



BETWEEN
THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Early signs of spring help warm the heart

Walking about, looking at flower beds in front yards, I have begun to see signs of life. No kidding — daffodils and snowdrop foliage is starting to come up. Snowdrops should bloom in four weeks or less. Daffodils usually start blooming eight weeks from now.

It's heartwarming to see signs of spring. To know that winter can't last.

This time of year will see little or no life in one of our prominent biennial wildflowers: mullein, great mullein, lamium or Verbascum. Two-hundred fifty species are native mostly to Europe and Turkey, where they grow in poor and disturbed soil.

Verbascum grow tall flower spikes with 5-petaled flowers, commonly yellow. Their leaves are large, gray-green and velvety. One of its common names is "flannel plant."

Mullein leaves can be gathered and dried. Tea made from the leaves acts as an expectorant to relieve chest congestion. Simmer a few leaves (dry or fresh) five minutes or more in a saucepan. Pour this "tea" through a sieve.

Drink some three times a day for as long as it takes for congestion to clear. Handy to know this time of year. Keep jars of dried mullein leaves ready in the cupboard.

Leaves come up in a rosette-shaped plant. The smaller the leaf the softer it is. In Union and Baker counties, mullein can be found on the edge of gravel roads.

GARDEN CHORES

- Seed and nursery catalogs arrive.
- Sow pansy seeds indoors.
- Swap seeds and plant information with gardening friends.
- Run germination tests on old seeds from previous years to see if they're viable.

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

The classic comfort of chicken soup

Addie Broyles
Austin American-Statesman

Chicken soup won't cure COVID-19, but it might ease your sniffles.

After so many months of pandemic life, we're getting better at making ourselves feel as good as we can, even with the coronavirus knocking at the door. (Or maybe even coming right in the house.)

January is usually a time when we're brimming with excitement for the year ahead, but with COVID-19 hitting its predicted peaks just as we experience our annual cedar fever season, many of us are digging deep for extra comfort and nourishment.

Thanks to the vaccine — and countless "Chicken Soup for the Soul"-worthy stories of kindness that have come out of the past 10 months — many of us are still finding some hopefulness as we look toward the year ahead. Maybe a few new chicken soup recipes will fuel some of that feel-betterness, too.

For the best chicken soup, start with the whole bird and simmer gently.

CHICKEN PARMESAN SOUP WITH CRUMBLED CROUTONS

When you need a quick, easy meal and don't want to deal with a pile of dishes, this soup fits the bill perfectly.

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Maple-walnut pie.

Laurie Skrivan/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

BEYOND PANCAKES

■ Maple syrup is an ingredient with a multitude of uses besides sweetening your breakfast

Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

You may as well admit it. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You do it. We all do it.

When you cook with maple syrup, and some of the syrup clings tenaciously to the measuring spoon or cup, you wipe it out with your finger and then lick the syrup off the finger. Don't you?

Of course you do. That's the treat for the cook, a little something extra you deserve for doing the work. A present to yourself. And it is a well-known scientific fact that maple syrup licked off a finger has no calories. It is an inexplicable scientific phenomenon that is equally true of syrup licked off of spatulas.

Whenever winter rolls around, I have maple syrup on my mind and on my finger — wait, never mind, it's not on my finger anymore. Usually beginning in late January, when the nights are cold but the temperature rises above freezing by day, the sap in sugar maple trees starts to flow.

Many people, if not most, do not think to use maple syrup for cooking savory dishes. That's a shame. The sweet maple flavor adds a boost to any number of foods. It's a must-have on roasted butternut squash or Brussels sprouts. It's great as an ingredient in salty spiced nuts. And it is a delight mixed in with pumpkin soup.

I tested the versatility of maple syrup with four dishes. One, admittedly, is a dessert. Actually, two were, but the less said about

Baked Maple Egg Custard, the better. Along with the one dessert, I also used nature's golden nectar in two meat courses and in a salad.

I should point out that I used real maple syrup. I highly recommend it, though it is not cheap. Imitation maple syrup should also work with these recipes, though the results won't be as satisfying.

Both of the meat dishes are roasts, with the maple flavor forming the main basis of the glaze. The dishes are similar in technique — you coat the meat in the glaze most of the way through the cooking process, to avoid burning the sugars in the glaze — but the flavors are quite different.

Specifically, one has bourbon. The other has the life-affirming mixture of cinnamon and cloves. Both derive considerable benefit from a kick of heat, which amplifies the effect of the maple, but you could leave out the spice if you do not like it.

Maple-Bourbon Glazed Chicken, it should not be a surprise to learn, is the one that had bourbon. Bourbon and chicken is a classic combination; and maple is one of the primary tasting notes of many kinds of good bourbon. Put it all together, and you should have a fine meal.

Which I did. The syrup adds a luscious sweetness to the skin, which brings out the natural gentle taste of the chicken, while the bourbon kicks in an earthy counterpoint that lingers pleasantly on the palate.

It is a great way to take an ordinary roast chicken and turn it into something fine.

Roast Pork Loin with Maple Glaze is even easier to make, but it is absolutely just as satisfying.

The natural sweetness of the pork is intensified by the maple glaze, of course, but not to the point where it becomes cloying. Perhaps it is tempered by the cinnamon and cloves, a combination that to my mind makes nearly everything taste better.

Nearly everything, but especially, as it turns out, pork and maple syrup. Come to think of it, the same glaze would be equally rewarding on chicken, but I wouldn't bother putting the bourbon glaze on the pork. Why would you want to, when you can just whip one up with maple syrup, cinnamon and cloves?

My salad dressing, Maple-Sherry Vinaigrette, is appealingly nonassertive. I don't like a dressing with too much of a bite, and it turns out that one way to calm down an aggressive vinegar is to add a little maple syrup.

That's important, because sherry vinegar, by definition, must have at least 7% acidity. That's higher than most other vinegars, so it needs a shot of maple syrup to make it more palatable on salads.

On the other hand, sherry vinegar also has perhaps the best flavor: rounded yet dry, often with a hint of nuttiness and a taste of fruit.

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