

# Search For Healthy Foods Ends In Natural Fruitcake

BY SALLY BAIR

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**RUSSELLVILLE** — Kathy Gordon's first natural fruitcake was devised from dried fruits that "looked pretty together," and a batter she thought would work well. Kathy recalls, "I cut up the fruits, threw them in a pan, made a loaf and it tasted so good."

Though at the time the fruit and nut roll was mostly the result of Kathy's search for healthy foods for her asthmatic children, that was the start of Kathy's Kountry Kitchen. Kathy lives at 1901 Old Limestone Road, Oxford, with her husband, Jim, and two children, Jennifer Eden, 9, and Everett, 6. The business originates in the family kitchen.

Kathy recalls, "The main reason I got into this was because of my asthmatic children. I was searching for other areas of care other than doctors." She has vivid memories of "nights and nights of sick kids." Although it took them four years, she managed to get both children completely off medication.

Her search for alternatives to medication led her to studying the family eating habits, and changing them to made-from-scratch foods. Her goal when she developed her fruit and nut log was to find a dessert "that tasted just as good as one with sugar."

After she made the loaf, she had many people taste it and received lots of favorable comments. One woman suggested that she make it into a log, which Kathy did, and then she began making them in a big way.

It was Christmas time when the idea came to her and that first year she gave out 150 one-pound logs.

Kathy says, "It was a taste people were really liking." She also said that her husband, Jim, had always wanted her to bake for a living, so it seemed natural to expand upon this delicious product.

To be perfectly legal, Kathy had her kitchen licensed, and has been in business ever since. After her first log, she decided to make

carob coated logs for Easter, and fashioned half-pound eggs.

Since she wanted the business to continue year round, she discovered that she could spread the mixture on a cookie sheet and sell bars, something that went well in the summer.

Kathy says, "I am always looking for something new, so I made some into bon bon size, and offered them by the dozen. People really like one bite sized, and I sold lots."

Kathy marketed the delicious confection mostly in health food stores, and then one of her store customers requested that she make the roll and coat it with chocolate. With reservations, Kathy found a good quality coating chocolate and found that the log sold very well. Now the natural fruitcake is sold with the choice of carob coating, white and chocolate coating.

For this holiday season, Kathy is offering logs of pound or half pound size, in addition to the bite sized in any coating. Kathy said she feels one reason her fruit and nut combination is accepted so well is that there is no citron flavor as with most fruit cakes. "It is not your typical fruitcake — it is not perfumey."

She continues to use the original three fruits that she chose because of their pretty color: pineapple, papaya and apricots. Pecans and raisins provide the additional flavoring, and she purchases all the supplies in bulk for her business.

Kathy points out that getting her kitchen licensed to be able to sell the logs was a simple matter. She first contacted the Department of Agriculture which has a booklet outlining the process. Then she met with a department employee who told her what she needed to comply with regulations, and what he expected. He also advised her to check the local zoning and to have her water tested.

Zoning was no problem, but they discovered that they shouldn't be drinking their water because of its high nitrate level. Kathy now feels



Kathy Gordon demonstrates how she grinds dried fruit to use in her natural fruit and nut log. Her husband, Jim, made the heavy duty grinder she now uses.

## Homestead Notes

that may have been contributing to family headaches. Now she uses only bottled water for her recipe.

Sometime after they had discussed the requirements for the business, the employee scheduled a visit to her home to see her kitchen; later he came unannounced. The license fee is \$5 annually.

Kathy said, "They want it clean, and they don't want you to use a common towel. Also you shouldn't be preparing the food if you have the cold or flu." She has found the regulations to be simple to follow, and is pleased to be licensed.

About her logs, she says, "The shelf life is so good. It doesn't spoil and it stays good." Because of its long shelf life, it is a natural for mail order, something Kathy thinks she may get into as time passes. So far she has restricted her marketing to stores in the immediate area to make delivery simple.

Originally she began selling in health food stores in Lancaster, but found it too far to drive easily. She wouldn't mind expanding the number of stores, but would do it only if stores could accept mail shipments, something some of them are not eager to do.

Kathy says, "I would like to expand if I could find the right person to guide me in that way. I would like to see the business grow, if that is what the Lord wants for me."

As part of the business, Kathy said she is always looking for decorative boxes to pack the bite sized pieces in. She now has some heart shaped ones that she hopes to have in her stores for Valentine's Day.

The business is a family affair, with Jim helping with the wrapping and cutting. He also made her a grinder to grind the dried fruits after her food mixer grinder gave out. She said he also devised a way of nicking trays to allow her to make even cuts for the bar cookies, so each bar is identical.

Jim was the one who solved her labeling problem, when no commercial printer wanted to include all the ingredients. Her husband composed a label on the computer, and kept making it smaller until he had a label that was acceptable.

Kathy felt very strongly about the need to label the logs so that buyers would know exactly what they were eating. The label

was important to include ingredients in the label so people would know, for instance, that I do not use aluminum baking powder. When I buy a snack food, I always read the label."

Kathy says her actual cooking time has decreased considerably since she started. "I've learned lots of shortcuts through doing it. My hands are used to doing it, and I can pinch off just the right amount of dough."

Also an experienced hairdresser who works three days a week in that profession, Kathy says, "I try to bake on the two days that I am off work. I try to educate my customers so they know that's when I can fill orders."

As she reflects on the process of

weaning her children from the medication, Kathy says, "I made a lot of mistakes, and sometimes took the children off medication too soon. It took years of rebuilding. We changed our diets and rebuilt our bodies. You must go slowly."

She adds, "It takes time to make dinner. I start from scratch. I make time to do it, because I reap what I sow." She also packs lunches for her children, and she said they try pretty hard to stick to eating the proper foods because they can feel the difference in their bodies.

Although Kathy has tried working on additional products, she says, "I want to stick with one product. I wasn't consistent with other products." At this point she is not experimenting because, "I like what we have."

Then, looking to the future, she says, "Maybe someday I'll have a bakery. I would like to have an all-natural bakery."

Kathy welcomes private orders of any size, and is going to at least one area store to distribute samples. But, she says, "I want to grow gracefully."

Most of her increased marketing to date has been word of mouth

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Because goat's milk is so easily digested, the Gordons keep three goats to satisfy their milk requirements. Here Kathy plays with one of them.



Kathy Gordon cuts one of her fruit and nut logs, a delicious "sweet" with all-natural ingredients.