

TASTE

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MONDAY, MAY 24, 1993

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Everyone goes nuts over peanut butter

Some people are just plain nuts about peanut butter. It's every mother's mainstay as a kid's sandwich filling. It will combine with jelly, honey, bananas and other accoutrements. It has also been a long-popular ingredient in the cooking of several cultures.

Peanut butter is a simple substance — shelled peanuts, with the addition of hydrogenated vegetable oil as a stabilizer to keep the mixture from separating, and sometimes salt and a sweetener such as corn syrup or dextrose.

Brands labeled "natural" use only peanuts and oil that is usually from the peanuts themselves. This kind can be easily created in a blender or food processor. Natural types should be kept refrigerated while the commercial store bought varieties can be stored after opening for up to six months at room temperature.

Those with a penchant for peanut butter find it a food that fits every course, "from soup to nuts." Although no one may ever really choose to serve peanut butter from the beginning to the end of a meal, it can be done. Such a meal might begin with a peanut butter fruit dip, followed by a peanut butter soup, a salad with peanut butter dressing, a main course of spicy Chinese chicken with a peanut butter sauce, and, of course, ice cream topped with hot melted peanut butter for dessert.

Nutty history

As far as Americans are concerned, peanut butter came into existence around 1890, when an anonymous physician in St. Louis, Mo., persuaded the owner of a food products company to process and package ground peanut paste as a nutritious protein substitute. The popularity of peanut butter escalated during World War II, when soldiers stationed overseas found it to be a tasty treat in C-rations. The postwar baby boom boosted sales of peanut butter even higher.

Today, more than 40 million Americans consume some 800 million pounds of peanut butter a year. By the time he or she graduates from high school, the average American is said to have consumed more than 1,600 peanut butter sandwiches. Believe it or not, folks, the Peanut Advisory Board claims that today, adults consume more peanut butter than kids. This is probably the reason for the formation of the Adult Peanut Butter Lover's Fan Club, which now has more than 70,000 members including Julia Roberts, Cher, Madonna, Tom Selleck, and Jack Nicholson.

Food bargain

For the money, peanut butter has always been a real food bargain at about 7.5 cents per tablespoon. However, be aware that in order to serve as an adequate meat substitute, peanut butter needs to be paired with grains and/or legumes. You can consider spreading it on bread or crackers, then topping it with some alfalfa sprouts for an extra nutrient boost.

On a good note, peanut butter has always been cholesterol free, mainly because of its vegetable origin, but it is still very high in fat. However, because the fats are primarily polyunsaturated and mono-unsaturated, it has been approved by the American Diabetes Association and Weight Watchers, according to the Peanut Advisory Board.

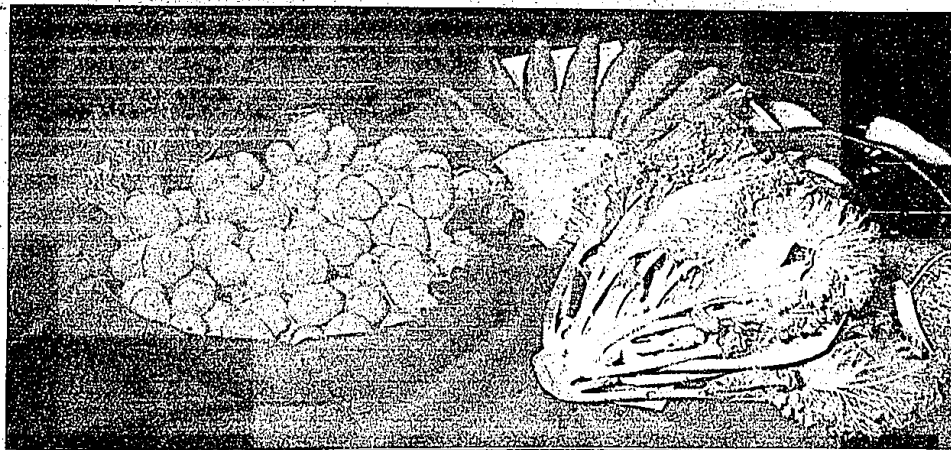
Peanut butter is most typically made from runner-type peanuts grown predominantly in Georgia, Alabama and Florida. These are preferred because of their uniform size, flavor characteristics and competitive costs. It takes about 650 peanuts to make a 12-ounce jar, and half the peanuts harvested in the United States, enough to cover the bottom of the Grand Canyon, go into making peanut butter.

Home version

You can make peanut butter at home using salted or unsalted cracked cocktail peanuts, typically the Virginia creamy colored varieties. Your home version can be cut with peanut oil or vegetable oil and must be refrigerated. It will separate and need to be stirred before serving.

Peanut butter lovers can get 143 ways to celebrate their favorite food by sending for The Official Peanut Butter Lover's Centennial Cookbook by sending \$8.00 to the Peanut Advisory Board, Centennial Cookbook, P.O. Box 7528, Tifton, Ga., 31793. Also available by mail is a brochure titled "Peanut Butter Passion." For a free copy, send a self-addressed, stamped business envelope to "Peanut Butter Passion," Department NFR, Suite 525, 1950 North Park Place, Atlanta, Ga., 30339. A brochure offering five recipes kids can prepare plus membership in the Texas Peanut Kids Club with a certificate and two stickers can be had by sending \$1, name and address to Texas Peanuts, P.O. Box 398, Gorman, Tex. 76454.

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 963-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JERRY ZOLINSKY

'ALIENS'
LAND IN PRODUCE SECTION

Be adventurous, nibble on raw jicama sticks instead of raw carrots. Substitute sunchokes for water chestnuts in salads and stir-fry combinations. These, and other exotic fruits and vegetables can now be found at your favorite supermarket.

BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

According to Don Matelson, president of New Day Distributors, a marketer of specialty fruits and vegetables, there are an estimated 4,000 edible fruits and vegetables in the world.

If you start counting strained peas and carrots right on through to last night's chopped broccoli, most of us have about 3,967 as yet untasted.

Matelson's goal is to change all that. In a well-attended seminar, sponsored by A&P/Farmer Jack, at Southfield's Plaza Hotel, Matelson introduced some of the 500 items that his firm supplies to retailers.

Flanked by tables loaded with such uncommon items as cactus leaves, red and plantain bananas, cherimoya and taro root, Matelson explained the culture and use of each item as it passed from hand to hand around the room.

"I'm trying to get people away from

the idea that these items are exotic," said Matelson. "After all, they're diet staples in their countries of origin. Just think of them as new flavors. Why not nibble on raw jicama sticks instead of raw carrots? The USDA five-day program is urging us all to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Be adventurous — make at least one of those servings something new and exciting."

Among the culinary cognoscenti in the audience was Leopold Schaeff, master chef and instructor at Schoolcraft College in Livonia. Schaeff's students were expected to attend because, the chef explained, "It's important that they should know about what's available today. Ten years ago, you never saw any of these produce items. Now, many of them are becoming staples."

See recipes inside.

See ALIENS, 2B

Bite into something exotic

Among the items discussed by Don Matelson at the exotic produce seminar were

■ **Tomatillo** (to-mah-TEE-yo). Matelson explained that it doesn't matter whether the membrane surrounding the fruit is dried or not. If it's dried, chances are it was transported to the Mexican market in the back of a pick-up truck. If grown in California, it's been treated gently on a shorter trip to market, so the membrane hasn't dehydrated.

Choose tomatillos that are firm and dry. They should be hard — they don't give like tomatoes. Like tomatoes, tomatillos are great for sauces, compatible with all kinds of spices and herbs.

■ **Cactus leaves** (Nopales). You can put them in a broiler and burn off the spines. Or you can "shave" them with a potato peeler. Soft but crum-



Specialty produce: Don Matelson, president and founder of New Day Distributors, displays the specialty fruits and vegetables he brought to a seminar on exotic produce.

Give your recipes a low-fat makeover

Editor's note: You can reduce the amount of fat in your family's favorite recipes without sacrificing flavor. Laura Letobar of Livonia, publisher of "Laura's Fat-Free Kitchen," and a radiation therapist at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, will show you how.

"Laura's Fat-Free Kitchen" is a sponsor of the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society. Look for her column on the Taste front the fourth Monday of each month.



LAURA LETOBAR

As a radiation therapist, I know it is very important to restrict the amount of fat in our daily diets. Studies have shown that we may be able to reduce our risks of certain types of cancer and heart disease by modifying our diet. Unfortunately, this can be difficult to achieve.

Instead of buying expensive pre-packed low-fat convenience foods, try to control the amount of fat in your daily cooking. Substitute low fat products for high fat products.

This month's recipe makeover was submitted by Dolores Harris of Livonia. She retired 1½ years ago from the City of Livonia Water Department. She's a widow with nine adult children, 11 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

When I asked what motivated her to submit a recipe for a makeover, she said she always liked this recipe, but prefers not to eat high-fat foods.

At 37.9 grams of fat per serving, Crescent Chicken Squares exceeds the maximum daily allowance of 30 grams of fat recommended by the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society.

With a few substitutions, we were able to reduce the total in the recipe from 151.6 grams of fat to only 11.3 grams.

Here are a few suggestions for making the transition to a low-fat kitchen easier.

GRAMS OF FAT PER SERVING
37.9

RECIPE MAKE OVER

Crescent Chicken Squares

GRAMS OF FAT PER SERVING
2.8

ORIGINAL RECIPE

3 ounce package cream cheese, softened
3 tablespoons margarine, melted
2 cups cooked, cubed chicken
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons milk
1 tablespoon chopped chives or onions
8 ounce can Pillsbury Quick Crescent rolls
3/4 cup seasoned croutons, crushed

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a medium bowl blend cream cheese and two tablespoons margarine until smooth. Add chicken, salt, pepper, milk and chives, mix well. Separate crescent dough into four rectangles. Press perforations to seal. Spoon 1/2 cup meat mixture on center of each rectangle. Fold four corners of dough to top center of mixture, twist dough slightly and seal edges.

Brush tops with reserved margarine. Dip into bread crumbs. Bake on ungreased cookie sheet, 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Serves 4.

REDUCED FAT RECIPE

3 ounce fat-free cream cheese, softened
2 cups cooked, cubed boneless, skinless chicken breast
1/8 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons skim milk
1 tablespoon chopped chives or onions
1 package phyllo dough
3/4 cup fat-free bread crumbs
Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In medium bowl blend cream cheese, chicken, pepper, skim milk, chives or onions.

Place a layer of phyllo dough in the bottom of a non-stick 8 by 8-inch pan. Spread mixture over dough. Top with another layer of dough.

Spray top of dough with cooking spray (about a 2 second spray). Sprinkle bread crumbs on top. Bake on middle rack of oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown.

Serves 4.

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