

TASTE

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TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Dinner's just a thaw away when you plan

OK, I'll be honest. Slaving over a hot stove boiling jars, blanching vegetables, simmering sauces and cooking jams is not my idea of how to spend a summer vacation. Not that I haven't tried all of the above and surely can appreciate the taste of summer in the middle of winter by walking down to the fruit cellar.

But canning has never been my forte. I can admit, however, to being a freezer junkie. Blueberries, frozen and thawed in February with just enough juice to make a cobbler perfection, literally send shivers of delight down my spine. Ditto for the fresh taste of shredded zucchini, garden fresh carrots, strawberries and luscious sweet breads.

There's something about the aroma of cinnamon from fresh zucchini-carrot bread as it warms slowly in the oven for a winter's breakfast treat.

My freezer has been a godsend. Not only does it house the fruits of my garden and summertime visits from the farmers' market, but it also offers me much-needed time savings. When I make lasagna, I always make an extra for the freezer. The same goes for meatballs. When I make bread, I could easily eat all five loaves; but when I freeze the extra three loaves, I simply having to heat them up to enjoy later.

Appetizers are stored in freezer bags, tightly sealed, just waiting to be plucked from the depths of my freezer when unexpected guests pop in on the James Gang. Family day trips are considerably less hassle, especially when I know that upon returning, a frozen batch of goulash will be waiting in the oven. It will be defrosted and with my oven's programmable temperature settings, piping hot and ready for dinner after a daylong trek to the zoo.

Freezer management

Last month's turkey I grilled and spent 20 minutes cutting into chunks for frozen leftovers is a two-hour defrost away from turning into this afternoon's turkey salad sandwich. The first rule for superior freezer management is to keep foods going in and coming out while keeping track of the flow.

The second rule is to make the freezer do part of your work. There are a few steps that I have found work best when stocking my freezer. I always begin with foods of top quality. The freezer does not improve the quality of the food; its function is to preserve the quality and the nutritive values.

Success in freezing foods depends a great deal upon proper packaging, wrapping and sealing of foods. In the dry zero degree temperature of the freezer, solidly frozen foods can lose moisture; they must be protected by wrapping a for the use of containers that are moisture proof, vapor proof, and airtight. Moreover, the wrappings must be tight, with no pockets of air trapped between the food and wrapping material. Air draws moisture from foods, resulting in freezer burn.

Storage containers

During a few of my cooking demonstrations, folks have a tendency to giggle when I mention that momma was a Tupperware lady. Personally, I disdain the use of foil and butchers wrap and have a tendency to rely on those burpable containers and plastic baggies that have a seal. Fill plastic bags and containers as full as possible when freezing, leaving necessary space for expansion. Use your hands or "burr" those containers to remove as much of the air as possible. Label packages clearly and carefully, specifying contents and date frozen.

When freezing more than a few packages, always spread out the items, allowing at least one inch between them for circulation of the cold air. Allow at least 12 hours for the food to freeze solidly before stacking and packing in the depths of the freezer. If you are lucky enough to have a freezer or have a refrigerator-freezer large enough to hold your freezer offerings, there are other jobs that a freezer can accomplish to make your life easier.

Defrosting

In her latest book "All New Hints From Heloise" (Copyright 1990, \$9.95), Heloise suggests that when frost begins to form about 1/4 inch thick, it's time to defrost. It's easy to do even with a freezer full of food. Line a sink or washtub with damp newspapers, fill the sinks with the frozen food, topping with more newspapers and then cover with ice.

Heloise claims that cooling efficiency decreases the more frost that builds up and a simple washing using a baking soda wash (1/4 cup baking soda to a gallon warm water) keeps the freezer clean and fresh smelling. Speaking of baking soda, she also swears by the practice of keeping a box of soda in the freezer at all time (or using charcoal briquettes).

So keep cool this summer and let your freezer do its job; it's a lot cooler than slaving over the stove and you'll reap the benefits for months to come.

freeze some summer to enjoy later

Freezer jams and jellies are the perfect way to savor homegrown fruits and veggies all winter. They're easy for beginners to make.

By KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER



If you're a gardener, soon you'll be bringing neighbors, relatives, and co-workers gifts of vine-ripened, juicy tomatoes, and bunches of basil and parsley.

And don't forget fruit — raspberries, peaches and plums. You can't possibly eat them all, and most of us don't have time to can. So what's a weekend gardener to do?

Why not make some freezer jellies and jams to enjoy in the winter when you can't get fresh produce, or give as gifts?

Even if you're not a gardener, but someone who swears you can't beat the taste of homegrown fruits and vegetables, freezer jam is the perfect way to savor those tasty memories all winter long. Produce markets and roadside stands are brimming with freshly picked fruits and vegetables. Now is the time to jam.

When you think of jams and jellies, don't just consider the familiar fruit versions.

Herb jelly flavored with fresh basil, minced fresh parsley and grafted lemon peel is the perfect accompaniment to meat and poultry. Use it as a glaze for pork roast or spread it on crackers and top with thinly sliced meat or mild cheese or an appetizer.

Salsa jam, made with ripe plum tomatoes, onions, cilantro, hot peppers and lime, adds zest



KRAFT GENERAL FOODS

Savory spreads: Easy freezer herb jelly and salsa jam preserve the flavors of garden fresh herbs and succulent vegetables. Serve them with meat and poultry or as appetizer spread on crackers topped with thinly sliced mild cheese.

to fajitas or quesadillas.

Freezer jams and jellies are easy enough for beginners to make. The ingredients are simple — crushed fruit or vegetables, sugar, water, and powdered pectin, a natural substance found in fruit that boosts the jelling process in jam-making.

"Freezer jam doesn't take all day to make," said Sandy Garcia of Farmington Hills. "It has a homemade flavor. I don't notice a difference in flavor and texture from cooked jams."

Like cooked jams, making freezer jam is a science. "The biggest mistake people make is they don't follow the directions," said Garcia.

"They don't boil it long enough so it doesn't thicken. They try to double the recipe, and you can't

use sugar substitutes either. Use regular granulated sugar. Use glass or plastic containers with a good seal and sterilize jars in the dishwasher."

Lisa Van Riper, a spokeswoman for the Sure-Jell brand of fruit pectin, agrees. "Making jams and jellies is an exact science," she said. "Stick to the recipe and you won't have any problems. Don't substitute ingredients. Use the type of pectin the recipe calls for. Each brand of fruit pectin has a different formulation."

It's also important to use fully ripened fruits and vegetables that are thoroughly rinsed with clear water. Crush berries one cup at a time. A potato masher works best, said Van Riper. If you use a food processor, pulse to chop the fruit. Do not puree. The jam

should contain pieces of fruit.

You can substitute unweetened frozen fruit for fresh fruit. Thaw the fruit to room temperature before crushing to equal the same amount of crushed fresh fruit. Do not drain off excess juice.

Keep in mind that a full rolling boil is a boil that does not stop when stirred. It is essential to get a full rolling boil for jam or jelly to set. Boil for the amount of time specified.

Sure-Jell Light is perfect for people who are counting calories and want to reduce the amount of sugar in the products they use. Van Riper said Sure-Jell Light contains 1/4 less sugar than Sure-Jell and was formulated to meet

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Demand for Michigan wines ripening

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

Annually, we've taken stock of the progress of Michigan's wine industry. It's healthy even after the disastrous 1992 growing season that could hardly be called summer.

"St. Julian's sales are booming outside Michigan in Illinois, Indiana and Nebraska," Braganini said. "For some producers up north, 1992 was a tough year because the crop never ripened, but our 1992 Riesling is the best we've made. The future continues to look bright. In 1993, we'll have a significant number of new plantings coming into production to bring our chardonnay close to 2,600 cases."

"People are buying our wines because they perceive value. In the \$5 range, we're as good as they get. Simply Red is our best seller at \$5."

In September, Great White will be introduced as a counterpart to Simply Red. It, too, will be \$5 and is a blend of chardonnay, vinognoles and riesling.

While Braganini deservedly touts his 1992 Riesling (\$8.50), we're putting all red wine lovers on alert for the 1991 St. Julian Chambourcin (\$8.50). Both wines are hard to beat at this price.

"I can't speak for the entire state, but I know that sales of St. Julian wines are up 10 percent this year," said owner Dave Braganini.



CHATEAU CHANTAL WINERY

New winery: Winemaker/partner Mark Johnson and owner Bob Begin discuss vineyard conditions at Michigan's newest winery, Chateau Chantal on Old Mission Peninsula north of Traverse City.

The number of Michigan wineries grew by three during the past year. Jack and Linda Stagnaga will welcome you to their Bowers Harbor Vineyard (2896 Bowers Harbor Road, Traverse City, (616) 223-7615).

From Traverse City, take M-37 (Center Road) 8.6 miles north on the Old Mission Peninsula to Seven Hills Road and turn left. Continue a half-mile and turn left on Bowers Harbor Road. The winery is on the left.

The Stagnagas believe, as all vintners in that region do, that Old Mission Peninsula is a natural

vineyard haven. The winery is producing chardonnay, Riesling and a Methode champenoise Brut sparkling wine. Most impressive of all Bowers Harbor bottlings is the 1991 Reserve Chardonnay (\$12.75). Vanilla oakiness harmonizes well with gentle fruit. If you like your chardonnay with defined oak impressions, you'll find it attractive.

Grower Bob Begin has teamed up with Mark Johnson, former Chateau Grand Traverse winemaker for 10 years, to open Chateau Chantal

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