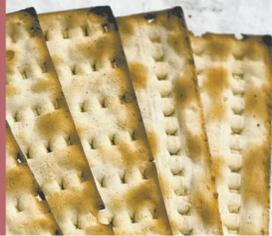


Taste!



MEXICAN FOOD

Say 'si' to Passover
PAGE 3



FIT FOR A KING

Bake a Royal Cake
PAGE 4

Thyme for Spring

Herbs are easy to grow and pack a flavorful punch



"People should experiment with different herbs and not be afraid of them. If you're not sure about timing, just use them at the end and enjoy the added dimension they'll bring to your food."

CHRIS MUMFORD
Chef and owner
Mumford's
Culinary Center

By Susan Bloom :: Correspondent

Want to spice up your cooking and add variety to your garden? Fresh and aromatic, herbs are one of the best ways to celebrate the new growth of spring and add a burst of flavor to any dish.

"People often forego using herbs because they're unfamiliar with them, but herbs can really enhance food and give it a different depth and flavor without really trying," chef Chris Mumford, 49, said.

The force behind Mumford's Unique American Cuisine in Long Branch from 1989 to 1997 and owner of Mumford's Culinary Center in Tinton Falls should know — he made a name for himself in Jersey culinary circles by bringing together creative combinations of flavors and herbs to create award-winning results.

"The key with most fresh herbs is to use them within the last 20 minutes of cooking to get the most of their essential oils," he said. "Also, fresh herbs oxidize and brown over time. The less you 'work' them, the more vibrant they'll be, so you want to make sure you cut them correctly — employing either a chop, chiffonade or slice technique."

He recommended that firmer herbs such as rosemary, thyme and marjoram be chopped, a process that will render them small enough to melt into food without mashing their essential oils into the cutting board, while softer herbs such as tarragon, parsley, basil, cilantro and sage be chiffonaded so that they're left more intact for cooking.

According to Mumford, herbs such as chives, dill and chervil should be sliced, a technique that exposes less of the herb's oils to the process of evaporation and allows the herb to keep its natural look and be part of the aesthetic presentation of the dish.

Mumford offered several tips for pairing some of the more popular fresh herbs with different foods when cooking.

"Rosemary is great with hearty foods such as stocks, sauces, soups, roasts and grilled dishes and also marries well with onions and garlic," he said. "Because it has a stronger oil and its flavor will last longer, you'll want to use rosemary in the beginning, middle and end of the cooking process because it can stand up to it."

According to Mumford, thyme has many of the same characteristics as rosemary, "but is a bit more delicate and marries well with citrus, such as in a ginger and thyme vege-

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INSIDE: See Chris Mumford's recipes. PAGE D2



How bacon sizzled and cupcakes rose to the top

Associated Press

Bacon. It's everywhere. Wendy's features it in the "Baconator" and Paula Deen crumbles it into quiche. Ditto for those deluxe cupcakes top-heavy with frosting. Is there a bakery or supermarket that doesn't sell them?

Bacon and cupcakes, such as sliders, bubble tea, popsicles, food trucks and chipotle, have caught on from coast to coast.

But how?

Food fads don't always spread exactly the same way as other types of pop culture, such as fashion and music. Chefs don't walk the runway at food shows holding up this spring's hot pad thai dish. There are no authoritative top 10 charts for food that show red velvet cake is No. 1 with a bullet.

But favored food items can go viral in the time it takes to upload a picture of salted caramel ice cream. The arbiters of trendy tastes include big-name chefs, bloggers, urban hipsters, eater tweeters and journalists. Usually, they work in some hard-to-quantify combination.

"It's kind of like trying to grab a jelly-fish, in terms of trying to understand it," said Ted Allen, host of the Food Network's "Chopped."

Food fads are older than the fondue pot in the back of your parents' pantry. But the lines of dissemination were easier to track before the existence of the Food Network and the Web. The high-brow authority was Gourmet magazine. Home cooks took cues from cookbooks and friends. There were just a few famous

See BACON, Page D3



Bacon and watermelon, though an odd pairing, are delicious together. AP PHOTO

ASK THE EXPERT

Gluten-free isn't always healthier

By Renee Ernst :: Staff Writer

Q: I keep hearing about gluten-free products. What is gluten, exactly, and what is a gluten-free diet? Is it meant for people with a gluten intolerance or is it for anyone to try?

Leanne, Brick

A: Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley, rye and sometimes oats depending on whether they were stored together, according to Caryn Alter, a registered dietician at CentraState Healthcare System in Freehold Township.

"A gluten-free diet is basically for people with celiac disease or some kind of intolerance to gluten," Alter said. Oddly enough, Alter said she has been

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