

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1992

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Make 'scratch' cookies quick with cake mixes

Think about biting into a fresh, home baked cookie, still steamy warm from the oven. Mmmm, chocolate chip, tart lemon, chewy fudge, sweet cherry or spicy applesauce all that can be made in a jiffy, ready for school lunch boxes, an afternoon birthday party, or even a relaxing tea.

Quick fix approach

Now think about a time-saving approach to "something lovin' from the oven." Believe it or not, there is a way to make time tested good cookies using a quick fix approach.

This approach originated in the Duncan Hines Company back in the early 1950s. It's still a great way to make wonderful cookies, and an outstanding marketing idea — using cake mixes for something other than the traditional cake.

Obviously, the idea was timed just right. With more dual income families joining the work force, that "special time" creating a batch of homemade cookies was about ready to fall by the wayside.

Cake mix ingredients

Cake mix ingredients are basically the same as those in most cookie recipes: all purpose flour, baking powder, baking soda and some flavor element.

With the addition of shortening and eggs, there are basic recipes that can be made that would even rival the measuring and creaming associated with a "scratch" cookie.

With the onslaught of grannies all over town running to aerobic classes, bingo parlors and side trips to the casinos at Atlantic City, I thought it would be interesting to prepare a few sample batches and run them up the proverbial flagpole at momma's house, just to see if she could tell the difference.

This was no easy feat, mind you because when I first called momma to make the taste test plans, she confided that this week "would be a little difficult because on Monday she had to clean the church, Tuesday was set for a permanent, Wednesday was her grandma golf tournament" — you get the message, right?

When a day and time was finally agreed upon, I hustled together about eight different versions and asked her to make a fresh pot of coffee.

Momma's test

With the last batch still steaming up the car windows on the ride down, I made the trek to Wyandotte and waited anxiously while she tasted my handiwork.

Complaining on how I was wrecking her diet, she put away more than any 8-year-old would have.

Her comments ranged from "I'd make this one when Aunt Phillis came over" to "these would be good enough for granddaddy's Maggie and Beth." Making absolutely no complaints about any, she was duly impressed.

As a matter of fact, she even asked for one of the "Kool Kookie" recipes claiming that she would make them for the Christian Mother's Rosary Confraternity meeting scheduled for next week.

You have to realize that momma has seldom asked me for a recipe she liked and that in itself, is one of the highest compliments I can ever get. Before we get into the recipes themselves, let me give you a few cookie "primer" secrets that never fail when I'm in the mood to make homemade cookies.

Cookie tips

First off, always preheat the oven and set the racks in the middle, not too close to the bottom or top.

Next, use one of the heaviest, flat baking sheets you can afford. Baking pans with sides will make the cookies more difficult to remove. Shiny cookie sheets work best and if you have dark anodized ones, double them up for best results.

Parchment paper (sold at local gourmet shops and kitchen stores) make cookies baking a breeze, and the sheets can be used over and over again until literally burnt.

Creative cookie bakers know the importance of allowing the cookies to cool on a rack completely before storing in an airtight container.

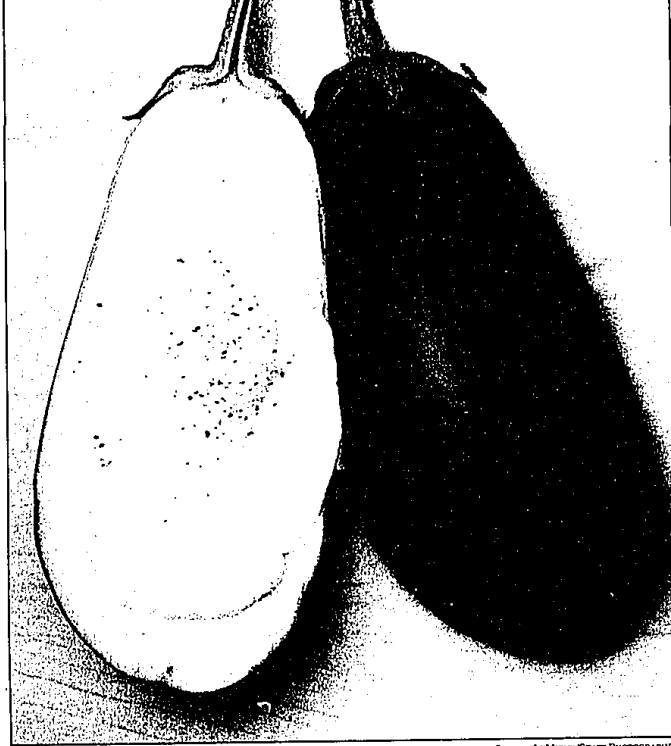
If the cookies become dry or hard, a slice of bread or an apple placed in the covered container works miracles to help soften.

Of course, in the Jones Gang household, a batch of homemade cookies rarely even sees the inside of a storage container.

So if life finds you too busy to make a batch of cookies from scratch, rest assured that these will warm the cookies of anyone's heart and are equally as good for birthdays, school lunches, church socials, family get-togethers or as a special treat for the grandchildren!

See recipes inside.

Eggplant



SHAWN LE MIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Everything it's cracked up to be



They're pretty to look at and good to eat. Eggplant's subtle flavor and meaty texture make it a versatile ingredient in many recipes. Eggplant is available year-round. Learn how to pick, store and cook this versatile vegetable.

BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

The eggplant is probably the only vegetable that can be truly described as voluptuous. Some vegetables, such as pattypan squash, are cute, and green onions could be deemed pert, but only the eggplant alludes to the seraglio.

A member of the nightshade family, along with tomatoes and potatoes, eggplant originated in southeast Asia, and has been adapted to Mediterranean cuisine from Provence, in southern France, to Arabia.

Eggplant's delicate lavender flowers are similar to the tomato's yellow blossoms, and eggplant bushes make decorative container plants or additions to a flower border.

The good news about eggplant is that it has practically no calories — only about 38 calories per cup. The other side of the story is that eggplant has practically no vitamins or minerals, either.

It is an excellent source of fiber and a fairly good source of potassium and folic acid. Potassium works with sodium to regulate the body's water balance and normalize heart rhythms.

Folic acid is necessary for the formation of blood cells and may help protect against heart disease, nerve damage and certain types of birth defects.

Eggplant's subtle flavor and meaty texture make it a versatile ingredient in many recipes.

"We carry eggplant all year round, and it sells steadily," said

Mary Ann Malorana, co-owner (with husband Joe, Sr. and son Joe, Jr.) of Joe's Produce in Livonia. "The younger generation of cooks is often unsure of what to do with eggplant, but one of us is usually around to answer questions and give cooking advice."

"Generally we have two kinds of eggplant on hand. The smaller ones are good for stuffing, and the larger ones are for recipes that call for a larger quantity of eggplant like ratatouille."

To find the best eggplant, Malorana recommends looking "for one that's nice and firm, with taut, glossy, deeply colored skin and a nice green end."

"Avoid eggplants with a discolored or dull skin. Allow about 1/2 pound per person. Store eggplant in the refrigerator, unwashed, in a plastic bag for up to five days."

Eggplant tends to absorb oil during cooking, which makes it attractive to those who love the flavor of olive oil and garlic, which are often components of eggplant recipes. Add raw or sautéed cubes of eggplant to soups or stews for added flavor.

To reduce the amount of oil absorbed, sprinkle cut slices of raw eggplant with salt and let drain in a colander for 30 minutes. Then rinse and pat dry with a paper towel.

Here are some serving ideas, top hot cooked eggplant with garlic butter, basil, oregano, marjoram, or minced parsley. Top baked slices with sliced tomato and shredded cheddar cheese, return to oven until

cheese is melted. Sauté cubed eggplant in olive oil with garlic, onions and mushrooms until soft.

Let us think that a Mediterranean background is necessary to appreciate this congenial vegetable. Listen to Ginger Vintzel of Troy.

Vintzel is of Dutch descent, and a "convert" to Greek cooking through marriage to husband, Michael.

"To me, moussaka with a rich custardy sauce is just to die for," said Vintzel, director of advertising and public relations for the Michigan Design Center in Troy. "It takes time and effort, but it's worth it."

"Even when I come home from the office really beat, I can conjure up enough energy to make a moussaka."

It doesn't hurt to have helpful in laws that will share their cooking experience, but Vintzel also relies on the cookbook published by the women of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Troy.

"It's the next best thing to marrying into a Greek family," said Vintzel. "These recipes have been refined over the years until they're absolutely foolproof."

"I don't especially like to cook — my husband is a much better cook than I am — but Greek food is something else. Once you start cooking from authentic Greek recipes you're hooked."

Eggplants are also extremely popular decorative items these days.

Try a silver bowl filled with deep purple eggplant and bright yellow lemons.

A lovely, lively and striking combination! Or, if country is your style, try the same combination with a rustic basket.

See recipes inside.

Chef gets fired up by cooking



BY KEELY WYGNONIK
STAFF WRITER

As a child growing up in Southfield, Paul Tootikian of Livonia used to watch his Armenian grandma cook. As soon as he could reach the stove, he started cooking too. By the time he was 11 or 12, he was able to reproduce the smells his grandma made when she cooked.

"That's when I learned I had a knack for cooking," said Tootikian, head chef at Cafe Cortina in Farmington Hills. "I first learned to taste through my nose. It came natural."

But like many of us, he didn't listen to the voice inside that was telling him to become a chef. Instead he studied welding.

Eventually, he decided to follow his heart to the kitchen and did his apprenticeship under Chef Stur Anderson at Bluebeard's Castle in St. Thomas.

"I still like to weld, and I'm a part-time carpenter," said Tootikian who has worked at Cafe Cortina since Jan. 2, 1992.

"Italian cooking is the base of all cooking. The Italians were the gourmets. They taught the French how to cook. I enjoy learning how things are made."

Family

Tootikian and his wife Judy have two children, Paul, 5, and Kelly, 3.

Favorite herb or spice

Basil.

Favorite tool at home and at work.

"A big French knife. I like it for cutting and flipping things over."

Cooking philosophy

"There are several ways of cooking something, but there's always a right way, and a wrong way. You have to identify the techniques to get it right. Once you learn why things are done the way they are you can experiment and change recipes."

Who does the cooking at your house?

"My wife and I share it, although she's always volunteering me for things like helping with the PTA spaghetti dinner."

What's a normal dinner at your house?

"We have simple dinners like chicken kabobs, rice pilaf with roasted peppers and steamed broccoli."

Name five things in your refrigerator.

"Lots of fresh fruit, Dijon mustard, fresh garlic, a pitcher of juice, and fresh herbs."

Cooking tip

"I always tell people if they cook the way they like it, they're doing it right. Express yourself, just follow the rules and do the best you can."

See recipe inside.



SHAWN LE MIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fresh picked: Chef Paul Tootikian picks red peppers in the garden at Cafe Cortina in Farmington Hills.