



TRASH TALK
BARBARA O'NEAL

Silicone: Better than plastic

After reading our last Trash Talk column about food waste, I was inspired to write about food storage alternatives. Better storage leads to less waste, and while plastic is great for storage and reducing food waste, the chemicals that leach from it and the impact of plastic on our environment are definitely not great. But then I fell down the rabbit hole of the internet.

What pulled me into that hole were the new silicone storage bags advertised as ideal for replacing plastic bags. From there, I checked out cooking and baking utensils and medical supplies. Turns out, silicone is quite interesting. It is not a naturally occurring substance, but can be made from natural ingredients, is generally inert (which means it keeps to itself) and anti-microbial, is heat-resistant, and is very strong so it is a better alternative to other plastics.

Unfortunately, food grade silicone in particular has not been well studied and a few experiments have raised serious questions. While durable and recyclable, it is not generally recycled and will remain in our landfills for hundreds of years. There in a nutshell is the good, the bad and the ugly. If you want to follow me further down the rabbit hole, keep reading for more information and a few recommendations.

First, what is silicone? Like plastic, it is a manmade polymer. In fact, the Plastics Council considers it a plastic. But instead of a carbon base, it has a backbone of silicon and oxygen. Silicon, without the “e,” is an ingredient in silicone. Silicon is an element found in silica, which is sand or quartz. Yup, sand. Silicon is extracted from silica (it rarely exists by itself in nature) and passed through hydrocarbons to create a new polymer with an inorganic silicon-oxygen backbone and carbon-based side groups. That means while the silicon might come from a relatively benign and plentiful resource like sand, the hydrocarbons in silicone generally come from fossil sources such as petroleum and natural gas. It is a bit of a hybrid material. Silicone also is known as siloxane because it is comprised of siloxane monomers that are bonded together into polymers to form the final silicone resin we use.

While the research indicates siloxanes are stable, they are not completely inert. In other words, there is a possibility of leaching siloxane. One study tested bottle nipples and bakeware with milk, baby formula and a solution of alcohol and water. Nothing was released into the milk or formula after six hours, but after 72 hours in the alcohol solution, several types of siloxane were detected in the solution. Some siloxanes are considered potential endocrine disrupters, and some have been linked to cancers and other health issues, plus they stay in the environment so can accumulate in people and wildlife.

Several studies have found small amounts of siloxanes migrate into foods baked in or on silicone. The amounts involved were dependent on fat content — the more fat a food had, the more siloxanes were transferred. While most were within regulatory limits, some were not. In general silicone is considered heat-tolerant. Some silicone rubbers are designed to withstand temperatures as high as 500 degrees and silicone

See Trash Talk / Page 3B

Dishes That Smell As Good As They Taste

Creating pan roast perfection



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Thomas Keller’s Pan-Roasted Cote de Boeuf is both fragrant and delicious.

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The kitchen I use at work is also the office break room. In addition, it is the main thoroughfare between the newsroom and the restrooms.

As a result, there is a constant stream of people trudging past — waves upon waves of people — and they all ask me the same thing:

“Whatcha’ cookin’?”

It’s a lot of fun. It’s like I’m putting on a show while I work.

But when I was cooking for this story, they did not ask what I was cooking and instead said something different.

“That smells amazing,” said one.

“That smells amazing,” said another.

“That smells amazing,”

INSIDE

• Recipes for the Cote de Boeuf (pictured) and a sauce accompaniment, as well as oven-roasted zucchini and roasted sesame chicken thighs, **Page 2B**.

said roughly 30 others.

I thought I must be on to something. Food that smells good while it is cooking generally tastes good, too. This was a promising development.

What I was cooking was pan roasts, and they smelled amazing. Not only that, but this was one of the rare times that the food tasted even better than it smelled, or at least it nearly did.

First, a definition: A pan roast is meat or vegetables that you sear briefly on top of the stove before putting the same pan in the oven to cook the food more gently until it

is done.

That simple, undisputed fact, however, appears to be news to the internet. If you look up pan roasts online, you get recipe after recipe for shrimp pan roasts, scallop pan roasts and even shrimp-scallop-lobster-oyster pan roasts.

But seafood cannot be pan roasted. A true pan roast would overcook seafood at best, and at worst turn it into rubber.

So I set out to make four real, non-seafood pan roasts. They each combined the best of both worlds — high direct heat and lower ambient heat — while leaving just a single pan to clean.

The simplest was pan-roasted pork chops. All this requires is an easy rub. Yes, the rub has seven ingredients, but it only takes a few seconds to whip up, and you probably have them already

in your pantry: garlic powder, paprika, onion powder, dry mustard, brown sugar, salt and pepper.

You just rub this mixture on both sides of the pork chops, sear them in a little hot oil for two minutes and then cook them in a hot oven for a few minutes more. The result is a delightfully flavorful chop that, because of the cooking method, is particularly tender and juicy.

One-Skillet Roasted Sesame Chicken Thighs was a little more complicated, but the flavor was richer and more complex, too.

PAN-ROASTED PORK CHOPS

Yield: 4 servings

1 teaspoon garlic powder

See Roasts/Page 2B

Spring training is a baseball fan’s dream



BOB’S
THOUGHTS
BOB BAUM

There is something glorious about the smell of freshly manicured grass, the sound of baseballs slapping into leather gloves and the crack of the bats as players swing away in batting cages.

For the true baseball fan, a trip to spring training is a must.

As those of you who have read these reminiscences may recall, I love baseball.

I wrote earlier about the Arizona Diamondbacks and their seven-game World Series triumph over the New York Yankees. But this time of year, everyone is undefeated, and hope literally springs eternal.

Half of the major league teams hold spring training in Florida. The other half are in Arizona, where for 19 seasons I

covered the Diamondbacks.

In my early days in Arizona, the Diamondbacks held spring training down Interstate 10 in Tucson.

It was there, famously, that a pigeon made the unfortunate decision to fly between home plate and a Randy Johnson fastball. Sadly, I wasn’t there to see the feathers fly that day. But you can find it easily on YouTube.

I was there when bees attacked players in the field, forcing postponement of a game in Tucson. The bees particularly went after the visiting pitcher, who it turns out slathers himself with tropical fruit-based cologne before taking the mound.

The Diamondbacks moved their spring operations north to Salt River Fields, a beautiful facility they share with the Colorado Rockies. It’s just outside of the north Scottsdale border, across the freeway from Talking Stick Resort and Casino.

At Salt River Fields, each team has a series of playing fields, including one that perfectly mirrors the dimensions of Chase Field, the Diamondbacks’ regular-season

home in downtown Phoenix.

Several teams (Cleveland, Cincinnati and, most significantly, the Los Angeles Dodgers, among them) have shifted spring training from Florida to Arizona. The reasons: Arizona’s teams require less travel and the drier weather makes games more likely to be played than rained out.

The Dodgers and Chicago White Sox share a spring training site in Glendale, not far from State Farm Stadium — home of the NFL’s Cardinals. Out in Surprise, where I lived for nine years, the Texas Rangers and Kansas City Royals share a facility.

The Seattle Mariners and San Diego Padres have long shared a park in Peoria. The San Francisco Giants are in downtown Scottsdale and the Milwaukee Brewers in a not-very-desirable part of west Phoenix.

Cleveland and Cincinnati are out in Goodyear. The Angels are in Tempe while the Cubs and Athletics play in Mesa. The

See Baseball / Page 3B

Hardy, beautiful peonies are perfect for any garden



BETWEEN
THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

Busy gardeners are discovering what our grandmothers knew. Peonies are hardy, beautiful and easy to grow. Each spring they bloom so profusely that you can cut large bouquets and no one will notice the flowers missing from the bush. They thrive into the far north, and they’re unmindful of winter’s cold and winds.

When you plant a peony, you won’t get instant gratification. Peonies are slower to

establish, but then can live for 100 years. Keep this in mind and use good, rich soil to plant the root, only an inch or so below the surface.

Peonies are a sleep, creep, leap plant. When you plant a new young root from the grower, figure on a year to sleep, a year to creep, and by the third year it will be ready to leap forth and amaze with the huge blossoms we have come to love.

After established, each year when the foliage emerges from the ground, top-dress the plant area with fresh chicken manure.

In late August, when foliage dies down, cut it off just below the soil surface and remove the debris from the garden area to prevent spreading any parasites or plant diseases.

Peonies are of two main types — woody stemmed and herbaceous.

The woody stemmed, or tree, peonies (originally from China) form large shrubs that do not die back to the ground each year but do lose their leaves.

The herbaceous peonies have numerous blossom forms — single, Japanese, anemone, semi-double, fully double, species and bomb (like a ball of petals on a plate).

No garden is really complete without at least one peony. When not in bloom they have beautiful dark-green foliage that shows off anything planted in front of it.

Yard chores

• Watch for the fuzzy blooms of pussy willows

• Thin spots and bare patches in the lawn can be overseeded now.

• Apply sulfur to the soils around acid-loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons, hollies and dogwoods. Use a granular formation at the rate of 1/2-pound per 100 square feet.

• Apply a balanced fertilizer such as 6-12-12 to perennial beds when new growth appears.

• Ornamental grasses should be cut to the ground just as new growth begins.

• Gradually begin to pull back mulch from roses.

If you have garden questions or comments, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!