

K's Kitchen: Manicotti worthy of a birthday celebration



By Kathryn Reed

Birthdays mean eating what you want and either having someone else make it or take you out for it. At least that's how I was brought up. And it's a tradition that I have carried on into my adult life.

Every April I'm pretty sure I know what Sue will want for her birthday. Every now and then she surprises me, but usually it is manicotti that she requests.

I must admit it wasn't until we were onto leftovers that I asked her what it is about manicotti that she likes.

"I like the flimsy soft noodles and gooey warm cheese," Sue said.

Plus, her favorite food group is Italian.

I like that it's something different than regular spaghetti or a lasagna. And when you are the cook, you can tell the recipient a lot of work went into making it. That's the other thing I like about this particular recipe – it's not hard to make. The most time consuming component is stuffing the manicotti shells.

It tends to be one of those recipes that tastes better when the outside temperature is cold – so it works about nine months of the year in Lake Tahoe.

The recipe I use is from "Shared Secrets" that was put out by the Butte-Glenn Medical Society Auxiliary. My sister, Jann, used to be a member. Betty Wang submitted the manicotti recipe for the cookbook, which was a fundraiser for the auxiliary.

One thing I like to do to make this and so many recipes come together faster is let someone else do a bit of the legwork. I don't have a problem buying grated cheese, or sliced mushrooms or chopped olives. It saves me time.

The recipe, I just realized as I'm typing it, calls for canned mushrooms. I've never used canned mushrooms for anything. I throw fresh sliced ones on top.

I think with how cheesy this is, it is better to serve the Parmesan on the side.

Manicotti

1 (10 oz.) pkg. chopped frozen spinach, thawed

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. Ricotta cheese

$1\frac{1}{2}$ C grated Monterey Jack cheese

$1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Italian seasonings

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp nutmeg

$\frac{1}{2}$ C chopped olives

16 manicotti shells

$3\frac{1}{2}$ C mushroom spaghetti sauce

1 (4 oz.) can slice mushrooms

$\frac{1}{2}$ C grated Parmesan cheese

Squeeze spinach until dry. Combine spinach, Ricotta and Jack cheeses, Italian seasoning, nutmeg and olives. Cook pasta in a large pot of boiling water for 10-12 minutes. Drain and rinse

with cold water. Stuff each shell with cheese mixture until full – don't worry if shell splits, just put the open seam on the bottom of the pan. Pour half of the spaghetti sauce into the bottom of a 9×13 pan. Place the filled pasta shells in the baking dish. Pour the remaining sauce on top of the shells. Garnish with mushroom slices.

Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until sauce bubbles.

Sprinkle on Parmesan.