

# Noodle kugel tradition brings sweet start to Jewish New Year

By Cheryl Sternman Rule

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Two decades ago, when I was 14, two women entered my life. The first was my stepmother, Barbara, who married my divorced father and offered him a second chance at love. The second was her mother, Arline, who offered me kindness, generosity and noodle kugel.

Things haven't been the same for me since.

The Jewish New Year, called Rosh Hashana, begins at sundown tonight. Before and after services, Jews everywhere will feast on an array of traditional foods, many of them sweet to symbolize the hope for a sweet year. The food I look forward to all year is noodle pudding, or lokshen kugel, the comforting dish I had as a teenager.

Arline's kugel is a heady combination of cooked noodles, cottage cheese, sour cream, sugar and eggs. The eggs are separated and the whites beaten stiff to

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provide airiness in what might otherwise be a heavy dish. Cornflakes on top lend texture, and I often add diced green apple for a hint of tartness. Something about the combination of tender noodles and sweetened cheese brings out the kid in me.

Much like Italians with their family recipes for marinara sauce, Jews are passionate about noodle kugel, and many recipes are passed down through the generations.

Naomi Kalmus of Saratoga learned the recipe for her noodle kugel, which contains a cup of raisins and is refrigerated overnight before baking, from her mother-in-law.

"My older daughter has made it for lots of her non-Jewish friends, and they love it too," she said in an e-mail. "I serve it for all kinds of occasions, including Hanukkah and sometimes Thanksgiving. My family likes to eat the leftovers as a lunch treat."

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Cindy Shanker of Los Gatos makes her kugel as I do — with cottage cheese, sour cream and apples — but she adds cinnamon sugar and pineapple.

"People love it because it's so rich. The only reason I don't make it more is because it's not healthy. But it won't kill anyone to have a nice little square on special occasions."

The word kugel is Yiddish for pudding, and noodle kugel generally contains cooked egg noodles tossed with butter or margarine and a variety of other ingredients. The mixture is then baked. Kugel can be sweet or savory, but most kugels served on Rosh Hashana are sweet.

As a baker, I believe everything sweet is wonderful, but it is even better to have an excuse to eat sweet foods with an entree rather than waiting until dessert. Noodle kugel fits the bill perfectly.

But kugels, however special, are not reserved only for holidays. In her book "Jewish Cooking in America," Joan Nathan writes that kugels and *cholent*

(stews) were created for those who observe the Sabbath. Religious laws prohibit work, including cooking, from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, but these dishes can be made in advance and kept warm overnight.

Nathan considers noodle kugel, first brought by Bavarian or Alsatian Jews to this country, "the quintessential Jewish-

American dish."

Central and Eastern European Jews brought their own versions. While European kugels may have been unsweetened or just barely sweet, Nathan writes of American-style kugels: "... in this land of milk and honey, kugels include dollops of sour cream, graham cracker crumbs, cream cheese, cottage cheese, apricot jam, and canned pineapples."

Dairy versions often use a combination of sour cream and cottage cheese, and many appear as part of a dairy meal, at which meat is not served, says Wendy Kleckner of Too Cater-

ers, the kosher division of Continental Caterers in Menlo Park. (Dairy meals are common at the end of Yom Kippur, when Jews break their 24-hour fast. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, begins at sundown on Sept. 24 this year.)

Too Caterers serves dairy noodle kugel, a savory kugel and a pareve kugel that contains neither milk nor meat products. Jews who adhere to the kosher dietary laws do not consume meat and dairy products at the same meal. Pareve foods (made without meat or dairy or their derivatives) can be served at any meal.

Kleckner's pareve kugel relies on Mocha Mix, a soybean-based non-dairy creamer, and margarine. The kugel's taste and appearance are so deceptively creamy, said Kleckner's colleague Paul Alexander, "that we've gotten in trouble before because people don't believe that it's non-dairy."

Whether you're Jewish or not, noodle kugel is worth a try. It is straightforward to make, goes wonderfully with many entrees and serves a crowd. *L'Shanah Tovah!* To a good year!

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In her book "Jewish Cooking in America," Joan Nathan writes that this "peppery sweet" kugel is one of her favorites. She recommends cutting it "like a cake" and serving alongside a roast, "much the way we serve sweet potatoes at Thanksgiving."

### Jerusalem kugel

Serves 10

- 1 pound capellini (very thin noodles), cooked *al dente* and drained
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place noodles in large bowl. In medium saucepan heat oil and 1/2 cup sugar. Stir until sugar turns very dark, almost black (about 10 minutes). Mix caramel with pasta. Cool slightly.

Beat eggs with salt, pepper, cinnamon and remaining 1/4 cup sugar. Pour into noodles and toss well. Transfer to greased tube pan and bake, uncovered, 1 hour; until golden on top. Remove from oven. Unmold on serving plate and serve.

Per serving: 399 calories, 10g protein, 16g fat ( 3g saturated), 53g carbohydrate, 557mg sodium, 142mg cholesterol, 1g dietary fiber.

### Grandma Arline's noodle pudding

Serves 8

- |                                                                       |                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8 ounces medium egg noodles, cooked, drained and rinsed in cold water | 16 ounces low-fat cottage cheese                                 |
| 4 eggs, separated (only 3 yolks will be used)                         | 1 cup sour cream                                                 |
| 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled         | 1/3 cup sugar                                                    |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt                                                     | 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored and cut into half inch cubes |
|                                                                       | 3/4 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed                              |
|                                                                       | 1 tablespoons unsalted butter, diced                             |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Butter 13x9-inch baking dish. In large bowl, gently whisk 3 egg yolks. Slowly add butter and salt and whisk well to combine. Stir in noodles. In medium mixing bowl, stir together cottage cheese, sour cream and sugar. Add apple. Add to noodle mixture and stir gently to combine.

Beat egg whites stiff. Fold gently into noodle mixture. Spread in baking dish. Top with crushed corn flakes. Dot with butter. Bake 45 minutes or until golden.

Per serving: 408 calories, 15g protein, 23g fat (13g saturated), 36g carbohydrate, 382mg sodium, 158mg cholesterol, 1g dietary fiber.

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This kugel is baked in a water bath, which gives it a fluffy texture. It is pareve and can be eaten with meat or dairy dishes.

### House Special pareve kugel

Serves 12

- |                                                      |                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8 ounces medium egg noodles, cooked and well drained | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract                                                    |
| 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted margarine, melted         | 1 cup sugar                                                                   |
| 5 eggs                                               | 1/2 teaspoon salt                                                             |
| 4 cups mocha mix OR soy milk                         | 1 cup golden raisins, soaked overnight in orange juice to cover, then drained |
|                                                      | 2 tablespoons cinnamon sugar                                                  |
|                                                      | Boiling water                                                                 |

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In 13x9-inch baking dish, toss noodles with margarine until coated. Beat together eggs, mocha mix, vanilla, sugar and salt. Add half of drained raisins. Pour egg mixture over noodles and spread in dish. Sprinkle with remaining raisins and cinnamon sugar.

Place baking dish inside larger roasting pan and set pan on open oven door. Carefully add boiling water to outside pan until it comes about 1/3 way up sides of baking dish. Place in oven and bake 1 hour. Cut into squares and serve warm.

Per serving: 355 calories, 10g protein, 13g fat (2g saturated), 51g carbohydrate, 182mg sodium, 116mg cholesterol, 1g dietary fiber.

From Wendy Kleckner of Too Caterers, the kosher division of Continental Caterers in Menlo Park