

from Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

by Lydia Lovell

Any day now, we can be pulling carrots from the garden. (If you haven't already had some baby ones, taken as you thinned, it must be because you didn't plant carrot seeds.) While the carrot crop commences at mid-summer, give or take, it can extend well into the winter, because carrots, left in the ground and well mulched just before first frost, keep as well as though stored in your vegetable crisper. Better, in fact. You may have to brush away the snow to harvest them in December, but they will taste as sweet and fresh as they do in August.

Nobody wonders how to use the carrot. As a vegetable, it is commonly peeled and cooked whole or in fairly large chunks, or sliced and boiled just until crisp-tender or, after cooking until soft, mashed, buttered, and parsleyed. But that hardly scratches the surface of the carrot's potential.

Carrot sticks appear on antipasto and hors d'oeuvre trays or, in fancier style, with long strips sliced very thin with a peeler, curled around spheres of plain or herbed cream cheese. Cheese balls scooped with a melon-baller, wrapped in carrot strips, and pierced with a toothpick, may be frozen until serving time. Elegant.

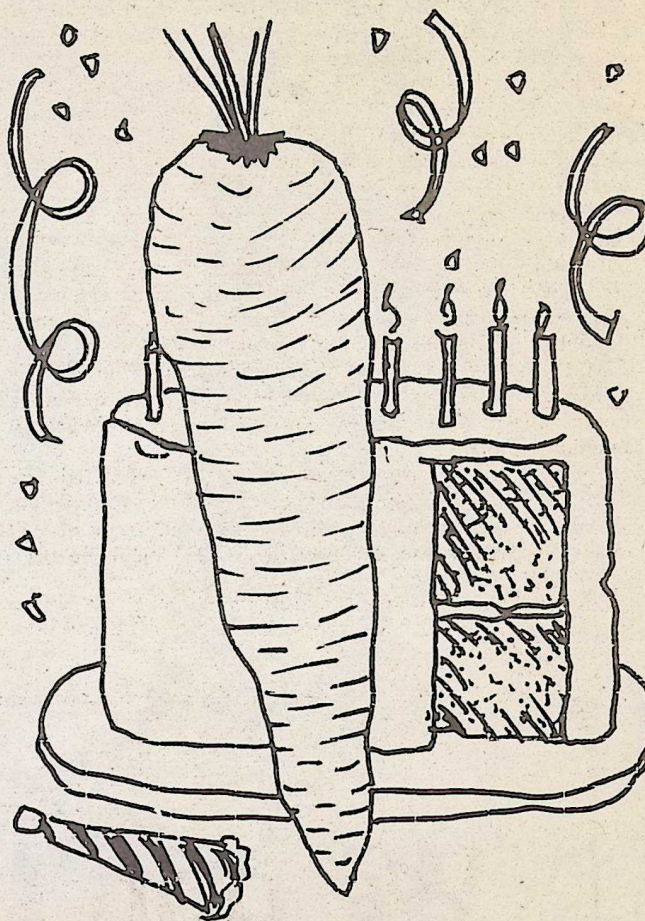
Shredded carrots find their way into potato salads and cabbage slaws, give texture and color to molded salads, and combine with mayonnaise, apple cubes, seedless green grapes, and raisins for a fruit-and-vegetable salad. Shredded carrot makes a better than fair-to-middling cake, too. And in tzimmes, carrots are indispensable. Carrot pudding vies for kudos with carrot soufflé. So plentiful are the choices it is difficult to decide which recipes to use. Aunt Olivia served carrots one way or another nearly every day. Not only did Uncle Henry plant several rows of them each year, knowing there would be great demand, he planted early and late varieties to ensure a steady supply. Aunt Olivia used the youngest and tenderest of this root vegetable for **CURRIED CARROTS**.

18 small young and tender carrots
1/2 C. carrot cooking water
1/2 C. sour cream
1/2 t. salt
1 T. flour
1 t. curry powder
1/4 stick of butter or margarine

Boil carrots 20 minutes in a covered saucepan. Drain, reserving cooking water. Put carrots in buttered casserole dish and keep warm. Rub flour and butter together; when smooth, add salt and curry powder, and rub well. Combine with carrot water and cook until sauce thickens. Remove from heat, stir in sour cream, pour over carrots. Cover for a few minutes and serve hot. Yield: 6 portions.

A tzimmes is a traditional Jewish dish, the principal ingredient of which is usually carrots. A tzimmes may include left-over meat or have a base of beef stock, but the recipe for tzimmes that Aunt Olivia liked best, the one she used most often, and the one I prepare on special occasions is called, simply, **CARROT TZIMMES**.

6 large sweet carrots [1 bunch]
1 C. orange juice
1/2 C. honey
1/4 t. cinnamon
1/2 t. salt
12 large marshmallows



Cook a bunch of peeled carrots 20-25 minutes until tender but still firm. Drain. Cut carrots into bite-size pieces, or thick slices and place in a buttered 2-quart shallow casserole that has a close-fitting cover. In a small bowl, mix together orange juice, honey, salt, and cinnamon. Pour over carrots. Cut marshmallows in half and arrange on top of carrots. Cover and bake 30 minutes at 350°. Uncover, stir, and bake ten minutes longer to brown top. This sweet vegetable dish enhances any turkey or chicken dinner, but is particularly delicious with duck.

Few things pleased Uncle Henry more than seeing a relish tray carried from the kitchen and placed on the dinner table. For him, a relish tray made a special occasion of an otherwise ordinary meal. Sometimes it offered nothing more complicated than sweet cucumber chips, a mound of cottage cheese sprinkled with paprika, and a heap of celery and raw carrot sticks. Occasionally, stuffed green olives, or pitted ripe ones, or those super-mouth-watering black olives-in-oil so beloved by the Greeks were accompanied by feta cheese and tiny fresh scallions. And sometimes Aunt Olivia opened a jar of **CARROT RELISH** or made up a fresh batch to please Uncle Henry.

2 lbs. carrots
1 large onion
1 bell pepper
salt
1 T. snipped parsley
1/2 C. cooking oil
1/2 C. sugar
1/4 C. cider vinegar
1 can undiluted tomato soup
1 t. fresh oregano

Thin-slice carrots on the diagonal, thin-slice onion and seeded bell pepper. In a saucepan, boil vegetables in salted water 20 minutes. Drain. Sprinkle with minced oregano leaves and snipped parsley. Spoon carrots into wide-mouthed jar. Mix oil, sugar, vinegar, and tomato soup in 10" frying pan. Cook five minutes until mixture thickens slightly. Pour over carrots in jar. Cover and refrigerate at least two hours before serving.

Birthdays elicited special attentions from Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry. The practice originated when I, the elder child in my immediate family, celebrated my fifth birthday. I had been left with Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry while my parents took a well-earned and much-needed vacation together. Just the two of them.

Like most children, I was not overly-endowed with altruism; I thought first of myself, not of my mother and father. When I discovered my parents would not be on hand to make a production of my birthday, I felt at least neglected, if not downright abused, but Aunt Olivia did her best to make amends. So well did she succeed that the simple observances my mother had arranged in earlier years paled by comparison. From that time forward, I looked to Aunt Olivia to provide birthday recognition for me. It was an assignment she accepted willingly.

To establish the mood, Aunt Olivia allowed me to invite my best friend to dinner. That, alone, added enormously to the festivities for Esther was a happy child and we giggled together throughout growing years. And I was permitted to choose the menu. Although I cannot recall details of birthday meals, I do remember the birthday cakes because they were a perennial favorite that appeared annually with appropriate numbers of lighted candles. **THREE-LAYER CARROT CAKE** is as good today as it was when I was five; it is rich enough to yield a dozen servings.

2 C. sugar
2 C. flour
1 t. cinnamon
1/4 t. salt
2 t. baking powder
1-1/2 C. cooking oil
4 eggs
3 C. grated carrots
1 t. vanilla extract
1/2 C. chopped walnuts or pecans

Measure dry ingredients onto sheet of waxed paper, then sift them together into a large bowl. With a spoon, make a well in flour mixture; pour oil into well, break eggs into oil, and stir until just mixed. Stir in grated carrots, vanilla, and chopped nuts. Pour into three 9" round layer cake pans, well-greased, and bake at 350° for half-an-hour or until done.

This **CREAM CHEESE FROSTING** recipe makes enough to ice the layers and the sides of the cake once they are stacked one atop two others.

1 lb. [one pkg.] confectioners sugar
1 8-oz. pkg. Philadelphia cream cheese
1/2 stick butter
2 t. vanilla extract

Allow cream cheese to come to room temperature; cream butter and cream cheese together with electric beater. Add sugar, half-a-cup at a time, beating after each addition. Stir in vanilla. Frost cooled layers; stack layers; frost sides.

Happy Birthday to YOU!