

MONDAY, JUNE 14, 1993

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Fresh herbs worth the hard row to hoe

You have to understand that the good Lord has not blessed me with a green thumb. Every year I plant a garden, and end up with a bumper crop of weeds, a few scraggly Miracle-Gro enhanced tomatoes, and a back yard filled with pumpkin vines, usually half eaten by squirrels and birds.

I have come to know that pumpkins, especially when left to rot, will sprout every year, much like the mint and garlic that has taken over where weeds dare not sprout.

Honorable intentions

Every year I start out saying — "I will devote time to weeding, hoeing and snipping those ever-present seed pods," but I'm lucky to garner the energy to light the barbecue and wipe off the patio furniture.

This year, as I have in the last eight years, I push a buggy down aisles of local nurseries and greenhouses, searching for opal basil, cilantro, and fresh rosemary plants dreaming that they will eventually end up in my salad dressing, fajitas and stuffed pork roasts.

My intentions are honorable, the weeds unfortunately, are more proficient. In all honesty though, I do get a few good weeks of fresh herb harvests before the plants bolt and go to an early seed death.

If you have yet to do so, now is the time to get those herbs in the ground or in sunny window boxes.

Good advice

Books like "Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs" (1987, Rodale Press) make it sound so easy. They talk about the "rose scented flowers of the garlic chives," and "creeping thymes with their pleasantly pungent fragrance" all the while I venture out to my garden and smell the obnoxious scent of rotting grass clippings from my compost pile.

Ah, but this year will be different. In addition to a newly purchased "garden wessel" and a slew of spades, rakes, shovels and a "low hedge of lavender that will perfume the air when anyone walks through" I am ready to begin year nine with the positive thoughts and necessities to make my own victory garden.

Rodale's book features suggestions for theme gardens. A hibiscus garden, a peonid garden, a national herb garden, knot gardens, dye gardens, medicinal gardens, you name it and they have a theme for it.

Garden theme

This year, my theme will be — "A please God, let it grow" garden. I started with a row of dark opal basil, that will hopefully make it into jars of white wine vinegar, and transform itself into a lovely bluish purple vinegar for holiday gift giving.

Planted due south is a row of curly parsley which I fully intend to snip regularly and chop into mounds of tabouli salad.

For some odd reason known only to Jerry Baker, the master gardener, my chives have resurfaced, much like the millions of pumpkin blossoms that I promise to thin out. The chives will decorate grilled fish, sliced tomatoes and simple sauteed vegetables that I will undoubtedly stand in line for at Joe's Produce in Livonia to purchase.

My sweet basil that I long for on paper-thin slices of tomato, mozzarella cheese and olive oil soaked bread is strategically placed for easy snipping should the weeds attempt a takeover.

This spring, I sent away for a dozen French shallots from a western Michigan nursery that cost me \$10 plus shipping and handling. Last week I saw them at the Eastern Market for a \$1 a basket.

I dream of shallots sizzling in butter and cream, tossed with pasta and Prosciutto. As an added bonus, I received a free packet of "super delicious special tomatoes with a high yield" from the foreign nursery that I started, as directed, indoors in \$7 peat pots and under a \$24 gro-light that only produced one plant. I have a recipe for a special ragout clipped from a cookbook that has its name on these budding beauties.

Strews among the herbs and tomatoes are the singular sunflower and lima bean plant that the kids brought home from an in-class project at school. Does anyone know how many lima beans grow on a single plant and will it feed a family of four?

I whole heartedly anticipate not having to drive to Mellor to buy those fresh rooted herbs wrapped in plastic. I look forward to a Martha Stewart fava of "simply throwing a handful of washed herbs on the hot coals for flavor and aroma." What the heck, if all else fails, I have a drawer of bottled varieties that will surely help make the Prego taste like it was home cooked. Bon Appetit!

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



Dad's territory: Vern Pixley grills steak with help from son Andrew, 14 months, while Tyler (the dog), wife, Lori and Jillian, 4, watch.



Celebrate Father's Day with a barbecue, and let dad cook the beef. Three fathers who love to cook share their secrets for grilling sensational steaks.

BY LARRY JANES
SPECIAL WRITER

The testosterone levels are building, and it's not at the local gym or on the baseball diamond.

Backyard grills all over town are heating up as temperatures begin to rise, launching the start of the annual summer barbecuing season.

And what better way to usher in the season than with a Father's Day "steak-out" and tips on grilling beef by three men — all of whom are fathers, masters of the grill and guys who love to cook.

As a matter of fact, all three couldn't wait for the first official day of summer on June 21, and started barbecuing early.

We begin with Vern Pixley of Rochester, owner of Pixley Funeral Home.

Vern's wife Lori, daughter Jillian, 4, son Andrew, 14 months, and last but certainly not least, the family dog, Tyler, who is Vern's barbecuing partner, never put the family gas grill away for the winter.

The Pixleys barbecue year-round (with the help of a propane-gas grill) and Vern and Tyler can be seen on frosty winter's eves flipping the Pixley family favorite — grilled beef tenderloin with mustard mint sauce — while the remainder of the family stays toasty warm by the fireplace.

Vern said he learned the secrets of great grilling from his dad, Don Pixley, who grilled beef on a small hibachi in the family fireplace. In addition to offering his tenderloin recipe, Vern said family favorites include chicken, pork tenderloin and pork chops.

GRILL MASTERS "steak-out" BARBECUE

When asked to reveal his grilling secrets, Vern places his claim to fame on always starting with a clean grill, slathering on the barbecue sauce at the end, just before serving, so as not to burn the meat with sweet sauce, and having his trusty favorite grilling tools, including a pair of long-handled tongs, always within arm's reach.

"The tongs are instrumental when preparing good beef on the grill because with a long-handled fork, you pick holes in the meat, allowing valuable juices to escape," said Pixley, who said his family grills an average of four nights a week, even during the off-season.

Living in New York City hasn't necessarily put a damper on the grilling aptitude of the author of "Dad's Own Cookbook," Bob Sloan. This cookbook is, as Sloan puts it, "everything your mother never taught you."

When it comes to cooking, Sloan said, it's the fear of the unknown that has kept men away from the kitchen for so long. Sloan's wife Randi, who grew up in Farmington Hills and now shops the markets of NYC with Bob, agrees, especially when dinner is on the table after a long day at work.

The Sloan's idea of grilling is burgers, and on the rare occasion that good beef is called for, Bob recommends "you should talk to and get to know your butcher for the best recommendations for grilling beef."

Apartment living means they must rely on a simple hibachi, but when it comes to tools, Bob Sloan claims that he wouldn't be without his favorite tongs, a good quality 8-inch chef's knife and an equally good saute pan. "Dad's Own Cookbook" (Workman, 1993) is a steal at \$12.95 for the wealth of information that it contains. If you know a dad who longs to cook like a pro but feels out of place in the kitchen, this book is a must for Father's Day.

See GRILL, 2B

Teacher shares tips for workday suppers

BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER



"What's for dinner?"
"We're going to try to help answer that question once a month with our new feature — "Super Suppers," dinner strategies for busy families."

Great dinners aren't just happen, they're planned. "Half the amount of time spent cooking is prep work and setting things up," said Therese Donohue Nagi of Livonia.

Nagi juggles two jobs. She's a substitute teacher in the Romulus School District and tutors recent immigrants enrolled in English-as-a-second-language classes through Birmingham-based Langua Tutor.

Still, she finds time to cook dinner three or four times a week. "We eat recycled leftovers twice a week, and a fast food carryout like pizza on Fridays," she said.

Married for three years to Chuck, an engineer, Nagi grew up in a large family and enjoys cooking. Her husband didn't, but Nagi, who approaches cooking like a lesson plan, taught him.



Quick supper: Therese Donohue Nagi mixes up a colorful and flavorful chicken stir-fry that is easy and quick.

Her colorful stir-fry, with chunks of zucchini, mushrooms, baby corn, water chestnuts and chicken marinated in a flavorful blend of soy sauce, freshly grated ginger, honey and low-

SUPER RECIPES

CHICKEN STIR-FRY

- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast
- 3 zucchini chopped into squares
- 8 ounce package mushrooms
- 4 ounce package baby corn (about 1/2 cup)
- 4 ounce package water chestnuts (about 1/2 cup)
- 1 cup Italian salad dressing
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger or 1 teaspoon dried
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon canola oil

temperature at 350 degrees. Add honey and ginger to chicken right before stir-frying the meat.

Cook half the chicken until it is done, (it will turn white), cook the other half of the chicken and leave the marinade in the bowl.

Put cooked chicken in separate bowl.

Cook zucchini in wok for 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from wok. Cook mushrooms, followed by water chestnuts and baby corn. Put all the cooked vegetables in one container. Put cooked chicken and marinade back into the wok, add cooked vegetables.

Take a spatula and lift the vegetables and chicken so that all are coated by the marinade. If marinade is too runny, slowly add 1 tablespoon of cornstarch to thicken it up.

Serve stir-fry over cooked rice. Serves 4.

Cut chicken breasts into cubes and marinate them with Italian dressing and soy sauce either overnight or at least 4 hours before cooking. Chop vegetables into small pieces and put in separate containers.

To prepare stir-fry — put 1 tablespoon canola oil in wok, set

See TEACHER, 2B