

TASTE

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MONDAY, APRIL 22, 1996

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Spring brings requests for lighter fare

Spring has certainly sprung and the questions and comments I've been receiving via my voice mail this column indicates you're ready for some lighter ideas in the kitchen. I'll admit, this was a long, cold winter and I'm glad to see spring. I look back at the hearty dishes of winter with warming gratitude but can't wait to get the garden "in," and check out the summer produce arrivals at the Eastern Market and neighbouring green grocers.

■ And speaking of the Eastern Market, I talked with Joe Wigley last week, and we're happy to inform you that Wigley's meats (and great corned beef) has reopened as of April 7. Their new location is in the Royal Diamond Market, 3405 Russell, Detroit.

■ Madeline Burton of Birmingham was one of many readers who called to comment on my crock pot column that ran before the holidays. Madeline also requested something lighter, healthier and "springy" that can be made in the crock pot. I know this will be a hit, especially with fresh asparagus coming in to the markets as we speak.

FRESH ASPARAGUS SOUP

- 2 pounds fresh asparagus
- 5 cups homemade or canned chicken broth, defatted
- 4 scallions, chopped
- 2 medium russet or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cubed
- ½ teaspoon seasoned salt
- ½ teaspoon fresh ground pepper, preferably white
- ½ cup plain non fat yogurt
- ½ cup tomatoes, chopped
- Pinch dill

Break off the woody, fibrous ends of the asparagus spears and discard. Rinse the asparagus and cut into 1 inch pieces. Place the asparagus along with the broth, scallions and potatoes in a slow cooker. Cover and cook on the low setting for 6-7 hours or until potatoes are tender. Increase the heat to high. Using a blender or food processor, puree the vegetable solids in batches with a little of the cooking liquid until as smooth as possible. Return to the liquid remaining in the slow cooker. Stir in seasoned salt and pepper. Cover and cook on high for 30 minutes. Serve garnished with plain yogurt, chopped tomatoes and dill. Serves 4.

Recipe from: *The Best Slow Cooker Cookbook Ever* by Natalie Haughton, copyright 1995, Harper Collins, Publishers, \$17.95.

■ The Michigan Beef Industry Commission is sponsoring the Michigan Beef Cook-Off. Your original beef recipe could be worth \$25,000! Last year, Cynthia Hodges of Ann Arbor was a runner-up. For entry information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to The Michigan Beef Industry, 2145 University Park, Suite 300, Okemos, MI 48864 or call (517) 347-0911. Hodges' recipe would be a welcome addition to any spring luncheon menu.

SIRLOIN SALAD WITH DRIED CHERRIES

- 1 boneless beef top sirloin steak, cut 1-inch thick, about 1½ pounds
 - 4 small or 2 medium heads Boston lettuce, torn (about 8 cups)
 - ½ cup crumbled blue cheese
 - ½ cup dried cherries
 - ½ cup pine nuts
- Dressing:
- ½ cup olive oil
 - ½ cup red wine vinegar
 - 2 cloves garlic, crushed
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - ½ teaspoon pepper

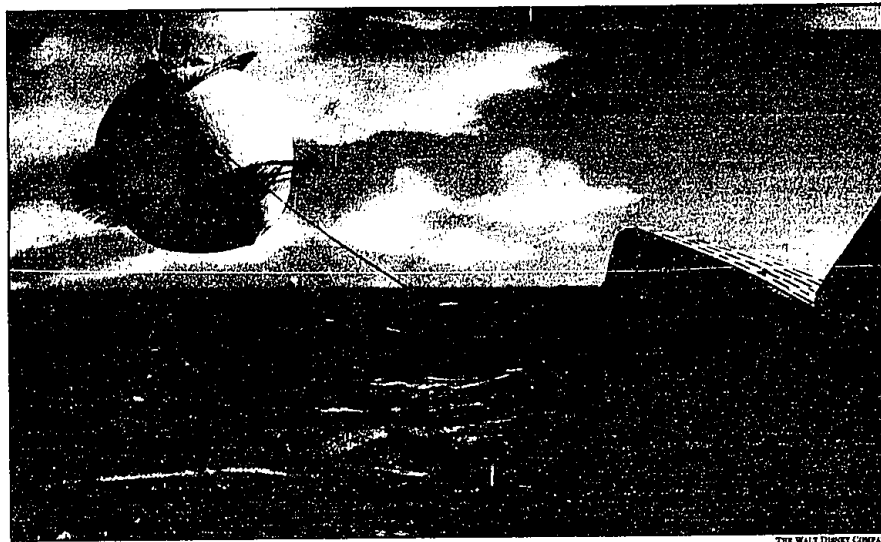
In a medium bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients. Remove and reserve 1/2 cup; cover and refrigerate. Trim fat from beef. Cut lengthwise in half and then crosswise into 1/8-inch thick strips. Add beef to remaining dressing; toss to coat. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. Remove beef from marinade; discard marinade. Heat a large non-stick skillet over medium high heat until hot. Add beef, at a time and stir fry 1-2 minutes or until no longer pink. Do not overcook. Remove from skillet with a slotted spoon. In a large bowl, combine lettuce and reserved dressing; toss to coat. Arrange beef over lettuce; sprinkle with cheese, cherries and pine nuts. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Recipe compliments of Cynthia Hodges, 1995 Michigan Beef Cook-Off finalist, and the Michigan Beef Industry.

See more reader-requested recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:
■ Cranbrook Schools' Le Gala De Cuisine



Fruit fly: In an ingenious attempt to escape an attacking shark, the inhabitants of a giant peach (a boy named James and his six bug companions) enlist the support of a flock of seagulls to lift them into the air in Walt Disney Pictures' "James and the Giant Peach."

'James and the Giant Peach' Inspires Juicy Recipes

STORY BY KEELY WYGONIK • STAFF WRITER

PEACHY TIPS:

- Choose intensely fragrant fruit that gives slightly to palm pressure. Avoid those that are hard, or have soft spots (bruises), or show signs of greening.
- Store ripe peaches in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.
- Ripen under ripe peaches at room temperature by placing in a paper bag with an apple; pierce bag in several places with the tip of a knife.
- Peach yields: 1 pound equals 4 medium; 2½ cups sliced; 2½ cups chopped.
- Always peel peaches that will be cooked or the skin will become tough and ruin the texture of the pie, preserves or whatever.
- To peel a peach, dip it in boiling water for 20 to 30 seconds; remove with a slotted spoon and immediately plunge into a bowl of ice water. Use a paring knife to pull off the skin. If the skin doesn't come off readily, repeat the process, or simply use the knife to peel the skin that resists.

Source: Sharon Tyler Herbst, author of *The Food Lover's Table* (Harvest Books, 1994, \$15).

The peaches are in early this year! Over 25 readers shared some of their favorite "peachy" recipes to win a "Peck O'Peach Paraphernalia" prize package from Disney Pictures' new family film, "James and the Giant Peach."

Walt Disney Pictures' juicy big-screen version of Roald Dahl's classic fantasy, "James and the Giant Peach," follows the exciting journey of a lonely young boy who finds some unusual new friends and unexpected adventures when he climbs inside a giant peach and sets sail for New York City.

Since the initial publication of "James and the Giant Peach" in 1961, this best-selling tale has captured the fancy of several generations of readers.

James, a nine-year-old English orphan is sent to live with his horribly wicked and greedy Aunts Spiker and Sponge. Unwanted by them and forced to perform their menial chores, the boy dreams about going to New York City — a place, his father once told him, where dreams come true. When James meets a mysterious old man who presents him with a bag of magical glowing green things (crocodile tongues) and tells him that marvelous things will happen, the boy sees a glimmer of hope.

Pressed for details about how the magic works, the old man tells him that the answers are within his own heart. Racing home, the boy accidentally spills the contents of the bag at the base of a barren old peach tree next to his home. As Spiker and

Sponge look on in astonishment, a peach instantly appears on the branch and grows and grows until it reaches 20 feet in diameter.

Quick to take advantage of their "cash crop," the Aunts charge admission for a gander at the "giant peach," but forbid James to go near it. Hungry and curious, he sneaks out that evening and takes a bite of peach just as the last remaining "green thing" wriggles its way out onto the mouth-watering morsel. When a glowing tunnel appears inside the peach, James enters it, and his adventure begins.

Director Henry Selick, who previously helmed "The Nightmare Before Christmas," re-teams with producers Denise Di Novi and Tim Burton as well as many of the same animators and film-making talents who helped create that landmark 1993 animated film.

Michigan peaches won't be in season until July, but other varieties are available in grocery stores and produce markets. "Although my daughters are now grown, we have such wonderful memories of the story of 'James and the Giant Peach,'" wrote Rackellina Hoff of Birmingham. "We never forget our family vacation when I read the book aloud while my husband was driving. Not only did we thoroughly enjoy the story, but the mouth-watering description left us salivating for peaches. In fact, midway through the book, we stopped at a roadside stand to buy some fresh peaches — and they were the juiciest, most delicious peaches we ever tasted!"

Here's a Hoff family favorite:

PEACH BLUEBERRY CRISP

- 2 cups fresh peaches, peeled and sliced
 - 1 pint fresh blueberries, washed
 - 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 - ½ cup sugar
 - ½ cup unsifted flour
 - ½ teaspoon cinnamon
 - ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- Topping:
- ½ cup flour
 - ½ cup uncooked old-fashioned oatmeal
 - ½ cup butter, melted
 - ½ cup light brown sugar, firmly packed

Combine fruit and lemon juice. Add remaining ingredients. Put in greased 8 by 8 by 2-inch baking dish. To make topping: combine flour, oats and brown sugar. Stir in ½ cup butter to make a crumbly mixture.

Sprinkle topping on top of fruit mixture. Bake at 375 degrees F. for 35 minutes. Top with whipped cream, if desired, serve.

• See more recipes inside

Bistro Beef Steak 'Lean 'N Easy'

In our quest for a healthy diet, we're eating more low-fat and non-fat foods than ever before. We also think we should eliminate certain foods, like red meat, to have a healthy diet.

"Consumers can learn to 'lighten up' when it comes to eating beef by choosing leaner cuts, trimming any visible fat and using low-fat cooking methods," said Mary Young, registered dietitian, and assistant director of education for the National Live Stock and Meat Board.

Today's beef has 27 percent less trimmable fat than just 10 years ago, and because of initiatives by retailers and processors, more than 40 percent of all beef cuts have no external fat at all. If you want the leanest cuts of all, look for the words "round" or "loin" in the name when shopping for beef. The leanest cuts are: beef eye round, top round, round tip, top sirloin, top loin and tenderloin.

Calories and fat can be significantly reduced by trimming all external fat from beef and other

meats, and removing skin from poultry before eating. Trimming external fat from lean beef reduces the total fat content by an average of over 50 percent. Trimming visible fat before cooking reduces fat even more. Surprisingly, trimming has a bigger impact on reducing fat than the grade of beef.

When selecting beef, grade is a consideration. The grade of beef, either USDA "Choice" or "Select" appears on the packaging label. Both "Choice" and "Select" cuts can be lean, but "Select" has the least amount of internal fat, called marbling (white flecks in the meat). Because of the lower fat content, "Select" cuts will cook faster, so proper cooking is important to ensure a juicy, tender meal.

Bistro Beef Steak, a "Light 'N Lean" recipe from the National Live Stock and Meat Board, is ready to serve in 30 minutes.

• See recipe inside



NATIONAL LIVE STOCK AND MEAT BOARD

Quick entree: *Bistro Beef Steak*, flavorful medley of boneless beef top sirloin steak, steamed new potatoes, green beans and sliced yellow bell pepper is ready to serve in 30 minutes.