



DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART
FLESHMAN

First fall of snow: A memory to be savored

The weather on both sides of my house can be different so perhaps I live on a weather line. It can be raining on one side and the sun shining on the other — a very strange phenomenon. On the morning of Dec. 10 I awoke to find snow in my backyard, the first real snow of the season. I immediately went to the front window in hopes that the street was still dry for driving.

No, it wasn't dry but there was another phenomenon there, for a pathway had been cleared from my front door to the main sidewalk that had also been cleared of snow to our knoll of mail and newspaper boxes.

My thoughtful neighbor had already been at work with shovel and muscle power on my behalf, something that has happened other winters but which has always surprised and pleased me.

While I growled inwardly — I had made plans to take a friend to lunch in joint with other friends and now wondered if the snow would change my driving plans — I couldn't help but think back to the excited cries of children, pointing fingers skyward as they heralded the first snow on lawn and trees and shrubs, the shocking beauty of it covering the ugliness of brown unyielding seasonal earth.

I was a child once, so many years ago, and those memories cling to digging out warm coats, caps, boots, and mittens to greet a new winter with a snowman for the front yard, complete with mouth rocks dug from the graveled road, a stored carrot from the cellar for nose, sticks from a bare bush for arms and a neck scarf for finishing touches.

See **Dory** / Page 2B



BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Nature's packaging

There is a sweet little flower called, "love-in-a-mist." Our neighbor, Doris, had it in her front flower bed. The flowers can be either white, pink, or blue and are star-shaped flowers with each petal being one point of the star. The center of the flower is predominantly green.

Love-in-a-mist, aka *Nigella sativa*, has several varieties, but all of them are used as a spice because their seeds smell like nutmeg. It is a welcome addition to the herb garden, with delicate foliage resembling fennel, earning it one of its common names of fennel flower.

Nigella seeds are 1/8-inch long and jet black with a matte finish. They closely resemble tiny chips of coal and have five distinct points. *Nigella* has a faint nutty, but bitter, taste due to the presence of nigellin. The seeds are almost always sold whole, not ground. The seeds can be powdered at home after roasting them to develop their flavor and make them brittle.

Plant *nigella* in full sun and well-drained soil. Since it produces only a few seeds, plant generously. Propagate from seed. Sow in place as it doesn't transplant successfully. Often you will get plants coming up the following year from seeds errantly scattered in the fall, making it a half-hardy annual.

See **Packaging** / Page 2B

Homemade Biscuits — And More



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS

Homemade buttermilk biscuits

BREAKFAST BECKONS

By **Daniel Neman**

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Every once in a while, my father would bake biscuits for breakfast. He made them the only way I knew they could be made: out of a box.

Only after I was grown did I realize that box-made buttermilk biscuits was merely a way of approximating something that could be done by hand. And it was not until even later that I came to know that homemade biscuits can be made with hardly any more effort and time than it takes to make the boxed version.

But that's not all.

We slathered my father's hot biscuits generously with butter — butter that we had acquired the way Nature intended, at a store. I knew that farmers of an earlier time churned their own butter, but that always seemed quaint to me, and cinematic.

It never occurred to me that I could make my own butter at home with the use of a common household appliance, and in less time than it takes to make biscuits.

And even that's not all.

Once the butter had melted into those biscuits, we would spread each half with jam. The jam, obviously, came in store-bought jars. I realized that many people make their own jam, but it wasn't until just a few years ago that I tried to do it myself. And yes, it was easier than I thought.

Honey, also, is a great topping for homemade biscuits. But let's leave that one to the bees.

Needless to say, homemade biscuits are better than biscuits made from a box or a tube. Homemade jam is far brighter and fresher than jam from a store.

Homemade butter, however, tastes just like butter. On the other hand, making it gives you a great sense of accomplishment. Plus, it's something to brag about casually when you serve it to guests. "What, this butter? Oh, I made it myself. I do that, you know."

This week, for breakfast — the best meal of the day — I made what no one but me calls BB&J: biscuits, butter and jam.

I began with the butter. I poured two cups of heavy cream into a food processor and turned it on. Voila, butter.

Actually, it's a little more complicated than that, but not much. The food processor separates clumps of butter from buttermilk. You pour off the buttermilk (but keep it, because it's buttermilk and you can cook with it) and press together the butter clumps until all the remaining buttermilk squeezes out.

And now it's butter.

One advantage to making your own butter is that you can control just how much salt you put into it, if you want salt. But a disadvantage is that it can cost more than store-bought butter, depending on where you buy your dairy products.

Next, I made the jam. I used an all-purpose recipe that makes jam out of any kind of fruit, but I chose strawberries because it is January and I could find them, and also because I love strawberry jam.

Making your own jam at home does take some time, but it is not at all difficult. All you need is a simple mathematical formula.

For the amount of fruit you use (I used



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS

Homemade strawberry jam

three pounds of strawberries), stir in one-third of that weight in sugar and one-third of the sugar weight (or one-ninth of the fruit weight) in lemon juice, plus a little bit of salt.

You let that sit for an hour or two, and then you simmer it all together for another hour or two. After it cools, you have brilliant, fresh-tasting jam. And you don't even have to use pectin.

With the butter and jam in the fridge and ready to go, I tackled the biscuits.

Biscuits are fun. You get to play with your food, and you end up with something incredibly buttery and flaky and delicious.

To assure the ultimate in flakiness, I make my biscuits like I make a pie crust. Actually, I make them like I make puff pastry.

First, I make sure that the flour is cold (I measure it out and put it in the freezer for 30 minutes) and so is the butter (I cut it into small cubes and put it in the refrigerator for the same time. I rub the butter into the flour (plus baking powder, baking soda and salt) with my fingers.

You could use a food processor, but the friction may cause the butter to soften, and cold butter makes flaky biscuits.

As with pie crusts and puff pastry, I try to work the dough as little as possible. But, in order to get layers, I fold the dough over on itself several times.

Your house may never smell as good as it does when you are baking buttermilk biscuits. But as wonderful as they smell, they taste even better.

I like them with a smear of homemade butter and a dollop of fresh jam.

HOMEMADE BUTTER

Yield: About 1 cup, or 2 sticks (16 servings)

2 cups heavy cream, see note
½ teaspoon salt, optional

Note: Because of its higher butterfat content, heavy cream is preferable to whipping cream, but whipping cream will work fine. If possible, use cream that is not ultra-pasteurized. Ultra-pasteurized will work, but it will have less flavor.

1. The cream will turn to butter faster if it is first left out of the refrigerator for an hour or so,

but this step is not necessary. Pour cream into a food processor, a blender or a stand mixer fitted with a whisk. Blend on medium-high speed or mix on medium-high speed (you will need to cover the mixing bowl with a clean towel). The cream will first thicken into whipped cream, then separate into clumps of butter and buttermilk.

2. Strain out the buttermilk, reserving it if you choose. Place the clumps of butter in a bowl and use a large spoon to press them together. Drain out the buttermilk, and continue pressing and draining until no more liquid escapes from the butter. If desired, stir in optional salt. If all the buttermilk has been removed, the butter will keep in the refrigerator for three weeks.

Per serving: 100 calories; 11 g fat; 7 g saturated fat; 90 mg cholesterol; no protein; no carbohydrate; no sugar; no fiber; 63 mg sodium; no calcium

HOMEMADE JAM

Yield: Around 64 servings (4 cups)

2 ½ pounds of fruit, after it is trimmed of stems, seeds, pits, etc.
1 ¾ cups (13 2/3 ounces) granulated sugar
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon (4 ½ ounces) lemon juice
1 teaspoon salt

Note: This recipe will work with any amount of fruit, as long as you use one-third as much sugar by weight as fruit, and one-third as much lemon juice by weight as sugar. Three pounds of strawberries, once the tops are removed, will yield around 2½ pounds.

1. Place fruit in a large, heavy-bottomed pot. If using berries, leave whole; cut larger fruits into bite-size chunks. Stir in sugar, lemon juice and salt. Allow to sit for 1 to 2 hours, or up to overnight (store in refrigerator if it will be more than a few hours).

2. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring frequently, until jam is thick and fruit begins sticking to the bottom of the pot. If the fruit does not stick, the jam will be done when the bubbles change texture and become like a bubbling pot of mud.

See **Breakfast** / Page 2B