A Taste Of China

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Cashew Chicken

3 Chicken breasts, boned and skinned
1/2 lb. Chinese pea pods
1/2 lb. Mushrooms
4 Green onions
2 cups Bamboo shoots, drained
1 cup Chicken broth
1/4 cup Soy sauce
2 tb Corn starch
1/2 ts Sugar
1/2 ts Salt
4 tb Salad oil
1 pack Cashew nuts (about 4−oz)

Slice breasts horizontally into very thin slices and cut into inch squares. Place on tray. Prepare vegetables, removing ends and strings from pea pods, slicing mushrooms, green part of onions, and the bamboo shoots. Add to tray. Mix soy sauce, cornstarch, sugar, and salt. Heat 1 tbls of oil in skillet over moderate heat, add all the nuts, and cook 1 min shaking the pan, toasting the nuts lightly. Remove and reserve. Pour remaining oil in pan, fry chicken quickly, turning often until it looks opaque. Lower heat to low. Add pea pods, mushrooms, and broth. Cover and cook slowly for 2 mins. Remove cover, add soy sauce mixture, bamboo shoots, and cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Simmer uncovered a bit more and add green onions and nuts and serve immediately.

Shrimp Toast

12 fresh uncooked large shrimp
1 egg
2 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon salt
Pinch pepper
3 slices sandwich bread
1 hard−cooked egg yolk
1 slice cooked ham (about 1 ounce)
1 green onion
2 cups vegetable oil

1. Remove shells from shrimp, leaving tails intact. Remove back veins from shrimp. Cut down back of shrimp with sharp knife. Gently press shrimp with fingers to flatten.
2. Beat 1 egg, cornstarch, salt and pepper in a small bowl until blended. Add shrimp to egg mixture and toss until shrimp are completely coated.
3. Remove crusts from bread. Cut each slice into quarter. Place one shrimp, cut side down, on each bread piece. Gently press shrimp to adhere to bread. Brush or rub small amount of egg mixture over each shrimp.
4. Cut egg yolk and ham into 1/2 inch pieces. Finely chop onion. Place one piece each of egg yolk and ham and a scant 1/4 teaspoon chopped onion on each shrimp.
5. Heat oil in wok over medium−high heat until it reaches 375F. Fry 3 or 4 shrimp−bread pieces at a time in the hot oil until golden, 1 to 2 minutes on each side. Drain on absorbent paper.

Moo Goo Gai Pan

4 chicken breast halves, skinned, boned and sliced
salt and pepper
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups water
1 tb cornstarch
5 tb corn oil
8 oz. fresh mushrooms, sliced
4 lb. bok choy or Chinese white cabbage, chopped
2 tb sugar
4 tb soy sauce
6 scallions, chopped

1. In a bowl, toss chicken with the salt and pepper, garlic and cornstarch mixture. Set aside.
2. Heat 3 tablespoons of corn oil in a wok and stir in mushrooms, bok choy/cabbage and sugar for 2 minutes. Cover and cook for 5 minutes. Remove from wok.
3. Heat remaining corn oil in wok. Stir−fry chicken for 2 minutes over high heat. Add soy sauce and mix well. Cover and cook for about 6 minutes, or until the chicken is thoroughly cooked.
4. Mix in the cooked vegetables and scallions. Stir fry together for about 1 minute. Serve hot with rice.

General Tsao's Chicken

Sauce:
1/2 cup cornstarch
1/4 cup water
1+1/2 tsp minced garlic
1+1/2 tsp minced ginger root
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup soy sauce
1/4 cup white vinegar
1/4 cup cooking wine
1+1/2 cup hot chicken broth
1 tsp monosodium glutamate (optional)
Meat:
3 lbs deboned dark chicken meat, cut into large chunks
1/4 cup soy sauce
1 tsp white pepper
1 egg
1 cup cornstarch
Vegetable oil for deep−frying
2 cups sliced green onions
16 small dried hot peppers

Mix 1/2 cup cornstarch with water. Add garlic, ginger, sugar, 1/2 cup soy sauce, vinegar, wine, chicken broth and MSG (if desired). Stir until sugar dissolves. Refrigerate until needed.

In separate bowl, mix chicken, 1/4 cup soy sauce and white pepper. Stir in egg. Add 1 cup cornstarch and mix until chicken pieces are coated evenly. Add cup of vegetable oil to help separate chicken pieces.

Divide chicken into small quantities and deep−fry at 350 degrees until crispy. Drain on paper towels.

Place a small amount of oil in wok and heat until wok is hot. Add onions and peppers and stir−fry briefly. Stir sauce and add to wok.
Place chicken in sauce and cook until sauce thickens.

Hunan Beef

2 cups broccoli florets
2 tablespoons cooking oil
2 teaspoons minced garlic
4 small dried red chilies
1 teaspoon cornstarch dissolved in 2 teaspoons water

Marinade:
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 teaspoons cornstarch
1 tablespoon Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
3/4 pound flank steak, thinly sliced across the grain

Sauce:
3 tablespoons Chinese black vinegar or balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
2 teaspoons sugar
2 teaspoons chili garlic sauce
1 teaspoon sesame oil

1. Combine marinade ingredients in a bowl. Add beef and stir to coat. Let stand for 10 minutes.
2. Combine sauce ingredients in a bowl.
3. Place broccoli in a large pot with 1 inch of boiling water. Boil until tender−crisp, 2 to 3 minutes; drain.
4. Place a wok over high heat until hot. Add oil, swirling to coat sides. Add garlic and chilies and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add beef and stir−fry until no longer pink, 1 1/2 to 2 minutes.
5. Add broccoli and sauce to wok; bring to a boil. Add cornstarch solution and cook, stirring, until sauce boils and thickens.

Barbecued Spareribs

2 banks of spareribs, uncut, about 2 pounds each
3 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 cup ketchup
1/2 cup sweet bean sauce (hoi sin deung) or hoi sin sauce
1/2 cup soy sauce
1/4 cup sherry

Trim off excess fat from the thick edges of spareribs. Place ribs in a shallow pan or platter. Mix remaining ingredients for a marinade and spread over both sides of the spareribs. Let stand for at least two hours.
Place one oven rack at the top of the oven and one at the bottom. Preheat to 375F. Hook each bank of spareribs with 3 or 4 S−hooks across its width, on the thick edges, and suspend under top rack. Place a large pan with 1/2" water on bottom rack. This pan will catch the drippings and keep the meat from drying out. Cook spareribs for about 45 minutes.

Fried Rice

2 eggs
1 teaspoon MSG (optional)
1/8 teaspoon groung white pepper
1/4 cup soy sauce
4 cups cooked rice
4 scallions, chopped, including green ends
2 cups diced cooked pork, ham, chicken, shrimp, or any meat
1 slice ginger, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
1/4 cup sliced mushrooms (optional)
1/4 cup vegetable oil

Put first four ingredients in a mixing bowl and stir slightly; the eggs should not be well beaten.
Heat wok or pan hot and dry. Add the oil. Brown the garlic and ginger slightly, then add the rice. Cook for 2−3 minutes, stirring to break up lumps and coat with oil. Add the rest of the ingredients except the egg mixture. Fry and stir constantly until thoroughly mixed. Add the egg mixture while stirring the rice so it will cover as much of the ingredients in the pan as possible. Cook about 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Serve while hot.

Hot and Sour Soup

2 1/2 quarts chicken stock
1 block (16 oz.) of tofu, cut into 1 1/2 inch long strips
5 shitake mushrooms, cut into thin slices
1/2 cup soy sauce
1/2 tsp. white pepper
1/2 cup white vinegar
1 1/2 cups bamboo shoot strips
2 tablespoons cornstarch dissolved in 4 tablespoons water
3 eggs. beaten
1/2 tsp. sesame oil

Combine first seven ingredients in a pot and bring to a boil.
Drizzle the cornstarch mixture into the soup, stirring to thicken.
Then drizzle beaten eggs into soup, stirring. Top with sesame oil.

Foo Yung

6 eggs, beaten well
1 cup shredded cooked meat (roast pork, shrimp, almost any!)
2 cups fresh bean sprouts (or 1 can)
2 scallions, chopped, including the green ends
1 medium onion, shredded
1 teaspoon sugar
1/8 teaspoon ground pepper
1 teaspoon MSG (optional)
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1/2 cup chicken stock or water
Vegetable oil for frying

Make gravy if desired (recipe follows). Preheat oven to 200F. Line a platter with several thicknesses of paper towel. Mix all ingredients except the vegetable oil together in a mixing bowl.
Heat a frying pan hot and dry. Put in vegetable oil to a depth of about 1/2 inch. Keep oil at this level by adding more, as some is absorbed in cooking. Bring oil temperature to medium. Stir up the omelet mixture each time before you take a scoopful of it out, in order to have the proper ratio of liquid and solid ingredients in each.
With a ladle or soup scoop, take a scoop of the egg mixture and gently put into the frying pan. When the first omelet has stiffened, gently move it over to make room for the next. The number of omelets you can make at once depends on the size of your frying pan. When one side of the omelet has turned golden brown, turn over gently with pancake turner to fry the other side. When done, transfer from frying pan onto paper−lined platter. Keep warm in oven until all the omelets can be served together. Serve with or without gravy.

Gravy:
1 1/2 cups chicken stock
1 tablespoon cornstarch
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 teaspoon MSG (optional)
1/8 teaspoon ground pepper
Pinch of salt

Mix all the ingredients together in a saucepan. Bring to a boil slowly with frequent stirring. When gravy has thickened, turn heat to very low to keep it warm until ready to use.

Shrimp with Snow Peas

2/3 lb. tiger prawns

Marinade for shrimp:
1 1/2 tsp. sherry
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. grated ginger
1 1/2 tsp. cornstarch
1 tsp. water

Seasoning:
1 Tb. chicken broth
3 Tb. water
1/2 tsp. cornstarch
3 Tb. oyster sauce (very important)
1 Tb. hoisin sauce

also needed:
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 clove garlic, pressed or minced
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 lb. snow peas

Shell and devein prawns. Rinse and pat dry with a paper towel. Combine marinade in medium bowl. Add prawns and mix well. Let stand 30 mins. Heat wok over medium heat, add oil, and stir fry garlic for 15 secs. Add prawns and stir fry until pink. Remove from wok, and place on plate. Add salt and snow peas to oil in wok. Stir fry 30 secs. Add seasoning sauce and stir slightly until think and bubbly. Add cooked prawns. Stir to coat everything with sauce. Serve hot with cooked rice.

Egg Rolls

1 lb. chinese cabbage (Napa)
2 stalks celery
1/2 lb. cooked shrimp
1/2 lb. cooked pork or chicken livers
10 water chestnuts
1/3 cup bamboo shoots
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. sugar
Liberal dash pepper
1/2 tsp. light soy sauce
1/4 tsp. sesame oil
1 beaten egg
10 egg roll skins
3 cups oil

PREPARATION: Boil cabbage and celery until very tender. Drain and squeeze out excess water. Shred very fine and set aside to drain further. Parboil shrimp and fry or bake pork. Mince both. Shred water chestnuts and bamboo shoots. Mix all ingredients but egg together. Beat egg. Wrap filling in egg roll skins and seal with egg.

COOKING: Heat oil in wok or deep fat fryer to 375 degrees and drop in egg rolls. When skin turns light golden brown, remove from oil and drain. (At this point restaurants refrigerate them and finish the cooking process as needed.) When cool, drop again into hot oil and fry until golden brown. Makes 10.

The two−stage deep frying method is actually a professional Chinese chefs' secret. It assures that the inside will be moist and not overcooked (as anything overcooked becomes dry) and the outside will be crisp.

Hoisin Beef & Scallion Rolls

1 whole flank steak
1/2 cup soy sauce
3 cloves garlic
1/2 cup ginger −−chopped, fresh
dash black pepper
1/2 cup hoisin sauce
1 bunch scallions

In a shallow dish, mix together the soy sauce, oil, garlic, ginger, and some pepper. Add the beef and marinate overnight in the refrigerator, turning once. Heat the broiler. Pat the marinated meat dry and broil the steak, about 4 inches from the heat, until rare, 5 to 6 minutes per side. Cool completely and then slice very think on the bias, across the grain of the meat. Trim the slices to form approximately 2 x 4 inch strips. Brush a thin layer of hoisin sauce on each strip of beef. Lay a small bundle of scallion julienne at one end and roll up securely. Arrange on trays, seam side down, cover tightly with plastic wrap (make sure the plastic is in close contact with the beef), and refrigerate until time to serve.

Kung Pao Chicken

2 tablespoons oyster sauce
1 teaspoon cornstarch
3/4 pound boneless, skinless chicken

Sauce:
1/4 cup Chinese black vinegar or balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup chicken broth
3 tablespoons Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
1 tablespoon soy sauce
2 teaspoons sesame oil
2 teaspoons chili garlic sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
2 1/2 tablespoons cooking oil
8 small dried red chilies
4 teaspoons minced garlic
2 stalks celery, diced
1/2 red bell pepper, cut into 1−inch squares
1 can (8 oz.) sliced bamboo shoots, drained
2 teaspoons cornstarch dissolved in 1 tablespoon water
1/3 cup roasted peanuts

1. Combine marinade ingredients in a bowl. Cut chicken into 1−inch pieces. Place chicken in marinade and stir to coat. Let stand for 10 minutes.
2. Combine sauce ingredients in a bowl.
3. Place a wok over high heat until hot. Add 2 tablespoons oil, swirling to coat sides. Add chilies and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add chicken and stir−fry for 2 minutes. Remove chicken and chilies from wok.
4. Add remaining 1/2 tablespoon oil to wok, swirling to coat sides. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add celery, bell pepper, and bamboo shoots; stir−fry for 1 1/2 minutes.
5. Return chicken and chilies to wok; stir−fry for 1 minute. Add sauce and bring to a boil. Add cornstarch solution and cook, stirring, until sauce boils and thickens. Add peanuts and stir to coat.

Lo Mein

4 cups cooked Chinese noodles (or very thin spaghetti)
rinsed and drained
12 oz. diced cooked meat (beef, chicken, pork ... any)
1 package frozen French−style green beans, thawed
2 cups fresh bean sprouts
3 scallions, chopped
1 slice ginger, shredded
1 clove garlic, minced
1 teas. MSG (Accent)
1 teas. sugar
1/4 cup soy sauce
3/4 cup vegetable oil
1/4 teas. sesame oil
2 Tbls. sherry

Mix together MSG, sugar, and soy sauce. Set aside.
Heat wok or pan hot and dry. Add just 3 tablespoons of the vegetable oil and all the sesame oil. Put in ginger and garlic to brown first, then all the other vegetables. Stir and cook for one minute over high heat. Add the sherry. Cover and cook one minute longer. Turn off heat. Remove vegetables, and drain; discard these juices. Set drained vegetables aside.
Heat wok or pan dry again. Put in remainder of oil. Turn heat to medium. Add cooked noodles and stir constantly to heat through and to coat the noodles with oil for a couple minutes. Add your choice of meat and reserved vegetables; mix thoroughly. Add reserved soy sauce mixture and stir until noodles become one even color. Serve.

Fried Won Tons

1 lb. Won ton skins
1/2 lb. Fresh ground pork
1/2 lb. Fresh prawns
4 Dried mushrooms, soaked for 2 hours
8 Water chestnuts, finely chopped
2 Stalks green onions, finely chopped
2 small Eggs, beaten
1/4 ts Pepper
1 1/2 ts Salt

Yield: About 60 to 70.

Shell and devein prawns. Mince fine. Stem mushrooms and mince caps. Mix with prawns, pork, water chestnuts, green onions, half of the beaten eggs and all of the seasonings.

WRAPPING:
Place won ton squares on working surface so corners face up, down, left and right. Place 1 teaspoon filling in the center of each skin.

Dip a little of the beaten egg onto the bottom corner, bring top corner to meet bottom corner. Press to seal. Moisten left corner and bring right corner to meet it. Press to seal. This should give you a little bundle that looks kind of like a nurses hat.

FRYING:
Heat 4 cups oil in wok. Fry wrapped won ton until golden (about 2 minutes). Turn over once. Drain and serve hot.

Empress Chicken Wings

1 1/2 pounds Chicken Wings
3 tablespoons Soy Sauce
1 tablespoon Dry Sherry
1 tablespoon Minced Fresh Ginger Root
1 Clove Garlic, Minced
2 tablespoons Vegetable Oil
1/3 cup Cornstarch
2/3 cup Water
2 Green Onions And Tops, Cut Into Thin Slices
1 teaspoon Slivered Fresh Ginger Root

Disjoint the chicken wings; discard tips (or save for stock). Combine soy sauce, sherry, minced ginger and garlic in a large bowl; stir in chicken. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Remove chicken; reserve marinade. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Lightly coat chicken pieces with cornstarch; add to skillet and brown slowly on all sides. Remove chicken; drain off fat. Stir water and reserved marinade into same skillet. Add chicken; sprinkle green onions and slivered ginger evenly over chicken. Cover and simmer for 5 minutes, or until chicken is tender.

Mandarin Pancakes

2 cups flour
3/4 cup boiling water
2 tablespoons sesame oil

1. Place flour in a bowl. Add boiling water, stirring with chopsticks or a fork until dough is evenly moistened. On a lightly floured board, knead dough until smooth and satiny, about 5 minutes. Cover and let rest for 30 minutes.
2. On a lightly floured board, roll dough into a cylinder; cut into 16 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a ball, then flatten slightly into a pancake. Brush top of each pancake with a light coating of sesame oil.
3. Place 1 pancake on top of a second pancake, oiled sides together. With a rolling pin, roll to make a circle 6 inches in diameter. Stack and roll remaining pairs of pancakes the same way. Cover with a damp cloth to prevent drying.

Cooking:

1. Place a nonstick frying pan over lm heat until hot. Add 1 pair of pancakes and cook, turning once, until lightly browned and bubbles appear on the surface, about 2 minutes on each side. Remove from pan and separate into 2 pancakes while still hot. Stack cooked pancakes on a plate while cooking remaining pairs of pancakes.
2. Serve pancakes hot. If making ahead, reheat pancakes in a microwave oven or wrap in a clean dish towel and steam in a bamboo steamer for 5 minutes.

Sesame Chicken

1 pound boneless chicken (or pork or steak)
2 tablespoons sesame seeds
1 tablespoon sesame oil
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 ounces small mushrooms, quartered
1 large green bell pepper, seeded and cut into strips
4 scallions, chopped diagonally
boiled rice, to serve

Marinade:
2 teaspoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon soy sauce
few drops of Tabasco sauce
1−inch piece fresh ginger, grated
1 garlic clove, crushed

1. Trim the meat and cut into thin strips about 1/2 x 2 inch.
2. Make the marinade. In a bowl, blend the cornstarch with the rice wine or dry sherry, then stir in the lemon juice, soy sauce, Tabasco sauce, ginger and garlic. Stir in the strips, cover and leave in a cool place for 3−4 hours.
3. Place the sesame seeds in a wok or large frying pan and dry−fry over moderate heat, shaking the pan, until the seeds are golden. Set aside.
4. Heat the sesame and vegetable oils in the wok or frying pan. Drain the meat, reserving the marinade, and stir− fry a few pieces at a time until browned. Remove with a slotted spoon.
5. Add the mushrooms and green pepper and stir−fry for 2−3 minutes. Add the scallions and 1 minute more.
6. Return the meat to the wok or frying pan, together with the reserved marinade, and stir over a moderate heat for a further 2 minutes, or until the ingredients are evenly coated with glaze. Sprinkle the sesame seeds on top and serve immediately with boiled rice.

Orange Beef

1/2 Lb. Top round steak
2 Tb Sherry
2 Tb Cornstarch
2 Egg whites
6 Tb Peanut oil

SAUCE:
1 1/2 cups Beef stock
2 Tb Light soy sauce
1 Ts Sugar
1 1/2 Tb Cornstarch
1 Ts Red wine vinegar

5 Dried red chile peppers, broken into pieces
8 Thin slices of orange rind (orange part only) or more
Fresh ground black pepper to taste

Whisk together the sherry, cornstarch, and egg whites until the mixture is foamy. Add the beef and toss to coat the pieces well. Set aside.
Cut meat into 2x2−inch pieces. Heat 4 tbs. Peanut oil in wok.
Fry quickly, just until crispy and browned, remove to wok rack to drain.
Add remaining 2 tbs. Peanut oil to wok. Add orange rind and red peppers to hot oil in wok. Stir−fry until orange rind begins to darken and aroma from oil becomes pleasant. Add remaining ingredients and stir until bubbly (add more beef stock if too thick). Add fried beef and toss to coat with sauce. Serve at once with steamed white rice.

Pork with Broccoli in Oyster Sauce

1 teaspoon sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 teaspoon MSG (optional)
1/4 cup oyster sauce
1/2 cup chicken stock
2 cups sliced lean pork (about 1 pound)
1 bunch (about 2 pounds) fresh brocolli, sliced
2 slices ginger, shredded
1 clove garlic, minced
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup water

Mix together first five ingredients and set aside.
Heat wok or pan until hot and dry. Add the oil, then the salt. Turn heat to medium. Add the ginger and the garlic and fry until golden brown. Turn heat to high. Add the pork and fry until outside is lightly browned. Add the broccoli and stir−fry for 3 minutes. Add the water, cover, and cook for 4 minutes. Pour in reserved sauce mixture; stir while cooking until gravy thickens. Turn heat down to low, cover, and cook for 2 minutes more. Place in covered serving dish until ready to serve.

Garlic Chicken

4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 1 lb.)
1 egg white
1 Tablespoon cornstarch
1 Tablespoon dry white wine or sherry
4 green onions
1 teaspoon minced gingerroot
3 teaspoons minced fresh garlic (about 6 medium cloves)
2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
Hot cooked rice

SAUCE
1 teaspoon crushed chili paste (sambal oelek) or more to taste
2 teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon cornstarch
2 teaspoons rice vinegar
1 Tablespoon water
2 Tablespoons dry white wine or sherry
2 Tablespoons soy sauce

Place chicken breasts in freezer for 1 to 2 hours or until very firm but not frozen solid. Slice crosswise into thin shreds. In small bowl, lightly beat egg white, then mix in 1 TBS cornstach and 1 TBS wine, stirring until cornstarch is dissolved. Add chicken and mix well to coat all pieces. Let stand at room temperature 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, slice green onions on the diagonal into very thin slices. Mince gingerroot and garlic. Combine Sauce ingredients, mixing well. Heat wok or frying pan, add oil, and stir−fry chicken until no longer pink. Remove chicken with a slotted spoon. Add onions, ginger and garlic to wok and stir−fry about 30 seconds, until ginger and garlic are fragrant but not brown. Return chicken to wok, restir sauce ingredients and add to wok. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture is well combined, hot and bubbly and thickens slightly. Turn off heat and splash with about 1 tsp of dark sesame oil. Serve over rice.

Fortune Cookies

8 oz. All−purpose flour
2 Tbl. Cornstarch
4 oz. Sugar
1/2 teas. Salt
4 oz. Vegetable oil
4 oz. Egg whites
1 Tbl. Water
2 teas. Vanilla extract.

1. In a deep bowl, mix the following ingredients: 8 oz. Flour, 2 tablespoons corn starch, 4 oz sugar and 1/2 teaspoon salt, blend in 4 oz. oil, 4 oz. Egg whites, 1 tablespoon water and 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, and beat until smooth consistency.
2. Write your own "Fortune" on a piece of paper 2 1/2" by 1/2". Prepared oven to 300F.
3. Scoop a tablespoon of cookie batter and spread evenly into a 4" circle on a well greased baking sheet.
4. Bake cookie for about 14 minutes or until lightly golden brown. Remove one cookie at a time from the oven.
5. You have about 15 seconds working time before the cookie hardens. Place the "Fortune" in the middle of the cookie.
6. Shape the cookie by folding it in half and grasp both ends. Place the finished cookie in a muffin pan with the ends down to hold its unique shape.

Cantonese Roast Duck

1 duck, about 5 pounds, fresh or frozen
1 tablespoon salt
1 scallion
3 slices fresh ginger

Glaze:
1 tablespoon light corn syrup
2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon soy sauce
Few sprigs fresh cilantro, for garnish

1. Thaw the duck, if frozen. Remove any excess fat, and rinse and pat dry with paper towels. Rub the entire surface of the duck, inside and out, with the salt. Cover and refrigerate for several hours, or, overnight.
2. Put the scallion in the cavity and lay the slices of ginger on top of the duck. Add at least 2 inches of water to a large flameproof roasting pan with a lid and put the pan on the stove. Place a large rack in the roasting pan and bring the water to a boil. Choose an oval casserole large enough to hold the duck and small enough to fit into the roasting pan. Place the duck in the casserole and then put the casserole on the rack. Cover and steam for 1 hour, checking the water level from time to time and adding more boiling water if necessary. Save the duck broth to use in soups or stir fry dishes. When done, remove the duck from the casserole and place it on a rack to dry.
3. Combine the ingredients for the glaze in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. With a pastry brush, paint the hot glaze over the surface of the duck. Allow duck to dry for 1 hour.
4. Preheat the oven to 375F. Roast the duck, breast side down, for 20 minutes. Turn over and continue to roast for 40 more minutes.
5. Transfer duck to a chopping board and allow to cool slightly. Using a cleaver, disjoint and cut the duck through the bone into bite size pieces. Arrange the pieces on a serving platter, garnish with cilantro and serve.

Bean Sprout Salad

2 tablespoon Sesame seeds
1 pound Fresh bean sprouts thoroughly washed and drained
3 Garlic cloves, peeled and minced
2 md Scallions −− trimmed & minced
1 − 1" cube ginger, peeled and minced
2 tablespoon Oriental sesame oil
1/3 cup Soy sauce
2 tablespoon Cider vinegar
1 tablespoon Mirin (sweet rice wine)
2 teaspoon Light brown sugar
1 teaspoon Spicy sesame oil

PREHEAT OVEN TO 300F. Toast the sesame seeds by spreading them over the bottom of a pie tin. Roast for 12−to−16 minutes, stirring often, until they are golden. The seeds can be toasted in advance and stored in an airtight container.

Place the bean sprouts in a large heatproof bowl and set it aside. In a medium−size skillet set over moderately low heat, stir−fry the garlic, scallions and ginger in the oil for 2 to 3 minutes, until they are limp. Add all the remaining ingredients, increase the heat to moderate, then boil the mixture, uncovered, for 1 minute to slightly reduce the liquid. Pour the boiling dressing over the bean sprouts, toss well, then cover the bowl and chill the salad for several hours. Toss again before serving.

Almond Biscuits

2 1/2 cups all−purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
1/2 cup margarine or butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1 egg
1 tsp almond essence
blanched almonds for decoration
beaten egg for glazing

1. Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a bowl. Cream the margarine (or butter) and sugar together until light, white and fluffy. Beat in the egg and almond essence. Stir in the sifted dry ingredients to make a stiff dough.
2. Form the mixture into balls about 1 − 1.5 inch diameter and place these on a greased baking tray. Place half an almond (split lengthways) on each ball and press to flatten slightly. Brush with beaten egg.
3. Bake in a moderate oven (350 deg F / 180 deg C) for 20 minutes or until golden. Cool on a wire rack. This quantity makes about 45 biscuits.

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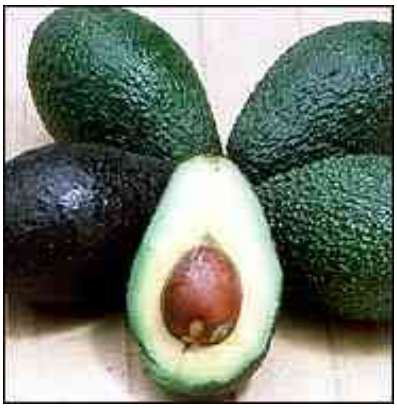

The Skin Isn't Great, but the Heart Is Pure Gold

by David Karp

FALLBROOK, Calif. - The avocado is an archaic anomaly. Botanically and popularly regarded as a fruit, it is typically used as a vegetable. It can hang on the tree for 16 months or more — roughly the gestation period of a rhinoceros — but ripens only after picking, when its reptilian hide belies the buttery flesh within. Indeed, scientists theorize that this extravagantly rich pulp evolved to entice megafauna like mastodons and ground sloths to swallow the fruit whole and disperse the giant seeds. More ... Article Archives

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Crockpot Steak Teriyaki

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2 1/2 pounds boneless chuck steak
1/4 cup soy sauce
20 ounces unsweetened pineapple chunks, drained
1/4 cup reserved pineapple juice
1 teaspoon finely grated gingerroot
1 tablespoon sugar
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 cloves garlic, crushed
3 tablespoons cornstarch
3 tablespoons water
Hot cooked rice

Cut meat into 1/8-inch slices and place in slow cooker. In a small bowl, combine soy sauce, reserved pineapple juice, gingerroot, sugar, oil, and garlic. Pour sauce mixture over meat. Cover and cook on Low 6 to 7 hours. Turn control to High. Stir in pineapple. Combine cornstarch and water in small bowl; add to cooker. Cook, stirring, until slightly thickened. Serve over rice.

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Steak and Ale Spicy Chicken Pasta

Cajun Cream Sauce:
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 cups heavy cream
- 6 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 tablespoons Cajun seasoning

For the pasta:
- 4 (6 oz.) boneless chicken breasts
- 2 tablespoons Cajun seasoning
- 4 cups Cajun Cream Sauce
- 1 1/2 lb. linguini, cooked
- 1 cup diced tomatoes
- 1/4 cup sliced green onions
- 1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

To prepare the sauce, melt butter over medium heat. Add all-purpose flour, stirring until blended. Continue stirring for 3 minutes. Remove pan from the heat. Add milk and cream and whisk until well-blended. Return pan to medium heat. Heat mixture, stirring frequently until the mixture just begins to bubble up the sides of the pot. Remove from heat and mix in the 6 tablespoons of Parmesan and 3 tablespoons of Cajun seasoning.

Sprinkle chicken breasts with the Cajun seasoning. Grill for 6 to 8 minutes, or until an internal temperature of 165F is reached.

Pour 4 cups of Cajun Cream Sauce into a large saute pan. Add linguini and toss with tongs until pasta is evenly coated with the sauce. Cook over medium heat for about 30 seconds.

Divide pasta among 4 large serving plates or bowls, mounding up pasta. Slice cooked chicken on the bias into 1/4-inch strips and place on top of pasta. Sprinkle tomatoes, green onions and Parmesan over each portion.

Grilled Marinated Flank Steak

1/4 cup soy sauce
3 tablespoons honey
2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 1/2 pounds flank steak

In a blender, combine soy sauce, honey, vinegar, ginger, garlic powder and vegetable oil. Blend for 15 seconds. Lay steak in a shallow glass or ceramic dish. Pierce flesh all over front and back with a sharp fork. Pour marinade over steak, then turn and coat the other side. Cover, and chill in the refrigerator 8 hours, or overnight.

Preheat an outdoor grill for high heat. Place grate on highest level, and brush lightly with oil. Grill steak for 15 to 20 minutes, turning once, to desired doneness.

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Hamburger Hashbrown Hotdish

---

1 (32 oz.) box frozen hash brown patties
1 minced onion
salt and pepper
1 lb. ground beef, browned and drained
1 can green beans (drained)
1 cup milk
1 can cream of mushroom soup
8 ounces shredded cheddar cheese
1 can French-fried onions

Butter a 9x13 pan. Cover bottom of pan with hashbrowns. Add hamburger, salt, pepper, and minced onion. Sprinkle beans on top. Mix soup and milk together and pour over peas. Top with cheese. Cover with foil and bake at 350F for one hour. Sprinkle with French Fried Onions and return to oven for ten more minutes.

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Old-Fashioned Baked Beans

---

2 cups navy beans
1/2 pound bacon
1 onion, finely diced
3 tablespoons molasses
2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
1/2 cup ketchup
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1/4 cup brown sugar

Soak beans overnight in cold water. Simmer the beans in the same water until tender, approximately 1 to 2 hours. Drain and reserve the liquid.

Preheat oven to 325F. Arrange the beans in a 2 quart bean pot or casserole dish by placing a portion of the beans in the bottom of dish, and layering them with bacon and onion.

In a saucepan, combine molasses, salt, pepper, dry mustard, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce and brown sugar. Bring the mixture to a boil and pour over beans. Pour in just enough of the reserved bean water to cover the beans. Cover the dish with a lid or aluminum foil.

Bake for 3 to 4 hours in the preheated oven, until beans are tender. Remove the lid about halfway through cooking, and add more liquid if necessary to prevent the beans from getting too dry.

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Trout Amandine

---

4 pan-dressed trout (about 1 lb. each)
2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
2 eggs
1/2 cup half-and-half
1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup slivered almonds
3 tablespoons butter or margarine, divided
3 to 4 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon dried tarragon
1/4 cup olive oil or vegetable oil

Sprinkle salt and pepper in the cavity of each trout. In a shallow bowl, beat eggs and cream. Dip trout in egg mixture, then roll in flour. In a small skillet over low heat, saute the almonds in 2 tablespoons butter until lightly browned. Add lemon juice and tarragon; heat through. Remove from heat and keep warm.

Meanwhile, in a skillet over medium heat, combine oil and remaining butter. Fry the trout for 8-10 minutes; carefully turn and fry 8 minutes longer or until it flakes easily with a fork. Top with almond mixture.

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Chilled Summer Salad

---

2 medium zucchini, cut in half lengthwise and thinly sliced
1 pint cherry tomatoes, quartered
1 medium green bell pepper, chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
1/2 pound sharp white Cheddar cheese, diced
1/4 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon fresh dillweed (1 teaspoon dried)
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

In a large bowl, combine the zucchini, tomatoes, green pepper, onion, and cheese; mix well. In a small bowl, combine the remaining ingredients; mix well. Add the mayonnaise mixture to the tomato mixture and toss until well coated. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours, or until ready to serve.

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Fried Pickles

Seasoned Egg Wash:
1 egg
1 teaspoon salt
1/3 cup milk
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/3 cup Worcestershire Sauce
1/3 teaspoon Tabasco

Seasoned flour:
2 cups flour
1/2 tablespoon paprika
1 tablespoon garlic salt
1/4 teaspoon poultry seasoning
2 teaspoons black pepper

Oil for deep frying
Klauson Whole Pickles

Whip together all ingredients for seasoned egg wash, set aside. Mix ingredients for flour mixture in a shallow dish. Slice pickles 1/8" thick. Dip into flour mix, then egg wash, then flour mix again. Fry until golden brown, about 1 minute. Drain on paper towels. Serve with dipping sauce of ranch dressing, ketchup or horseradish sauce.

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Flag Cake

---

1 - 9X13 inch white cake
2 pints strawberries
1 pint bluberries
Boiled Icing

Boiled Icing:

1 cup white sugar
1/3 cup water
1 tablespoon light corn syrup
1/8 teaspoon salt
2 egg whites
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
3 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

Combine sugar, water, corn syrup, and salt in a saucepan; stir until well blended. Boil slowly without stirring until mixture will spin a long thread when a little is dropped from a spoon (hold the spoon high above saucepan), or reaches 238F - 242F. In a large bowl, beat egg whites with a mixer until they are stiff, but still moist. Pour hot syrup slowly over egg whites while beating. Continue until mixture is very fluffy, and will hold its shape. Add vanilla, and beat until blended. If icing does not seem stiff enough, beat in 2 or 3 tablespoons confectioners

sugar 1 tablespoon at a time until stiff enough to hold its shape.

De-stem the strawberries and cut in half. Spread boiled icing on cake. In the top left hand corner of the iced cake, make a four inch tall by five inch wide rectangle with the blueberries. Lightly press the berries into the icing. Fill in the rectangle with remaining blueberries in rows. The white space in between will resemble stars.

Place strawberries cut side down in rows going across horizontally. The bottom stripe is red, so start with that row. Be sure to press the berries lightly into the frosting.

Applebee's Quesadillas

---

2 (10-inch) flour tortillas
2 tablespoons butter softened
1/3 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
1/3 cup shredded Cheddar Cheese
1/2 medium tomato, chopped
2 teaspoons diced onion or green onion
1 teaspoon diced canned jalapenos
1 slice bacon, cooked

Heat a large frying pan over medium heat. Spread half the butter on one side of each tortilla. Put one tortilla, butter side down in the hot pan. Sprinkle the cheeses evenly onto the center of the tortilla in the pan-but not all the way to the edges. Put the tomato, onion, bacon and jalapeno over the cheese, and cover with the other tortilla butter side up (like a grilled cheese sandwich). When the bottom side is browned, about 45-90 seconds, flip the quesadilla and grill the other side. Remove the quesadilla from the pan and, using a pizza cutter, cut through the middle like a pizza. Serve hot with sour cream, guacamole, and salsa.

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Oven BBQ Ribs

---

3 lbs. pork back ribs
1 (8 ounce) jar honey
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon chili powder
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
2 tablespoons Old Bay Seasoning
1/2 teaspoon onion powder
1/4 teaspoon celery salt
1/2 cup dark brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
1 medium onion, grated or finely chopped
12 ounces barbecue sauce
1/4 cup white sugar

Place all ingredients together in large roasting pan. Cut ribs apart for easier serving. Mix together making sure to coat all ribs with this semi-dry paste.

Spread ribs out evenly on bottom of pan and cover lightly with foil. Bake at 375F for approximately 1 hour turning or stirring occasionally. You can use broiler for these ribs, just watch more closely, and adjust cooking time.

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Spicy Supercrunchy Fried Chicken

---

1 good chicken, cut into serving pieces, or use 8 to 10 leg pieces
(drumsticks and thighs), trimmed of excess fat
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tablespoon curry powder
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
2 tablespoons minced garlic
1 Scotch bonnet (habanero), or other fresh chili, stemmed, seeded
and minced, or cayenne to taste, optional
1 egg
1 cup flour
Lard and butter combined or vegetable oil
Lemon or lime wedges for garnish.

1. In a bowl, toss chicken with salt, pepper, curry, allspice, garlic, chili, egg and 2 tablespoons water. When thoroughly combined, blend in flour, using your hands.
Keep mixing until most of the flour is blended with other ingredients and chicken is
coated (add more water or flour if mixture is too thin or too dry; it should be dry but not powdery). Let sit while you heat fat; at this point chicken can marinate, refrigerated, for up to a day.

2. Choose a skillet or casserole at least 12 inches in diameter that can be covered. Add enough fat to come to a depth of about 1/2 inch and turn heat to medium-

high.
If you are using butter, skim any foam as it rises to the surface.

3. When oil is hot (a pinch of flour will sizzle) raise heat to high. Slowly add chicken
pieces to skillet (if you add them all at once, temperature will plummet). Cover skillet,
reduce heat to medium-high and cook for 7 minutes.

4. Uncover skillet, turn chicken and continue to cook, uncovered, for another 7 minutes.
Turn chicken again and cook for about 5 minutes more, turning as necessary to ensure
that both sides are golden brown.

5. Remove chicken from skillet and drain on paper towels. Serve chicken at any temperature, with lemon or lime wedges. Yield: 4 servings.

Killer Burgers

---

1 pound extra lean ground beef
1/2 cup onions, finely chopped
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon dried basil
1/8 cup Italian bread crumbs
1/2 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup teriyaki sauce
6 large hamburger buns

In large bowl, combine beef, onion, salt, pepper and basil; mix well. Mix in bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese and teriyaki sauce (add more breadcrumbs as needed to get firm mixture). Divide into six equal balls and flatten into patties. Allow patties to marinate in the fridge for at least 30 minutes.

Prepare grill for medium to high heat. Place patties on a lightly greased grill and cook five minutes on each side, or to desired doneness. Serve on hamburger buns with desired sides and condiments.

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Shrimp-Rice Casserole

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1 finely chopped onion
1/2 green bell pepper, finely chopped
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
3 cups cooked rice
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1/2 can milk
1 (12 ounce) package frozen shrimp, cooked and finely chopped
1/2 cup grated Cheddar cheese

Saute onion, bell pepper and celery in a small amount of oil. Remove from heat, then add rice, mushroom soup which has been diluted with milk, and shrimp, cooked and finely chopped. Place mixture in a buttered casserole dish. Sprinkle grated Cheddar cheese over the top and bake, uncovered, at 300F for 1 hour.

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Mile High Biscuits

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3 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 cup sugar
4 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup shortening
1 egg, beaten
1 1/4 cups milk

Combine dry ingredients in a mixing bowl. Cut in shortening until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add egg and milk; mix until dough forms a ball. Turn dough out on a lightly floured surface and knead 10-12 times, only. Roll out to 3/4 inch, cut with floured cutter. Place on lightly greased baking sheet. Bake at 475F for 12-15 minutes or until light brown.

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Chicken Salad with Grapes & Walnuts

4 cups cubed (1/2 inch) cooked chicken (about 1 3/4 lb)
1 cup walnuts, toasted and chopped
1 celery rib, cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices (1 cup)
2 tablespoons finely chopped shallot
2 cups halved seedless red grapes
3/4 cup mayonnaise
3 tablespoons tarragon vinegar
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh tarragon
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Toss together all ingredients in a large bowl until combined well.

Mocha Brownies

1/2 cup shortening
1/2 cup butter
1 cup cocoa
2 cups sugar
1 tablespoon hot water
2 teaspoons instant coffee
4 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla
1 cup flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1 cup chopped nuts (optional)

Preheat oven to 350F. Grease a 13x9 inch pan. Melt shortening and butter over low heat or in the microwave. Remove from heat and add cocoa, blend well. Add sugar and mix well. Dissolve instant coffee in hot water and mix into creamed mixture. Add eggs one at a time, beat well, by hand, after each addition. Stir in vanilla, flour, and salt.
Do not over beat. Fold in nuts. Bake 25-30 minutes. Cool completely.

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Olive Garden Neopolitan Ziti

---

1 1/2 pounds sweet/hot Italian link sausage
1 1/3 cups green bell pepper, cut 1"x1/4"
2 tablespoons olive oil
3/4 pound ziti pasta, cooked
Parmesan, grated
Parsley bouquets

Marinara Sauce:
28 ounces Can Italian-style or plum tomatoes with juice
10 3/4 ounces tomato puree
1 teaspoon garlic, minced
4 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup fresh basil; packed, chopped
Salt and pepper

Bake or pan-fry the sausages until fully cooked, drain, cool. Halve the sausages and cut the split sausages into 1/2" slices. Saute the bell peppers in olive oil over moderate heat only until their crispness is loss, but peppers are not soft. In a heavy sauce pan add the tomatoes, tomato puree, garlic, olive oil and fresh basil and bring to a light simmer on moderate heat. Add the sauteed pepper strips and cooked sausage and heat for 3 to 5 minutes.
Serve the pasta, topped with the sausage, peppers and salsa marinara and garnish each plate with a parsley bouquet. Pass the Parmesan.

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Mango Chicken

1/4 cup green peppers, chopped
2 tablespoons shallots, chopped
2 tablespoons butter
1 chicken bouillon cube, crumbled
1 cup mango chutney
1/2 cup orange juice
1 cup water
1 tablespoon ginger, chopped
1 1/2 cups mango, cubed
4 boneless chicken breasts

Pound chicken breasts to 1/4" thick. Saute green pepper and shallots in butter. Add chicken. Saute until done. Remove chicken from skillet. Add bouillon, mango chutney, orange juice, water and ginger. Stir. Simmer for 5-10 minutes until sauce thickens. Return chicken to skillet with cubed mango. Heat through.

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Pork Chops with Corn Dressing

2 eggs, beaten
1 can cream-style corn
1 can whole kernel corn, drained
1/4 cup butter or margarine, melted
1/3 cup chopped celery
2 tablespoons chopped pimentos
2 cups cubed white bread (about 4 slices)
1/2 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
4-6 pork chops

In a mixing bowl, combine eggs, corn, butter, celery, pimiento, bread cubes, paprika, salt and pepper. Spoon into a greased 13x9x2 baking pan. Arrange chops over dressing. Sprinkle with additional paprika and salt. Bake covered in 350F oven for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake 30 minutes longer or until chops are done.

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Chili Cheese Jubilee

---

1 lb. ground beef
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
1 medium onion, chopped
1 (8 ounce) can tomato sauce
1 package chili seasoning mix
1/2 cup water
2 eggs
1 cup light cream (or milk)
1 (6 ounce) package corn chips
6 ounces monterey jack cheese, shredded
1 1/2 cups sour cream
3/4 cup cheddar cheese, grated

Brown the ground beef until crumbly, drain and set aside. Melt butter in skillet. Add onion; saute until tender. Add tomato sauce, seasoning mix, and water; simmer 5 minutes. Beat eggs slightly; add light cream (or milk). Mix well. Remove tomato-chili sauce from heat; add egg-cream mixture slowly, stirring constantly. Place 1/2 corn chips into the bottom of a 2 quart casserole; top with 1/2 of meat. Add layer of jack cheese; cover with 1/2 tomato-chili sauce. Repeat layers. Frost the top with the sour cream. Sprinkle with grated cheese. Bake in 325F oven for 25 to 30 minutes.

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Indonesian Satay

---

3 tablespoons soy sauce
3 tablespoons tomato sauce
1 tablespoon peanut oil
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 pinch ground black pepper
1 pinch ground cumin
6 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves - cubed
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1/4 cup minced onion
1 clove garlic, peeled and minced
1 cup water
1/2 cup chunky peanut butter
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Preheat an outdoor grill for high heat, and lightly oil grate. In a medium bowl, mix soy sauce, tomato sauce, peanut oil, garlic, black pepper, and cumin. Place chicken into the mixture, and stir to coat. Cover, and marinate in the refrigerator about 15 minutes.

Heat vegetable oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat, and saute onion and garlic until lightly browned. Mix in water, peanut butter, soy sauce, and sugar. Cook and stir until well blended. Remove from heat, mix in lemon juice, and set aside.

Thread chicken onto skewers. Cook on the prepared grill 5 minutes per side, until chicken is no longer pink and juices run clear. Serve with the peanut butter sauce. Discard remaining marinade.

American-Italian Pasta Salad

---

1 (16 ounce) package fusilli pasta
1 cup frozen petite peas, thawed
2 (2 ounce) cans sliced black olives
1 cup cubed Genoa salami
3/4 cup chopped green onions
3/4 cup chopped celery
1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
1 (.7 ounce) package dry Italian-style salad dressing mix
1 cup mayonnaise
1 cup sour cream
2 tablespoons milk

In a large pot of salted boiling water, cook pasta until al dente, rinse under cold water and drain.
In a medium bowl combine mayonnaise, sour cream, milk and Italian dressing mix. Whisk together until smooth, set aside.
In a large salad bowl combine cooked and cooled pasta, peas, olives, salami, green onions, celery and parsley. Mix in dressing last, reserving 1/2 cup. Let sit over night in fridge. Stir before serving. Add extra dressing if pasta appears dry.

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Zippy Egg Casserole

---

1 pound pork sausage
1 (5.5 ounce) package seasoned croutons
1 1/2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese
1 cup shredded Swiss cheese
1 cup shredded pepperjack cheese
8 eggs
1 pint half-and-half cream
1 1/2 cups milk
1 1/2 teaspoons dry mustard
1 tablespoon minced onion
salt and pepper to taste

Place sausage in a large, deep skillet. Cook over medium-high heat until evenly brown. Drain, crumble, and set aside.

In a lightly greased 9x13 inch baking dish, arrange the croutons in a single layer. Layer with Cheddar cheese, Swiss cheese, and pepperjack cheese. Top with the cooked sausage.

In a large bowl, beat together the eggs, half-and-half, milk, mustard, onion, salt, and pepper. Pour into the dish over the sausage. Cover, and refrigerate overnight. The next morning, bake in an oven preheated to 350F for 45 to 60 minutes. Let sit for 20 minutes before serving.

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Strawberry Icebox Pie

---

1 cup slivered almonds, toasted
1/2 cup graham cracker crumbs
1/4 cup sugar
6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) unsalted butter, melted

Filling:
5 cups quartered hulled strawberries (about 24 ounces)
1 cup sugar
1/4 cup cornstarch
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons grated orange peel

1 1/2 cups chilled whipping cream

For crust: Position rack in center of oven; preheat to 350F. Butter 9-inch-diameter glass pie dish. Coarsely chop almonds in processor. Add graham cracker crumbs and sugar; process until finely ground. Add butter; process until evenly moistened. Press crumb mixture onto bottom and up sides of prepared pie dish. Bake crust until set, about 12 minutes. Cool completely on rack.
For filling: Place 2 cups strawberries in medium saucepan. Mash strawberries with potato masher until chunky. Add sugar, cornstarch, and lemon juice. Stir over medium-high heat until sugar dissolves and mixture boils and thickens, about 3 minutes. Transfer mixture to

bowl. Cool to room temperature. Stir in remaining 3 cups strawberries and grated orange peel. Mound filling in crust. Chill pie until cold and set, at least 2 hours and up to 6 hours.

Using electric mixer, beat cream in large bowl until peaks form. Spread whipped cream decoratively over filling. Cut pie into wedges and serve.

Bullseye BBQ Sauce

1/2 Cup minced onions
1 can tomato sauce - 8 oz.
1 Cup water
1 1/4 Cup ketchup
2 Teaspoon brown sugar
2 Teaspoon prepared yellow mustard
1 Teaspoon olive oil
1 Teaspoon worcestershire sauce
1 dash tabasco sauce

Combine ingredients, cover and simmer for 30 mins.

Grilled Garlic Shrimp

---

2 lb. shrimp, peeled
2 cloves garlic, minced
Salt, to taste
2 tablespoons chives, minced
Dash of Worcestershire sauce
1/2 cup butter
3 lemons, juiced
Pepper, to taste
1/2 cup parsley, minced

Saute garlic in butter. Remove from heat; add lemon juice, salt, pepper, Worcestershire, parsley and chives. Stir. Add shrimp. Marinate for 20 minutes.

Put shrimp on skewers. Put foil on barbecue and lay shrimp on foil. Grill for 6 to 10 minutes or until done.

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Bourbon Steak

1 (1 1/4 lb.) flank steak
1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 cup bourbon
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons water
1 small clove garlic, crushed

Place steak in a large shallow dish. Combine remaining ingredients, stirring well. Pour over steak; cover and marinate in refrigerator 4 hours, turning steak occasionally.

Drain steak, reserving marinade. Grill steak over hot coals 7 to 10 minutes on each side or to desired degree of doneness, basting often with marinade. To serve, slice steak across grain into thin slices.

Grilled Lemon-Rosemary Chicken

---

1 (3 1/2 lb.) chicken, cut up
3 large lemons
1/4 cup olive oil or vegetable oil
1/2 cup fresh rosemary or 3 tablespoons dried rosemary
6 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
Rosemary sprigs
Lemon wedges
Salt and pepper

Remove and discard excess fat from chicken. Rinse chicken and pat dry. Cut lemons in half and ream juice to make 3/4 cup. Combine reamed lemon shells, lemon juice, oil, the 1/2 cup rosemary and garlic in a large heavy-duty plastic bag or nonreactive bowl. Add chicken and seal bag (or cover bowl). Rotate bag to distribute marinade and place in a shallow pan. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours or until the next day, turning chicken occasionally.

Remove chicken from bag, reserving marinade. Arrange chicken, bone side down in center of cooking grate. Place lid on grill. Cook, turning pieces occasionally and brushing with reserved marinade, until meat near bone is no longer pink (30 to 35 minutes for breasts, 35 to 45 minutes for thighs and drumsticks; cut to test). Transfer chicken to a platter or individual plates. Garnish with rosemary sprigs and lemon wedges. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

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Sweet Corn with Lime Butter

Soak whole, unshucked ears of corn in water for a few hours or overnight. Place them over charcoal or in the ashes of a barbecue pit. Rotate the ears about every 5 minutes to avoid burning on one side. They will be ready in about 30 minutes, when the husks are beginning to scorch on all sides and the interior is steaming.
Serve with Lime Butter.

Lime Butter
==========
1 1/2 sticks butter, softened
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
Salt, to taste

Mash butter and lime juice together with a fork. Add salt and blend.

Roasted Barbecue Potatoes

1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 tablespoon chili powder
2 teaspoons onion powder
2 teaspoons garlic salt
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon sweet paprika
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
10 large red-skinned potatoes (about 5 pounds), quartered

Preheat oven to 400F. Mix first 8 ingredients in large bowl. Add potatoes; toss to coat. Transfer mixture to large rimmed baking sheet, spreading potatoes evenly. Bake potatoes until brown and tender, stirring occasionally, about 55 minutes.

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Grilled Fruit with Yogurt Sauce

For sauce:
- 12 oz. (1 1/2 cups) nonfat plain yogurt
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint

For skewers:
- 4 firm-ripe plums, each cut into 8 wedges
- 4 firm-ripe peaches, peeled and each cut into 8 wedges
- 1/2 ripe pineapple (1 1/2 lb), peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch pieces

Special equipment: 24 (8-inch) wooden skewers soaked in water 1 hour

Prepare grill for cooking. Stir together yogurt, honey, lime juice, and mint in a small bowl and chill until ready to serve.

Thread about 8 pieces of fruit onto each skewer. When fire is medium-hot (you can hold your hand 5 inches above rack 3 to 4 seconds), grill fruit in batches on lightly oiled grill rack, turning once, until browned and slightly softened, about 5 minutes total.

Serve fruit on skewers with sauce on the side.

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Red Lobster Cheddar Bay Crab Bake

---

2 cups Bisquick baking mix
1 3/4 cup finely shredded cheddar cheese
2/3 cups milk
2 tablespoons butter, melted and divided
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon fine parsley flakes
1/3 cup crab meat (fresh or canned lump)

Preheat oven to 450F. Combine baking mix, 1 cup of the cheddar cheese, milk, and 1 half of the melted butter in a medium bowl. Mix by hand until well-combined.

Pat out the dough into circle approximately 8 inches in diameter, with a slight lip around the edge, like a pizza crust. Sprinkle the parsley over the top of the dough. Be sure the dried parsley flakes are crushed fine. You can easily crush the flakes in a small bowl with your thumb and forefinger. Sprinkle the crab over the top of the dough. Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the crab. Don’t go all of the way to the edge of the dough - leave a margin of a half-inch or so around the edge.

Bake for 14-16 minutes or until the cheese on top begins to slightly brown. Combine the remaining butter with the garlic powder and brush it over the top of the bake as soon as it comes out of the oven.
Slice it like a pizza into 8 pieces and serve hot.

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Chicken Garlic Bites

2 boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite size pieces
1/2 cup olive oil
4 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/2 cup breadcrumbs
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Place chicken in shallow dish. In small bowl, mix olive oil, garlic, and black pepper. Pour over chicken. Cover and marinate 30 minutes. Drain. Preheat oven to 475F. Mix bread crumbs and cayenne. Coat chicken. Arrange in a single layer on cookie sheet. Bake 10 minutes or until brown.

Ham and Asparagus Crepes

3/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup skim milk
1 beaten egg
1/8 salt
1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
nonstick spray coating
1/2 cup shredded carrots
1/2 cup sliced leeks
1/2 cup water
3/4 cup evaporated skim milk
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons dry sherry
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
24 asparagus spears
12 slices of baked virginia ham

For crepes, combine flour, milk, egg, thyme and salt. Beat until blended. Spray a 6-inch skillet with nonstick spray coating. Preheat skillet; then remove skillet from heat. Pour in 2 tablespoons batter. Lift and tilt skillet to spread batter. Return to heat; brown on one side only. Invert skillet over paper towels; remove crepe. Repeat with remaining batter.

For sauce heat carrot, leek, and water to boiling. Reduce heat; cover and simmer 5 minutes. Do not drain. Combine milk, cornstarch, salt, and pepper. Stir into vegetable mixture. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly. Stir in sherry and 1/2 cup of the cheese until melted.

For filling, combine ham and asparagus and 1 cup of the sauce. Spoon 2 spears and 1 ham strip onto unbrowned side of each crepe. Roll up. Arrange crepes, seam side down, in a 3-quart rectangular baking dish. Spoon remaining sauce over crepes. Cover; bake in a 375F oven 25 minutes or until hot. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake, uncovered, 5 minutes more.

Grilled Veggie Sandwich

---

1 (1 pound) loaf focaccia bread
1/4 cup mayonnaise
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 small yellow squash, cut horizontally into 3/8 inch thick
1 small zucchini, sliced
1 red onion, sliced
1 cup sliced red bell peppers
1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
1/8 cup olive oil

In a small bowl, combine mayonnaise, minced garlic, and lemon juice. Set aoli sauce aside in the refrigerator.

Preheat the grill for high heat. Brush vegetables with olive oil on each side. Brush grate with oil. Place bell pepper and zucchini pieces closest to the middle of the grill, and set onion and squash pieces around them. Cook for about 3 minutes, turn, and cook for another 3 minutes. The pepper may take a bit longer. Remove from grill, and set aside.

While the vegetables are cooking, cut foccaccia into 4 slices. Spread aoli sauce evenly over top, and sprinkle with feta cheese. Place on the grill, and cover with lid for about 2 to 3 minutes. Watch carefully so the bottom doesn't burn. This will warm the bread, and slightly melt the cheese. Remove from grill, and layer two pieces

with vegetables. Cover with remaining bread. Serve warm.

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Garlic Basil Bow Ties

12 ounces bow tie pasta
2 tablespoons olive oil
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 1/2 cups plain yogurt
6 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

Cook pasta according to package directions; drain well. Toss with oil, garlic and yogurt. Add parmesan cheese, basil, and spices. Toss well and serve.

Spring Salad

---

12 slices bacon
2 heads fresh broccoli, florets only
1 cup chopped celery
1/2 cup chopped green onions
1 cup seedless green grapes
1 cup seedless red grapes
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 cup blanched slivered almonds
1 cup mayonnaise
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
1/4 cup white sugar

Place bacon in a large, deep skillet. Cook over medium high heat until evenly brown. Drain, crumble and set aside.
In a large salad bowl, toss together the bacon, broccoli, celery, green onions, green grapes, red grapes, raisins and almonds. Whisk together the mayonnaise, vinegar and sugar. Pour dressing over salad and toss to coat. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

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Key Lime Pie

For Crust:
1 1/4 cups graham cracker crumbs from 9
(2 1/4-inch by 4 3/4-inch) crackers
2 tablespoons sugar
5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

For Filling:
1 (14-oz) can sweetened condensed milk
4 large egg yolks
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons fresh or bottled Key lime juice

For Topping:
3/4 cup chilled heavy cream

Make crust: Preheat oven to 350F. Stir together graham cracker crumbs, sugar, and butter in a bowl with a fork until combined well, then press mixture evenly onto bottom and up side of a 9-inch (4-cup) glass pie plate.
Bake crust in middle of oven 10 minutes and cool in pie plate on a rack. Leave oven on.
Make filling and bake pie: Whisk together condensed milk and yolks in a bowl until combined well. Add juice and whisk until combined well (mixture will thicken slightly). Pour filling into crust and bake in middle of oven 15 minutes. Cool pie completely on rack

(filling will set as it cools), then chill, covered, at least 8 hours.

Make topping: Just before serving, beat cream in a bowl with an electric mixer until it just holds stiff peaks. Serve pie topped with cream.

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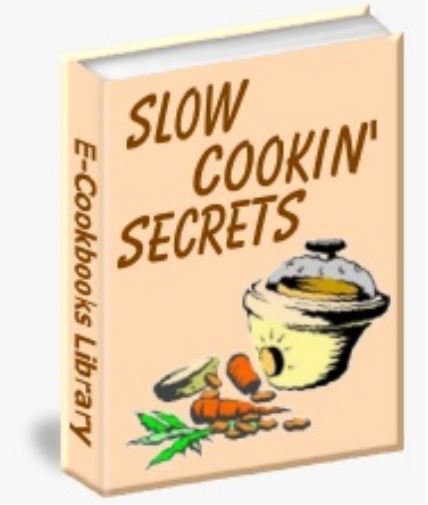

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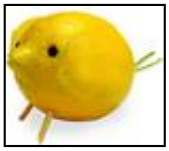
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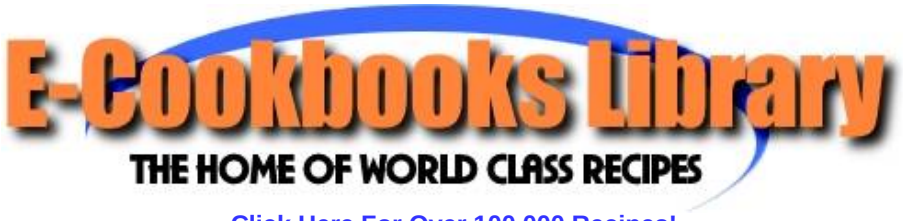

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Crab Season: Broil 'Em!

by Mark Bittman

A year ago, at the start of soft-shell crab season, I made an unusually fortunate discovery in the usual way: accidentally. I had long been a fan of grilling soft-shell crabs, but mostly out of laziness. Soft-shell crabs are best sautéed, not so much for the crust they develop — most are more than a little crunchy naturally and retain their crunch no matter how you cook them — but because cooking in a pan helps retain at least some of their flavorful juices. Still, it makes an awful mess. First, you need at least eight soft-shells for four people, so two big pans are in order. More inconvenient, soft-shell crabs are notorious spatterers, so the cleanup time is longer than the cooking time.

That endless cleanup is why, when I learned how to grill soft-shells 20 years ago, it became my method of choice. You can cook two dozen crabs at once on a large grill, there is no cleanup, and the crabs, like almost everything else, taste great when grilled. Of course, there is a compromise involved: as the crabs exude their juices, the source of the spattering in stove-top cooking, those juices drip onto the fire and are gone forever. But the crabs shrivel and dry out a bit, and their small legs inevitably become charred. To compensate, I usually basted the grilling crabs with liquid, usually a mixture of butter, lemon and Tabasco. (By the way, I don't want to denigrate this technique. It will remain in my repertory.)

Then there's the weather: it's difficult, and unpleasant, to grill in the inevitable spring rain. So last year, when the crabs started arriving, and I prepared to grill them, and it began raining, I did what I usually do when I can't grill: I broiled. And I discovered that this simple alternative solved the problems inherent in both sautéing and grilling. The crabs did not spatter (or if they did, I didn't notice), and they remained plump and juicy. A sprinkle of salt, a drizzle of lemon (some olive oil is nice, but not necessary), and that was that.

How About Lunch Dear? Bring Everyone

by Nigella Lawson

It is a dangerous time of year for the normally sensible host, lulled by the weather and by the feeling that the constraints that normally apply no longer hold weight. So what if you haven't got enough dining room chairs? No one minds sitting on an upended laundry basket if the sun is shining; the chicken, split and roasted with tarragon, has a summer-meadow freshness; and the wine is cold. Come late spring, I find it's all too easy to discover that I've invited every other person I know, and their children, to Saturday lunch.

Normally, I'd stack the odds more in my favor. I've always been a believer that in the kitchen, just as everywhere else that matters in life, you should play to your strengths and not to your weaknesses. I've always favored the "small, select gathering" approach. Cooking for crowds is great in theory; in practice, more than six people around my kitchen table can fill me with incipient misanthropy, especially after a long day's work. Who are these people I call my friends? What are they doing here? But at this hopeful, new-sprung edge of summer, with soft breezy warmth still something of an uplifting novelty, I can believe anything's possible. So come right over, no problem.

How does this happen? It's not just that we feel more expansive at this time of year (though there is that) but that we fool ourselves, too — we allow ourselves to make the familiar mistaken assumption that easy-eating early summer food is easily cooked, that a relaxed afternoon in the garden means an equally relaxed morning in the kitchen. How much more wrong could anyone get? Winter is easy, a stew practically cooks itself. But the light touch you want at this time of year needs heavy planning and, more than that, self-control. It's hard not to invite people over without working yourself into a lather of anxiety trying to make everything too wonderful for words.

But the truth is, it's surprising how little you do need to do to make everyone, including yourself, relax. Believe me, there are ways of inviting your friends over, even en masse, without hating them for having the brutal inconsideration to take you up on your hospitality. Make it lunch, make it light, and make them work.

It may sound glib, consumerist, even a touch Marie Antoinette, but let other people peel grapes and spin sugar. Cook a little and shop a lot, I say.

On a recent Saturday, for instance, I found myself with 11 people invited to lunch — well, it started as eight and then grew, as these things do — and since in the morning I had a school project to write with my 8-year-old and reading to do with my 5-year-old, I knew that the possibilities were limited. (Speaking of limited possibilities, I am a

great believer in child labor. I know the age is against it, but a little danger is no bad thing. Let them top and tail green beans, for instance, using scissors. The kitchen should not be a fearful place, hot with menace.)

And in cooking, as in the sonnet form, the art lies in the constraints. Had I been given a free hand, the lunch might have been fancier, but it couldn't have been better. My one foray into anything approaching real cooking was a roast of beef: good, juicy, flavorsome loin meat, an extravagant six and a half pounds of it. The butcher had larded and tied it; all I had to do was put it in a hot oven for an hour and a quarter, then let it stand, sprinkled with flaky Malden salt, while its red meaty juices oozed back into its tender center. (We English have made very few contributions to the culinary world stage, but Malden salt is one of them; you can buy the stuff at Dean & DeLuca, among other places.)

To go with it, I bought three large jars of French petits pois, which I drained in a colander, removing the lilac clumps of marshy onion that come in the bottles. They're good for flavor, but their slimy texture is vile. Then, to give the peas the freshly infused flavor of home-grown summer, I poured a little basil-infused oil into a large pan and tossed in a couple of little gem lettuces, sliced finely. When these were wilted and darkened in the herbal heat, I threw the peas in after them, along with a cupful of counterfeit chicken stock (it is only the French who affect disdain for the bouillon cube; the Italians, no slouches in the cucina, after all, are unapologetic about using dadi and so am I) and heated them through until warm. At the last minute, after mounding them into a large, warmed bowl, I sprinkled some roughly torn-up basil leaves over the pile and brought it to the table.

With the warm, sliced beef and the warm, fragrant peas, I also served a plate of char-grilled peppers — taken from a store-bought Spanish vacuum-pack — that I drizzled with red wine vinegar and green, green olive oil, spiked with capers and carpeted with freshly chopped flat-leaf parsley. Also, a light salad of pousse — baby spinach, already cleaned, thank you very much — just dressed with a spritz of lemon juice, Malden salt and olive oil, and sprinkled with some toasted pine nuts (that is to say, I simply tossed them into a hot dry frying pan until, just scorched with heat, their resiny aroma wafted invitingly upward).

Anything else? Not much. To serve with the beef, I grated some fresh horseradish root into a bowl of crème fraîche, stirred in a little Dijon mustard and white wine vinegar and a few finely chopped chives. Actually, I'm lying: I didn't do this, I got a friend to. Well, she asked.

Then, for afterward, I brought forth vast hunks of three different cheeses. I like abundance, which is best served by providing a lot of a little rather than a little of a lot. It is always better, I believe, to choose three or four cheeses and really go to town on them, than to feel you're offering choice by buying four-ounce slices of about 10 different types. This is, as I've bossily written before, partly an aesthetic dictate, but mostly it's a practical one; if each portion of cheese is small, however many there are, everyone is going to feel inhibited about cutting some off. However generous you have been, it is only the meagerness of each portion that will be apparent.

And I know everyone is fixated on dessert — fearful of eating it, even more desperate to provide it — but this final course doesn't have to be a big deal. I bought two pounds of strawberries, hulled and halved them, and left them to steep while we ate the main course (an hour or so before) in a light dusting of extra-fine granulated sugar and a sprinkling of rose water. Wimbledon meets "The Arabian Nights" — what more do

you want?

Lunch went well enough for me to suggest same time, the next week. What I served was this: First, a pasta niçoise — it's one of those recipes that once you've cooked it, you can't believe you haven't ever done it before, but know you will again. Most of the ingredients that normally go toward a salade niçoise are instead thrown into a large bowl of pasta; what follows is hearty and substantial, but still light with the shoulder-warming kiss of summer.

Then, there's a tarragon chicken, split and roasted, that I hesitate even to call a recipe. Don't think of that sauce-heavy French traditional dish, but rather a quick way of infusing poultry with a liquorish herbal hit of summery freshness. You can marinate it in the fridge all day in advance, but if planning ahead is not one of your strengths, then know that even half an hour at room temperature does its bit.

If you like, the pasta and chicken can be considered an either/or: I don't see the necessity for a dizzying procession of courses. But do finish with the passion fruit fool; there is something about the fragrant astringency of passion fruit, which when mixed with the bland, soft thickness of whipped heavy cream, makes one feel about as near to sensation heaven as it's possible to get at lunchtime. It is a recipe from my first book, "How to Eat" (John Wiley & Sons), and I return to it again and again.

All the recipes here serve four to six people; the quantities can be easily boosted according to the expansiveness of your mood and the invitation-happy attitude that ensues from it. And please don't take the strictures about ingredients and their quantities too seriously. Regard them as guidance rather than as a blueprint. So much in the kitchen is arbitrary; it's about what you have and then what you do with it. Or in other words, possession is nine-tenths of the culinary law. When I have stipulated, for example, that you use six tomatoes for the pasta niçoise, it is not because the recipe would fail if you used five or seven, but because I had six tomatoes in the house.

That's how this game works; that's cooking. The rest is recipe-following. Which is a very different thing.

Astonish the Crowd. Cook a Cucumber

by Kay Rentschler

The king of cool has a warm side.

The cucumber, icily verdant in a salad, becomes something entirely different when treated like a normal vegetable — that is, when put in a pot. Cook a cuke just enough, and it becomes seductive, slippery and melonlike, with a sweet, haunting, faraway flavor.

Which of the three principal kinds of cucumber found in the United States are best for this mission?

The warty little cukes are best left for the pickling barrel. The tapered, thin-skinned, barely-seeded greenhouse cucumbers, a k a European cucumbers, are nicely suited to architectural functions like layering.

The fat slicing variety is meaty and flavorful once divested of its almost plastic seeds and waxy armor, and can go the distance in a braise. For baton and lozenge-shaped cuts, these large green field varieties are ideal.

When pairing cooked cucumbers, many chefs think fish first. Delicate and touchy, the two complement each other perfectly. As for seasoning, cooked cucumbers welcome dill, vinegar and sugar, but grow expansive in the company of cream, butter, olive oil and even fruit juice.

The trick to cooking cucumbers is a high-heat sear in butter to maintain their crunch, said Bob Kinkead, the chef at Colvin Run Tavern in Tysons Corner, Va. "They love butter," he said, adding that European cucumbers hold their firmness better than their slicing counterparts. He makes individual cucumber gratins by sautéing half-moon cucumber slices, tossing them with lightly reduced crème fraîche and lemon juice and layering the slices in porcelain ramekins. A couple of minutes in a hot oven finishes them. Mr. Kinkead serves them alongside grilled salmon.

At Crofton on Wells in Chicago, Suzy Crofton creates a crust for a salmon fillet by arranging thin slices of European cucumber in a scale mosaic on the raw fish; a bit of garlic purée holds them in place. She pan sears the salmon cucumber side down, and finishes it skin side down in a hot oven.

Across town at Tru, Rick Tramonto prefers the local slicing varieties. "This is farm country," he said. "Corn, tomatoes and cucumbers." For a dish accompanying black roasted sea bass, he sautés shallots in extra virgin olive oil, reduces orange juice and

rolls thick cucumber batons (previously blanched in vegetable stock) in the reduction to glaze them. He finishes the dish with a mist of white wine and a pinch of tarragon or fines herbes.

Mr. Tramonto has also been known to use his vacuum-pack machine to seal cucumbers with olive oil, garlic, citrus and thyme, poach them and serve them with halibut.

Cucumbers, members of the gourd family and technically fruit, come to us by way of India. In a style befitting its origins, David Bouley, the chef and owner of Bouley in TriBeCa, blanches cucumber boats, sprinkles them with kaffir lime and bay leaves, coriander seeds, some thinly sliced cornichons and a bit of butter, then wraps them in foil and grills them.

But that is not the only trick up his sleeve. He sprinkles a blanched hollowed-out cucumber boat with salt and pepper, fills it with Cantal, runs it under the salamander and dusts it with fresh flowering fennel seeds. The cucumber is part of a vegetarian tasting menu.

Ben Barker, the chef at the Magnolia Grill in Durham, N.C., makes a warm cucumber sauce for pan-seared snapper by combining cucumber purée and a knob of butter in a double boiler, adding a hot broth charged with dill and vinegar and a touch of crème fraîche, and zapping it all with an immersion blender. "The cucumber adds surprising body to the sauce," Mr. Barker said.

Their watery composition notwithstanding, cucumbers prefer moist heat. Blanched, then glazed in an apple or citrus reduction with a forgiving chunk of butter or a splash of fruity olive oil allows the cucumber to retain its integrity and oblige other flavors at the same time. When cooking cucumbers, there is a tendency not to take them far enough, but warm, essentially raw cucumbers have no appeal whatever.

A court bouillon is a good way to get flavor into the cucumber itself, and proved stupendously good with French-fried cucumbers, a favorite dish of the chef Chris Schlesinger. At The Back Eddy, his restaurant in Westport, Mass., his chef de cuisine, Aaron DeRego, insulates cucumber sticks with breading and fries them in hot fat. They make a seductive appetizer served with a curry sauce, but they are also served alongside coriander-crusted striped bass. The court bouillon ramps up the flavor of the cucumber enough for it to take on crisp breading and a spicy sauce.

As summer heads south, a light sweater, a plate of fried cukes and a cold American lager, outdoors on a deck, sounds just about right.

Bless Butter, Cream and Simple French Fare

by Nigella Lawson

Does anyone really eat French food anymore?

You may think I'm joking. I'm not. Even in France, they seem to be losing their appetite for the stuff. During my last visit to Paris, every soi-disant hip bistro was churning out carpaccio and fettuccine au beurre — and this last as a side dish, of all things.

Of course, in the French countryside they are not so unpatriotic, but the old, fondly held belief that you cannot eat badly anywhere in France, however so humble the little hole-in-the-wall establishment may be, is no longer truly tenable. The great edifice of la cuisine française is crumbling.

But you have to love the French: their confidence may have taken a knock, but their glorious trademark self-esteem is undented. From their perspective, you see, this decline is all our fault.

And they have a point. Part of the demise of French cooking is due to the prejudices of the modern Western world. All that fat, those eggs, so much heavy cream and cheese: this is not what we want cluttering up our plates and clogging up our arteries these days.

Now, I make no pretense that these are my concerns. I'm actually on the side of the French here, and this week's recipes, for coq au vin and a traditional apple tart, reflect that.

Moreover, I have never quite understood why there is among us such disproportionate fear of fat and dairy. For one thing, the jury is still out on whether these foodstuffs are indeed harmful to us. (I rather suspect that if we were such fragile creatures, so minutely susceptible to the fuel we choose to run on, we would have fallen out of the evolutionary loop a long, long time ago.)

And for another, the crucial element must be portion size. Ever notice how chic Parisiennes eat pastry for dessert and still fit into their size 6 tailleurs?

They eat a slice of cake at dinner and that's it. They do not, as many of the rest of us do, skip dessert and then, back at home, mooching about the house at midnight, devour half a cake.

Meanwhile, a recipe stipulates a quarter of a cup of heavy cream and every non-Français has a fainting fit. But this recipe may make enough to feed eight — and really, how much harm could a couple of teaspoonfuls of cream do?

French food observes none of the current dietary proprieties, and when it has, as with the now outmoded nouvelle cuisine, the food begins to lose its point and dwindles into mere

plate decoration.

That, too, may be our fault, but no matter. It happens.

And that's the trouble.

French food falls foul on any number of complaints: it's either too fatty, too fussy or just plain takes too long. Cuisine grand-mère may be wonderful, but even grandmothers do not want to stay in the kitchen anymore, larding and basting and stuffing and rolling all day long.

Food is no less impervious to fashion than any other part of our cultural life, and so it follows that we view cooking differently depending on the age in which we live.

These days we adhere to the Italian model, which is to say we believe in taking the best ingredients we can find and doing as little as possible to them. This is in absolute contradistinction to the old French way, which enshrined the belief that cooking was a transformational act: any foodstuff, no matter how humble, could, through loving attention, long hours of simmering and a great deal of skill (and butter), be turned into something heart-stoppingly delicious. French cooking pays homage to the cook, not the food.

But that, you could argue, was then.

And if now it is alarmingly easy to eat badly in France, there are other reasons, too. The heart of good French cooking does not lie in haute cuisine. The great restaurants, wherever they are, can stay great, all fancy ingredients and cloches à go-go. But what matters is what happens in the back streets, all those little family-run places which are beginning to exist only in the nostalgic memories of wistful Francophiles. The young no longer want to go into the family business, earning a pittance while working long hours in a job that offers neither glamour nor independence.

Furthermore, French food can continue only as long the French feel that it is their noble birthright. When the national minister of culture — as indeed happened some years back — exhorts food producers and housewives to go into schools to demonstrate to pupils the greatness of French cooking, you know that something is amiss.

Of course, I am English, and therefore tainted by the longstanding antipathy between our two nations.

Still, I take no real pleasure in France's culinary crisis. Real French food is everything home cooking should be: comforting, transporting, with a reach that far extends the pettifogging, constraining vagaries of fad and fashion.

True, there is no novelty in a coq au vin, but that is also what I love about it. As you sear some cubed salt pork or pancetta in a pan, soften some shallots and simmer chicken in a deep, velvety red wine, your kitchen smells of the promise of good food, and it doesn't disappoint.

The dish is not pretty — the red wine does have a way of tingeing everything a bruised and purplish hue — but this is food for the stomach and the heart, not the photo-op.

And for all who fear that French cooking requires long hours in the kitchen, you should know that perhaps the greatest contribution to the dessert menu ever made, a crisp, flaky, buttery apple tart, is perhaps one of the easiest.

Unroll a sheet of store-bought puff pastry, slice a few apples and arrange them on top, stick it in the oven and see why French cooking was for so long held to be the greatest on earth.

- Recipe for Coq au Vin
- Recipe for Apple Tart

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Cosseted Lettuces and Pampered Greens

by Florence Fabricant

Judy Rogers was probably destined for a culinary career, though she certainly did not plan one. "In this profession I've lived in a bubble," she said. "I'm spoiled."

When she was 16 and growing up in St. Louis, she wanted to spend a year in France. Neighbors set her up with a French family. The family's name was Troisgros, and they happened to run a Michelin three-star restaurant in Roanne, near Lyon.

"What a bizarre privilege," said Ms. Rodgers, 42, who is now the chef and an owner of Zuni Cafe in San Francisco. "I spent every afternoon after school in the kitchen. And since I promised to write down the recipes for our neighbor back home, it reinforced the learning.

"I knew it was simple, and I knew it was the very best. Every meal was a special occasion, not just holidays and Sunday dinner. Not only that, there were my schoolmates, 16-year-olds who all knew how to make mayonnaise. I didn't know anyone in America who did that."

On returning home, she went to Stanford University, then cooked for a year with Alice Waters at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, Calif. "I knew that upon leaving Chez Panisse the world would take notice," she said. "I was a progeny of the temple."

Several years in France and Italy taught her to follow her instincts as she shops for ingredients. On a recent visit to Bill Fujimoto's Monterey Market in Berkeley, she picked up some arugula and some small, silky heads of lettuce.

"I buy salad greens the way I buy cut flowers, and treat them just as lovingly," she explained. "Here's some organic endive," she said, picking up a bunch. "Properly grown, it has real character. And this is real chicory. It's sturdier than frisée, but I think it has more flavor. Frisée is cute, but so what? So much of the issue is getting the produce and using it before its sensuality is deadened in the walk-in cooler."

Back in the restaurant kitchen the other day, she assembled some salads. She went about it casually. It has become second-nature.

"Cooking well is like trying to explain to someone how to use a stick shift driving up a hill: you have to do it," she said. "You're better off making the same recipe six times than constantly trying new ones. You'll do it differently each time, and probably make

it better. It's the only way to free yourself from slavishly following recipes."

Salad is a good place for home cooks to start, she advised.

"You can play with the seasonings, taste the vinaigrette," she said. "When you're working on a big scale, in a restaurant, an extra splash of vinegar or oil doesn't matter. That's why we cook by feel and don't measure everything. Do you use a measuring spoon to put milk in your coffee? Can't you make a sandwich? And how does a 6-year-old sweeten lemonade? By taste."

The focus of her summer salads is the lettuces, the leaves, the greens. She rinses them in plenty of water and dries them well, wicking the last droplets off by tossing them in a big bowl with torn pieces of paper towel. She uses her hands.

"Hands are best, even to mix the salad once it's dressed," she said. "Utensils will tear it. And you have to use a wide bowl, one that's twice as big as the quantity of ingredients. You can't work a salad with blunt instruments in a deep bowl."

Just as she will nibble a bit of lettuce in the market before buying it, she always tastes her dressing on a piece of the greens.

"I like a salad that's carefully thought out and beautifully seasoned, one that's not overwhelmed with vinegar," she said. "With mâche I use Champagne vinegar sparingly. I don't want to insult the delicate mâche. My seasonings are lemon oil and coriander seeds. That combination always tastes like summer to me. I love to add some nasturtiums. The stems have more flavor than the petals — sweet, then peppery — so leave on a bit of stem. Add black pepper and some mozzarella or some other fresh tangy cheese and olives alongside and you have a lovely first course."

Another of her salads balances the sweetness of fresh corn and halved cherry tomatoes with a bit of shallot and some red wine vinegar; it is glossed with good olive oil.

"These corn kernels are like little pearls," she said. "This is a great summer salad to dump onto a piece of grilled salmon or next to a piece of chicken or some lamb chops. Right now I use corn over and over. That's what I do when a certain ingredient is in season: repeat it in different ways. There's nothing wrong with that.

"You'll see lots of shell beans on my menu. But when they're in a salad, I don't use vinegar. I don't like beans and acid. I think the acid makes them taste sour. The shell bean salad is delicious with some cold roast pork or slices of prosciutto."

She calls potato salads "a joy of summer." And she cooks potatoes with "boatloads of salt."

"You go just shy of the sea," she said. "It's easier to season them as they cook. Your water should be about as salty as you want your potatoes to be. Then you don't have to add any more. It's the same with pasta. I put the potatoes with baby mustard greens and hard-cooked egg. Mustard greens are racy and hot. They need big, round flavors like potatoes and egg."

She mixes the potatoes in the dressing first, and then adds the greens and egg, mixing briefly with additional dressing so that the slices of egg are kept mostly intact, then scoops portions of the salad onto plates.

"I love the way the dressing picks up bits of the soft edges of the potatoes and takes on a creamy richness," she said. "It's something you discover happening as you mix the salad. But you have to notice it. The little things you take for granted are what make a difference."

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The Deep-Fried Truth About Ipswich Clams

by Nancy Harmon Jenkins

IPSWICH, Mass. - Was it truly a potato chip entrepreneur named Lawrence Woodman — known as Chubby — who invented the Ipswich fried clam? And did it really happen near here, on Boston's North Shore, shortly before noon on a steamy July 3 in the year 1916? Most food-invention stories are apocryphal at best and downright self-promotional at worst, but this one may just have a grain of truth.

No less an expert than Jasper White, the dean of New England chefs and a noted seafood authority, has faith in the legend. Mr. White uses $3,000 to $4,000 worth of Ipswich clams every week at his restaurant, Jasper White's Summer Shack, in Cambridge, Mass. Right now, at today's prices, that's about 40 gallons of shucked clams a week, he told me, adding that most of those Ipswich clams end up in his Friolator. (By my calculations, that's some 16,000 individual clams.)

But are Ipswich clams always, always from Ipswich? In fact, it's no secret among seafood suppliers and restaurants that most of the soft-shell clams currently sold as "Ipswich" clams — even in Ipswich — in fact come from Maine, where muddy tidal flats like those along the Damariscotta River and in Sagadahoc Bay yield a delicious harvest. An invasion of predatory green crabs, along with environmental pressures, have sharply reduced the number of local clams, experts say.

True or apocryphal, the story of the invention of the fried Ipswich clam — Mr. Woodman, faced with a huge vat of hot oil for his potato chips and a mess of clams harvested from the mud flats of his home town, reportedly had a eureka moment — is unabashed gospel for lovers of this regional specialty.

At its finest, an Ipswich fried clam, whatever its provenance, is a meltingly tender soft-shell clam body surrounded, belly and all, by a crumb coating that, when deep-fried (preferably in lard), becomes a salty, crunchy-crisp casing for the soft and sweetly briny clam inside. The combination is irresistible.

But what makes Ipswich clams so special?

"Oh, you know — it's the same thing that makes Clos Vougeot special," Mr. White said by phone from Cambridge, referring to the classic Burgundy wine. Is it "le goût de terroir," then — literally, the taste of the soil? Or, in this case, "le goût de la mer" — the taste of the sea?

"A lot of them are mudders," Mr. White explained. "They come from mud flats. And I

think the mud ones are best. They're richer tasting, they don't have all that grit you get with the ones from sand flats."

Basically, Ipswich clams are steamers, or soft-shell clams, but it's where they live that makes them special.

The Ipswich clam flats, along with those in neighboring Essex to the south and Rowley to the north, are part of the Great Marsh, an extensive, hauntingly beautiful and biologically rich environment of salt marshes, tidal creeks and estuaries — some 17,000 acres stretching from Cape Ann north across the New Hampshire border.

At low tide, the flats can reach out a mile or more to where the sea laps the shore at Plum Island Sound. It is in this wet, salty, muddy environment that the soft-shell clam, Mya arenaria, thrives, at low tide burrowing into the mud to escape its predators (those crabs, mostly, and sea birds), then emerging to open to the cleansing seawater when the tide turns, as it does twice in each 24-hour period, to cover the flats once again.

Or at least the clam used to thrive here. In recent years there have been far fewer clams in the Ipswich-Essex-Rowley flats than ever before in history.

"We're getting a few," said Joe Pickul, a sales representative for the Ipswich Shellfish Company, one of the largest fresh seafood purveyors in the country and a major supplier of Ipswich clams. "But I'd have to say not even 10 percent," he added, of what he sells.

Mr. Pickul grew up in Ipswich and started digging clams with his father, he said, when he was 8 years old.

The current daily limit for commercial diggers on the Ipswich flats, according to Phil Kent, the Ipswich shellfish constable, is 180 pounds, about three bushels of clams, all of which must be dug on one tide.

"Used to be you could get that in two and a half hours," Mr. Pickul said, "but now I could spend the whole tide and not get 20 pounds."

Which is where those Maine clams come in. "Your mud clam is the sweetest," Mr. Pickul said as he walked through the Ipswich Shellfish Company plant last week. "It has a darker shell from the high amount of acidity in the mud. We also get clams from Chatham on Cape Cod, but they tend to be sand clams, paler colored and with a lot of grit. Your Rhode Islands are basically hard-shells, and Canada — well, they don't have such great consistency."

(New Yorkers curious about Ipswich fried clams can find them regularly on the menu at, among other places, Fresh in TriBeCa, where the clams come from the Ipswich Shellfish Company.)

There are a number of reasons why the population of native Ipswich clams has plummeted. There are those green crabs for one thing, a non-native species with a voracious appetite for soft-shell clams.

There have also been other pressures on the species, like upstream pollution and runoff. It may simply be that clams, like most other wild creatures, go through natural growth cycles. Or most likely, the reasons for the decline can be traced to a combination of

factors.

"Years ago, when a lot came out of Ipswich, Ipswich clams became the standard," said Michael Hickey, the chief shellfish biologist with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. "They got put on menus almost like they were a type of clam. There's still a lot harvested, but it's not what it used to be. For 25 years they've been in short supply."

Yet the legend of Ipswich fried clams continues. Why?

Back to Jasper White again.

"It's also that the folks in Ipswich really have an industry," he said. "They've got beautiful shuckers. If I had to shuck my own clams I'd have to hire six guys."

The shuckers at the Ipswich Shellfish Company are almost entirely Cambodian-Americans; part of a population of Southeast Asian immigrants who settled around the town of Lynn, just to the south of here.

The morning I visited the plant, there were some 30 white-capped and mostly silent women, working side by side at long tables, industriously sorting, shucking and cleaning clams. The clams had been dipped briefly in 180-degree water and then in cold water to shock them into releasing their skins from their shells, making it easier to pop open the shells and remove the clams. Each worker then nipped off the neck, or siphon, and deftly whisked away the mantle, or skin.

The women are paid by the piece — individual gallons, not clams — and Mr. Pickul said a good worker can produce a gallon or more an hour.

That's a lot of clams, but Ipswich Shellfish provides shucked clams to restaurants all over the country, especially in New England, where fried clams are considered a regional delicacy on a par with lobster rolls — which, truth to tell, they often accompany, for an unbeatable acme of richesse.

Route 133, which leads from Rowley to Ipswich to Essex and beyond, is the pilgrim road for fried-clam lovers. Woodman's, now run by descendants of that same Chubby Woodman who is said to have invented the fried clam, is high on the list of tourist destinations. There are others, too: J. T. Farnham's and Essex Seafood in Essex, and in Ipswich, the Clam Box, established in 1935 and owned for the last 18 years by Marina Aggelakis, called Chickie, who runs the place now with Dimitri, her son.

Mrs. Aggelakis, an imposing woman with a radiant smile who rules the Clam Box as if she were the queen of a particularly happy and fortunate land, has been in the restaurant business all her life. Her father, Louis Galanis, founded the famed Agawam Diner in nearby Rowley. But in Ipswich, she has clearly found her true calling.

Though the Clam Box serves other foods as well, it is fried Ipswich clams that draw the crowds, starting when the doors open at 11 a.m., often at that hour to white-haired folks who have been standing in line patiently for 30 minutes or longer, and many of whom, one suspects, have been patronizing the Clam Box for 60 or so years.

After a breakfast of Ipswich fried clams, Mrs. Aggelakis took me through her kitchen to show me how the clams are done. (The only secret she cheerfully refused to impart was the recipe for her superb coleslaw.)

Shucked clams are dipped in a bath of evaporated milk, then tossed in a breading mixture of yellow corn flour — not cornmeal, Mrs. Aggelakis emphasized, but finely ground "corn flour." (Later I determined that the corn flour was in fact a very finely ground corn meal; masa harina, widely available, makes a good substitute. Jasper White uses Rhode Island johnnycake meal.)

Quickly, so as not to let the breading get soggy, the clams are dropped in the first of two frying vats. After half a minute, they're removed and dropped into the second vat.

This way, she explained, excess breading is deposited in the first vat, and the oil in the second vat, where the clams spend the rest of their brief culinary life, stays cleaner and fresher. As is true of most of the other fried clam-shack proprietors, Mrs. Aggelakis also filters her oil daily.

And that's the real secret to fried clams Ipswich style: freshly shucked clams, light breading, fresh oil that is never allowed to go stale, and fresh frying.

"They say that Woodman's invented fried clams," Mrs. Aggelakis said, "but I believe we perfected them."

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An Astonishment of Riches in a Tiny English Town

by Marion Burros

LUDLOW, England - ONLY 9,000 people live in this charming market town near the Welsh border, surrounded by lush and rolling hills. Just 9,000, but Ludlow has no fewer than three Michelin-starred restaurants — the greatest concentration anywhere in Britain outside London.

Seats in these celebrated but tiny establishments — the Merchant House, Hibiscus and Mr. Underhill's at Dinham Weir — are hard to come by. Together, they have only 21 tables, and their fame is growing. Culinary tourists from Birmingham and Oxford think nothing of spending hours in the car to make a 7 p.m. reservation during the week. And those from London, 140 miles away, are descending on the village in increasing numbers every weekend. Not to eat in just one of the places, but in all of them, over two days: two dinners and lunch, say. (I did it at a more leisurely pace, in three days.)

For a country that has not entirely shaken a reputation, now undeserved, for dreadful food, the cluster of stars in Ludlow is a phenomenon worth exploring. They define a hub of culinary excellence of the sort one might expect to discover in France but surely not in a nation where sweets are called puddings and bubble and squeak is the name of a national dish.

As in real estate, let alone prospecting for gastronomic gold, a large part of the reason for Ludlow's success is location. Nothing in this Shropshire village costs as much as it does closer to London or in the far tonier precincts of Surrey or the Cotswolds. Everything is within the financial reach of a budding restaurateur — the land, the housing, the help.

"It's not like the Cotswolds, which is all done up in aspic," said Shaun Hill, the chef and owner of the Merchant House. Mr. Hill arrived in Ludlow from Devon, where he ran the kitchen at the highly regarded Gidleigh Park. "If you disturb a flower there," he said, "a man comes out and glares at you."

But not even one Michelin-starred restaurant — much less three — can survive in a vacuum, and the food served in Ludlow's constellation isn't exactly cheap. (It starts at roughly $30 for lunch, rising to as much as $70 for dinner, both prix fixe.)

Shropshire may not be Surrey, but there is still plenty of money around, and Ludlow is at its center. Most of it is hidden in the countryside just outside town, up winding roads, where the local squirearchy hunts and shoots, and where Londoners are increasingly buying weekend homes. "There's established money here," Mr. Hill said. "So it's inflation-proof."

Chris Bradley, the chef and owner of Mr. Underhill's, said he was attracted to Ludlow by the low price of real estate, adding that he could pass his saving along to his customers. "It seemed like a good idea to have a Michelin-starred place to go to that doesn't cost $300," he said.

Mr. Bradley said that when he and his wife, Judy Bradley, bought the spot, it looked like Fawlty Towers, the threadbare inn in the popular British television series. Mr. Underhill's is now a small, charming inn with eight perfectly appointed rooms and a dining room just large enough to seat those staying there. It lies beneath the brooding ruins of an 11th-century castle and overlooks a splendid English garden above a dam on the Teme River.

The third star in Ludlow is owned by Claude Bosi, 30, an ambitious disciple of Alain Ducasse, and his wife, Claire Crosby. Their restaurant, Hibiscus, is in a half-timbered 17th-century building that would seem remarkable in most English towns. Here, it is but one architectural gem amid dozens of other half-timbered and Georgian facades. The restaurant is spare, elegant, almost formal, with oaken raised-panel walls and a beamed ceiling.

The service is absolutely correct, but not at all stuffy — Ms. Crosby's warm manner allows her guests to feel at home and welcome.

The dining room at Hibiscus on an early spring night displayed a perfect cross section of Ludlow's three-star clientele, from old guard to nouveau riche, with members of a faded Gosford Park gentry dining alongside a professional woman whose cellphone rang at dinner. (She had the grace to answer in the anteroom.) An assortment of sparkling amuse-bouches — tiny but sublime potato croquettes scented with vanilla, and a single bite of creamy onion quiche — perfectly fulfilled their function.

They set the scene for a lovely meal: snails coated in a lively garlic-lime foam, followed by succulent baby lamb and a dessert of strawberries with celeriac jelly and whipped cream scented with Sichuan peppercorns, a brilliant combination of wildly unexpected flavors.

"I think Claude will have two stars before too long," said Mr. Hill, of the Merchant House, exhibiting the generosity that is typical of the three chefs here but would be an anomaly elsewhere.

"It's quite odd," said Mr. Bradley, of Underhill's. "We all socialize. It's rare in England. In Suffolk, where we were before, it was tremendously cutthroat. This is a rare opportunity to walk over to another Michelin-starred restaurant." And so they do, eating at one another's places several times a year.

If Hibiscus offers Parisian haute couture, both the Merchant House and Mr. Underhill's are Savile Row, serving the chefs' interpretations of modern British cooking.

A meal at Mr. Underhill's is like a glorious dinner party: the guests eat what the chef cooks, though his wife is careful to ask about any likes and dislikes at check-in. (In warm weather, the party moves to the garden on the riverbank. Inside the inn, fashionable Tuscan colors warm the gray stone floor and provide a cheery setting.)

Mr. Bradley describes his cooking as modern Scottish, Anglo-Mediterranean and

modern British. Despite the adjectives, he said, "we are ingredient-driven — and nothing too radical."

Our meal began with Champagne and hors d'oeuvres in the little sitting room off the dining room: buttery, crisp cheese strips; tarts of Brie, chives and tomatoes, suffused with flavor; tiny sushi. Anyone would have to be careful not to make a meal of the sourdough and its accompanying butter.

The cooking here is very straightforward, so the ingredients must be impeccable, and they are: a perfectly cooked piece of brill (a sort of English turbot, with spots) with a touch of lime and cardamom delights, while the silky dauphinois potatoes and creamed celeriac are habit-forming. Offered a choice of desserts, my dining companion heard Highland parfait and said she could not live without it. It is ice cream with praline oatmeal, a tribute to Mr. Bradley's place of birth, Scotland. It pleases some.

We had our final one-star meal at Mr. Hill's six-table Merchant House, which he runs with the assistance of a part-time dishwasher and his wife, Anja Hill, who makes the bread and most of the puddings.

Mr. Hill said he used his credit card to make the down payment on the half-timbered house that is now the restaurant. For four months, there was no sign in front; he couldn't afford one. There are no frills here, just polished wooden tables, dark wide-board floors and unostentatious cutlery and crockery that seem wonderfully suited to the deceptively simple cooking.

Mr. Hill is a master cook who doesn't have to prove anything — rereading my notes from the meal I see the word "perfect" scattered generously. There was a perfect and subtle sauce for the lamb; delicate, perfectly cooked sole; perfectly cooked asparagus, artichokes and morels with a hollandaise sauce light as foam.

And Mrs. Hill's cardamom ice cream with apple tart is a stunningly spicy harmony of flavors, while her crème caramel received its own superlative in my book — the creamiest ever made.

As in all such constellations, it is unclear how long Ludlow will keep its three stars. Mr. Bosi has professed an interest in moving on. Mr. Bradley would like a larger place. And Mr. Hill said he has no grand plan to stay. Wise diners will book accordingly, before the night sky changes once again.

Pasta, the Irish-Italian Way

by Mark Bittman

How a working-class Irish girl from South Boston became a chef with a national reputation for making pasta is one of those virtually unanswerable nature-vs.-nurture questions. But to watch Barbara Lynch as she mixes dough with her hands and feeds it into an old pasta machine that's no bigger than a home model is to see a young woman with the soul of an Italian grandmother.

Wouldn't she save time by using a food processor?

"I never tried it," she said.

Ms. Lynch, 38, is the chef and owner of No. 9 Park in Boston, a four-year-old restaurant in a renovated 19th century mansion that sits directly across from the Massachusetts State House and Boston Common. It's a spare and stylish place, with a largely familiar, upscale country European menu: butter-poached lobster, herb-crusted lamb, crispy duck and the like. Reviews have been strong. Ms. Lynch has won a number of awards and, in Boston at least, she is a celebrity chef.

What those reviews always mention, though, and what really keeps everyone I know who's been to No. 9 Park going back is the pasta. Ms. Lynch and her staff produce seven types of pasta most days, for specials and for regular menu items. Each is seductive, pliant and reflective of a bit of her past. Most are not only traditional pastas but also common ones: they will not sound like new recipes, nor should they. Instead it is the precise combination of ingredients in the doughs and sauces that set these dishes apart.

For the tagliatelle here, Ms. Lynch piled flour on the counter. She mixed in a little salt, broke eggs into the center of the flour and began integrating flour and egg. The tools were: her countertop, a fork and a scraper for cleaning the counter.

But her hands did the real work, kneading, sprinkling more flour, shaping and rolling. They seemed to move unconsciously and almost effortlessly. She chatted as she worked. There was a cavalier quality to her movements that seemed to belie her gift.

How Ms. Lynch developed this gift is not readily apparent. "I figured I'd own a sub shop or a bar in Southie," she said of her career prospects in the years following her near-graduation from high school in 1982. "I was three points shy and refused to go to summer school," she said.

She had one favorite class, though: home economics. Her instructor had a job at a culinary school in Cambridge, and encouraged Ms. Lynch to go. She couldn't afford it, but went to a few classes anyway. Then she got a job as a server at the old-fashioned St. Botolph Club in Back Bay. At home, she found herself keeping up with the reading.

Kitchen work followed, as flowers do a bud. Ms. Lynch got a job at the Harvest, a Harvard Square restaurant that has spawned some of Boston's best chefs, including Chris Schlesinger, Lydia Shire and Jimmy Burke. From there, she went to Michaela's, where Todd English was emerging as a national "name" chef.

"At that point," she said, "I was cooking all day, then staying up half the night reading cookbooks and trying to learn the drill."

When Mr. English opened Olives, Ms. Lynch took some money she had saved and headed to Italy, where she cooked alongside local women in the home of a friend. It was there, she said, that "it all fell into place."

Ms. Lynch spent three weeks abroad — learning how to make pasta and sauces, baking bread in wood-fired ovens and roasting meats in them as the ovens cooled, preserving tomatoes and other foods but mostly, she said, "following the women around all day."

The recipe here is one of the first she learned: an ultra-rich pasta dough cut into the ribbons known as tagliatelle, and served with a traditional Tuscan meat sauce that differs from other typical meat sauces in several ways, chief of which are its two key ingredients, chicken livers and sage.

"There must be chicken liver for this sauce to be authentic," she said, "and it must be cooked with sage." She adds to this base other meats, preferably equal amounts of ground pork, veal and lamb. Beef, she insisted, will not work: the flavor is wrong. And then she lets everything simmer.

The process of cooking is, in fact, very simple: some aromatic vegetables are sautéed in olive oil, followed by the liver and sage, some red wine that's allowed to reduce, the ground meats, stock and tomatoes. The result, with or without cream, is bold and rich, a sauce that requires a big pasta to stand up to it.

As for that pasta — as anyone who has made fresh pasta a few times but has not made it a daily habit — things are not quite so simple. It takes time. As a result, I've given proportions here for making enough pasta for four people. Since the sauce will cover pasta for eight, you can make it to serve two pounds of dried pasta, or use some of the sauce on one occasion and one on another. Or you can double the fresh pasta recipe.

Either way, if you're rolling out pasta for tagliatelle, it's best to follow Ms. Lynch's lead exactly: use your hands, and work with total confidence despite all appearances. It works.

An Ode to Sloppy Joe, a Delicious Mess

by Andrea Strong

Some foods are memory triggers, meals that send you back to long-forgotten moments in your life. The sloppy Joe sandwich is one such time machine. Finding it on the menu at Drew Nieporent's sunny version of the neighborhood deli, TriBakery, took me back to the lunchroom of my elementary school in Queens.

It was a puberty-driven war zone, where hair-netted lunch ladies ladled heavy spoonfuls of chopped meat and tomato sauce onto puffy, perfectly round hamburger buns, the sort of rolls that were often turned into ammunition when pulled apart, rolled into tiny pellets and used in battles waged against the boys seated across the lunchroom.

The sandwich was just this side of awful. The entire messy mass, oozing a greasy, beef-scented tomato sauce, left my fingers and lips stained deep orange for hours. Nonetheless, some 20 years later, standing in line at TriBakery, surrounded by tall men in suits, I had to have one, if only to feel 12 again.

Surely, those elementary school cooks in Queens tried hard, but they have nothing on TriBakery's consulting chef, Chris Gesualdi, formerly of Montrachet. His sloppy Joe sandwich ($6.75), a tribute to the one his mother, Rose, used to make for him as a child, is perfect: a sweet and spicy hill of thick sautéed ground beef spilling out of a toasted homemade kaiser roll. Topped with melted cheddar, it is a terrific antidote to adulthood.

Mr. Gesualdi is not the only chef experimenting with this stain-inducing sandwich. Tim Kelley, the new chef at Zoë, the American bistro in SoHo, makes Asian sloppy Joes in honor of his own somewhat traumatic experience with school lunch.

"I grew up on a farm in Oregon, and my mom used to make me these crazy vegetarian lunches," he said. "When you are a 14- year-old kid and you show up with these hippie sandwiches, well, I used to get hit. I mean there were sprouts everywhere."

Mr. Kelley stashed the hippie sandwiches in his locker and began eating in the lunchroom, where sloppy Joes became his favorite meal. "It was the total opposite of my mom's cooking," he said. "It's a very fond memory for me."

For his Asian-tinged sloppy Joe ($14.50), Mr. Kelley simmers pulled pork in a fiery tomato-based sauce, brightened with ginger, garlic and Vietnamese chili paste, then piles the saucy meat on a buttery house-made scallion bun and tops it off with a handful of fresh mint and cilantro leaves, a soothing balm to the pork's chili-driven heat.

While Mr. Kelley's Joe is far from traditional, it is delicious. It is the sort of sandwich that

makes you want to be 12 again, if only to lick your fingers boldly at the table and adamantly refuse to share.

A Cuban version of the sloppy Joe is on the menu at Isla, a sexy Havana-inspired restaurant in the West Village. It is essentially a ropa vieja sandwich, a meaty tangle of marinated pulled skirt steak stewed in an aromatic tomato sauce with garlic, cumin, tomatoes, peppers and chilies, loaded into the center of a pillowy Cuban steam-oven bun ($9).

The owner, Diane Ghioto, says it is a tribute to a sloppy Joe sandwich that originated in Havana.

Cuba? The sloppy Joe smacks of American inventiveness: it's a classic example of the Depression-era trick of stretching hamburger meat. But Ms. Ghioto insisted that the sandwich originated in Havana.

"Sloppy Joe's was a bar in Havana in the 30's owned by a guy named José García," she said. "The bar got its name because his place was always a mess, and the ropa vieja sandwich served there came to be known as a sloppy Joe. As far as I can tell, the American version is a bastardization of that sandwich."

Andrew Smith, editor in chief of the Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink, said that he had heard a dozen different stories about the first sloppy Joe sandwich. "As far as I know, there is no definitive answer to the question of the origin of the sandwich," he said.

He did not completely discredit the Havana connection, pointing to the fact that the first print use of the term "sloppy Joe" was probably in reference to a bar called Sloppy Joe's in Key West, Fla.

One of its regulars was Ernest Hemingway, who also spent a good deal of time in Cuba. Indeed, according to the bar's Web site, Hemingway had suggested the name in tribute to Mr. García's Rio Havana club, which sold liquor and iced seafood. Because the floor was always wet with melted ice, his patrons "taunted this Spanish Joe with running a sloppy place . . . and the name stuck."

Jean Anderson, author of "The American Century Cookbook" (Clarkson Potter, 1997), who was unfamiliar with the Havana theory, said that her research pointed to a cafe in Sioux City, Iowa, where a cook named Joe made loose meat sandwiches — a Midwestern term for seasoned ground meat cooked loosely in a skillet — that eventually came to be known as sloppy Joes.

Support for Ms. Ghioto's Cuban theory came from Leonard Zwilling, general editor of the Dictionary of American Regional English. He confirmed that a sandwich was indeed served at the Sloppy Joe's bar in Havana and that a version of it wound up on the menu at the Town Hall Deli in South Orange, N.J., in 1936, when it was (and still is) not a messy chopped meat sandwich but a triple-decker deli sandwich. Jack Burdorf, an owner of the Town Hall Deli, knew the sandwich's history. His father had worked at the deli and then bought it with a partner.

"Around 1934 or '35," Mr. Burdorf said, "the Mayor of Maplewood, Robert Sweeney, used to vacation in Havana and hang out at an old saloon called Sloppy Joe's. When Sweeney returned to New Jersey, he described the sandwich he used to eat there to my dad, and asked him to recreate it."

The result, Mr. Burdorf said, was a sandwich that to this day is called the original sloppy

Joe: layers of ham, tongue and Swiss cheese topped with coleslaw and Russian dressing, served on long, thin slices of soft buttered rye bread and sliced into four squares ($16.45).

If the original sloppy Joe was a giant club sandwich, what of the messy manwich of a meal so many Americans grew up eating?

The truth behind the humble beginnings of the sloppy Joe may never be known, whether it was a triple-decker created from the memory of a mayor who visited Havana or a loose meat sandwich born in a cafe in Sioux City, Iowa.

What really matters is the place your mind goes when you pick one up, take that first bite and feel the slow trickle of greasy sauce down your chin. Because in the end, memories are more potent than any definitive version of history. One woman's Havana is another woman's Queens.

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From Tuscany, Simple Perfection

by Nigella Lawson

When good food writers die — to misquote Oscar Wilde — they go to Italy. I, however, am taking no chances with what will be coming to me in the afterlife and so have decided to spend as much time as possible there while alive.

True, there are many fine, compelling, extra-culinary reasons to book a ticket to Italy. I have nothing against architecture, art, ludicrously beautiful landscapes, the most euphonious language coined by man or the whole bella figura, dolce vita deal. It is, you could argue, a price worth paying even for those who aren't led to the travel agent by their stomachs. But when I plan a trip to the boot, my prime motivation is simple, unadulterated, pleasurable greed.

I have been going there ever since my late teens, when I maneuvered my way into a place at Oxford — without any knowledge of Italian — to study medieval and modern Italian by promising that I would go to Florence and apply myself to the language of Dante. In fact, as it happened, I landed a job as a chambermaid and not even in a smart hotel, but in a small pensione in the street that leads from the Duomo to the Piazza della Signoria. I learned to gossip there, to shop for food and to cook and eat it all'Italiana. And to cook Italian, I learned above all, one must think Italian, which means giving the fewest possible ingredients the greatest possible respect.

If, in a court of law (and let's hope it never quite comes to that), I had to cite two dishes that best exemplified this dictum of respect, I would have no trouble. I present as evidence a certain contender for my last meal on earth, spaghetti alle vongole, and then that perfect Italian creation, a tagliata. The first offers pasta with clams and the second, a thick slab of flavorsome steak, sliced thinly and, in this version, scattered with shredded radicchio and shaved Parmesan — what more could you want? Well, I'm with Mae West: too much of a good thing can be wonderful. And so I offer add-ons, too: oven-baked polenta and perfect lemon gelato for dessert.

It may have been an education, a career or two, and a few lifetimes ago, but once you've lived in a country properly, even short vacations there give the feeling, in some crucial sense, of returning home.

Of course, for most Italians, Italy isn't really a country — it's been in existence for only 140 years or so — but a clutch of regions, and I tend to feel most at home in Idyll Central: Tuscany.

And to fulfill the fantasy properly, I need a home, which is why I rent a house rather than stay in hotels. I am not happy simply eating Italian food, I want to cook it, too. I need to

occupy the life — not buy a ticket to watch it.

Of course, everything is much easier when you're on vacation. I've always felt that shopping is the hardest part of cooking, and when you don't need to rush frenziedly to the store in your lunch break but can stroll through some Italian market, basket nuzzling at your waist, stopping off every now and again for a gelato or caffè shakerato, then we're not talking stress-inducing overload.

Add to that a house that has a kitchen that gives out to an olive grove and a pergola-vaulted table outside where you can sit with friends, forking through spaghetti as you contemplate the Tuscan hills, and you're as near to entering a state of grace as can ever be possible in this world.

So thanks, you might say. Where does this leave us now, at the end of September — vacation over, back to work and fall on the way? I'll tell you where it leaves us all: with the food. And to tell the truth, I don't even need the recent memory of a trip to Italy to make me feel infused with the Italian spirit. I just need to start cooking.

The most important thing my Italian experiences have taught me is that good food doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, simplicity is ever the key. The Italians, rightly, are confident about the quality of their produce. Luckily, the rest of us now have access to high-quality ingredients, too.

Now, as to lunch: It is scarcely authentic to the Tuscan hills, but I urge upon you, as an accompaniment to the tagliata, a bowl of golden, sweetly grainy, oven-baked polenta.

I got the idea for serving it with a tagliata this summer, at a fabulous restaurant outside Lucca called Vipore. Cesare Casella, now of Beppe on East 22nd Street in Manhattan, was once the chef there. I was eating polenta with cheese instead of meat. But I pinched a little tagliata off someone's plate and dipped it into the polenta and found it to be heaven. There is something about the savory intensity of the strips of beef with the corn-sunny mush that blends elegance with comfort; it tastes plainly fabulous.

Of course, I might in this case hold off on the radicchio topping, and maybe sprinkle the shavings of Parmesan over the polenta instead of the steak.

In Italy, to be honest, if you want a good ice cream you go to the gelateria — and, in fact, even out of Italy there are good store-bought gelati to be found. But I have never, off Italian soil, come across a proper gelato di crema; think vanilla ice cream, only in place of vanilla, you infuse the milk with a modest grating or shaving of lemon zest.

This doesn't turn it into lemon ice cream, itself a cool dollop of heaven. What happens, rather, is that the small-volume scent of lemon makes the eggs eggier and the custard creamier. In short, we're talking platonic ideal of ice cream.

And even if you cannot quite stir yourself to make the effort to make it, just be happy in the knowledge that it exists. As with Italy, sometimes you have to be content to let it be just a state of mind.

Cooling Off the Backyard BBQ

by Mark Bittman

The Fourth of July guests are wandering around the backyard - nibbling chips, manhandling the carefully stuffed grape leaves, sipping beer or some rosé from Provence. You, on the other hand, are standing in front of the hot grill with smoke blowing in your face, watching a piece of chicken catch fire.

A lot has changed in backyard cookery in the last few decades. The menu is no longer limited to hot dogs and hamburgers, and might not even include meat. The grill may be fueled by rocks heated by gas or simply gas flames. If there are coals, they may be real charcoal, not petroleum-laden briquettes. And the cooking is correctly called grilling, rather than barbecuing, which is an extremely slow, smoky form of grilling over indirect heat.

What has not changed, at least at big parties, is that the person doing the grilling does not have any fun. It's not that grilling isn't enjoyable; it is as easygoing a cooking process as exists, though not without its stressful moments. It's that there is too much fussing going on in front of that grill.

The menu here is designed to change that. Follow it, and you can grill two of the most labor-intensive foods — ribs and chicken — with minimal effort and almost no risk of incinerating the meat. And most of the grilling is done before guests arrive.

The secret to the grilling is a combination of low heat, indirect grilling (in which the food is set off from, not over, the coals), and a final blast of hot, direct heat. You need a covered grill, preferably gas, though real charcoal or briquettes do not present much of a problem: you just need to replenish the fire, either by adding coals a few at a time to its sides or by keeping a batch of coals going in a second grill.

Chicken and ribs are tricky to grill because their fat renders and catches fire over high, direct heat. If the flames are low enough and the griller vigilant, by turning the meat frequently and shifting it around the grill, the job can be done well. But the energy expenditure is enormous, especially when feeding large numbers of people. By taking more time and using lower heat, the cooking can be done slowly and leisurely.

Grill the chicken or ribs slowly on the coolest part of the grill, covered, until most of the fat has melted away. For chicken, this usually takes 30 to 45 minutes; for ribs, up to several hours. The time will depend on just how low the fire is. If your grill has a thermometer, you might aim for 300 degrees or even a little lower. When the chicken or ribs are cooked through, they will be lightly browned but not truly crisp. At that

point, they can be set aside for a while: up to a couple of hours for the chicken, up to a full day for the ribs.

When you are ready to serve the meats, brown them right over the coals over moderately high heat. They will still need your attention, but only for a few minutes. You can then attend to more important matters, like enjoying your own party.

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A History of the Mideast in the Humble Chickpea

by Jodi Kantor

The last time you bit into a falafel sandwich you were probably thinking about nothing more than the warm spice and crunch of the chickpea fritters and the way they played against the soft bread, crisp vegetables and nutty tahini sauce.

Unless you're Palestinian, in which case you may have had weightier culinary issues on your mind.

Many Palestinians believe that Israelis have stolen falafel, a traditional Arab food, and passed it off as what postcards at tourist kiosks all over Israel call "Israel's National Snack."

"We always sort of look at each other and roll our eyeballs when we pass a restaurant that says `Israeli falafel,' " said Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian-American and a professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago.

Some do more than roll eyeballs. Aziz Shihab, a Palestinian-American and the author of the cookbook "A Taste of Palestine," once picked an argument with the owners of an Israeli restaurant in Dallas that served falafel. "This is my mother's food," he said. "This is my grandfather's food. What do you mean you're serving it as your food?"

It's nice to think that sharing a cherished food brings enemies together, easing tension and misunderstanding. But the world's rawest conflicts can include disagreements over common foodstuffs. Irish Catholics and Protestants have lightly bickered over whiskey. Turks and Greeks have feuded over coffee. And Jews and Arabs argue about falafel in a way that reflects the wider conflict, touching on debates over territory and history. "Food always migrates according to immigration and commerce," said Yael Raviv, an Israeli student at New York University who wrote her Ph.D. thesis on Israeli nationalism and cuisine. "But because of the political situation, falafel has taken on enormous significance."

"Every Israeli tourist brochure has a shot of falafel," Ms. Raviv continued. "And every Israeli cookbook has a falafel recipe."

Jewish and Israeli attitudes toward the falafel debate range from defiance to ambivalence to outright shame — just as they do toward the conflict at large. Some Jews point out that no single group can own a method for frying a mush of legumes; they say that falafel is generically Middle Eastern, having originated in Egypt and

found its way as far as Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

"Have we stolen pasta from the Italians?" asked Geoffrey Weill, who does public relations for Israel's Ministry of Tourism. "What kind of nonsense is that?"

Hagay Nagar, the Israeli co-owner of Hoomoos Asli in New York, says that falafel is now "an international food, like a hamburger." (Nevertheless, his restaurant has an Arabic name: "Asli," a word adopted by Israeli slang, means "original" in Arabic.)

Some argue that there is some historical precedent. Joan Nathan, the author of "The Foods of Israel Today," said: "Falafel is a biblical food. The ingredients are as old as you're going to get. These are the foods of the land, and the land goes back to the Bible. There have been Jews and Arabs in the Middle East forever, and the idea that Jews stole it doesn't hold any water."

Claudia Roden, born in Egypt and the author of "The Book of Jewish Food," confirmed that while falafel was never specifically a Jewish dish, it was certainly eaten by Jews in Egypt and Syria.

Other Jews and Israelis are less comfortable with the Israelization of falafel. Take Orna Agmon, a co-owner of the Falafel Queens, a set of upscale falafel restaurants in Israel. Ms. Agmon and her business partner, Ella Shein, were so ambivalent about the issue, she said, that "it took us many years to actually have the courage to open a falafel restaurant — we were afraid this act would be misunderstood."

Ms. Agmon and Ms. Shein polished their falafel-making skills under the tutelage of Palestinian women, she said, "who make the best falafel you can imagine." And who volunteered their knowledge without asking for compensation. "It was three years ago, it was a different period," Ms. Agmon said, referring to the relative calm that preceded the current violence. "It is still something that's hard for us to think about now."

As surprising as it may sound, given the bloodiness and acrimony of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Zionism has always been perfumed by a whiff of romance with Arab culture. The Eastern European Jews who flocked to Palestine in the late-19th and early-20th centuries rejected their Continental pasts in favor of a return to their ancient roots. "The Jewish settlers were looking for new ways to connect with their biblical pasts," Ms. Raviv said, "and Arabs were the perfect role models."

Some Jewish settlers in Palestine referred to themselves as "Hebrew Bedouins" and donned kaffiyehs, or Arab headdresses. "Politically, the Zionists ignored the Arabs, but culturally, they romanticized and tried to imitate them," said Yael Zerubavel, a scholar of Israeli culture at Rutgers. This imitation didn't seem like theft, Ms. Zerubavel said, "but localization, a process of putting roots in soil."

The newly arrived Jews needed a cuisine to suit their new identities and surroundings. "Their native food was inappropriate for the weather and the produce," Ms. Roden said. Not surprisingly, they were enchanted by the smoky eggplant dips, rustic breads and aromatic spice mixtures of Palestinian cuisine. As Najwa al-Qattan, a Palestinian-American and a professor of Middle Eastern history at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, put it, "If you were given the choice between falafel and gefilte fish, which would you choose?"

These Zionists, by and large socialists, loved humble street foods like falafel, Ms. Roden said. They showed little interest in the primary jewels of Palestinian cuisine, like

musakhan, a sumptuous ovenful of chicken, onions, sumac and pine nuts layered with fresh bread. Still, it wasn't until hundreds of thousands of Jews from Arab countries emigrated to Israel in the 1950's that falafel truly became an Israeli emblem.

"And We Have Falafel," a popular Israeli song written in 1958, included such lyrics as: "It used to be when a Jew came to Israel he kissed the ground and gave thanks/Now as soon as he gets off the plane he has a falafel." It also has the line "only we have falafel," adding "because this is the national food of Israel."

In particular, Jews from Yemen got into the falafel business, opening up concession stands. These immigrants, Ms. Zerubavel said, "made it possible to incorporate elements like falafel without referring to them as Palestinian." Yael Raviv of N.Y.U. added that falafel's lack of history as a specifically Jewish food speeded its adoption in the Jewish state, whose diverse residents could unite around a local dish that would be, she said, "valid to everyone."

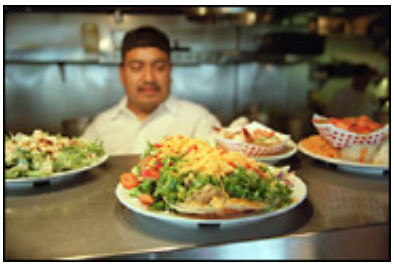
Orna Agmon of the Falafel Queens compared falafel's history to that of the sabra, the local prickly fruit that Palestinians ate for centuries before Israelis started using the word as a nickname for a native-born Israeli. Similarly, Ammiel Alcalay, a Jewish professor of Middle Eastern culture at Queens College, believes that "it's total appropriation, and that it's linked to very concrete things like land and sustenance." Mr. Alcalay said that Israelis have claimed falafel in the same way that they have Jaffa oranges and the spice mixture zaatar. (Zaatar usually consists of some combination of wild oregano, thyme, sumac and sesame seeds.)

But with time, Israelis have become quicker to acknowledge falafel's provenance. Throughout the mid-1990's, during the shaky peace, Israeli tourists flocked to Jordan, and then to Palestinian villages inside Israel. Dan Almagor, who wrote the lyrics to "And We Have Falafel," said he would write the same song today — but with a line about the dish's Arab origins.

And the falafel itself keeps changing. The original Egyptian dish was made with fava beans; as falafel moved northward, cooks substituted chickpeas. Until recently, Israel's most notable contribution to its evolution has been to cram novel accompaniments, from shredded beets to French fries, into falafel sandwiches.

But the Falafel Queens have developed two new varieties: red falafel (flavored with jalapeños and served with roasted peppers, tomatoes and spicy yogurt sauce) and orange falafel (made with sweet potatoes and accompanied by cabbage, honey and ginger tahini). "Israelis love to think that falafel is their own," Ms. Agmon said. "But it's something we adopted. For me, falafel is an Arab food with a long history and amazing versatility, to which we tried to contribute a new variation."

And perhaps Palestinians will grow more tolerant of Israeli enthusiasm for falafel. Aziz Shihab, who once quibbled with Jewish restaurateurs over it, claimed that his views have softened. "It's a regional food, not a people food," he said. "The more I think and the more I pray for peace, the more I think it's a silly argument."



Fish Tacos Worth Gasping Over

by Lucian K. Truscott IV

Los Angeles - Sunset Boulevard east of Hollywood doesn't look like much of a culinary destination as it winds through rolling hills on the way downtown. Passing through the terminally hip zones of Silver Lake and Echo Park, the boulevard is crowded with thrift shops full of 1950's muumuus and quaint little boutiques featuring leather bustiers, nestled against auto body repair shops and open-front garages that install car alarms.

Perched in the blazing sun on asphalt parking lots and tucked into narrow mini-mall storefronts here is a secret world of taco stands and 12-table restaurants featuring the inexpensive and harrowingly spicy fish taco, a Mexican fast-food delight not often found north of Los Angeles or east of San Bernardino.

The fish taco is a transplant from beach-side places in Baja California, where the bounty of the sea is cheaper and more readily available than the carne asada and carnitas — grilled beef and roasted pork — common to tacos elsewhere in Mexico. Down on the beach in Ensenada, Mexico, a fish taco from a curbside stand costs the equivalent of an American dollar. At La Playita Siete Mares ("the Little Beach of the Seven Seas"), a colorful taco stand in the middle of a parking lot on Sunset Boulevard, a couple of dollars will get you the same basic thing: a flash-fried soft corn tortilla piled high with deep-fried breaded chunks of red snapper slathered red with hot sauce and buried under a mountain of shredded cabbage, chopped tomatoes, onions and cilantro, with a dollop of runny crema, a light cream sauce. Thick slices of lime are usually served too, and the sagacious eater will douse the pile liberally with their juice before trying a bite.

It would seem that eating a fish taco is about the same as eating a carne asada taco, but the glacier of icy shredded vegetables atop the spiced fish presents a special challenge. My personal solution is like so: sitting at the picnic table common to all taco stands, position your mouth directly above the paper plate and next to the taco, roll the taco and its fixings loosely, open wide and shove. There is an immediate detonation of insanely spicy seafood, eased somewhat by the cooling crunch of cabbage and onion and tweaked by the acid twang of tomato and lime juice. (The munched taco will ooze fish and hot sauce and cabbage onto the plate, there to be collected and rerolled in a second tortilla, handily provided.)

Once your eyes have stopped watering enough for you to see a fuzzy outline of what remains of your taco, roll everything tightly and shove again. With luck and enough cold beer or frozen fruit juice, you will be able to come close to replacing the bodily fluids lost to perspiration and tears — and a couple of bucks more will buy you another one.

All the fish tacos I tasted were made with "trimmings" from red snapper, cod or mahi-mahi. These are chunks of meat from around the tails, gills or bellies of fish that have been filleted to sell to restaurants or supermarkets. I spoke to one restaurateur who put fish tacos on her American menu because the fish trimmings were inexpensive and she was happy to use scraps that would have otherwise gone for chicken feed.

A short distance from La Playita is Alegria on Sunset, in a run-down strip mall. There is nothing run down about Alegria, however. It is owned by a woman and her two daughters, who serve Mexican home cooking to pierced and tattooed rockers, production assistants and grips who live in Silver Lake and Echo Park. The fish tacos at Alegria are made with cod marinated in orange, lime and lemon juices, along with onions and peppers, then quickly sautéed in a hot skillet. You get two tacos piled high with fish, lettuce, red cabbage, onions, cilantro and crema and served with pico de gallo, rice and black beans on the side, for $6.95 at lunch, $8.95 at dinner. This is a slightly more upscale fish taco, and while spicy, it doesn't launch quite as brutal an assault on the taste buds as the ones down the street.

On the west side of Los Angeles, just east of the 405 freeway on West Pico Boulevard, is La Serenata Gourmet restaurant, a branch of the main Serenata in East Los Angeles. It specializes in moderately priced Mexican seafood dishes and is popular with movie industry people who have offices a short distance away in Santa Monica. The fish and shrimp tacos here are in a class by themselves. Mahi-mahi or shrimp are dusted with salt, pepper and spices and quickly sautéed with onions and garlic. At $3, not at all spicy and bursting with the flavors of fresh seafood and creamy avocado, both the fish and the shrimp tacos are a treat for those who don't fancy Mexican food that torches the palate like a flamethrower.

Several local chains also feature fish tacos. Rubio's Baja Grill has outlets scattered around town, including one at the food court of the upscale Beverly Center mall. They serve fish tacos with different toppings starting at $2.05. Baja Fresh, a chain that has spread into Washington State, Arizona, Colorado and Texas, has deep-fried fish tacos for $2.10, served with pico de gallo and a "special sauce," and a charcoal-grilled mahi-mahi taco for $2.95, served with an avocado-jalapeño-tomatillo salsa. The tacos at these chains are a giant leap above the mass-produced fare shoved over the counter at places like Taco Bell, but they lack the distinctive kick in the teeth you get at street-side taco stands or the homemade subtleties of tacos served at places like La Serenata or Alegria.

Of course, nothing beats eating a fish taco at the beach with a noseful of salt air and an ice-cold beer. You can come close to approximating the Ensenada fish taco experience at the Reel Inn, a seafood restaurant in Malibu. It has semi-Americanized fish tacos, served with fresh salsa, cheese, lettuce and tomato. They are a little pricey at dinner, but there is a lunch special on Tuesdays: two fish tacos for $3.50. And as they say out here at the edge of the earth, If it's Tuesday, I'm there, dude.

Up a Mountain, Chasing a Cheese

by Marian Burros

UDINE, Italy — It is a simple dish for a complicated part of the world. Frico, they call it: cheese melted in a pan, then allowed to cool into a sheet that cracks into shards under a finger's pressure. Served as the farmers eat it, with potatoes, onions, a bit of smoky bacon, it is called frico del fattore, and it rates as one of the great regional delicacies of a nation that is filled with them. To find it — and the Montasio cheese with which it is made — I set out one warm, cloudless morning to drive from the high plains of this central city in Italy's northeastern corner up into the Dolomites, to the tiny village of Sauris di Sotto.

This is Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a mountainous region set atop the Adriatic Sea in the manner of a bauble at the end of a rod. Bordered by the swampy Veneto to the west, mountainous Austria to the north and the rough turf of Slovenia to the east, it has been a land of passage and invasion for thousands of years. Friuli, in fact, was part of Austria until 1866, as was Venezia Giulia until after World War I.

The Friulians have taken something from all those who have trespassed against them, Celts, Hungarians, Venetians, Hapsburgs, Yugoslavians, Charlemagne, Napoleon and even Attila the Hun. There are several languages here, styles of architecture, types of cuisine. Flavors seldom seen elsewhere in Italy thrive: chocolate, cumin, dill and cinnamon. Its prosciutto is superb, and its wines. But its cheese, Montasio, is nonpareil — nutty, rich and, with 40 percent fat, ideal for melting. Available in America mostly in its semi-aged state ("semistagionato" is the Italian term), it is sold all over this region at various stages of development, from fresco, or young and soft, to stagionato, aged more than 10 months, with the dry and crumbly texture of Parmigiano. In Sauris, I had been told, the frico would be prepared to perfection.

As we drove out of Udine, in the heart of the Friuli plain, past acres and acres of corn that will be this fall's polenta, the Dolomites abruptly appeared, like sheets of rock. We began our climb — straight up, it often seemed.

Montasio has been made in this region since the 13th century, when monks of the abbey at Moggio Udinese developed it, originally with sheep's milk, later with cow's, and gave it the name of the plateau on which their abbey stood. A decree from 1473 confirms the right of the Comune Cavazzo "in accordance with ancient custom" to graze livestock on the high plateau "in exchange for cheese as compensation to the landowners."

A taste for Montasio spread down through the valleys to the plains of Friuli and the Veneto to the west. By 1775, it was available in San Daniele, where it was paired with

the best known of all Friulian products, San Daniele prosciutto — sweeter than Parma's and, as it happens, aged Montasio's true soul mate.

The cheese is now protected by a consortium of makers who insist on local milk and standardized timetables for aging it; in 1986, the cheese was awarded recognition by the Denominazione di Origine Controllata, a governing body for Italian food and wine. This has had both good and bad results. Good because the designation protects how a cheese is made and where it comes from. Bad because the organization insists on a uniformity that is beyond the grasp of some smaller cheese makers, making it impossible for them to sell their marvelous cheeses under the Montasio label. Uniformity is not always a good thing.

There was, before Sauris, a planned detour to a farm near Tolmezzo, to watch a wizened old farmer make cheese from the milk of his own cows and sheep. A four-wheel-drive vehicle was the only way to negotiate the mountain, with its switchbacks and hairpin turns through tunnels carved out of rock. When the paved road ran out, there was a track, and at the end of that track a dilapidated hut with a ceiling black from the smoke of generations of cheese makers. The farmer was stirring a copper pot over a wood fire. A few cheeses and some smoked pork ribs were hanging from the rafters above him. Not so long ago, this is how all cheese was made in Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

The cheese maker dipped his hand into the pot to see if a curd had formed in the hot milk. No. A few minutes later he tested it again, pulling out curds and shaping them into a round of fresh cheese. Finished, he silently took out a knife and cut several pieces for me to taste: creamy, warm cheese, smelling, it seemed, of the fields outside his walls. Then he reached for a piece of cheese he was aging, a hard ricotta, and cut into it as well. The flavor, darker, more smoky, was equally tantalizing.

The farmer said he had been making cheese every day for 30 years. He never has to go to town to sell it. Customers find him.

"It's the fashion these days to search out these remote places for the food," said Wayne Young, an American who works for the Bastianich vineyard in Friuli. The fashion, yes, but none of the product can get very far.

I said thank you and goodbye with a lot of smiles and bowing. The past was very present there in that farmer's shack in Tolmezzo, and fragile, too.

Up another steep hill, we came to Sauris, a picture-perfect little ski village hard against the snowcapped mountains. With its wood-timbered houses rising off clean-swept streets, not an inch of the town would be out of place in the Austrian or Swiss Alps.

At Restaurant Kursaal, where the chef, Daniele Cortiula, was waiting, there was little to dispel the Alpine mood. In front of him were onions, potatoes, cubes of Montasio and chopped speck — the flavorful smoked bacon that is one of the region's most valuable treasures.

First, Mr. Cortiula prepared the celebrated frico, which is nothing more than melted Montasio, which crisps as it cools. He served it with a peppery salami of donkey (better than one would think), soft polenta and a stew of young horse (much better than one would think, with hardly a whiff of gaminess). Young Montasio, he said, is usually paired with delicate white polenta; aged Montasio is served with yellow polenta, which has a stronger corn flavor. (Fred Plotkin, who has written the definitive book on the food and wine of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, "La Terra Fortunata," published by Broadway

Books in 2001, pairs frico with pears, apples or sweet onions.

The chef produced a small skillet, in which he cooked first the speck, then the potatoes and onion. When these were ready, he slowly added cubes of Montasio. And then with a flick of a very practiced wrist, he turned these homely ingredients into a perfect frico del fattore. Around the solids the cheese formed a crust the color of a Vermeer sunset — perfectly gold.

The flavor was addictive: a nutty, flavorful mass. Abandoning Parmigiano-Reggiano forever was not beyond the realm of possibility.

Frico Del Fattore

1/2 cup finely diced speck or pancetta (smoked bacon)
1/2 cup onion, finely chopped
1 pound potato, peeled and thinly sliced
1/2 pound (scant) fresh Montasio, cut in 1/4-inch cubes

1. Sauté bacon in a medium-size nonstick pan over medium heat until it gives up some of its fat. Add onion, and cook until onion begins to color.
2. Add potato, and stir well to coat. Add 3/8 cup water; reduce heat to low; cover, and cook, stirring once, about 15 minutes, until potatoes are soft and water has evaporated. Mixture should be fairly dry.
3. Add cheese, several pieces at a time, and stir continuously, adding more cheese as it melts. When cheese is almost completely melted, turn mixture into an 8-inch nonstick pan (nonstick surface should be perfect, or cheese will stick), and cook over low heat to brown bottom. As fat from cheese accumulates, spoon it off.
4. When bottom is browned, carefully flip onto plate, and then return frico to pan to brown the other side, about 20 minutes total. Remove, and cool slightly; cut into small wedges and serve warm or at room temperature.

High Spots in a Nation of Hot-Dog Heavens

by Paul Lukas

"Gimme two, with mustard."

That's the standard lunch order countless New Yorkers make at this time of year, and with good reason: a hot dog tastes better in summer. Or is it that summer tastes better with a hot dog? Either way, the food and the season were made for each other. It is no accident that the annual hot-dog-eating contest at Nathan's in Coney Island is held on July 4. Try to imagine it taking place during autumn or winter and the image just doesn't compute.

In New York, hot dogs are street food. When New Yorkers think of frankfurters, they think of pushcart vendors and takeout deli counters and maybe Katz's Deli on the Lower East Side. And while storefront doggeries can be found here and there around town, it is worth noting that the two most celebrated ones — Gray's Papaya and the flagship Nathan's in Coney Island — both have no seating. Clearly, the New York hot dog is meant to be consumed on the move.

There's nothing wrong with that, but it is a different story in other parts of the country, where the hot dog is treated as a genuine meal — humble food, perhaps, but sit-down food nonetheless. The most obvious example is Chicago, whose hot dogs are also stylistically distinct from those of New York. This raises another point: the United States teems with hot-dog subcultures that invest their wienies with a gustatory passion that puts New York's bland pushcart franks to shame. For as much as I love a frank from a street vendor, the sad truth is that the calling card of the New York dog is water. And before this frank becomes your hastily gobbled lunch, it is typically steamed or boiled, stored in a sea of cloudy liquid that looks like dishwater, and topped with either runny sauerkraut or that orange gruel that people insist on calling onions. The noble hot dog deserves better.

With summer now in full swing, it is a good time for a rundown of regional hot-dog styles, and some prime places to get them. While neither exhaustive nor comprehensive (my apologies to places like Pink's in Los Angeles and Lafayette Coney Island in Detroit, which serve standout dogs but reflect no particular regional style), this survey at least suggests the frankfurter's surprisingly wide gastronomic range — a range barely hinted at in New York.

The Chicago Dog

Any serious discussion of hot dogs must begin in Chicago. The Chicago dog is usually

steamed, but this uninspired cooking method is amply counterbalanced by the wiener's accouterments, which include a poppy-seed bun and a veritable tossed salad of toppings: tomato wedges, pickle spears, disarmingly bright emerald relish, chopped onion, hot chilies (often endearingly called "sport peppers") and celery salt.

Sadly, my favorite Chicago hot-dog shack, Gold Coast, recently closed, although there is another branch that I hope to visit soon. Other prime Chicago outlets include Fluky's, which dates back to 1929, and the old-fashioned drive-in Superdawg, whose franks are served in hilariously retro-themed cardboard boxes. But the Chicago hot dog features such a winning combination of ingredients that it is hard to go wrong, no matter where you stop in for a bite. And with doggeries seemingly situated on every Chicago block, you are never more than a few steps away from satisfying that craving whenever it hits.

The Deep-Fried Dog

Many years ago I got a particularly delicious hot dog at a diner called Blackie's in Cheshire, Conn. The kitchen was out of view, so I asked the woman behind the counter how the franks were prepared. "They're boiled," she matter-of-factly replied. Then, after a pause: "In oil."

Such was my introduction to the deep-fried dog, an arteriosclerotic delight found primarily in the Northeast. Just about anything tastes better if it is fried, of course, but the deep-fried dog's pleasures are also textural: the franks begin to rip apart in the hot oil, resulting in a gnarled dog with a crunchy exterior and lots of singed edges and crevices.

While Blackie's is fine, I've since found two fried-dog outlets that are better. The first is Swanky Franks, a roadside diner in Norwalk, Conn. The dogs here have a garlicky undercurrent, and the tables and countertops are adorned with festive little condiment carousels laden with mustard, relish and chopped onions. Griddle-grilled dogs are available for the fry-squeamish, but such timidity has its price — the grilled franks cost a quarter extra.

Even better is Rutt's Hut, a time-warped tavern in Clifton, N.J. There's a takeout counter on one side of the building, but I advise hunkering down in Rutt's dimly lighted tap room, where the bartender barks out orders to the kitchen in a clipped Greek accent via a counter-mounted microphone.

Order two franks and he shouts "twodogstwo!" Ask for fries, and it's "A frrrenchie!" Such irresistible ambience aside, the dogs are spectacular — crisp, juicy and bursting with garlicky flavor — especially when topped with Rutt's homemade cabbage-and-carrot relish. Have a beer, admire the hand-painted menu on the wall (featuring old-school favorites like Taylor ham sandwiches), and hear yourself reflexively saying, "I'll have another dog, please."

The Char-Dog

Given the popularity of the hot dog as backyard grilling fare, it is surprising how few commercial doggeries cook their franks over hot coals. But in western New York State, a hot-dog stronghold, many outlets offer charcoal-grilled dogs. The outstanding doggery in the region is Ted's Jumbo Red Hots in Tonawanda, a town just outside Buffalo. The grill men poke, pierce and cut the franks as they cook, allowing the charcoal's smoky essence to penetrate deep into the meat. The result is a hot dog that smells and tastes like a cookout. And for dessert, there is an Anderson's custard stand

just down the road.

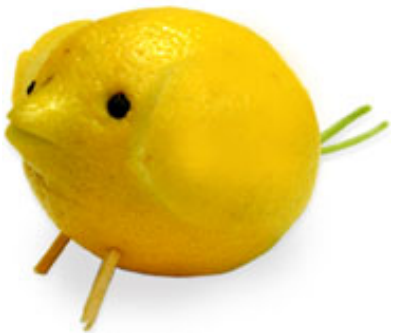
The Chili Dog

Although out of favor in New York, chili is the hot-dog topping of choice in much of the country, most notably Cincinnati, the nation's unofficial chili capital. But at the risk of incurring the collective wrath of the Queen City, my favorite chili doggery is in Allentown, Pa. It is called Yocco's the Hot Dog King, and its chili sauce makes a lip-smacking accompaniment to the fine wieners. While most doggeries dole out their chili with a ladle, slopping differing amounts on each dog, Yocco's countermen apply a precise chili payload with a long-handled tablespoon, which they wield with a mesmerizing flick of the wrist. It is an appealingly unique and routinized approach, one that makes Yocco's chili dogs dependably scrumptious, time after time.

The Slaw Dog

Southerners have long understood that coleslaw makes a cooling counterpoint to spicy barbecue, and many of them have applied this same approach to hot dogs. The acknowledged king of this particular hill is Nu-Way Weiners in Macon, Ga., where the fresh homemade slaw is a popular topping on the shop's red-hots (which are literally bright red, making for a nice bit of visual flair). Nu-Way, which opened in 1916 and still has the original neon sign hanging out front, is a particularly pleasant spot for lunch, with a friendly staff and businesspeople, kids and retirees chowing down together. It is like a comfortable neighborhood coffee shop, except everyone happens to be eating hot dogs.

Finally, no hot-dog roundup would be complete without Essie's Original Hot Dog Shop in Pittsburgh. While the Steel City's dogs have no regional quirks, the Original's griddle-grilled beauties have one thing going for them: flavor. The franks' tight skins snap as you bite into them, resulting in an explosion of beefy goodness. This is not just a great hot dog; this is a great piece of meat. And happily, although I do not get to Pittsburgh as often as I would like, my standard order at the Original is one I have had lots of practice delivering elsewhere: "Gimme two, with mustard."



Celebrating Citrus

Introduction and Garnishes

The citrus family of fruits is one of nature's great gifts to cooks. The citrus fruits most common to Western palates — lemon, lime, orange, grapefruit — have varying degrees of acidity and sweetness; when used as a flavor base, they give both savory and sweet dishes a wonderful balance of acidity. Used to brighten a recipe, they awaken other flavors in an almost magical way. And let's not forget that citrus fruits are more than just juice: citrus zest (the colorful outer portion of the peel, not to be confused with the bitter white flesh just under the skin, known as the pith) has an additional depth of flavor that is invaluable.

Lemon Pig

1 lemon
1 black peppercorn
1 piece parsley
4 toothpicks

1. Choose a lemon with a nicely pointed "nose." With the point of a knife, make one hole on each side of the nose and fill each with a black peppercorn to create eyes.

2. Cut a short horizontal wedge in the middle of the nose without separating the piece from the lemon to create a mouth.

3. Make small diagonal cuts on each side of the head, creating ears.

4. Curl up a little piece of parsley and place to imitate the tail and place toothpicks (whole or halved) underneath for the legs.
Yield: One pig.

Oranges in Blackberry Sauce

3/4 pound blackberries, fresh or frozen (unsweetened)
1/2 cup seedless blackberry preserves
6 oranges, large and seeded
6 mint sprigs
1 piece brioche or pound cake, or cookies

1. Put the fresh or thawed blackberries and the preserves in a food mill fitted with the finest screen, and strain. To remove any remaining seeds, pour the sauce into a sieve with a medium mesh. Bang the top edge of the sieve with a spatula or the palm of your hand so that the seeds jump up and most of the liquid goes through. Do not press on the mixture immediately with a rubber spatula, as any seeds in it will clog the holes.

When most of the sauce has been strained through the sieve, press on what is left in the strainer with a rubber spatula to extract the remaining sauce. Clean off the bottom of the strainer to retrieve any extra sauce.

2. With a vegetable peeler, peel the rind from two of the six oranges.

3. Pile up the strips of rind, and cut them into a fine julienne. You should have about 3/4 of a cup.

4. Put the julienned rinds in a saucepan with 2 cups of cold water, bring to a boil and boil for 10 to 20 seconds. Drain, and cool under cold water. Dry with paper towels and set aside.

5. Peel the rest of the oranges with a sharp knife, cutting closely all around the flesh, so that the pith as well as the rind is removed and the oranges are completely nude.

6. Cut the orange flesh from the attached segments.

7. Spoon about 4 tablespoons of the blackberry sauce on each of the six plates. Arrange orange segments in a wheel design in the center of the sauce, and sprinkle the julienne of orange rind around the plate at the edge of the sauce to form a border.

8. Garnish the center of the plate with a mint sprig, and serve with a slice of lukewarm brioche, pound cake or some cookies.
Yield: 6 servings.

Grapefruit Gratin

2 grapefruits, preferably pink (about 1 pound each)
3 tablespoons light brown sugar
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon Cognac (optional)

1. Using a sharp, thin-bladed knife, remove the skin and underlying pith from each grapefruit, leaving the fruit totally exposed.

2. Cut between the membranes on each side of the grapefruit segments, and remove the flesh in wedges. You should have about 24 wedges.

3. Squeeze the membranes over a bowl to extract the juice, and save or drink.

4. Arrange the grapefruit sections in one layer in a gratin dish. When you are ready to complete the dish, preheat the broiler.

5. Sprinkle the grapefruit segments with sugar, and dot them with butter. Place the dish about 4 inches under the heat in the broiler, and broil for about 5 minutes to brown the edges of the segments lightly. If desired, sprinkle with the cognac, and serve immediately.
Yield: 4 servings.

Candied Grapefruit, Orange and Lemon Chips

1 ruby red grapefruit (about 1 pound)
1 large seedless orange (about 12 ounces)
1 large lemon (about 9 ounces)

5 tablespoons sugar

1. Preheat an oven to 200 degrees.

2. Cut the grapefruit crosswise into 10 slices, each about 1/8-inch thick, and discard the end pieces.

3. Line a jelly roll pan with aluminum foil, and arrange the grapefruit slices in one layer in the pan. Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons of the sugar.

4. Repeat step 3 with the orange and lemon, cutting each into slices about 1/8-inch thich and sprinkling them all with the remaining 3 tablespoons of sugar.

5. Bake the pans on two separate racks in the preheated oven (or use two ovens, if available) for 3 1/2 to 4 hours, until the slices are dried and candied but not browned.

6. Remove them immediately from the pans and cool them to room temperature on a rack. Store the citrus chips in a plastic container, tightly covered. Serve them as a garnish or snack.
Yields: About 30 chips.

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The Greening of the Herd

By Marian Burros

Early May weather in Vermont is predictable in its unpredictability. In one of the state's most beautiful farming communities, wintery gusts of wind were blowing across the Flack Family Farm while budding trees promised spring. Occasional shafts of sunlight broke through the clouds to light the chickens, pigs, sheep and cows grazing on fields of luscious green grass.

Doug Flack and his daughter, Sarah, have 18 head of cattle here in this pastoral bit of northwestern Vermont, including a new crop of calves happy to be petted, 30 plump hens making a racket around the henhouse, 40 sheep and their lambs somewhere over the hill and 23 sows, boars and piglets, which roto-till the soil, readying it for planting crops. All the animals here are raised the old-fashioned way, and the cows and sheep survive on a diet made up exclusively of grass.

Mr. Flack is at the forefront of a nascent agricultural movement that is slowly gaining strength in small pockets of the United States and abroad, one that has turned away from the modern industrial feedlot, where animals are fed a steady diet of corn and antibiotics, in favor of the ancient methods of the herdsman, where cattle are raised on grass — more healthfully, supporters say — without hormones or routine use of antibiotics.

The flavor of grass-fed animals is capturing the attention of chefs on both coasts. In New York, Jonathan Waxman is serving grass-fed veal at Washington Park; at Anne Rosenzweig's Inside, both grass-fed beef and veal are on the menu, as they are at Dan Barber's Blue Hill and Peter Hoffman's Savoy. Cesare Casella is readying a herd of grass-fed cows upstate for his restaurant, Beppe, while serving superb pasture-raised pork. In California, Alice Waters has ordered grass-fed beef for Chez Panisse in Berkeley, and Traci Des Jardins is serving it at Acme Chophouse in San Francisco. While it's not yet widely available, grass-fed beef is in specialty markets in the Bay Area.

Americans are coming late to this old-fashioned way of raising animals. Pampas-raised beef from Argentina is renowned as some of the best in the world; many European farmers never stopped raising animals on grass; and the English never gave it up entirely.

Indeed, pasture-raised meat from small independent farms has gained many supporters in England since the outbreak of mad cow disease that effectively crippled the British commercial beef industry, thought to be the result of feeding cows parts of infected animals. Prince Charles in particular has been a vocal proponent of the grass-

feeding movement; today there are superb examples of grass-fed meat at many butcher shops and at least two new up-market restaurants in London: Notting Grill and Smiths of Smithfields.

In short, feeding animals a grass diet is hardly a new trend. Pasture-raised meat is what Heidi and her border collie were after in the Swiss Alps with Peter the goatherd in the 19th century. It's what nomads have done for hundreds of years, and it's how cattle were raised in this country until the 1950's, when fertilizer companies began to offer farmers subsidies to use their fertilizers to grow grain. Corn soon replaced grass as the feed of choice for the last months of a steer's life; it fattened the cattle faster than grass and was available year-round. Before long the term "corn fed" was as good as saying the tenderest meat in the world.

The peasant wisdom of yore has been advanced by science. "It's medieval farming meets modern technology," Mr. Flack said. "Instead of having children making sure animals don't graze in the wrong pasture, we have electronic fences and remote control to start and stop the fences."

Many small farmers, especially in the Northeast, which has the country's best grass, are pursuing grass-fed animals as a way to save family farms. Not so incidentally, they point to the human health and environmental advantages of animals raised this way. Mr. Flack is one of the few who are concerned with the taste of those animals. Taste, after all, is what will ultimately sell his product in the open market.

"What we produce is exquisite meat, not a smooshy tenderness, a nice texture and not lean," he said. "I think lean meat is dreadful. Ours is juicy and smooth, not gristly. It's beef that tastes like that sweet smell you smell when you go into the barn."

I'll have to take his word for it. Mr. Flack didn't have a single piece to sample. It's one of the problems with grass-fed animals, at least from a consumer's point of view: with only some exceptions, they are available seasonally and even then must generally be ordered in advance, like Bordeaux futures.

Farmers like Mr. Flack don't even think of themselves as cattlemen. Ask him his profession, and he will say, "I raise grass." Farmers who pasture-raise their animals must be first and foremost grass farmers, said Allan Nation, owner and publisher of The Stockman Grass Farmer, a magazine in Hattiesburg, Miss., that has been cheerleading the grass-fed movement since 1984.

"We were supposed to be harvesting grass for animals and not raising animals. We've all forgotten that," Mr. Nation said. If a farmer doesn't raise grass, he will soon find himself feeding his animals grain. "That's how we got into trouble."

Yet for grass-fed meat to become mainstream in the United States, growers will have to solve a taste and texture problem. Most of the grass-fed meat available to consumers here is at the point of quality where organic food sat, wilted and withered, 20 years ago. Today there is some grass-fed meat that is superior to the meat harvested from grain-fed animals, like that I tasted from River Run Farm in Oregon, but after tasting 32 samples of pasture-raised beef, pork, veal and lamb from 19 different farms, I know that much of it is wildly inconsistent, often tough and stringy, with an off taste. Still, many people who choose grass-fed meat do so for reasons that have more to do with health and the environment than they have to do with taste. For example, grass-fed animals are less likely to harbor deadly bacteria like E. coli O157:H7. Their meat has fewer calories and less fat, and it has within it high levels of conjugated linoleic acid,

which, in preliminary animal studies, has shown promise in cancer reduction. Grass-fed animals also have more omega-3 fatty acids than corn-fed ones, and although the omega-3's differ from those in fish, they may still be beneficial.

For those reasons among others, demand for grass-fed meat has increased far beyond this country's ability to produce it. Certainly it has surpassed the farmers' ability to produce grass-fed meat that is consistently flavorful and tender. "Quite frankly," Mr. Nation said, "the demand has been so great we haven't focused on the quality of it."

Still, people are clamoring. "We're thinking of selling it on eBay," said Jonathan Chase, who grazes close to 300 cows in Derby Line, Vt. The concept has occurred to more than one frustrated farmer.

"We are just at the beginning of this," said Ridgway Shinn III, director of the New England Livestock Alliance. "Realistically it will be a couple of years before we have a significant number of animals."

There are three keys to the development of tender, tasty and juicy grass-fed animals, experts say: the quality of the grass; the process by which they are slaughtered and aged; and their genetic makeup. America has the grass, though it is not enough to bring all animals raised here to market. It is slowly opening slaughterhouses. But it doesn't have the genetics.

"Mongrels," said Gearld Fry, a partner in the Jacob Alliance, a livestock consulting firm in Rose Bud, Ark., speaking of a majority of cattle in this country. (Conventional cattlemen consider the firm's work to be part of a hopelessly radical movement.) "Most of them have been bred for the feedlots to be huge and don't do well on grass. What we want to do is bring the animals back to the proper genetic makeup and back to what they were meant to eat — grass."

Importing semen from cattle abroad will produce "astronomical numbers in five years," Mr. Fry added. "Only one-tenth of the cows and one-tenth of 1 percent of the bulls are genetically superior animals in this country."

Once the right cows are here, farmers will have to learn how to manage the grass they do have. Intensive rotational grass management is the term Mr. Flack uses; it involves electrified fences that allow the farmer to move the cattle from one pasture to another so they don't overgraze. Depending on the season, the period of time a herd is allowed to graze in a particular field may be no more than half a day; at most it will be three days. Then the grass has to be given a chance to grow back. "If it is not done properly," Mr. Flack said, "over time the quality of the land goes down and the quality of the animals goes down."

Sales of most grass-fed meat in the United States take place locally, and much of that meat is sold frozen. Still, as many in the business of raising it point out, grass-fed meat seems to be on the same trajectory as organic food once was. It will become more readily available as interest in its flavor and health benefits increase.

"Just like organic vegetables," said Allen Williams, an animal geneticist and a partner in the Jacob Alliance, "the lunatic fringe has become mainstream."

Road Food for the Fast Lane

by Regina Schrambling

Englishtown, N.J. - Standing less than six feet from the track at Raceway Park here, it's hard to disagree with a promoter who calls drag racing "the most sensory of all spectator sports."

You can smell it in the melting rubber, see it in the blur between blinks and hear it in engines blasting from zero to 200 miles an hour in seven seconds. You can even feel it: the vibration of two race cars pounding down the track has been measured at 2.2 on the Richter scale.

Only taste is a conspicuous no-show. If drag racing has a flavor, it is sausage and peppers, or cheese steaks and fries. And if it's grim pickings for the fans, it's even bleaker for the competitors. This is not a world where real men eat mesclun. Judging by all the boxes I spotted outside drivers' trailers, Dunkin' Donuts is the breakfast and dinner of champions.

But now even this bastion of burgers and Budweiser has been infiltrated by the new American cult of the chef.

A Pro Stock racing team that has long traveled with a cook proudly hired one with a pedigree in February. And while the chef, Nicky Morse, may not be making the galantines and terrines he perfected at Ziggy's Continental in Columbus, Ohio, he is introducing the team to a whole new world of ingredients like Boursin cheese and chorizo salami and premium bacon — sometimes all in one sandwich.

Just before lunchtime last Friday, Mr. Morse was ensconced in one end of an 18-wheeler in a stainless-steel kitchen that would seem large in a Manhattan apartment. On a Garland burner he had Great Northern beans simmering with a meaty ham hock; in the oven three loaves of bread were just developing a golden crust. He was slicing deep red tomatoes and layering them with fresh mozzarella on a counter covered with bowls of roasted peppers and chopped garlic and an array of imported cheeses and Italian meats. Over the next two hours he would assemble sandwiches and ladle soup for a succession of drivers, mechanics, technicians, publicity agents and one wife and baby traveling with Team Jeg's, a father-sons stock car team in from Columbus, Ohio, for the $2 million Matco Tools SuperNational event here. When he finished, he would start marinating Flintstones-worthy veal chops to be served family style with penne before the night's race.

When Mr. Morse's kitchen is wiped clean, other teams are just setting out in search of a restaurant, often for their first real meal of the day. Jeg Coughlin Jr., a son of the team's founder and a Pro Stock world record-holder, said: "We used to have to go out

to dinner, and it would be 11 o'clock at night. Now we work to have dinner by 6:30, and it keeps the team's chemical balance on keel."

In a sport that emphasizes fuel and performance, Mr. Morse provides just another competitive edge, not so very different from the weather station the team uses to track racing conditions. ("Humidity is good for bread and terrible for the cars," the chef said.)

"Sometimes when I shop, I feel bad because the bill is so big," he said. "But they've got some of the top guys in the world working here, and they want to keep them." No wonder he can go through five pounds of chocolate, Callebaut and Hershey's alike, on a weekend, much of it in a tire-size tart.

Team Jeg's can indulge in a full-time chef partly because the family's main enterprise, Jeg's High Performance Mail Order, sells racing parts to the tune of more than $100 million a year. Racing alone is big business, though: the event here was the ninth stop on a $50 million, 23-event circuit of the National Hot Rod Association.

Mr. Morse, who is 36 but says he still gets carded, cooks for the team on weekends it races and spends the balance of the year at his home in London, Ohio. He is used to oven-frying on the fly, having worked as a freelance chef for Country Music Television, traveling to sets and the homes of artists like Tanya Tucker to cook. The difference today is that the same faces are in his kitchen for every meal.

"Sometimes I feel like my grandmother," he said after asking yet another team member who had ambled in, "Want something to eat?" Handing out sandwiches, cheese and chocolate, he seemed like a human vending machine for the antsy and the bored. A new variety of Vlasic pickles and an obscure Norwegian cheese were offered with equal excitement.

The chef found the job through a team member but did not accept it until he had vetted his potential employers. Realizing that their favorite restaurant in Columbus was an Italian place he admired, "he knew we were past the Olive Garden," Mr. Coughlin said. As soon as he took over the mobile kitchen, he threw out his predecessor's chafing dishes and pushed aside the jars of dried herbs.

Despite a filet mignon budget and freedom to cook what he chooses ("they have the option not to eat it"), Mr. Morse has limits. His small refrigerator and stove run on propane. The water tank is tiny, and he has to scrub his pots and pans with the abstemiousness of a drought victim. To save water, he dispenses with china in favor of throwaway plates.

He has learned to do most of his shopping at home, buying meats from a wholesaler and cheeses from well-stocked specialists. "I can only count on finding butter and milk on the road," he said, recounting his fruitless search for fresh thyme and skinny asparagus near Old Bridge Township Raceway Park.

Mr. Morse could almost pass for a driver, in his bright chef's coat with the name Jeg's splashed across it. But he knows his place is in the kitchen. He is not allowed to drive any Team Jeg's vehicle bigger than a golf cart (even that once accidentally wound up in a racing lane). He is not sure what model year his own car is but knows it has been hit 11 times, sometimes with him in it.

The chef has come a long way in just a couple of months. When a souped-up Chevy

Cavalier outside his kitchen guns its motor with the decibels of 30 Hell's Angels at a stoplight, he no longer even flinches.

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I Like Tuna Cooked, Not Raw

by David Pasternack

I started cooking when I was 18, and my first job was in a fish restaurant on Long Island. I grew up on the South Shore, and I still live there and go fishing there. Over the years, I had lots of French training, but I wanted to do fish. Joe Bastianich and Mario Batali gave me the chance when they opened Esca in Manhattan.

The biggest lesson I've learned working in an Italian restaurant is to keep things simple. Take tuna, for example. I do not serve rare seared tuna, though it is something that almost every chef has been doing. I cook tuna slowly in olive oil and then let it marinate as it cools. It's thoroughly cooked, but if you do it the right way, it's rich enough to melt in your mouth. It's the way they eat tuna in Italy. The American culture does not understand this. No one eats rare tuna in Italy.

I like yellowfin or albacore tuna the best, and I use the belly cut because it's the fattest. In some shops you can buy canned tuna that's labeled ventresca. That's the belly cut. Regular tuna is from the shoulder. I get the whole fish without the head delivered to the restaurant. Ninety pounds. The fish are bled and dressed at sea. Fresh tuna that's handled properly will have no veins or blood lines.

No matter how I plan to serve the tuna, I first cut it in chunks and season it with sea salt and pepper. If you just season your oil, it doesn't penetrate the fish. I cover the tuna with oil in a pot, add two cloves of garlic, bring up the heat and then let it barely simmer for 10 minutes. I add bay leaves and lemon thyme. Regular thyme and lemon zest are a good substitute. Then I let it sit for at least an hour.

It's like making a pot roast: if you make it on Monday and wait until Wednesday to eat it, it will only get better. The Italians have done tuna that way for 1,000 years. They'd catch the tuna when it was running in the Strait of Messina and preserve it in oil.

I often put the cooked tuna in oil and seal it in canning jars, but you can refrigerate it for a few days. Just bring it to room temperature before you use it. You can even serve it warm, chunks of it over spaghetti with black olives and some of the oil. Or with a white bean salad. Or over ripe tomatoes. But it's no good piping hot or ice cold.

I like to mix it in a salad with romano beans, the flat green beans that are so meaty, like filet mignon. They're better than regular green beans but you can use them if you can't find the romanos. I cook the beans in lots of salted water until they're tender. I don't like those crunchy little French beans. I've noticed that even in France they're

now cooking vegetables until they're tender. And in Italy the vegetables are always well-cooked.

With the beans and the tuna I like some potatoes, fingerlings that aren't too starchy. Instead of salad greens I add parsley leaves and lovage. Lovage has a celery taste, a cooling flavor with a touch of bitterness. If you can't find it, use the inner leaves from a bunch of celery.

I also put salted anchovies in the salad. I soak them first to get rid of some of the salt, but you need something salty. Like the anchovies. Or some nice Calabrese olives with their anise flavor. Or big capers. I toss everything with a dressing made from Italian red wine vinegar, some extra virgin olive oil and some of the oil from the tuna. The dressing has to be fairly acidic: two to one, oil to vinegar, instead of three to one.

I like to keep the tuna chunky, not break it up too much. It's a rustic dish, and you want to serve it looking rustic. Toss it like a salad on a big platter. A glass of wine, some crusty bread and the salad are all you need for lunch on a hot day.

It hasn't been hard for me to feel right at home cooking Italian. My wife is Italian. Most people who meet me think I'm Italian, even though my family is Russian and English. I even once said, "we Italians" on television. My father never let me forget it.

Tiny Poppy Seeds, Ground Tinier for Big Flavor

by Kay Rentschler

Something of a dark Gypsy exoticism surrounds blue poppy seeds, whose richness brings savory depth to confections. Their flavor flirts at the edges of animal, vegetable and mineral without making a firm commitment to any of them. Ultimately, it is as a finely granular, dusky backdrop that poppy seeds make their point best, a point well articulated in the presence of lemon or orange peel, the smoke of sweet spices or the fragrant notes of honey or orange flower water.

But that does not describe poppy seeds as most of us know them. These curious little granules seem to have a secret life - one known better by cultures that have used them for centuries.

For most Americans, poppy seeds and bagels go hand in hand. They offer the teeth a tiny crunch, and a toothpick hours of gainful employment. But they don't register much of a taste. Get a group of them together, though, and they register - not always pleasantly. Poppy seed fillings are anything but weightless, tending to go dense and dry. Yet there is a reason poppy seeds have been cultivated since the second century, and it is not just the magical and medicinal properties associated with the poppy itself.

The more familiar blue poppy seeds, prized in dishes from Eastern Europe - cakes and pastries, dumplings and noodles, and more - are produced mainly in the Netherlands. But they, like all poppy seeds, originated in Asia. Not all poppy seeds are blue - cream, yellow, dark red and white are among the other colors - and not all of them make their way into doughs and desserts. White seeds, for example, produced in India, Turkey and Southeast Asia, are ground or toasted to enhance savory fare. White seeds have a neutral creamy nuttiness that makes sauces lush. They tolerate sauces with a lot going on in them - spice and fire in particular.

Poppy seeds are upward of 40 percent oil. Their fine oils turn quickly, making the seeds' naturally sweet and nutty flavor a thing of the past. They grow rancid without missing a beat, and so must be purchased fresh from a reliable merchant. (Keep them frozen or refrigerated at home.)

Poppy seeds also benefit from group interaction - sprinkling them around is mere child's play - and must be crushed to work their magic. Then their emulsive properties are similar to those of ground nuts, and they can be used in cakes, fillings and sauces. Fillings and cakes go dry and moccasinlike if overbaked, however, and are notably dowdy without proper enhancements - cream and fragrance, for instance, are crucial to their appeal.

The nubby weave that results when crushed poppy seeds, cream, sugar and eggs are baked

is satisfying in small amounts and explains why such sweets are treated more like confections than a slab of poppy seed poundcake is likely to be. A dark, bitter demitasse is a poppy seed confection's perfect soul mate.

Poppy seed fillings like a sheath of dough around them, the thinner and buttery the better. Phyllo, strudel or flaky pie dough are more appealing than the thick heavy bread doughs some recipes suggest.

I hoped my food processor would be up to the task of grinding poppy seeds, but it was not. The seeds swirled around like dust on a street corner and came back to settle unscathed. A mortar and pestle was equally ineffective. I was left brushing stale grounds out of my coffee grinder and sacrificing a handful of white rice to its blades for cleaning before I could grind the seeds.

The trick to grinding poppy seeds for desserts is to do so just enough to break them open, releasing their oils, while letting them hang on to traces of their crisp contours. Though a number of recipes call for soaking the seeds overnight in water before grinding them, the fillings I made with soaked poppy seeds were spongy and sodden.

Among their many virtues, poppy seeds were once thought capable of divining true love. Medieval legend suggests tossing a piece of poppy seed cake out the door and asking a dog to fetch it. The direction the dog takes on its return will be the direction from which true love arrives. A charming idea, but I didn't try it.

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Solving the Riddle of the Duck

by Russ Parsons

If the hottest part of summer is the dog days, the first few weeks of fall are my duck days. There is no better way to spend a cool foggy day than in the kitchen, and I can imagine no better companion for that than one of those billed birds, or maybe two or three.

This might surprise some people. Duck suffers from a difficult reputation, at least culinarily. Too many sweet-and-sour duck a l'oranges at indifferent restaurants. Too many attempts at roasting a duck at home that ended up stringy and greasy.

But this is a fault of the cook, not of the bird. Give me a duck, and I'll give you a meal. Give me several, and we can invite friends. In fact, I did this just the other day. Three ducks turned into four courses for 10 people. And all without the benefit of fuzzy accounting.

There are two main problems with ducks. First, the legs and the breast meat are so radically different. The breast meat is tender and, to my taste, perfect when cooked to about medium-rare. The legs are the opposite, stringy and full of tendons that need to be well cooked before they soften.

This is one reason roast duck is so often disappointing: If you get the breasts right, the legs are going to be downright inedible. But if you cook to the legs, you'll wind up with a dried-out breast.

The other problem with ducks is that they contain a remarkable amount of fat, most of it located just under the skin. If you're not careful, you'll wind up with a spattering mess in the oven and a dinner that's dripping in grease.

The most delicious solution to both these problems is to look at a duck not as a single piece of meat, but as a collection of parts, the sum of which is much greater than the whole. This involves a little work and a bit of time, but hey, it's a fall weekend, what else do you have to do?

First, you catch your duck. The best place to find them is at Asian markets. For some reason, fresh duckling that is an $8-a-pound luxury at a Western grocery sells for less than $2 a pound in an Asian one. Best of all, the ducks will usually come with their heads and feet attached (why this is a good thing, I'll explain later).

If you're not up for the full deal, many Asian markets also sell fresh duck legs. What they do with the breasts, I don't know, but I've got a suspicion they will probably be appearing soon at a fancy restaurant near you.

Nothing goes to waste

The next step is to separate it into its respective parts. Take the breast filets from the carcass. Do this by cutting down the length of the breast right next to the central "keel" bone. Gently pull away the breast meat, scraping along the ribs with a sharp knife whenever the meat sticks. Score the breasts lightly on the skin side, cutting through the skin but not to the meat. This will help drain away the fat during cooking. Season with salt, pepper and some minced rosemary, cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate.

Cut off the legs and peel away the skin and any visible fat. Start the legs braising, then cut the skin and fat into rough 2-inch squares and place them in a saucepan.

Remove as much skin and fat as possible from the rest of the carcass and add it to the saucepan too. The neck is particularly rich in fat, one reason it's good to shop at an Asian market.

What is left will be primarily bones. Put them in a roasting pan with a couple of carrots and an onion and roast at 400 to 450 degrees until everything is well browned, about an hour. After roasting, put everything in a stockpot, add enough water to cover and set it to simmer for the rest of the afternoon to make a good strong broth. Don't forget to add the feet, which are rich in gelatin and will add body to the liquid.

What about the fat? Now we're getting to the good part. Add about half a cup of water to the saucepan and set it over medium heat. Shortly after it comes to a simmer, you will begin to hear a sputtering. At that point, the water will have evaporated, and all that will be left in the pan is pure fat and the skin that's cooking in it.

Let the fat continue to cook until the bits of skin are well-browned and crisp. Scoop them out with a slotted spoon, sprinkle with fine salt and drain on some paper towels. These are like duck chicharrones (you might call them "quacklings").

Cool the fat and decant it into a large jar. You may be amazed at how much fat results from this process. With just three ducks, I ended up with a full quart of duck fat. Be sure you use a really large jar. This is one of the sublime cooking fats -- duck is to southern France what bacon is to Georgia.

Now the work is done. The rest of the meal is mainly garnish.

One duck, several courses

Serve the broth first, perhaps with some tiny boiled turnips. Then come the stewed legs, served on polenta or lightly buttered pasta.

Grill the breasts, skin-side first for about 12 to 14 minutes, then on the meaty side for another six to eight. Slice them crosswise, cutting them on the bias to show as much of the meat as possible and serve the slices around the outside of the platter with some kind of braised bitter greens (maybe the turnip tops?) in the center.

Finally, toss the duck cracklings with a variety of sturdy lettuces and dress the whole thing with red wine vinegar and just a little olive oil.

I'm thinking a big California Chardonnay for the broth (one of the few foods it pairs really well with), a Zinfandel or Barbera for the ragu and then a Pinot Noir or Barolo for the breast and to linger with over the salad. For dessert, anything more than sorbet or fresh fruit would be overkill.

Forget paradise, just give me a fall day with a duck.

Recipe: **Duck Ragu**

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Giving Cabbage the Royal Treatment

By Kay Rentschler

Nothing says winter vegetable like a head of cabbage. I see one just now, heading into a steam bath with a sack of potatoes and a side of pork. Of course, winter has no exclusive rights to cabbage, which finds itself scraped raw on a box grater in July. There is, however, something in a cabbage's gravity, the inscrutability of its smooth, round face, and the jealous grip it keeps on its inner leaves that tells the cook to chop, steam and soften.

Cuisines that have adopted the cabbage as their own — Russian, Polish and Hungarian in particular (the Germans and Austrians got partial custody) — agree. They bundle up cabbage and get it good and warm, then stuff it, use it to stuff other things, stew it, sauté it, salt it and simmer it some more. The silky richness and sweet pungency that result explain why winter and cabbage arrive together in the same frosted breath.

It is not surprising that head cabbage (green, red and Savoy), the stoutest and most stalwart of the wild cabbage family, stayed up north, while some of its sexier relatives, like lacinato (black kale) and broccoli rabe, headed south to drizzle olive oil on their leaves.

Green and red cabbages weather temperatures between cool and downright cold — 20 degrees will not faze them — and can step up to the heat as well. The crinkly, smiling Savoy cabbage, on the other hand, is more tender and sweet in character than its counterparts and frilly enough to shiver. As such, Savoy cabbage has made its culinary home in moderate European climates like those of England and France.

Cabbage has enjoyed fame and perfidy. The ancient Romans celebrated its blood-cleansing properties, particularly in the context of hangovers. Today, doctors tell us to tank up on cabbage for its antioxidant and potentially anti-cancer benefits. But throughout much of history, cabbage has suffered marketing problems. Considered a poor man's food, it was deemed unworthy of preparation by Europe's great chefs (Lewis Carroll's fanciful "cabbages and kings" speech conveyed the incongruity of the two words in a single phrase), and to this day carries a whiff of poverty about it.

Unfortunately, that is not the only whiff we get from cabbage, especially boiled cabbage, whose sulfuric compounds sneak through cracks and keyholes to hang poisonously in the hall. The best solution to cabbage odor is simple: don't overcook it. Some of the very compounds that make cabbage healthful and tasty (called glucosinolates) turn ugly when they leach from the vegetable, into its cooking liquid and off into space. Proper cooking also assures that nutrients stay where they are supposed to — in the cabbage, not in the cooking liquid.

Consumption of cabbage is thought to occasion bloating, which can lead to social

embarrassment. How nice for everyone that caraway seed, a medieval answer to those ills, pulls a double shift as antidote and aromatic.

No cabbage deserves to be boiled, a Hungarian chef once told me. Indeed, a gentle braise, brief simmer or leisurely sauté pays off handsomely when cooking cabbage, which will smell and taste sweet for your troubles. Red cabbage is higher in fiber and takes longer to cook than green.

Cabbage is still dirt cheap, but squeaky clean. No garden grit enters its inner sphere, so it is core, chop and go for the cook.

Having considered one head much like the next, I was surprised to find that green and red cabbage come with dozens of proper names. Given the abundance of carefully cultivated cabbage types, I wondered if consumers could be trained to recognize differences among them. Unfortunately, said Dr. Matt Kleinhenz, an Ohio State University horticulturist and cabbage enthusiast, our options are not as abundant as they might seem.

Most cabbage varieties, he said, are developed with mass marketing in mind (for sauerkraut, coleslaw and the like); those sold loose in stores are considered all-purpose and bear no labels at all. Growers have worked to make all cabbage mild and unassertive — vanilla, in effect, he said.

So, assuming that vanilla is what you want, what should you look for when buying cabbage? Taut, glistening leaves free of little holes or discoloration, and bowling ball density in the hand. And color? Red cabbage is consistently colored throughout. Green cabbage, however, becomes progressively paler toward the center, Dr. Kleinhenz said. Heads with a minimal green in their outer leaves have been heavily trimmed, suggesting they may be old or that there were problems on the farm, in storage or in transit. Short answer: go for the green.

Here we are then, an ice rink of winter before us. There is plenty of time for a few plates of cabbage. The fusty king? Forget him. The head that rolls may be his own.

- Recipe: Cabbage and Potato Gratin With Mustard Bread Crumbs
- Recipe: Cabbage and Sparerib Soup

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Gingerbread, Pleasingly Plain or Dressed Up

By Kay Rentschler

Gingerbread isn't the prettiest sister home for the holidays. She is plain and pensive, preferring family and close friends to fancy parties.

But throw a shimmering sash around her, a well-chosen jewel or two, and everyone runs to her side. Gingerbread is out on the dance floor while her sisters are still getting dressed.

The best gingerbread has a glazed umber surface, a deep velvet crumb and a synergy of warm spices that rush into a wall of molasses before you can nab them. There they smolder seductively until the trail ends and you have to take another bite.

A good gingerbread recipe is equal parts boldness and reserve. No one wants gingerbread to be light on its feet (a buoyant open crumb is all wrong and suggests overzealous leavening), but it shouldn't be ponderous. The surface sheen and guardedly bitter sweetness can be traced to molasses.

Moisture in the batter is important; the spices create a suggestion of dryness. The molasses, butter and brown sugar counteract this, aided by a couple of eggs.

Balance is central, too: skirmishes among seasonings that result in an alpha hit of powdered clove, say, or a bitter jolt of molasses, can downgrade gingerbread's come-back-for-more appeal.

Ginger, of course, is the lead spice, dogged by cinnamon, and then things get interesting: a wisp of clove for depth, a sneeze of cayenne for heat and a sprinkle of anise for magic are my personal favorites.

Gingerbread's long-felt flavor is sustained in part by a texture of unbroken calm; minced fruits and nuts and hairy bits of fresh ginger interrupt the batter's flow and are simply a distraction.

The urge — and it is great — to eat gingerbread screaming hot should be resisted: the knife bruises the crumb, and the taste of raw flour is inclined to sneak through the spice.

Wait 45 minutes. Gingerbread's texture is sublime the first day, but suffers a bit of drying the second (when, oddly, its flavor improves). On the third day a broiler comes in handy, and some butter.

The makeover of gingerbread from stay-at-home to "it" girl took little effort. A round pan, for starters, helped: it's hard to beautify a sliced shingle no matter what you do. Frosting, I

felt, would be insulting: gingerbread is not frivolous. But flowing sauce, yes, definitely.

Needing to be foiled, gingerbread loves whipped cream. But it also takes to tart winter fruits like a shortcake to strawberries.

Poached or broiled pineapple sings alongside gingerbread, as do a few spoonfuls of pomelo curd, garnished with candied pomelo peel. Pan-seared, sugar-dipped tart apple wedges are lovely as well. The gingerbread softens under the cream and enjoys the fruit's sharpness.

Start to finish, two hours, and the kitchen smells like a Christmas carol.

- Recipe: Spicy Gingerbread
- Recipe: Sugar-Dipped Pan-Seared Apples With Apple Butter
- Recipe: Poached Pineapple, Cranberries and Pecans

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Just Right for Hanukkah

by Joan Nathan

When I invited a friend to dinner last Friday to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah, she accepted with a caveat: she and her husband do not eat red meat. I said that I was making brisket, but would give them something else. "Oh, but we eat brisket!" she exclaimed.

Almost everyone likes brisket. It is the perfect comfort food: fragrant, flavorful, and if you cook it right, fork tender. (I always have one on hand in the freezer.) In Eastern European Jewish homes, brisket was reserved for special occasions like weddings. In Texas, barbecue brisket is everyday food. A versatile cut, brisket can be simmered as a pot roast on top of the stove or cured and used for corned beef and pastrami.

Brisket is the Zelig of the kitchen. It takes on the character of whoever cooks it. In the early part of the 20th century, when "The Settlement Cook Book" reigned supreme in American Jewish households, recipes for savory briskets of beef with sauerkraut, cabbage or lima beans were the norm. As tastes became more exotic, cranberry or barbecue sauce, root beer, lemonade and even sake worked their way into recipes.

"My mother always sent me to New York with a huge brisket with gravy frozen in," recalled Eli N. Evans, the author of "The Provincials," who was born in North Carolina.

"She was worried that I couldn't eat good Southern Jewish home cooking in the barren canyons of Manhattan. We called it Atlanta brisket, and her secret was marinating the meat overnight in the dark, epicurean liquid called Coca-Cola."

Levana Kirschenbaum, an owner of Levana's Restaurant in New York and the author of the just published "Levana's Table: Kosher Cooking for Everyone" (Stewart Tabori & Chang), grew up in Morocco, where few if any cooks made brisket. Hers was a tradition of top-of-the-stove lamb tagines. While many Moroccan cooks in this country have adapted their lamb dishes to brisket with tomatoes, preserved lemons and olives, Ms. Kirschenbaum has created a new brisket with Asian ingredients. "I wanted the hint of sweet and sour so I made a brisket with ginger and soy sauce," she said. "Coca-Cola gives it a bubbly fizzly thing. It is exciting."

Or if you want it simple, do it as Sanford Herskovitz, a k a Mr. Brisket, a Cleveland meat purveyor, does: with Coke, onion soup mix and chili sauce. Mitchell Davis, author of the recently published "Mensch Chef" (Clarkson Potter) scoffed at sweet and sour until his editor Chris Pavone insisted he try his brisket with pears. "I was a disbeliever on principle," he said. But he tried the recipe.

"As I cooked the liquid, puréeing the onions and pears together and tasting the result, I realized he was right," Mr. Davis said. "It was the magic of mixing ingredients."

Mr. Davis might have taken convincing, but Jewish cooks really are no strangers to sweet and sour brisket. Among the evidence is a restaurant review that appeared in The New York Times in 1872, entitled "A New Cuisine. The Jewish Restaurant — Peculiar Food — Experiences of a Seeker After Novel Dishes." The article read, "What we actually had before us seemed to be beef with raisins, the whole floating in a sea of gravy. . . . Beef and raisins were incompatibilities." The waiter, sensing the diners' distress, told them: "Some people's very fond of it, but generally if you ain't born and bred up religiously, that kind of thing, why, Sir, it's what they call it in this 'ere country, rather rough. 'Ave a mutton chop, Sir!"

Would anyone, today, turn down brisket for mutton chops?

There are two rules for cooking brisket: cook it long and cook it with the fat. Since the meat comes from the muscular forequarters of the steer, slow cooking is required to tenderize the meat. The first cut, or flat portion of the brisket, is available oven-ready at supermarkets all over the country.

Jack Lebewohl, the owner of the Second Avenue Deli, whose brisket recently won first prize in a Slow Food competition, said: "I try to get a very large, good-quality brisket. It should not be too lean. You have to be careful with the cooking, spice it right, and cook it slow." For the cholesterol-conscious, the fat can be frightening.

Mr. Herskovitz is outspoken on the subject: "When there is no fat you absolutely kill the taste," he said. "If you cut the fat off beforehand, your brisket is `farfaln.' You have defeated your purpose."

But you can have the cooking benefits of fat without serving a plate of it: simply cut the fat off after the brisket has finished cooking. One home brisket cook, Lucy Lang of Riverdale, in the Bronx, who has been making brisket almost every Friday night since 1949, said the secret is sweet and spicy paprika, a little fat, and loads of onions, which give the meat flavor and moisture.

Many busy cooks prepare the brisket a day ahead and refrigerate it, allowing the flavor to deepen. When ready to serve, they simply remove the fat, slice the brisket against the grain and reheat it. That is what I'll do this Hanukkah and that is what will have my "we don't eat red meat" friends asking for seconds with their potato latkes.

- Recipe: Brisket in Sweet-and-Sour Sauce

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A New Year's Resolution: Guiltless Gratification

By Nigella Lawson

I have never been a member of the Lite Eating Brigade. Eating is necessary; it is also pleasurable. Further, I believe the obsessive tendency to demonize certain foods is downright unhealthy. It is food-fearmongering.

As far as I'm concerned, Diet Another Day.

And yet, and yet. I am not impervious to seasonal pressures. Those who say they enter the new year without thought of diminishment programs or belt-tightening resolutions are not being entirely honest. Besides, after the more than usual gluttonous indulgences of the holiday season, I actually look forward to a period of restraint.

But if it's lean, mean spa cuisine you're after, you've come to the wrong shop. My notion of restraint carries within it no trace of self-denial. Perhaps I should make it quite clear from the start that even when I'm trying to reduce my food intake, I don't fool myself — or others — that my concerns are, in the purest sense, dietary.

I know that it makes some people feel better if they tell themselves that their food obsessions are health concerns, but I have no intention of passing off neurotic self-absorption as smug, if specious, nutritional awareness.

The key point here is vanity, underpinned by a primitive seasonally induced tendency to believe in and hope for renewal and transformation. It might not last long, but I go into the new year, as we all do, full of sprightly intentions.

Nor do I claim to be above the vagaries of fashion, and in hopeful weight-reduction mode, I am assisted by the current vogue for low-carbohydrate eating. By my lights, any diet that lets you eat cheese, red meat and bacon is a good thing.

Low fat tends to mean low flavor, and eating food that tastes at best bland and at worst bad seems a waste. Besides, people who follow low-fat diets always look somewhat dried up to me. I mean that both literally (just think of the customary desiccated complexion of low-fat types) and metaphorically: those who deny themselves the pleasures of food deny themselves the pleasures of life.

There is also, personally speaking, a purely practical advantage to this low-carb approach. As someone who can eat an entire bread basket before even ordering the appetizer at dinner, I've found that giving up carbohydrates is the simplest way to curb intake, and, although I hate even writing these words, lose weight.

Anyway, I find I can stay on a diet longer if the first recipe on it is for hamburger Holstein: a juicy, tender, chopped steak patty, topped with a fried egg, its bright, golden yolk crisscrossed with anchovies. It may sound excessive, even notwithstanding dietary concerns, but actually the balance of textures and flavors is perfect: the oiliness of the egg is matched by the sharp saltiness of the anchovies, and both point up the tender savoriness of the rare-cooked meat. You don't even miss the bun.

Of course, all dietary restrictions involve loss. The drawback to low-carb eating may not be in the realm of flavor, but huge textural deprivations. Boy, how I miss crunch, foods that snap or crack or have even a bite of crispness.

So on those evenings when I want to slouch around snacking and watching television, I grate Parmesan, mound spoonfuls of it on a baking sheet and give them a quick blast in a hot oven to make lacy-rimmed crisp, Parmesan disks.

All this is gratifying enough, but sometimes one wants not just food that tastes good but food that bolsters that new-year-is-upon-us my-body-is-a-temple mood. I'm talking Virtuous Flavor: a hot, sour cleansing broth, spiked with ginger and lemon grass, studded with salmon, bok choy and shiitake mushrooms, or baked snapper with black olives, pine nuts and seasonal Seville orange juice.

When you eat like this you're giving yourself more than just fuel, you're stoking that wonderful sense of hopeful confidence that comes from a meal that tastes good and makes you feel better.

- Recipe: Hamburger Holstein
- Recipe: Parmesan Disks
- Recipe: Salmon With Ginger and Lemon Grass Broth
- Recipe: Snapper With Seville Orange Juice, Pine Nuts and Olives

Sugar Sweet, and Heavy on the Crunch

By Kay Rentschler

You haven't thought of popcorn balls in years. And now, when you do, squeaky plastic foam, sugar epoxy and hand-forged machinations — crafts projects, in short — come to mind.

I've got news for you. A good popcorn ball makes kibble of even plain popcorn.

Not to be tossed back like caramel corn (the unexamined snack is not worth eating), a popcorn ball sits weightlessly in the palm, inviting admiring sniffs and glances, and takes a slow spin through the fingers like a whiffle ball in the pitcher's hand. Ghosts of butter, sugar and vanilla play upon its surface, chased by the olfactory rush of freshly popped corn.

A good popcorn ball is pretty, too, sparkly gold with a shaggy come-hither finish; not too large, but no two-biter either. You want to gnaw it like an apple, feel its fine taffy pull and gnash your teeth along its crisp contours. When you are finished, your hands will not be sticky and your jaw will not be tired. You will reach for another.

I mention these things with the privilege of hindsight. Making a popcorn ball is easy. Making a good one is not.

I thought I'd start with the easy part, the popcorn, and the easiest popcorn I could find, at that: a standard microwave bag yielding 11 1/2 cups. Much as I like their corn, I didn't want Paul and Orville getting in on the seasonings, so I bought no-frills "natural" popcorn.

A popcorn ball gets its sticking power from sticky stuff, of course, but you can't just mix raw honey or corn syrup. (That wouldn't make a ball, but you could upholster your arm.) I knew that the stable sugars in corn syrup keep sweet things soft and chewy and that I would have to boil the syrup with sugar.

I was prepared for a challenge: finding the correct proportions of corn syrup and sugar (for final texture), getting them to the correct temperature to pull things together, and arriving at a quantity small enough to keep the popcorn nimble, not leaden, and the snacker out of insulin shock. A challenge it was.

Most recipes take the syrup up to 260 degrees. This temperature produces fine popcorn balls, if you like biting into crustaceans. At 240 degrees, on the other hand, the more pliant soft-ball syrup produced pretty balls that fell apart when I turned my back.

Thermometers climb slowly above 220 degrees, but changes to the sugar are irrevocable. The winning number was 245: I pulled the saucepan from the heat and poured the syrup (now liquid glue) on the popped corn. The sugar's viscosity held things just to the sticking

point, and the syrup volume was minimal enough not to overwhelm.

I resolved to take popcorn balls to their logical conclusion, but not to let them have their way with me. Butterscotch chips, red hots and peanuts would find no succor here. Toasted coconut and pecans were a different story. They were rich and beguiling, not bossy. A handful of baby marshmallows gave a supple pull to the whole; who can resist a marshmallow melted just out of sight?

But by far the biggest textural boon were the Rice Krispies a friend suggested. Their fragile round crackle between kernels added a bit of folly to a solid world.

Who said popcorn balls were kid stuff? It had to have been one of my friends. The one who snickered when I said I was working on them. The one who just asked for the recipe.

- Recipe: All American Popcorn Balls

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Smoky & Sublime: Bell Peppers Come Alive with Roasting

By Russ Parsons

Roasted peppers are one of food's sure things. They're beautiful to look at, a deep Titian red. They have a voluptuous texture, closer to a nice, fatty piece of tuna sashimi than a vegetable. And their flavor is a profound mix of sweet and earthy, pungent and perfectly balanced by itself.

The simplest dish in the world, and one of the most satisfying, is a plate of roasted, peeled peppers dressed only with a little good olive oil and a sprinkling of salt. The pepper repertoire doesn't stop there, of course, but anything else you do is a matter of adornment rather than improvement.

One of the most common pairings for peppers is with tomatoes, one of nature's other perfect foods. All over the Mediterranean basin, these two show up in dishes both simple (roasted pepper and tomato salad) and complex (peperonata, found under different names from Spain to Morocco).

Roasted peppers are utterly unlike raw ones. In the first place, roasting removes that thin skin of cellulose. That's the tough part that's so difficult to digest. And it gently cooks the meat, softening it and bringing out hidden dimensions of flavor.

There are any number of ways to roast a pepper. Perhaps the most primal is simply throwing them on the grill. This has the advantage of accommodating a large number of peppers at the same time. A regular 21-inch kettle grill will easily hold more than a dozen large peppers at once. Just keep turning them to hit every bit of skin (including the bottoms and the tops), and move them from place to place so every pepper gets its turn over the hottest parts of the fire.

Go ahead and char them. You're not looking for browning here, but a definite blackening of the surface. So tough is this skin that even after this rough treatment, when you peel it off, there will be red flesh underneath. Roasting peppers over fire also lends a distinct but subtle smokiness to the flavor.

You can roast large batches even more easily in the oven, if you're willing to forgo that smoky grace note (indeed, in recipes such as the peppers stuffed with tuna, a purer flavor is better). To do this, arrange the peppers on a jellyroll pan and bake them at 400 degrees, turning them once or twice to keep them from sticking. Cooked this way, the skin will puff up like a balloon without nearly as much blackening.

Roasting peppers on the grill will take from 25 to 35 minutes, depending on the heat (it's a good thing to do while you're waiting for a really hot fire to die down enough to cook meat). Roasting them in the oven takes 20 to 30 minutes.

Whichever method you choose, once the skin has begun to loosen, cover the peppers with a damp cloth and let them cool for 10 to 15 minutes. The steam will finish the job.

Some cooks recommend roasting them under the broiler or over an open flame on a stovetop burner. Although these methods will work, they have significant drawbacks. The broiler cooks the peppers too unevenly. Doing them on the stovetop has the obvious disadvantage of letting you do only one or two at a time. And heaven help you if a roasting pepper pops, as they are wont to do, spilling its juices so it bakes onto the stove.

Peel the peppers by rubbing away that charred skin with your fingers. For tough spots that might have been a little underdone or were in hard-to-reach crevices, use the back of a knife. Though you may be tempted to rinse them to get rid of the last little flecks of skin, don't. The flesh is coated with a thick, delicious juice and you don't want to lose any of it.

You'll find red bell peppers ranging in size and shape from small and boxy to long and tapered. Some of the biggest ones are proprietary varieties grown in California, Florida and Mexico. But we were amazed at the quality and depth of flavor of the peppers we found at our decidedly un-gourmet neighborhood supermarket.

And, of course, you'll find peppers in colors other than red. Almost any grocery store will have yellow ones, too, and many will have purple, orange and even chocolate brown.

These peppers taste essentially the same -- the colors come from a nearly flavorless family of pigments called carotenoids. These are the same chemicals that make tomatoes red and peaches yellow (peppers, like tomatoes, are botanically fruits, even though we eat them as vegetables).

And just like peaches and tomatoes, the emergence of the bright colors is tied to the ripening process. While all peppers start out looking green, their more flamboyant plumage is actually there all the time, masked by the dominant pigment chlorophyll.

As the peppers ripen and the sugar levels increase, the chlorophyll breaks down. The green cloak drops and the mature colors are revealed.

Because roasting peppers is one of those things where it's just as easy to do a dozen as it is to do one, you might want to store some to use another day.

They do freeze remarkably well because of their high moisture content (one more reason to save all those juices you'll find on the inside). You don't even need to peel them -- stick them straight into the bag once they've cooled enough that they won't melt it.

Later, when you're ready to use them, you can defrost and peel as many as you need. Pickled peppers you find in jars in the grocery story have a much different flavor because of the vinegar they're preserved in.

Of course, since they're available so constantly in these modern times, freezing them doesn't carry the same sense of urgency as it once did. But as any pioneer will tell you, having roasted red peppers in the freezer is the culinary equivalent of money in the bank.

Sweet!

By Maria Gallagher

Baking Christmas cookies can be a joyous experience, or a terribly frustrating one. How satisfying it is to press or cut perfect little trees and bells and stars. And how heartbreaking, to open the oven door to find those shapes flattened and featureless, or all soldered to the baking sheet.

For advice on preventing such common baking mistakes, we turned to Diane Marinelli, a Delaware County baker who expects to make 2,000 pounds of cookies this holiday season. The owner of Cookies by Diane in Clifton Heights spent many years fine-tuning recipes at home before leaving nursing to pursue her passion for baking.

"You should really be able to bake a perfect cookie," said Marinelli, 47, a self-taught baker who resides in Springfield.

If you're new to cookie baking, or bake just once a year, Marinelli suggests buying a cookbook with easy-to-follow instructions, perhaps one in the Betty Crocker series. Drop cookies, bars and dough shaped into balls are easiest. Cookies made with a dough press, piped from a pastry bag, or cut from rolled dough are more difficult.

Start with a basic butter cookie recipe and improvise. Most call for a teaspoon of vanilla, but other flavors can be substituted, such as almond extract, or lemon or citrus juice with a generous pinch of zested rind from the fruit. A few drops of mint extract enhance chocolate cookie dough.

For texture, add poppy seeds to butter dough (good with lemon flavoring). Chocolate mini-chips or finely crushed nuts work well in drop cookies, but will plug the tip of a pastry bag.

Growing up in South Philadelphia, Marinelli watched her father's mother make caggionetti, a deep-fried, ravioli-like cookie with a nut filling. Diane's first baking was done in a child-size Easy-Bake oven, and her first sales experience was selling her cookies at bake sales to benefit her school, St. Monica's. She since has taught her daughters, Marisa, now 17, and Elyse, 14, many of her techniques. Both help decorate cookies at their mother's shop during the busy holiday period. (Diane's husband, John Marinelli, a marketing manager for IBM, helped fund Cookies by Diane.)

Following recipe instructions exactly will improve chances of baking success, Marinelli said, but often that's not enough.

Here are some tips gleaned from her baking experiences.

Use premium ingredients. When a recipe offers a choice between butter or margarine, Marinelli prefers butter for its richer flavor. And premium baking chocolates taste better than

discs or mass-market brands.

Pre-measure all ingredients and mix them just before baking. Use glass measures for liquids, and metal for dry ingredients. Level off flour or sugar with a knife.

Use an oven thermometer to ensure correct temperatures. Marinelli says 350 degrees is best for baking most cookies. For a convection oven, bake at 325 degrees. To avoid burned bottoms, never put cookies in the lowest oven level.

All ingredients should be at room temperature, unless otherwise specified. Combine dry ingredients first, liquid ingredients next, then add the dry to the wet. Don't over-mix.

Don't let the dough sit and dry up before baking. If you step away, Marinelli suggests adding a little water or milk to the dough to restore its texture.

For drop cookies or ball cookies, use a melon baller or tiny ice cream scoop for consistency in size. It also keeps body heat from warming the dough.

Use parchment or silicone baking mats when possible. Marinelli uses stainless steel air core cookie sheets and never greases them, explaining that greasing also can cause cookie bottoms to burn.

If the first batch of cookies spreads on the pan when baked, add a small amount of flour to correct the consistency of the remaining dough. Refrigerating the dough can also help.

Pressed cookies go directly on ungreased stainless steel sheets. When done, Marinelli loosens them gently with a spatula to keep them from sticking, but does not lift them, since they break easily when warm.

Drop cookies are more durable and can be removed at once to cool on wire racks.

To hasten cooling, place the pan next to an open window.

When melting chocolate, a very small amount of lecithin crystals, paramount crystals (sold in specialty shops) or solid vegetable shortening can be stirred into the melted chocolate to thin it and help it adhere to the cookies.

When giving cookie gifts, buy inexpensive baskets and line them with linen napkins in holiday prints. Wrap in cellophane with colorful bows. Don't use plastic, which can turn crisp cookies soft and alter the taste, Marinelli said.

For a grander gesture, use a large basket and include packages of gourmet coffees, teas, mugs, perhaps with a rolling pin, cookie cutters and recipes.

Marinelli shared two cookie recipes: one for White or Dark Chocolate Butter Almond Cookies, and a recipe for Walnut Melts handed down by her maternal grandmother, Emma Sgueglia.

- Recipe: Basic Butter Almond Cookies
- Recipe: Chocolate Dip
- Recipe: Walnut Melts

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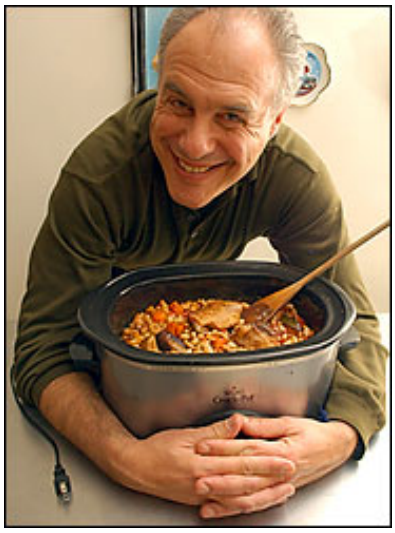

Slow and Low Is the Way to Go

By Mark Bittman

It cost me $30. I call it the Monster of Braising. I use it almost every day.

Go ahead and sneer. I love my slow cooker.

Essentially a small, closed electric pot that provides extremely low and reliably even heat, the slow cooker is simple, safe and, as long as you don't try to stretch its capabilities, virtually foolproof.

You may know it as the Crock-Pot. The Rival Company, now owned by the Holmes Group, trademarked that name when it introduced the product in 1971.

But slow cookers are made by a host of companies: Farberware, Proctor Silex, even Black & Decker. And recently, as the cookers have been given new looks and new functions, even food snobs like me are realizing their potential, albeit a little later than the more than perhaps 100 million Americans who already own one. Ask yourself this: Is it time for an attitude adjustment?

"The slow cooker is steadily growing in popularity," said Douglas Kline, a spokesman for the Target chain, which is based in Minneapolis. The company carries eight styles of slow cookers ranging in price from about $10 to $50 and is expanding the line.

"There is a trend toward eating meals in," Mr. Kline said. "Couple that with the reality that everyone is working and strapped for time, and the slow cooker is the perfect appliance."

The slow cookers you'll find at Target and at other national chains offer stainless steel or plain white exteriors, and incorporate programmable features like timers and automatic on and off switches, which make them even easier to use. They are still not chic, but, man, are they practical.

In recent weeks, I have used my Crock-Pot (it's a Rival, as are about 80 percent of the slow cookers owned in the United States) to make chicken stock, cassoulet, congee, choucroute garni, slow-cooked pasta sauce with ribs, black beans, white beans, lamb stew with olives and vegetables, short ribs with Chinese spices, and pork loin with milk and garlic.

While I was running errands.

While I was working.

In my sleep.

And I'm not joking.

None of the recipes I made was especially creative, but without the slow cooker they require at least intermittent attention. To make my Chinese-style short ribs, though, I unceremoniously dumped some ribs, soy sauce, water and a few other ingredients into the pot, turned the thing to low and went to bed. The next morning, my house smelled like heaven. The short ribs were tender beyond belief, and the stew was as delicious as any I've ever produced.

Talk about slow food! In fact, barring a return to the days of household servants, braising cannot get any easier.

Until recently, there has been something of a divide between the slow cooker and the adventuresome home cook. An interesting confluence of factors, however, is now bringing the two together.

First, whenever there's a difficult economy, people turn to cheaper cuts of meat. Cheaper cuts of meat, of course, take time to tenderize. But these days, unlike those in tough economic times of the past, many more households have two breadwinners, making it unlikely that there will be someone home all afternoon to cook. And no one walks in at 6 p.m. and starts braising lamb shanks.

Second, those cheaper cuts — lamb shanks, short ribs, pork cheeks, brisket — are suddenly in vogue in the country's best restaurants, not so much because they're cheap (on the contrary, in restaurants they're overpriced) but because, among other reasons, they taste so good.

Enter the slow cooker. As Patrick Hind-Smith, a senior buyer for Williams-Sonoma, said: "We added a slow cooker to the company's catalog a couple of years ago. I took one home to try it out and discovered cuts of meat I used to turn up my nose at."

The slow cooker's reputation, however, has long suffered from its image as the tool of the bored housewife, a machine filled with cheap meat and putatively convenient ingredients like cream of mushroom soup or taco mix (whatever that is).

At least for those in the crowd that considered "Mastering the Art of French Cooking" its culinary bible, the slow cooker was never much more than a bad joke. My wife and I received a Crock-Pot for our wedding in the mid-1970's. We took one look at the corn-and-vine motif, put it back in the box and returned it to the store.

People with lofty culinary goals may have snubbed them, but most American households own a slow cooker. And those numbers are rising. According to a June 2002 study commissioned by the Betty Crocker Kitchens in Minneapolis, 80.6 percent of United States households have a slow cooker, up from 76.5 percent in 1996.

Sales of slow cookers, said Kelly Lockwood, vice president of global communications and design for the Holmes Group, rank just behind the microwave and toaster oven (neither of which is really suitable for cooking) in sales of countertop food-preparation appliances — higher, for example, than blenders and way higher than food processors.

Sales of slow cookers slackened in the 1980's, as most people discovered the so-called joys of takeout, prepared and microwaveable foods, but the mid-1990's saw a resurgence, and

now there's a veritable boom. Rival alone expects to produce five million Crock-Pots this year.

What should you make in yours? The mass-market press devoted to slow cookery is generally unhelpful, though recently I have seen some appealing chili recipes, discussions of stews made with real vegetables and, in the current issue of Better Homes and Gardens magazine's "All-Time Favorites: Slow-Cooker," a recipe for Cuban pork that I actually want to make.

Andi Bidwell, senior food editor of Betty Crocker Kitchens, which publishes several slow-cooker titles each year, said, "Home cooks across the country may not be terribly interested in going way far afield, but they do want some new things." She mentioned Carolina-style pulled pork — a natural for the slow cooker — and an onion soup in which the onions caramelize effortlessly.

Moderately experienced cooks can figure most of this out by themselves. It's likely that after you've tried a few recipes adapted to the slow cooker, you will create your own adaptations. On the second day of my proud ownership, I made stock, combining chicken, vegetables, parsley and water. I turned the heat to low and left the house; when I returned, it was done. This was not exactly creative cooking, but I could not have been more pleased.

THERE are limitations: If you want browned meats, for example, you're going to have to do some skillet work before setting your pot to bubbling. You're probably not going to make dessert in the thing.

What the slow cooker is best for is braising. Period. For the most part I want mine for those cuts of meat, and things like beans, that take a long time anyway. Indeed, for its ability to transform cheap cuts of meat with an almost unbelievable lack of input on the part of the cook, the slow cooker is worth the price. A six-quart programmable Rival Crock-Pot sells for $50 or less. (If you're frugal, look in a church thrift shop; you'll find the one I returned in 1976, or a similar model, for $6.)

The new slow cookers are not only pretty good looking, they feature innovations designed to make them easier to use. Some machines, for example, will switch on at a preset time, cook for four to six hours on high or eight to 10 hours on low, then automatically switch to warm. (The difference between high and low is the time it takes for the cooker to bring food to 212 degrees, the ideal simmering temperature; warm is between 140 and 160 degrees.)

I'm not sure such advances are necessary. My machine has no more than a switch that says high, low and off.

For the recipes here, I did little more than take some of my favorite braised dishes, skipped the browning step (actually, I could not resist browning the meat for the cassoulet before adding it to the cooker), and doubled or tripled the cooking time.

It doesn't seem to matter much. The slow cooker demands less involvement on your part — in fact, stirring is counterproductive during the first hour or two, because it defeats the slow but steady buildup of heat in the closed environment. There are foods — chicken, for example — that you can overcook, but as long as you choose things that you want to cook to death anyway, it isn't going to happen.

A couple of final recommendations. Unless you are interested in pushing things to the limit, don't mess around with recipes that have you add pasta or the like to already cooked meat at the last minute (or, in this case, at the last hour); if you want precise timing, switch to the

stove top. Don't, of course, add uncooked meat to cooked meat unless it will have a chance to become fully cooked before serving; food prepared in the slow cooker must reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees for at least a minute in order to be safe to eat.

But as long as you don't rush things, this will not be a problem. And since rushing is not what this is about, you have nothing to worry about. Except, perhaps, your attitude.

- Recipe: Pasta With Tomato Sauce and Ribs
- Recipe: Short Ribs With Chinese Flavors
- Recipe: Slow-Cooker Cassoulet

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Turning Your Slow-Lane Turkey Into a Roadrunner

by Mark Bittman

It's almost a given that both time and oven space are at a premium on Thanksgiving. Both of those problems are caused by the same animal: the turkey. With an average cooking time of three hours and a size that fills even a big oven, turkey can be trouble.

Yet it's hard to argue with tradition. Otherwise sophisticated cooks remain wedded to canned sweet potatoes with marshmallows, packaged stuffing and canned cranberry sauce. Trying to wean them from the turkey to something equally festive but more flavorful (capon, goose, pork roast and standing rib all come to mind) is akin to trying to sell a tofu dog at Yankee Stadium: there will be takers, but don't bet against the norm.

There is at least one way, however, to cut the cooking time of the average turkey by about 75 percent while still presenting an attractive bird. That is to split it down the middle before roasting. The technique, commonly used with chickens (and sometimes called spatchcocking), is simple. You turn the bird backside up and use a sharp, sturdy knife to cut along both sides of the backbone, where it meets the ribs. The bones there are thin enough for the process to be easy and straightforward, and it usually takes less than five minutes. Turn the bird over, press on the breastbone, and you've reduced an eight-inch-high monster to something under four inches (you can even roast the turkey on one oven rack and something else, simultaneously, on the other).

You've also exposed the legs, which need more cooking than the breasts, to more heat — you'll notice how they stick out — and allowed the wings to shield the breast. Roasted at 450 degrees (with the heat moderated if the bird browns too fast), a 10-pound bird will be done in about 45 minutes. Really. It will also be more evenly browned (all of the skin is exposed to the heat), more evenly cooked, and moister than birds cooked conventionally.

This method of roasting precludes stuffing the turkey. (Because I've long maintained that stuffing is best cooked outside of the bird, where it can become crisp, rather than inside, where it is mushy, this is hardly a disadvantage.) You can still make a great pan gravy:

First, pour off all but a few tablespoons of the fat from the turkey's roasting pan. Leave as many of the solids and as much of the dark juices behind as possible. Place the roasting pan over high heat (use two burners if necessary) and add about three cups of stock. Bring to a boil, stirring, then turn the heat to low. If you want a thick gravy, stir in a couple of tablespoons of cornstarch blended with an equal amount of cold water (if that doesn't thicken it to your liking, repeat). Simmer while you carve the bird, and stir in a little butter if you like.

Some people will balk at the inclusion of garlic in the recipe here, but the turkey must

derive its flavor from something. And I might suggest a couple of possible variations:

You can roast a mixture of vegetables — diced carrots, onions, parsnips, potatoes, turnips or a combination are all good — beneath the bird. Or you can substitute a couple of tablespoons of finely minced ginger, a bunch or two of chopped scallions and a couple of tablespoons of soy sauce for the tarragon.

But perhaps this is too heretical. You'll already be presenting a bird with a surprising new look.

- Recipe: 45 Minute Roast Turkey

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Refrigerator & Freezer Storage Chart

Since product dates aren't a guide for safe use of a product, consult this chart and follow these tips. These short but safe time limits will help keep refrigerated food 40° F (4° C) from spoiling or becoming dangerous.

- Purchase the product before "sell-by" or expiration dates.
- Follow handling recommendations on product.
- Keep meat and poultry in its package until just before using.
- If freezing meat and poultry in its original package longer than 2 months, overwrap these packages with airtight heavy-duty foil, plastic wrap, or freezer paper, or place the package inside a plastic bag.
- Cook foods to the required minimum cooking temperatures:
  - 165 F > Poultry, poultry stuffing, and stuffed meat.
  - 158 F > Ground Beef, fish, and seafood.
  - 150 F > Pork and food containing pork.
  - 145 F > shell eggs and foods containing shell eggs.

Because freezing 0° F (-18° C) keeps food safe indefinitely, the following recommended storage times are for quality only.

Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
Eggs		
Fresh, in shell	4 to 5 weeks	Don't freeze
Raw yolks, whites	2 to 4 days	1 year
Hardcooked	1 week	Doesn't freeze well
Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, opened	3 days	Don't freeze
Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, unopened	10 days	1 year
Mayonnaise, commercial Refrigerate after opening	2 months	Don't freeze

Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
TV Dinners, Frozen Casseroles **Keep frozen until ready to heat**		3 to 4 months

Deli & Vacuum-Packed Products	Refrigerator	Freezer
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads	3 to 5 days	Don't freeze well
Pre-stuffed pork & lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed w/dressing	1 day	Don't freeze well
Store-cooked convenience meals	3 to 4 days	Don't freeze well
Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks	Don't freeze well

Raw Hamburger, Ground & Stew Meat	Refrigerator	Freezer
Hamburger & stew meats	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months
Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months

Ham, Corned Beef	Refrigerator	Freezer
Corned beef in pouch with pickling juices	5 to 7 days	Drained, 1 month
Ham, canned, labeled "Keep Refrigerated," unopened	6 to 9 months	Don't freeze
Ham, canned, labeled "Keep Refrigerated," opened	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months
Ham, fully cooked, whole	7 days	1 to 2 months
Ham, fully cooked, half	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months
Ham, fully cooked, slices	3 to 4 days	1 to 2 months

Hot Dogs & Lunch Meats	Refrigerator	Freezer (in freezer wrap)
Hot dogs, opened package	1 week	1 to 2 months
Hot dogs, unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months
Lunch meats, opened package	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months
Lunch meats, unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months

Soups & Stews	Refrigerator	Freezer
Vegetable or meat-added & mixtures of them	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months

Bacon & Sausage	Refrigerator	Freezer
Bacon	7 days	1 month
Sausage, raw from pork, beef, chicken or turkey	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months
Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1 to 2 months
Summer sausage labeled "Keep Refrigerated," unopened	3 months	1 to 2 months

Summer sausage labeled “Keep Refrigerated,” opened	3 weeks	1 to 2 months

Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb, & Pork)	**Refrigerator**	**Freezer**
Steaks	3 to 5 days	6 to 12 months
Chops	3 to 5 days	4 to 6 months
Roasts	3 to 5 days	4 to 12 months
Variety meats (tongue, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings)	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months

Meat Leftovers	**Refrigerator**	**Freezer**
Cooked meat & meat dishes	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months
Gravy & meat broth	1 to 2 days	2 to 3 months

Fresh Poultry	**Refrigerator**	**Freezer**
Chicken or turkey, whole	1 to 2 days	1 year
Chicken or turkey, parts	1 to 2 days	9 months
Giblets	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months

Cooked Poultry, Leftover	**Refrigerator**	**Freezer**
Fried chicken	3 to 4 days	4 months
Cooked poultry dishes	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months
Pieces, plain	3 to 4 days	4 months
Pieces covered with broth, gravy	1 to 2 days	6 months
Chicken nuggets, patties	1 to 2 days	1 to 3 months

Fish & Shellfish	**Refrigerator**	**Freezer**
Lean fish	1 to 2 days	6 months
Fatty fish	1 to 2 days	2 to 3 months
Cooked fish	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months
Smoked fish	14 days	2 months
Fresh shrimp, scallops, crawfish, squid	1 to 2 days	3 to 6 months
Canned seafood Pantry, 5 years	*after opening* 3 to 4 days	*out of can* 2 months

The History of Cheese

Most authorities consider that cheese was first made in the Middle East. The earliest type was a form of sour milk which came into being when it was discovered that domesticated animals could be milked. A legendary story has it that cheese was 'discovered' by an unknown Arab nomad. He is said to have filled a saddlebag with milk to sustain him on a journey across the desert by horse. After several hours riding he stopped to quench his thirst, only to find that the milk had separated into a pale watery liquid and solid white lumps. Because the saddlebag, which was made from the stomach of a young animal, contained a coagulating enzyme known as rennin, the milk had been effectively separated into curds and whey by the combination of the rennin, the hot sun and the galloping motions of the horse. The nomad, unconcerned with technical details, found the whey drinkable and the curds edible.

Cheese was known to the ancient Sumerians four thousand years before the birth of Christ. The ancient Greeks credited Aristaeus, a son of Apollo and Cyrene, with its discovery; it is mentioned in the Old Testament.

In the Roman era cheese really came into its own. Cheesemaking was done with skill and knowledge and reached a high standard. By this time the ripening process had been developed and it was known that various treatments and conditions under storage resulted in different flavours and characteristics.

The larger Roman houses had a separate cheese kitchen, the caseale, and also special areas where cheese could be matured. In large towns home-made cheese could be taken to a special centre to be smoked. Cheese was served on the tables of the nobility and travelled to the far corners of the Roman Empire as a regular part of the rations of the legions.

During the Middle Ages, monks became innovators and developers and it is to them we owe many of the classic varieties of cheese marketed today. During the Renaissance period cheese suffered a drop in popularity, being considered unhealthy, but it regained favour by the nineteenth century, the period that saw the start of the move from farm to factory production.

Acid
A term used to describe a cheese with a lightly sourish flavour.

Ammoniated
When certain cheeses are past their prime and overripe they will smell and often taste of ammonia. This particularly applies to soft cheeses such as Brie and Camembert. For those unfamiliar with this smell, it can possibly best be described

by imagining a cheese that has been sprayed by a particularly vm catQa thing to be avoided at all costs!

Annatto
A colouring agent used to colour a great variety of cheeses ranging from English Cheddar to the French Maroilles. Annatto is a dye obtained from a South American plant.

Aroma
A cheese's smell or odour which can vary from lightly aromatic to ferociously overpowering. Note that while most strong smelling cheese will also be strong tasting, this does not apply to all. Limburger is a case in point. The American cheeses Brick and Liederkranz both have distinctive aromas but are not overly strong tasting cheeses unless well aged.

Barnyardy
A descriptive term often used to describe a cheese's aroma and sometimes its taste as well. Many people find goat's milk cheeses barnyardy, particularly aged ones.

Bleu
French name for blue veined cheeses.

Bloomy rind
Cheeses that develop a light white down on their surfaces are known as bloomy or flowery rind cheeses. Such a rind develops as a result of the cheese's surface being sprayed with the Penicillium candidate spore. The best known cheeses of this type are Camembert and Brie.

Brushed
Certain types of natural rind cheeses, cooked and uncooked varieties, have their rinds brushed during the period they spend ripening. This brushing, done by hand or machine, helps the interior of the cheese to keep moist during the ripening period; it also has an effect on the final flavour of the cheese.

Casein
the element of milk which solidifies when coagulation takes place.

Cellar
The room, usually underground, where cheeses are left to ripen. Some cheeses, Roquefort is the most famous, are ripened in caves.

Cheddaring
A cheese that is 'cheddared' has its curd cut into blocks which are turned and stacked at the bottom of the cheese vat at intervals of ten to fifteen minutes for about one-and-a-half hours.

Close
Used to describe a cheese's texture. A close textured cheese is one which is smooth, unblemished and devoid of holes or cracks.

Cooked
A step in the cheesemaking process when the cheese curd is heated, sometimes in the surplus whey. Cooked cheeses are all hard cheeses such as Emmentaler and other Swiss types.

Cream
The fatty element of milk.

Creamy
Used to describe both the taste and sometimes the texture of certain cheeses.

Curdling
An early stage in cheesemaking when milk coagulates due to the introduction of rennet.

Curing
Also known as maturing or ageing - the stage in the cheesemaking process when a cheese is left to ripen.

Crumbly
The condition of a cheese that breaks away when cut often applicable to blue veins.

Dry matter
The part of the cheese that remains after all moisture is removed. Soft cheeses, such as Brie and Camembert, will, on average, contain about 50 per cent dry matter and 50 per cent water.

Earthy
A descriptive term often used to describe the nature of monastery cheeses.

Fat content
The fat content of cheese refers to the fat content in the dry matter of the cheese. It is usually indicated on the cheese's packaging. The average is 45 per cent but it can be as low as 4 per cent and as high as 75 per cent.

Fresh cheese
Cheese that does not undergo a ripening period e.g. Cottage Cheese, Cream Cheese, Ricotta.

Gruyere
Not only the name of one of the best known Swiss cheeses in the world but also a general name for large cheeses made in France e.g. Gruyere de Comte, Beaufort, Emmentaler.

Hard
Descriptive term for cooked cheeses.

Holes
Also called 'eyes', basically openings in the body of cheeses such as Emmentaler, Gruyere and other Swiss types. Such holes are spherical, equally spaced and about the size of cherry stones. The holes are caused by bacterial activity which generates prioponic acid causing gas to expand within the curd.

Lactic
Milk aroma, sometimes flavour, of certain cheeses.

Micro-organisms

Yeasts and ferments present in milk and milk curd.

Monastery
Certain cheeses are linked historically in that they were originally developed by monks. They are known as monastery cheeses although they range in flavour and aroma considerably.

Moulds
Moulds can be on the surface of cheese or be developed internally. Surface moulds are the result of cheese being treated with the Penicillium candidate spore; internal moulds are created by the introduction of Penicillium glaucum or Penicillium roqueforti spores both to create blue veined cheeses. Certain French goat milk cheeses develop a natural bluish surface mould and some of the newer double creme cheeses have both a surface mould and an internal mould e.g. Blue Castello, Bavarian Blue, Duet.

Mushroomy
Flavour and aroma description of certain soft and semi-soft cheeses, particularly members of the Brie/ Camembert family.

Nutty
A flavour description of certain cheeses, often refers to a hazelnut flavour.

Open
Texture description referring to a cheese which contains openings and holes in its body. The opposite of close.

Paraffin
Many cheeses are coated with a paraffin wax, particularly those destined for export markets. Edam is probably the best known. The wax protects the cheese.

Pasteurisation
The treatment given to partially sterilised milk.

Paste
The interior of a cheese.

Pronounced
Descriptive term for a cheese's aroma or flavour.

Penicillium
Moulds that are developed on the surface of bloomy rind cheeses (Camembert, Brie) and internally in blue veins (see moulds).

Persille
A French term for a blue vein cheese used in reference to Roquefort because it is the only bleu from sheep's milk.

Piquant
Descriptive term for a sharp tasting cheese.

Rennet
A substance obtained from the stomach linings of young calves which contains a

coagulating enzyme.

Rind
The protective external surface of a cheese. Rinds can be natural or artificially created, thick or thin, hard or soft, washed, oiled, brushed or paraffined. Their prime role is to protect the cheese's interior and allow it to ripen and develop harmoniously. Their presence affects the final flavour of the interior of the cheese.

Skimmed milk
When part or all of the cream has been removed from milk, the milk is referred to as skimmed. Cheeses made from such milk generally have a lower fat content than average; some (but not all) are quite pronounced in taste.

Starter
A bacterial culture which produces lactic acid.

Supple
Descriptive term used to describe a cheese's texture - firm but not hard, pliable and resilient.

Tangy
Descriptive term used to denote a cheese's flavour usually meaning sharp, distinctive, flavoursome.

Texture
A cheese's texture can be soft, firm, supple, waxy, open, close and so on. Texture is largely dependent on its moisture content - the softer the cheese the higher its moisture content.

Washed rind cheeses
The rinds of certain cheeses are regularly washed while they are being ripened. The purpose of this is to keep the cheese moist, supple and to ensure it does not dry out. Such washings can be done with elements as varied as salt water or brandy - thus the washing plays a part in the cheese's final flavour. Some of the strongest smelling and tasting cheeses in the world are washed rind varieties.

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