

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 1997

TASTE

B

2 UNIQUE



KELLI LEWTON

Flavorful herbs the natural spice of life

Webster's dictionary defines an herb as "a plant or plant part valued for its medicinal, savory or aromatic qualities." Most people view herbs simply as plants with many useful properties. But for us chefs, cooks, gardeners, healers and romantics, herbs are one of the most enchanting garden and forest creations with their wide variety of distinct fragrances, fabulous flavors and diverse healing benefits.

Herbs should enhance the flavor of food, not overwhelm it. Restraint is better than over-enthusiasm.

The knowledge of how to use herbs in cooking to enhance and refine flavor was developed by the Greeks, and they passed it down to the Romans. When the Romans moved their armies north, their cooks brought supplies of herbs they dried and preserved in salt and oil and live plants, which they cultivated in occupied lands. These herbs spread throughout Europe. The 1400s brought about a new era of spices. With the discovery of new trade routes, the use of herbs was no longer limited to local varieties, and herbs were revered like gold or silver.

Adventurous Europeans brought herbs to the New World in the 1700s to be mixed with existing North American herbs creating a huge variety of herbs. Each of us has to experiment, play and cook to discover which herbs we like and dislike. Mix and match, simmer, stew, chop, bake and grill - you will be amazed by the wonderful flavors, aromas and tastes you can import on even the simplest of menus.

Here are some herbs to get you started; hundreds more await.

■ **Basil:** (A native of India) a fragrant annual. There are many different types of basil including Wild Lemon, Bush, Camphor and Sacred. Basil is a must with garlic, tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, pasta, tomato sauce and pesto. Healing benefit: Reduces flatulence, acts as a diuretic, promotes perspiration, and acts as a calamine.

■ **Bay:** (Sweet or Sweet Laurel) is an evergreen tree, a native of the Mediterranean. In ancient Greece, Olympians were rewarded with silver or gold plated laurel leaves. These are evergreen leaves, sturdy and glossy in color, and lend a strong taste. Use them sparingly, one or two to flavor stews, soups, marinades. Healing benefit: Helps to relieve cold symptoms.

■ **Oregano:** (A native of the Mediterranean and Asia). Associated with typical Italian seasonings, although oregano is used in few dishes in Italy. Its use in pizza adds to its fame, it's also excellent with meats for roasting or broiling and works well with onion, garlic, tomato and marjoram. Healing benefit: It has an antispasmodic effect; it's a decongestant and prevents inflammation.

■ **Parsley:** Comes in many sizes and shapes. It is used to season all types of foods including soups, salads, stocks, potatoes and fish dishes. Healing benefit: Used as a diuretic.

■ **Mint:** There are approximately 20 varieties, spread across Europe, North Africa and North America. All varieties have a strong, pungent or spicy taste. Most contain volatile oil high in menthol. Use mint in drinks, gelatins and desserts, and for seasoning meats such as goat or lamb. Healing benefit: Great for refreshing breath.

■ **Rosemary:** The name comes Latin "Rosmarinus" meaning dew of the sea. An aromatic evergreen, rosemary thrives in warm climates by the seashore. A strong herb, rosemary adds robust flavor to marinades, fish, some veal dishes, chicken, lamb and roasted meats. Healing benefit: An antioxidant, rosemary extends the life of food and is used to stimulate circulation. It is recommended for use in baths, and to calm the nervous system.

■ **Sage:** The herb is an evergreen plant native to Italy. Its use in pizza adds to its fame, it's also excellent with meats for roasting or broiling and works well with onion, garlic, tomato and marjoram. Healing benefit: It has an antispasmodic effect; it's a decongestant and prevents inflammation.

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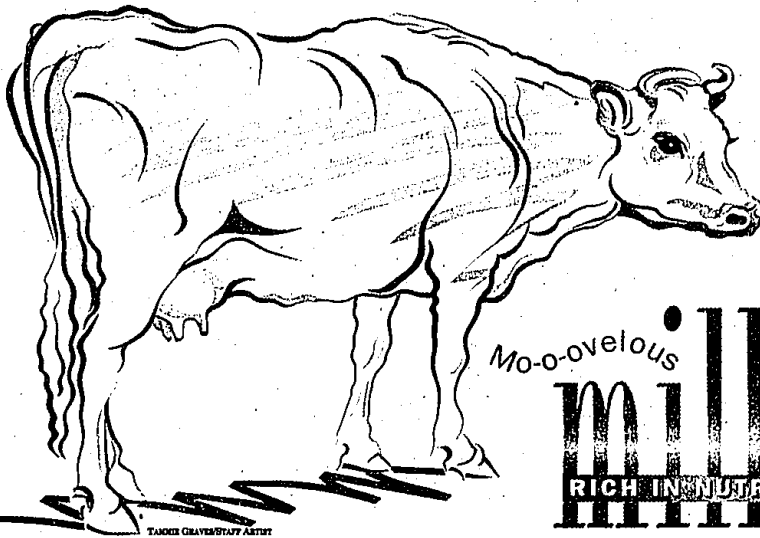
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TAMAR CHAYEN/STAFF ARTIST

The "Milky" Way

- Reduced-fat cheeses tend to toughen quickly if direct heat such as a broiler or toaster oven is used. Cook cheese on low heat, stirring slowly; add flour, cornstarch, or arrowroot to shredded, reduced-fat cheese to help blend it for a cheese sauce.
- Fold, do not stir, yogurt into other ingredients and it will keep a thick consistency.
- Use a 50-50 mixture of yogurt and mayonnaise for a lower fat sandwich spread.
- Stir yogurt into pan drippings for instant gravy, or use yogurt has a marinade for meats and poultry.
- Pour milk over fresh fruit and sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar for a simple dessert or summer-time snack.
- Combine equal parts of milk and coffee to a scoop of chocolate ice cream and blend for a delicious mocha treat.
- Dip pretzels into chocolate milk for the taste of a chocolate-covered pretzel.

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

It is widely known that milk has many health benefits. Each day, millions of parents around the world tell their children to "drink your milk." Indeed, milk is one of nature's most perfect foods. Human mothers' milk is called "liquid gold" because of its rich color and beautiful nutrients.

Milk is a wonderful source of protein, vitamin D and vitamin A. But most importantly, it is a fantastic source of calcium. Our bodies require calcium at every stage of life. Children need calcium to ensure that bones grow strong and hard, and that teeth grow properly. Adolescents need calcium because of the rapid physical growth that occurs. In fact, teens who consume too little calcium will never reach their potential height. Teens today drink a lot of soda. Besides soda pop being low in calcium, it contains phosphorus, which blocks calcium uptake by the bones. Adults need calcium to keep bones dense. After age 40, our bones begin to lose calcium slowly. If the bone skeleton is properly built up, there may never be enough bone loss to cause osteoporosis, a painful and crippling bone disease. Another important nutritional component of milk is lactose, a natural milk sugar. Lactose helps the body absorb calcium and other minerals.

June is National Dairy Month, and a great time to enjoy milk in all its wonderful forms.

Dairy Requirements

SERVINGS PER DAY

- Children - 3
- Teens - 4
- Adults - 2
- Pregnant and nursing women - 4
- Pregnant and nursing teens - 5

MILK EQUIVALENTS

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 cup ice milk
- 1½ cups ice cream
- 1½ cups cottage cheese
- 1 cup pudding (made with milk)
- 1½ ounces cheese

Fluid Milk

Whole milk contains 8 grams of fat and 150 calories per 8-ounce serving. You can greatly decrease the fat content and lower the calories significantly by choosing two percent, one percent, or skim milk. Two percent milk contains 5 grams of fat and 120 calories per 8 ounces serving; one percent milk has 3 grams of fat and 100 calories; and skim milk contains just a trace of fat and 85 calories.

Low-fat milk with added non-fat milk solids provides an extra boost of protein and is labeled "protein fortified" milk. Butter-milk is made by adding a lactic-acid-producing culture to freshly pasteurized skim or low-fat milk. It is thicker than skim milk but also much higher in sodium. Chocolate and other flavored milks can be made with regular, low-fat or skim milk. Whether you are buying it for yourself or for your children, it is a good idea

to choose the lowest fat version possible. Skim and low-fat milk contain just as much of the vitamins and minerals and protein as whole milk and surprisingly, a bit more calcium.

Yogurt

Even though yogurt has been around for centuries, it has been popular in this country just for the past 50 years or so. Yogurt is made by injecting milk with two cultures: *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*. These bacteria metabolize the milk to produce lactic acid and other byproducts. The result is a delicious, custard-like product that is rich in nutrients and available in a wide variety of flavors. Because of the metabolism of milk sugar, people who are intolerant of fluid milk can usually consume yogurt with no unpleasant side effects. The lactic acid also acts as a protective factor against bacterial contamination by restraining the growth of harmful gastrointestinal germs. This plays a major role in treating digestive tract infections.

When my brother and I traveled around Europe several years ago, we ate foods from places with questionable sanitary standards. Whenever we would feel a little queasy, we would eat a container of yogurt to "reestablish" the good bacteria and help us feel better. Be sure to check the yogurt ingredient label for active yogurt cultures. If it doesn't have

Please see MILK B2

Treat dad to meaty swordfish

MAIN DISH
MIRACLE

MURIEL G. WAGNER

Outdoor grilling was probably invented by a smart woman who wanted to free herself from her hot kitchen during summer months. She lured the man of the house into becoming the star barbecuer by appealing to his latent fascination with cooking and by choosing the most masculine of foods to cook - rack of ribs, huge steaks and enormously thick burgers.

In the interest of health, chicken has made inroads into this masculine domain, but for the healthiest and most adaptable food for grilling, fish, usually runs a poor third.

For this Father's Day, why not give dear dad's taste buds a treat by planning a meaty fish like swordfish for the barbecue?

Nutrition studies on the virtues of eating more fish are voluminous. One new one caught my eye. Investigators found in a study of 1,800 men followed for 30 years, that men who eat eight to nine ounces of fish a week are 40 percent less likely to die of a heart attack than men who ate little or no fish.

I selected swordfish because it is one of the "meatiest" fishes. When cooked, it is similar in color and texture to other white meats - veal and pork. I used Worcestershire sauce for seasoning to emphasize swordfish's meat-like qualities. Swordfish is neither fishy tasting nor flaky textured like salmon or whitefish. The Mango Salsa is the perfect sweet-tart accent to bring out the full-bodied flavor of the fish.

Swordfish is a low-fat fish and low in saturated

fat and cholesterol as well. It has about a quarter of the fat and saturated fat and one third of the cholesterol of an equal amount of well-trimmed strip steak. (Saturated fat is three times more likely than cholesterol in your food to raise your blood cholesterol.)

Swordfish is perfect for the grill because it's easy to turn and doesn't fall apart. I prefer not to marinate the fish because the acid in the marinade will partly cook the fish before you even get near the heat. Most people don't like fish because it's overcooked.

Swordfish is expensive, but unlike burgers or a steak, what you see is what you get. There's no waste and forget the bones. There aren't any.

Freshness is of primary importance in choosing swordfish. Know your fish market and trust your nose. Ask the counter person to let you sniff the fish for a fresh sea water smell. Remember, fresh fish doesn't taste or smell fishy. The dark meat in swordfish (small, wing-like shapes) can be removed, but only if you're very fussy. It doesn't lighten when it's cooked.

For the Mango Salsa, select mangoes that are firm but give to the touch. The more red or yellow areas, the riper and sweeter the fruit. Mangoes have a large, flat pit. Slice parallel to the pit. Then dice larger pieces. I like to see what I'm eating.

Look for Main Dish Miracle on the second Sunday of the month in Taste. Muriel G. Wagner is a registered dietitian and nutrition therapist with an office in Southfield. She publishes "Eating Younger," a quarterly newsletter. To subscribe, send a check for \$13.50 to "Eating Younger," P.O. Box 69021, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069.

GRILLED SWORDFISH

- 1-1/4 pounds swordfish steak, cut into four pieces
- 1 tablespoon oil (olive or canola oil)
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- Rinse fish and pat dry.

Brush fish first with Worcestershire sauce, then oil. Place fish flat on hot grill, about 4 to 6 inches above heat. Grill for 3 minutes. Turn and brush again with sauce and oil. Cook 4 to 6 minutes more. The swordfish is done when it turns opaque toward the center and is firm to the touch. Be careful not to overcook.

Serves 4.
Food Values: Calories: 176, fat 7.6 g, saturated fat 2.4 g, sodium 151 mg, cholesterol 9 mg, total 66 mg. Food exchanges: 4 lean meat.

MANGO SALSA

- 2 large ripe mangoes, peeled, pitted and coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped jalapeno or chili pepper, depending on heat desired

In medium bowl, mix all ingredients, stirring gently to combine. Refrigerate at least one hour to blend flavors. This can be prepared one day ahead. Serves 4.

Food Values: Calories 56, fat 0, saturated fat 0, sodium 161 mg, cholesterol 9 mg. Food exchanges: 1 fruit

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Focus on Wine
- Father's Day Celebration