

Tomato tips and a ‘secret’ soup recipe

There are all kinds of books on the best way to grow tomatoes. Everyone has his or her own secret way. There’s probably no secret to it at all. I’ve had good luck and bad luck with tomato crops. Luck some years has a lot to do with weather.

If it’s too hot or too cold, the tomato won’t set as much fruit. And that may have to do with how effective pollination is. On the indeterminate (they just keep growing) vines, it increases fruit production if the spurs, suckers, or whatever you want to call them, are pinched out on a regular basis. They take strength away from the fruiting branches.

Loose soil is important so that the roots get oxygen as well as water. Mulching is important to prevent loss of moisture. Calcium is important to prevent blossom-end rot. I have a friend who puts a handful of milk powder in each hole as she first plants the tomatoes in her garden. Regular, even watering prevents fruit deformity.

When you finally have buckets of wonderful tomatoes, you need to save them to brighten your winter meals. Can tomatoes for winter use to make soups, sauces and salsa.

Meantime, use fresh tomatoes in salads. You can also stuff them by removing the core and pulp and draining for a few minutes upside down on a plate after (optionally) lightly salting the cavity. Save the top for a lid for your little salad and then fill the cavity with turkey, tuna, chicken or egg salad.

I got the soup recipe below from a restaurant after enjoying a bowl of it. I couldn’t believe they would share their “secret” recipe.

CREAM OF TOMATO SOUP

From 4B’s restaurant, Grants, New Mexico

32 ounces of canned, diced tomatoes
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons sugar
9 ounces chicken broth, undiluted
1 tablespoon chopped onion
2 cups cream
Pinch of soda

Mix tomatoes, chicken broth, butter, sugar, onions and soda. Simmer for 1 hour. Heat cream in a double boiler. Add hot cream to hot tomato mixture. Ready to serve and enjoy. Makes 2 quarts of delicious soup.

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

Homemade Crackers



Homemade English oat crackers.

Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

GET CRACKING

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

What makes people happier than crackers? What brings more joy? Especially when they are accompanied by a nice piece of cheese?

Crackers are one of the four most important food groups, along with ice cream, pie and peanut butter. They help build strong bodies 12 ways and are part of a healthy diet, especially when eaten in moderation.

I am reliably informed that crackers can, in fact, be eaten in moderation, though I have never found this to be true in my personal experience.

And crackers are so easy to serve: You go to the store, buy a box of crackers, and empty them out onto a platter when you get home. Your guests look at the platter and think, “Oh, how nice. She went to the trouble of buying a box of crackers.”

But what if you made the crackers yourself? What if you wowed your guests with crackers that are better, far better, than any they have ever had from a box?

Except Triscuits, of course. Nothing beats a Triscuit.

I decided to make six different kinds of crackers (I like crackers. Perhaps I have not been sufficiently clear about this). It was a bit of work, especially when you’re making six kinds, but the results were well worth it — especially if you are having company. If you’re cooking for yourself, I’d just go buy a box of Triscuits.

The first cracker, from a recipe by Ina Garten, is one I’ve made several times before,

English Oat Crackers. These are terrific; immensely flavorful and tremendously rich. Frankly, if you added a couple of chocolate chips, they would practically be a cookie.

With three times as much oats in it as flour, these crackers have a great flavor and a hefty chew. They also have brown sugar and two sticks of butter for less than 30 crackers, so yeah, as I said: cookies.

But they are wonderful. They don’t even need cheese. Serve them with slices of apple or a handful of grapes, and pretend to be surprised at all the compliments.

The next batch I made are (very nearly) just as good, with far fewer calories. The semi-iconic Napa Valley restaurant Mustards Grill, which created this recipe for Crispy Sesame Crackers, serves it as a base for seared Ahi tuna. I serve it by itself, or perhaps with a bite of cheese.

The dough for these sesame crackers is made with yeast, which is a bit of a mystery because they turn out so thin and crisp. The simple dough rises, but you roll it out. That’s what gives it such a delightful cracker texture.

The classic cracker flavor comes from the simplicity of the ingredients (yeast, sugar, water, flour, butter, salt) and of course from the sesame seeds added to the top.

The other cracker I made that uses yeast comes from another nearly iconic restaurant, White Dog Cafe in Philadelphia. These crackers, too, were very thin and very crisp.

They were also particularly flavorful, as you might expect from the name: Curried Poppy Seed Crackers. With these, curry powder

der is mixed into the dough before it rises and is rolled and stretched as thin as it can possibly be.

The thinness is what makes them crisp, and the crispiness is what makes them delicious. That and the curry powder, of course.

The easiest and most basic crackers I made, Cream Crackers, come from the fertile but notoriously inexact mind of Mark Bittman. I had to make three corrections to the very short recipe — and I had to make the crackers twice because I didn’t catch that third mistake until I had tried to bake them.

But they were great. They are so simple, so pure, that they possess an elegance. They are also the perfect foil for any kind of topping; though they are excellent on their own, they also enhance the flavor of whatever you serve with them.

And with only four ingredients (flour, salt, butter and milk or cream), they take less than a half-hour to make, from start to finish.

My last two types of crackers came from “Bernard Clayton’s New Complete Book of Breads,” which is so good with bread that I thought I would see how its crackers compare.

I was not disappointed. Both were full-flavored, complex and satisfying.

The Cheddar Cheese Crackers were just as addictive as you might expect. They are crackers with the cheese already in them. In a way, they are sort of like Goldfish crackers, only more subtle.

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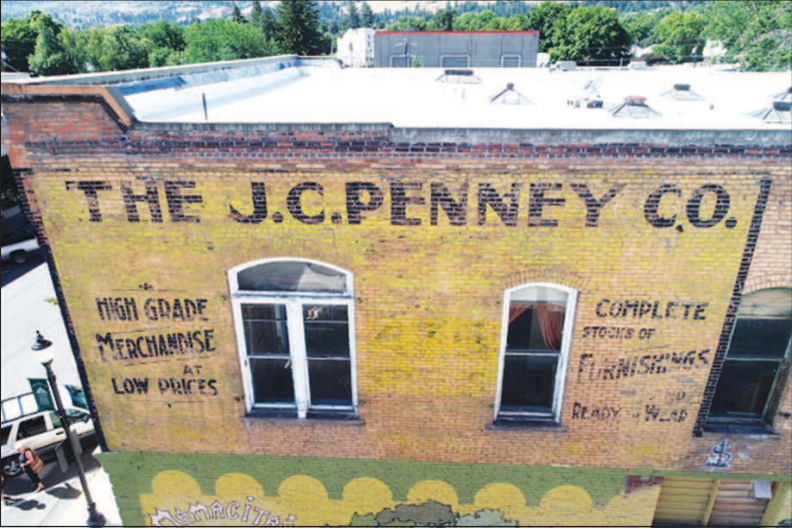
The long history of 110 Depot St. includes ghost signs

By Ginny Mammen

The address 110 Depot St. in La Grande has had an interesting history. Its first structure was built in 1888 as a two-story wooden building which, during its short life, housed a hardware and grocery store with a one story tin shop at the rear. It was destroyed by fire on July 4, 1891.

In the early days of La Grande, fire was an ever-present lurking enemy of wooden buildings. According to Bernal Hug Sr. in “History of Union County,” the fire started on the southwest corner of Washington and Depot and “soon spread to adjacent buildings and then crossed the street. It burned four city blocks in less than an hour.”

The present building was constructed in 1892. This new building was known as being located in the Bryan and Dumphy Block (National Register of Historic Places) and was occupied early on by a hardware store with offices on the second floor.



Submitted photo

A ghost sign for J.C. Penney Co. at 110 Depot St.

Who were Bryan and Dumphy? Bryan was Richard E. Bryan, born in Indiana in 1841, who came to La Grande in 1880 at age 39 from Bates County, Missouri, where he had been in the mercantile business.

In La Grande he engaged in the hardware business until 1890. It’s most likely that he was the one who constructed the current building. He built up a thriving hardware business, but as an entre-

preneur who diversified into other businesses, real estate soon became his newest interest. According to his biography he “became the owner of much property in La Grande, including valuable business property and tenement houses and had one of the finest residences in the city.”

Richard and his wife Addie moved to Portland where he became one of the “men of influence of Portland.” Mr. Bryan died in 1915.

Dumphy (sometimes spelled Dumphy or Dumphrey) was likely Charles S. Dumphrey, who was listed in the 1900 Eastern Oregon Directory for La Grande as operating a bowling alley in the Bryan Block, even though the 1900 Census listed him as an unemployed miner. The 1903 City Directory listed Dumphrey, C. S. & Co. — Drugs, Paint & Oils — Depot Street corner Washington Avenue.

This was located in the same block as Bryan’s building. Charles

was born in New York in 1848, married Ida Gayetty in Illinois in 1884 and kept moving west until he and Ida arrived in La Grande. Like his fellow entrepreneur Bryan, Dumphrey kept on moving and creating businesses. He died in San Diego in 1911.

In 1898 the La Grande Observer had an advertisement for “Causey-Pierce Real-state Co. Office Rooms 3 and 4 of the Bryan Block.” The names of other stores and businesses have been lost in history but the store that moved into 110 Depot St. on April 6, 1914, remains not only on the building as a ghost sign but as a part of La Grande’s history for over 100 years.

The name of the store’s founder was James Cash Penney, born in Missouri in 1875 as the seventh of 12 children of James and Mary Penney.

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