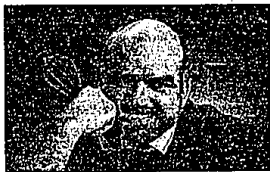


MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1993

# TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

## Pancakes: they're not just for breakfast

For every meal, every course, from appetizer to dessert, there's a pancake. A traveler could circle the globe and find some form of this international favorite — in sizes as small as quarters and almost as big as manhole covers — stacked for breakfast, glorified for dessert, stuffed for entrees, rolled and sliced for hors d'oeuvres. Call them hotcakes. Call them crepes. Call them blini. Call them palacsintak. Call them pfannkuche — they're all pancakes. Pancakes are much closer to man's original bread than our baked loaves.

It was on hot stones set before the hearth fire that simple "ashcakes" of ground cereal and liquid were baked in the days of the caveman. Can you imagine what the poor souls had to go through to get syrup or honey? Today's pancakes are a fluffy, tender, civilized version of an ancient bread.

### Pancake traditions

Pancakes have been known to be intertwined with religion, tradition and legend. Jewish people eat them on their holidays — during Hanukkah, latkes, potato pancakes.

During Passover pancakes are made with matzo meal and no leavening. During Shavuoth, when dairy dishes are eaten, cheese blintzes, which are similar to pancakes, are served.

In early Christian days, when Lent was a time of abstinence from meat as well from animal foods like milk, cheese and eggs, pancakes became a treat for the day before the beginning of Lent.

Shrove Tuesday pancakes are still eaten in many countries. In England, Shrove Tuesday is often called "pancake day".

### Pancake legends

Let's not forget the old North American legend about Paul Bunyan. He had a pancake appetite so big that, according to legend, he needed a grill with a corral around it, and grain elevators to hold the flour.

Concrete mixers were said to have churned the batter which emerged in 4-foot waves onto a griddle greased by cooks who skated over it with slabs of bacon tied to their feet. (Sounds like some of the Janes clan at the last family reunion!)

### Cooking pancakes

There are many different ways to cook pancakes. Basically, all start with a batter consisting of flour, butter, eggs and milk. Taste and texture differences begin with the addition or omission of a leavening agent such as yeast baking soda or baking powder.

Should you prefer to use yeast, it would be best to allow the batter to "ripen" for at least 6 to 8 hours before beginning to cook.

Personally speaking, I think the lightest pancakes are achieved by the separation of the egg yolk from the egg white with the yolk being beaten into the batter and the white being beaten separately until stiff but not dry, and then gently folding the egg white into the batter and pouring the batter immediately onto a hot, greased griddle.

Prepackaged mixes with names like Bisquick and the locally favored Jiffy mixes mean that pancakes can be made with the simple additions of eggs and milk.

Whereas I would be the first to admit that a box sits on my pantry shelf for a quick breakfast fix, the homemade version that requires the cook to sift the flour, and includes an arsenal of leavening stirred into melted butter and buttermilk, is still a personal favorite.

The shake-and-pour mixes available on grocery store shelves are a virtual recycler's nightmare and after trying a batch, yours truly would rather make a batch from scratch than deal with the lumps.

Here's a secret tip used by the great chefs before they begin to cook their favorite pancakes. Heat up the griddle or fry pan from the start with a small amount of grease or butter to coat the pan bottom. After the pan is heated significantly, pour the grease, wipe with a clean cloth and add more fresh grease or butter and heat accordingly.

Then, just before the pan begins to smoke, add your batter. Always throw out your first pancake, as it only begins the seasoning of the pan and collects too much of the pan taste.

Then, repeat with the grease and you're in business. Stuffing them, rolling them or whatever... I love em!

Check out the Janes family-tested recipes inside, and you'll find out that pancakes aren't just for breakfast anymore! Bon Appetit!

To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

# WINTER VEGETABLES UGLY ON THE OUTSIDE, BEAUTIFUL INSIDE



They're not much to look at, but like many plain people, winter vegetables are beautiful inside. Their earthy flavor adds character to comfort foods.

By JOAN BORAM  
SPECIAL WRITER

The best thing you can say about winter vegetables is that they're unpretentious. The worst thing you can say is that they're drab and unattractive. Their very name prompts a lifted eyebrow. Who could become enchanted across a crowded produce aisle with something called "rutabaga"? And doesn't "parsnip" put you in mind of "Edward Scissorhands"?

But, like many plain people, winter vegetables are beautiful inside and have fiber, besides. Often, rutabagas, parsnips, celery root and their country cousins are found languishing in an obscure corner of the produce section, upstaged by glamorous Chilean imports.

Look for them — their earthy flavor adds character to soups, stews and roasts, comfort foods that steam kitchen windows and make winter tolerable.

A few years ago, winter vegetables sold mainly to older customers," said Nino Salvaggio, owner of Nino's Strawberry Hills in Farmington Hills. "But that's changing. There's more emphasis on traditional cooking, generally, and the glossy food magazines have started featuring turnips, parsnips, and other less trendy vegetables in their pages."

Throw some parsnips, rutabagas or celery root in the pot with your potatoes, and mash them together when they're cooked. It's a simple way to give potatoes more flavor and food value, and a good way to acquaint your taste buds with unfamiliar vegetables.

Rutabagas are a very good source of vitamin A. Cut up some parsnips and

rutabaga, and put them in the roaster with carrots and potatoes when you roast a chicken.

Root vegetables are much more a part of the European cooking tradition than the American.

"Anybody can make spectacular dishes if they have a bucketful of foie gras or a huge black truffle," said Elwin Greenwald of Elwin's Tu-Go in Royal Oak who teaches French Peasant Cooking at Kitchen Glamour stores. "But for real home cooking like you find in the little bistros in France, you can't do without peasant vegetables like turnips or rutabagas or parsnips."

"I love to puree these vegetables separately, along with carrots and beets, and create an artist's palette on a plate, with portions of each vegetable creating the overall color scheme."

Jicama, a traditional Mexican root vegetable, is certainly unattractive enough, said Greenwald. But underneath its thick skinned exterior, jicama (pronounced hee-cah-mah) is crisp, slightly sweet, and tastes a lot like water chestnuts. Jicama is delicious raw, and is wonderful in salads. It isn't usually served alone, but is perfect combined with other vegetables in stir-fry.

"Give a European the smallest plot of ground and he will plant a garden," said Swiss-born Chef Leopold Schaeffli who teaches at Schoolcraft College in Livonia. "Root vegetables are ideal for the small garden because you can leave them in the ground until you want to eat them. In some cases, freezing actually improves the flavor."

Celery root is knobby and misshapen, but Schaeffli said it's a favorite with Europeans. It has the delicate flavor of celery, to which it's related, and adds a lot of depth and mellow-ness to soups and stews.

"There's so much you can do with these vegetables once you past their rough exterior," he said.

See recipes inside.

## Baker's a sweetheart to sweet lovers

By KEELY WYGONIK  
STAFF WRITER

Nothing makes Mary Denning happier than seeing people smile as they walk into her cake shop in Westland. She's won numerous prizes for her cakes, but the challenge to do something she's never done before makes her a pastry chef, not prizes, motivates her to keep entering contests.

In December, for the sixth year in a row, Denning took home the first-place, best-of-category trophy in a contest sponsored by the Detroit Metro Bakers & Allied Club.

Denning grew up in Westland, and lives in Garden City. She began taking cake decorating classes from the Wilton Company when her kids were small, and discovered she had a knack for it. As her children grew, so did her talents, and pretty soon Denning was teaching classes.

She got a job at Iversen's Bakery in Detroit, worked there two years, left to work at Baker's Loft in Southfield, and after two years, was hired by Farmer Jack's to manage her cake-decorating department. She traveled to different stores, teaching cake decorating, and left to open her own shop.

"It's neat to have a job where someone pays you to do what you want to do," she said. For Valentine's Day the shop is decked out with tiny heart-shaped single serving cakes, truffles, chocolate Valentine cards, Valentine baskets, decorated cupcakes, cookies and other treats.

### CHEF'S SECRETS



Valentine treats: Mary Denning knows a lot of sweet ways to say "I love you."

Denning enjoys sharing her talents with others and for the past four years, she's taught two classes at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn — advanced pastries and hotel and restaurant desserts. Her students have won prizes in various culinary arts contests which brings her a lot of joy. For the past four years, she has also served as president of the Michigan chapter of the International Cake Exploration Society, and has written articles about cake decorating for various trade publications.

### Family:

Mary and her husband Charlie, a latho operator, have been married 23 years. They have two children, Jennifer Still who is married to Scott, and Jerry. Jennifer works at the shop and is studying elementary education at Eastern Michigan University. Her brother helps out on vacations, and in the summer, and is studying engineering at Central Michigan University. Mary's father-in-law, also named Charlie, is retired, and comes to the shop every day to sweep, wash dishes, and lend a hand.

Who inspired you to become a pastry chef?  
"My aunt. She was always such a great baker. She taught me a lot."

What's a normal dinner at your house?