

## HOME SENSE



LOIS THIELEKE

## Asparagus: A harbinger of spring

Springtime means fresh Michigan produce. Asparagus is a springtime delicacy, especially when it comes from your backyard. Unfortunately most of Michigan asparagus goes to processors so the fresh supply here is limited.

Most of the asparagus in the grocery stores comes from California, so visit your local farmers market for the "best" asparagus.

Look for bright green asparagus spears and lightly packed tips with a lavender tint. Ideally, asparagus should be eaten as soon as possible but can be stored, uncleaned, in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator crisper. Asparagus can also be stored upright; trim the ends and place in a narrow container with 1-inch of water. Cover with plastic and store in the refrigerator for up to three days.

### Preparation

To prepare asparagus, simply cut or break off the tough stem ends and soak them in cold water to clean. Peeling asparagus is not necessary and is a matter of personal taste. Asparagus can be steamed or tied in a bundle and boiled gently. Both methods are very quick, requiring only 3 to 5 minutes for tender, bright green asparagus. Overcooking makes asparagus limp, discolored and bitter. Asparagus, whole or cut, hot or cold, can also be used in stir-fry, quiche, omelets, salads and casseroles. Swiss and cheddar cheese are especially nice with asparagus. Toss leftover asparagus with equal parts garbanzo beans and tomatoes and top with a light vinaigrette dressing to eat for lunch or as a tasty side dish.

### Seasonings

To keep your asparagus low in fat and calories, use seasoning and spices to enhance flavor rather than butter or hollandaise sauce. Citrus, thyme and tarragon are just a few of the flavors that complement well. Asparagus is rich in folate and vitamin C with only 23 calories and less than half a gram of fat per serving (about 6 thin stalks).

Michigan asparagus is green and snapped above the ground. There is also white asparagus that is picked as the tip of the plant peeks through the ground. The sunlight doesn't change the color to green. It is prepared the same way as the green variety.

### Rhubarb is arriving

Rhubarb is also a welcome site in the spring. The spring stalks of rhubarb are the most tender. Pink to red and all shades in between make rhubarb flavorful. Rhubarb can be grown in a hot house. This is usually a pink color and may have a milder flavor. Rhubarb's long celery-like stalks are edible but the leaves and roots contain oxalic acid which is toxic, so do not eat them.

After picking rhubarb, refrigerate quickly or it begins to wilt. Placed in a moisture-proof container and refrigerated, they'll keep for about a week. Rhubarb is generally known as "pie plant" as it is frequently used for pies. Rhubarb can be stewed, made into jam or jelly, used in coffeecakes, pies, cobblers, salads, cookies or served as sauce for meat or poultry. Rhubarb is extremely tart so it will need a lot of sugar unless you add another sweet fruit, such as strawberries or pineapple. Stewing rhubarb with orange juice will also produce a sweet-flavored product.

Don't cook rhubarb in an aluminum or cast iron saucepan. Rhubarb will leach all the bacteria out of the cracks and crevices and change the color of your saucepan. One pound of fresh rhubarb makes about 2 1/2 cups of sauce or the one bunch you may purchase.

Please see ASPARAGUS, D2

## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Focus on Wine
- Make camp lunches fun



Sensational: Balsamic-Marinated Sirloin and Asparagus stars beef top sirloin. It's simple to prepare and looks great.

NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION

## Great grilled beef

Choose the steak - Tender steak choices (chuck eye, top sirloin, ribeye, Porterhouse/T-Bone, tenderloin or top loin) can be marinated briefly prior to grilling to impart the marinade's flavor. Less tender steaks (top round or boneless chuck shoulder) must be marinated in a tenderizing marinade prior to grilling.

Choose the ground beef - For juiciest burgers, choose 80 percent lean ground beef. Shape into patties using a light touch, otherwise burgers will be compact.

Grill properly - Turn steaks with tongs. Do not use a fork, which pierces the beef and allows flavorful juices to escape. Turn ground beef patties with a spatula. Do not flatten them; flavorful juices can escape resulting in a dry burger.

Cook to the correct doneness - Cooking times are based on beef removed directly from the refrigerator. Use the time suggested in recipes as a guide, and turn steaks and burgers occasionally. For food safety reasons, cook steaks to at least medium rare (145 degrees F). Top round steaks are most flavorful when cooked to just medium rare. Ground beef patties should be cooked to medium doneness (160 degrees F) or until the centers are no longer pink and the juices show no pink color.

Use an instant read thermometer to check the internal temperature of the steak or burger near the end of suggested cooking time. For steaks, horizontally insert the thermometer (past the indentation on the stem) into the thickest part without touching the fat; the temperature registers in seconds. For burgers, insert the thermometer horizontally and check the temperature.

Information from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association

# Steaks, burgers sizzling stars

BY KEELY WYGNONIS  
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This is the weekend to get fired up - about grilling, and the lazy days of summer ahead.

Most of us will be cooking steaks and burgers on a gas grill, and the person in charge will probably be a man. According to a survey conducted by the Barbecue Industry Association, men are twice as likely to do the grilling, 67 percent, compared to 33 percent for women. Sixty percent of grill owners have gas grills, and seven percent have natural gas grills. Charcoal grills are owned by 60 percent of all grill owners. About 19 percent of grill owners have both a charcoal and a gas grill.

Hamburgers, steaks, hot dogs and chicken are the most popular foods to grill. When backyard chefs have a question about grilling, lots of them pick up the phone and dial 1-800-Grill-Out (1-800-474-5588). The hotline, offered 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday, through Labor Day is staffed by home economists. This year the Weber certified experts received additional training from the National Seafood Educators to answer questions about grilling seafood and fish.

Lots of people in Michigan called the Weber Grill-Line in 1999. In fact, our state ranked seventh in a list of top 10 calling states. Weber found that men do 68 percent of the grilling, but when there's a problem or a question, women are more likely to call for help, 51 percent compared to 49 percent

men.

Taste editor, Ken Abramczyk, said "it's kind of like asking for directions."

For some suggestions on the best way to cook a steak or burger this Memorial Day weekend, we asked a couple of our experts.

Beef provides protein, iron, zinc and several B-vitamins. For the leanest cuts, choose those with "loin" or "round" in the name such as top sirloin and top loin.

When Virgie Marble, executive chef at Morton's of Chicago, steakhouse in Southfield, grills steak at home his favorite cut is a rib eye. His second favorite is a New York Strip Steak.

Marble says the secret is to start with a good piece of meat. "The simpler the better," he said about seasoning. "I use garlic powder, seasoned salt and pepper."

When he makes beef kabobs, Marble marinades the meat in olive oil, teriyaki sauce, brown sugar, ground ginger, garlic powder and lemon juice. "Marinate the meat about a half hour to an hour," he said. "Use a good virgin olive oil; it doesn't flare up."

Marble uses ground round, for burgers and mixes barbecue sauce with the meat before shaping it into patties.

He's got two grills at home - gas and charcoal - but prefers the charcoal grill. "It gives the meat more of that charcoal flavor," he said. "With a gas grill it's harder to control the temperature."

Diane Reynolds of Farmington Hills, a registered

dietitian at the Kroger Co., leaves grilling to her husband Mark.

"It's kind of a guy thing," she said. "I don't know if it's because there's fire involved, but he also likes to stir-fry."

The Reynolds grill year-round on their gas grill, even when it snows. New York Strip, trimmed of fat is their choice cut of steak, and for burgers, Reynolds recommends ground sirloin over ground chuck because it's leaner.

For those counting calories, Reynolds says - yes you can have your steak and lose weight too - but you've got to control the portion. A serving is about as big as a deck of cards or a computer mouse.

For lower fat options, consider ostrich or buffalo, which Reynolds have a beef-like texture. You can mix ground buffalo with ground sirloin for a lower fat burger.

Jerry Nelson of Canton who works in the meat department at Bob's of Canton, also has a gas and charcoal grill. But for steaks, he uses his charcoal grill.

Delmonico, he said is the most tender, flavorful steak. He'd rather have a Porterhouse instead of a New York Strip Steak.

When Nelson makes burgers he chops up onions and green peppers and mixes it in with the meat before he makes patties.

Then he gives the patties a shake of salt and pepper before grilling to perfection.

See recipes inside.

## RECIPES TO SHARE

# Souffle 'sandwich' casserole feeds a crowd

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK  
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Jean Wynn of Livonia remembers working at Hutzel Hospital in Detroit in the 1970s with her supervisor, Anna Caffrey, who also was a great cook and host.

"She had a little tip for entertaining," Wynn recalls. "She said, 'Always set the table before guests arrive.' Then they see the hosts have things under control."

Caffrey gave Wynn a recipe for a chicken souffle sandwich casserole, which Wynn describes as a special dish, that should be prepared the day before and chilled overnight. Prepare this casserole, and you can expect requests for the recipe, Wynn said.

"I would describe it as a good luncheon or buffet dish, in that it isn't a red meat dish," Wynn said. Even though it is called Mrs. Caffrey's Chicken Souffle Sandwich Casserole, it isn't really a sandwich. It features layers of bread along with chicken, eggs, mushrooms, water chestnuts, mayonnaise, cheese and cream of celery and cream of mushroom soups.

For dessert, Wynn enjoys baking a lemon cake. She thinks she has made

Maude's Lemon Cake "20 to 30 times" over the years.

"It came from an elderly lady named Maude Embury, who in turn had been making it since probably the 1950s," Wynn said. Maude was the parent of one of her friends.

"The recipe is dependable. It's a natural lemony taste and is not a fake. You can take it to a work function or a buffet gathering.

"Some things are easy to make, but not delicious. But this is both. The lemon flavor is a real zinger."

Wynn said you can dress this cake up with whipped cream.

### MRS. CAFFREY'S CHICKEN SOUFFLE SANDWICH CASSEROLE

- 9 slices white bread, crust removed
- 4 cups cooked chicken, sliced
- 1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 5-ounce cans water chestnuts, drained and sliced
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 9 slices sharp cheese
- 4 eggs, beaten

- 2 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 2-ounce jar pimientos, drained and chopped
- 1 can cream of celery soup
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2 cups buttered bread crumbs

Lino large flat buttered baking dish with bread. Top with chicken. Saute mushrooms in butter 5 minutes and spoon over top. Sprinkle on water chestnuts. Dot with mayonnaise and top with cheese.

Beat eggs, milk and salt together. Pour over casserole. Mix soup and pimento and spoon over all. Cover with foil and store overnight in refrigerator.

Bake uncovered in 325-degree F oven for 1 1/2 hours. Sprinkle with bread crumbs on top for the last 15 minutes. Serves 10-12.

### MAUDE'S LEMON CAKE

- 1 package gold cake mix
- 4 eggs
- 3/4 cup oil
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 (3 ounce) package lemon Jell-O

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Beat above ingredients together four minutes. Pour into a greased and floured Bundt pan. Bake 60 minutes. Cool.

Make glaze from juice of two lemons (plus grated rind) and 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar. Poke holes all over cake with fork or thin skewer, then pour the glaze over it, until absorbed.

(Note: For 1/2 recipe, bake in loaf pan about 30 minutes.)

Recipes courtesy of Jean Wynn of Livonia.

Everyone knows the best recipes are the ones you share. Send us your favorite original recipe, and if it's chosen to be featured in the Recipe to Share on the third Sunday of the month in Taste, we'll send you a cookbook.

Send recipes for consideration in Recipe to Share to Ken Abramczyk, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (734) 591-7279, or e-mail kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net

Please include a daytime phone number and the best time to call, so we can contact you about your recipe. Try to be as specific as possible with recipe details such as can and package sizes.