

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Uncorking a wine bottle closure issue

Wine lovers have accepted the traditional cork too long! We've been frustrated with the standard natural cork closure. It has made favorite wines "corky," spoiling them with an off-odor and flavor, imparted to wine by natural corks that are contaminated with the chemical trichloroanisole (TCA). We've cringed as an inexperienced waitperson struggles to open a bottle we've ordered in a restaurant.

Corks crumble as a corkscrew is pushed through and some cork pieces float in an otherwise pristine glass of wine. Corks break as attempts are made to extract them from the neck of the bottle. At such times, a synthetic cork, screwtop or even crown cap seems preferable!

OK, crown caps are a bit radical. Yet winemakers such as David Forsyth of Hogue Cellars in Freewater, Wash., said "it's not a question of if, it's when" synthetic corks will be found in more wine bottles than natural corks.

Synthetic cork manufacturer Supreme Cork commissioned research into consumer attitudes toward synthetic corks. They learned that while consumers may be aghast at premium wine bottles with screwtops, wines that used synthetic corks garnered no negative perceptions.

Other research findings

The Portuguese Cork Association (APCOR) cried FOUL. Why? Portugal is the world's leading manufacturer of natural corks.

APCOR commissioned an independent international research group, to survey wine drinkers in Australia, the UK and the US. This survey showed that 76 percent expressed a preference for natural cork, with just 9 percent for plastic stoppers. The preference was strongest in the US at 81 percent with 73 and 72 percent respectively for the UK and Australia.

A total of 69 percent of those polled believe that a real cork in a wine bottle is viewed as an indication of wine quality; rising as high as 83 percent in the US and 79 percent in Australia. Yet, the type of closure ranked as the fourth most important factor in wine choice, with only 28 percent claiming it was a very important factor.

Ranking at the top of wine choice factors was previous experience with the wine. That's great! Brand loyalty. If you like it, you'll buy it again. Next most important at 53 percent was wine style.

So what? Cork is natural, recyclable and biodegradable. No manmade substitute replicates these cork properties. Although recycled cork is never used again as a wine bottle closure, it has other uses, such as the manufacture of bulletin boards, placemats, coasters, floor tiles or baskets. That's good, but a cork is

Food experts offer gift ideas for fathers who love to cook

BY LANA MENI
STAFF WRITER
lmeni@oe.hometown.net

Next Sunday is Father's Day, do you know what you're going to get for dad?

If new golf balls, ties or a shirt seems like a tired gift idea, and dad enjoys an occasional attempt in the kitchen, why not consider a cooking gadget? New cooking gadgets can rejuvenate the meal-making process.

We asked local food experts for gift suggestions and exactly what kitchen items they couldn't do without. The ideas range from common to trendy.

Dobbie Hubbard, kitchen manager of the Victorian Rose in Rochester, has suggestions for the outdoorsy-type Dad.

"I'd suggest a really good set of barbecue utensils," Hubbard suggested for the dad who likes to grill for the family. "And you must have a really good grill."

Today's barbecue utensils vary in style. We found Bali-style skewers with a Tahitian flower theme, but that might not suit dads who don't appreciate a feminine touch. The Mr. BAR-B-Q set at Bed, Bath & Beyond is reasonably priced at \$9.99 and is masculine enough for any man. It has a modern style with sleek silver cylinder handles. We located the set at the Rochester, Westland, Beverly Hills and Farmington stores. Sharon Lane is the assistant manager at the Family Buggy in Rochester Hills — a restaurant that specializes in hearty home-cooked meals. Lane's ideas mirror Hubbard's thoughts.

"An electric skillet," Lane said. "I use my mine everyday to make casseroles, smothered chicken, and meat and potato dishes."

Lane's husband isn't a fan of cooking, but if he did cook it would probably be a meat dish.

"A good knife is necessary," she said.

Stepping up in style

Stereotypical families that include meals made solely by Mom are fading, of course. Not all dads play golf and cook hamburgers. Some dads actually enjoy time in the kitchen to make upscale food. For the father who has fun creating sophisticated meals, Chef Josef Foreman of the newly opened Giacomo's Fine Italian dining in Clarkston shared his favorite cooking tools.

"For me, I can't do without a rolling pin because I make a lot of pastries," Foreman said. "But for a gift for dad I would suggest a hand blender. It can be used to puree for soups and sauces. And ... drinks."

On the same lines is the tomato press, a fun-trendy gadget, that comes from an old idea. A tomato press is a fresh way to make hardy tomato-based soups and sauces. We found a bright red Italian Tomato Press for \$25 at Williams Sonoma in Livonia, Troy and Ann Arbor. The easy-to-use press strains the skins and is a modern version of the old wooden tomato crushers that originated in Sicily.

Foreman also said he enjoys receiving new aprons chosen by his family. He uses them while grilling outside and in the cooking classes he teaches.

"A decent apron is fun because there's so many different styles out there," Fore-

man said. "A nice set of German steel knives is a great gift. And the olive oil misters are good too."

Olive Oil sprayers are a new trend for grilling. Rather than use brushes which can be messy, the sprayers distribute oil evenly without any mess. We found the Olive Oil Misto for \$9.99 at Bed, Bath & Beyond. Perfect for vegetables and fish.

At the Loon River Cafe in Sterling Heights, Chef Ray Hollingsworth stuck with items that can be used for his breakfast ideas. He specializes in wild meats like elk, pheasants and rabbits. His number one suggestion is a cast iron skillet that can be used at campfires or in the home.

"I use it for my meal called Hunter Breakfast," Hollingsworth said. "Bacon, potatoes, peppers and topped with eggs. I use it when I'm fishing."

We found a five-piece cast iron skillet set with a Dutch oven for \$50 at Cabela's stores.

Hollingsworth said he likes solid basics rather than huge equipment. What is a trendy idea that he enjoys is a gas-powered blender that he said can be used while spending time in nature. The blender has a motor similar to a

that

bo

Cool gadgets: At left, Double Mezzaluna (meaning two half moons in Italian) has a wooden handle and two half-moon blades that's a fun way to cut vegetables like celery or potatoes; \$23.50 at Williams Sonoma. Below, Chef Ray Hollingsworth of Loon River Cafe in Sterling Heights says he

loves to use heavy cast iron skillets to cook bacon-egg-potato breakfasts. This five-piece set, with skillets, a round griddle, a cover and dutch oven is \$45 at Cabela's.

used for dressings, soups or drinks.



Grilling is year-round for this family

BY NORMAN PRADY
SPECIAL WRITER

If Memorial Day just past was the start of barbecuing season across America, it was merely another in the endless series of strolls to the grill for the Thomas family of Beverly Hills.

"We cook out three or four nights a week," said Susie Thomas, 36, a pre-K schoolteacher. "Everything tastes better. The meat is juicier. A steak in the oven is dried out. I've got to have it done on a grill."

But it isn't just the taste of the food that drives the Thomas family out of the house

for more than half of their daily dinner. Susie and her husband, Dr. Mark, 34, a pediatrician, like the reduced clean-up.

"No pans," said Mark. "No big mess in the kitchen. And, we like being outdoors."

Susie and Mark use a propane grill, but they don't have big issues about the taste of propane cooking versus charcoal cooking.

"We use a charcoal grill when we go camping and it tastes a little different, but the propane is ready faster."

For Connor, 8, and Kelsey, 7, it doesn't matter what kind of fuel you use to cook their hot-dogs as long as you don't burn them.

Mark likes to grill salmon fillets, strip steaks, marinated shrimp, and chicken. For Susie, the greatest thrill of the grill is not animal but vegetable.

"When I was growing up," she said, "Everyone grilled hamburgers and hot-dogs and then when I was older someone made vegetables on the grill and that was wonderful. Smoky grilled vegetables. In a specialty made grill wok. Wonderful."

Perhaps not traditional, she said, but wonderful.

Try grilling veggies too

SUSIE'S GRILLED VEGGIES

For the vegetables
3 zucchini
3 yellow squash (the size of zucchini)
1/2 cup cut-up Shiitake mushrooms
1/2 cup cut-up Portabella mushrooms
1 Vidalia onion

(The selection of vegetables can vary as long as the uncooked firmness of the vegetables is the same so that cooking time will be equal)

For the marinade
1 cup (or more) Balsamic vinaigrette, ready-made or your own

Please see RECIPES, B2

PICK OF THE PACK: 1998 was an average vintage for cabernet in the Napa Valley. Some early releases were under par. There are always exceptions.

Here's one: 1998 William Hill Napa Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon \$38. It's rich, complex, layered and generous with a supple finish. MAIL THESE REDS FROM OZ: 1999 Redbank Sally's Paddock, Victoria \$40 (40 percent shrink); 2000 Redbank Paredyate Cabernet Merlot (50/40 blend) \$10; and 2001 Yangaarra Park Cabernet Sauvignon \$10. SUMMER-SIPPING CHARDONNAYS EXCELLENT: 2000 William Hill Napa Reserve \$23.

VERY GOOD: 2000 Joseph Phelps, Carneros \$27 and 2000 Dry Creek Vineyard \$35; 2001 Yangaarra Park \$10; 2001 Redbank Long Paddock, Victoria \$10; and 1999 La Palma Gran Reserva, Chile \$18.