

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

How to make taco shells and other reader requests

Thanks for your calls and positive responses to my recent column on cutting fat. Because of your responses there will be more to follow.

Barb MacIntyre of West Bloomfield wants to know how to make taco shells like Mexican restaurants. Well Barb, pick up a package of fresh flour or corn tortillas in the refrigerated dairy case of your local grocery. Authentic Mexican recipes call for the tortillas to be "passed" through some hot oil in a fry pan just enough to soften and roll.

For a healthier version, warm each tortilla in a fry pan or griddle sprayed with non-stick coating spray until warmed throughout. To make authentic crispy taco shells, stuff the tortillas with cooked seasoned meat, secure with a toothpick and deep fry for two minutes.

You can also purchase a taco fryer from a cooking shop that positions soft tortillas in a basket for frying. After frying, the soft tortillas turn into crispy shells. Expect to pay about \$10 for the taco fryer.

For more on Mexican cooking, pick up a book by Diane Kennedy. She is one of my favorite Mexican cookbook authors.

Herbed oil

Betty Lund of Troy requested a recipe for herbed canola oil. The easiest way to make herbed oil is to gently heat the oil to about 250 degrees, add some fresh herbs, toasted nuts, spices, hot peppers or citrus rinds in a clean, sterilized jar. Carefully pour the warmed oil over the infusion mixture into the jar. Seal and allow to stand in a dark cupboard for two weeks. This can be done with canola, olive, peanut, vegetable, safflower or sunflower oil. Do not use fresh garlic as the garlic can turn toxic.

Theresa of Livonia wants information on freezing potatoes. In her book "The Potato Garden" (copyright 1993, Quarto Inc. \$17) Maggie Oster doesn't recommend freezing fresh potatoes, but says you can freeze mashed, baked, stuffed, hash browns and potato pancakes with good results. Potatoes in soups or stews freeze poorly and often disintegrate when reheated.

Springtime pie

Here's a reader-requested recipe for Strawberry-Rhubarb Pie. It's incredibly easy, and if you don't have a good pie crust recipe, store bought pie crusts can be substituted. If you're using frozen rhubarb and strawberries, add 10 minutes to the baking time.

STRAWBERRY-RHUBARB PIE

- 1 double pie crust
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 1/2 cups fresh strawberries
- 2 1/2 cups of 1/2-inch pieces fresh rhubarb

Prepare dough for pastry. Line a nine-inch pie pan with one crust. Set aside. Combine sugar, flour and salt in a medium bowl. Add strawberries and rhubarb. Toss lightly to coat. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Spoon filling into unbaked pie shell. Make a lattice top or use top pie crust as desired.

Glaze top of crust with a little milk or lightly beaten egg. Cover pie crust edges with foil. Bake for 25 minutes. Remove foil. Bake for 25-30 minutes longer or until crust is golden brown. Makes 8 servings.

George Keller of Garden City wants to know how to get rid of the "fishy" taste when cooking fish. Well George, good fresh fish shouldn't smell fishy. As I've said before, know your fish monger and don't be afraid to ask how fresh the fish is. Frozen fish should be completely defrosted before cooking. Never over cook fish. When cooking defrosted fish, cook it in milk for 15 minutes before cooking as the lactic acid has a tendency to reduce the "fishy" taste. To reduce the fishy smell, sprinkle a baking dish with 1/4 inch of baking powder and place in the bottom of your oven. It helps remove some of the smell and when finished, rinses it down your drain.

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eclectic Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- You can always count on mom for the best recipes.
- See Prouse of Birmingham shares super vegetarian supper.



Cutting-edge cuisine: Jim Lark (left), Chef Marcus Haight, and Mary Lark at the restaurant.

Fabulous Feast

TREATS GUESTS ROYALLY

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEAD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Have you ever wanted to prepare an extraordinary dinner, but hesitated because you didn't know how to pull it off? It's not that difficult if you plan ahead.

Share a historic moment with some good friends. Invite them to a dinner fit for a king. Recreate the celebrated Three Emperors Dinner. It's not that difficult if you plan ahead.

selected from the original 17-course menu and designed a six-course offering with each course accompanied by a different Roederer Champagne.

"Using recipes and directions from the latter half of the 19th century is not anything like following a modern recipe," said Haight. "Actually, all I had to work with was a detailed description of the method and some broad, general parameters. Deciphering the recipes and methods reminded me of reading Escoffier, something I used to do about two hours each night when I was in culinary school. It brought me back to those days."

"Food served at the Three Emperors Dinner was cutting edge for 1867," said Jim Lark.

Haight expanded on this remark by commenting that the lobster recipe he suggests, (see recipe inside) represents the "in" thing in modern cuisine.

"Preparing fish with vegetables is considered the latest cooking trend," he said. "It only goes to prove that cuisine is cyclical and there is something to be said for classical cooking."

"No beef," was Fournault's suggestion for a champagne dinner. "Serve a Rose (pink champagne) with duck or lamb prepared medium rare."

Jim Lark echoed the no beef idea, but said he's not personally fond of lamb with champagne, even a Rose.

"Courses need to be light," he stressed. "Set the meal with a Breton style, build to a rose, perhaps, and end with a demi-sec." He also suggests that fowl, veal and rabbit make good matches for champagne.

See recipes inside.

Recreation of such historic dinners is among the reasons the Lark's diners voted their favorite restaurant to top billing over many outstanding dining establishments nationwide.

For the celebratory Three Emperors Dinner, Haight

Viognier is a white grape with an attitude

Viognier, a white grape native to France's northern Rhone Valley, is used to produce Condrieu and Chateau Grillet. Ten years ago, little viognier was planted in France. Condrieu and Chateau Grillet, two small appellations, could boast slightly more than 100 acres of viognier total. Now there are about 300 acres of viognier in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France with more plantings planned.

Not much is different in the United States. In 1984, there were no bearing viognier vines in California. Today, there are just under 300 acres with a domestic total of about 350 acres. Virginia has 32 acres, and is second to California, but Horton Vineyards is the only commercial viognier producer in that state.

The best thing about viognier is that it is not at all like chardonnay. We like chardonnay and there are many good ones, but sometimes we need a change. The other neat thing is that France does not have a lock on making viognier. Domestic producers have looked to France as a model for producing cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay and pinot noir, but now the French are experimenting with viognier as much as we are.

While visiting some Rhone Valley Condrieu producers, we learned that one may

barrel ferment viognier and put it through malolactic fermentation in the styles of a chardonnay, while another tank ferments the wine and does not use malolactic fermentation. There is no French model. Viognier is a grape with an attitude, challenging winemakers and consumers to discover its nuances.

Winemakers Scott Harvey of Renwood Winery, and Leo Sobon of Sobon Estates speak of the difficulty ripening viognier. Sobon says that "viognier is similar to tinfandel with its uneven ripening." Harvey's experience says "get it ripe and it naturally makes a big wine."

Arrowood Vineyards winemaker Mike Berthoud maintains that "when you let viognier get ripe, you also find out that half of it has been eaten by birds. We roll the dice each day during harvest and wait to get the ripest viognier to make the most flavorful wine."

Winemaker Dwayne Helmuth of Callaway Vineyards admits, "We're so inexperienced, we don't know what to expect and are using inconsistency as viognier's middle name, but the grape is really following its genetic design. We need time to discover this and learn to deal with it effectively."