

Kids' KOrner

All-American Food Basket Filled With International Items

WASHINGTON — Come and share a dinner of all-American foods.

We'll start with a salad featuring fresh spinach, a native of Persia introduced in Europe in the 16th century; cucumbers, a product of India brought by the Romans to Britain; and tomatoes, originally known as "love apples" and not eaten in the United States until 1835 because they were thought to be poisonous. And we'll have hearts of artichoke, first grown in Africa's Barbary Coast.

For a main course, we'll have an all-American steak, probably from Hereford cattle, developed in England in the 19th century. We'll zing up its taste with ketchup, the name of which comes from the Chinese word for the brine of pickled fish, and smother it in onions, native to central Asia and worshipped in ancient Egypt. Or we'll serve carp, which Europeans brought here in 1876, and top it with lemon, a native of India.

Okra From Slaves

We'll have potatoes, introduced to the western diet by Spanish colonists who found them in 16th-century Peru; broccoli, an Italian vegetable rarely seen in the United States until after World War I; and okra, brought here by African slaves. We'll have bread, baked from a variety of wheat brought to Kansas by 19th-century German Mennonites.

Dessert? Perhaps pie, baked with apples, a European native; or cherries, originally from Persia; or peaches, a Chinese fruit introduced to Europeans 2,000 years ago; or watermelon, originally from Africa. Or maybe that American favorite, ice cream, an

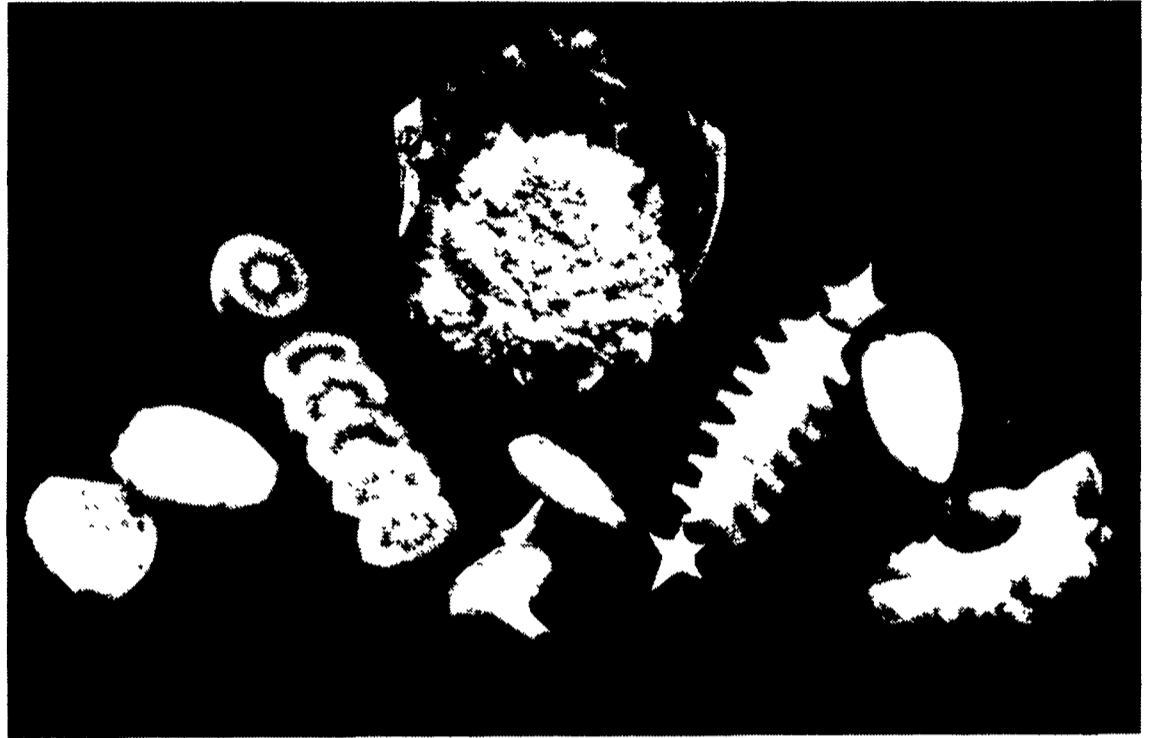
Italian concoction that Catherine de Medici's cooks made for the French in 1593.

All-American foods? What Americans eat is about as diverse as where Americans come from. And, partly because many new Americans are coming from parts of the world that are new sources of population, the variety of the foods we eat is undergoing a tremendous spurt. Immigrants from Mexico and Central America have brought many of their foods with them, as southern Europeans once brought garlic and olives. Vietnamese, Chinese, Laotians, Ethiopians, Afghans, and Iranians, among others, have imported their specialties.

"Once again, America is restocking the melting pot to suit her newest immigrants, who are increasing in diversity and number," writes Elizabeth Schneider in "Uncommon Fruits and Vegetables: A Commonsense Guide." "Mexicans bring jicama, Thais want lemon grass, Japanese ask for daikon, and Cubans love calabaza. Every day the larder grows. Foods that look strange now (as ginger, shallots, bean sprouts and even avocados did not so long ago) may soon be common in our culinary vocabulary."

Cosmopolitan Taste Buds

Americans traveling abroad are finding more foods that pique their taste buds and excite their culinary imaginations. High-speed transportation and modern refrigeration processes bring food from abroad here easily, still fresh. Increased interest in healthful eating has inspired a taste for fresh fruits and vegetables, low in cholesterol and



A few years ago, these strange-looking foods would never have been found in American supermarkets. Today, they and many other delicacies from foreign lands have found space in the stores' gourmet sections and some are crossing over onto regular grocery shelves. From left, they are: white cactus, kiwi fruit, yellow cauliflower (center top), shiitake mushrooms (center bottom), starfruit (both sliced and whole), and ginger root.

calories, high in vitamins and fiber, and many of them new to American menus.

But perhaps the greatest change has come in the way Americans look at food and its preparation. Experts agree that we no longer are interested in simply stocking up with enough fuel to get us through the day.

"We're growing up as a country, and food is becoming a more important part of our lives," says Jeff Cohen, owner of Washington's Sutton Place Gourmet, a supermarket cornucopia of exotic foods, from Hawaiian mahi-mahi fish to California black figs, from a respectable Tennessee caviar to goat cheeses from New York state.

"American cuisine is a melting pot in itself," Cohen says. "There's American cuisine from New Mexico, from Maine, from Louisiana, and a little bit of everything from all over the country. But put it all together, and you have something new."

"There are so many more adventures we can increase to add variety and excitement to our meals," says Judi Greening, director of consumer and informational services for Frieda's Finest/Produce Specialties of Los Angeles.

Frieda Caplan, the company's founder, is credited with bringing to this country a hairy brown fruit with green flesh, known as the

Chinese gooseberry, widely grown only in New Zealand after it was introduced there in 1906. Ms. Caplan imported some for a customer, then nurtured a market for them under a new name: kiwi fruit.

Ms. Caplan's success has been copied to various degrees with such other exotic foods as Jerusalem artichokes, spaghetti squash, jicama, cherimoyas, and passion fruit. Once such foods take hold, it's only a matter of time before Americans try to grow them.

Relocated Delicacies

A Santa Rosa, Calif., firm is (Turn to Page B14)

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. PEACH |
| 2. RED | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

AMERICUS VESPUCCIUS WAS AN ITALIAN MERCHANT EXPLORER WHO CLAIMED TO DISCOVER THE CONTINENT OF AMERICA IN 1497. COLUMBUS FIRST SET FOOT ON MAINLAND AMERICA ON HIS THIRD VOYAGE IN 1498. HE DID NOT DESPITE THE CLAIM. VESPUCCI'S NAME WAS ACCEPTED FOR SOUTH AMERICA AS WELL AS NORTH AMERICA.

