

GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 11

JANUARY 2024

WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM

GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM

Why do we eat what we eat?

Happy New Year!

I hope to hear from you and, as always, I hope you enjoy this issue.

Enjoy!

Gwen

In this issue

Evolution of the Modern Diet (Part 1)

Food Stories – Chicken and Waffles

The Exchange

What's new

As I mentioned in last month's newsletter, I have been working on creating options for people who have sensitivities to certain ingredients such as gluten or fructan (the component of garlic and onion that irritates the stomach lining.)

As I have been learning more about these sensitivities, I began to wonder why there seem to be so many these days. When I was a kid, there were basically 3 major issues, peanut allergy, seafood allergy and something called PKU, (phenylketonuria) which was a genetic inability to process phenylalanine. I am not saying that there weren't others, just that those were the ones most talked about.

Nowadays, it seems like everyone is trying to avoid something in their diet. For some it is salt or sugar, which have long been known to impact blood pressure and insulin production. For others, however, it is something much more specific, such as garlic, gluten, or grapefruit (which interferes with the way certain medications are absorbed by the body).

If you ask the question "How did so many other sensitivity issues develop in such a relatively short time?" (evolutionarily speaking). You will get a variety of different answers:

1. Science got better at identifying root causes of what we used to call "sensitive stomachs".
2. As our diets changed to include more processed foods, our systems couldn't keep up.
3. As we began to engineer our food (creating new varieties, developing new methods for insect control, feeding our farm animals new diets, etc.) our systems couldn't tolerate this either.

I am sure there are many other opinions out there, and I am not here to pick a reason, but it is fairly clear that there is, at the

minimum, substantially more conversation about our food and how it makes us feel.

Perhaps a good place to start is a look at where we came from. Once upon a time, way, way back in the olden days, the first apes began to walk upright on two feet. It was slow going. For hundreds of thousands of years, our ancestors walked more like today's great apes, upright sometimes, but mostly hunched over, using their arms for balance and speed. These animals ate a raw diet, both plants and other animals (usually carrion). Raw diets take a ton of calories to consume and digest. They require large teeth and long intestines to absorb as much nutrition as possible.

At some point, about 1.9 million years ago, fire was first harnessed. With that skill, evolution kicked into high gear. We began walking more upright and using and making tools. Fire meant food could be cooked (providing 20-25% more nutrition). Fire meant warmth and protection from other animals. Cooked food meant less need for those huge teeth, and long intestines. Smaller teeth meant smaller jaws which left more room in the skull for bigger brains. Can you see where this is going?

By the time that Homo sapiens had evolved, our bodies were designed to eat cooked food, our brains were more developed, our bodies had less fur, and our nomadic tendencies were short lived.

Most indigenous peoples ate a version of the same diet. Proteins obtained hunting, fishing or farming (legumes); vegetables, aromatics, as well as other spices and herbs foraged or farmed. This basic diet evolved in cultures all around the world and remained fairly constant until civilization evolved to a point where people put down roots, built permanent structures and with the time not spent moving around, began to spend time altering their food. Both by selective breeding (only using the plants and animals with the most desirable traits to procreate) and by altering the food itself. Baking was the first step, but once metal became available, the possibilities were limitless.

So now we have shot forward in time to about 5000 years ago. Most people still participated in sourcing their own food, (or they knew the people who did). Food was cooked, aromatics used for flavoring, but for the most part it was unadulterated. Food was consumed in the way it grew. Exploration fueled the next leap in cuisine as the explorers returned with exotic goods from around the world. New tastes, new flavors, maybe even new techniques for preserving food were shared, but our food was still basically the product of evolution with very minimal genetic meddling from humans.

As towns grew, and people began to specialize in specific trades, farmers markets replaced communal larders. People might have become more removed from the production of their food, but they still knew the producers. Refrigeration didn't exist so

shopping was a regular occurrence with large baskets and boxes full of fresh food that you picked up as you moved through the market, placed in your cart and moved on. Soon the General Stores appeared, creating permanent structures where you could pick up what you needed but food was still in giant barrels produced locally, and was measured out by the proprietor.



Oddly enough, one of the most pivotal inventions that took us from scooping grain from a barrel to grabbing a box of pasta off the shelf, was – **the Box!** Food that you could grab off of the shelf by yourself was the key to the first Grocery Store, and that would not have been possible with cardboard boxes and paper bags. One of the first, and certainly the most well-known was A&P. The full name was Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company and it is considered by many to be the OG of the modern grocery store. Decades later, we have seen the rise and fall of mom & pop stores, giant chains, and now we are in a sort of renaissance of the old school butchers, cheese shops and other specialty shops harking back to the old farmers' market days.

The difference in today's grocery stores from the old country store is the sheer number of products available, the number of shelf stable products, and the speed with which new products hit the shelves. How did we get to a point where a store can carry over 40,000 different items? There are many different factors that had an impact on food selection and that is where we will pick this up next month. Stay tuned!



Food Stories

Chicken and Waffles – who ever thought that would be a good idea? Apparently, someone very smart. While the

Pennsylvania Dutch had a version with stewed chicken and gravy, the current fried version was born in Harlem in 1938.

The first references of chicken fried in hot oil are found in “What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking” (published in 1881 and written by Abby Fisher). Thomas Jefferson’s contribution of a waffle iron brought over from France in the late 1790’s, combined with the Pennsylvania Dutch recipe for waffles laid the groundwork.

The original version was served at a place called “Dickie Wells” after its owner and founder Richard Wells (b. 1908) Richard was a tap dancer pulling in about 12 times the annual salary as most black men of the time. Realizing that his legs wouldn’t support him forever, he opened a restaurant, hoping to capitalize on his popularity with the club crowd. He ran one a very few places that served a late-night menu. Since closing time for most clubs was too late for dinner and too early for breakfast, Richard decided to serve them both at the same time (although his version usually came with a shot of bourbon).

Chicken and Waffles remained a mostly southern offering, appearing in several Harlem restaurants and in the deep south, but not too many other places until 1976 when Herb Hudson opened “Roscoe’s House of Chicken” in LA.

Hudson had grown up in Harlem and had moved west. He had ties to the Motown crowd, so his restaurant became popular with the music industry people and then, eventually everyone.

If you want to try making it on your own, try adding a little **Nate’s Nashville Hot** to your breading!

The Exchange

How about trying this?

Substitute **Gwen’s Blends Hot Chocolate** mix for cocoa in your chocolate cheesecake. (or add it to the standard one you’re doing.)

Add some **Everything Spice** or **Za’atar** to your next batch of bread or biscuits.

Sprinkle Some **Italian Seasoning** in your scrambled eggs or omelet.

Mix a tsp or two of **Baharat** in your peanut butter next time you make a sandwich.

What’s new at Gwen’s Blends

Check out our new Variety Packs!

Dip Assortment
Burger Seasoning
Chicken Seasoning
Snack mix Assortment

Each packet contains 6 single use servings of different varieties of blends to try along with a recipe.

\$15.00 each

Festivals

January

Taking the month off to re-charge.

February

February 3

South Riding Winter Festival

Community Center

12:00-4:00 PM

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I’ll add them to the list.

Don’t want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I’ll remove you.

ggattsek@gmail.com



Check out the website www.gwensflavorblends.com

You never know when something new will show up in the store!

GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 12

FEBRUARY 2024

WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM

GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM

Welcome to February.

I hope your 2024 is off to a good start. I am looking forward to the Spring fair season and to seeing all of you. The season is shaping up to be a busy one. I'll keep you all in the loop as I confirm some new venues.

Gwen

In this issue

Evolution of the Modern Diet (Part 2)

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1900-1919

What's new



The Urbanization of Our Diet

Last month we took a look back, way back, to see where the human diet began as a way of figuring out how we got to where we are today. A mere 200 years ago, just a blink in the span of evolution, we were still primarily sourcing our own food. General Stores were beginning to fill in some things, but our diets were surprisingly, relatively unchanged from the indigenous people the early explorers met when they first landed. We still cooked over open flame, we still grew a large portion of our grains and produce and we still struggled with preserving what we had, but couldn't consume immediately.

The earliest methods of food preservation, drying and smoking, were great for meats and grains, but what about fruits and vegetables? Pickling helped, but not everything lent itself to that method. Around 1809, in response to a request from his government, a Frenchman named Nicolas Appert, discovered that heating and sealing food prevented it from spoiling. While the government was looking for a way to sustain its armies and navies, the method was a game changer for everyone.

Being able to preserve food that used to be perishable meant more than feeding an army, it meant food could travel further away from its source for everyone. In many ways, this opened the door for cities to really grow and expand. They were no longer limited by the need to have farmland close by, nor did the farmers have to stay so close to towns and cities to sell their wares. The beginnings of a true urban/rural divide was on the horizon.

Canning also allowed for combinations of items to be consumed. You could mix several types of fruit in a single jar. (Perhaps the earliest fruit cocktails started that way). This led to experimentation, jams and jellies of all sorts, different cuisines

could be shared. These were the predecessors of those 40,000 SKU's we mentioned last month.

And yet, the food was still relatively unadulterated. Farmers could keep up with the demand and life continued on. As the population grew, however, small local farms were not able to keep up with the demands. Larger companies began to buy up land and to produce vast quantities. Grocery stores got bigger and bigger and so did we.

Science chimed in, offering to develop varieties with higher yields, pesticides to prevent loss, chemicals to keep moisture in, more chemicals to keep moisture out, and ultimately, hormones to increase production. Dupont launched a slogan in 1935, "Better Things for Better Living...Through Chemistry" that carried them all the way to 1982 when the "Through Chemistry" part was dropped. While Dupont intended the phrase to instill faith in big business, it is also an apt description of how the world, in general, approached solving almost everything.

Somewhere along the way, we really took a left turn. We have moved very far away from the old family farm just down the road in more ways than just one. For many Americans today, where their food comes from might as well be Mars. Many people have never laid eyes on a cow or chicken, much less felt the crisp snap of a fresh green bean straight from the garden. Many people don't know that you can eat the skin of a fresh cucumber, or that *truly* fresh basil has the most amazing aroma. Mass production, through any means possible, became the rule of the day.

Some think that the pressure to create more, faster and cheaper is at the heart of many of the food allergies and sensitivities that so many people deal with. In place of the all-natural, locally grown food we used to eat, we now consume large quantities of processed or altered food. Our systems did not evolve the means of processing the types of molecules we are now taking in. You could spend a lifetime looking for answers, but at the end of the day, I am not so sure that the **Why** is as important as the **What's Next**.

With all of the resources the US has access to, you'd think that there would be some sort of standard definition of a healthy diet. Some oversight keeping our food sources safe. Enter the FDA. Hundreds, if not thousands of doctors, nutritionists, inspectors all running around trying to make sure that our food is safe. While many, if not most, of their standards are necessary, there seems to be one area that they just can't seem to wrap their collective heads around – What constitutes a healthy diet? For all of their effort, we still don't have a definitive answer.

You can ask 100 experts and get 100 different answers. Fat is bad, fat is good, sugar is bad, sugar is ok in moderation, eggs are terrible for you, eggs are an amazing source of protein. You

know the drill. How are we supposed to sort through all of this and make reasonable decisions about our own diet, health and welfare?

The real problem is that every scientist, every author, every media outlet has its own bias. Even I have a bias that shapes the books I read, the articles I discount, the conclusions I draw, and, ultimately, the information I choose to share. The bias is not intentional, usually, but we each process new information through the filters of our own experiences. Certainly, some big businesses fund research programs designed to prove that their products are THE answer, but most research is undertaken with genuinely good intentions.

This bias shows itself in many ways. A news outlet may have a slot to fill, so a recent study from a major university pops up and whether or not it has been confirmed, duplicated or had any peer review, it is out there for all the public to see. The next thing you know, your local supermarket is carrying Habanero Dusted Crickets because some study said that capsicum and cricket keratin may reduce the risk of toenail fungus. I know that is a bit of hyperbole, but you get my point.

So, back to our original question. How do you know what is a good diet and what isn't? After reading last month's newsletter and up to this point in this month's article, I think you can take a pretty good guess what my bias is. It is hard to argue the fact that 99% of human history was built on a fresh, unadulterated, unmanipulated diet. I am not suggesting that we all get fire pits and hunt, forage or grow our own food, but I am suggesting that maybe reducing the amount of processed food we consume is not such a bad idea. Paying attention to labels and looking for organic produce or hormone-free meat certainly help. It doesn't always have to be expensive, there are lots of companies out there producing responsibly sourced and prepared food at a reasonable cost.

Here at Gwen's Blends, I make every effort to find the freshest, healthiest ingredients from responsibly run distributors. The popular opinion that healthy eating is bland and boring is one of the misconceptions that I wanted to dispel with Gwen's Blends. There is nothing boring about Peri peri Chicken, or Cajun Shrimp and Rice. Spices are an incredibly easy and inexpensive way to bring excitement and flavor to the table, both figuratively and literally. It isn't even all that hard to accomplish. It just takes a little planning.

So, at the end of the day, it really boils down to paying attention, reading labels, and taking the time to treat yourself and your loved ones well by sharing the love of good food. Hopefully, our spice blends become a part of your healthy diet journey!

Be well!



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History!

The first two decades of the 20th century

1902 -Karo Corn Syrup first sold in stores and Jell-O was touted as the “America’s Most Famous Dessert” by *Ladies Home Journal*

1903 – Milton Hershey invented the Hershey bar

1904 – St. Louis World’s Fair introduced the following to the world: Cotton Candy, Hamburgers, Hot Dogs, Dr. Pepper, Waffle Cones

1905 – Lombardi’s in NYC opened the very first licensed, brick and mortar pizzeria

1906 – Planters Peanuts launched. Also, William Kellogg launches Corn Flakes.

1907 – Hershey adds chocolate kisses to their menu

1912 – Oreos introduced

1913 – Peppermint Lifesavers appeared

1914 – Tastykakes hit the shelves

1916 – Kraft first debuted processed cheese

1917 – Planters peanut debuts Mr. Peanuts

What’s new at Gwen’s Blends

Pick your Own Variety pack!

available only at fairs.

Pick any combination of 6 mini-blends for \$15.00

Recipes available.

Festivals

March

March 22-24

Capital Arts & Crafts Fair Spring 2024

Dulles Expo Center

10:00-5:00 (4:00 on Sunday)

April

April 20

Spring Craft Fair

5994 Plank Road

Fredericksburg, VA

9:00-3:00

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I’ll add them to the list.

Don’t want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I’ll remove you.

ggattsek@gmail.com



Check out the website

www.gwensflavorblends.com

you never know when something new will show up
in the store!

GWEN'S BLENDS

SPICE HOUSE

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 13

MARCH 2024

WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM

GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM

It's hard to believe that March is already here.

Snowdrops and crocuses are starting to peak their heads out and for the green thumbs among you, it's time to start thinking about your garden. Cool weather vegetables like cabbage, broccoli and some of the leafy vegetables will be showing up in nurseries and indoor seeds are ready to be sown.

We spoke last month about how society has distanced itself from the joys and benefits of growing your own food. Those gardeners among you know what I am talking about. Eating fresh produce is nice, but feeling the soil, watching it grow and then harvesting it yourself is another level.

There is yet another level, the health benefits of gardening. There are quite a few studies out there that show that gardening reduces cortisol and improves overall mood. And that's before you even eat the stuff!

Enjoy,

Gwen

In this issue

The Health Benefits of Herbs & Spices

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1920-1940

What's new

The Herb-Health Connection

Most of us are familiar with the idea that certain foods can influence how we feel. It is also fairly well known that many modern-day medicines were originally derived from plants and that there is a growing number of people who are returning to a more natural way of taking care of their bodies.

I am not only speaking of the push towards more organically grown food, but also towards more organic ways of healing. If any of you are cat caretakers, you will know that cats will eat grass to make themselves expel things from their stomach that are upsetting to their digestive system. Many other animals also, instinctively migrate towards certain plants if they are unwell.

As our ancestors explored their world looking for food, they too noticed that certain plants made them sick and others made them feel well. The individuals that learned the most were the early healers, the precursors to our modern-day doctors.

Many of the early healers were women. In the hunter/gatherer society, the men did the hunting and the women did most of the gathering, so they were the ones with the most experience with the plant life. This tradition of women healers continued well into the eras of written history and up until the late 1600's when the patriarchal church began to worry about solidifying their control of their congregations and began to cast the seeds of doubt about women healers, ultimately declaiming them as witches. What followed is widely acknowledged as a dark time in history, when women were hunted down and killed simply for wanting to help their neighbors.

Fortunately, not all of their knowledge was lost and over time, we regained control of our collective senses and the art of herbalism has survived and, in fact, thrived over the years. Today, many of the ancient practices have survived in the forms of

scented candles, scented oils used in massage and, for better or worse, in the upsurge of plant-based supplements available online and in stores. There are also less complicated and commercial ways of enjoying the benefits of different herbs and spices, simply by adding them to our diets. By cooking with them and adding them to our salads

I have struggled with exactly how I want to present this information because **I do not wish, in ANY way, shape or form, to pretend that I am educated or trained enough to recommend any type of treatment or to diagnose any type of ailment or shortcoming.** So, if in the end, I have chosen to simply present a listing of some of the herbs and spices used in my blends that are commonly acknowledged to have benefits to one's overall health, please see this as a way to pick up some information that you can use as a jumping off place for your own re-discovery of herbal benefits and healing.

Now, with that out of the way, let's move on to the fun stuff. Most people know that when your nose is stuffed, mint (menthol) can help you breathe. But did you know that it also helps with digestion? That is where the tradition of after dinner mints started. It is also why so many antacids are mint flavored. Many pregnant women know that ginger can also help settle a stomach. So too can cayenne, peppercorn and nutmeg, to name a few.

One of the largest areas of research in the herbal healing world is inflammation and the relief of it. Turmeric is one of the most notable spices to relieve inflammation, but cinnamon, basil and parsley also are known to help (and they all help with keeping your breath fresh, so you can be pain free and knock out bad breath all in one fell swoop.)

Antioxidant is another buzz word these days. As our population has increased in size, (and I don't mean how many of us there are) cardiac health has become one of the most pressing concerns for most people over the age of 20. Preventing damage for the younger generations, and reversing it for the middle and older population can be accomplished by the same methods. Exercise and eating well are the simplest of the tools at our disposal and there is a wide variety of herbs and spices that can help with the latter.

Basil, cinnamon, bay, cumin, and paprika not only make a great tomato sauce, but they also are chock full of antioxidants. Fennel, Mustard and garlic can improve overall heart health, and dill, fenugreek, thyme and turmeric can help lower blood pressure. Coriander helps lower blood sugar and lower blood pressure, two key factors in preventing long term damage.

There are many herbs and spices that can have an antibiotic effect, basil, bay, cinnamon, mustard, oregano and peppercorn, all have antibiotic qualities. Sounds to me like a hearty tomato sauce should play a regular part in your diet 😊.

Other less commonly known benefits include:

Dill – can alleviate menstrual cramps and may help with epilepsy

Cumin – is an immune booster that may also help fight cancer

Rosemary – Helps lower pain, improves cognition and lowers stress

Ginger – May help reduce migraine pain

I guess at the end of the day, it is probably safe to say that like our ancestors, maintaining a healthy diet is the single most important way we can honor our bodies and keep them in the best shape they can be. Perhaps incorporating more spices and herbs in our diets can help us to live long and healthy lives.

If this topic interests you, I can recommend a good book to start with. Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs is always my starting point. From the historical, horticultural and healing side of things it is a must have book in your library. There are also a ton of websites that have information about the subject. I usually stick to sites sponsored by reputable medical institutions or universities until I get a sense of what claims are realistic and which ones might be a bit riskier.



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History!

1920-1939

1920 – Eskimo pies and Good Humor Ice cream make their debut

1921 – Wonder Bread is born

1922 – The World tastes its first Girl Scout Cookie

1927 – Kool Aid is invented although “Kool-aid Man” would not appear until 1954

1930 – Heinz debuts its 57 variety line

1932 – Fritos joins the Lays family

1934 – Hawaiian Punch joins the juice game

1934 – Campbells Cream of Mushroom and Noodles with Chicken appears. The test kitchen opened in 1941 to start developing all those delicious recipes we all remember.

1936 – The first Issue of “Joy of Cooking” was published

1937 – Spam and Krispy Crème brighten our day.

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I’ll add them to the list.

Don’t want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I’ll remove you.

ggattsek@gmail.com

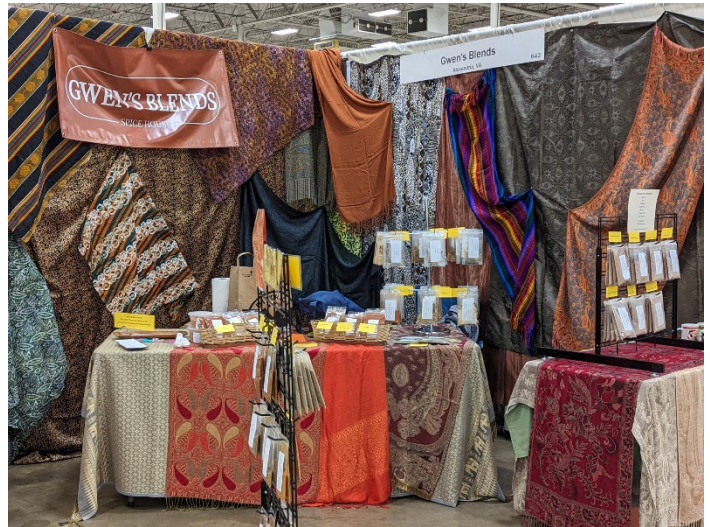
What’s new at Gwen’s Blends

Lots of new flavors and products in the pipeline.

I am working on a Jumbo SingleShot – a Crawfish boil that will be \$9.00.

Other items in the pipeline include Tortilla Chicken Soup and Indian Butter Chicken.

(hoping to have at the fair at the Dulles Expo)



Festivals

March

March 22-24

Capital Arts & Crafts Fair Spring 2024

Dulles Expo Center

10:00-5:00 (4:00 on Sunday)

April

April 20

Spring Craft Fair

5994 Plank Road

Fredericksburg, VA

9:00-3:00

April 27

South Riding Mosaic Festival

South Riding Town Square

12:00-6:00

Check out the website

www.gwensflavorblends.com

you never know when something new will show up in the store!

GWEN'S BLENDS

SPICE HOUSE

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 14

APRIL 2024

WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM

GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM

Get ready for those April Showers!

It's the start of the 2024 Craft fair season and I am gearing up for about 6 or more events over the next three months. Hopefully some of you will be able to join me. As much as I enjoy the act of creating the blends, catching up with all of you is, by far, the best part of what I do.

This month I took a stab and untangling some of the jumble of information available regarding healthy diets. We all like to eat good food, but my hope is to help you prepare food that is good to you in addition to just being delicious.

There is a lot to slog through out there, but hopefully I have been able to help you see a clearer path to nourishing your body and soul.

Enjoy,

Gwen

In this issue

What is a Healthy Diet, anyway?

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1940-1949

What's new

What is a Healthy Diet, anyway?

Sounds like it should be a simple enough question, but in today's world of internet searches, 24-hour news cycles, influencers and infomercials, it is getting hard to know who or what to listen to.

I think the first place to start is by listening to your own body. I don't mean the old rule that "your body craves what it really needs, you just have to listen". If that were true, then alcohol, chocolate, and French fries would be the basis of a healthy diet, and we all know how that would play out.

No, what I mean is **really** listen. How do you feel after you eat a huge bowl of spaghetti or ice cream? How about a double cheeseburger and fries? Do you feel like you want to take on the world, or take a nap?

Just as we have lost touch with where our food comes from, so have we lost touch with how our food makes us feel. Nationally, the United States has an obesity rate of 41.9%. Close to a million people suffer from heart attacks each year. In 2021, the last year statistics are available, 11% of Americans had diabetes. It would appear that our food is not making us feel too good.

Last month we looked at the health benefits of some spices and herbs. This month let's widen the scope and see what else we can find to eat that helps us feel our best.

"Eat your vegetables if you want to grow up big and strong." How true! The recommendation of 5 portions a day is one of the few guidelines that hasn't changed over the years and happens to be agreed upon by most reputable authorities. Fresh fruit and vegetables provide our body with an infinite source of vitamins and minerals, fiber, and sugar in its simplest form. That isn't to say that canned or frozen preparations don't contribute to our welfare, they do, but fresh is always best.

Once you get beyond the fruits and vegetables, the rules get a bit fuzzier, more fraught with conflict and a little harder to digest, if you'll pardon the pun. It's hard to avoid the dietary noise.

"NO FAT" "NO CARBS" "NO MEAT" "NO SALT"

"FAT IS OK, BUT SUGAR IS THE DEVIL"

It's hard to think straight with all of the clutter. So, let's look at each of the supposedly "bad" things we are supposed to cut out of our diets.

FAT

While a diet full of fat is undeniably less than ideal, some fat is, in fact, necessary. Monounsaturated fats, such as those found in olives, avocados and many seeds, are necessary for cardiovascular wellbeing. They contribute to lower bad cholesterol levels, which can reduce the risk of stroke and heart disease. They also help maintain healthy cells throughout your body.

Reducing your fat intake should probably be done by watching which fats you consume, not necessarily following those "low fat" product labels. Many "low fat" products add sugars, salts and other additives to compensate for the altered recipe.

CARBS

Carbohydrates get a raw deal in my opinion. They are the energy source for your entire body. All of your body's cells are run on the energy created by a process called Glycolysis. This process breaks down glucose molecules as a part of a multi-step reaction to produce the energy that cells run on. Without glucose, we die. So, a certain amount of carbohydrates are necessary for quick access to glucose. Other types of food, such as proteins, are ultimately broken down to glucose, but it takes more energy to convert those molecules, so having an easy access source makes sense. The problem comes when you consume too many carbs and the body never has to activate the system to breakdown other foods and so the excess food builds up in your body and ultimately converts to fat.

MEAT

Whether to eat your proteins in the form of meat or plant-based proteins is really a personal decision. If you choose the animal protein path, just be aware that many animal fats are what are called **Saturated fats** and fall into the category of fats that can have a negative impact on your health. It doesn't mean that you can't enjoy a juicy ribeye steak, but maybe you shouldn't have one every meal. Try mixing in some chicken, fish, and eggs once in a while.

SALT

Salt is responsible for maintaining fluid levels in the body as well as having a role in muscle and nerve function. As with all other types of food, a little bit is necessary. The real issue comes when your cardiac functions are out of whack and your blood pressure is high. The quickest and simplest way to lower blood

pressure is to reduce the volume of blood being circulated through your body. Since salt tends to help your body retain water, which raises the blood volume, lowering your salt intake can help lower your blood pressure.

SUGAR

Sugar is, technically speaking, a carbohydrate, which we discussed previously, has an important function in your body's biochemistry. What most nutritionists and doctors are referring to when they talk about lowering sugar intake, is processed sugar. The kind is sugar that is used as an ingredient in the manufacturing of food, as opposed to the sugars that are naturally occurring in unadulterated foods.

Americans, in particular, consume about 60 pounds of sugar per year, on average. That translates to 106,000 calories per year! And remember, that's an average.

I am the last person in the world to dis sugar, I struggle with finding the right balance myself, so you'll find no preachy sermon here! I even use sugar in several of my blends, most notably the barbecue rubs. I am just providing some information to make your own choices. It is not the sugar that is bad, it is the overindulgence that can get us in trouble.

Epilogue

I guess at the end of the day, what matters most, is how you feel. Food, in its most basic form, is fuel for your body, plain and simple. That doesn't mean that you can't enjoy fueling up! But food also heals and nourishes your soul as well as your body.

Socrates is believed to have said, "All things in moderation, including moderation." That seems to be a pretty good idea with food too. Fortunately, most herbs and spices don't fall into any of the categories we looked at. And in moderation, most are considered safe.

So, take from this what you will, choose your path, and flavor it with Gwen's Blends.



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History! 1940-1949

1940 – the first Dairy Queen opens in Joliet, Illinois.

1942 – The Boiardi family launched industrial production of their Italian recipes. Chef Boyardee soon became a household name.

1945 – Elmer Dowling, of Fritos, met Herman W. Lay, who agreed to distribute Elmer’s products and Frito-Lay was born.

1945 – Tupperware and the microwave were invented.

1946 – The first frozen French fries hit the stores.

1948 – Frito-Lay launched Cheetos.

1948- The first McDonalds opens in San Bernadino, Ca.

What’s new at Gwen’s Blends

Festivals

April

April 20

Spring Craft Fair
5994 Plank Road
Fredericksburg, VA
9:00 AM-3:00 PM

April 27

South Riding Mosaic Festival
Town Square
South Riding, VA
12:00-6:00 PM

May

May 4

Junior Eagles Spring Fair
21 Cool Spring road
Stafford, VA
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM

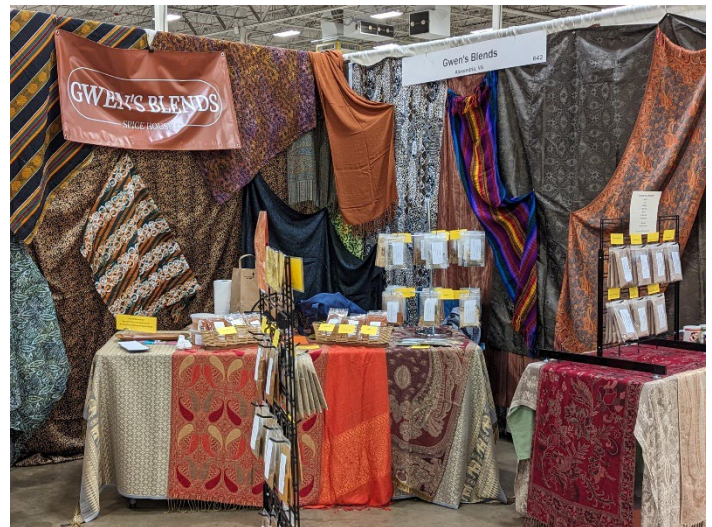
May 18

McLean Day
Lewinsville Park
McLean, VA
11:00 AM-5:00 PM

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I’ll add them to the list.

Don’t want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I’ll remove you.

ggattsek@gmail.com



Check out the website

www.gwensflavorblends.com

you never know when something new will show up in the store!

GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 15

MAY 2024

WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM

GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM

Happy May!

Hopefully we are finished with all of that cold, rainy nonsense, and the sun is shining and those May flowers we were promised are well on their way.

Two of the most frequent questions I get are:

“How do you use this?”

“What do you do with this?”

So now that we have talked about history, cultural influences and the properties of herbs and spices, let's talk about using them.

Bon Appetit!

Gwen

In this issue

Cooking with Herbs & Spices

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1950-1959

What's new

Cooking with Herbs and Spices

Way back, in Issue 2, we talked a bit about some of the basics of cooking with herbs and spices, and the difference between using each one. Herbs, being mostly the leaves of plant are much more fragile and do not stand up as well to long cook times. Spices, on the other hand, are primarily stems, bark and roots and blooms, and are more well-suited to longer cook times to allow for full extraction of flavor. (Noted exceptions would be fresh garlic, ginger and turmeric)

Since all of my blends are made with dried ingredients, I will focus more on that aspect of cooking with herbs and spices, but many of the techniques will be useful for fresh herbs as well.

One of the simplest ways to incorporate the flavors of herbs and spices into your food is to re-think some of your basic starting points – oils and butters. Starting your cook with an infused oil or butter is the first step in what you hear chefs on TV call “layering your flavors”.

Creating oils (and vinegars) is as simple as adding 2 cups of oil to 1½ cups fresh herbs or 2-4T dried herbs or spices. Place in a tightly sealed jar, away from direct sunlight, for 2-3 weeks. When working with the dried herbs, spices, or blends, start with smaller amounts and taste about a week into the process. You can always add more, but diluting down if the result is too strong gives you an unbalanced product that feels unfinished.

Butters are also easy to make. Simply let a stick of butter approach room temperature, then mix in 2-4T of dried herbs or spices. (You can use fresh herbs, but the butter will not keep as long.). Roll the mixture up in plastic wrap or pack into a small ramekin and let chill for at least 1 hour before using. Butters will keep about a week in the refrigerator, but you can also freeze.

Next, on the list of flavorings is salt. While technically not an herb or spice, it is a key component in many of the blends I create as well as many other commercially available products. Salt is another word you hear frequently on cooking shows. While it is certainly not absolutely necessary to add salt to your food, there is a certain reaction caused by using small amounts of salt that “unlocks” the flavor of other ingredients, so a pinch here or there (if your diet allows) can amplify the other ingredients you are using.

Marinades are another way to infuse flavor in your foods. While the possible combinations are endless, the essential recipe is a liquid (or liquids) and herbs, spices and salt. The key to a marinade is that it is used ahead of the cook, allowing the protein or vegetable to *marinate* in the flavor for a period of time, usually a minimum of 1 hour and frequently, overnight to extract the full flavor. Most of the blends I create, with the exception of the rubs created for grilling and smoking meats, lend themselves well to being used in marinades.

For example, a mediterranean marinade might consist of: The juice of 2 oranges and 1 lemon paired with 1-2T of Greek Seasoning or Avo’s Portuguese Allspice.

Applying a blend directly to the food you are cooking, either by sprinkling or rubbing directly on the food, or by adding to the cooking liquid is yet another way to flavor your food. Grilling, broiling and smoking lend themselves to rubbing a blend directly on the meat or vegetables. Adding to flour or cornmeal for breading prior to frying or baking can create a flavorful first bite experience.

Finally, adding herbs and spices to sauces, either cooking sauces or those intended to be added at the end of the cook can give you that last layer of flavor. Almost any blend can be turned into a quick sauce by adding to melted butter in a 1:1 ratio (1T butter:1T blend). The barbecue & grilling rubs can be quickly tuned into barbecue sauce by adding them to ketchup:

1 C	Ketchup
½ C	Gwen’s Blends Rub
¼ C	Molasses

So now we know how we are getting the flavor into the food. How are we going to cook it? That’s the next question. Here are the most common techniques.

Sautéing- Quick cooking of small pieces over a medium high to high heat source and utilizing butter or oil. Works well with thinner cuts of meat, fish or vegetables. Since butter or oil is used to help keep the food from sticking and burning, infused oils and butters are an excellent choice for sautéing. The short cook time also means that pre-seasoning with a marinade can really jazz up your meal.

Roasting or Baking – A dry heat cooking technique that brings out deep flavors and leaves a crispy caramelized exterior. Great for larger cuts of meat or poultry such as roasts, tenderloins and whole birds. Marinades are a wonderful prep method and exterior application of the herbs and spices will enhance the caramelization.

Braising – A combination of dry and moist heat that is used mostly on tougher cuts of meat that need more time for the connective tissues to break down. Usually, food is seared and then placed in a pan with stock or broth. Think stews and pot roast. Any method of seasoning works here, a marinade to get things started, a little infused butter for the searing, an exterior rub and some seasoning added to the cooking liquid.

Broiling & grilling – Close proximity to open flames, usually with a shorter cook time, is the perfect method for cuts of meat or vegetables 1” thick or less. Marinades are a definite plus here and exterior application of seasonings help create a wonderfully flavorful crust.

How you store your spices is almost as important as how you use them. While most sources will tell you that spices will keep for 2-3 years, that is slightly misleading. Dried herbs and spices, kept in a dry sealed environment really don’t have anything that can “spoil”, so in that sense the 2–3-year rule is accurate. That being said, if you open a bottle of spices and aren’t immediately hit with a blast of flavor, then your spices are probably too old. You can still use them, but it will take more seasoning to achieve the level you were getting when they were fresh.

Fresh definitely has an impact! A friend of mine tried the Taco/Fajita Seasoning one night and the next morning she told me she had to double the meat because she assumed it was just like the store-bought taco seasoning packs that she usually used. Her taco meat was way too, spicy, so she had to tone it down. The spices that I use are very fresh, I go through them quickly and store them correctly. Most of the product you find in a grocery store is about 1 year older than what you will find at Gwen’s Blends, so the degradation has already begun before you even open the jar. As with most produce, fresh is always best!

Notes

Whenever you see “oil”, think extra virgin olive oil unless stated otherwise.

Always remember, you can always add more – more time, more salt, more seasoning, but you can’t add less. Start with smaller amounts until you get a sense of how much impact a pinch or two has before you jump to a couple of tablespoons.

If you are experimenting with a new spice, try it on something relatively mild so that you will get a truer sense of how you like

it. My palette is usually chicken. I try most of my blends on chicken so that I can taste the nuances. Pasta is another good place to try a new twist.

Modifying a recipe to make it lower salt or lower fat is usually a pretty straightforward affair. A lower salt stock, or lower salt soy are good substitutions. Things can get a little trickier with fat, however. It's always best to look it up online before swapping a heavy cream out for skim milk, or even milk. Fat frequently serves a purpose in a recipe and removing it can have unintended results.

The most important note of all!

Have fun! Cooking is an art not a science, so play around. It's ok if something doesn't turn out exactly like you expected it to. Sometimes we learn more from the unexpected than we would have from a predictable outcome. There are no failures and who knows, your "mistake" could turn into something you really like, but never would have known if you hadn't tried.

Important Conversions

¼ tsp dried herbs = 2-3 tsp fresh herbs
½ tsp granulated or minced garlic = 1 clove
1 tsp dry mustard powder = 1 T prepared mustard



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History! 1950-1959

1952 – Colonel Sanders sells their first franchise.

1952 – Lipton Soup rolls a dehydrated onion soup that will become the famous Onion Dip Mix.

1953 – The French Sardine Co, (established 1917) becomes Star-Kist Foods.

1953 – Eggo Frozen waffles are introduced.

1953 - Cheez Whiz makes its appearance in grocery stores.

1954 – C.S. Swanson Co markets its first TV dinner.

1956 – JIF peanut butter hits the shelves.

1957 – Galactically famous Tang orange drink is introduced.

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

May

May 4

Junior Eagles Spring Fair
21 Cool Spring road
Stafford, VA
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM

May 18

McLean Day
Lewinsville Park
McLean, VA
11:00 AM-5:00 PM

May 25

Manassas Market
Manassas, VA
Harris Pavilion
9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

June 1-2

Occoquan Riverfest
Occoquan, VA
10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

June 8
Taste of Springfield
Springfield Town Center
6500 Springfield Road
11:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

ggattsek@gmail.com



Check out the website
www.gwensflavorblends.com

you never know when something new will show up
in the store!

GWEN'S BLENDS

— SPICE HOUSE —

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

ISSUE 16

JUNE 2024

WWW.GWENSFLAVORBLENDS.COM

GGATTSEK@GMAIL.COM

One of the reasons that I started Gwen's Blends was to share the love of good food. Sharing food is (in my opinion) the single greatest way to show love (especially to yourself). Not only do your friends and family get to taste the love you put into your food, but you get to experience the pure **Joy of Cooking**. (That would be an amazing name for a cookbook, by the way.)

For those of you who are already well experienced in the kitchen, much of this month's column may be a bit old hat, but hopefully there will be something new for you as well. For those of you just starting your journey, I hope that this intro helps you have a smooth start.

Gwen

In this issue

The Art of Cooking

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1960-1969

What's new



The Art of Cooking

So now, you are ready to try your hand at a new recipe. What comes first?

First and foremost, you need to read the recipe from start to finish. You are looking for:

Ingredients – do you have them all?

Equipment – do you have everything you will need?

Techniques – are you comfortable with all of them?

There is very little more frustrating in the kitchen than getting halfway through a recipe and discovering that you are missing something critical, (or even not so critical, just important).

Depending on the recipe and where you are, that missing item could create a small delay that has little or no impact, or it could come at a critical time and jeopardize your entire cook. Rather than take that risk, a few minutes at the onset can save a lot of irritation later on and none of us cook to get irritated.

Once you determine you are fully stocked and ready to go, then go for it! Remember to taste as you go along. Take notes, if you decide that you might like to try a little more this or a little less that next time. Recipes are guides not rule books. (unless you are baking and then you need to learn from someone else because I stink at baking). If you are cooking for yourself, friends and

family, then improvisation can help make a dish your own, make it something special you share. (More on good swaps and substitutions later.)

If, on the other hand, you are missing a key ingredient, then you have a decision to make. Go to the store to get it, put it on your list for your next trip to the store and move on to something else for dinner tonight, or see if you can find a good substitute in your pantry. The internet is full of good hacks and some of them are quite helpful. Now, not everything is a good candidate for substitution, You can't have duck l'orange with out duck, but you could have chicken l'orange. It's up to you to decide if the recipe you are trying will work with what you have, but here are few suggestions for some basics.

Buttermilk – Add 1 T of lemon juice to 1 cup of regular milk.

Shortening – Substitute butter, margarine or cooking oil. (1 cup shortening requires ¾ cup of oil).

Flour for frying – Try baking soda

Onions – Red, yellow, shallots can all fit the bill in a pinch.

Fresh herbs – Replace with dried herbs at a ratio of 3:1 (fresh: dried).

Salt – Depending on the recipe, try soy sauce, a little bacon, capers or olives.

So, let's say that you have all of the basics, but are looking for a change, or someone doesn't like one of the ingredients. This is where the **Art of Cooking** comes into play.

Many years ago, I interviewed at a culinary school. The interviewer asked me if I was interested in Baking or Cooking. In my ignorance, I replied "I don't know, what's the difference?" As many of you probably already know, baking is a science while cooking is a little more forgiving. That doesn't mean you can go around throwing a bunch of random ingredients in a pot and expect a gourmet dinner to pop out, but it does mean that you have plenty of leeway to tailor a recipe to your own liking.

Let's look at a recipe for Chicken Soup as an example of a starting point.

Ingredients

1 C Rice, long grain white, wild or a combo
1 T Vegetable oil
1 Onion, medium, chopped
2 Celery Stalks, chopped
1 lb. Chicken breast, boneless, cubed
2 T Gwen's Blends Seasoning
42 oz. Chicken Broth

Instructions

Mix the rice(s) with oil in slow cooker, cover and cook on high for 15 minutes.
Stir in the remaining ingredients.

Cover and cook 7-8 hours on low or 4-5 hours on high or until done.

Pretty basic, right? All right let's look at this recipe step by step.

* Rice – you could certainly replace with noodles, gnocchi or dumplings. If you do, then skip the first step of toasting the rice and add your swap ingredient later in the cook.

* Onion and celery are fairly basic foundations to a good broth, but they do not need to be the only vegetables. (You can also remove them entirely.) Feel free to add, carrots, potatoes, squash, mushrooms, just increase the stock enough to make sure that everything is covered in the crockpot.

* Chicken breast – dark meat works as well, or maybe you don't want meat at all. You could even substitute chuck roast or pork.

* Chicken broth – You can substitute, vegetable, beef or mushroom.

* Seasoning – The choices above will help determine your seasoning.

So, starting with the same basic outline, you could end up with a simple chicken and rice soup or a hearty beef vegetable soup. Understanding the relationships between different foods can help you expand your horizons. It's all in how you think about different types of food.

Here's a starter guide to thinking about substitutes.

Grains and pastas

In most cases, pasta and most grains are interchangeable. That being said, some are better for some things than others. Pasta has pretty standard uses, but the different shapes aren't just for looks. They each have a purpose. The more twisty styles are meant to hold more sauce, the longer thinner for twirling around pieces of meat or vegetables, etc.

The rices and grains all work well in both hot and cold preparations. Soups, salads, side dishes. Try to think of them as you would pasta, with smaller cuts of your meat or vegetables, but in the same manner. Farro with cucumbers, cranberries and toasted pecans can serve as a foundation for grilled chicken or as a stand-alone side dish.

Cooking times will vary with each type of ingredient. Pasta takes just a few minutes, but farro can take 45 minutes or so. Don't forget to factor that into your cooking plan.

Vegetables

If you can begin to think of vegetables in four groups, the swaps become simple. Root vegetables (carrots, turnips, parsnips, potatoes) all can be cooked in the same manner. Leafy greens (lettuce, spinach, kale, cabbage, etc.) usually bring to mind a cold salad, but with the exception of lettuce, most add flavor and

texture to a hot dish when wilted down. Hard skinned squash (Acorn, butternut, pumpkin) has the most in common with the root vegetables. Their cooking is very similar as is the texture.

The rest of the vegetables world, (summer squashes and cucumbers, celeries, tomatoes, legumes) live in that world of all possibilities. Raw all by themselves, cut up into salads, added to sauces and stews. There is very little (except maybe pancakes) that they can't do.

Liquids

Here is yet another layer of flavor to be discovered. Broths are the first thought for most people and they bring a lot to the table (so to speak). However, they are not alone. Vinegars, used sparingly, along with lemon or lime juice, can add a pop of acidity and freshness. Worcestershire sauce and its unique umami flavor can take a recipe to the next level.

Before you pour, stop and think about what else is in the pot. What does the broth bring to the dish? Would wine be better? Water? Do I want something creamy? Should I add milk or cream. Should I marinate ahead of time instead of cooking in the liquid?

Meat

Meat, meat substitutes, or none at all are entirely personal choices. Most recipes are capable of accommodating more than 1 protein option. The most important factor to consider is cooking method. Trying to swap a chuck roast for pork chops probably won't work very well, but a pork butt roast might. Silken tofu won't replace chicken on a grill very well, but extra-firm will (with some marinating). For the most part, if you think more in terms of the cut than the animal it is coming from, you will have more success. Swapping a lean cut for a lean cut, roast for roast, etc.

Herbs & Spices

Finally, the last ingredient (and the most important if you ask me.) seasonings. In many cases, the choice of seasoning is a lot like the choice of protein, a personal preference. However, also like choosing a protein, the method of cooking can help you make good swaps. Fresh herbs are best cooked for a minimal amount of time, so either add them towards the end of the cook or add them after the cook. Dried herbs can take a little more time in the heat, but don't always stand up to direct heat, so may not be the best choice for grilling (the exception is Blackening, which is based on a quick, very hot searing of the herbs to lock in the flavor). Some spices, like nuts, are much more effective after a little bit of toasting and generally need a fair amount of cook time to release their full potential.

In terms of flavor profiles, here is where you can really expand your repertoire. In the recipe for soup given above, you could go with a traditional herbal blend such as Tuscan Seasoning or Summer Blend, or you could take it in a completely different

direction with Southwestern Rub, Cajun Blend, or even King's Curry.

Once you have chosen your flavor profile, other swaps may become more apparent. Still using our soup recipe, a Cajun Blend might make you think about adding bell pepper or okra, Southwestern Rub could suggest a little bit of jalapeno or corn and so on.

At the end of the day, what matters most is creating food that you, your friends and family enjoying cooking, sharing and eating. There is a very old stereotypical statement attributed to Jewish grandmothers everywhere:

"Eat, eat, it's good for you!"

There is so much truth in that statement. Food nourishes both the body and the soul. I hope that, after reading this column, you are inspired to get in the kitchen, stretch your wings and share some love.

Have fun!



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History!

1960-1969

1962 – Lenders bagels first to sell frozen bagels

1964 – Pop-tarts are invented

1964 – Buffalo wings are invented at the Anchor Bar in Buffalo.

1965 – Poppin' Fresh, the Pillsbury Doughboy, is born

1965 – Shake 'n' Bake hits shelves "and we helped!"

1965 – Cool Whip is introduced

1966 – Nabisco invents Snack Mate Processed Cheese Spread in an aerosol can.

1969 – Pringles "potato" chips are sold for the first time.

1969 – The first Cracker Barrel opens on I40 in Lebanon Tenn.

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

June 8
Taste of Springfield
Springfield Town Center
6500 Springfield Road
11:00 AM – 5:00 PM

July/August

Gwen's Blends will be taking the summer off to work on some new creations for the fall. Stay tuned!

Our online store will be in full operation, so please stop by and shop when your pantry needs re-stocking.

New at Gwen's Blends!

King's Curry – a delightful take on a traditional Indian curry, two years in the making.

Chesapeake Bay Style Seafood Seasoning – a fresh take on a bold, zesty seafood blend.

Know someone who would like to join us? Send their name and email to me and I'll add them to the list.



Check out the website

www.gwensflavorblends.com

you never know when something new will show up in the store!

Don't want to hear from us anymore, let me know and I'll remove you.

ggattsek@gmail.com

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 17

www.gwensflavorblends.com

July 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



In this issue

Spicing up Cool Summer Meals

Food Stories – Food inventions from 1970-1979

What's new



Spicing up Cool Summer Meals

The days are longer and it still feels like there aren't enough hours in the day to get everything done.

On the bright side, the abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables can make meal prep a breeze. (A cool breeze, that is!) With a little planning, a well-stocked spice cabinet and pantry, and a refrigerator full of fresh produce, eating light, healthy and cool couldn't be simpler. Not only that, but summer cooking lends itself to easy meal prep.

There are many ways to put some really good food on the table without heating up the kitchen. Let's see how you can maximize on flavor while you minimize the time you spend in the kitchen.

Grilling

If meat is a big part of your menu, think about what can you marinate ahead of time, freeze and then thaw out the morning before grilling? One thing I do is to buy the large value packs of chicken, white or dark, divide the chicken between 4 resealable bags, and then add olive oil, a little lemon juice and a different seasoning to each bag. The meat can be left whole or cut into bite sized pieces. Then I freeze three of the bags for later in the week or even next week.

Slow Cooker

How about the slow cooker? While many people associate the slow cooker with hearty, heavy winter meals, I tend to use it more in the summer because it doesn't heat up the kitchen like

running the oven does. Ribs, pulled pork or beef, even baked potatoes can be cooked in a slow cooker.

Steaming

One of the things a microwave does very well is steaming vegetables. A little bit of water and a couple of minutes and voila! Mix up a little bit of herbed butter or flavored oil to drizzle and you have a restaurant quality dish.

Cold Soups

After a long, hot day, a bowl of cold soup can be the perfect anchor for a meal. Gazpacho and cucumber soup are very filling all by themselves. They are quick to put together in large batches and last for several days in the refrigerator. Combined with a side salad, maybe some cheese and fruit, or some nice fresh bread and you can let your day just slide away.

Salads

Such a short and simple word for such a large and widely varied assortment of delicious offerings. From Egg *Salad* to Potato *Salad* to Fruit *Salad* to a Green leafy *Salad*, salads can be made of almost anything and the majority do not need to be cooked, The combinations are endless.

Even a “simple” green salad can transform to a meal fit for royalty if you get creative with your add ons. You can add meat (think ham, chicken, beef), fruit (fresh or dried), nuts, cheese, all the major food groups. Then when you top it off with a homemade vinaigrette or dressing, even your kids will be begging for salad for dinner.

Fruits

While most people think of fruit more as a dessert, it certainly has a place at the entrée stage as well. Prosciutto and melon, sprinkled with a dash of Chili Lime Seasoning or a bowl of berries with a pinch of Lebanese 7 Spice mixed into a cup of yogurt can certainly hold their own.

Epilogue

No matter what you choose, the spices you choose can turn the ordinary into extraordinary. Even the most basic of dishes can benefit from an infusion of flavor. Try a little Avo’s Portuguese Allspice in your tuna salad. Maybe a little Cajun Blend in your potato salad. Anyone for a little bit of Ranch cole slaw? I have included a couple of recipes for you to think about trying. Good luck and remember,

Spice **IS** the variety of life.

Gwen

Homemade Mayonnaise

Ingredients

2 Egg yolks
2 tsp Lemon juice
1 tsp **Gwen’s Blends Seasoning**
1½ C Olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

Place the first three ingredients in a food processor and combine.

Then, with motor running, drizzle in the olive oil.

Mayonnaise should become thick and pale.

Taste, salt and pepper as needed, and use immediately or put in refrigerator for up to a week.

Our recommendations: Avo’s Portuguese Allspice, Garlic Herb Blend, Lebanese 7 Spice, Cajun Blend.

Gazpacho

Ingredients

2 lbs. Tomatoes, halved and cored
1 Pepper, cored, seeded and cut into chunks (try an Anaheim or cubanelle)
1 Cucumber, peeled and chopped
1 Onion, (white or red), chopped
2 T **Tuscan/Italian Seasoning**
1 Garlic clove
2 tsp Vinegar (sherry, red wine or cider)
½ C Olive oil
Salt to taste

Instructions

Preheat oven to 425°.

Place the tomato halves, cut side down on a sheet pan and drizzle with olive oil.

Roast for 20 minutes, pull out and let cool.

Peel skins off tomatoes and pour tomatoes, juices and oil from pan into a food processor.

(you can skip the roasting if you want, it isn’t required, it just adds another dimension of flavor, just chop the tomatoes and puree with the other ingredients.)

Combine everything else and puree until smooth.

Add salt to taste.

Chill and serve.

Notes: 1. You can also roast the pepper, onion and garlic.
2. Try it with lump crabmeat and/or avocados on top.

Herbed Vegetables

Ingredients

1 lb. Vegetables, assorted fresh
2 T Butter
2 tsp **Gwen's Blends Seasoning**

Instructions

Place the vegetables in a steamer and steam for 3-4 minutes.
Melt butter in a saucepan and add the herbs.
Stir the butter with the vegetables and serve.

Our recommendations: Herbs de Provence, Italian Seasoning, Garlic Herb Blend, Summer Blend.

Notes: Any firmer vegetable such as asparagus, carrots, green beans, broccoli, cauliflower will work.

Next Level Corn on the Cob

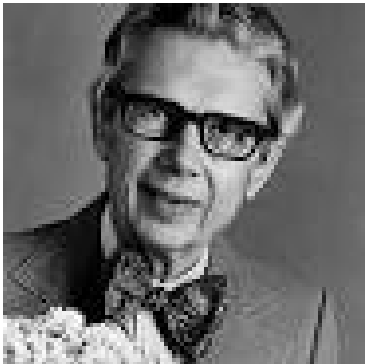
Ingredients

1 T Butter
1 tsp Gwen's Blends Seasoning
4 Ears of corn, husks removed

Instructions

Combine butter and seasoning in small bowl and microwave until butter is melted.
Brush the butter over the ears of corn.
Microwaved on high 5-6 minutes, turn over and repeat.

Our recommendations: Chili Lime Seasoning, Cajun Blend, Garlic Herb Blend, Southwestern Rub.



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History!
1970-1979

1970 – Orville Redenbacher changes popcorn forever

1970 – Hamburger Helper is invented

1971 – The Crock-Pot is introduced by Rival and changes the way America cooks

1971 – Nissin Foods introduces Cup-o-Noodles

1972 – The term “junk food” is coined by Michael Jacobsen of the Center for Science in the Public Interest

1973 – The Clorox Corp. buys the rights to Hidden Valley Ranch dressing from its creator

1973 – McDonald's introduces the first fast food breakfast item, The Egg McMuffin

1974- The first Lite beer is introduced – Miller Lite

1978 – Ben & Jerry's opens their first store in Vermont

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

July/August

Gwen's Blends will be taking the summer off to work on some new creations for the fall. Stay tuned!

Our online store will be in full operation, so please stop by and shop when your pantry needs re-stocking.

New at Gwen's Blends!

King's Curry – a delightful take on a traditional Indian curry, two years in the making.

Chesapeake Bay Style Seafood Seasoning – A bold, zesty seafood blend.

On the Roadmap for Fall 2024!

Creole Seasoning

Moroccan Blend

Koram Blend

Memphis Rub

SingleShot Spaghetti & Meatballs

SingleShot Feast Corned Beef

DO you have an idea for an article?

DO you know someone who would enjoy reading *Spice, The Variety of Life*?

DO you have an idea for a blend you would like me to try and make or an idea for a SingleShot?

Then DO reach out!

I would love to connect.

You can reach me at
ggattsek@gmail.com

Got any great hacks or cooking tips you would like to share?

Let me know. I'm going to devote an issue to workarounds, tips and hacks in the next month or so.

Have a great month!



SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 18

www.gwensflavorblends.com

August 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



In this issue

The Power of Food

Food Stories – Food inventions and trends from 1980-1999

What's New



The Power of Food

Many of those who love to cook, come about that love from growing up around people who loved to cook. The experience of watching people prepare food with love can be a powerful anchor to those people and the memories they helped create. The smell of cookies, warm from the oven, or the aromas emanating from a pot of Bolognese simmering on the oven usually go hand in hand with memories of the person who was doing the cooking and baking.

I was lucky in that I had the opportunity to watch two of my great-grandmothers in the kitchen as well as two grandmothers, my mother and various other relatives. My father may not have been much of a cook, but he was one of the original “foodies” always looking for something he hadn’t tasted and then sharing it with me (sometimes with less than enthusiasm on my part) leading me to broaden my palate.

When I began the journey that has become Gwen’s Blends, I thought that simply making it easy and accessible for people to experience good food was the end game. It turns out that was the jumping off point. Over the last couple of years, meeting

all of you and hearing how food impacts your lives and being challenged to explore new and different blends and taste experiences has made me reevaluate many things. One of the most relevant is that it is not enough to simply present the tools, you need to help people learn how to use them. I hope that you enjoyed the recipes that I included in last month's issue. I know that many of you are far more accomplished chefs than I, but I hope that I can encourage you to push your envelope a little further.

As I research more blends, cultures, and flavors, I find myself thinking back to some of my first and most impactful food memories. I thought I would share a few here in hopes that it will trigger some of you to take a short trip down memory lane and remember why you developed your own love of food. I also hope that this will inspire you to share some of your food memories with the people you cook with and for so that they can form new food memories with you.

"When it feels right."

How many of us have heard that from someone trying to share a family recipe? Kind of baffling in the moment, isn't it? I remember, as a young child, standing in my Bubby's kitchen trying to learn how to make her rice pudding. Bubby was my great-grandmother, and she made the only rice pudding I ever liked, so my mother, sister and I decided that we needed to learn how to make it so that when she went to Florida for the winter, we could still have some. We expected the "pinch of this" and the "dash of that" explanations, we figured we could see how much she used and with practice, we'd get it. What we didn't expect was the finesse of touch needed to determine when the cooking was done. It was many years later, when I was beginning to create my own culinary POV and recipes, that I finally understood. Cooking is as much an art as it is anything else. Bubby, I know it took a long time, but I finally get it, "It feels right."

Oh, BTW, we came really close, but we never were able to totally duplicate the rice pudding.

Crabmeat en Chemise

One night while dining out, my father suggested I try a new dish. We were in a very nice French restaurant near Bailey's Crossroads in Virginia, called The Iron Skillet. The chef was from Cyprus but was classically trained in French cuisine. I loved crab and I loved cream, so I gave it a go. To say that this dish blew my mind would be an understatement. I had never eaten anything so delicate and refined before. Yes, it was crab and cream, but the way it was wrapped in a perfectly cooked crepe, filled with succulent lumps of crabmeat and covered in the most exquisite cream sauce I have ever eaten (to this day) made it a meal that I still remember 50 years later. I enjoyed

that dish many times, as well as many other of Chef Alex's creations, but nothing opened my eyes like that first time.



"Would you like to order for the young lady?"

The Iron Skillet was the foundation for one of my more humorous food memories. Along with the crabmeat en chemise, I learned to love many other dishes not found on too many everyday family tables. In 1973, my family had an opportunity to travel overseas to visit family. On the way, we stopped in London for several days, staying at the Savoy. One evening, we decided to try the formal dining room. We dressed and went down. Once seated, we were presented with menus, conveyed our drink orders to the waiter and began to decide what we wanted. When the waiter returned, he asked if we were ready to place our orders. I placed my order and he turned to my father and asked if he would like to order for me. My father replied that I had just ordered for myself. The waiter persisted and asked him again, a little more insistently, and once again, my father declined. The waiter appeared very exasperated, so I piped up "I know escargot are snails. I happen to like them. Please bring plenty of bread to dip in the sauce."

Fresh is best.

Many of my memories revolve around eating food grown in our own garden, passing the corn directly from the stalk, through the window to my mother and a pot of hot water, (stalk to plate – 10 minutes), going out back of the garage at my gram's house to pick blackberries still warm from the sun for dessert. Learning to appreciate the value of fresh food. Making my own chicken stock for the first time made me feel like a real chef. It was delicious!

I could go on, but I think you get the point. Food is so much more than just a combination of vitamins, minerals and complex carbohydrates to feed the body's cells. Food, done right (and by right, I mean with care and love) nourishes the soul, the spirit, the very essence of who we are. Whether you prefer hot & spicy, vegetarian or vegan, soup or salad, food has the potential to change your mood or change your life.

I know that there are a lot of different schools of thought about how to take care of yourself and that "mindfulness" is

probably an overused word, but it actually applies here. Life is crazy and sometimes we need to eat on the run, grab a fast-food meal or a frozen dinner. As long as we don't let that become our normal, as long as we take the time to focus on our food and its preparation whenever we are able, as long as we are mindful of the power of food in our lives, then we can rest assured that we will live a life full of wonderful food memories to sustain us through the crazy times.

Be well,

Gwen



Food Stories

Important Dates in Food History!

1980-1999

1981 – Nestle debuts Lean Cuisine

1982 – Paul Newman enters the Salad dressing market, sets the stage for responsible business models, opening the door for today's eco-friendly and socially mission-oriented companies.

1985 – Coca Cola introduces “New” Coke, triggering both the worst marketing disaster and record setting comeback in corporate history.

1987 – Snapple creates a new beverage category with its line of iced teas.

1989 – Conagra launches the “Healthy Choice” line of low fat, low cholesterol, low sodium frozen food after its CEO has a hearty attack.

1993 – Food Network is launched, creating a new category of celebrities, Chefs.

90's trends -The Fat-free craze hit without anyone realizing that all of those fats were replaced by sugar. Food manufacturers began to face criticism for unsafe and unnatural ingredients. The 90's saw the beginning of the shift back to our roots, home gardens, clean food, and healthy choices.

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

September 7-8

Burke Centre Festival

10-5 both days

Burke, VA

September 28-29

FallFest

10-5 both days

Occoquan, VA

New at Gwen's Blends!

Creole Seasoning – Watch out New Orleans, Gwen's Blends is gonna give you a run for your money.

Korma Blend – A surprising blend of sweet and heat!

Memphis Style Rub – The Perfect Rib Rub!

Do You:

Have an idea for an article?

Know someone who would enjoy reading *Spice, The Variety of Life?*

Have an idea for a blend you would like me to try and make or an idea for a SingleShot?

Then please reach out!

I would love to connect.

You can reach me at
ggattsek@gmail.com



Got any great hacks or cooking tips
you would like to share?

Let me know. I'm going to devote an
issue to workarounds, tips and hacks
in the next month or so.

Have a great month!

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 19

www.gwensflavorblends.com

September 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



In this issue

Scent Memories

Food Stories – What’s the difference between various cooking oils?

What’s New



Scent Memories

I hope that my trip down memory lane last month helped some of you recall your favorite food memories. Smell is the strongest trigger for evoking memories out of all of the senses. Research suggests a couple of reasons for that. For our ancestors, it was a necessary part of existence. Smells helped identify specific areas. They were the first “map” of the ancient world. The scent of the ocean meant that fish, crabs, oysters etc. were nearby. The fresh scent of blossoms on a fruit tree, the cool dank smell of a cave, even the scent trails left by the wildlife, all served to guide our ancestors to food and shelter.

As evolution did its thing, the primate brain began to change, and the sense of smell became even keener, with the human nose/brain combo detecting and identifying somewhere around 1 trillion different scents. When we smell something, the molecules enter our noses and travel to a series of receptors that essentially turn the scent into a specific electrical impulse to be identified by the brain. The portion of the brain

responsible for processing smell, called the olfactory bulb, is located next to the parts responsible for memory and emotion. Memory is important in the identification process since the new scent is compared to the millions already catalogued. If a match is found, then we recognize the scent, if not we create a new entry.

Research suggests that the close proximity to the emotion center may be responsible for the strong associations we form. Sight and sound are actually routed differently, passing through other areas of the brain before getting to the memory center, so they aren't perceived or archived quite the same. Other research projects have found that the brain activity after smelling a scent with a positive association triggers more brain activity than a generic scent commonly thought to be pleasant. Those positive scents also induce slower, deeper breathing patterns which leads to a more relaxed state of mind, creating more positive associations and so on. All of this supports why we react so strongly to smells that remind of us of something good. They truly do make us feel better.

Another interesting fact is that most of the memories triggered by a smell come from childhood. This is because the first time a scent is encountered is the most powerful and has the strongest connections formed with the experience. This phenomenon is being explored as a possible treatment for people suffering from memory disorders. Called "Reminiscence Therapy", it involves using certain smells to try and trigger or reconnect to memories no longer easily accessible. It is also interesting to note that the loss of smell is, for many, an early symptom of Alzheimer's, leading scientists to wonder if testing of the ability to smell could possibly contribute to an early detection method.

So, let's circle back to food memories. Smell is a big part of the experience of flavor. How many of us remember the smell of freshly baked cookies cooling in the kitchen? Does that make you feel happy? Chicken soup simmering on the stove on a winter's day, does that make you feel safe and loved?

Sometimes it doesn't have to even be a completed dish. Some spices are so distinct that they can trigger memories all on their own. Bay leaves, cinnamon and ginger are three of the strongest. Bay leaves, from the Bay Laurel tree, immediately take you to steaming, fragrant pots of soups and stews. Cinnamon, the dried bark of a small evergreen tree from Sri Lanka (also a member of the laurel family) totally takes you to the bakery for some hot apple pie or snickerdoodles. Ginger, a root from the same family as turmeric, galangal and cardamon, evokes memories of exotic tastes, Chinese stir fry, Jamaican Jerk, and Indian curries.

It has been said that you eat with your eyes first. That may be true when you are dining out and do not have the pleasure of smelling the meal as it is cooking. You have heard me say that

cooking and sharing food is a gift for you as well as the other people you share it with. Not only do the pleasant smells trigger the relaxation mentioned earlier, but the sheer act of doing something you love has amazing benefits. Lower levels of stress, higher level of endorphins, and healthier food thrown in for good measure. How can you lose?

Here are a few recipes to trigger your scent memories, raise those endorphins and make you a hero to your family and friends.

Have fun and enjoy,

Gwen

Create new scent memories

Chicken Bone Broth

Ingredients

- 3 qt Water
- 2 lb. Chicken wings, backs, necks (the more cartilaginous and bonier, the better)
- 3 Celery stalks
- 2 Carrots, unpeeled
- 1 Onion, quartered
- 2 Bay leaves
- 2 T **Gwen's Blend Seasoning**

Instructions

Place everything in a large stock pot. (The vegetables can be placed in whole.) Bring to a boil and then lower to a simmer and let cook 6-8 hours. Salt & pepper to taste. Remove large pieces and then pour through a colander lined with cheesecloth. Either skim fat while still hot or wait until it cools and use a spoon to scrape it off.

Our recommendations: Italian Seasoning, Tuscan Seasoning, Herbs de Provence, Chili Lime Seasoning, Summer Blend, Garlic Herb Blend, Avo's Portuguese Allspice.

Curried Squash/Potato Soup

Ingredients

- 8 C Sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into cubes
- 1 T Butter
- 2 C Granny Smith apples, peeled and chopped
- 1 C Onion, finely diced
- ½ C Celery, thinly sliced

- 1 Bay leaf
- 2 tsp **King's Curry**
- 1 Garlic clove, minced
- 3 cans Chicken broth
- ½ C Cheddar, extra-sharp white, grated

Instructions

Preheat oven to 400°.
 Spray cooking spray on a foil covered baking sheet and arrange potatoes in a single layer.
 Cook for 45 minutes or until tender.
 Melt the butter at medium heat in a Dutch oven.
 Add apple, onion, celery and bay and sauté for 10 minutes.
 Stir in curry and garlic, cooking for an additional 1 minute.
 Add potatoes and broth, stir well.
 Reduce to low heat and simmer, uncovered for 30 minutes.
 Discard the bay leaf and partially mash the roasted potatoes.
 Stir well and serve with a sprinkle of cheddar cheese on top.

You can also use Baharat, Peri peri (regular or hot), Avo's Portuguese Allspice. Think about swapping potatoes for butternut or acorn squash.

Oven Barbecued Spareribs

Ingredients

- 3 lbs. Spareribs
- 8 oz. Tomato sauce
- ¼ C Vinegar, cider
- 2 T Onion, finely chopped
- 1 **Gwen's Barbecue Rub** (5.25 oz.)
- 1½ Garlic cloves

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350°.
 Place ribs on a sheet pan and roast for 45 minutes.
 Put rub, tomato sauce, garlic and vinegar in a saucepan and bring to boil.
 Pour half of the sauce over the ribs and roast 30 minutes more.
 Turn ribs over, pour half of the remaining sauce over the ribs and roast 1 hour.
 Remove from heat and brush the remaining sauce over ribs before serving.

Our recommendations: Carolina, Memphis, Texas, Kansas City or Baby Back Rib Rubs.

Food Stories

What's the difference between varieties of cooking oils?

See the chart that follows to find the best one for what you are preparing.

Oil	Best uses	Smoke Point Fahrenheit
Almond	Sautéing, stir fry	420°
Avocado	Stir fry, searing	520°
Canola	All purpose, dressings, and cooking	400°
Coconut	Confectionary, shortening replacement	350°
Corn	Frying, dressings	450°
Cottonseed	Frying, dressings	420°
Flaxseed	Dressings	225° Not for cooking
Olive EVOO	All purpose	320°
Palm	Flavoring while cooking	446°
Peanut	Frying	450°
Safflower	Dressings	450°
Sesame	Sautéing, marinades, stir fry	410°
Soybean	Dressings, replacement for shortening	450°
Sunflower	Dressings, sautéing	450°
Walnut	Pan fry, searing, grilling	400°

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

October 11-13
Capital Arts & Crafts Fair – Fall Show

10-6 Friday 7 Saturday
 10-5 Sunday
 Dulles Expo Center
 Chantilly, VA

November 9
Robinson Marketplace
 9AM-3PM
 Robinson High School
 5035 Sideburn Road, Fairfax, VA

November 8-10
2024 Northern Virginia Christmas Market
10AM-5PM each day
Dulles Expo Center
Chantilly, Va

November 16-17
City of Fairfax 2024 Holiday Craft Show
10AM-5PM Saturday
10AM -3PM Sunday
Fairfax High School
3501 Lion Run, Fairfax, VA

New at Gwen's Blends!

Chesapeake Bay Style Seafood Blend - all the notes you'd expect from a Bay blend

Moroccan Blend – The kind of blend you'd expect from the Spice capital of the world.

Roasted Garlic Salt – Take your game up a notch!

Got any great hacks or cooking tips you would like to share?

Let me know. I'm going to devote an issue to workarounds, tips and hacks in the next month or so.

Have a great month!

You can reach me at
ggattsek@gmail.com



SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 20

www.gwensflavorblends.com

October 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



In this issue

The Science of Taste

Small Bites – A new feature. A random assortment of interesting, informative and often humorous food facts. This month, different salt varieties and their best uses.

What's New

The Science of Taste

So, what is “taste”? (And by the way, we are not talking about whether or not you should have your own show on HGTV or start your own personal stylist business, but rather the taste that has to do with food.) According to the Oxford dictionary taste is “the sensation of flavor perceived in the mouth and throat on contact with a substance”. This definition takes us to our next question. What is “flavor”? Flavor is the result of a combination of smell, temperature, texture and the chemical sensations received in the taste buds.

Before we go any further, I am going to debunk a myth. The areas of your tongue are not specialized for certain flavors. All areas of your tongue can sense all 5 of the basic tastes. That being said, not every taste bud can taste every flavor. Each one is designed to focus on a certain flavor. We have between 2000-5000 taste buds on the surface of our tongue. Each taste bud has between 50-100 taste receptors, giving us 100,00-500,000 opportunities to taste. The various types of receptors

are randomly located so the combinations are as endless as the variety of flavors.

Each of those flavors is comprised of a balance of the 5 basic groups: saltiness, sweetness, sourness, bitterness and savoriness (umami). Each of these flavors actually serves an evolutionary need.



raw sugar cane

Sweet – Sweetness is a sign of energy since it is found primarily in carbohydrates. Carbs equals energy and energy equals survival, so identifying good sources of energy is important. With the exception of the Obligatory Carnivores (cats & polar bears, who can't digest plant material at all and have no ability to taste sweet at all), most animals will search out and consume some plant-based foods that are loaded with carbs, frequently in the form of sugar. Being able to easily identify energy sources is a huge asset to survival.



bitter melon

Bitter – Bitter tastes are warnings. Most toxic materials have a bitter taste which serves as a warning to prevent consumption. Modern processing techniques have neutralized much of the toxicity in things like coffee, cacao, or chicory. The bitter greens we all love so much aren't really toxic, but evolution tried to pull a fast one on the grazers by fooling them with a bitter taste into believing that they should avoid eating them. Kind of like the mimicry of insects that have "eye spots" on their wings to make predators think that they are looking at their prey straight on. While bitterness might not be your cup of tea on its own, using it to balance another flavor works wonderfully. Think about a Manhattan with a splash of bitters. Doesn't alter the entire cocktail, they just make everything else stand out a little clearer.



citrus

Sour – Sour is another profile that serves as an alert. It is the primary taste of unripe fruit, spoiled foods, and high acidity, all of which can cause sickness or injury. In small amounts it works very much like bitterness to balance out a profile. I am sure most of us have heard more than one chef on television talk about adding a little acid to cut the richness. Think about a salad dressing without vinegar or lemon juice, doesn't sound very appetizing, does it?



salt crystal

Salt – Salt, like sweet is a survival flavor. Salt helps regulate the level of water in your body, so animals living in arid areas need to consume salt to prevent water loss. Those living in very moist environments consume less salt to prevent too much retention which can lead to multiple organ failure. In the cooking world, salt is also the balancer. Going back to our television chef buddies, "needs a little bit of salt" is a very common refrain. Like a splash of bitters livens up a cocktail and a pinch of nutmeg or cinnamon can amplify the flavors in a sauce, salt serves as another way to round out flavors.



Soy Sauce

Savory – Umami as a taste was not really recognized until 1907 when a Japanese researcher began to try and explain more complex flavors. It is now a widely accepted member of the flavor family. In the evolutionary sense, savoriness is the indicator of proteins, responsible for muscle and organ growth

and health. It is necessary for hemoglobin production and antibodies as well. That is why it is perceived as a pleasant taste and elicits a pleasurable response.

There is one more element in the complex structure of taste, Pungency. We might recognize it more easily as the spicy/hot piece of the puzzle. Spicy foods are not detected by taste buds. They actually trigger pain receptors. When enough receptors are activated, you experience an endorphin release, so that is where the pleasure of spicy foods comes from. It is very common for cuisine from very hot climates to be extremely spicy. Part of the reason is that the capsaicin triggers sweating which helps cool you off. Another reason is that hot peppers help preserve food and ward off bacteria. They can also kill off any bacteria or fungi that may have taken hold.

So, now that we have covered the basic taste groups, let's try some recipes that highlight the individual groups.

Enjoy,

Gwen

Sweet

Spiced Fudge

Ingredients

1 can condensed milk
2 tsp vanilla
3 T butter, room temp
2 ½ C semi-sweet chocolate chips
1 T **Baharat**

Instructions

Place a metal bowl over a saucepan of boiling water. Add all of the ingredients to the bowl and stir continuously until the butter has melted and everything is combined smoothly.
Pour into a parchment lined pan.
Refrigerate 2 hours, until firm.
Cut into desired size and serve.

Bitter

Café Mocha Rubbed Ribeye Steak

Ingredients

2 1" thick boneless ribeye steaks
2 T Unsalted butter
2 T **Café Mocha Rub**
2 tsp Salt

Instructions

Bring the steaks to room temperature.
Heat a large skillet over med-high heat. (Cast iron if you have it)
Combine the rub and the salt and rub both sides of the steaks.
Melt the butter until it starts to sizzle.
Put steaks in and sear for 3-4 minutes.
Flip to the other side for 2-3 minutes or until they reach your preferred level of doneness.
Remove from heat and let rest 10 minutes.

Sour

Chili Lime vinaigrette

Ingredients

3T Cilantro or parsley
3 T Plain yogurt
3 T Orange juice
2 T White vinegar
1 T Sugar
2 tsp **Chili Lime Seasoning**

Instructions

Combine all ingredients in a cruet or medium bowl.
Shake or whisk well until thoroughly combined.

Salt

Homemade Crackers

Ingredients

3 C Flour
2 tsp Sugar
2 tsp Salt
4 T Oil or butter
1 C Water
1 T **Everything Seasoning**

Instructions

Sift dry ingredients together and add butter/oil and water.
Combine until a little bit tacky. Split into halves.
Flour your work surface and working on ½ of the dough at a time, roll to 1/8 "thick.
Brush lightly with oil, cut into squares and prick with a fork.
Place on a sheet pan and bake 12-15 minutes until golden.

Umami

Taco Soup

Ingredients

1 lb. Processed cheese, cubed
 1 lb. Ground beef
 1 can Corn, whole kernel, undrained
 2 cans Tomatoes, diced fire-roasted, undrained
 1 Jalapeno, seeded and diced
 2 T **Taco/Fajita Seasoning**

Instructions

Combine all ingredients in slow cooker.
 Cover and cook 4-5 hours on low or 3 hours on high.
 Serve with tortilla or corn chips.

Spicy

Nashville Hot Chicken

Fry chicken as you normally would but keep 1 cup of the frying oil.

Add 1 packet of **Nate's Nashville Hot** to the oil, brush over chicken and serve with white bread and sliced bread and butter pickles.

For an even spicier version, try adding a little cayenne, garlic, and onion powders to your breading flour.

Small Bites

Variety	Color	Characteristics	Best Herb pairing
Kosher	white	dissolves well,	All
Gray Sea salt	Gray to gray green	Sometimes harsh	Garlic, cumin, bay, thyme
Sel Gris	gray	low sodium, bright	Rosemary, garlic, bay, thyme
Kala Namak	Light pink with gray tinge	strong sulfur taste, vegan, Indian cuisine	Turmeric, basil, coriander, saffron, cumin
Himalayan	pink	potent mineral flavor, poultry, fish, brines	Rosemary, oregano, basil, garlic, bay, thyme
Smoked	Light to dark brown	barbecue and meats	cinnamon, clove, nutmeg, allspice
Fleur de Sel	white	Caviar of finishing salts, light, violet-like aroma	All
Maldon	white	dissolves slowly on tongue	Lemon balm, lavender, delicate flavors
Black lava	black	Finishing, sulfurish, best on sushi and grilled stuff	Pepper, garlic, bay, thyme
Red Alaea	red	Great in rubs, mixed with clay, earthy-mineral taste, goes well with seafood	Pepper, cinnamon, turmeric, cloves, allspice-

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

October 11-13

Capital Arts & Crafts Festival – Fall

Dulles Expo Center

10-5 Friday & Saturday

10-4 Sunday

November 8-10

Annual Northern Virginia Holiday Market

Dulles Expo Center

10-5 all three days

November 9

Robinson Secondary School Marketplace

5035 Sideburn Road, Fairfax, VA

9-3

November 16-17

Holiday Craft Show

Fairfax High School

3501 Lion Run, Fairfax, VA

10-5

December 13-15

Capital Arts & Crafts Festival – Holiday

Dulles Expo Center

10-5 Friday & Saturday

10-4 Sunday

New Blends

Fall, Winter & Spring Herb Blends. These blends complement our Summer Blend and give you a full year of herbaceous flavor.

You can reach me at

ggattsek@gmail.com

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 21

www.gwensflavorblends.com

November 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



In this issue

Layering of Flavors

Food Stories – What’s the difference between types of Vinegars?

What’s New



Layering of Flavors

Layering flavors in food is a technique that involves adding ingredients at different stages of cooking to create a balanced and harmonious flavor profile. The goal is to have the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

To achieve that you must know your ingredients and understand the balance of the 5 major tastes and their interactions.

There are many different techniques that you can use to layer flavors, some of which you probably already do. Seasoning your meat before you put it on the grill is a layer. Sauteing vegetables before adding them to a soup or omelet is layering. Marinating is a layer.

Like anything, however, you can over layer. Trying too much can actually result in food that is too busy. Too much sauce, over browning, over smoking, can all create a jumble of flavors that don't really taste all that terrific.

Let's break it down.

From the very get go, make sure that you season each ingredient in your dish. That doesn't mean that you are going to coat everything in salt, herbs, or spices, but a pinch of salt to bring out the natural flavor, or a little bit of garlic to add some contrast might be nice. Think about what you are cooking and then think about the spices you have. Is there a combination that springs right to mind? If so, then that's your inner chef chiming in.

How about adding some vegetables? Have you ever roasted a pork tenderloin with sauerkraut? How about adding some butternut squash to your chicken soup? A little bit of jalapeno to your cream sauce?

Onions and their kin (shallots, leeks, scallions) all have slightly different flavors and can be used to provide a little brightness in your dish. Would sweet Vidalia's taste better than yellow onions? How about leeks for a change? Of course, you need to make sure that you have seasoned your vegetables to get the maximum effect!

I think we have all heard TV chefs talk about salting your pasta water. Liquids can also give your food a boost. Try substituting stock for water when making rice or other grains. Maybe a little flavored oil for your sauté work. How about a splash of red wine in a beef stew?

Marinades open a whole other set of options. Allowing the uncooked food to steep in a briny, umami packed solution does wonders for flavor and can also help tenderize a tougher cut of meat. Dry rubs also work well, however they need a little longer to work their magic, so let them sit overnight before cooking.

Acid and fat are the last two major players in the layering game. Acid gives a pop and fat starts off the cook with a huge boost of moisture and umami.

Timing is everything in layering flavors, followed closely by tasting as you go. Start with sauteing onions, garlic, other vegetables. This introduces your fat and the opportunity for the first round of seasoning. You also want to think about the amount of time certain foods take to reach their flavor potential. Onions, carrots, chilies, squash and many root vegetables take longer to soften and sweeten, so make sure they get their loving near the beginning of your cook.

Spices can take a while to fully bloom, so consider using them closer to the beginning. You can even toast them to bring the flavor out even more. Herbs tend to lose their impact if cooked too long, so consider adding them closer to the end.

Meats depend on the cooking method and cut of meat to determine cooking time. The same with grains. Take a

moment to think about cook times and plan accordingly. And as a reminder, taste as you go, taste as you go!

Does the dish need a last-minute boost of acid? A pinch more salt perhaps? Once those final adjustments are made, all that's left is to serve and enjoy.

Like anything else in this world that's worth learning, time and experience will guide you through your attempts. As long as you are having fun, that's really all that matters. You will probably have some spectacularly awful dishes, we all do. Something that sounded great in your brain, will not translate well to the plate. Eat it if you can, trash it if you can't and move on, just make sure you make a note to yourself to avoid that particular mistake again.

So, where to start? That's the million-dollar question. I have included a few ideas below. Take a look and see if anything inspires you. If not, then just get in the kitchen and let your inner chef take over. Have fun and as always,

Enjoy!

Gwen

Flavored Olive Oil

Flavored olive oil (and by olive oil, I mean Extra Virgin Olive Oil), is a wonderful vehicle for adding flavor to anything from bread to vinaigrettes to whatever you are sauteing.

Fresh bread dipped in oil mixed with Za'atar or Italian seasoning is a refreshing starter. (Or as a base for a vinaigrette). Oil seasoned with Chili Lime seasoning adds a little punch to your shrimp kabob.

For dipping, start with ½ T seasoning per ½ cup of oil and adjust to taste.

For infusing an oil with flavor, double that ratio, let sit for 1 week and then taste. Adjust as needed according to your taste. Let sit for 1 more week.

Our Recommendations: Za'atar, Italian Seasoning, Herbs de Provence, Chili Lime Seasoning, Garlic Herb Blend,

Marinades

The standard marinade consists of a ratio of ¼ C liquid:2 T of seasoning. Once the food is placed in the marinade, it should sit in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour and up to an overnight soak. Once the food has come out of the marinade, you can put the leftover marinade in a saucepan and boil for 5 minutes. It is then great for marinating further during cooking or serving on the side as a sauce.

Ex. Flank Steak – ¼ C low sodium soy sauce + 2 cloves garlic + 4 tsp Gwen's Blends Seasoning

Our recommendations:

Beef: Gwen's House Rub, Adobo Seasoning, Southwestern Rub, Taco/Fajita Seasoning with Olive oil.

Poultry: Shawarma, Smoked Chicken Rub (regular or hot), Peri peri (regular or hot) with olive oil and a bit of lemon juice.

White Sauce

Ingredients

1 T Butter or margarine
1 T AP flour
1 Pinch of salt
¾ C Milk
1 tsp Gwen's Blends Seasoning

Instructions

Melt margarine in small saucepan.
Stir in flour, salt, and seasoning
Add milk.
Cook and stir over medium heat until thickened and bubbly.
Cook 1 minute more.
Serve.

Simple Tomato Sauce

Ingredients

1 can Whole, peeled, tomatoes
1 Onion, halved
2 Garlic cloves, peeled and left whole
2 T Olive oil
1 T Gwen's Blends Seasoning

Instructions

Put everything in a medium to large pot and simmer for 15 minutes.
Using a spatula or spoon, crush the tomatoes against the sides of the pot to break them up a bit.
Continue to simmer for another 30 minutes.
Remove the onion. (If a bit breaks off, no big deal, you can actually chop them up if you like a chunkier sauce).
Smash the garlic against the side of the pot like you did the tomatoes and stir in.
You can enjoy as is, or if you prefer a smooth sauce, an immersion blender does the trick.
(Note: If you prefer a deeper flavor, you can roast 6-7 whole tomatoes for 30 minutes in the broiler and remove the skins.)

Food Stories – Vinegars, What's the Difference?

White wine – best for savory uses, subtly fruity, cooking and brining, hollandaise and bearnaise

Red wine – bold & zesty, not great for pickling due to color, great for dressings

White Balsamic – sweeter than white wine, sweeter profiles

Champagne – may have more than just grapes, mild & delicate, dressings & marinades

Rice wine – very light, good for pickling, stir fry, rice, mildest and least acidic of all

Balsamic – pressed grape juice, not fermented alcohol. Mellow fruity flavor profile, syrup-like consistency

Distilled white – pickling, cleaning, poaching eggs, baking, not great for cooking, hot applications

Sherry – dressings, glazed marinades, reductions, Spanish/Basque fortified in oak barrels, similar applications as balsamic but more delicate and medium bodied.

Apple cider – fermented apples & sugar, fruity and tart, pickling, marinade, sauces

Malt – condiments, dips, dressings, pickling, nutty, toasty citrus profile

Black – made from glutinous rice, common use is dipping sauce for dumplings and braising pork shoulder or ribs

STD pickling ratios:

3 parts Water
2 parts Vinegar
1 part Sugar
½ part Salt

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

November 8-10
Annual Northern Virginia Holiday Market
Dulles Expo Center
10-5 all three days

November 16-17
Holiday Craft Show
Fairfax High School
3501 Lion Run, Fairfax, VA
10 AM -5 PM

You can reach me at
ggattsek@gmail.com



SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 22

www.gwensflavorblends.com

December 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



Reflections

Like a lot of people, I tend to get very introspective as the year draws to a close. I am not one for making a whole lot of New Year's resolutions, but I do like to take stock of where I've been, where I am, and where I want to go next.

I don't know about you, but 2024 was a bit of a rollercoaster for me. From Fredericksburg to Arlington to Chantilly, I had 16 fairs this year and what I realized is that, with a full-time job, that's a bit too ambitious. Coping with the rain we seemed to have every weekend this spring was tough. Getting to meet/reconnect with all of you is always the high point. It was nice to meet so many young people really wanting to expand their palates and horizons. That being said, the plan for next year will be to slow down a bit so that I can enjoy the ride. 2023 saw me do over 20 festivals and fairs and I cut it back to the 16 this year, but I think next year will be closer to 8-10. I'll keep putting the schedule on the newsletter so you can all keep track.

Aside from getting to meet and spend time with all of you, what I enjoy the most is the adventure of creating new blends

and finding new ways to inspire people to spread their culinary wings. I took the months of July and August off from shows and got to concentrate on creating new blends. After two years, I finally landed on a curry recipe that I am proud of.

I listened to the feedback from everyone and launched a line of dip mixes. I expanded the Variety Pack offerings to enable people to sample different blends. Each pack has 6 different blends with recipes that work with each blend. There are now 8 different curated collections. I also added 13 totally new blends to the Gwen's Blends family.

The downside of all of that creativity is realizing that I have over a hundred items to keep track of. Inventory of both the completed blends and the ingredients used in creating them is a sizable task. To that end, I will be making some tough choices this year about slimming down the menu. I will always have the recipes and will be happy to fill special orders. If I discontinue your favorite, don't panic, just drop me an email and I'll mix some up for you.

Several of you have asked whether I have considered doing something with my newsletters. Creating a compilation, re-working into a more cohesive journey through food or something along those lines. While I appreciate the compliments, that feels a little out of my league. I thoroughly enjoy the writing and the research to come up with new topics, (although I can always use suggestions for ideas). The thought of taking it to the next level is intriguing, but also a little scary. Is it something I could find someone to help me figure out? Maybe. Do I want to? Maybe. To that end, I did meet a

publisher and author coach at a show this fall and will be reaching out after the holidays. Who knows?

I have also begun to explore the possibility of creating a cookbook based on the blends I have created. "How do you use this?" is a question that I hear quite frequently and the few recipes that I have created as the instructions for the Variety Packs have been well received. This led me to create a small guide that many of you might have seen at my shows this summer. Could a legitimate, real cookbook, be in my future? Maybe. Would I enjoy working on that? Most definitely!

Lastly, while I have always tried to keep Gwen's Blends as accessible as possible, I have paid attention to the other spice and food vendors that I meet, and I most decidedly look like a home-based business. When I started this adventure a few years back, I was hesitant to invest a great deal of money until I figured out whether Gwen's Blends had any potential. Thanks to all of you and all of the other people I have met, I think it is safe to say that it is time to raise the bar. To that end, I will be experimenting with new looks in packaging and labeling. Hopefully, I will also begin to get a grasp on marketing, social media and all of those front of house chores that I have been avoiding.

I guess to sum it up, I am looking forward to a great year. I am hopeful that 2025 is chock full of meaningful and fulfilling experiences. I look forward to seeing all of you at one festival or another. I hope that you have a wonderful holiday season, and that the new year brings you only the best.

Take, care and be well!

Gwen

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

December

Shirlington Light up the Village!
December 5, 6-9 pm
The Village at Shirlington
Arlington

Four Mile Run Holiday Market
December 8, 9am-1pm
4109 Mount Vernon Avenue
Alexandria

Christkindlmarkt
December 14, 11am-4pm
5115 Little Falls Road
Knights of Columbus
Arlington

Corn dogs. Follow me
for more recipes!





You can reach me at ggattsek@gmail.com

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 22

www.gwensflavorblends.com

December 2024

ggattsek@gmail.com



Reflections

Like a lot of people, I tend to get very introspective as the year draws to a close. I am not one for making a whole lot of New Year's resolutions, but I do like to take stock of where I've been, where I am, and where I want to go next.

I don't know about you, but 2024 was a bit of a rollercoaster for me. From Fredericksburg to Arlington to Chantilly, I had 16 fairs this year and what I realized is that, with a full-time job, that's a bit too ambitious. Coping with the rain we seemed to have every weekend this spring was tough. Getting to meet/reconnect with all of you is always the high point. It was nice to meet so many young people really wanting to expand their palates and horizons. That being said, the plan for next year will be to slow down a bit so that I can enjoy the ride. 2023 saw me do over 20 festivals and fairs and I cut it back to the 16 this year, but I think next year will be closer to 8-10. I'll keep putting the schedule on the newsletter so you can all keep track.

Aside from getting to meet and spend time with all of you, what I enjoy the most is the adventure of creating new blends

and finding new ways to inspire people to spread their culinary wings. I took the months of July and August off from shows and got to concentrate on creating new blends. After two years, I finally landed on a curry recipe that I am proud of.

I listened to the feedback from everyone and launched a line of dip mixes. I expanded the Variety Pack offerings to enable people to sample different blends. Each pack has 6 different blends with recipes that work with each blend. There are now 8 different curated collections. I also added 13 totally new blends to the Gwen's Blends family.

The downside of all of that creativity is realizing that I have over a hundred items to keep track of. Inventory of both the completed blends and the ingredients used in creating them is a sizable task. To that end, I will be making some tough choices this year about slimming down the menu. I will always have the recipes and will be happy to fill special orders. If I discontinue your favorite, don't panic, just drop me an email and I'll mix some up for you.

Several of you have asked whether I have considered doing something with my newsletters. Creating a compilation, re-working into a more cohesive journey through food or something along those lines. While I appreciate the compliments, that feels a little out of my league. I thoroughly enjoy the writing and the research to come up with new topics, (although I can always use suggestions for ideas). The thought of taking it to the next level is intriguing, but also a little scary. Is it something I could find someone to help me figure out? Maybe. Do I want to? Maybe. To that end, I did meet a

publisher and author coach at a show this fall and will be reaching out after the holidays. Who knows?

I have also begun to explore the possibility of creating a cookbook based on the blends I have created. "How do you use this?" is a question that I hear quite frequently and the few recipes that I have created as the instructions for the Variety Packs have been well received. This led me to create a small guide that many of you might have seen at my shows this summer. Could a legitimate, real cookbook, be in my future? Maybe. Would I enjoy working on that? Most definitely!

Lastly, while I have always tried to keep Gwen's Blends as accessible as possible, I have paid attention to the other spice and food vendors that I meet, and I most decidedly look like a home-based business. When I started this adventure a few years back, I was hesitant to invest a great deal of money until I figured out whether Gwen's Blends had any potential. Thanks to all of you and all of the other people I have met, I think it is safe to say that it is time to raise the bar. To that end, I will be experimenting with new looks in packaging and labeling. Hopefully, I will also begin to get a grasp on marketing, social media and all of those front of house chores that I have been avoiding.

I guess to sum it up, I am looking forward to a great year. I am hopeful that 2025 is chock full of meaningful and fulfilling experiences. I look forward to seeing all of you at one festival or another. I hope that you have a wonderful holiday season, and that the new year brings you only the best.

Take, care and be well!

Gwen

What's new at Gwen's Blends

Festivals

December

Shirlington Light up the Village!
December 5, 6-9 pm
The Village at Shirlington
Arlington

Four Mile Run Holiday Market
December 8, 9am-1pm
4109 Mount Vernon Avenue
Alexandria

Christkindlmarkt
December 14, 11am-4pm
5115 Little Falls Road
Knights of Columbus
Arlington

Corn dogs. Follow me
for more recipes!





You can reach me at
ggattsek@gmail.com