

MONDAY, MARCH 22, 1993

# TASTE

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## TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

## Tap into maple tree to make pure syrup

How many times have you read a story in the food section and thought "yeah, sure, do they really cook and do that stuff?" So I and behold, as I sat quietly in my Laz-y-Boy recliner, thumbing through a mountain of food magazines, and I got this phone call from friend, and fellow cooking aficionado, John Cargill of Westland. He said that his family had a pot of boiling maple sap on the stove, and that the spring-like weather we've been enjoying between snow storms has spurred the annual "flowing of the sap."

"That's nice," I respond, knowing that I'd be content to read about it. Not knowing anyone except John with a sugar maple tree in their backyard, I secretly wished for a sample.

About 30 minutes later, there's a knock at my door, and as I stride to a laundry basket of towels, I am greeted by John and his son, Jamie, who have already bored a 3-inch hole in my silver maple tree, attached a spigot, and are searching for a gallon plastic milk jug to attach to the tree to collect the sap.

### Flowing sap

I am somewhat impressed as I watch John and Jamie securely tie the jug to the spigot and see a steady stream of sap begin to flow from my tree. About 3 hours later, I venture out to check the tree, and am surprised to find the gallon jug overflowing.

Suddenly, I got this incredible urge to don a red plaid sweat shirt ala Ruell Gibbons. I empty the jug into a heavy 8-quart pot and scramble to search for the multi-mimeographed sheets that the Cargills offered me about what to do with my bounty.

I reattach the jug while sap continues to drip from my tree. I am not only hooked, I swallowed the bait hook, line and sinker. Three days and seven gallons of sap later, I stop to make pancakes for lunch and serve them with homemade maple syrup.

Never in a million years did I think that I would ever be making homemade maple syrup. Now I can't stop.

### American tradition

The art of making homemade maple syrup and maple sugar is uniquely American. It started with the Indians who in turn taught early settlers. Small scale family sugaring has long been an American tradition, and recently the rising cost of maple syrup has provided additional incentive for the backyard sugarer.

A good maple tree is said to yield 15 to 20 gallons of sap during a single sugaring season — enough to make about 2 quarts of pure, preservative-free maple syrup.

### Making syrup

This isn't the stuff in plastic bottles that sells for about \$1.89 in the local grocery folks, this is real pure maple syrup, the kind that sells for about \$10 per quart.

In all honesty, I didn't even know I had a maple tree, let alone the patience and capabilities to make real syrup. Anyone with a sugar maple, black maple, Norway maple or silver maple tree can make syrup.

For the uninitiated, if you have a tree that produces those crazy helicopter seeds that clog gutters and sprout all over the garden, you can tap for the sap.

Supposedly there are several sap flows, but by far the best time to tap is late winter or early spring before the buds open — sugar content is high, flavor is at its peak, and the cool nights inhibit bacterial action.

Cargill claims that the best place to tap is the south side of the tree (the side that gets the most sun). After the initial hole is drilled no deeper than 3-inches, a tap or spile is inserted.

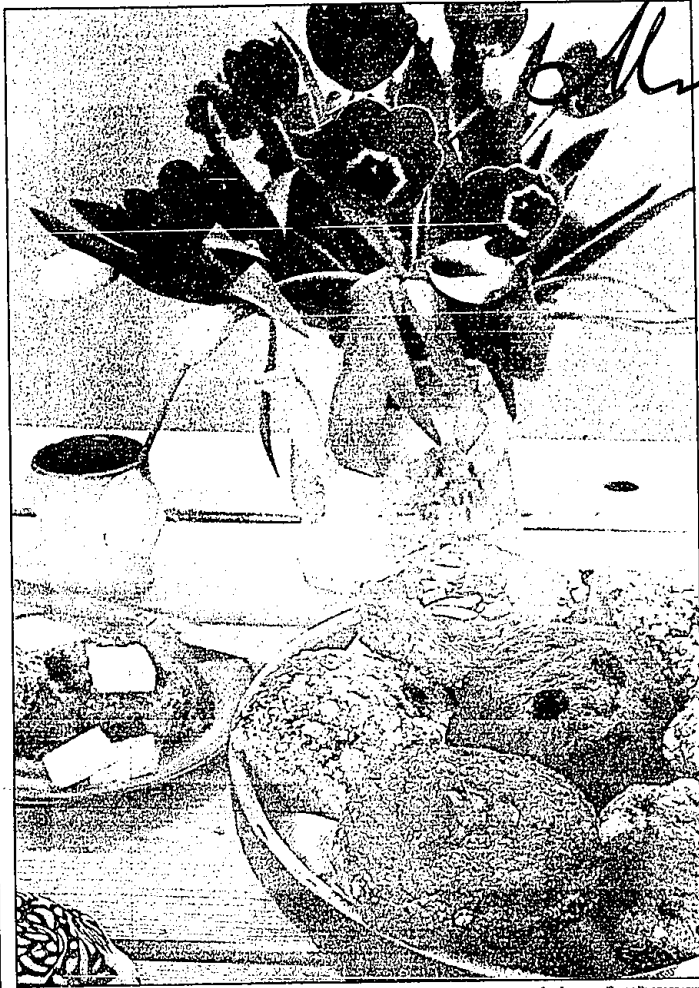
Good luck at trying to locate a spile, the hardware and landscape shops suggested I use a 1/4-inch galvanized pipe angled at one end that has a notch cut in it to hold the rope that holds the bucket. Tap holes can be placed anywhere from 2-6 feet above the ground.

Once you have collected about a gallon of sap, Cargill suggests you pour it into a heavy saucepan and heat it over low heat, allowing the water in the sap to evaporate.

I collected 7 gallons of sap and ended up with about 2 cups of syrup after 2 days of steady slow cooking, and trust me here folks, it was well worth the effort. No more corn syrup, sugar and maple flavoring for this guy, now that my lips have tasted real homemade maple syrup!

See Larry Janes' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.

## WAKE UP WITH MAGNIFICENT



Jim Jandfield/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Healthy start:** Homemade, low-fat muffins are a delicious way to start the day. They can be made ahead, frozen, and reheated for breakfast or snacks. Ingredients like skim milk, yogurt, and fruit cut calories, but not flavor

# Muffins

Not all muffins are the same. Some contain almost as much fat as a candy bar. Learn how to make flavorful low-fat muffins.

By GENE RINSCHLER  
SPECIAL WRITER



An oat bran muffin and glass of orange juice sounds like a healthy way to start the day.

But according to a recent Tufts University Diet and Nutrition Newsletter, a 4.4-ounce Mister Donut "Good for you Oat Bran Muffin" contains 436 calories and has 12 grams of fat. That's only 3 grams of fat shy of a 2-ounce Hershey bar.

Muffins can be part of a healthy, low-fat breakfast, if you choose the right ingredients. "When I first began to make a no-fat muffin it was quite a challenge," said Sherron Masselink of Troy. "It has to taste good."

Leonore Baum of Farmington Hills has been teaching natural-cuisine cooking classes for over 20 years. Every week she teaches two to three classes for beginning natural and vegetarian cooks, including one called *Marvelous No-Fat and Low-Fat Muffins*.

"I don't use refined sugar; some of the muffins are sweetened with brown rice syrup especially for diabetics, or with maple syrup," said Baum. "I use very little oil in a basic recipe, no more than 2 to 3 tablespoons of canola oil or unrefined corn oil, and no eggs."

Most of the time Baum said she uses an egg substitute called "Ener-G," which is a gluten-free base made of potato starch and leavening. After mixing the powder with water she adds it to the dry ingredients in a basic muffin recipe.

For more information about Baum's cooking classes, call 478-4455. There are still openings in *Marvelous Muffins I* which meets 6-9 p.m. Monday, March 22 and *Beginning Cooking*, 6-9 p.m. Monday, April 26.

See MUFFINS, 2B

## Symphony volunteers harmonize in kitchen



BETSY BRETHEN

A noteworthy event is about to take place in Plymouth. On Friday and Saturday, April 2 and April 3, the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra is hosting a benefit dinner and concert at Fox Hills Country Club in Plymouth. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. with the concert to follow at 8 p.m.

Tickets for concert and dinner are \$45 adults, \$25 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Tickets for concert only are \$25 adults and \$13 for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. For ticket information, call 461-2112.

The Plymouth Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1946. On April 2 and April 3 they will present a concert of Cole Porter favorites featuring guest artist Dennis Smith, trombone.

This week's Winner Dinner Winner, Jill Licata, Plymouth League president, will conduct one of the tunes at the concert. The group is the fund-raising arm of the orchestra.

With the help of her neighbor, close friend and business partner, Cathie Layman, Licata has cooked up a menu that is quick and easy to prepare. It will have your family begging for an encore. Licata and Layman have much in common.

Both are parents of teenagers. They work together selling fashions from the Doncaster clothing line, and volunteer a lot of their time to support the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra. On busy nights, when they have

spent the day working together, they will often pool their resources and prepare this dinner for both families. The cookie recipe is so easy. It is usually delegated to one of the teenagers. Now that's what I call working in concert.

Nominate a friend to be a Winner Dinner Winner, or submit your favorite recipe to be considered for publication in this column or elsewhere to: Winner Dinner Winner, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham, MI 48012.



Bill Dinsdale/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Quick dinner:** Plymouth Symphony League members Jill Licata (left) and Cathie Layman stir up Beef with Broccoli and Mushrooms.

## OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC

### Winner Dinner Recipes



#### BEEF WITH BROCCOLI AND MUSHROOMS

1 1/4 pounds beef flank steak, thinly sliced across grain  
4 1/2 tablespoons low sodium soy sauce  
1 1/2 tablespoons sherry  
1/4 teaspoon ginger  
1 teaspoon brown sugar  
1/4 teaspoon onion powder  
1/4 teaspoon pepper  
1 tablespoon cornstarch  
2 stalks broccoli, cut into 1-inch pieces  
1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, thinly sliced  
2 green onions, shredded  
4 tablespoons oil

In large bowl mix steak slices, soy sauce, 2 tablespoons oil, sherry, ginger, brown sugar, onion powder, and pepper. Add cornstarch and mix well. Cover and set aside in refrigerator to marinate at least one hour.

Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in wok or frying pan. Add marinated beef and stir-fry until browned. Add vegetables and continue stir-frying until vegetables are crisp-tender and meat is done. Serve with rice pilaf. Serves 4 to 6.

#### AUNT EVELYN'S QUICK RICE PILAF

1 medium onion, chopped  
1/4 cup margarine  
1 1/2 cup dry Minute Rice  
1 1/2 cup beef bouillon  
1/4 teaspoon salt, if desired  
1/2 cup raisins  
1/2 cup pine nuts  
2 tablespoons chopped parsley

Sautee onion and butter five minutes. Add rice and saute three more minutes. Add bouillon and raisins. Bring to a boil. Remove from heat. Cover and let stand five minutes. Stir in nuts and parsley. Serves 4 to 6.

#### NO FLOUR PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES

1 cup sugar  
1 cup peanut butter  
1 egg  
1 teaspoon baking soda

Mix ingredients and roll into one-inch balls. Place balls on lightly greased cookie sheet and press with fork. Bake at 350 degrees for 8-10 minutes or until browned. Cool cookies at least five minutes, or until firm, before removing from cookie sheet. Makes 2 dozen.