

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Zeroing in on Zucchini

by Lydia Lovell

At the very time everyone else's garden began yielding more than enough produce for the family who raised it, their neighbors, and their non-gardening relatives, Uncle Henry's came into full flush as well. The phenomenon wasn't to be wondered at because almost everyone sowed seeds or set out little plants within a few hours of the same moment. All it took was a week of sunny weather in May to warm the garden soil, and the appearance at a nursery of a display of seed packages and flats of tomatoes . . . and vegetable gardens were the center of everyone's attention. Experience taught all but the most mulishly inflexible that modern fertilizers and old-fashioned composting are an unbeatable combination to achieve early and ample harvests.

Keeping himself and Aunt Olivia and our family of four well-supplied with produce was Uncle Henry's principle goal from early June, when radishes, spinach, lettuce, and early green peas were ready, clear through until Christmas, when frosts had sweetened the turnips, and brussel sprouts still swelled on tall stalks despite the nippy air, and when carrots awaited pulling while a blanket of snow added another layer of insulation to their hay and pine needle mulch. Once we were taken care of, distribution was made to other relatives, friends, and neighbors. The inevitable time came, though, when everyone had all the green beans and luscious ripe red tomatoes and zucchini they could possibly use.

Uncle Henry would bring his baskets into the kitchen and, with a wink at me, say, "'Livvy, I know you've no use for this stuff and I don't suppose you want it sent to the dump, so shall I just toss it on the compost heap?"

"Compost heap? Henry Lovell, you know better than to think I'd let you do any such a thing! Why, somewhere folks are going hungry, and you're talkin' of throwing away food? You just set it right down there on the table, and I'll tend to it. And anything else you can't find anybody to take off your hands, you bring straight here to me."

"Yes, Ma'am," Uncle Henry would answer with a big smile. "I'll be right back with a few more thinnin's if you can use them." And out he'd go, only to return with another basket heaped with tomatoes, green and wax beans, and more zucchini.

A major source of despair was zucchini. We ate zucchini raw, cut in strips and dunked in an herb-seasoned cream cheese dip, and diced into tossed salads where, Aunt Olivia said, it was better than avocado. We ate zucchini cooked, too; fried with onions and tomatoes in olive oil, seasoned with salt, pepper and bay leaf, it was tasty. We ate zucchini parboiled, drained, mixed with shredded Cheddar cheese and bread crumbs, packed into a buttered casserole, and baked 20 minutes at 350°. Aunt Olivia even created a recipe for **Zucchini Muffins!**

2 C. cooked zucchini 4 C. flour
4 beaten eggs 2 T. baking powder
¼ C. melted margarine 1 t. salt
2 C. milk ¼ C. sugar

After cooking zucchini until tender, put into a strainer, press gently to release liquid, and allow to drain. In a large bowl, beat eggs. Measure 2 C. of zucchini pulp and combine with eggs. Add melted margarine. Sift dry ingredients together and add to squash mixture alternately with milk. Fill greased muffin



tins two-thirds full and bake in 400° oven 25 minutes until done.

Aunt Olivia's recipe for **Zucchini Pie** could be given a fancier title and become a quiche, by whatever its name, making it disposed of a couple of medium zucchini and supplied a vegetable dish for six of us.

3 C. diced zucchini 4 eggs
½ C. chopped scallions 1 C. cottage cheese
1 C. Bisquick Pinch of salt
½ C. cooking oil

Combine all ingredients, mix well, and pour into a greased 8" square pan. Bake in 350° oven for 30 to 40 minutes until golden brown.

And still zucchini kept arriving in the kitchen. As he delivered basket after basket, Uncle Henry began to look apologetic. Undaunted, Aunt Olivia experimented with flavors and herbs, stuffings and sauces. She eventually came up with a recipe for **Stuffed Zucchini** which we all agreed was better than previous trials.

½ C. mushrooms, sliced 1/8 t. each, garlic powder,
2 T. butter oregano, thyme
¾ C. minced onion ½ lb. Gruyere cheese, grated
¼ C. chopped green pepper 1 lb. chicken livers
1 6-oz. can tomato paste 4 slices lean bacon,
1 T. sugar crisp-fried
½ t. salt 4 medium zucchini

In a small saucepan, brown sliced mushrooms in butter. Add minced onion and chopped green peppers. Cook 5 minutes until tender. Add tomato paste, sugar and seasonings. In a large skillet, fry bacon and drain well. Discard all but one T. bacon fat. Cook chicken livers in bacon fat for several minutes. Drain well. Combine livers and cheese with first mixture. Set aside.

Cut four medium zucchini in half, lengthwise, and remove seeds with a spoon. Place skin-side-up in a buttered shallow baking dish. Bake, covered with foil, for 15 minutes at 375°. Turn zucchini hollow-side-up and fill cavities with mixture. Crumble bacon over top. Re-cover with foil and bake another 30 minutes until squash is tender and filling is hot. Remove foil for last ten minutes to crisp. Serves 4.

You might think Aunt Olivia would renege, quietly suggest to Uncle Henry that no longer was there a market for zucchini, and ask him to either find another place to peddle them or, yes, silently and surreptitiously bury them in the compost heap. But no. Not Aunt Olivia. She called all six of us to dinner one evening and served us **Oyster and Zucchini Fritters**. They were so delicious we actually asked her to repeat the performance.

1 pt. fresh-shucked oysters 1 C. chopped zucchini
1½ C. flour 1 beaten egg
2 t. baking powder 1 T. milk
1 t. salt ½ C. oil for frying
¼ t. garlic powder

Drain and chop oysters, discarding liquor. In a large bowl, combine dry ingredients. In a medium bowl, combine oysters, zucchini, egg, and milk. Add wet mixture to dry mixture and stir only until blended. Heat oil to 375° in electric frying pan. Drop mixture by large spoonful in a single layer in hot oil. Fry fritters three minutes altogether, turning once, until golden on both sides. Drain on absorbent paper and serve immediately with cocktail sauce or **Horseradish Sauce** mixed from 1/2 C. prepared horseradish sauce and 1/4 C. mayonnaise, heated but not boiled.

The season for zucchini drew to a close as every season must, but before we polished off the last of them, Aunt Olivia discovered a recipe we all agreed was the very best way of all to fix zucchini. Not only is **Zucchini Cake** moist and delicious, it keeps for months in the freezer and is a grand goodie to have in reserve when unexpected company knocks at the door.

2 medium zucchini, 3 C. flour
shredded 2 t. baking powder
3 eggs 2 t. cinnamon
1 C. cooking oil ¾ t. nutmeg
2 C. sugar 1 C. chopped walnuts
2 t. vanilla 1 C. white raisins

1 8¼-oz. can crushed pineapple

Shred zucchini into a medium bowl. In a large bowl, beat eggs until foamy, add sugar and vanilla, beat in oil, add zucchini, and continue beating until thick. With a spoon, mix in well-drained pineapple, flour, and seasonings. Stir thoroughly. Add nuts and raisins. Stir to blend. Divide batter between two well-greased loaf pans. Bake in preheated 350° oven for one hour (if glass loaf pans are used, set oven temperature at 325°). Cool in pans for ten minutes, then remove to wire rack. When cold, wrap in plastic film or foil, and freeze.

Oh, no . . . not MORE zucchini!