

MONDAY, MARCH 28, 1994

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Master the technique of eating artichokes

I think it was Julia Child who said: "The artichoke is the only vegetable that, when you finish eating it, you have more on your plate than when you started." We never ate anything as elusive as an artichoke in Wyandotte not because it wasn't available, but because the only vegetable we ate was corn.

I can to this day, recall the first time I ever encountered an artichoke. I was just a lad fresh out of high school, and was interviewing for a cook's job at the Top of the Flame, at that time a gourmet eatery on the top floor of what used to be the Michon Gas building at the foot of Woodward downtown. Fortunately, I was accompanied by my neighbor's mother who was one of those gracious elevator operators that have gone the way of 10 cent ice cream cones.

Twila was her name and fine dining was her game. She acquainted the taste buds of this little ole boy from Downriver to the taste of life in the big city. I don't think I liked the taste of my first artichoke, especially when I found my one, putting more effort into eating it than anything else. It was but a week later that I discovered the tasty thistle steamed and marinated at a little cozy bistro dubbed the Kickapoo on Grosse Isle. I have been a faithful admirer ever since.

Amongst it's other devotees, the artichoke is regarded as a thing of epicurean elegance and delight. It first came into prominence as a food-stuff in 16th century Italy. It has gone on to win acceptance as a delicacy by many of the cognoscenti of the Western world, but is curiously left unknown or disdained among people's everywhere. My guess is that in addition to its velvety and buttery taste, it is indeed just a plain edible thistle with thorns.

Eating tips

An artichoke is by far the only vegetable I can recall that is so demanding to eat. There are three phases to enjoying an artichoke. The first is the most fun and requires the fingers. This stage consists of discarding, one by one, the artichoke's outer layer of petals also known as bracts and dipping their fleshy lower tips into melted butter or a sauce. The petals are placed between the teeth and then gently pulled, extracting fleshy tidbits from their flowery base. There are some 40 odd petals to pull, dip and nibble from a basic artichoke.

Phase two is the most exacting and requires the dexterity of a surgeon. Once the petals are enjoyed, the diner must coordinate the fingers and a knife in unison to extract and dispose of the inedible center, usually referred to as the choke. Unskilled laborers will leave fragments of the choke and yes, to consume the choke will, for a lack of better terms, "choke" you.

This done, phase three simply requires the diner to cut the remaining artichoke heart into bite-sized morsels, again to be enjoyed with a sauce or butter.

An unadorned artichoke is one of the least fattening foods on earth, averaging a mere 25 calories. This virtue, however, diminishes when the vegetable is accompanied by creamy clogging butter, mayonnaise and hollandaise sauce.

Cooking methods

One of the best ways to enjoy an artichoke is to steam it. Ah, but that technique too deserves some special remarks. To first prepare an artichoke, the cook, to avoid any possible injury of the diner, should snip off the thorny tips of the artichoke petals. Best done with kitchen scissors, the artichoke will then have to be placed in an acidulated bath to keep from turning brown - (an acidulated bath is 1 quart of water mixed with 1/4 cup lemon juice).

Next, the long rubbery stem must be chopped off as close to the base as possible to facilitate standing. Yours truly prefers to remove about a dozen or so of the petals surrounding the base as these are usually tough and chewy, even after steaming.

Next, "X" marks the base with a sharp paring knife, about 1/4 inch deep to facilitate cooking and ensure a tender heart. At this point the artichoke can be steamed, covered for up to 30 minutes or boiled for about the same time. You can discern the doneness when a sharp paring knife is inserted into the base and easily pulls out.

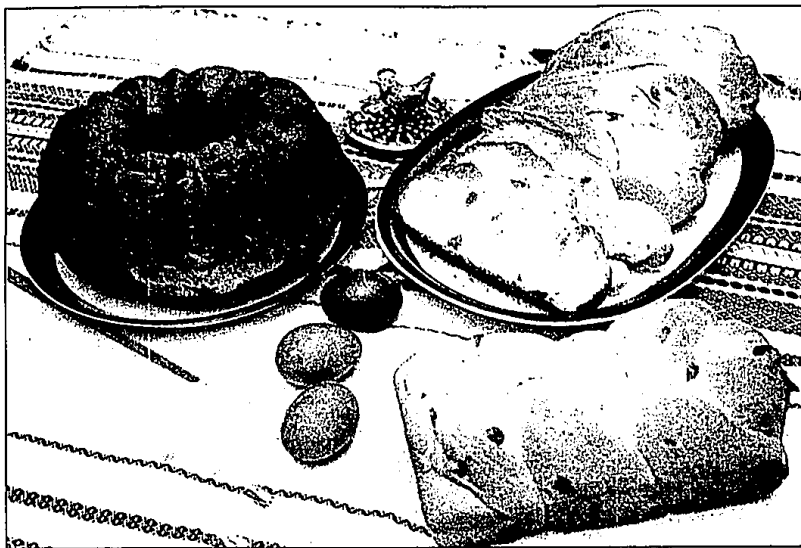
Serve the artichoke immediately at this point, you can stuff the artichoke with a mixture of bread stuffing, eggs and/or meat.

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

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Meet Wayne Hu of West Bloomfield, a finalist in the Pillsbury Bake-off Contest.
- You can afford to drink Bordeaux wines more often. Wine columnists Ray and Eleanor Heald tell you how.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL THREKLER

Easter tradition: Braided or baked in a bundt pan, Polish Babka bread is a tradition in the Majewski home. Robert Majewski cracks eggs, while his son, Matthew, grates lemon peel for the bread dough.

Easter Bread

KEEPS THE HOME FIRES BURNING



BY KEELY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

"Having the same bread my family is having on Easter perpetuates the tradition," said Dr. Robert Majewski who grew up in Massachusetts. "We can't always be together, but can share the same bread."

Majewski, has lived in Livonia with his wife Judy and

their sons, Mark, 11 and Matthew, 4 for the past four years. He learned how to bake the sweet citrus flavored raisin bread called babka from his mother when he was 10, and is passing the tradition on to his sons.

In addition to baking bread for family and friends, Majewski sends a loaf to his

former instructor Dr. Chet Glomski in Buffalo, New York.

"When I was in dental school a friend of mine and I decided to bake Easter bread. We gave the extra loaf to Dr. Glomski. The first year I graduated from dental school I sent him one as a lark on Palm Sunday. He sent me a very nice thank you. I've sent him one every year. This is the 23rd year in a row," said Majewski a dentist at Mott Children's Health Center in Flint.

Since graduating from dental school, Majewski has fine-

tuned his bread baking skills. His sons enjoy helping him.

On this particular day, Matthew is standing at the counter grating lemon peel, while his brother helps braid dough. Judy stands back watching. Baking bread is a father and son project.

Because of health concerns, Majewski reduced the amount of eggs in his mother's recipe, substituting two eggs, plus four egg whites for four whole eggs. The only noticeable difference is a lighter colored batter.

See BREAD, 2B

Southern cook cuts fat in 'down home' recipes



LAURA LETOBAR

Beth Mele of Livonia has a great recipe for those of you looking for an easy way to fill a lot of tummies. Mele moved to Livonia two years ago from Baton Rouge, La. As a clinical physicist at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, she is responsible for assisting physicians in administering radioactive implant therapy.

Because her schedule sometimes keeps her at the hospital at all different hours, she likes to prepare recipes that are easy and provide leftovers for lunches and late dinners.

She is a wonderful cook but does not like to use all the fat most of the "down home" recipes require. Many Southern recipes call for a "roux." This is a flour and oil mixture that is used to thicken a stew or make gravy. Mele says it takes practice and patience to make a proper roux.

Start by melting the butter or oil in a pan. Add equal parts of flour, stirring continuously. The flour and oil will make a paste. As the paste cooks, it turns a rich brown color. If not watched carefully at this point, it will quickly burn, and then you have to start over.

Although it does thicken the recipe nicely, it will add a large amount of unnecessary fat to the recipe. Fortunately, Mele believes it is not necessary in most recipes.

In her makeover recipe, I eliminated the thigh meat because of its high fat content. By using only boneless, skinless chicken breasts, I reduced the total fat from the chicken from 115.6 grams of fat to 30 grams.

See SOUTHERN, 2B



RECIPE MAKE OVER



Louisiana Chicken Stew Original Recipe

1/4 cup vegetable oil
2 large whole chicken breasts (about 3 pounds) skin on, cut into 8 pieces
12 chicken thighs (about 4 pounds)
1/4 cup flour
1 1/2 cups coarsely chopped onion
2 cups coarsely chopped celery
2 medium green bell peppers, coarsely chopped
1 can (32 ounces) tomatoes, chopped, with juice
4 tablespoons tomato paste
1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
4 cups chicken broth
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 large bay leaves
2 large garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 pound precooked, coarsely chopped andouille sausage
Brown all chicken in a large Dutch oven with 1/4 cup oil. Remove chicken to a platter. Add flour to remaining oil to make roux. Place onions, celery and green peppers in roux and cook for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, lemon juice, hot pepper sauce, bay leaves, chicken broth, garlic, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer. Return chicken to Dutch oven. Simmer, uncovered for 30 minutes. Add the sausage. Cook another 30 minutes, or until the chicken is tender and the sauce is thick. Serves 12.

Louisiana Chicken Stew Reduced-Fat Recipe

1/4 cup water
10 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite-size pieces
1 1/2 cups coarsely chopped onion
2 cups coarsely chopped celery
2 medium green bell peppers, coarsely chopped
1 can (32 ounces) "no salt added" tomatoes, chopped, with juice
4 tablespoons "no salt added" tomato paste
1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
3 cans (10.5 ounces each) Campbell's low sodium chicken broth
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 large bay leaves
2 large garlic cloves, minced
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 pound precooked Louis Rich brand Polish turkey sausage
Brown all chicken in large non-stick Dutch oven or stew pot. Remove chicken to a platter. Place onions, celery, green peppers and 1/4 cup water in pot and cook for 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes, tomato paste, lemon juice, hot pepper sauce, bay leaves, broth, garlic, and pepper. Bring to a simmer. Return chicken to Dutch oven. Simmer, uncovered for 30 minutes. Add the sausage. Cook another 30 minutes, or until the chicken is tender and the sauce is thick. Serves 12.