

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Shortcuts make up for lost time while preparing dinner

Some time ago, when I was younger and had much more hair, I had endless time to cook, and endless time to shop for ingredients. Anyone delivering a package to my house on the afternoon of a dinner party would have found me in the kitchen dicing or slicing, trussing a chicken, clarifying butter or whipping egg whites in a copper bowl. Those days are long gone.

There is nothing that puts a crimp in your cooking style than the addition of a family. It's hard to whip egg whites when at any moment your kid(s) will wake from a nap, the school will call and say they just threw up after recess, or you have to make 29 (why not an even 12, 24 or 36?) cupcakes for the next day's bake sale. It's also not easy to stuff a chicken breast when your \$80 French knife has just been used to cut 2-inch Styrofoam or corrugated cardboard into the shape of a nucleus. Have you ever tried to concentrate on a recipe while your kids call out a thousand times from the dining room table "dad, what does intrigue mean?" Once you have kids, speed and convenience is definitely the name of the game.

Roast chicken

Take for example roast chicken, which is almost everyone's favorite dish. In the old days I used to slip fresh snipped herbs under the skin and baste the chicken constantly. Now I don't even tie up my bird (the kids used the string to make Halloween spider webs). If I can find an onion that hasn't sprouted six inches of green under the grocery bags under the kitchen sink, into the chicken it goes. I rub the chicken generously with bottled lemon juice and shake on some cheap Italian seasoning that I picked up at the dollar store. My kids will be studying English 101 at community college before I'll have the time to make a wonderful mixture of chestnuts and diced prunes again, I suspect.

Butter flavored with microscopically minced garlic is also great if you have the time. Now when I need garlic butter to spread on Wonder Bread and pop under the broiler, I open a jar of chopped garlic and mix in a few tablespoons of margarine.

Easy potatoes

Scalloped potatoes go wonderfully with roast chicken. Scalloped potatoes were a signature dish, made with a real roux, hand shredded cheddar cheese and a fresh bread crumb crispy top. I have since learned a trick from a newsmagazine article and I can make them in nothing flat. I slice up about 2 pounds of potatoes (skin on, of course) and then plunge them into cold water. Simply bring 2 cups of milk to a boil in a large saucepan (skim or low-fat will suffice) pat the potatoes dry, and boil them in the milk until barely tender. Add salt to taste and tip the entire mixture (the sludgy milk and half cooked potatoes) into a buttered casserole dish. Scatter a handful of bread crumbs on top (the more seasoned the better) and bake the potatoes in a 400 degree F. oven for 20 minutes or until bubbly. You will have to soak and scrub the saucepan - that's boiling milk for you - but it's worth it.

For people who are constantly on the lookout for kitchen help, I highly recommend children for such menial jobs as cutting up carrots, onions and peppers. These vegetables, when scrubbed, peeled, cut into big cubes (even a 7-year-old can do that) and then tossed into a pan and drizzled with olive oil, it can be done next to the chicken for about 45 minutes to an hour.

Even picky eaters love roasted carrots as they really cook up sweet and tender.

Yes, even busy cooks can make the time to have dessert. After the chicken and vegetables roast, brownies always make for the ideal dessert. I used to serve them with poached pears, sugar glazed strawberries or real whipped cream. Some people like their brownies on the chunky side and some feel they should be more like fudge. My opinion is that they should be happy I made them.

A dinner of roast chicken, roasted vegetables, scalloped potatoes and brownies is a festive meal. In certain lights, it even could be elegant. To make it so, I put aside the Corolle and haul out the Lennox. Everyone thinks I'm working for making such a monumental effort. I sit back, with a smile and say "oh, it was nothing."

Chef Larry Janes is a free-lance writer. He welcomes your calls and comments. To leave a message for him, dial (313) 963-2947 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1886. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in *Taste* next week:

- Celebrate Hanukkah
- Holiday cookies

Thanksgiving Dinner



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMEYER

Tasty side dish: Chef Louai Sharkas of the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham will be making "French Bread and Sweet Corn Pudding," a Southern-style dish for his family's Thanksgiving buffet.

Chefs bring family favorites to dinner

BY RENEE SKOGLUND • STAFF WRITER

While the turkey may be the focal point of Thanksgiving dinner, it's the colorful, savory side dishes that make the table sparkle and guests salivate.

I love to make green beans with mushrooms and bacon or baby carrots cooked in chicken broth then bathed in butter, fresh lemon juice and chopped chives. We asked area chefs what they planned to bring to their mom's or sister's house (the usual Thanksgiving destinations), and the replies were surprisingly simple and straight from the heart.

Chef Bill Dembiec of Westland who works at Greenfield Village will make his grandmother's recipe for creamed onions. "Oh, it's really good. It's a semi-sweet dish. The onions are sweet and the cream tames the sweetness. The potato chips add a saltiness. When you bake the dish you have a collaboration of flavors."

The Dembiec clan, seven siblings and an assortment of nieces and nephews, will gather around sister Cherise Lambert's table this year and tell lots of stories. "We tell a lot of 'remember whomever.' We grew up with a lot of respect for seniors. There were always stories about past events. They were always brought up at the dinner prayers."

Some of those stories are bound to be about his grandmother, who helped raise Dembiec and taught him and his sisters how to cook. "I remember making the creamed onions with her," said Dembiec.

Although Dembiec has

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added his own personal touch to the creamed onions, only his grandmother could make the perfect lemon meringue pie, another Thanksgiving favorite. "I really miss that lemon meringue. No one had her touch," said Dembiec.

Chef Louai Sharkas of the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham will be making "French Bread and Sweet Corn Pudding," a Southern-style dish he originally created as an accompaniment to lobster. It became an instant hit at the Townsend and will be part of their Thanksgiving buffet.

"Although it has a slight sweet taste, it's more savory. It's not a dessert," said Sharkas who lives in Southfield. "I think it will be perfect on the Thanksgiving table. It's a nice substitute for dressing."

Sharkas and his mother, Amelida, who share a home, expect a large crowd for this year's Thanksgiving feast, which will include two or three turkeys, a ham and two roast legs of lamb.

"Just about every member of my family will be there. About 35 to 40 people. We never count. There's too many, an

army of relatives from every area in the country."

Like most good chefs, Sharkas credits his mother for his love of cooking. "She's a great influence in my taste. My first classes in cooking were when I was four-years-old in her kitchen. Every holiday, I was the only one of the kids who went in the kitchen and helped out."

There's always room for Jell-O, right? Chef Michael Hunter of Botsford Inn in Farmington continues the inn's decades-old tradition of making "Sherry Cherry Jell-O." And he's not been tempted to change the recipe one bit.

"I don't change things that aren't broken. People love it the way it is," he said. "It's a real popular item at Botsford. We have to make three or four pans every week."

While Hunter said he definitely would bring the Jell-O if invited to a Thanksgiving dinner, he would also bring his mother's baked sweet potatoes cooked in cider. "It's very good. She slices the potatoes really thin and bakes them with dried fruit, cider and cinnamon," he said.

Fortunately for people planning to eat out this Thanksgiving, Hunter will be cooking in Botsford's kitchen. Guests will be able to sample the sweet potato dish, which will be part of dinner buffet. Hunter knows it will be a hit. "It's a 10, definitely."

When asked who is the better cook, he or his mother, Hunter said: "She thinks I cook better, but I know she cooks better."

See recipes inside.

WINE SELECTION

Thanksgiving wines

All wines below, both whites and reds, are recommended especially to match Thanksgiving Turkey and all the trimmings!

■ Lusciously rich chardonnays:
1995 Clos du Bois Chardonnay \$13 - very good value
1994 Chateau St. Jean Belle Terre Chardonnay \$21
1994 Girard Estate Chardonnay \$20
1992 Chateau St. Jean, Robert Young Vineyard Reserve in magnum only \$58 - the most luscious chardonnay we've tested this year

■ Fruity and complex dry reds:
1994 Lockwood Merlot \$17
1994 Gundlach-Bundschu Merlot \$21
1994 Schafer Merlot \$20 - stunning!
1992 Slaton Hills Cabernet Sauvignon (Washington state) \$14
1992 Livingston Cabernet Sauvignon Stanley's Selection \$22
1993 Livingston Cabernet Sauvignon Mof. Vineyard \$32
1992 Girard Cabernet Sauvignon \$22
1989 Fatzel Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve \$24
1990 Mastrobattino Taurasi Red (Italy) \$22

■ Best buys under \$10:
1995 Hogue Fume Blanc \$7.50
1995 Clos du Bois Sauvignon blanc \$8
1995 Hogue Semillon \$7.50 - serve with Dungeness crab
1995 Dry Creek Vineyard Dry Chenin Blanc, \$7.50
1990 Beringer Nouveau, Gamay Beaujolais, \$6.50

MacRostie dedicated to Carneros wines

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Steve MacRostie, owner and winemaker at MacRostie Winery in Sonoma, California has a passion for wines from the Carneros appellation. When he launched his winery in 1987 producing only 1,300 cases of Chardonnay, his commitment was to the Carneros region of southern Sonoma and Napa counties because of the area's ideal combination of climate and soil.

MacRostie is convinced that great wines begin in the vineyard. "A winemaker's job is to control what happens in creation of his raw materials," he contended. "It's relatively simple to make a good wine. Just select the best grapes then let the fruit speak for itself in the wine. I've learned the importance of a wine's flavors and mouthfeel and strive for a careful balance between fruit and oak without letting either dominate. I take every measure to avoid the astringent effects of grape skins and oak tannins from barrel aging."

The Carneros appellation is blessed with a maritime influence creating persistent morning fog and afternoon breezes during the height of the growing season. This climatic condition affords Carneros more moderate temperatures and a longer growing season than any other north coast California wine region. With a longer growing season, grapes have more "hang time" to mature on the vine developing more flavors and complexity in the wine.

Carneros soils are dense and shallow with moderate fertility restricting development of a vine's root system. The vine gets only the water and nutrients to sustain growth, and retard vigorous foliage development. In this condition, grapes are smaller and have less but more concentrated juice with flavor intensity.

See WINES, 2B



RAY HEALD

Winemaker Steve MacRostie, owner and winemaker at MacRostie Winery, emphasizes the wines of California's Carneros appellation.