mom away from home," McCreary is there to comfort them when they are sick and counsel them on a one-to-one or group basis whenever they have medical or diet-related concerns.

A firm believer in the importance of eating a well-balanced meal, McCreary submitted a menu that is low in fat, high in fiber and easy to make. Featuring recipes for lemon chicken, brown



STEFAN CANTRELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Winner Dinner: Cindy McCreary and her children Bryan 5, Katie 9, and Laura 7, present one of their favorite dinners.

rice royale and zucchini bread. McCreary accompanies this meal with steamed broccoli and carrots and a salad of cut-up seasonal fruits.

McCreary and her husband Tom, who teaches sixth grade science at Cranbrook Middle School, and the 1990 recipient of the Metro Detroit Outstanding Science Teacher of the Year award, are the parents of three children. A close family, they love to go camping and involve their children in all aspects of their lives.

Submit recipes to be considered for publication in this column, or elsewhere, to: Winner Dinner, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham, MI 48012.

OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC

Winner Dinner Recipes



LEMON CHICKEN

6 chicken breasts, boneless and skinless
1-2 lemons (or 3-5 Tablespoons lemon concentrate)
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
1 cup bread crumbs
2 eggs, lightly beaten
1-2 tablespoons vegetable or olive oil
3-4 heaping tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
2 ounces sliced almonds
Lemon peels or paper-thin lemon slices
Salt and pepper to taste

Place eggs and bread crumbs in separate bowls. Dip chicken breasts in egg and then roll in bread crumbs. In a large skillet, add chopped garlic to oil and cook on medium heat, being careful not to burn the garlic. Lightly brown both sides of breaded chicken in skillet. Remove meat to paper towels to drain. Place chicken in a casserole dish or shallow baking pan. Pour lemon juice or lemon concentrate over the chicken. Add 1/4 cup of water to cover the bottom of the dish. Cover with lid or foil and bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes to 1 hour.

BROWN RICE ROYALE

1 1/2 cups fresh mushrooms, sliced
1/2 cup finely chopped green onions, including tops
1/4 cup finely chopped celery, including leaves
1-2 tablespoons butter or margarine

1 can chicken broth, 1 1/2 ounces
1 cup brown rice

In a 2 or 3 quart saucepan, saute vegetables in butter or margarine until tender. Add rice and chicken broth and bring to a boil. Cover with a tight-fitting lid and lower heat to simmer. Cook 1 hour or until rice is tender, adding additional broth or water to prevent rice from burning, if necessary. Serves 4 to 6.

ZUCCHINI BREAD

3 eggs
2 cups sugar
1 cup vegetable oil
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1 cup raisins
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup shelled walnuts or pecans (optional) coarsely chopped
3 cups flour, unsifted
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
2 cups zucchini peeled, grated and drained to remove excess moisture

Beat eggs until foamy and gradually add sugar and oil. Combine and sift dry ingredients and add to egg mixture. Add zucchini, vanilla, raisins and nuts. Pour batter into two buttered and floured loaf pans. Bake at 350 degrees for 55 to 65 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted in the center comes out clean. Let stand 10 minutes, remove from pans and cool completely on a rack. Makes two large loaves or six mini loaves.