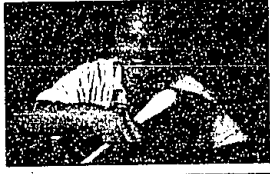


TASTE

MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1995

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TASTE BUDDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Some foods are better without a grain of salt

We discarded the salt shaker long ago at our house and mainly keep a box of Morton's handy for when it comes time to clean a wooden salad bowl.

But I would be lying if I told you the Jones Gang cooks without a grain of salt.

You don't need a salt shaker to add salt to foods. I was shocked when I read the label on my favorite canned chicken broth and learned it is loaded with sodium. Then there's the fat-free salad dressing mix, the package of taco seasoning, the ketchup bottle, and of course, fast food burgers to which we do occasionally succumb.

But as Gomer Pyle would say, "Surprise, surprise, surprise!" There are some foods that actually taste better without the addition of salt. Take a garden fresh salad.

Dress it with good olive oil, a splash of lemon juice, and a hint of chopped garlic, toss it and you get the flavor Mother Nature intended it to have. Freshness, and the lack of salt, make for greater tasting vegetables, especially when steamed, boiled or stir-fried and dressed only with a splash of fresh lemon.

Contrary to popular belief, the pasta you usually add a handful of salt to while boiling will not taste insipid without the addition of salt. There are also a number of intriguing salt-free sauces that are available.

Homemade salt-free mayonnaise is enlivened with a healthy tablespoon or two of plain yogurt. Meat, fish and poultry need not be encased in salt, and really will cook better and retain more of their juices without the shake of salt before roasting, baking or pan frying.

But what is today's health conscious cook supposed to replace salt with? Are there any magical jars of secret condiments that can actually do what salt does — make your food taste better?

Yours truly enjoys a prepackaged product called "Mrs. Dash Table Blend," which is a blend of herbs and spices that actually replaces flavor. But to be perfectly honest, it can't even come close to replacing the needed salt in a tabouleh salad, homemade gravy or french fries.

Flavor enhancers

Researchers say that the best substitute for salt is fresh lemon. Not the reconstituted bottled version, but the real stuff, freshly squeezed.

They say it tends to bring out natural flavors, especially in meat, fish and poultry. Lemon, of course, is paramount in the broiling of fish.

Vinegar and wine also have the ability to add flavor. Pork responds remarkably well to vinegar and does even better when brushed with a mustard-honey glaze to counteract the bitterness of the vinegar during the last 45 minutes of cooking.

A sprig of rosemary tucked innocently inside a pork roast will offer a hint you will remember in the kitchen and not just a great new taste.

Many dishes are immediately associated with a specific herb. A lamb roast awakens at the touch of mint or rosemary. Saltimbocca, the specialty of Rome, is subtly scented with sage.

A good steak or roast, rubbed with a split clove of garlic, can do you no wrong. Basil loves noodies (i.e. pasta), and a good bay leaf can wow garners to a stew. Always right, parsley is a must have when making a fresh vinaigrette, even something made up in a Good Seasons cruet, while oregano works wonders when coupled with anything in a tomato base.

Spices

Ditto for spices. The classic French blend quatre spices (four spices) contains five tablespoons of ground cloves and three tablespoons each of ginger, nutmeg and pepper. This blend is used generously in the making of hearty soups, rich sauces, meats, and even fruits.

You say hee-haw and I say the white sauce for macaroni and cheese would be absolutely nothing without a fresh grating of nutmeg.

Nutmeg also gives a touch of the unusual to the humble meatloaf or meatball or the classic cheese and spinach pie. The list is endless.

Many of you are like me and are looking to modify your daily intake of salt. That's what food police are warning us to do, but be advised — cheese, prepared sauces such as soy, Worcestershire, mustard and pickles all contain excessive amounts of salt.

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside.
Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Economic Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-3047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.

LOOKING AHEAD

- What to watch for in Taste next week
- Barbara Norman answers, "What Can I Do With My Bread Machine?"
- Chef Larry Jones shares family tested recipes.

50ifty things to do with apples

BY JOAN BOBBIN • SPECIAL WRITER



PHOTO BY MICHIGAN APPLE COMMITTEE

Michigan's harvest, one of the best

BY JOAN BOBBIN • SPECIAL WRITER

October is National Apple Month, when we celebrate America's favorite fruit.

There are about 7,500 varieties of apples grown worldwide and 2,500 varieties grown in the United States. About 250 varieties are grown in Michigan, but only about 12 major types for retail.

"This has been the greatest year ever for Michigan apples," said Patrick O'Connor, spokesman for the Michigan Apple Commission. "We're looking at a record 23.8 million bushels, an increase over 1993, when we also had a record crop."

"The weather that was detrimental to so many other agricultural products was perfect for producing big, juicy apples. The recent weather — cool nights and warm days — is just what we need to develop flavor and color."

Michigan ranks second nationally in apple production, exporting apples to South America, Europe, and even Saudi Arabia.

Unlike so many other industries, most of our state's 1,400 apple growers are still "Mom and Pop" businesses, with orchards of 60 acres or less.

One of these family-owned orchards is Davies Orchard and Cider Mill, in Salem Township. Co-owner (with husband and in-law) Judy Davies has been growing Paula Red, McIntosh, Jonathan, Empire, Red and Yellow Delicious, Ida Red, Winthrop, and Rome apples from 2,000 trees on a 20-acre farm for just over 20 years. They recently added Gala and Jonagold varieties.

The Davises have a retail store in the barn where they also sell cider and honey, and doughnuts on weekends when business is brisk. They also have a thriving u-pick business.

"We keep those trees sized down so people can pick their apples without ladders," said Davies. The Davies customers receive a fact sheet that includes several methods for putting apples away.

"The important thing is that there's a steady temperature, between 32 and 40 degrees," said Davies. "A temperature fluctuation is bad for apples. One of the best ways to store them is to put them in a plastic bag and keep them in an extra fridge in the garage or the basement."

"Some people wrap apples individually in newspaper and store in the attic in a Styrofoam container. An attic is better than a garage because it gets a little heat leak from the rest of the house. A detached garage is a little too cold, depending on the severity of the winter, of course, but in an attached garage you can store them against the inside wall, as I do. I had an aunt who used to put them in plastic bags and store them in the attic under a pile of blankets."

Davies has been in the apple business for 23 years, and she still loves apples. "There are so many varieties, and each has a different flavor, how could I get tired of them?"

"I have hundreds of apple recipes on file, but my favorite is still good old American apple pie."

Apples are a good source of vitamins A and C, and minerals. A medium apple provides 4 grams of dietary fiber. The soluble fiber in apples, called pectin, is similar to that in oat bran and can be a factor in cholesterol reduction. An average apple has just 80 calories, contains 170 mg. of potassium, is high in complex carbohydrates, and has no sodium or cholesterol.

A recent Michigan State University study revealed that apple eaters had fewer respiratory infections and tension-related complaints. Additionally, a USDA study found that the mineral boron in apples makes bones stronger and may help prevent osteoporosis.

"It's true what they say, an apple a day keeps the doctor away."

See recipes inside

- Grate apples and low-fat cheese for a filling for an omelette.
- Add diced apples to a spinach salad.
- Mix and puree diced apples, frozen strawberries, frozen concentrated fruit punch and low-fat plain yogurt for a creamy drink.
- Toss cubed turkey, plain yogurt, chopped apples and walnuts together; serve as a salad or in pita bread.
- Add diced apples and raisins to rice cooked in apple cider for delicious rice pilaf.
- Apples make great "dippers." Try dipping slices in spreadable cheese or peanut butter. Thin the peanut butter with applesauce for smoother dipping.
- Sauté julienne-style apples and carrots; sprinkle with herbs.
- Mix applesauce with wine and lemon juice; serve over baked chicken breast.
- Add apple slices and apple cider to melted butter and chopped onions; pour mixture over baking fish, such as haddock or cod.
- Stir sherry into applesauce; serve with ham or pork entree as a garnish.
- Mix apple chunks or applesauce into low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt and season with a dash of cinnamon.
- Turn a peanut butter & jelly sandwich into a peanut butter & apple sandwich. Substitute apple slices for jelly on peanut butter sandwiches.
- Mix apple chunks into oatmeal or put on top of pancakes to energize your breakfast.
- Apples and cheese are a great combination for a dessert tray. Gouda, Swiss, Monterey Jack and Cheddar go well with apples.
- Toss apple chunks in a chicken and vegetable stir-fry. Coat with a sauce made from 1/2 cup apple cider, 2 tablespoons teriyaki sauce and 2 teaspoons cornstarch. Cook until sauce is thickened.
- Layer classic Reuben ingredients on caseronyr bread. Add apple slices before placing cheese slices on sandwich.
- Grill chickens with a sauce made from applesauce, lemon juice and tomato sauce. Or pour the sauce over chicken breasts and bake.
- For a quick dessert, microwave whole or pared apples in citter until tender. Sprinkle Grape Nuts cereal on top for added crunch.
- Freeze individual serving containers of apple juice or applesauce and put in a lunch bag to keep other foods cold. It will thaw by lunchtime, yet still be cold.
- Core an apple. Cut it in half and carve out some of the flesh. Fill the cavities of both halves with tuna, ham or chicken salad or peanut butter and raisins. Place the two halves together and you have a portable, totally edible package.
- For each quart of hot mulled apple cider, add 1 cinnamon stick, 1/2 teaspoon whole cloves, 1/2 cup brown sugar, 1/4 teaspoon allspice and thin orange wedges dotted with cloves. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 10 minutes.
- Add canned apples slices to prepared granola. Serve as a topping for French toast, pancakes, and waffles.
- Fill 4 cored apples with a mixture of 1 cup chopped cranberries, 1/4 cup sugar, 1/4 cup apple cider, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, and 1/2 cup chopped nut meats. Bake, cool slightly, then serve with a spoonful of whipped topping.
- Combine apple juice and instant tea, and add a cinnamon stick.
- Combine chopped, canned apple slices with pancake batter. Serve with warmed maple syrup mixed with applesauce.
- Make apple butter: Combine 5 pounds of peeled and sliced apples, 2 cups apple cider, 2 teaspoons cinnamon, 1/2 teaspoon each allspice, cloves and nutmeg. Cook until apples are soft, then add 2 cups brown sugar. Cook slowly for several hours until thickened and smooth.
- Add sliced apples to chicken salad made with yogurt. Sprinkle with hulled sunflower seeds.
- Combine cooked sliced apples, vanilla and cinnamon and add to low-fat yogurt.
- Place tuna salad mixture on toasted whole wheat bread. Top with sliced apples, raisins and bean sprouts.
- Use apples in baking a spicy coffee cake.
- Warm up Halloween parties with an "Apple Brandy Slizzer." Mix 2 ounces brandy, 6 ounces of apple cider, 1/2 ounce lime juice, 1 cinnamon stick and 2 cloves. Heat, but do not boil. Remove from heat, and add 1 teaspoon dark rum and a slice of lime.
- Try apple butter on roast beef, ham or roast chicken sandwiches. Spread between slices to keep bread from getting soggy.
- Mix freshly chopped fresh apple and chopped walnuts into cranberry sauce.
- Prepare the Thanksgiving turkey with apple-walnut stuffing, and garnish with decoratively sliced apples.
- Dips/pesto
- Decorate a room with baskets of fresh apples and whole nuts. Use a light coating of mayonnaise to give apples a holiday glow.
- Create fancy carved apple garnishes for hors d'oeuvre trays.
- Serve compotes and cheese slices on apple slices, slices or wedges instead of crackers.
- Top apple slices with pine cheese sauce or sausage rounds.
- Put round apple slices on one side of the glass-ceramic clove plate for a beautiful alternative to chips.
- Add sliced apples to chicken salad made with yogurt. Sprinkle with hulled sunflower seeds.
- Combine cooked sliced apples, vanilla and cinnamon and add to low-fat yogurt.
- Mix vanilla yogurt and applesauce together and freeze for a frozen sorbet.
- Spread applesauce over hot oatmeal, hot cereal or pudding or mix in granola for a sweet crunch.
- Make jam with apple juice instead of water for an extra juicy spread or dessert.
- Mix chopped apples and peanut butter and spread on rotary sticks.
- Use leftover Scotch egg sauce for apple sauce. You can mix raisins or soaked wheat germ into the apple sauce mixture in the fridge for extra snacks. Spread it on bread or crackers or use as a healthy and delicious dip.
- Spread caramelized broiled apples over broiled ham. Sprinkle the ham with ground cloves and the apples with ground cinnamon. Broil, and serve as a main dish.
- Combine ground apples with nutmeg-spiced sauce, such as browned carrots or sweet potatoes.
- Fry the apples in one half cup of melted butter and brown sugar. You can mix raisins or soaked wheat germ into the applesauce mixture in the fridge for extra snacks. Spread it on bread or crackers or use as a healthy and delicious dip.
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