

Thanksgiving: A Culinary Choice

by Janet Barkas (a/k/a Jan Yager, Ph.D.)

What's the best part of Thanksgiving? Is it the reunited family sitting around a table laden with carefully prepared homemade foods? Is it the cuisine itself? Or, is it the special character of the guests, perhaps, that calls for a meal that is equally special?

This year you have vowed to try some new dishes — but what should they be? Too often, published recipes are fictionalized accounts of an "ideal" meal. The menus that follow, however, are quite the opposite — they have stood the practical test of many Thanksgivings, past and present. The first is the bill of fare of Eleanor DeMarse of Rochester, New York — not a cook by profession, but someone who cooks like a professional!

ELEANOR'S TRADITIONAL THANKSGIVING MENU

Aunt Adeline's Gelatin Squares
Succulent Turkey with Homemade Stuffing and Gravy
Mashed Golden Delicious Squash
Homemade Cranberry Sauce

The second dinner might seem a bit unorthodox, but to the vegetarian or someone just tired of turkey, it will be a filling and unforgettable feast.

JANET'S NEW STYLE THANKSGIVING MEAL

Cream of Vegetable Soup
Cicero Salad
Meat-Like Lasagna
Herbed Carrots
Apple Cranberry Meringue Cake

Whichever menu you choose, be prepared for many pats on the back along with shouts of, "Any more _____ left?"

TRADITIONAL THANKSGIVING MENU

AUNT ADELINE'S GELATIN SQUARES

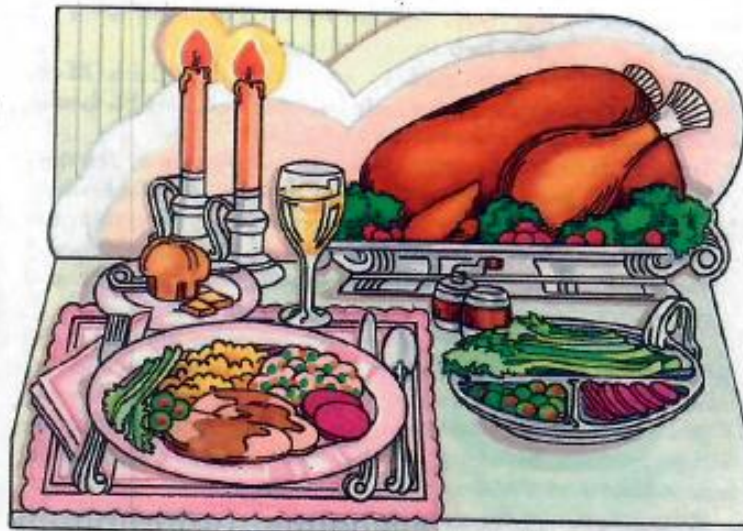
Dissolve 2 packages of strawberry gelatin dessert in 1½ cups boiling water. Combine 1 (thawed) package of frozen strawberries with 1 small can of crushed pineapple. Add the fruits to the gelatin liquid. In another bowl, mix a small package of softened cream cheese with ½ pint of sour cream.

Pour half of the fruit mixture into an 8-inch-square pan and let it set until firm. Then cover it with the sour cream mixture and pour the remaining fruit mixture on top. Allow the entire dish to chill until firm. Cut into individual squares (about 6-9) and serve on separate plates. Gelatin squares may be prepared a day in advance to reduce same-day cooking burdens.

SUCCULENT TURKEY WITH HOMEMADE STUFFING AND GRAVY

Preheat the oven to 325°.

Prepare the stuffing for a 10-12-pound turkey by first sautéing 3 cups chopped celery and 1 cup finely chopped onion in ½ cup melted butter. Allow the vegetables to cool slightly before



ILLUSTRATED BY MARGARET RUSSELL

adding them to 8 cups of bread crumbs (store-bought or made from crustless bread). Season the stuffing to taste with poultry seasoning, celery salt, and a little sage; mix well. Rinse the turkey inside and out and pat it dry, then stuff.

Baste the stuffed turkey with the butter that is left over from sautéing the onions and celery. Eleanor usually roasts the turkey for the length of time suggested on the wrapper, and for Eleanor it is usually an infallible method. But for those who need more specific directions, roasting time for a 10-12-pound turkey is usually 4-4½ hours. Yield: 16 servings.

Homemade gravy should be made in the same pan that was used to roast the turkey to get the full benefits of the pan drippings. But skim the fat off the drippings first.

Make a paste of flour and a little water. Use about 1½ tablespoons flour for each cup of gravy that you wish to make. Beat the paste until smooth, while slowly adding more water until the mixture looks like milk. Heat the drippings that are in the pan. Then, just before the boiling point, slowly stir in the flour-and-water paste. Add water to the mixture — approximately 4-5 cups water per ½ cup drippings. Boil the gravy vigorously, stirring constantly until it thickens.

MASHED GOLDEN DELICIOUS SQUASH

Peel a butternut squash and cut it into pieces. (One squash will serve 2 persons.) In a medium-sized pot, place a little water and cook the squash, uncovered, until it is tender. Drain off the water and mash the squash. Add pepper, salt, a little brown sugar, and stir the squash again.

HOMEMADE CRANBERRY SAUCE

Even the most inexperienced cook will find this recipe easy. Wash a 1-pound bag of whole cranberries and then boil the berries in about a cup (or less) of water until they pop and become soft. Add ¾ - 1 cup sugar. This sauce can be made the day before and stored in the refrigerator. Yield: 1 quart.

Crown your traditional Thanksgiving feast with old favorites like apple, pumpkin or mince pie.

JANET'S NEW STYLE THANKSGIVING MEAL

CREAM OF VEGETABLE SOUP

To make 3-4 servings boil 2 cups of water with the following: 2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced; 1 medium carrot, peeled and sliced; ½ cup string beans, cut up; ¼ head white cabbage, sliced; 1 bay leaf; 1 teaspoon chopped chives; a sprinkling of parsley flakes; and 1 packet of vegetable broth.

When the vegetables are cooked (15-20 minutes), melt 2 tablespoons butter or margarine in a saucepan. Add 2 tablespoons white flour, 1½ cups water from the vegetables and ½ cup whole milk. Stir the liquid; when it is warm-to-hot, pour it into the pot of vegetables. Cover; simmer over a very low flame about 10-15 minutes. (Garnish with fresh parsley, if you wish.)

CICERO SALAD

To make the dressing for this tasty salad, place a finely chopped garlic clove and 2-3 tablespoons salad oil in a medium-sized bowl. Allow the garlic and oil mixture to sit at least 1 hour, or, if possible, overnight. Then add the juice of ½ lemon and 1 tablespoon parsley flakes. Stir.

Clean and drain a head of lettuce (romaine, iceberg, Boston) and tear into bite-sized pieces. Add the lettuce pieces to the oil and seasoning mixture, a few at a time. When all the lettuce has been thoroughly coated, stir in slightly less than ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Top the salad with your favorite croutons, salt and pepper to taste. Serve ice cold.

These ingredients will yield 4-6 small salads, but some guests might want to make this salad their main course!

MEAT-LIKE LASAGNA

Either a traditional lasagna pan or a 9-by-13-inch cake pan may be used for this dish. To make one 9-by-13 pan that will amply

feed 4-6 persons, use the following ingredients: 1 tablespoon olive oil; 1 clove minced garlic; 2 large Bermuda onions, chopped; a large can (1 lb. 3 oz.) texturized vegetable protein meat substitute or 2 cups grated cooked soybeans; 2-3 cups tomato sauce (homemade or prepared); 16 ounces mozzarella; 8 ounces ricotta; and cooked lasagna noodles (about ½ pound). (Those interested in counting calories may use a 9-inch loaf pan and 4 noodles instead.)

Preheat the oven to 350°. In the bottom of the ungreased pan, spread some of the tomato sauce. Layer the rest of the ingredients in this order: noodles, thinly sliced mozzarella interspersed with dabs of ricotta, and sauce. Repeat, and end with noodles topped by sauce. If you wish to sprinkle a little mozzarella on the top, do so during the last 10 minutes of baking to prevent burning.

Bake the lasagna for about 45 minutes or until the sauce bubbles. Serve piping hot. Double or triple this recipe to fit your needs. You can easily refrigerate leftovers.

HERBED CARROTS

This dish is simple to prepare and very flavorful. Clean, peel and slice 4 very large carrots (figure on 2 carrots per person, and increase the ingredients according to your needs). Place them in a colander, and put the colander in a pan with a small amount of water. Steam the carrots until tender and drain thoroughly. Season with 1-2 tablespoons margarine or butter, 1 tablespoon brown sugar, 1½ teaspoons parsley flakes, and ½ teaspoon tarragon leaves, crushed. Add a little water if the mixture appears to be too dry. Serve hot.

APPLE CRANBERRY MERINGUE CAKE

Everyone will enjoy this calorie-reduced dessert, which makes use of the traditional cranberry, but in an unusual way that results in an ice-cream-sundae-like treat.

Form a base by combining ¾ cups crushed graham-cracker crumbs with 1-2 tablespoons margarine or butter. Spread the crumb mixture along the bottom of an 8-inch cake pan.

In a small saucepan, place 4 cups diced apples, ½ cup whole cranberries, a dash of lemon juice and enough water to cover the fruits. Cook over medium heat, adding brown and white sugar (about ½ cup each), nutmeg and allspice to taste. Simmer for 5-10 minutes.

In another smaller pan, cook ½ cup whole cranberries and ¼ cup sugar for the cake topping for 10 minutes, or until the mixture has thickened.

For meringue, combine 3 egg whites, ⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar and 6 tablespoons sugar. Beat until the whites form stiff peaks that keep their shapes.

Pour the mixed fruit filling over the graham-cracker layer and spread the meringue evenly across the filling. Carefully spoon the cranberry topping into the center of the meringue.

Bake at 375° for about 20 minutes or until the meringue is golden. Chill before serving. Each of the 12 squares in this cake is about 60 calories. If you are not weight conscious, increase the graham crackers, margarine and sugar in the fruit filling for a richer and thicker cake.

So there you have it — two complete Thanksgiving dinners to satisfy even the fussiest gourmet!

