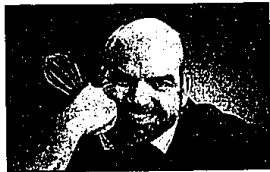


TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Cooking in clay fits 'comfort food' mold

Cooking in clay is without a doubt the second oldest culinary method, exceeded in antiquity only by roasting meat on a stick held over a fire.

Clay cookware is experiencing a culinary revival, mainly attributed to the once again popular "comfort food" trend that finds us enjoying blade-cut chuck roasts, hearty roast chickens and fish, cooked slowly to tenderize, keep in the moisture and accentuate the flavor.

Rediscover clay

Although not as readily available on the market as it once was, clay cookware can be found in most kitchen stores and houseware retailers.

But those of us who enjoyed the flavorful treats from cooking in clay can still find them boxed carefully in the fruit cellar, hiding behind the ice cream maker and electric knife.

Like the aforementioned classics, clay cookware will never go out of style. It will continue to mosey on in and out, experiencing a short-lived resurgence, then only to return to the cellars and basements of the eclectic kitchen collector.

Making a comeback

Clay cookware is similar to a paisley tie: If you hold onto it long enough, it's bound to become popular once again.

If you have forgotten just how well these clay beauties performed, all you need to do is simmer up a pot of chicken and vegetables or the toughest cut of pot roast you can find and follow the manufacturer's directions.

Classic unglazed clay, known commercially as a Romertopf or Schlemmertopf, will require you to soak it in water for at least an hour before being placed in a cold oven.

Cooking benefits

The water retained in the clay walls allows your food to steam, in addition to trap in and hold all the aromas and flavors.

Much like an ancient pressure cooker or the olden days waterless cookware, these pots also boast the fact that they help keep in much needed nutrients that are normally cooked away during cooking routines.

Glazed clay cookware, similar to the bread pot and steamer pot, need not be soaked and can be placed into the workforce immediately following a generous wiping of oil to retard sticking.

The glazed pots available nowadays are definitely more "giftay" but the serious cook will be able to appreciate the extraordinary tastes and texture derived from this type of cooking.

The Yunnan Steampot with center steam chimney sits upon a boiling saucepan filled with the cook's choice of liquid.

Personal favorites include broths, wine and court bouillions. Cut up chicken, vegetables and rice turn out better than finger-lickin' good when using this clay steamer.

Again, the only problem with the Yunnan steamer is finding one.

Check the Oriental stores in the area or ask artists who work with clay. Not only will you have an unusual and healthy cooking vessel, but also a work of art to proudly display in your kitchen.

Dieter's delight

For the diet conscious, clay cookware is a god-send mainly because you can cook with little or no oil.

It tenderizes meats and does wonders to fish and few herbs, not relying on calorie laden sauces.

The resulting products are leaner, juicier and offer incredible tenderness, something a dieter usually gives up when preparing leaner entrees.

Cleaning tips

Clay cookware should be washed by hand and not placed in the dishwasher, mainly because of its breakability and the fact that it retains moisture.

Always follow the manufacturer's or artist's recommended cleaning and utilizing procedures.

Baked on grit and stubborn stains can usually be removed with a generous sprinkling of salt and some elbow grease.

Many of the upgraded models now offer an unglazed exterior for great soaking capabilities coupled with a lightly glazed interior for easier cleaning.

So if you are lucky enough to have a clay cooker hidden in the bowels of the basement or are looking for a new technique for cooking hamdrum foods, you won't be disappointed when you cook with a clay pot.

See Janes family-tested recipes inside for Roast Chicken A L'Orange, Poor Boy Pot Roast and Country Style Spare Ribs in A Honey Sauce. Rib lovers rejoice! These are great tasting fall-off-the-bone ribs.

Recipe Repair

Substitutions cut fat, not flavor

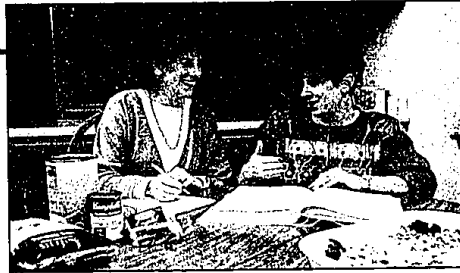
■ Cut the fat in your diet. It's easier than you think. A few healthy substitutions cut 18 grams of fat from "Terry's Chicken," a casserole.

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Like a lot of brides, Laura Letobar of Livonia wasn't very handy in the kitchen when she got married. "As I became more familiar with cooking I found I actually enjoyed it. Soon I started trying out new recipes every week," she said. The only problem was, as her interest in cooking increased, so did her weight, and her husband's.

Ten pounds after her wedding, she started experimenting with recipes to reduce the fat. "We found it much easier to lose weight and felt better by reducing the amount of fat in our meals instead of trying to starve ourselves with miniature portions."

A radiation therapist at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Letobar said she was also concerned about the health consequences of a high fat diet. Recent medical studies link certain types of cancer including breast and colon, heart disease, and diabetes to a high fat diet.



Recipe repair: Laura Letobar (left) shows Terry Berlin how to reduce the fat in one of her favorite dishes.

Terry's Chicken

ORIGINAL RECIPE

GRAMS OF FAT 26 per serving

- 8 chicken breasts (skinless/boneless)
- 8 slices Muenster cheese
- 1 can (10 3/4 oz.) cream of chicken soup
- 2 cups Pepperidge Farm stuffing mix
- 1 stick margarine (melted)

Serves eight

Terry's Chicken

LOW FAT RECIPE

GRAMS OF FAT 8 per serving

- 8 chicken breasts (skinless/boneless)
- 1 can (10 oz.) Campbell's 99% fat free cream of chicken soup
- 2 cups reduced sodium chicken broth
- 4 cups Pepperidge Farm stuffing mix

Preheat oven 325 degrees. Spread cream of chicken soup on bottom of non-stick 9 x 13 x 2 baking dish. Place chicken breasts on soup. Combine stuffing and soup in a separate bowl. Spoon stuffing over chicken to cover completely. Cover pan with foil and bake for 1 1/2 hours. Remove cover for the last 15 minutes of baking to brown stuffing. Let cool 5-10 minutes before serving to allow excess liquid to evaporate.

Serves eight

At a departmental pot luck at the hospital, Letobar volunteered to bring Cheesy Potatoes to put this "new" way of cooking to the test.

"Little did my co-workers know that I substituted low fat cheese, low fat sour cream, and completely omitted the butter. Not only did they eat an entire pot that had over four pounds of hash brown potatoes in it — they even asked for the recipe. Many couldn't believe it was low fat until I reminded them there was no oil slick floating on top of the pot."

With the success of the pot luck behind her, Letobar started "Laura's Fat Free Kitchen," a monthly newsletter with low fat cooking tips and recipes.

She also met Judy Neubaucher of the American Cancer Society, and with her help and support, began talking to cancer support groups about low fat cooking.

"I wanted to help my patients more," she said. "If it's a hassle, you're not going to do it. People are busy. When the doctor says 'reduce the fat in your diet,' they don't know where to begin."

"I shop at Meijers and Pace, and use a lot of generic products to keep the cost down."

"I don't use a lot of pots and pans, and my recipes are easy enough for a spouse or kids to make."

She's quick to say her newsletter isn't just for dieters or cancer patients. "Everyone knows home cooking is the best cooking. If you lose a few pounds because you changed your cooking style — great! But, this is just an organized way of sharing information with others."

As a service to her subscribers, Letobar offers a recipe repair shop to help subscribers reduce the fat content of favorite family recipes.

Terry Berlin of West Bloomfield gave Letobar "Terry's Chicken" a casserole dish to convert.

Berlin "eats pretty healthy." She doesn't eat a lot red meat or foods with gravy and sauces, includes lots of vegetables and fruits in her daily menus, and seasons foods with lemon juice and herbs.

Her recipe (see illustration) contained 26 grams of fat per serving. Letobar reduced it to eight.

"It's a very good dish, but it was rich," said Berlin. "Laura made it a lot lighter, but the taste isn't bland. I won't go back to the original recipe."

"The casserole called for a lot of cheese," said Letobar. "I used Campbell's 99 percent fat free cream of chicken soup instead. I substituted chicken broth for margarine and used more stuffing mix."

See more tips for low fat cooking, and recipes inside.

Delicious Armenian meal a treat to eat

With Halloween only days away, most little minds, and many, many big minds, are busy with thoughts of one thing — candy, candy and more candy!

Unfortunately, one cannot live on peanut butter cups alone, so this week's Winner Dinner offers a delicious meal that is truly a treat to eat.

Submitted by Patricia Stamboulion, this "sweet" menu is replete with vegetables, and tastes even better when made a day ahead and reheated.

Stamboulion and her husband, Jim, live in Farmington Hills with their two young children. A homemaker, Stamboulion is on the go with her children, volunteering at their school and taking them to and from their after-school activities.

Like many contemporary mothers, Stamboulion has her own small business, Invitations & More, that she

has developed over the past three years.

She makes house calls, taking orders for special occasion invitations, stationary and other specialty items.

As much as she enjoys her part-time career, the real joy in her life comes from taking care of her family.

An avid cook, Stamboulion is always interested in trying new recipes and adapting old ones so that they are more healthy.

Everything that she knows about Armenian cooking she learned from her mother, Isabel Aranosian of Farmington Hills. She is now passing on the family tradition of fine cooking to her daughter and son, who are frequent helpers in the kitchen.

Thank you, Patricia Stamboulion, for sharing your recipes with us, and until next time, all the best and Happy Halloween. Please keep those slimmer "Winner Dinners" coming.

Submit recipes to be considered for publication in this column or elsewhere to: Winner Dinner, P.O. Box 3583, Birmingham, MI 48012. Each winner receives an apron with the words Winner Dinner on it.

Winner Dinner: Patricia Stamboulion, Michael, 3 1/2 and Jessica, 6, present one of their favorite dinners.

JOHN STORMEZANO/
STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Observer & Eccentric Winner Dinner Recipes

TAS KEBAB

2 pounds leg of lamb or sirloin steak, cut into 1-inch cubes
2 tablespoons margarine or oil
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
2 medium-sized onions, chopped
2 green peppers, chopped

In a heavy skillet, brown the cubed meat in margarine or oil. Drain the fat and add salt, pepper. Add enough water to cover the meat. Cook on low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 1 to 1 1/2 hours or until the meat is fork-tender. Add additional water if necessary.

Add the chopped onions and cook for an additional 1/2 hour. Stir in the green pepper and tomatoes and cook until tender. This dish can be made ahead and reheated. Serves 4.

GREEN BEAN STEW

1 pound fresh or frozen green beans, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 large onion, sliced thinly
1 can (14 1/2 ounces) beef broth
1 can (15 ounces) stewed tomatoes
Salt and pepper to taste
1 pinch celery seed
2 tablespoons margarine or butter

In a medium-sized saucepan,

saute onions in margarine or butter until they are lightly browned. Add the other ingredients and stir together. Cover, bring to a boil and then lower the heat and simmer for 45 minutes or until beans are tender. Serves 4.

ARMENIAN CRACKED WHEAT PILAF

1 cup coarse cracked wheat (bulgur), rinsed and drained or rice
1/2 cup fine noodles or vermicelli broken into small pieces
4 tablespoons margarine or butter
1 can (15 1/2 ounces) chicken broth

On medium heat, melt the margarine or butter in a saucepan. Add the noodles, stirring until they are medium-brown in color. Add the cracked wheat, stirring to coat the ingredients. Pour in the chicken stock, cover the pan and bring to a boil. Adjust the heat to a gentle simmer for 15 minutes. Stir gently with a fork, cover and simmer for 5 more minutes. Serves 4.

EASY SALAD DRESSING

1/2 cup olive oil
juice of 1 lemon/h. Garlic salt to taste

Combine the ingredients and whisk to combine. Toss gently over salad of mixed greens.