

# TASTE

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**TASTE BUDS**



CHEF LARRY JANES

## Master the sweet art of stovetop candy making

Have you ever started your holiday baking and ended up eating more than you give? If proholiday dieting has control of your destiny, be forewarned. This column is not for the weak-willed. As a matter of fact, it's guaranteed to add a few pounds to both the maker and the recipient.

I'll be the first to admit that when I make cookies, the need to sample each batch has been written in stone. But forget the cookies today because here's a holiday primer on the things to make in your kitchen that are loaded with sugar, chocolate and all those other things diet mavens have warned us about.

**Holiday treats**

I'm talking about popcorn balls, turtles, truffles, sugared nuts and mouthwatering holiday mints that have us joining diet groups and health clubs for our New Year resolutions. Just about anyone can make cookies, but it takes a strong-willed culinary afficionado with a cupboard filled with candy thermometers, marble slabs and asbestos fingertips to make succulent holiday treats.

It also takes a guiltless conscious and a certain amount of willpower to put out bowls of popcorn balls, trays of truffles and finger-lickin' good batches of fudge without first having it go literally to your waist, thighs, hips and chin.

**Candy equipment**

When it comes to equipment, you can purchase anything and everything at most local gourmet shoppes and houseware departments in major stores. But is a \$10 candy thermometer really necessary to turn out a \$6 batch of holiday candy? Can you justify its purchase when you know it will be used for only 20 minutes out of the year? Read on.

**Momma's test**

Momma explained the difference between a hard ball candy stage and a soft ball stage by showing how the boiling sugar felt when dropped into ice water. If it sank immediately taking no known structure, it wasn't boiled long enough. If it felt "soft" and squishy in the ice water it was considered to be in its "softball" stage (approximately 235 degrees F).

If it landed in the water and immediately hardened into teeth crunching hardness, it was in its "hardball" stage (approximately 300 degrees F.) Unfortunately, for too many of us novice candy makers, an additional 30 seconds on the stove was all it took to transform something sweet and gooey into a rock-solid ball of hard candy.

To answer the above question, yes, for best results, rely on a candy thermometer. You can invest in a candy thermometer but better than that, pick up an "instant read" all purpose thermometer and you'll have the best, not just for candy making, but also for meat cooking as well. Taylor makes the best and expect to pay in the neighborhood of \$12.

Even more important when preparing holiday candies however is the need to have on hand long handled wooden spoons that don't reek of garlic from last night's stir-fry, and more importantly, measuring cups and spoons.

**Proper cookware**  
Always use cookware that is at least four times the volume of the ingredients or a three-quart capacity for each 1 1/2 pounds of candy being made. Anyone who has ever made stovetop candy can attest to this reasoning, especially after the first pot boils over and you spend the remainder of the holidays scraping caramelized sugar from the reflector pans and stovetops.

Candymaking in the home kitchen is an art with its secrets lying in following the recipes closely, using the correct equipment, measuring carefully, and making accurate tests for the "doneness" of holiday candies.

No "fingerfuls" or "handfuls" are allowed. Cooks interested in picking up the necessary goodies, foil wraps, boxes and other accoutrements should head for reputable baking shops that have knowledgeable sales staff.

The Baker's Acre in downtown Wayne, Michigan is one of my favorite stops, as are all of the Kitchen Glamor Shops with locations in Rochester, West Bloomfield, Novi and Redford.

Take it from a pro, if you're interested in pursuing the recipes provided for the best holiday candies, farm the kids out for a few hours, turn on the answering machine and get ready to do nothing more than make candy.

You won't be disappointed in the results, but then again, your stick-skinny friends and relatives who are concerned about their weight might be. Bon Appetit.

See Janes family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox 1886.



JIM JACOFIELD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Holiday baking: Avery Robinson, 3, Ian, 6, Davida, and Ruby, 9, work together to make Holiday Sugar Cookies. Avery Robinson rolls cookie dough with his own rolling pin.

# H·A·N·U·K·K·A·H

## FAMILIES CELEBRATE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

By KEELY WYGONIK

Giggles float like bubbles in Davida Robinson's kitchen in Franklin where Avery, 3, is helping her bake Holiday Sugar Cookies. Avery isn't tall enough to reach the counter so he stands on a step stool.

He rolls out dough with a miniature version of his mother's rolling pin, makes menorahs, stars and dreidels with cookie cutters and decorates them with blue and red sprinkles. On this particular day, Avery was wearing a black shirt that was soon streaked with flour.

Mom didn't seem to mind, and Avery was having a ball. Soon he was joined by his brothers Ian, 6, and Ruby, 9.

Hanukkah, like Christmas, is "for children," but that's where the similarity ends. "Christmas is one of the holiest holidays for Christians, and Hanukkah is a minor festival," said Lissa Hurwitz of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit. Hanukkah is not considered a major Jewish holiday because it is not prescribed in the Torah. This year, it will be celebrated from sundown on Saturday, Dec. 19 to sundown Sunday, Dec. 27.



*Latkes, candles, gelt and dreidels help Jews celebrate Hanukkah, which starts at sundown Saturday, Dec. 19. The holiday marks the dedication of the holy Temple in ancient times, after Jews, having defeated a tyrannical king's larger army, reclaimed it.*

For Jewish families, Hanukkah is a time to celebrate their religious freedom and to entertain family and friends.

During this Festival of Lights, Jews remember a miracle that occurred long ago in the Greco-Roman world. The Syrians outlawed the practice of Jewish rituals, and tried to convert Jews to Hellenism. Some refused, battled, and regained Jerusalem and the holy Temple. There was only one vial of oil left, but miraculously it burned for eight days. The celebration of Hanukkah dedicates Judah Maccabee's small Jewish army reclaiming the Temple from An-

tiocbus' mightier Syrian forces.

To Jews, the miracle of Hanukkah is that the light of Judaism has never been extinguished, and that the Jewish people have remained loyal to the Torah and to the Jewish way of life.

Some families decorate their homes with Hanukkah posters and paper chains.

"It's a totally fun holiday. It's casual," said Davida Robinson. Most of the celebrations are in the home. There are parties, and children receive gifts, often small amounts of money, called Hanukkah gelt.

Families also play a game with a four-sided top called a dreidel. Depending on the top letter showing after the top stops spinning, the player will either put in the kitty, take the entire kitty, win half of the kitty or pass. The "stakes" are usually nuts, candy or pennies.

From a child's perspective, Hanukkah "lasts longer" than Christmas, "and it's fun," said Ruby Robinson.

Children look forward to receiving gifts, but like many moms, Davida tries to stress other parts of the holiday like making cookies, reading about the

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## Quick meatless meal ideal for busy nights

**WINNER DINNER**



BETSY BRETHIER

December is back — that delightful, dizzying month in which both Hanukkah and Christmas are celebrated. Together these holidays, and all the festivities that accompany them, brighten up the darkest time of the year.

And yet, this season of lights is also, for many people, a season of frights, as there is much to be done in such a short period of time. In an attempt to alleviate some of the stress of the season, at least in the kitchen, this week's Winner Dinner, selected from the recently published Livonia Newcomers and Neighbors cookbook, "Our Favorite Recipes," offers a menu for a hearty meatless meal that can be prepared in less than an hour.

Members of this organization, which was originally part of the Welcome Wagon of Livonia, contributed recipes for this cookbook. Featuring recipes for Karla Van Egmond's 3-bean chili, Julie Way's applesauce muffins and Paula Reimann's sweet and sour spinach salad, this meal is easy to make and ideal for those nights when family members are coming, going and eating at different times.

The Livonia Newcomers and Neighbors is a non-profit women's



JIM JACOFIELD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Winner Dinner: Paula Reimann (left), Julie Way and Karla Van Egmond present 3-bean chili, applesauce muffins and sweet and sour spinach salad.**

club whose purpose is both social and philanthropic. It is open to all residents of Livonia, not just newcomers, and has activities and interest groups for women of all ages. The cookbook is a fundraising effort for the organization; however, a portion of the profits will be divided among different

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OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC

### Winner Dinner Recipes



**3-BEAN CHILI**

- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon olive or cooking oil
- 2 cans (14 1/2 ounces) Italian style stewed tomatoes with seasonings, chopped coarsely and undrained
- 1 cup water
- 1 can (6 ounces) tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 tablespoon Dijon style mustard
- 1 teaspoon dried basil, crushed
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano, crushed
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 can (15 ounces) kidney beans, drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) garbanzo beans, drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) great northern beans, drained
- 1 cup carrots, chopped
- 1 cup whole kernel corn, fresh or frozen
- 1 cup zucchini, chopped

In a Dutch oven, cook garlic in hot oil for 30 seconds. Stir in undrained tomatoes, water, tomato paste, chili powder, mustard, basil, oregano, cumin and pepper. Add the three cans of beans and chopped carrots; bring to a boil. Reduce heat

and simmer, covered, for 20-30 minutes.

Stir in corn and chopped zucchini. Simmer, covered for at least 20 minutes or until the vegetables are cooked. Hot pepper may be added to taste. Spoon into serving bowl and top with either grated Parmesan cheese or grated cheddar cheese. Serves 6.

**APPLESAUCE MUFFINS**

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter softened
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup applesauce
- 1 1/4 cup all purpose flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup walnuts, chopped

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease bottoms only of 12 (2 1/4-inch) muffin pan cups. Cream butter and sugar in large bowl until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs, one at a time, and add applesauce. Sift together flour, baking powder and salt and add to the butter mixture. Stir in nuts and beat with a fork until all the ingredients are moistened. Don't over stir; batter will be lumpy. Fill each prepared muffin pan cup two-thirds full with batter.

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