

# LIVING

## FOOD & DRINK

Wednesday, December 3, 2008 ♦ RGJ.com



SECTION

**CONTACT**  
Mimi Beck Knudsen  
775.788.6556  
MKNUDSEN@RGJ.COM

eating  
news & notes

### Openings aplenty

■ **WEST STREET MARKET**, on West Street between First and Second streets, celebrates its opening from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. Food and drink establishments already or scheduled to be open are: Brickhouse Bakery, Great Basin Basket, West Street Wine Bar, Earthly Delights and Seven Tea House and Bar. Parking will be validated for the garage at West First and North Sierra streets. Look for more coverage in an upcoming Food & Drink.

■ **SAINT JAMES INFIRMARY**, a stylish bar with an outstanding house cocktails list (at a reasonable \$7 each), is now open at 445 California Ave., 657-8484.

■ **RUBICON DELI** just started serving sandwiches and soups du jour from 445 California Ave., Suite B (in rear), 322-9792. Try the blue cheese bread.

■ **SUSHI LOVER**, recommended by several readers, just started sending out rolls at 400 W. Fifth St., 323-8899. All-you-can-eat sushi is \$15.95 for lunch, \$20.95 for dinner.

#### 'CAN THE MAYOR'

**Donate:** "Can the Mayor," the city of Sparks' holiday food drive, runs through Dec. 12. Donate food items from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays at Sparks City Hall, 431 Prater Way, Sparks.

#### BUBBLES, BABY

**50:** Whispering Vine Wine Co., 3886 Mayberry Drive, is holding its annual Champagne and sparkling wine tasting from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Friday. The event features bubbles from 50 producers, including Billecart-Salmon, Veuve Clicquot, Pommery and Nicolas Feuillatte, and pizza from Eclipse Pizza Co. Cost: \$40. Reservations: 787-9463.

#### COOKBOOK SIGNING

**Demonstration:** Jennifer Bushman, star of the online cooking show "Make It Easy" ([www.RGJ.com/MakeItEasy](http://www.RGJ.com/MakeItEasy)), will sign two of her cookbooks (\$19.95 each) and demonstrate a recipe from 2 to 3 p.m. Saturday at Moana Nursery, 1100 W. Moana Lane, 825-0602.  
—Johnathan L. Wright, RGJ

#### COMING UP

**OLD SOUTHWEST RENO HOME TOUR**  
Homes in old southwest Reno are decorated for the holidays. Take a tour.  
**THURSDAY IN HOME & GARDEN**

#### INSIDE TODAY

Comics ..... 7-9D  
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# BAKING BASICS



#### RESOURCES

**COOK'S ILLUSTRATED EQUIPMENT CORNER:** [www.cooksillustrated.com/testinghome.asp](http://www.cooksillustrated.com/testinghome.asp)

**"BAKING WITH JULIA: SAVOR THE JOYS OF BAKING WITH AMERICA'S BEST BAKERS"** by Dorie Greenspan (1996, William Morrow)

**"BAKING ILLUSTRATED: THE PRACTICAL KITCHEN COMPANION FOR THE HOME BAKER"** by the editors of Cook's Illustrated (2004, America's Test Kitchen)

**"THE SIMPLE ART OF PERFECT BAKING"** by Flo Braker (2003, Chronicle Books)

*Source: Lara Ritchie, culinary director, Nothing to It! Culinary Center*

#### SPICE CHECK CHALLENGE

McCormick.com, the Web site of the venerable spice and seasoning company, now includes a McCormick Fresh Tester that tells bakers if their spices are past their prime. Input the code from the bottom of the spice jar, and you will also be entered through Dec. 29 to win a set of new spices and a cookbook. Visit [www.mccormick.com/Spices101/HowOldSpices.aspx](http://www.mccormick.com/Spices101/HowOldSpices.aspx).

**LEFT:** Thick royal icing is piped through a pastry bag to create snowflake patterns on classic gingerbread cookies. For gingerbread ornaments, make cookies a week ahead so they harden.

PHOTOS BY RICHARD STOKES/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

What you never knew you needed to know about making holiday treats

BY LAURA LONGERO  
[llongero@rgj.com](mailto:llongero@rgj.com)

**S** smell the warm butter. Hear the familiar crack as eggs drop into the bowl. Feel the power of a wooden spoon against the batter. Admire the beauty of a frosted three-layer cake. And finally, taste. Taste moist, decadent chocolate cake melting on your tongue or the whisper of licorice in almond anise biscotti.

Baking at its finest is an experience that uses all the senses. The finished product can bring comfort and happy memories to friends and family. As we enter the holiday baking season, it's a good idea to brush up on some basic skills.

Professional pastry chefs whip up concoctions like crème brûlée and soufflés, but home cooks don't need a bevy of kitchen skills to produce cookies and cakes that are delicious. There are some things that are necessary — quality ingredients, the right equipment and a reliable recipe — but the rest is practice. And you know what they say about practice.

#### Get in there

Lara Ritchie, culinary director of Nothing to It!



Cindy Etchevary of the Eldorado Hotel Casino's pastry operation fashioned this easy but elegant wreath from white cupcakes, gumdrop "berries" and mint leaves covered in white melting chocolate.

Culinary Center, loves to bake.

"It can be relaxing and so gratifying when you sink your fork into a perfectly delicious cake or gobble up cookies right out of the oven. It is a nurturing process for sure — for both the giver and the receiver."

SEE BAKING ON 4D

#### MAKE IT EASY

### Dunk, dredge, spread: 3 holiday dips



WITH JENNIFER BUSHMAN  
**RGJ.COM/MAKEITEASY**

Log on to [RGJ.com/makeiteasy](http://RGJ.com/makeiteasy) to see this and previous videos with Jennifer Bushman.

Dips are a holiday party essential, but bely those gloppy packaged versions. Jennifer Bushman's "Make It Easy" dips begin with a base of cream cheese or sour cream and layer in fresh herbs and other flavors. Consider these recipes more guide than prescription; feel free to experiment.

#### ROASTED RED BELL PEPPER DIP

**1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, room temperature**  
**1 teaspoon minced fresh garlic**

**1/4 cup lime juice**  
**2 tablespoons fresh basil**  
**2 tablespoons fresh Italian (flat leaf) parsley**  
**2 roasted red bell peppers or 1 large jar roasted red peppers, thoroughly rinsed and patted dry**

In bowl of food processor fitted with metal blade, combine cream cheese, garlic, lime juice, basil and parsley until smooth. Add peppers and pulse until just combined. Chill and serve with mozzarella sticks, pepperoni, assorted vegetables and bread sticks.

SEE MORE RECIPES ON 2D

#### GIFT GUIDE

Chop, grip, brew, pipe, probe and more — 10 gifts for kitchen commandos inside today's Food & Drink.



3D

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# Baking/Quality of ingredients can make huge difference

From 1D

Her advice for new bakers? Get in the kitchen.

"Just try it out. Food is supposed to be fun."

Todd Kihara, former pastry chef at Charlie Palmer Steak and Fin Fish in Grand Sierra Resort, said the most important thing in baking is to measure correctly and double-check your recipe.

"Practice, practice, practice. If you fail, just get back and try it again because that's the only way you learn."

## Temperature, sifting, measuring

There are some basic techniques that bakers use over and over — creaming butter and sugar together, kneading bread or pizza dough and whipping egg whites.

For starters, many ingredients should be at room temperature, something cookbooks and recipes don't always tell you.

For instance, depending on the warmth of your home, items like butter and eggs should stand on the kitchen counter for 30 to 40 minutes to come to room temperature. Use large eggs; most baking recipes are written with them in mind.

Ritchie also said it's important to use the pan the recipe calls for.

Flour should always be sifted properly. If the recipe says "1 cup of flour, sifted," measure the flour first, then sift it. If it says "1 cup sifted

## WHEN DO INGREDIENTS GO STALE?

Herbs, spices and many other baking essentials — all of which should be kept in a cool, dry place — will not be high-performing if they are outdated. Here are the timelines:

■ **BAKING SODA:** The box should have an expiration date, but standard shelf life is about three months.

■ **BAKING POWDER:** Should last about six months as long as it's stored in a cool, dry place.

■ **CHOCOLATE CHIPS:** 12 to 24 months if kept cool

■ **COCOA:** 24 months

■ **CORNSTARCH:** 24 to 48 months

■ **COOKING OILS AND FATS:** 4 years

■ **FLOUR:** white, 24 months; wheat, 12 months

■ **HONEY:** Indefinitely

■ **MOLASSES:** 12 to 18 months

■ **SALT:** Indefinitely

■ **SPICES:** They don't go bad, but they'll start to lose their strength. As long as they're kept in a cool, dry place, they can last four years for whole spices (like cinnamon sticks and whole nutmegs) and two to three years for ground spices.

■ **SUGAR:** white, indefinitely; brown, 12 months

■ **VANILLA:** 2 to 3 years

■ **YEAST:** 18 to 24 months

**SOURCE:** Staff research

flour," sift the flour over parchment paper into a measuring cup.

When measuring flour or powdered sugar, ingredients should be spooned into a measuring cup and then leveled off with the back of a knife. And make sure to stir ingredients after sifting because sifting doesn't mix ingredients.

## Whipping, altitude adjustments

For the best whipped cream, make sure your bowl, whips and the cream are cold — the cream will whip faster this way. Alternately, if you're making meringue, egg whites should be at room temperature (which makes

fluffier meringue), and the whips should be oil-free. Use a glass or metal bowl for whipping whites because plastic absorbs fat.

Tim Carman, executive pastry chef of the Eldorado Hotel Casino, suggested wiping your whips and bowl with a paper towel dabbed either with white or cider vinegar — the vinegar will evaporate quickly and cut any traces of oil. He also said clean mixing bowls are essential for baking.

Reno's altitude (4,500 feet) presents challenges that bakers in other parts of the country do not face. At sea level, more leavening agents like baking powder and baking soda are needed than at higher elevations. There

are no hard-and-fast rules, but at Reno's elevation, bakers should use about 1/4 teaspoon baking soda or 1 1/4 teaspoons baking powder for every 1 cup of flour.

"High-altitude baking is more of an art than a science," Ritchie said.

## Ingredients

The quality of ingredients used in baking can make a tremendous difference in your final product. Like the difference between a Chanel suit and one off a picked-over sale rack.

"The capability of creativity is tremendous (in baking), and relies on quality of ingredients," Ritchie said. It's key to use quality flour, butter, vanilla and chocolate.

Ritchie suggested using King Arthur flour or Giusto's, a European-style flour with a higher gluten level. Choose unsalted butter over salted butter at the supermarket.

As for vanilla: In cakes or cookies, the average diner won't detect differences arising from vanilla quality, but will with pastry and bread. The quality of vanilla "makes a phenomenal difference," Ritchie said. She recommended Madagascar vanilla, such as Nielsen-Massey vanilla, which is available online at Williams-Sonoma.com.

And who wants to skimp on chocolate? Valrhona and Scharffen Berger are Ritchie's preferred baking bars. Make

sure to use baking bars (found in the baking aisle at the supermarket), not eating bars, which have more sugar and flavoring added. If a recipe calls for bittersweet, use only that chocolate because the recipe takes into account elsewhere the need for sugar.

When melting chocolate, Carman said, keep water or steam from direct contact with the chocolate or it will seize.

## Equipment

The right equipment can make or break your baked goods. An oven too hot or the wrong size pan, while not always recipes for disaster, will nevertheless impede the baking process.

Kihara said his No. 1 baking tool is a rubber spatula.

"I use it all the time." He also said the beneficial effect of working with your hands, and using a light touch where necessary, can't be replicated by any tool.

"Hands are a crucial part of making any pastry."

Ritchie's favorite baking tool is her KitchenAid stand mixer. She also relies on good (as in not warped) measuring cups and spoons, a liquid measure, a food processor, a plastic bowl scraper, a good rolling pin, a triple sifter, baking sheets, cooling racks, a silicone basting brush and parchment paper.

She likes silicone baking pans because they don't stick and are easy to clean.

Consider purchasing muffin pans, 8- or 10-inch cake pans, loaf pans if you like to make quick breads and a silicon mat if you bake cookies (the mat goes on top of the baking sheet).

Install a hanging thermometer in your oven so you know it's cooking at the correct temperature. Ovens usually have hot spots, so make sure to rotate pans while baking to cook items evenly.

Carman said that because expectations are high for holiday meals, it's especially important to test the recipes for dishes you'll be serving. Tried-and-true recipes are the best way to go.

And what happens if you goof and botch one of the ingredients? There really are no quick fixes, Carman said. When making a soup, a cook can add herbs or stock if too much of another ingredient is added, but baking is more scientific.

"If you put too much sugar or salt, you can't take it out," Carman said — yet another good reason to test baked goods before you present them.

Ritchie said that bakers should have patience and be willing to be bold.

SEE BAKING ON 5D

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**BONUS TOPIC:** Learn how the "rich" structure their portfolios to enjoy 6% or better inflation protected income, while protecting their principal AND in many cases, having their income be primarily tax-free!

Tuesday, December 9th 4:00 p.m. South Valleys Public Library 15650 Wedge Parkway Reno, NV 89511	Thursday, December 11th 5:00 p.m. Sierra View Library 4001 S. Virginia Street Reno, NV 89502
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**Reservations are required as seating is limited.**  
To Reserve Seating Call: (775) 853-9033

Please note: This free educational class is designed for investors with at least \$250,000 in their investment portfolio. Financial advisors are NOT invited (I have no desire to teach them my secrets). CPAs and attorneys, on the other hand, are welcome.

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