

MONDAY, AUGUST 22, 1994

TASTE

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Snip, dry fresh herbs before they fade away

The James Gang garden has proliferated well beyond expectations this summer. Our tomato plants have outgrown their cages, and at one point before gracefully toppling over, stood at least five feet tall. Our pepper plants have provided many a delectable grilled vegetable to accompany everything from burgers to grilled fish.

A lone zucchini plant has for some miraculous reason, chosen not to overtake the entire backyard, and brings forth just the right amount of vegetables to stuff, sautee, and be made into bread.

Fresh herbs

Even the herbs are thriving. The rosemary, planted four years ago and brought in every fall to adorn the kitchen window sill, has developed into a gorgeous plant. Fresh rosemary has accompanied many a pork roast, pork tenderloin and stuffing at our house.

Cilantro has been chopped into salads, steeped in a marinade, and sprinkled over grilled chicken, then allowed to flower and bring forth coriander seeds. The dill, which went into the ground as a tiny handful of seeds, has brought forth towering spindles of aromatic leaves and seeds that were chopped and sprinkled on fresh salmon and perch.

The parsley, another transplant from years past that enjoys wintering on the windowsill, has been used for garnishes, sauces, tabbouleh, salad dressing and potato salad.

But the star of our garden has always been basil. In an honesty, I was a bit concerned. They were growing rather slow during June and early July, but it must have been the fireworks from the Fourth of July that caused them to awaken and bloom into gorgeous, bushy plants.

Last year, we planted two plants and never seemed to have enough for pesto or to sprinkle on tomatoes. But this year, with six plants in the ground that are nearly knee high, we've had more than enough of the leafy herb.

As summer comes to a close, the herbs in the James Gang family garden are beginning to bolt. Every day I venture out to find the start of a fresh flower on the tops of my basil, parsley and fennel plants. The tarragon has topped, and the dill and cilantro plants have turned to seed. I've already clipped two basil bushes, gathered their leafy branches together, tied them with some kite string and hung them upside down to dry gracefully in front of the basement dehumidifier.

The leafy parsley has been trimmed of its bitter, large branches from the bottom, awaiting new, tender, savory growth.

If herbs in your garden are bolting too, don't despair. Here are a few tips for drying your favorite herbs so that you can enjoy them throughout the winter.

Drying techniques

If you are contemplating a large harvest, there are several effective techniques for drying herbs. To air dry herbs, you can tie bunches of herbs together (as I did) with string and rubber bands and hang them in a warm, dry, dark and well ventilated area that is as dust free as possible.

If dust is a problem, you can poke a hole in the bottom of a brown paper bag and insert the herb cluster lantern-style.

To dry seed herbs (such as coriander, dill, fennel, etc.) wrap unpunctured paper bags around the stems and secure them; the seeds should fall into the bag as they dry. All fresh herb drying done in this form should take about two weeks.

If you haven't the room or time for air drying herbs, the oven is a viable option. With a gas oven, simply leave the pilot light on and the internal temperature stays around 85-90 degrees Fahrenheit. Spread a single layer of herbs on cookie sheets set on the oven racks. Turn herbs once daily. They should be dry in three to four days.

If your oven is electric, turn it on to its lowest setting and proceed as with gas; the herbs should dry in a matter of hours. Oven drying works particularly well for succulent herbs like basil, parsley, tarragon, rosemary and cilantro. Of course, if you have a dehydrator, simply follow the directions.

When the leaves are crisp and fully dry, strip them from the stems. Place them in glass bottles with airtight lids or resealable bags for optimum storage. Seeds can be stored in a likewise fashion.

Remember that when using dried herbs and spices, use half the recommended fresh amount. You can also freeze fresh herbs as you would freeze any leafy green. A clever alternative is to puree fresh herbs with a little water in a blender and then freeze in ice cube trays. When frozen, pop the herbs into freezer bags and label. Toss the frozen herb cubes into soups and stews for added flavor.

Fresh herbs can also be preserved in vinegars and jellies, but that's another column.

See Larry James' family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1898.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Back to school lunch ideas.
- Jewish New Year breads.



Flair for food: Janet Jackson (left) and Barbara Batdorff impressed judges with their colorful and tasty appetizers in the Bays "Passport to Spain" recipe contest.

ARTISTIC COOKS

MAKING WINNING IMPRESSION



Meet two local cooks who were named runners-up in the 1994 Bays English Muffins "Passport to Spain" National Recipe Contest. Their recipes were judged on the basis of taste, imagination, appearance and practicality.

BY KEELY WYONKIN
STAFF WRITER

Barbara Batdorff of Birmingham and Janet Jackson of Farmington Hills have never won a recipe contest before, but their creative flair for cooking impressed judges who named them runners-up in the 1994 Bays English Muffins "Passport to Spain," National Recipe Contest.

Batdorff's "Laguna Tuna" is named in honor of her brother, Thomas Dede who lives in Laguna Niguel, Calif. "I use this filling to make sandwiches when he visits,"

she said. Toasted English muffin halves are the base for Batdorff's classic tuna melt made exciting with the addition of horseradish sauce, sliced avocado and melted provolone cheese.

To make "Texas Lone Stars" Jackson spread toasted English muffin halves with a mixture of chicken, cream cheese and jalapeno peppers. This south-of-the-border quarters and garnished with a red pepper star.

Batdorff and Jackson's recipes were selected from more than 3,000 entries submitted nation-

wide. There were five finalists, and 30 runners-up. The winner, Mary Louise Lever of Reno, Ga., won a trip to Spain. Batdorff and Jackson received a gift packet of Bays English Muffins and a Bays gourmet apron in recognition of their delicious winning entries.

Both women met for the first time in our Livonia photo studio, and were surprised to learn they have a lot in common.

They love to cook, and enjoy experimenting. Both have strong artistic backgrounds, which shows in the colorful, creative way they prepare, and present dishes.

"Cooking is an expression. It's therapy and creative," said Batdorff.

"People are intimidated by cooking and they shouldn't be. You have to do it," said Jackson.

"We've been cooking for centuries. We have it so easy in comparison to people who had to cook over an open fire."

Jackson used a small cookie cutter to cut stars out of red pepper for her Texas Lone Stars. Batdorff perked up bland-looking tuna with avocado slices and ruby red tomato slices.

Before moving to Michigan from Fairfield, Conn., Jackson worked as an art director for different advertising agencies. She met her husband, John, a copy writer while on assignment at W. B. Doner & Company advertising agency in Southfield. "I'm writing children's stories and trying my own recipe I can," she said. "For awhile I was trying one new recipe a day."

See COOKS, B2

Busy mom prepares meals in batches



DARLEEN SYKES

Darleen Sykes of Farmington Hills is one very busy lady! She's a full-time bookkeeper with the UAW, a Hospice volunteer, and carries also a full load of credits per semester working toward a bachelor's degree in hospital administration. Needless to say, she has very little time to cook. In order to prepare healthy meals for her family, Sykes has learned to cook in large batches. She freezes a portion for busy days when she doesn't have time to cook.

Her recipe for spaghetti sauce is proof that she is very resourceful in the kitchen. Sykes says that this is the time she rinses out all the old ketchup bottles in her refrigerator and pours them into the sauce. She also adds opened jars of prepared spaghetti sauce such as Ragù.

The stewed tomatoes Sykes uses in her sauce are the "original flavor." Not the Italian or Mexican flavored. But, she said these other flavors can be used to create a sauce more to your personal taste.

One of the tricks she uses to quickly adjust the flavor of the sauce is to add up to one tablespoon of sugar. This will cut the tangy taste easily without having to adjust all the other ingredients.

See BATCHES, B2

RECIPE MAKE OVER



Darleen's Spaghetti Sauce
Original recipe

- 1 pound ground
- 60 ounces canned stewed tomatoes
- 4 packages spaghetti sauce (powdered)
- 8 ounces tomato paste
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 16 ounces mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon sugar, optional

Brown ground round in skillet with onions. Mix other ingredients in a large pot and stir thoroughly. Simmer over medium heat for one hour. Add sugar, to taste, to mellow flavor. Makes 16 servings.

Calories per serving: 143, Saturated fat 3 g, total fat 8 g (50 percent of calories), protein 7 g, carbohydrates 11 g, cholesterol 24 mg, fiber 1 g, sodium 300 mg, iron 2 mg.



Darleen's Spaghetti Sauce
Reduced-Fat Recipe

- 1 pound (100 percent) ground turkey
- 60 ounces canned stewed tomatoes
- 4 packages spaghetti sauce, (powder)
- 8 ounces tomato paste
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 16 ounces mushrooms, drained
- 1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon sugar, optional

Cook ground turkey in non-stick skillet with onions. Mix all ingredients in a large pot and stir thoroughly. Simmer over medium heat for 1 hour. Add sugar, to taste, to mellow flavor. Makes 16 servings.

Calories per serving: 93, Saturated fat 0 g, total fat 1 g (7 percent of calories), Protein 10 g, carbohydrates 11 g, cholesterol 15 mg, fiber 1 mg, sodium 302 mg.