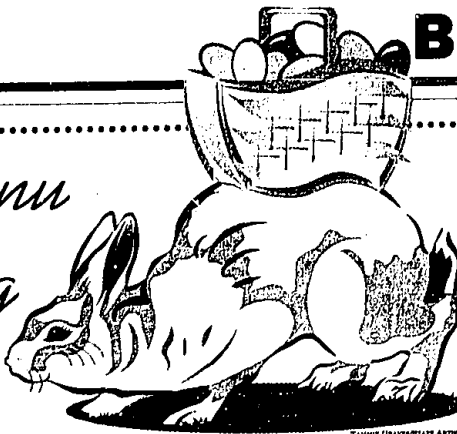


TASTE

Light Easter menu celebrates spring



THOMAS LEAVENWORTH ARTIST

BY KERLY WYGONIK
STAFF WRITER

Holiday traditions change with every generation, and there's nothing wrong with combining the best of the new and old.

In our family, Easter Sunday without ham and kielbasa would be like Christmas without a Christmas tree. We enjoy those special foods, but prefer something lighter for the main entrée.

A couple of years ago, my sister-in-law proposed a good solution — a ceremonial plate containing a sampling of those special foods, which are blessed at our church on Holy Saturday. The plate is beautifully garnished, and passed around as an appetizer. Everyone enjoys a

slice of ham, some kielbasa with horseradish, hard-cooked eggs, and a slice of bread. Our tradition is saved, and there's no temptation to over-indulge.

Choosing a menu is always a challenge. Many of us work, and getting ready for the holidays only adds to our already busy schedules.

Our Easter Afternoon Celebration of Spring for six was designed by Kelli Lawton, chef/owner of Two Unique Caterers and Event Planners of Bloomfield Hills for families searching for easy, light, festive dishes. Some of the items can be prepared ahead of time.

"This Celebration of Spring begins with tongue-dazzling Heart-

land Field Greens tossed in Raspberry Vinaigrette," said Lawton, who grew up in Birmingham and graduated from the culinary arts program at Schoolcraft College in Livonia. "The festivities continue with Roasted Herb Chicken Breasts, accompanied by a light Spring Risotto and Balsamic Asparagus."

"Be sure to serve hearty rolls and breads, and leave room for

dessert — Very Berry Spring Tart with a Linger Crust.

Lawton and the staff of Two Unique Caterers and Event Planners are celebrating their fifth anniversary this spring. A culinary arts instructor at Schoolcraft College, Lawton was a member of the 1992 Michigan Culinary Olympic team and won several gold medals in domestic and international competitions.

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Hop to it, make your own candy

I don't know if you're like me, but I really enjoy making and giving gifts from my kitchen — candy in particular, and especially for Easter.

Pick up any candy-making book, worth its weight in chocolate, and you'll find yourself turning, dipping, heating to exact degrees, molding, chilling and certainly exhausting yourself in the kitchen. Then you need to worry about taste, appearance, seeping, storing, and packaging, not to mention shopping at specialty stores for just that "right" paper cup, dipping stick, or heavy-bottomed saucepan to insure the proper outcome.

But there are great candy recipes that don't require a lot of time, specialty ingredients or expensive culinary equipment. As a matter of fact, you might be so pleased with the outcome that you'll put away those old staid chocolate books, and start looking for easier recipes. These easy-to-make candies taste and look as good as their old-time cousins.

First off, let's get one thing straight: Candy making is basically just a mixing together of varying amounts of sugar, cream, butter, corn syrup, chocolate, nuts, and dried fruits, and cooking them. Cook them very slow and you get great fudges and butter creams; go a few degrees higher and faster and you get chewy caramels. Further heat intensifies products brittle and toffee.

Proper equipment

There are suggested guidelines that can practically guarantee success when making candy at home. Any kitchen that deserves to be called a kitchen should have at least one piece of heavy-weight cookware. The most optimum, of course, would be a two or three-quart saucepan. The least desirable, but still acceptable, would be a 12-inch deep-sided fry pan.

The reason a good heavy-weight pan is needed is that the heavier the pan the more evenly heat is conducted through it. Cookware that doesn't have a thick bottom overheats, and must be watched constantly. It will produce hot spots, which are not good to have when making candy. Borrow or buy a good heavy-weight pan if you plan to make home-made candy. It's a good investment.

Even novices own a heavy-weight aluminum saucepan that must be as old as me, and I wouldn't dare imply that she get a new one. Cleanup is a breeze with heavy-weight cookware. If I make candy in it and something hardens beyond recognition, I simply fill the vessel with water, place it on the stove, bring the pot to a boil, and presto! It's cleaned (and just about sanitized, I might add).
Cooks married to engineers and accountants might feel a little more in control and accurate with a candy thermometer, look for one that reads in one or two degree increments. But I graduated from momma's cooking school, and she could tell when the candy was done by dipping in a spoon, dropping a few drops into cold water and gauging its viscosity. Candy thermometers, especially for the inexperienced, are worth their weight in gold. Read your thermometer at eye level.

Wrapping it up

Paper and candy cups are available at cake and candy supply stores, but I generally rely on what's available at my neighborhood market. You can shell out big bucks for boxes, specialty wrappers, imported chocolate, ribbons, bows, and all the whistles and bells in town, but there's something a bit more personal about home-made candy packed in a nicely wrapped shoe box, with some crumpled, colorful tissue, held together with a ribbon.

If you plan on making more than five pounds of candy, it will behoove you to purchase high quality, imported chocolate in bulk rather than relying on individual bars from the local grocery store. It might actually be less expensive.

Finally, and probably most important, when attempting to make candy, read and follow all of the directions to a "T". Make sure all of the sugar is dissolved, avoid splashing. Never make candy on humid (excessively rainy) days, and probably most important of all, have fun doing it. Invite a friend, relative or child over and get creative.

See Chef Larry Janes' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry Janes is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc. To leave a voice mail message for him call (313) 963-2047 on a Touch-Tone phone then mailbox number 1888.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

Speed scratch cooking.

Menu

- Young Mixed Heartland Greens with Raspberry Vinaigrette
- Roasted Herb Chicken Breasts
- Spring Risotto
- Balsamic Asparagus
- Very Berry Spring Tart with a Linger Crust

YOUNG MIXED HEARTLAND GREENS

6 cups Assorted Field Greens
(Most produce stores sell a "gourmet" mix of greens, clean and ready to eat. You could use that for a base and mix with leaf lettuce or romaine).

- 1 English Cucumber, diced
 - 1/2 cup Alfalfa Sprouts
 - 1/2 cup Michigan dried cherries or cranberries
 - 1/2 cup Walnuts, chopped and toasted
- Combine all ingredients together. When ready to serve, toss with Raspberry Vinaigrette. To toast nuts, spread on cookie sheet and bake in 350 degree F oven for 4 to 5 minutes.

Raspberry Vinaigrette

- 1/2 cup frozen raspberries
 - 3 tablespoons frozen orange juice concentrate
 - 1/2 cup white vinegar
 - 1/2 cup peanut oil
 - 1/2 cup vegetable oil
 - White pepper to taste
 - Cayenne pepper to taste
 - 1 teaspoon salt
- In a large bowl, combine all ingredients except peanut oil with a large wire whisk. While continuing to whisk, add peanut oil in a slow steady stream to incorporate well.

ROASTED HERB CHICKEN BREASTS

- 6 six-ounce boneless, skinless, chicken breasts
- 1/2 cup Dijon Mustard
- 1/2 cup Dijon Mustard
- 2 tablespoons white wine (of your choice)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
 - Pinch cracked black pepper
 - Pinch fresh herbs, assortment, chopped fine (your choice parsley, sage, thyme and rosemary)
- Combine all ingredients, except chicken breasts, in a large bowl. Coat chicken with Dijon mustard rub. Cover in the nit overnight, and marinate, with mustard rub, chicken in 350 degree F, oven for 30 to 35 minutes. Or grill on the barbecue or broil chicken in the oven.

SPRING RISOTTO

- 1 cup Arborio rice
 - 1 tablespoon olive oil
 - 1 cup assorted sliced mushrooms (wild or exotic if available)
 - 1/2 cup onion, diced
 - 1 teaspoon garlic, chopped
 - 1/2 cup white wine (of your choice)
 - 1 tablespoon shallots, chopped
 - 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, freshly grated
 - 2 1/2 cups stock (chicken or vegetable)
 - 2 teaspoons salt
 - 1/2 cup savory chopped herbs (your choice of fresh rosemary, thyme, parsley, or basil)
- Heat olive oil in large saute pan. Saute onions, garlic, and shallots until clear. Add rice and continue to saute for 1 minute. Deglaze with white wine; gradually start adding hot stock a few ounces at a time. Continue to stir until liquid is absorbed by rice, about 10 minutes. Add mushrooms and spices. Continue cooking and adding stock for another 10 minutes. When rice is plump and liquid is absorbed remove from heat. Stir in herbs and adjust seasoning to taste. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

BALSAMIC ASPARAGUS

- 2 bunches fresh asparagus
 - 2 tablespoons olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons Balsamic vinegar
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - 1 tablespoon fresh basil, chopped
- Trim bottoms of asparagus by about 2 inches. Lay asparagus on cookie sheet, and brush with olive oil. Broil asparagus on all sides in the oven, until golden. Chill in refrigerator. Arrange on platter, and drizzle with Balsamic vinegar. Salt and pepper to taste, and sprinkle with chopped basil.

• See dessert recipe inside.

Suggestions for busy cooks

- Raspberry Vinaigrette can be prepared up to 5 days ahead of time.
- Clean and prep mixed greens the night before and wrap in a damp towel.
- Dice and pre-prepare vegetables for risotto the day before dinner.
- Prepare stock for risotto a few days before, or substitute canned or pre-prepared base.
- Tart shell can be prepared 3 days in advance. Cool and wrap in plastic.
- Pastry cream can be made 2 days in advance. Cool and wrap in plastic.

Readers request more details

BY ELEANOR AND RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

A mid-February column brought inquiries and requests for more details. It seems the world doesn't have enough details.

The triple distillation process for producing Ketel One Vodka brought several inquiries. Here's the skinny:

A copper potstill known as Ketel #1 is located in the Nole Distillery in the Netherlands, where Ketel #1 vodka is made. Following an ancient tradition of maintaining a perfect distillation temperature, a coal fire monitors both temperature and contents of the potstill.

The vodka is distilled three times, but in the third distillation, the first and last 100 gallons are drawn off and not used for Ketel One because they are considered either too harsh or too weak. The "mid-portion" of the vodka batch is kept in underground stills enhanced clarity and tasted for smoothness before bottling.

A once-distilled vodka may contain fusel oils, a distillation byproduct that yields a harsh taste and strong "alcoholic" smell. The

triple distillation eliminates fusel oils and gives Ketel One a fresh, delicate, icy taste. You can sample Ketel One at the following fine restaurant bars: Larco's in Troy, Michigan; Mushroom in Southfield; and The Townsend Hotel in Birmingham.

Paul van den Muysenberg, consul of the Netherlands and a West Bloomfield resident, is proud of the product from his native country and said, "The Netherlands is the third largest foreign investor in the U.S. We've been good trading partners for 200 years, but Ketel One history is even longer — 300 years."

The "TomOlives" we recommended to replace the traditional olive in a Ketel One martini are not available locally. They can be ordered from Old South TomOlives, (800) 834-2413, or sampled at Larco's, where owners Mark and Sue Larco insure they are available upon request. If you want more information on Ketel One Vodka, Hank Baccol of Great Lakes Marketing Co. says you can get a free video by phoning (800) 243-3616.

• See reader requests inside.

Wine Selections

- Pair richly flavored chardonnays with roast chicken, grilled fish, rich cheeses, trout with lemon butter, scallops and Oysters Rockefeller. For meatless preferences, potatoes and root vegetables make good matches. Try:
1994 Villa M. Eden Grand Reserve Chardonnay, \$10
1994 Chalone Vineyard Chardonnay, \$27
1994 Chalone Gavilan Chardonnay, \$15.00
1993 Acacia Reserve Carners Chardonnay, \$22
- Not readily available, but worth a search, are two delicious, well-priced reds:
1994 Shenandoah Vineyard Sangiovese, \$12
1994 Shenandoah Vineyard Special Reserve Zinfandel, \$8.50
- McDowell Valley has made a comeback with the following impressive releases. If you're interested in offbeat varieties, these are some of the well-priced best:
1994 McDowell Vignier, \$14
1994 McDowell Granache Rose, \$6
1992 McDowell Estate Syrah, \$14
- For grilled meats and those that spring barbecues:
1993 Eschol Cabernet Sauvignon, \$10 (What a steal!)
1994 Oltava Dry Creek Cuvée, \$13
- Best buy under \$10:
1994 Columbia Crest Semillon-Chardonnay, \$7