



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

The peculiar pineapple

Bromeliads are a group of plants which include such diverse members as the small gray air plant, the Spanish moss which hangs from trees in the South, and pineapples.

All bromeliads are tropical (all die in temperatures below freezing) and none is poisonous to humans.

High humidity is also necessary to bromeliads.

When western Europeans first tasted pineapples in the 1600s, it started a search for the right kind of heat/humidity combination so that pineapples could be grown in their colder climates.

Many experiments were tried which included hotbed modifications using manure for heat. The final combination of a hotbed using both manure and rotting oak bark (a plan adapted from tanneries) was found to work. This provided their glass houses with constant even heat year-round.

The primary motivation for developing a system for heating their glass greenhouses was their desire to grow pineapples.

Pineapples have never lost popularity. Now we do not think of all the troubles and trials Europeans went through to gain convenient and local access to the pineapple's wonderful fruit.

Used in main entree meat dishes as well as desserts, there seems to be a recipe containing pineapple for every occasion. Pineapple upside down cake, Asian sweet and sour dishes and even Hawaiian pizza.

Propagating a pineapple is easy. Simply cut off its top and set it in a pot full of moist potting soil. Keep it damp not wet. It will take 2 years to root and produce a very small pineapple. Patience is a virtue.

GARDEN CHORES

- Overcrowded or unproductive rhubarb plants may be divided now.
 - Fallen, spoiled, or mummified fruits should be cleaned up from the garden and destroyed by burying.
 - Mulch strawberries for winter with straw. This should be done after several nights near 20 degrees, but before temps drop consistently to the teens. Apply straw loosely but thick enough to hide the plants from view.
 - Shop now for perennials and trees. Nurseries have sales in the fall.
 - Rake and collect fallen leaves.
 - Set up bird feeders. Birds also need a source of unfrozen water for winter's duration.
 - Shut off and drain outdoor water pipes and hoses.
- If you have garden questions or comments, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!

COOKING WITHOUT A NET

By James P. DeWan
Chicago Tribune

Oh, how we've fallen. Why, twern't too long ago that, come supper time, Pa would tote his shootin' arn out the back forty and fill a couple varmint with enough buckshot to tenderize their eatin' bits, if you know what I mean.

No? How 'bout this, then: People used to know how to feed themselves. Presently, not so much.

Sure, we can follow recipes like a chimp and drop F-bombs like Gordon Ramsay, the shouting, often profane TV chef; but when it comes to turning with breezy insouciance the contents of our fridge into something delectable, we seem to have lost our collective woo. Too many of us, raised without proper culinary learnin', find ourselves all growed up with nary a clue as to how to manage the kitchenly arts.

Let's see if we can at least start to fix that. Why you need to learn this

Numerous studies have confirmed the correlation between diet and health. People who eat tend to stay alive longer than people who don't. Just sayin'.

The steps you take

First, forget all your troubles. Second, c'mon. Get happy. Third, remember that cooking, like nearly everything else, is learned behavior. It's not just following recipes. Imagine your surgeon, scalpel in one hand, copy of "So, This Is The Brain" in the other.

If you haven't had the good fortune to have learned from a culinary expert — a beloved parent or grandparent, for example, who could cook the pants off the aforementioned Chef Ramsay — don't take this the wrong way, but, it's conceivable you simply may not know what you're doing. And if you don't know what you're doing, you shouldn't expect success, much less perfection.

To become a good or even great cook, then, treat the task like any other subject: Study. Practice. And learn from both your mistakes and your successes.

My advice is to start with foods you know. It's why it's easier for an English speaker to learn French than, say, Welsh, because French is more familiar because of its similarity to English. The English word "student," for example, is "etudiante" in French, whereas in Welsh it's "myfyriwr." I tried pronouncing that word and bit my tongue.

To learn to cook without a net, then, start with things you already know, like a simple tomato sauce, or French toast, or a vinaigrette. And think about the following, in no particular order:

1. Knowing what something's supposed to be before you start gives you a fighting chance of reproducing it. Like that simple tomato sauce. Do this: Brown some bulk, hot Italian sausage over medium-high heat in a little oil, then add some canned crushed tomatoes and simmer. The spices in the sausage will season the tomatoes and the result will both look and taste like what you'd call spaghetti sauce.
2. Look for ratios. For example, long grain and parboiled rice are 2 parts liquid to 1 part rice. And a lovely sauce to decorate said rice can be obtained with a ratio of 8 parts liquid (like flavorful chicken broth) to 1 part roux. (Roux itself is a ratio: equal weights of



Terrence Antonio James/ChicagoTribune-TNS

A key element of cooking without a net is paying attention to ratios. Take French toast: At the heart it's a mixture of eggs and milk in about equal parts, plus flavorings. That's it.

fat and flour cooked together).

Or what about when you want a nice, fresh salad, but that grotty bottled dressing serves only to enrage. A basic vinaigrette is a 3-to-1 emulsion of oil to vinegar. Pour it all into a screw-top jar. Add a pinch of salt and shake like Charo's hips. (That line would have killed in 1974.) Not necessary, but, you can stabilize the emulsion with a little mustard, and complexify the flavor with a bit of honey or maple syrup, a spill of hot sauce, some fresh herbs, or a little minced garlic or onion.

Here's one more: Let's say Mags and crew, fresh from their negative COVID-19 tests, have arrived at your place and, their senses of taste and smell intact, they're craving French toast. You recall that a couple eggs whisked with an equalish volume of milk, a splash of vanilla extract and a dusting of cinnamon will produce about half a dozen pieces of French toast. Doing the math in your brainiac head, you scale up that "recipe" with more eggs and an equal measure of milk. See? Math is our friend.

3. Salt. Generally, added salt comprises approximately 1% of a recipe's total weight. Consider this, then: A teaspoon of table salt weighs about 6 grams. That means that a teaspoon of salt will season 600 grams, or about 1.3 pounds, of food, enough for two moderate humans. Note that different types of salt — table, kosher, sea — and even different brands, have different weights per volume. Thus, taste as you go.

4. Herbs and spices, which we'll conflate into one word: spices. Typically, spices are used somewhat sparingly. Look through a handful of random recipes and you'll see lots of half teaspoons. Consider that different containers of the same herbs and spices will have different potencies, and you'll understand that it's just this side of random. Again: Taste as you go. You can always add more basil, right?

5. Learn to eyeball: Measure a quarter teaspoon of salt or spice into the palm of your hand to see what it looks like. Add another quarter teaspoon to see a half teaspoon. Add another half teaspoon to see what one teaspoon looks like. Finally, add two more teaspoons to see what a tablespoon looks like. Dig? Eyeballing allows you to cook without wasting precious minutes searching for your consarned measuring spoons.

CURSINGLY TASTY VINAIGRETTE

Prep: 5 minutes
Makes: 1 cup

- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar or sherry vinegar
- 1 to 2 teaspoons mustard
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup (optional)
- Dashes of hot sauce as needed (optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder or 1 clove garlic, minced (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

- To make in a bowl:
1. Whisk first seven ingredients in a small bowl.
 2. Whisk in a couple teaspoons of olive oil to create emulsion. Continue whisking as you drizzle in remaining oil in a steady stream.
- Or, to make in a covered jar:
1. In a small, lidded jar, shake first seven ingredients with great vigor.
 2. Add a couple teaspoons of olive oil and shake to create emulsion. Add about a third of remaining oil and shake to emulsify. Add remaining oil and shake again.
- Or, if you're in a hurry or simply not worried about the homogeneity of your emulsion, simply combine all ingredients in a lidded jar and shake like one of those paint mixing machines at the hardware store.
- Note: Vinaigrettes can keep several days in the fridge, but the oil likely will solidify. Simply take it out 30 minutes before using, then whisk or shake everything together again.

FRENCH TOAST

Prep: 5 minutes
Cook: 15 minutes
Makes: 6 pieces

- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Butter or oil as needed
- 6 slices bread
- Maple syrup, sour cream, powdered sugar, fresh fruit

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Buy nothing, sell nothing, gift anything

Facebook group helps those in need as well as those who want to give

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Whether you need clothes, furniture or help with mowing your lawn, the Buy Nothing La Grande/Island City and Surrounding Areas Facebook group has you covered. The group is part of an international movement focused on giving. "The 'Buy Nothing' movement is meant to create a local gift economy, designed to build community," said Tammy Hintz, founder of the La Grande chapter. "People in the group benefit in so many different ways."

Rebecca Rockefeller and Liesl Clark started the hyper-local gifting network in July 2013 in Bainbridge Island,

Washington. Since then it has spread to 30 nations, according to the Buy Nothing Project website. Hintz started the La Grande network in 2016, and now counts 442 members helping in any way they can.

Posts are not restricted to people making offers, and anyone can ask for what they need, as long as there is no price. The idea, Hintz said, is people have resources they may not even realize they have, and by creating a platform to share these resources, the community can grow and come together.

"I think this group is important to have because it reminds us that behind each post is a human being

and that you don't always need to receive anything in return when giving," group member MacKenzie Reisner said. "In a community as small as ours it is important to help our neighbors when we can. Learning by example and teaching our youth that an item's value isn't always monetary will only strengthen our community now."

Reisner joined the group less than a week ago and said she loves the generosity she sees in posts.

"I just think the exchange of a need being met with

generosity of the giver, followed by the gratitude of the receiver is super cool," Reisner said. "I enjoy seeing the kindness in the group. People are so willing to help out and give to others. I also love the vulnerability within each post. Asking to be gifted something you need versus asking to purchase something can be so hard for a lot of people, and this group takes the pressure or obligation to pay out of it."

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Screen capture from Facebook

Buy Nothing La Grande/Island City and Surrounding Areas Facebook group administrator Anah Harvey posted Oct. 29 she is gifting a box of bath powder for small critters.

