

## KITCHEN KAPERS



KEN ABRAMCZYK

## Food: A centerpiece of family, life

I don't know where my interest in food began.

It might have been during childhood. I cherish the memory of my mother's kitchen, and the smell of her beef stew, meat loaf and pot roast. In these days, I wasn't much help in a kitchen. Friends were more important.

In the summer in Lexington, neighbors would pool their favorite dishes for a group picnic. Mom was known for her chicken and potato salad. I saw a friend of mine eat about six or seven dumplings once.

My interest in food might have been inspired by the chef from Tennessee with a thick Southern accent at the restaurant where I worked on Telegraph Road in Redford in 1976. I never understood him, although he talked the language of food — sometimes in language that can't be repeated here.

"Kenny, get me some tomatoes" sounded like "Kenny, git me some maters." I would return, grinning like an idiot, with 24 potatoes.

Maybe it was the years I bartended — and later, cooked — at the former Holiday Inn in Livonia on Plymouth Road in the late 1970s and early 1980s while attending Wayne State University. There I expanded on my basic knowledge — learning, for example, how to cook a prime rib — and made some classic mistakes — I once baked muffins using baking soda instead of baking powder.

### Recent memories

Then there are the more recent memories of the smell of a rack of lamb encrusted with tons of garlic, cooked by some old friends who enjoy good eating. We affectionately called ourselves the Gut Guys, tagged once on a trip to Chicago and an infamous dinner of crab legs and beer at a bar with a cement floor.

When my holidays weren't so crammed with activities, creating traditional holiday plum pudding at my brother's home in Dearborn also was a treat.

My interest in food might have been inspired by family potlucks. I'd be apprehensive about the dish I made, or planned to make, usually some brave new world I planned to visit, like chocolate mousse, for about two dozen people.

### Socializing

Food, for me, has always been the centerpiece of socializing, sharing love and friendship with family members and friends. That pasta salad or rumaki always initiates conversations at a potluck.

A night out almost always consists of dinner. And dinnertime at home is a day-in-review for family members and an excellent time to find out exactly what your kids are up to, or for that matter, your spouse.

Today, it might just be the sheer pleasure of food preparation that draws me to it — watching the creativity of a master chef, the dynamics of the marriage between spice and sauce, flour and butter, yeast and water (always lukewarm, not too hot).

But it's also fun for me. Spending time in a kitchen allows me a chance to focus on something else besides sitting at a computer or talking on the telephone. Like building and gardening, it allows me to work with my hands, such as encasing a roast or chicken with garlic and herbs, entrapping juices and flavor and experiencing the anticipation of a glorious dinner.

Walking the few steps to my herb garden to pick a few sprigs of thyme and for a beef stock, or some asparagus or zucchini dishes also is a joy.

Making fresh salsa is easy — grab a few cilantro leaves, pick three tomatoes

Please see KAPERS, D2

### LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Summer Slippers
- Lebanese dishes

# Strawberries, Cherries are just the Berries

## Pick-it-yourself for some berry-delicious desserts

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**R**os Timbers, special events coordinator at Ward's Orchards in Ypsilanti, calls it a family activity you can't find anywhere else in the world.

You pick. You decide. You choose what fruit you want off that tree, that patch, that bush. No need to sort through produce at the market. You want it, you pick it.

Oh, those sweet fresh strawberries and cherries. Strawberry shortcake and cherry pie. Strawberries dipped in chocolate, sweet cherry turnovers. Strawberry fields forever, and cherry, cherry.

With strawberry season kicking off this week, and cherries expected as early as the last week of June, "u-pick" farms soon will be busting with activity.

### Nutritional value

Gail Cox, nutrition coordinator at Botafog Hospital and a registered dietitian, advises people not to worry about the calories. Each cherry contains about 4 calories each, so 25 of them contain about 100 calories.

Berry recipes can be found on inside pages

"It's better that they should eat these foods in high quantity than fill up on cookies and chips," Cox said. "People never gained weight by eating fruit."

Gail Poer, a West Bloomfield nutritionist, said fresh strawberries and cherries, like many other freshly-picked produce, have wonderful nutritional value.

"The vitamin content diminishes with its storage time," Poer said. "Fresh-picked fruits are a good source of vitamins and they're the tastier."

Indeed. About eight medium strawberries contain 5 grams of fiber, more than a slice of whole wheat bread.

They are an excellent source of Vitamin C, more than a glass of orange juice and a good source of potassium.

"It's also a good source of folate and ellagic acid, a phytochemical, which is believed to fight against cancer," Poer said.

Cherries are also a good source of Vitamin C. About 25 of them contain 3 grams of fiber. Cherries also contain quercetin, another phytochemical believed to help fight carcinogens.

Let's not forget they taste good, too.

### U-drive to u-pick

Timbers said u-pick's popularity has more to do with the experience of picking your own produce, and not because consumers will save money.

"You got to go outside and do something they can't do anywhere else in the world," Timbers said. "It gets the kids out and it's a good family activity."

"The experience isn't about saving money, but it is about a nice family activity," Matt Spicer, son of the owner of Spicer Orchards in Fenton and manager of the farms there, said. This year's strawberry crop is "great." The harvests bring out the families to the farm, Spicer said.

"We get a lot of moms and dads with their kids," Spicer said. Straw-



KETTNER'S WHEAT GERM

**Whip it up:** Easy-to-bake Strawberry Kissed pie has a golden brown meringue crust filled with berries and vanilla pudding, topped with reduced-fat whipped topping. Sliced almonds and wheat germ add a chewy, crunchy texture to the pie crust.

berry picking began about 10 days ago. Spicer expects strawberries to continue for another three weeks.

The key to growing a good strawberry — sandy ground and lots of rain. "We haven't had to irrigate much this spring," Spicer said. "If it's dry, we irrigate once every three days."

### Cherries almost here

For true cherry lovers, the National Cherry Festival in Traverse City is scheduled for July 1-8 and is also the world's largest cherry festival. The festival expects to draw 700,000 visitors to savor the flavor of cherries in pancakes, pies, cannoli, turkey wraps and salsa.

For those who don't want to battle the throngs, u-pick can be a viable alternative that's local.

Ward's offers u-pick cherries. Call next week for picking information and crop availability.

A late freeze may have damaged cherries, but orchard owners won't know for sure until the crop ripens.

"Too much rain also splits the cherries," Timbers said. "It's very weather dependent."

The picking season for cherries is very short. "You have to pick them very quickly, you have a very short window," Timbers said.

Spicer offers tart and sweet cherries for picking. The tart cherries will be available for about two weeks, but sweet cherry picking season last only about three or four days, Spicer said.

Orchard operators advise people who wish to visit their orchards to call first to check the availability of berries.

See recipes and u-pick information inside Taste.

### U-call before u-pick

Here are some farms and orchards to call about u-pick strawberries and cherries:

■ Blake's Big Orchard Apple Orchard — Armada, one mile south of Armada on North Avenue and 33 Mile Road, Five miles east of Romeo. U-pick strawberries, raspberries, cherries, (810) 784-0710.

■ Blake's Orchard and Cider Mill — Armada, near intersection of Romeo Plank Road and Armada Center Road, Three miles west of Armada or five miles east of Romeo. U-pick strawberries, raspberries, and cherries, (810) 784-5343.

■ Long Orchard & Farm — Commerce Township, on Bogle Lake Road — One-third mile north of Wix Road. U-pick strawberries, (248) 360-3774.

■ Spicer Orchard — Fenton, U.S. 23 north, three miles north of M-59 to Clyde Road exit, exit east. U-pick strawberries, blueberries, and cherries, (810) 632-7692.

■ Ward's Orchards — Ypsilanti, I-94 to Huron Street, exit 183, then south four miles, follow the signs. U-pick strawberries, (734) 482-7744.

### Festival

For information on the National Cherry Festival, call 1-800-988-3380 or visit the festival Web site at [www.cherryfestival.org](http://www.cherryfestival.org).

The Observer Newspapers will be running periodic updates in the Taste section on u-pick orchards and the produce available.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHEEZY MARKETING INSTITUTE

## Winemakers say law will harm sales

House Bill 4752. Good intentions run amuck or hidden agenda?

Michigan winemakers such as Mark Johnson of Chateau Chantal said it will hurt him sales. "We can ship direct to a person in Michigan by telephone, but if that person wants to send our wine as a gift to a friend or business associate, we can't under HB 4752," he said.

Wine merchant John Jonna said,

"If we can't ship gift baskets containing wine or spirits in the state, that's the difference between profit and loss in a year."

Walter Keck, administrative commis-

sioner for the Michigan Liquor Control Commission, said that if HB 4752 (S-2), is passed with its current language, "it would require the vote of three out of five commissioners and could take up to six months to promulgate the required rule," so wine transactions Johnson and Jonna refer to could become legal again.

What's going on?

Bill sponsor Rep. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, claims, "My only aim is trying to protect minors from being able to purchase wine

over the Internet and retain Michigan liquor laws as they are."

Yet insider information indicates that preliminary language for HB 4752 was drafted by attorneys for the Michigan Beer & Wine Wholesalers Association (MB&WWA) and that two days after introduction of the bill last Friday, Rep. Cassis had a party sponsored by the MB&WWA. Rep. Cassis denies MB&WWA language involvement, but said she used a room MB&WWA made available.

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Influence

MB&WWA represents a monopoly with big bucks. They have filled many a campaign coffers in this state. They want to protect their lucrative monopoly by further restricting your rights. MB&WWA is Vetoed to HB 4752. Bit by bit, they influenced amendments to Cassis' bill, both in

the House and Senate, strengthening their position and caring little about language harming Michigan wine business.

"I promise to investigate the language of amendments further," Cassis said. "If it is harmful to small business in Michigan, I will get it changed." But Cassis also said that her bill "protects the Michigan wineries from all the small California wineries desirous of direct-shipping wine to Michigan consumers."

Odd, because Michigan wineries we spoke with have no concern about this. With quality wines, they do not fear competition and do not desire protection.

John Jonna said it best, "The more big business [MB&WWA] controls laws, the more it hurts the little guy like me. There is no level playing field when big business monopolies are in control." He also believes that exports of protection from the Internet and reduction of free trade is causing Michigan to lose its competitive business edge."

Jonna senses the smoke screen of protection of minors veiling the real issues of financial gains of a monopoly not caring

### Wine Picks

■ Pick of the week: 1998 Quivira Dry Creek Cuvee \$15, a blend of grenache, mourvedre, syrah and tempranillo. Smooth and depthful, easy to drink and a "enjoy me now" wine.

■ Merlot is a great match with summer grilled foods. The best bottles of merlot have loads of lush fruit giving the wine a "swooning" ability. When they are perfectly dry, fruit "sweetness" matches them to grilled firm-fleshed fish, poultry, pork,

grilled veggies and red meats.

■ Merlot with fruit salsa or a peach-swaney, spicy barbecue sauce. With merlot, complexity increases with price. The best are generally over \$20.

■ Super stuff: 1997 Dry Creek Vineyard Reserve Merlot, \$25; 1997 Dry Creek Merlot, \$22; 1997 Clos du Val Merlot, \$28; 1997 Robert Mondavi Merlot, \$24; and 1997 Farrel-Carano Merlot, \$23.

■ Good values: 1998 Coppola Diamond Series Merlot, \$15; 1997 Constellation Great Merlot, \$12; and 1998 Carmen Merlot, Chile, \$8.