

Don't mess with candy perfection

By DANIEL NEMAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

When Skittles announced it was going back to making one of its candies lime flavored, Colleen Schrappen was happy. She was ridiculously happy.

Schrappen is a colleague and a friend who, as far as I can tell, spends very nearly half of her waking life thinking about candy. She is also a runner and is trim and fit. I hate her.

Apparently, in 2013, Skittles replaced its lime flavor (an original, along with lemon, strawberry, grape and orange) with green apple. I'm not even sure I knew this had happened. I love Skittles, by which I mean I used to eat them all the time when I was younger, especially on late-night drives to help keep me awake, but it is entirely possible I have not had them in 10 years or more.

I'm not even sure I could tell the difference between lime and green apple flavors. To me, and I suspect to a lot of you, the flavors were never lemon, lime, strawberry, grape and orange. The flavors were always yellow, green, red, purple and orange. My favorite flavor was red.

Not so Schrappen. She took the change to green apple as a personal affront. For eight years, she has been going to the trouble of buying Skittles — one of her favorite candies — emptying the bag into a candy jar, and throwing away the green apple ones.

"Hallelujah," she said about the return to the lime flavor. And then she went



Mars Incorporated
Fudge Brownie M&Ms.

on to discourse about several other candy trends. I don't disagree with her about most of them, or I wouldn't if I had given them the sort of thought she gives them.

One major annoyance is the habit of companies taking perfectly good candies and then trying to change them.

There is a reason Snickers are the best-selling candy bars in the world: The flavors are right, the proportions are right. Everything is exactly as it should be.

But in recent years, the Snickers folks have become bored with their obviously successful formula and have been tinkering with it. Some now come with an exterior of dark chocolate, which is not the worst change they could make.

But some also have almonds or hazelnuts instead of peanuts, and they put peanut butter into others, and Schrappen says that's just wrong.

M&Ms now come in as many new flavors — Schrappen would call them unsanctioned flavors — as Oreos, and she isn't happy about the weird Oreo flavors, either.

To her, M&Ms, and especially peanut M&Ms, are the embodiment of per-

fection (she is too young to remember when peanut M&Ms were themselves a controversial addition to the pantheon of candies). Trying to improve on perfection is a doomed task, which is why we now have such aberrations as Fudge Brownie M&Ms.

I actually like Fudge Brownie M&Ms, but Schrappen points out — forcefully — that they aren't even candies at all. They are tiny brownies in a candy shell. Similarly, Snickers now come in brownies with peanuts and brownies with almonds.

Schrappen has a rule about candies that she believes should become a law: No more than one alteration to the original recipe should be allowed. After that, it can no longer be considered in the same family as the original candy.

Skittles can swap out their lime flavor for green apple, no matter how abhorrent she finds the idea, and they can still be Skittles. Reese's Peanut Butter Cups can add pretzels — an addition she heartily supports, by the way — and they are still Reese's.

But when you take a Snickers bar and change the chocolate exterior and add brownies and add almonds, it is no longer a Snickers bar at all. Calling it a Snickers is only an attempt to fool people.

So says Schrappen. And you know how Kit Kat bars now come in multiple flavors, from mocha-and-chocolate to fruity cereal?

Don't get her started on Kit Kat bars.

Chicken Parmesan is reborn as crunchy meatballs

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Planning meals on vacation is always a challenge. It's a drag to schlep a week's worth of ingredients to your destination, packed in the car along with your suitcases, and you never know how the vacation home's kitchen will be outfitted.

Besides, who wants to spend hours in the kitchen when you're on vacation? The best getaway meals come together quickly with just a few pots and pans and feature everyday ingredients you can find at even the tiniest grocery store.

This easy meatball dish from Cook's Country that I made in a cabin in the woods on a recent leaf-peeping trip is great solution. It boasts all the flavors of classic chicken Parmesan but takes about half the time to prepare. The red sauce comes together in about 10 minutes on a stovetop, and the chicken is just as easy. Instead of pounding boneless breast meat into thin patties to be layered with sauce and cheese, you roll seasoned ground chicken into golf ball-sized meatballs. A crunchy panko topping made in the microwave is the crowning touch, along with a generous sprinkling of Parmesan cheese.

The results are hearty, easy to portion and extremely versatile. The meatballs can be served in a bowl alongside some crusty bread and a tossed green salad, or be spooned on top of your favorite pasta. They also are great tucked into a hoagie bun for a quick and easy lunch the next day.

CHICKEN PARMESAN MEATBALLS

For sauce

5 tablespoons olive oil, divided
5 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced thin
1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes
1 15-ounce can tomato sauce
2 1/4 teaspoons dried oregano, divided
1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

For meatballs

22 Ritz crackers
5 ounces grated Parmesan cheese (2 1/2 cups), divided
1 large egg, beaten
2 teaspoons garlic powder



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS
Chicken parmesan is reimagined as a saucy, one-pan meatball dish with a crunchy panko topping.

1 teaspoon pepper
2 pounds ground chicken
8 ounces shredded mozzarella (2 cups)
1 cup panko bread crumbs
1/4 cup torn fresh basil

Make sauce: Heat 3 tablespoons oil in large saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add sliced garlic and cook until lightly browned, about 1 minute.

Stir in crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, 1/4 teaspoon oregano, 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper flakes.

Bring to simmer, reduce heat to medium-low and cook until slightly thickened, 10-15 minutes. Remove from heat and keep warm.

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees.

Make meatballs: Place crackers in a large ziplock bag, seal and crush with a rolling pin. (You should get about 1 cup.)

Combine crumbs, 2 cups Parmesan, egg, garlic powder, pepper, remaining 2 teaspoons oregano and 1 teaspoon salt in a large bowl.

Add chicken and mix with your hands until thoroughly combined. Divide mixture into 20 portions about 1/4 cup each. Using your hands, roll into meatballs and transfer to a 13-by-9-inch baking dish.

Pour sauce over meatballs, then sprinkle with mozzarella. Bake until meatballs are at least 160 degrees and mozzarella is melted and beginning to brown, 40-45 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine panko, remaining 2 tablespoons oil and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt in bowl. Microwave until panko is light golden brown, 1-3 minutes, stirring every 30 seconds.

Sprinkle meatballs with panko mixture, remaining 1/2 cup Parmesan and basil.

Serve in a bowl, stuffed into hoagie buns as a sandwich or on top of pasta.

Serves 4-6.
— Cook's Country

Storing vegetables takes attention to detail

By LIZ DOUVILLE
For EO Media Group

Questions are being asked on how to store vegetables. Not all vegetables store well; knowing canning procedures and freezing methods are worth investigating.

• Beets taste best when plants have been exposed to several weeks of cool frosty weather.

Wash beets, trim tops to a half inch, place in perforated plastic bag and store in a refrigerator or unheated basement. Storage life is two to four months.

• Cabbage is harvested when heads are firm. Remove loose outer leaves. Store in a refrigerator or unheated basement in plastic bags for up to two months.

• Carrot storage requires a moist environment. Dig and trim green tops to 1 inch. Brush off the soil but do not wash. Place in covered boxes or covered containers surrounded by straw, leaves, sawdust or moist sand and place where temperatures are just above freezing. We always used moist sand for storage and were able to enjoy them for 6 months. They can also be left in the ground with a heavy mulch and can be dug as needed throughout the winter.

• Cauliflower may be stored in perforated plastic



Fresh organic vegetables and fruits take some know-how when storing for winter.

bags in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Freeze any surplus.

• Corn can be held in the refrigerator for approximately two weeks. The only way to continue to enjoy farm fresh corn is to freeze or can.

• Melons. Watermelons do not continue to ripen after harvest and do not

store well. Cantaloupes will ripen, (soften and become more juicy) after harvest, but the sugar content or sweetness will not increase. If the melon is not ripe, store in a paper bag at room temperature for a few days then give it the sniff test. The blossom end should have a sweet melon smell. Peaches,

pears and plums continue to ripen after they are picked. Place in a paper bag at room temperature. Plastic bags won't work for ripening.

• Onions are the ultimate grow-to-store food. When they have achieved a mature size, push over the tops to help the stalks dry and prevent neck rot

(a disease that shortens storage life). After a few weeks, pull the onions and cure by laying on an old screen or rack in an airy spot until the necks are dry and the skins crackly. Once they have dried, break off tops, leaving half to 1 inch of stem to act as a seal against rot. Or you can twist the neck

before curing, letting it dry that way and then cut it off. Good storage conditions range from 32 to 40 degrees. The closer to just above freezing, the better. Hang in a mesh bag or braid and hang.

• Peppers. I grow sweet banana peppers and bell peppers and freeze both. Wash, dry and add to the plastic bag in the freezer. Normally the bell peppers are still green at harvest. I am going to try a hint I read to place green bell peppers in a paper bag with an apple to ripen. Allowing jalapenos to turn red increases both heat and sweetness. Green jalapenos are more crisp and crunchy.

• Potatoes. Plants are mature when they die back. Leave the tubers in the ground for 10 to 14 days after the vines are dead before digging to give the skin time to set. Carefully dig to avoid slicing into the potatoes. Lightly brush off excess dirt. Do not wash. Before placing into storage, the tubers should be cured at a temperature of 45 to 60 degrees for two weeks. Thickening of the skin occurs during this time. Potatoes should be stored in a dark place; temperature should be between 40 to 45 degrees. A cool garage or basement may be the best site. Another possibility would be a second refrigerator.

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