

Variations of Vegetables

by Lydia Lovell

As months go, on Cape Cod, March is nobody's favorite; everyone's tired of winter and looking for signs that spring lurks around the corner. Even though those signs are hard to find, patience will eventually be rewarded. Aunt Olivia had her own ways of coping with weary moods resulting from still another snowfall, with frustration caused by a thaw that brought snowdrops and crocuses into bloom and the sleet storm that spoiled them too soon. She fought off depression with renewed efforts to create different and stimulating taste-treats for her family.

Probably it was a blustery afternoon in March that she first decided to depart from a traditional Sunday-night-supper of pancakes, bacon, and maple syrup. Perhaps in her ice box there waited some zucchini that wouldn't keep long. Or perhaps the maple syrup jug was nearly empty. Whatever the reason, the result was **Zucchini Pancakes**.

2 C. zucchini, coarsely chopped
3/4 t. salt, divided
1/2 C. flour
1/2 t. double-acting baking powder
dash of pepper
2 medium eggs
2 T. minced onion
1 small clove garlic, crushed
1/4 C. milk

In a medium bowl, combine chopped zucchini and 1/2 t. salt; let stand 30 minutes. Drain in a sieve, pressing out excess liquid. Return to bowl. Sift flour, baking powder, 1/4 t. salt, and pepper together onto wax paper. In a small bowl, beat eggs until foamy. Stir in onion and garlic. Alternately add flour mixture and egg mixture to zucchini, stirring to combine. Oil a griddle or heavy skillet and heat until drop of water dances on surface. Drop batter by large tablespoonfuls, and cook until bubbles form on top and bottom is golden; flip to cook other side. Serve with crisp-fried bacon strips and pass a bowl of tart jelly. Currant or beach plum jelly are particularly good choices.

Green vegetables are as important to our continued good health as the yellow ones such as carrots and squashes but, probably because their flavors are stronger, peas, green beans, broccoli and the like, are less popular. Uncle Henry preferred yellow to green vegetables, but Aunt Olivia felt everyone should eat both in equal quantities. To make the green vegetables as palatable as possible, she often improvised. Uncle Henry found **Broccoli Au Gratin** a great improvement over the steamed vegetable unadorned.

1 bunch fresh broccoli
1 t. butter
1/2 C. grated Swiss cheese
1/2 t. salt
Pinch of pepper
1/4 C. bread crumbs

Trim woody portions from stems and discard. Cut broccoli flowerets from stems. Cut stems into 1" cubes. Arrange broccoli in a saucepan with a tight-fitting cover so that stems form a base for flowerets. Bring to a boil, cover, lower heat, and cook until flowerets are tender. Remove them with a slotted spoon to a buttered 1-quart casserole. Continue to cook stems until tender; save them for another recipe. Combine salt, pepper, and lemon juice and sprinkle over broccoli flowerets. Top with cheese and bread crumbs tossed together. Dot with butter. Bake 10 minutes at 450° until cheese melts. Serves four.

Among winter vegetables the Lovell family always laid-in in good supply were turnips. Sometimes as spring approached the turnips became a little wrinkled and needed sprucing up a bit. If you have no old turnips but can find rutabagas in the market, these do very well as a substitute when preparing Aunt Olivia's **Turnip Puff** for six servings.

1 small turnip or 3 small rutabagas
3 medium potatoes
1 3-oz. pkg. cream cheese
1 T. butter
1 small onion, chopped fine
3 T. orange juice
1/2 t. salt
Pinch of black pepper
Dash cinnamon (optional)
3 eggs, separated

Preheat oven to 375°. Pare turnips and cut in large dice. Peel potatoes and quarter. Cook vegetables together in covered saucepan. Drain well. In a large bowl, mash softened cream cheese with fork; add drained vegetables. Blend with electric mixer. In a small saucepan, saute chopped onion in butter for two minutes; add seasonings; combine with vegetables. Beat in egg yolks. Wash and dry beaters thoroughly. Whip egg whites until stiff; fold into potato mixture. Turn into well-buttered 1-1/2 quart casserole. Bake, uncovered, 35 minutes. Serve immediately.

As a group, Lovells are easy people to please at the table because few of our family have strong dislikes when it comes to food. They may disagree about politics; they differ in their choices of music, art, and literature; their preferences in the world of sports are diverse. Usually, however, when the subject is food, they are of a single mind. Except when the food is spinach. Some of us are especially fond of spinach; others can barely stand being in the room when it is served. Aunt Olivia staunchly maintained that everyone should eat a few bites, like it or not. To insure that those least willing to do so would make an attempt, she went to great lengths to prepare the vegetable in attractive and tasty ways. That's how Aunt Olivia's **Spinach Souffle** became one of my favorite dishes.

2 T. butter
2 T. flour
2/3 C. milk
1 t. chopped onion
1-1/2 C. grated cheddar cheese
3 eggs, separated
1 T. milk
1-1/2 C. cooked chopped spinach
Pinch of black pepper

Preheat oven to 350°. In the top of a double boiler, melt butter. Sauté onions one minute; remove pan from heat; blend in

flour, and gradually whisk in 2/3 C. milk. Place pan over boiling water and cook, whisking, until smooth. Add cheese, cover, and leave until cheese melts. Meanwhile, separate eggs and whip whites very stiff. Set aside. Beat yolks with 1 T. milk and pepper. Drain cooked, chopped spinach in a sieve, pressing out excess liquid. Combine spinach with egg yolks and add to cheese sauce. Fold in egg whites. Pour into greased casserole and bake 45-50 minutes or until knife blade at center comes out clean. Serve at once to six.

Fresh-from-the-garden green beans are a treat that need no embellishment with spices or herbs, but those that come packed and frozen or canned can be improved. Try **Dilled Green Beans** for a change of pace. Aunt Olivia prepared them for Uncle Henry using canned beans, but I prefer the frozen variety.

1 10-oz. pkg. cut green beans
1 green onion, finely chopped
1/2 C. water
2 t. cornstarch
1/2 C. cool water
1/4 t. dill weed
Dash black pepper
1 t. cider vinegar
1 t. instant chicken bouillon granules

In a one-quart casserole, cook beans in 1/2 C. water until tender, but still crisp, about 8 minutes. Drain, cover, and set aside. In a small saucepan, blend remaining ingredients. Cook, stirring constantly, over medium heat until clear and thickened. Pour over beans; toss to coat. Bake, covered, at 375° for 10 minutes. Serves 4.

Next time you're at the vegetable counter, look for three or four very large cucumbers. I know you usually choose long thin ones, but this recipe calls for fat ones. You're about to sample **Fried Cucumbers**.

3 to 4 large cucumbers
Approx. 1/4 C. flour
1/2 t. salt, pinch of pepper
4 T. melted margarine
1 T. grated onion
2 T. fresh parsley, snipped fine

Peel cukes, quarter lengthwise. Remove and discard seeds. Cut each quarter into 1" chunks. Dry on a linen tea towel. In a plastic bag, mix flour, salt, and pepper. Shake cuke chunks, a few at a time, in flour mixture. Heat margarine in large frying pan. Add cuke chunks and onion. Fry over medium heat, stirring, four to five minutes until golden. **Do not overcook.** (Makes them soggy.) Drain on absorbent paper. Sprinkle with parsley. Serve piping hot to four. If you like these, save the recipe for next summer when you are certain to overlook a couple of cucumbers that hide under those big floppy leaves in your garden until they are over-size. This is the perfect way to put them to good use.

Between now and then, if you try the suggested vegetable variations, your meals should take on an element of the unexpected that Aunt Olivia always declared was especially effective during the month of March to combat late-winter "blahs."