

For Great Foods, There's No Place Like Home

I have to say for all of you out there that if you have lived your whole life here in southwest Ohio, there's something very important you have missed and I want to share that with you. You see, I grew up here then spent over 20 years split between south Florida and Chicago before coming home in 1999.

It took living somewhere else to help me understand what a real blessing it is to be right here.

I've enjoyed many things associated with the places I've lived or visited over the last half-century and I would discourage you from falling into the trap of stereotyping other areas. There are great people and things to do most everywhere you go. I feel very sad for people I've met who are quick to dismiss our area in favor of, say, living in California or New England. There is a richness everywhere if you look for it. Certainly, that can be said for the foods and culinary traditions of different regions.

I'd love to bring a food editor for one of the national food magazines into our area in August and serve them Silver Queen corn fresh from the garden, dripping with butter, hot off the grill. Or how about a thick, juicy slice of one of those huge, knobby tomatoes with just a sprinkle of coarse salt that we wait all year long for and never get enough of when they come into season.

Many of us will be coming into that time of year that is all about church fellowship and special carry in meals as Easter approaches. I've got to tell you, if it's been a while for you it does a heart good to experience the whole taco. I'm not just talking about Easter services. I'm talking about a bonifide Easter egg hunt with 2 and 3-year-olds all dressed up, grinning ear to ear and screaming after finding that first egg. And it may seem silly to some but I love to see ladies all dressed up. Add on a fancy flower pinned on and a great hat and it just doesn't get any better.

Where are all of the national news cameras when all of this is going on? I think you understand my point.

I want to offer up some great recipes for comfort foods today, including a delicious meatloaf recipe from a really special family member along with a potato recipe acquired from one of those national treasures, a lady at church who learned to cook while living on the farm. These are both dishes guaranteed to empty your platters at that next covered dish gathering.

Anna Lee's Dutch Meat Loaf
(Serves 6 happy diners)

1 ½ to 2 pounds ground chuck
1 cup Town House Crackers,
crushed
1 medium sweet onion, finely
chopped
8 oz. Hunts Tomato Sauce (1/2 of a
15 ½ oz. can)
1 large egg, well beaten
1 ½ teaspoon sea salt
¼ teaspoon fresh ground black
pepper



Very gently combine all of the above ingredients and form into a loaf on a shallow baking pan. Place in a 350°F preheated oven and begin baking. For the sauce combine the following ingredients:

8 oz. Hunts Tomato Sauce (remainder of the 15 ½ oz. can)
1 cup luke warm water
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons French's prepared mustard
2 tablespoons dark brown sugar

Pour sauce over the meatloaf in oven and continue to bake for 1 ½ hours longer, basting about every 20 minutes. When done remove from oven and allow to rest lightly covered with foil for 15 minutes before slicing.

Now when you plopp that wonderful meatloaf down on the plates for everyone, you'll need a potato dish to go along with it. I've got nothing at all against mashed potatoes but if we're going to pull out all of the stops then let me recommend:

Creamy Potatoes Au Gratin
(Serves 6 to 8)

There's something about potatoes combined with cheese. The use of the Gruyere and Parmesan together provides great texture and an amazingly rich flavor.

2/3 cup unsalted butter, softened
3 pounds Idaho potatoes, peeled and cut into ¼-inch thick slices
1 cup grated Gruyere cheese
1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

2 cups heavy cream
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon paprika

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter a large oven proof casserole dish with about 2 tablespoons of the softened butter. Arrange a layer of the potatoes in the baking dish, and top with a sprinkle of the grated cheeses over them. Continue layering the potatoes and cheeses until you've used them all ending with a layer of potatoes. In a small bowl, whisk the cream with the salt and pepper; pour this over the potatoes. Dot the remaining butter over the top and sprinkle with the paprika. Bake for 1 to 1 ¼ hours, or until the potatoes are tender and golden brown on top. Let stand for about 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

We were down at the Cincinnati Convention Center this past Friday for the Cincinnati International Winetasting event and I've got to say that if you love wines this is one event that you really should take advantage of. There were something over 600 wines offered for you to taste and in many cases the people who own the individual wineries or actually make the wines were presenting them.

I'll point out for you that these events are not about wine drinking. One thing I not only recommend but would insist that you strive to do at tastings of this size is to get comfortable with spitting. This simply means that you take advantage of the buckets provided and endeavor to make it through the tasting as a survivor. Also, there's no way in the world you will be able to keep track of what you have experienced if you don't stay lucid.

Most of my time was spent tasting white wines, particularly Chardonnays, as we are headed for summer and we have a need for more of them for our inventory. Just one really delightful wine was the 2004 Lobster Cove Chardonnay produced by Meeker Vineyards. The wine is all about abundant fruit and not wood, which provides a fresh, power packed tasting experience and would make this wine a real delight with salads, poultry, grilled salmon or by itself as a cocktail. I'll keep you informed about other finds we come up with.

If you'd like to chat or have questions, please contact us at 888-288-0668 or visit us on the web at www.winedog.com. Hope you have a terrific week! Cheers.