

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Food has a way of saying 'you're special'

You might think I'm a few slices short of a loaf, but I really do enjoy this taste of year. The holidays rekindle family traditions. Valentine's Day sparks my taste for more romantic culinary interludes. Fat Tuesday and Ash Wednesday are also reasons to celebrate.

I seek out reasons to cook, to create, to satiate and to nurture. And if being an optimist is only half enough, I also pride myself in being a hopeless romantic. I send flowers, cry at the movies, perform crazy random acts of kindness, and am head over heels in love.

Comforting recipes

I saw "The Bridges of Madison County" twice, and believe it or not, actually got excited when the "Recipes of Madison County" by Jane Hemminger & Courtney Work, (copyright 1995, Ozmar House Publishers, \$14.95) crossed my desk. If you didn't see the movie, which stars Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep, I couldn't imagine a better Valentine's Day rental.

In a nutshell, she offers, he accepts. And from that moment on, the lives of an Iowa housewife and an adventurous photographer are passionately intertwined.

Lovers of romance and food will really enjoy this book because it was written after the movie, which portrays the strong role food plays in strengthening the bonds of intimacy in all relationships. The simple offering of food nurtures romance.

In "The Bridges of Madison County," food plays a key role between Francesca and Robert. She takes a dinner invitation on the Roseman Bridge for Robert. Green peppers stuffed with wild rice - a perfect choice for this meal, subtly they symbolize a continuity between the business of Francesca's everyday life and the freshness of her encounter with Robert. The simplicity of Francesca's stuffed peppers, a jelly jar of flowers, and blues on the radio set just the right mood for this steaming evening.

Food is also a physical expression of caring and compassion.

Food has a special way of saying "you're special." That unexpected pot of chicken soup from a friend feeds the soul as much as it nourishes the body. Remember folks, it could all start, as it did in the movie "over a simple glass of iced tea."

The recipes in the book are easy, comforting, Midwestern food at its laid back best. Unlike true love, there's nothing complicated in the book.

Classic love

Nurturers of classic love will appreciate "At Home With the French Classics" by Richard Grossman (copyright 1988, Workman Publishers, \$14.95). It's a compilation of the great French recipes that have been updated and simplified for the contemporary American kitchen.

Chef Grossman goes into great detail about the heritage of classic French cuisine. His suggestions for Veal Orloff require a steady hand over the Kenmore range, but it's well worth the effort. Whether he's discussing the benefits of a classic Bouillabaisse or harkening the need for proper cookie molds for making impeccable Madelines, lovers of candlelight, soft music, low wattage light bulbs, red roses and the desire to cook to seduce will appreciate this book.

Having once been hailed as the father of cajun cuisine, Paul Prudhomme has once again floated to the top of the pot with his new tome "Fry Pools That I Love" (copyright, 1995, William Morrow Publishers, \$25). This book contains fiery additions to basic recipes. In his usually unusual food pairings, Prudhomme stirs a paste of ground pecans and coffee into a plain sauteed chicken for a daring new taste. After trying the recipe and piping through the holes, I could only help but wonder where these chefs come up with their ideas?

As with all the recipes in his book, the base for each is a seasoning mix, blend or pasta that requires the use of a well stocked herb and spice pantry.

In retrospect, my mamma would look at one of his recipes and wonder for sure if it would kick up her ulcer. If you are fan of Taganent, make sure to have plenty on hand. Ah, but if it's the spark that begins the eve of romance, why not?

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To receive a free mail message for him dial (313) 653-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then dial his number 1886.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Little things you can do to cut fat.
- New beverage splashes for your glass.

CHINESE NEW YEAR - THE YEAR OF THE RAT

TRADITION SERVES UP OPTIMISM

STORY BY KEELY WYGONIK

Say "rat," and most of us (shriek!) Rat has a negative connotation as in "you dirty rat," or "I smell a rat." So why are some people looking forward to celebrating the Year of the Rat, which begins Chinese New Year on Feb. 18?

The rat is ambitious, honest, sincere, generous, and in self-control," said Linda Parker, owner of the Hunan Palace restaurant in Farmington Hills, which is celebrating Chinese New Year on Feb. 18.

Each year is named for one of the 12 animals beginning with the rat and progressing through to the ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, fowl, dog and pig. This cycle of

years is frequently used for astrological purposes, much the same way the 12 signs of the zodiac are used in the west to describe personality traits and tell fortunes.

"He's the leader of the 12 animals in the Chinese Zodiac. People born in the Year of the Rat are smart, and very friendly," added Shou Yu, manager of New Peking Chinese Restaurant in Garden City, which is celebrating new year Feb. 18-22.

In China a whole month is set aside to celebrate the passing of the old year, and to welcome the new. Outdoor parades with ceremonial dragons and fireworks mark the occasion observed some time between mid-January and mid-February. Families feast, and relatives travel for miles to be with one another.

"Chinese New Year is like Christmas - the family gets together," said Paul Leung, owner of Oceania Inn in Rochester Hills, which is celebrating Chinese New Year Feb. 18-19 and 22-24. "The older generation gives red pocket money to the younger generation as a sign of good luck. Also, the Chinese do a good job of cleaning the house to welcome the new year."

Celebrations in U.S. cities with large Chinese populations such as San Francisco and New York, are generally limited to one day.

Local restaurateurs are planning special menus, and will offer entertainment to mark the occasion. No Chinese New Year celebration would be complete without the Lion Dance to scare away evil spirits from the old year, and welcome the new year.

Parker and Chef Jack Dai said they considered characteristics of the animal linked to the coming year, and then determined the special dishes that they would prepare. For example, Peking Duck, which requires two days advance notice, symbolizes ambition. The menu also includes sesame beef, Chinese style shrimp and colorful peas.

"One of the menu at New Peking is a gold fried dumpling, that looks



New year treats: Baking and pastries are a part of Chinese culinary tradition, and new year's revelry. Many of these treats are cut into a round shape like a wheel to symbolize wholeness and continuity.

like a gold nugget, so everyone who eats it will become rich," said Yu.

"The Year of the Rat is also seen as a year of opportunity, and also a good time to launch new ventures and make new investments. It's the year of optimism," said Marshall Chin, one of the managing partners of Mon Jim Lau in Troy, which will celebrate new year on Feb. 18.

"For our Chinese New Year celebration we focus on what we do well, and our menu is based on popular items and specialties," he said. The menu includes Macadamia Nut Crusted Salmon with lomon grass sauce, Asian vegetables and Thai rice noodles. Entertainment includes Lion Dance, magicians, fortune tellers, and music.

Oceania Inn's menu offers a Dim Sum Platter, Tender of Steak marinated in Black Pepper Sauce, and stir-fried chunks of chicken breast with a mixture of Chinese vegetables and mushrooms in oyster sauce.

Parker, Shu and Leung told me Chinese New Year menus

often include a whole fish with the head and tail on. The head symbolizes a good beginning, and the tail a good ending. In Chinese, fish means enough - that you always have plenty of what you need - money, food, and good health. Noodles symbolize long life.

"A lot of the time we have oysters," said Leung, "so you will be prosperous in your business."

Baking and pastries are also a part of Chinese culinary traditions. Cookies are cut into a round shape like a wheel to symbolize wholeness and continuity.

For a Chinese New Year party at home, cooks at the Grisco Kitchens suggest decorating your table with bamboo mats, decorative paper parasols, and brilliant red and gold napkins. Rice bowls can hold a variety of condiments, and colorful chopsticks and stands will add to the atmosphere. A Chinese restaurant can supply a beautiful main course, leaving time for baking cookies full of Oriental flavor. See recipes inside.

HEALTHY APPETITE

Respect your diabetic sweetie's diet

BY PEGGY EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

My friend called me the other day to say her 20-year-old son has diabetes. She asked me to talk to him and tell him what to do. Well, the only thing I could tell her was to learn everything she could about diabetes. I couldn't give him a "cookbook" lesson in diabetes without knowing much more about his lifestyle. After all, diabetes is a complicated disease that has no known cause or cure. In diabetes, the body does not make enough of the hormone insulin. The job of insulin is to get sugars (from the foods we eat) out of the blood stream and into the muscle and brain tissues.

If left untreated, a person will die. If treatment is "half-hearted" - that is, a person only sometimes controls their blood sugar - then serious illness can result from

diabetes complications including kidney failure, blindness, heart attack and circulation problems sometimes requiring amputation. This is serious and scary stuff. The best option: control your diabetes!

If you have a loved-one who is diabetic, you don't necessarily have to forego something sweet on Valentine's Day. However, respecting and accommodating your sweetie's diet requirements is a far greater gift than any box of chocolates.

New studies indicate that diabetics who check their blood sugar throughout the day have a greater understanding of what foods have the strongest effect on their blood sugar levels. The good news is that some people have found that their bodies can tolerate an occasional sweet treat with little or no effect.

Still, it is imperative that dia-

betics stick to a diet that has been formulated for their particular needs.

The meals we eat everyday contain a mixture of protein, carbohydrate and fat-containing foods. We use protein foods to build and repair our body, we use carbohydrate foods for energy for our muscles and brain, and we use fat foods to cushion our internal organs and absorb fat-soluble vitamins. Of course, this is just a small part of what protein, carbohydrate and fat do; there is much more to it.

Digestion, breaking down food for our body to use, is a complex process that starts when we put food in our mouth. Our body responds and sends out digestive enzymes and hormones. As the food moves into our stomach and intestines, these enzymes and

See DIABETIC, inside

TIPS FOR CONTROLLING DIABETES

(good for the whole family)

- **Fast food is ok if you make good choices.** A "junior" hamburger or roast beef sandwich, along with a side salad and milk makes a good meal. Or try corn-on-the-cob, baked beans or a dinner roll instead of french fries, biscuits or cola.
- **Read food labels.** "Dietic" doesn't mean "diabetic." Be careful of added sugars - they come in many forms including sucrose, fructose, dextrose, maltose, lactose, corn syrup and honey.
- **Use calorie calculators** let you enjoy the sweet taste of sugar without the extra calories or effect on your blood sugar. However, foods with low calorie sweeteners are not necessarily calorie-free. For example, diet soda has no calories, but sugar-free hot cocoa does.
- **Eat a fruit or bread serving before exercising.** But speak with your doctor if you are involved in aerobic sports training on how to balance your meals for your activity.
- **Try to avoid fried foods.** If you must eat something fried, then count on an extra three or four fat servings for every fried item you eat.
- **When eating in the home of friends,** ask them if you have diabetes and have to eat selectively. This will save the embarrassment of your host urging you to eat "just one piece of chocolate cake."
- **If you are traveling by air or train,** ask in advance for special meals.
- **If you must drink alcohol,** do so only in moderation with your doctor's approval. Never drink on an empty stomach and avoid sweet wines, liquors or mixes that contain sugar.