

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 1996

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

Summer brings beautiful berries

What can be more refreshing on a warm summer's eve than a chilled bowl of fresh berries — by themselves, dripping with juice, lightly dusted with powdered sugar or dilligled with creme fraiche.

The strawberries on your grocer's shelves are from Florida and Texas, and in a week or so, California berries should be heading our way. Because of the cold spring, local berry farmers say it's impossible to predict when Michigan strawberries will be ripe.

According to Middleton Berry Farm in Lake Orion, the strawberries are very slow in growing this year. Chris Long, at Long Family Orchard in Commerce Township, predicted the berries would be ready for picking in late June. "We need some warm days," she said.

Fresh blackberries should be rolling in soon. I noticed them last week at the Eastern Market in small amounts. Blackberry season runs from late May through late July, but in all honesty, I just can't wait for Michigan's famed blueberry crop.

With harvests beginning in mid-June and peaking around mid-July, our fingers will be blue for weeks as the Janes Gang heads west to visit friends in Muskegon and bring back 5 pound bags of fresh blueberries. Due to the cooler start to the season, loganberries and gooseberries should be heading our way in late June or early July.

Storage tips

If memory serves me correctly, it was Uncle Earl who introduced the family to gooseberries, and since then, we have made scores of gooseberry pies. Without a doubt, if you love berries, Michigan has one of the best growing seasons, and always produces a juicy squinting, flavor intense assortment.

If you are planning on using berries to cook or can, you can roughly figure on one quart to yield about 3 1/2 cups. Fresh berries are very perishable. One of the secrets to keeping them around for a few extra days is to keep them cool, and just as importantly, keep the air circulating around them. If you purchase berries in those plastic bags, immediately transfer them to a colander and refrigerate in a vegetable crisper or the lower part of the fridge until ready to use. Berry aficionados swear berries should never be washed until ready to use as the added moisture will cause them to mold faster. Of course, it only makes good sense to pick over the berries before refrigeration as one or two bad berries can easily spread a mold that will attach itself to other berries rather quickly.

Even with the proliferation of green grocers who, through the miracle of fast transport can offer us berries in the dead of winter, I personally like to freeze the freshest Michigan berries I can find to enjoy all year long.

Freezing berries

After a quick washing, the berries are patted dry and picked over and then placed on a baking sheet which then goes straight to the freezer. After about 2 hours of sub zero temperatures, the berries are easily transferred to plastic freezer bags which can be labeled and dated for future use.

Should you desire to process any berries with sugar and syrup, the best berries are the ripest ones. Fresh ripe berries don't need ascorbic acid or anti-oxidant like apples, pears or other fruits when processing. I like to place a good quality freezer bag inside an eight inch round cake pan and then ladle in the cooled berry mixture. The bag and pan are set in the freezer until the mixture is frozen at which time the bag is sealed, the pan removed. This way, you can stack about 20 cups in the space of a three pound coffee can. (Chef's secret — I do this with my homemade stock and broth — it sure saves space!)

Please to put individual serving dishes in the freezer, and wait about 15 minutes before filling them with berries. It's just enough time to give the berries a super chill.

Longing to make your dinner guests think you prepared creme fraiche? Simply allow 2 cups of a good vanilla ice cream to melt (don't heat) and then over so lightly drizzle that over the chilled berries for an exotic taste. But whatever you do, don't try to mask the flavor of a good fresh berry with spices, alcohols or sweet dessert toppings. All good basic cookbooks feature pages of recipes for using fresh berries in everything from soup to stuffing.

Chef Larry Janes is a free-lance writer. He welcomes your calls and comments. To leave a message for him, dial (313) 933-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1886. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ The perfect pig roast.



Award-winner: Grecian Shillet Ribeyes, Best of Beef recipe winner from the 1995 Beef Cook-Off, will win rave reviews served simply as a steak or nestled in pita bread for a Mediterranean sandwich.

MARINADE

Economical steaks from the chuck are an excellent choice for the grill. When marinated, and then grilled rare to medium, they are tender, juicy and delicious. The following tips will ensure good results when marinating chuck steaks for grilling.

- To tenderize, a marinade must include an acidic ingredient (like lemon juice, vinegar, wine or salsa).
- Allow 1/3 to 1/2 cup marinade per pound of beef.
- Reserve and refrigerate a portion of the marinade for basting during grilling.
- Marinate in a closed heavy-duty plastic bag or glass dish.

■ Always marinate in the refrigerator.

■ Marinate top blade, chuck eye and thin strips for woven kabobs 30 minutes or up to 6 hours; other chuck steaks for 6 hours or as long as 24 hours. Marinating longer than 24 hours causes the meat fibers on the surface to break down and yield a mushy texture.

■ Leftover marinade that has been in contact with raw meat must be brought to a full rolling boil before it can be used as a sauce.

Source: Meat Board Test Kitchens & Beef Industry Council

STAKEOUT

your options for BEEF

BY KEELY WYGNONIK
STAFF WRITER

Who better to ask for advice on preparing sumptuous, melt-in-your-mouth steak than guys who ought to know — men behind the scenes at two of metro Detroit's newly opened steak houses — Carvers in Farmington Hills, and Ruth's Chris Steak House in Troy.

They have a lot in common. All are married, have children, and enjoy cooking.

"Always look for the best quality meat," said Leonard Jump of Troy, general manager of Ruth's Chris Steak House. "Look for well-marbled cuts." Marbling relates to quality grading — greater amounts of marbling result in higher quality. Marbling enhances palatability by increasing juiciness and flavor.

Married to Pam, and the father of four — Leonard, 18, Anron, 14, Adam, 9, and McKenzie, 8 months. Jump recommends searing meat on a high temperature, and then lowering the heat for the rest of the cooking process.

"I'm a grill person," he said. His favorite cut — "a whole tenderloin. I marinate it in sauce (Jack Daniels, salt and pepper, rubbed into the meat), and put it on the grill."

Marinades and dry rubs infuse steaks with flavor. Tender beef steaks can be marinated briefly for flavor, 15 minutes to 2 hours. These include rib eye, rib, top loin, Porterhouse, T-bone, tenderloin, sirloin, chuck top blade and chuck eye steaks.

"Enjoy your steak, and have fun cooking it, because cooking is fun," said Russell Scharf of Troy, a manager at Carvers. One of his favorite marinades is roasted, minced garlic, mixed with olive oil, cracked black pepper and kosher salt. Scharf and his wife, Seann, take turns cooking.

"I'm a third generation chef, and enjoy cooking, even on my days off," he said. "My wife loves to barbecue. When he prepares steak for his wife and daughter, Alexandra, 2, he marinates London broil in Italian dressing, grills it, slices the meat and serves it in a salad of mixed greens, and vegetables including lightly sauteed asparagus, cucumbers and Roma tomatoes."

"Make sure the grill is hot and clean," recommends Carvers Chef Ken Pipok of Redford.

His steak marinated in red wine, such as cabernet, minced garlic, shallots, and scallions gets rave reviews from his wife, Vicki, daughter, Julie, 9, and son, Bradley, 7.

"When I'm through grilling the steak I sautee mushrooms and onions in the leftover marinade," he said.

For ease, convenience and great taste, nothing beats the classic American staple: the grilled beef

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Make food and wine a journey



For the last several years, Dearborn's Ritz-Carlton has celebrated an International Cultural Festival at the hotel during the winter. Because those events which featured wine and food were the most popular, the name was changed to The International Journey of Food and Wine and it is celebrated with multiple themes several times during the year.

If you missed the French Tribute at the Ritz in May, you can journey to the Orient July 8-14, Germany Sept. 16-22 or Italy Nov. 18-24. Each journey has a number of

events, and if you're not on the mailing list, you may want to get on or obtain more information by calling (313) 441-2100.

Attending the French Tribute gave us a good idea to pass along to all of you who phone our Voice mail with questions about matching wine and food. At a seven-course, small-portion dinner, two wines, one French and one domestic were paired with the same dish. The object here was not that one wine was necessarily better than the other, but to notice how each wine changed with the dish and to identify that change.

As an example, while the 1994 Rodney Strong Sauvignon Blanc from California's Sonoma County had attractive fresh melony fruit on its own, all that fruit came

across sweet and flat when served with Vegetable-stuffed Morel Mushrooms. But its partner, 1992 Chateau de Sancerre, a lively Loire Valley wine, had just the right crispness, balanced fruit with lemon grass notes to make a better match with the more earthy morels.

Lesson: a very fruity wine isn't the best match with a vegetable dish.

In another pairing, 1994 Heas Collection, Chardonnay from Napa Valley was teamed with 1993 Domaine Druid Meursault "Limozin" (a white Burgundy). While many people were attracted to the toasty oak of the Burgundy tasted without food, the more

WINE SELECTIONS

- Merlot - the hottest of the hot reds. Serve it with grilled or roasted lamb. Use lots of rosemary in your preparation.
- 1994 Chateau Souverain Merlot \$13
- 1994 Rutherford Hill, 20th Anniversary Merlot \$15
- 1993 Sterling Vineyards, Three Palms Merlot \$22
- 1993 Merryvale Merlot \$25 - rivals the best from St. Emillion for a lot less money.
- Get the grill hot, put on a steak and kick back with:
- 1994 Vichon Coastal Selection Cabernet Sauvignon \$12 - great value
- 1993 Vichon Cabernet Sauvignon \$10 - beats the socks off many \$25 bottles.
- 1992 Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon \$28.50
- Best buys at \$10 and under:
- 1994 Vichon Coastal Selection Chardonnay \$10
- 1995 Chateau Souverain Sauvignon Blanc \$7.50
- 1995 Sauter Dry White (from Spain) \$6.50
- 1993 Conde de Valdemar Riesling \$9.50
- 1993 Padoncelli Cabernet Sauvignon \$9.50

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