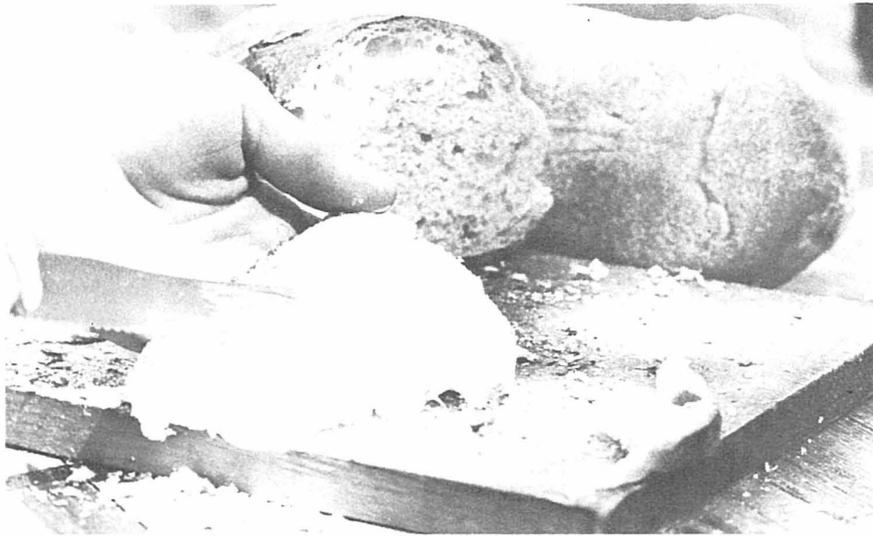


# The Cook Book of the New Alchemists



shadow bread  
sky oven  
cloud snow  
fire smoke

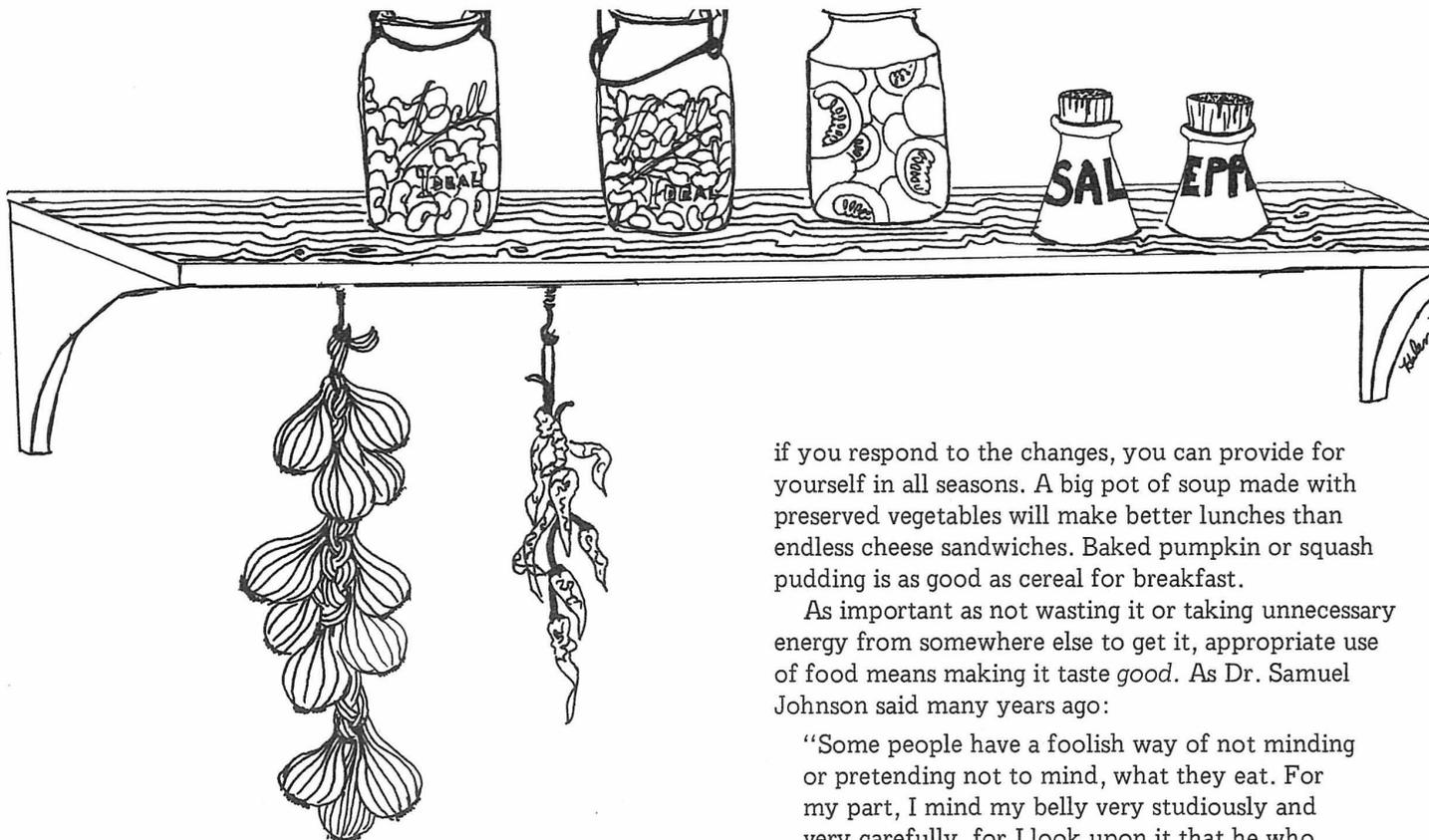
feed us  
who saw  
your fusion

bread oven  
snow smoke  
fire cloud  
sky shadow

feed those  
who recall  
the vision

— Meredith Fuller-Luyton

Photo by Hilde Maingay



In the third *Journal*, we included a section called the *Trash Fish Cook Book*. This year we want to share some of our other favorite things to do with food. If we called it the “Trash Food Cook Book”, you’d get the wrong idea – it’s about good food – mainly food we grow ourselves, but like the “trash” fish, these good foods are often little known or underutilized. We have found that growing the food is only the first step. In living both more economically and more ecologically, people have to learn to change their food preparing habits and their eating habits. In too many cases, the need for food triggers the foot to push the gas pedal to go to the store. I have seen store-bought lettuce in a friend’s refrigerator when there was much better available in the garden or, more subtly, rice on the table night after night when the garden could supply a variety of starchy foods that didn’t have to be grown somewhere else and shipped.

I think the main thing in learning to use food properly is to take stock of what you’ve got and use that rather than to think of some particular dish you want or are used to having and then buying whatever you need in order to make that. It’s creative, it’s fun, and it’s an important step in trying not to be a drain on the rest of nature.

It’s late fall now and I am beginning to rely on stored and preserved foods with a few hardy things still coming from the garden and fresh treats from the greenhouses. Each season offers different foods but,

if you respond to the changes, you can provide for yourself in all seasons. A big pot of soup made with preserved vegetables will make better lunches than endless cheese sandwiches. Baked pumpkin or squash pudding is as good as cereal for breakfast.

As important as not wasting it or taking unnecessary energy from somewhere else to get it, appropriate use of food means making it taste *good*. As Dr. Samuel Johnson said many years ago:

“Some people have a foolish way of not minding or pretending not to mind, what they eat. For my part, I mind my belly very studiously and very carefully, for I look upon it that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else.”

Here are some of the good things we make.

## BEANS

Beans aren’t just beans – the three dishes I describe are as different as can be. Encouraging note: If red beans cause belly disturbances for you, try some other color, such as black or white beans. Many people find these much less aggressive.

### BLACK BEANS AND RICE

This recipe is for about two cups of uncooked beans. They should cook three hours, more or less, depending on whether you soak them before cooking, how large they are, how hard, etc. It is better, of course, to save time and energy and soak them overnight. Cover the beans with water and, if they get dry any time during the cooking, add more water. After about two hours, chop and add a couple of garlic cloves, an onion and as much hot pepper as you like. Season with at least a teaspoon of cumin and a little oregano and sage. Add a couple of tablespoons of coconut oil if you have it (it’s very common in Costa Rica and we always bring a bottle back) or some grated coconut. Serve the beans on just plain buttered rice or for a really special dish, rice cooked in coconut milk. Make a hot sauce by soaking minced hot peppers in warm oil for twenty-four hours. For a different taste, season black beans with bay leaf and cloves instead of cumin.

An orange sauce is good on any variety of simply cooked dried beans. Chop a hot pepper and two garlic cloves finely and simmer them in a little white wine – a half cup should be enough, but add more if it cooks away. Meanwhile, squeeze the juice from two oranges, add two tablespoons of vinegar and mix a tablespoon of cornstarch into the liquids. Stir this into the wine and peppers and simmer until it thickens. Thin with boiling water if necessary.

### CHILI BEANS

If you soaked the beans, cook them in that water plus a jar of tomatoes. Add lots of onion and garlic and hot pepper after an hour of cooking. Season strongly with oregano, sage, paprika and parsley. Serve with cornbread or tortillas.

### MIDDLE EASTERN BEAN PUREE

Cook white beans until they're tender. Strain off most of the liquid and save. In a blender, puree about two cups of beans with a garlic bud, about three tablespoons of oil, the juice of a lemon, salt and pepper. Vary amounts according to taste. I sometimes add a little vinegar for extra tartness. Add bean cooking liquid to achieve the consistency you want. You can dip bread into the puree. Syrian bread is especially good, but I wouldn't complain about homemade whole wheat. You can also serve it on tomato quarters or lettuce. I've made the same sort of puree with overly mature green peas, the seed part of green beans, and dried limas.

### FISH CURRY

You can use left-over baked or fried fish or your less desirable frozen fish. Left-over rice is fine, too.

For two people: Chop a large onion and a handful of parsley. De-bone the cooked fish and break into small pieces. Three-quarters of a cup is plenty for two people. Fry the fish, onions and parsley until the fish is slightly browned. Add more oil and put in as much rice as you'll eat. Season with lots of good curry powder, a little sage and oregano and garlic. Stir fry until the rice is a little browned, too. It's good served with cold yogurt or cranberry sauce or pickles.

### COSTA RICAN RUN-DOWN

We learned to make Run-Down from a lady in Limón who cooks on a crooked stove, in a frying pan with an iron stuck under one side to level it out. We asked her why the dish is called "Run-Down" and she said, "Because it's made with coconut milk....."

For two people who eat a lot, grate one coconut. Through this pour about two cups of water slowly, squeezing out the milky liquid. This is the coconut

milk as opposed to the watery liquid inside the coconut, which is coconut water. The remaining coconut meat should have had all its goodness removed by this process if you've squeezed enough and so should be thrown away. (Ed. Note: i. e., either composted or fed to the chickens). Cook the milk down while you get the rest of the things ready.

Cut into pieces and fry unbattered fish fillets or steaks. A large hand-sized piece cut into one-inch chunks should be enough for each person. Also fry a chopped onion and a small hot pepper and, when they're ready, add a cut-up tomato. Put the fish, onions, etc., into the coconut milk, simmer a few minutes and serve over rice.

### CABBAGE AND SOUR CREAM PIE

Shred four-and-one-half cups of cabbage. Steam it just a few minutes, not so much that it's done. Drain the cabbage and mix with a cup of sour cream, a tablespoon of flour, a tablespoon of caraway seed, some dill and salt and pepper. Put the filling into a regular two-crust pie and bake.

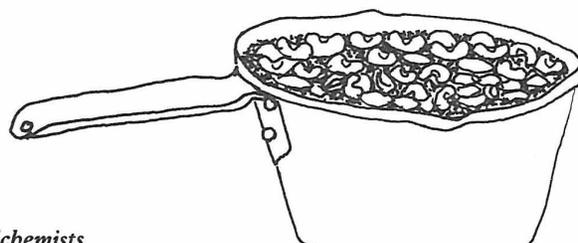
### VEGETABLE CURRY

Another flexible favorite is vegetable curry. Use any mixture of fresh or frozen vegetables you like, but be sure to include a chopped onion. I particularly like green beans, crookneck squash and broccoli together. Cut all the vegetables into small pieces and simmer until each is the appropriate doneness. When the vegetables are done, drain off the juices and stir in yogurt to make a thick sauce. Heat through. You can stabilize the yogurt by stirring in a little cornstarch while it's cold, if you want to make sure it doesn't curdle. Season with good curry, garlic and fresh parsley.

### ZUCCHINI CASSEROLE

This recipe is adapted from Claudia Roden's *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* (Vintage Books, 1974), my very favorite cookbook. The book is very well suited to mostly-vegetarian cooking – full of lovely things like eggplant cream, carrot soup, spinach cheese pie and Jerusalem artichokes with tomato sauce.

For the casserole, slice a couple of medium-sized zucchini, enough for two people. Steam or simmer until barely tender. Drain and put it into a buttered casserole with a fried onion, salt and pepper. Beat an



egg or perhaps two and mix with a cup of grated cheese. We like a combination of parmesan and cheddar. Pour over the zucchini. Sprinkle the top with nutmeg or fenugreek or both and bake for twenty to twenty-five minutes. The egg mixes with the juice from the zucchini and forms a custard. Of course, crookneck or scalloped squash are fine, too.

Frozen squash is often spoken of harshly, but I think it's fine if you simmer it in its own water, squeeze out the water and proceed with the casserole above or a good tomato-cheesy-spicy one.

#### ARMENIAN YOGURT SOUP

This is another one adapted from Claudia Roden's Middle Eastern cookbook.

This summer we had a lot of goat's milk at the farm, which led to some interesting milky things. This is an excellent recipe to use if your yogurt, like mine, isn't exactly thick. It's an excellent recipe even if you can make thick yogurt.

Beat two eggs with four cups of yogurt. Bring slowly to a boil, stirring frequently. The eggs should keep the yogurt from curdling, but you can stabilize it with cornstarch to make sure. Stir in two cups of water and about two cups of noodles. I prefer spinach noodles. Simmer until the noodles are done. Salt and pepper. Meanwhile, fry a chopped onion and three tablespoons of crumbled dried mint in four or more tablespoons of butter. Pour the mint butter on top of each bowl of soup. Sounds strange but it's good. Really, it is.

#### VEGETARIAN MOUSSAKA

Slice a couple of eggplants, salt the slices and, after fifteen minutes, dry them. Flour and fry until brown. Also fry a chopped onion and a couple of garlic cloves. Make a couple of cups of thick white sauce, beating in an egg for a richer sauce. Layer the eggplant with the sauce, seasoning generously with cinnamon, nutmeg, fenugreek and coriander, or whichever of them you have. Top with a thin layer of cheese and bake. (You can cover the eggplant layers with an inch-thick layer of mashed potatoes for a more substantial dish.)

#### IMPROVED STIR-FRY

I guess everybody stir-fries vegetables, but a few things can make a stir-fry really special. I always sauté lots of garlic and fresh ginger root before I put in the other vegetables. A little soy sauce, sherry and cornstarch added at the last improves things too. Put a few fried cashews or peanuts on top. A really nice thing is a hot peanut butter sauce mixed in with the vegetables when they're done. It's good on a single vegetable too.

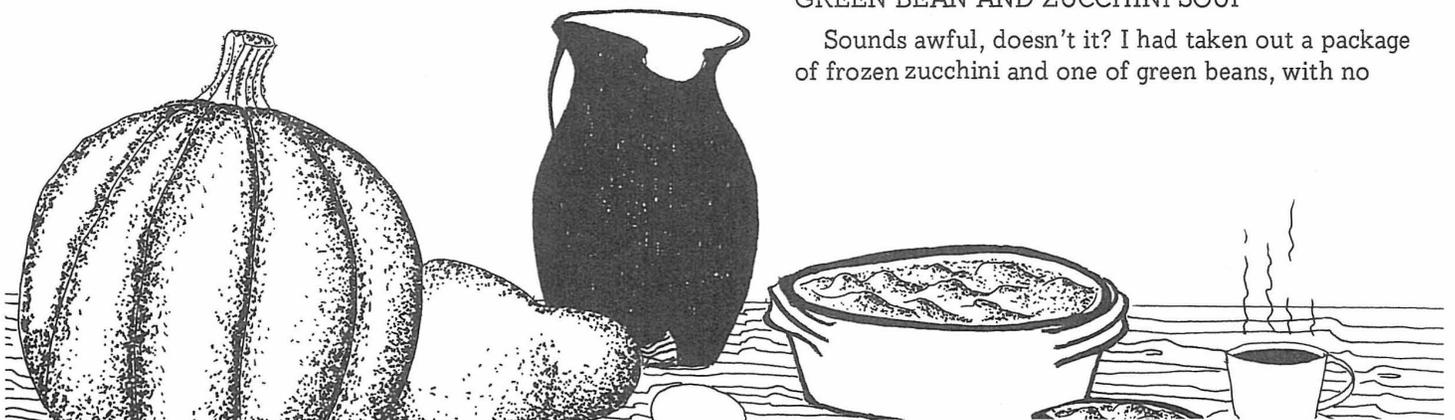
Mix: Three tablespoons peanut butter, two tablespoons oil, two tablespoons soy sauce, two tablespoons dry sherry, two tablespoons sugar, four tablespoons water, a little bit of hot pepper and two tablespoons tomato paste (or use cooked-down tomatoes and leave out the water). Beat everything together and serve over vegetables. (Adapted from *Chinese Vegetarian Cooking* by Kenneth H. C. Lo, Pantheon Books, 1974.)

#### BREAKFAST IDEAS

We've come up with some good breakfasts, using the foods we've grown. You can make a squash or pumpkin pudding by following any recipe for pumpkin pie filling or just by mixing two to three cups of squash with an egg, a cup of milk, sugar, butter and spices, and baking it. Or you can just cut the squash in two and bake it with butter, spices and brown sugar or maple syrup. It's fine to cook it the night before and heat it up for breakfast. We also like to make tortillas and put hot homemade fruit sauce (apple, pear, mulberry) on them and melt a little cheese on top. Corn can be mixed with an egg, a little milk and just enough flour to hold it together and then fried like pancakes. In Latin America, leftover rice and beans are often fried together for breakfast and served with a fried egg on top. A lovely thing that's good at any meal is to stew fruit, fresh or frozen, in a big pot with spoonfuls of biscuit dough dropped in to make dumplings. (Keep the lid on during cooking.) Strawberries are perfect. Serve with butter and cream or milk.

#### GREEN BEAN AND ZUCCHINI SOUP

Sounds awful, doesn't it? I had taken out a package of frozen zucchini and one of green beans, with no



particular plan. At dinnertime, I came up with this and it was so good I decided to serve it to Nancy Jack, who does not speak fondly of frozen beans or zucchini. She has relented.

Thaw and simmer, with very little liquid, frozen zucchini and green beans - a couple of cups of each. (Of course, fresh would be even better.) Chop and fry a few spring onions, including the green tops for color, and two garlic cloves. Purée everything in a blender, adding two eggs, salt, pepper, a little butter, and spices - I used rosemary and savory, lightly. Return to the pan and simmer for a few more minutes. It's good with fried bread and cheese.

#### FRIED BREAD (Chapattis)

Mix one cup of water with four cups of flour and ½ teaspoon salt. Knead well - at least five minutes. You can make the bread immediately or store the dough several days in the refrigerator. Take small lumps of dough and roll out into ¼" thick circles six inches across. Fry these in one-inch-deep hot oil until browned. This is a chewy crisp bread, quite different in texture from a baking powder bread.

- Susan

#### NECESSITY IS THE BREAD OF INVENTION

This bread is created from piles of this and that left in the cupboard such as tablespoons of oatmeal, barley, rice, brown rice, cream of wheat, wheatena, wheat germ, etc. Gather these grains and grind them to a rough powder. Cook them in 2 cups of water as you would hot cereal.

It usually takes the better part of a day for the whole process.

- 1 package of yeast
- 1 cup warm water
- 2 Tbsp. honey
- 1 envelope powdered milk, dissolved in
- 2 cups warm water
- 3 Tbsp. oil
- 2 Tbsp. salt
- 3 Tbsp. strong molasses or 1/3 cup regular molasses
- 2 cups cooked wheat berries
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 cups cooked ground grains
- 2 to 3 cups rye or whole wheat flour
- 2 Tbsp. chicory
- 5 cups white flour

Mix well. Allow to rise until double. Knead very thoroughly with a little white flour. Separate into two or three loaves. Allow to rise again. Brush with beaten egg. Bake at 300° for one hour.

- Tanis



#### SOUP AND SALAD

To me, soup and salad is such a lovely combination. Since salad makings are plentiful in the summer, I began combining garden vegetables to make some really excellent soups. This recipe, adapted from Claudia Rosen, makes an unusual use of eggplant. It's become a favorite of mine.

Grill the eggplants over a naked flame or under a broiler until their skins are black and blistered all over. Peel them carefully, removing all the charred particles.

Melt 5 tablespoons butter in a saucepan. Add 3 tablespoons flour (more if you want an eggplant cream) and stir over very low heat till well blended. Remove from heat.

Drain the eggplants and mash them or put them in the blender. Purée with butter and flour mixture. Return to the heat and gradually add two to two-and-a-half cups of milk, stirring constantly until it thickens and the taste of flour is gone. Season with salt and pepper. Add ½ cup Parmesan cheese. Stir till melted. Chop lots of parsley to add before serving.

Another excellent soup that is thick and creamy but uses no milk is this potato soup.

In 5½ cups water, cook a combination of onions, carrots, celery and potatoes. When tender, remove, saving a cup of the water. Purée the remaining mixture in the blender. Dissolve a chicken bouillon cube in the reserved cup of water to make a stock. Add this to the puréed mixture. Return to the heat. Season with salt and pepper and lots of chopped parsley.

Although this idea came to me too late in the season to try it, I'm very pleased to know that one can make use of sunflower heads.

Take the whole head of the sunflower and clean the seeds off it. Put it in a pot with water and boil it until brown in color or until the outer skins can be peeled away easily. You now have a white mass that tastes like mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper.

Here's an interesting use of the milkweed which grows abundantly around here. You can use it for pokeweed.

When plants are young, take the whole plant, minus the roots, and place it in boiling salted water. Boil until soft and serve with butter. It resembles spinach.



## BREAD RECIPES

This is a recipe we have used over and over again. When Marsha Zillis introduced it to us years ago, it was said to be an old Grange recipe. It's a bread or, with one addition, a cake. Both are moist, tasty and rich. Makes 1 loaf.

Mix into a bowl: 2 cups flour, 2 cups sugar (1 cup of flour may be whole wheat and the sugar may be cut down. Honey can be used in place of the sugar but it alters the consistency), 2 teaspoons baking powder, 2 teaspoons cinnamon, 1½ teaspoon soda and 1 teaspoon salt. Beat in 1½ cups oil and 4 eggs, one at a time. Then add 6 cups grated carrots. Vanilla and nuts will heighten the flavor and texture. You can add 1 cup crushed pineapple to it, which adds a lot of moistness and makes it more like a cake. When I add the pineapple I usually make the cream cheese frosting.

For a voluptuous icing, beat together 1 cup butter, 1 8-ounce package of cream cheese, 1 teaspoon vanilla and a 1 pound box powdered sugar. This recipe makes more frosting than I need, so you may want to cut it in half.

The abundance of winter squash and pumpkin we had this winter resulted in this excellent bread. The

general commentary was that it is a whole meal in a piece of bread!

Mix 1½ cup sugar with ½ cup oil, and add 2 slightly beaten eggs, 1 cup pumpkin or squash (I usually use a bit more) and 1/3 cup water.

Sift together 2 cups flour, 1 teaspoon soda, 1 teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon each of allspice, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg, ¼ teaspoon baking powder. Add to the squash mixture and blend well, then throw in some raisins and nuts and bake the bread in a loaf pan at 350° for an hour or until it's done.

— Kathi

*There is a small but stubborn caucus of New Alchemists who have not submitted to the charms of some of your sturdier greens. Kale, for instance. Acknowledging its marvelous nutritional qualities we remain sullenly obstinate. Yes, Portuguese Kale Soup is lovely, but look at the quantities of Linguica necessary to discipline it. We look upon it with disfavor when it is sprung on us in a salad. However, when Hilde puts it in a soufflé it becomes not only palatable but delicious. The following recipe should be taken seriously if for no other reason. One never knows when one might be confronted with ominous green waves of kale.*

— NJT

## SOUFFLÉ

Cook a batch of greens such as broccoli, kale, spinach, beet greens or swiss chard and chop them very fine — you should wind up with about the amount in a 10-ounce package of frozen greens. Drain them thoroughly and add 2 tablespoons butter or margarine. Stir in a saucepan over high heat until the butter is melted and any excess moisture has evaporated. Then add chopped onions and parsley to taste and blend in 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, ½ teaspoon salt and some pressed garlic. Add ½ cup milk all at once (you may need more depending on how many vegetables are used).

Cook all over medium heat, stirring until mixture thickens and bubbles, then stir in ½ cup grated cheese.

Beat 4 egg yolks until thick and lemon-colored — to these, add the cooked greens mixture, stirring constantly.

Beat stiff 4 egg whites and fold them thoroughly into the mixture and pour all into an *ungreased* 1-quart soufflé dish. Bake in a moderate oven (350°) for 35 minutes or until an inserted knife comes out clean.

This should be served and eaten *immediately*. Here's another method for keeping exuberant greens at bay:

## QUICHE LORRAINE

Use regular or whole wheat pie dough — spread it in a pan with sides at least 1½" high. Sprinkle a layer of grated cheese on top of the dough (Optional: you can

add, if you are inclined, a layer of cooked, spiced, crumbled hamburger meat, or a layer of cooked, thin-sliced, finely chopped ham or bacon crumbs). Then add a layer of slightly cooked, finely chopped greens (broccoli, kale, beet greens, swiss chard or spinach). Sprinkle a layer of grated cheese on top. Another layer of either meat or tomato or green pepper slices is optional. Now make the milk mixture: ½ cup white flour and ½ cup whole wheat flour, some salt, pepper, paprika powder. Add 4 cups of milk slowly to this to make a smooth sauce and stir in 6 beaten eggs. Now, pour the mixture over the other layers in the Quiche and bake it in a moderate oven about 30 minutes (or perhaps a bit more, if there are many layers). This is good eaten hot or cold.

(You may arrange strips of dough on top of milk mixture and then bake).

—Hilde

### GREEN BEANS (or SPINACH) with EINBRENNE (German Recipe)

Here is a way to make green beans (either fresh or frozen) more interesting. Cook 1 pound fresh green beans or 1 package frozen green beans (not too long — they should still be green and slightly firm) in water to just barely cover. Meanwhile, chop a small onion

and cook it in butter in a skillet until transparent - not brown. Add about 1½ teaspoons flour, stirring well. Now, drain the liquid from the cooked beans into the onion-flour mixture, stirring till smooth. Taste for salt and pepper and add the green beans, then heat through.

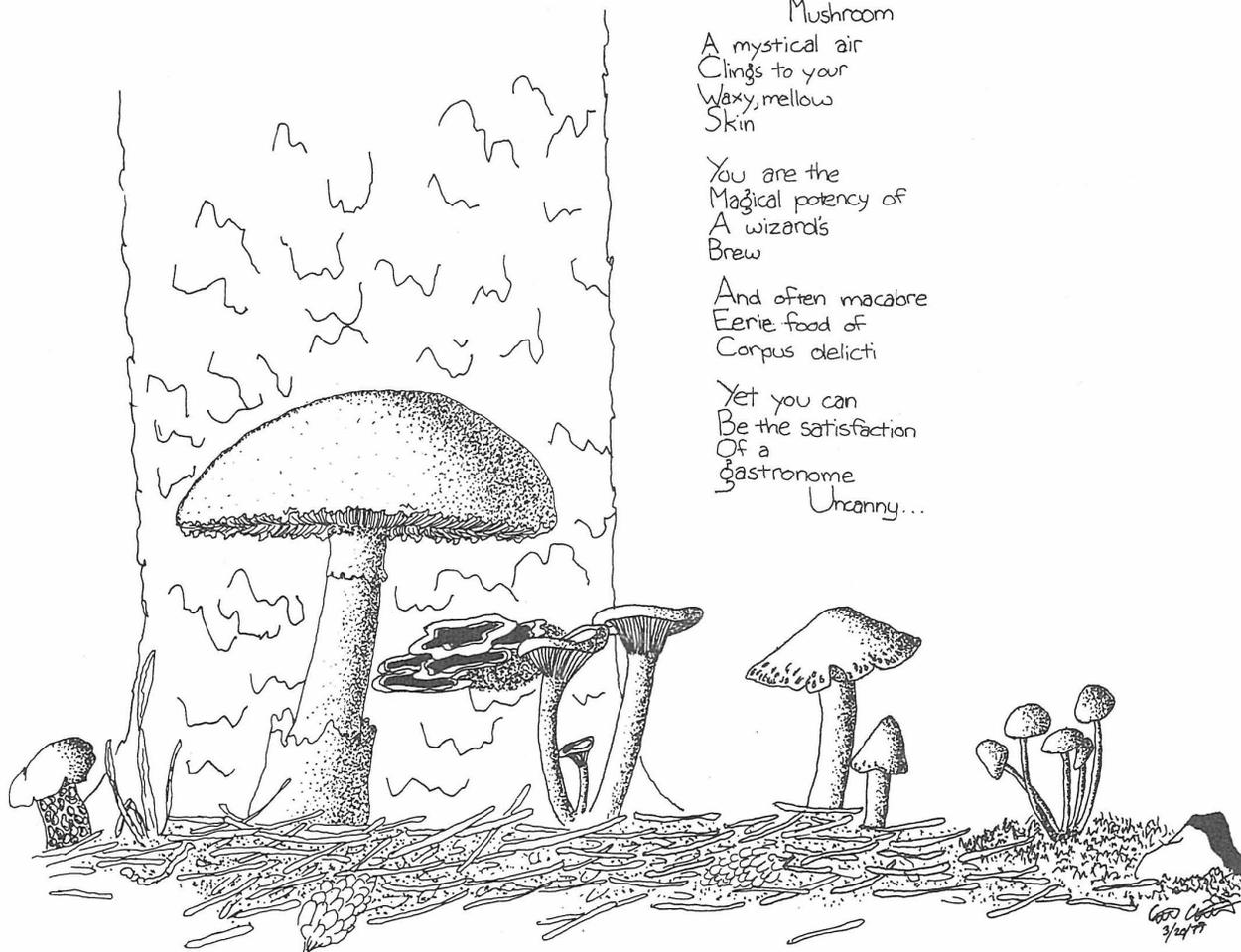
You can treat spinach the same way. Cook fresh spinach (about a pound) and chop it (an old-fashioned wooden chopping bowl and chopping knife are good for this) or you can use a package of *chopped* frozen spinach.

### COLCANNON (Irish Recipe)

This can be made at any time of the year, but it is especially useful when potatoes and cabbage are harvested at the same time. Cook as many small potatoes as you want (the little red ones are very good) with their skins. Peel them when cooked (let them cool a little or you'll burn your fingers) and mash them very coarsely into a couple of tablespoons of butter in a skillet (You can use oil, but butter really tastes better).

Chop a small head of cabbage (actually, shred it) and add it to the potatoes. Cook potatoes and cabbage together about 5 minutes, stirring often. Cabbage should not be limp, but still nice and crispy.

— Claire



#### Mushroom

A mystical air  
Clings to your  
Waxy, mellow  
Skin

You are the  
Magical potency of  
A wizard's  
Brew

And often macabre  
Eerie food of  
Corpus delicti

Yet you can  
Be the satisfaction  
Of a  
Gastronome  
Uncanny...

# The Trash Fish Cook Book



## Rides Again!

### CHAIN PICKEREL

The pickerel, one of the commonest predators of weedy waters east of the Appalachians, from New Brunswick to Florida, is a fish I hadn't thought of as a "trash fish." For years, I've been having too much fun catching and eating them. But this summer we witnessed a couple fishing a small pond, alternately catching largemouth bass and pickerel. They kept the bass and put back the pickerel which, I have discovered, seems to be the general practice. The pond was small, so we didn't reduce our own harvests by enlightening them. But I trust our readers don't fish in the same small ponds, so I will share this secret. Those pickerel would have been a whole lot better on the table than the bass. I am especially partial to the texture of pickerel, fried or baked. On this count, it has few equals among fresh water fishes.

I don't know why pickerel are not more accepted. Before I ever lived within their range, I was told that most of the pickerel one catches are small and skinny (true) and therefore terribly bony (not true). Massachusetts law stipulates a minimum length of fourteen inches for pickerel and I would take home smaller ones if I could. Even the fourteen-inchers are less bony than most panfish.

Sometimes pickerel taste "lakey." This taste appears to be characteristic of certain bodies of water, particularly shallow ones with a lot of water weeds (other than lily pads) and algae. But I have yet to meet the pickerel too "lakey" to be made delicious; just lay on the herbs a little more heavily.

### PANFRIED PICKEREL

There's nothing unusual about panfrying a pickerel but here are details in case you don't know how to panfry anything. I cut the fish in several pieces about six inches long. If the fish has gotten excessively slimy, rinse it off, and then roll each piece in flour seasoned with salt and pepper and a little dill, if you like. Fry the pieces in about three-quarters of an inch of hot oil until nicely browned. Cook it well — underdone fish is not good fish. We like fried pickerel for breakfast.

### BAKED PICKEREL WITH HERB STUFFING

This is a fancier method for cooking large pickerel. The proportions I give are for a single fish large enough to feed two hungry people.

Melt a couple of tablespoons of butter in a pan and fry a chopped onion in it until it's soft. Then mix in

about a cup of bread crumbs. Add *lots* of herbs. I like a mixture of thyme, rosemary and sage, about a tablespoon of each. Fill the cavity of the fish with the stuffing and bake at 375° until the fish is flaky in the thickest parts — probably forty-five minutes. A few minutes before the fish is done, make a cup and a half or so of white sauce. Mix a little of the sauce with the juice of a lemon (or two) and then slowly stir the juice and sauce mixture into the rest of the sauce. Salt and pepper. When the fish is done, pour the sauce over it and serve. The same sauce is lovely on broccoli, so I like to make enough to have sauce on everything.

### FRESH WATER BLACK BASS

Having maligned the largemouth bass in the above section on chain pickerel, let me clarify my position. I realize that very few people will classify the black basses (largemouth, smallmouth and spotted) as "trash fish", but I submit that they, and particularly the largemouth, are greatly over-rated as food fish. I suppose their table status is related to the high regard in which they are, rightly, held as sport fish. I spend a fair amount of time fishing for bass, and there are times when I feel foolish looking several pounds of food in the face, thinking about putting it back in the water. So, I make the best of a good situation by applying a tip from my erstwhile co-author and ol' fishin' buddy, Bryce Butler: Fillet the bass and fry it fast in deep oil, using your choice of breading, oil and spices. Bryce uses a mixture of flour and, of all things, Ralston, a breakfast cereal. I don't know why this is so, but I have found filleted and deep fried bass to be far superior to bass prepared any other way.

### BULLHEADS

Bullheads are one of the chief fish in our diet; see the first installment of the TRASH FISH COOK BOOK in the third *Journal* for basic bullhead recipes. This summer we tried a couple of new ways of preparing them. The first was a different smoking method contributed by a visitor from Holland, Jacques Visser. Jacques' method worked well with other fish, too, but the bullheads were everyone's favorite. This is a very soft smoke with no preservative value, but wonderful to eat.

Jacques constructed a simple smoker with an old oil drum. He cut a hole about nine inches square

near the bottom of the drum and made a piece that was used as a damper over the hole. Two holes were drilled about six inches from the top of the drum so that a skewer could be run across it.

The fish should be gutted but not skinned or beheaded, then salted and allowed to sit for a couple of hours. Meanwhile, burn enough wood to get a good bed of coals. When the flames have almost died down, dry the fish thoroughly and run a skewer through the gills. Put the skewer through the holes provided in the drum, suspending the fish down inside, put a cover over the drum and close the damper. When the fish are good and hot, dip several handfuls of fresh cedar needles in water and throw them on the coals. Keep an eye on the fish. If you've got the right amount of fire, you can just let the coals burn themselves out, by which time the fish should be done. But don't let them burn or dry out.

We have also smoked bullheads conventionally, with good results. This summer we were invited to contribute to a wedding feast and, having caught forty some bullheads the night before the wedding, decided to smoke them. Smoking is not something you can rush and, as the hour drew near, we could see that our bullheads were going to be "almost done", which is *not* satisfactory for a wedding feast (or any meal, for that matter). Susan solved the problem by putting butter and rosemary on the almost-done fish and broiling them for just a few minutes.

The next two creatures are not fish, but they do live in the water and are often encountered or even accidentally caught by anglers.

#### FRESH WATER "MUSSELS"

These are actually not mussels, but fresh water clams, of which there are many species, found in all North American waters except the smaller creeks and brooks and those waters which are severely polluted. They are especially numerous in large rivers, but here in New England we find them in abundance in ponds. To collect fresh water clams, look for shells on shore or in the shallows, then look a little deeper, probing in the sand and mud.

I was brought up to believe that fresh water clams are inedible, and I must admit that I have sampled some that would substantiate that claim. But I have also had some that were wonderful. The best I have ever eaten were the exotic Asian fresh water clam *Corbicula*, which has become established in much

of the United States, but many of our native species can also be quite good. If you need to convince yourself of the gustatory potential of fresh water clams, stop by your nearest gourmet foods store and pick up a tin of "smoked baby clams", which are actually full-grown *Corbicula*, imported from Japan.

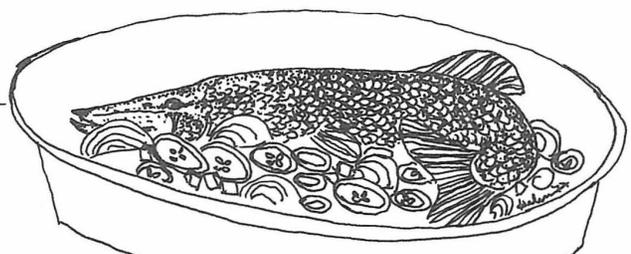
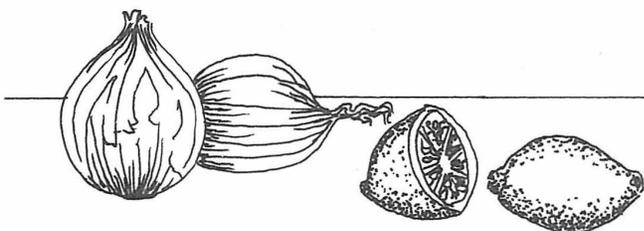
So far we haven't gotten fancy with fresh water clam cookery; we just put them overnight in a pot of water with corn meal (this is supposed to clean the sand from them; we aren't sure it is critical), steam them just enough to open the shells, and saute the whole animal in garlic butter. The results vary considerably, which apparently has more to do with the body of water where the clams were taken than anything else, though it may have something to do with the species as well. So far, we aren't able to look at a live clam or a body of water and predict the food quality. We welcome comments from readers on this or other aspects of preparing fresh water clams for the table.

One word of caution: Clams are filter feeders and thus concentrate whatever is in the water in their tissues. So be more careful about where you get them than you would with fish. Avoid any waters known to receive sewage or pesticide pollution.

#### SNAPPING TURTLE

One of the true gourmet treats of North American fresh waters is the snapping turtle. Anglers often see them and occasionally catch them (usually to everyone's dismay). They can be caught on set lines or with special traps, but the easiest way to get a snapping turtle is to look for one on land in the late spring or early summer, when the females leave the water to lay their eggs. The males seem to wander quite a bit at this time, too, and they can often be seen crossing roads near ponds and swamps. To capture a snapping turtle on land, simply pick it up *by the tail* and hold it *well away from your body*. *Don't do it any other way*, unless you have fingers to spare.

Before you go out and catch a snapping turtle, though, you should ask yourself, "Do I *really* want to eat one?" My father used to say "A snapping turtle has seven different kinds of meat, all good, and seventy different smells, all bad." That prepared me for only one aspect of the tedious and mildly disgusting task of dressing a snapper. There are a few who love snapping turtle soup more than I, and I do in about one turtle a year.



In one respect, turtle butchering is easy; there are few animals harder to love than a snapper. And your conservationist friends will applaud you; this super-predator eats just about anything that moves in the water, up to and including ducklings. It is *not* an endangered species.

So, having made a commitment to do the deed and set aside the better part of a day for it, the first task is to kill the turtle. This should be done the night before you plan to butcher and cook it and, if feasible, two days before you plan to feast on turtle soup. If your turtle doesn't turn up on a convenient day, don't worry, it will live for many days as long as you keep it damp and shaded. The standard instructions for killing a snapper say to chop its head off. To do this you will need to stretch the neck out. A variety of instructions have been given for this; in my experience they mostly don't work, and only result in much struggle for all and suffering for the turtle. I prefer to axe the turtle between the eyes, anyway. Snappers, unlike other turtles, cannot completely retract their heads into the shell. You can get a clear shot there, and there is a lot of meat in the neck and right on up over the top of the head, where the brain should be. However you proceed, use a *very sharp* axe — turtles are *tough*. Once the turtle has been killed, hang it up by the tail to drain overnight.

The next step is to open up the shell, which is easier than it sounds. Just bring a *large* pot of water to boil and put the turtle in, on its back. You will probably need to place a rock or brick on the belly of the animal to hold it down. At this point, try to overlook any left-over kicks and twitches. Just how long to boil the turtle depends on its size; about an hour will do for the average snapper. One of my more poetic colleagues says to boil it "until it looks like a horse with a head cold that sneezed in its nosebag." The point of boiling the turtle whole is to soften the under shell and loosen the skin, while retaining the fluids in the main shell. So don't overdo it; over-boiling will cause the shell to break up and the fluids to be lost. You can make an occasional test poke with a knife at the point where the two shells, upper and lower, are joined.

When the turtle has boiled sufficiently, decant the water and allow it to cool. If you have done the job well, you should be able to remove the bottom shell with your fingers. Pour off and save the juice inside the shell. Now comes the hard, time-consuming part.

You have to pick out laboriously the seven different kinds of meat, while savoring the seventy differ-

ent smells. This involves skinning out the legs, feet, neck and tail and poking around every cranny inside, including up next to the top of the shell.

Turtles have muscles in the most amazing places. In the process you will discover not only various new odors, but more sticky fat than you ever dreamed of. Would you believe fat between the toes? I find it helps to make up disgusting songs about turtle fat. Soon you will discover more flies than you thought existed in your neighborhood. The job will take long enough that you will discover why I only do it once a year.

If you persist, you will end up with a surprisingly large amount of meat of a variety of colors and textures. Some real turtle connoisseurs save the liver and other parts; I don't like them. It is now up to you to make a gourmet dish to justify all that time, labor and stench.

The classic snapping turtle dish is snapper soup, which we prepare as follows.

Simmer the turtle meat, cut into small pieces, until it is approaching tenderness. We use the liquid mess from inside the turtle shell but some people find our results distinctly funky. If you prefer less funk (or less taste, Bill would say) use tomatoes and water. Then we add onions, corn, celery, green peas and carrots (you can use any vegetables you like in soup), and simmer until they're tender, adding spices and seasonings to taste. The soup is better the second day.

A fancier dish which everybody liked, even those who didn't like the soup, was adapted from *The Joy of Cooking* recipe for terrapin. Follow the steps given above, ending up with clean meat and the broth from the shell. Melt several tablespoons of butter in a pan and stir in an equal amount of flour. Slowly add the broth from the shell and a cup of tomato sauce. Stir until the mixture is smooth. Add the chopped turtle meat and a chopped onion. Simmer until the turtle meat is almost tender, adding water if necessary. Turtle isn't one of your naturally tender beasts, so you should be content with a hearty chewy meat. At this stage, season to taste with thyme, basil, marjoram, bay leaf, etc., and add a couple of tablespoons of dry sherry. The sherry is important. Simmer a while longer and serve on rice.

These two recipes, and particularly the second one, should make your snapping turtle one of the most memorable meals of the year, and not only because of the preparation.

— Bill

