Columns

Is it too early start thinking about a spring garden?

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker

I saw a thing today on The Book of Faces that states that the past 10 weeks have been the "darkest" weeks on the calendar, so in honor of the days getting longer, it's time to way too prematurely start talking about spring stuff.

Last year was the first time in a couple decades that I didn't put in a garden, and frankly I missed it more than I thought I would. Of course, the yield is so scant compared to the effort put in, but there is something pretty redeeming about having produce that you've grown from seed.

There are always farmer's markets around to fill the coffers, but it's not quite the same. My problem is that I'm too old and out of shape to be crawling around on the ground taking care of my personal slice of Eden, so I always end up walking away and leaving it to it's own devices by July. The resultant jungle of interspersed tomatoes in their cages, purslane and water hemp looks "turrible," to quote that noted philosopher Charles Barkley. It got so bad a couple of years ago that we lost one of our pets in the twisted mess of plants. OK, not really, but you get the point. It's hideous.

The question then becomes how to grow a few veggies without creating a weed space that would swallow a small child. For the first time, I'm considering some sort of raised garden beds. The shape size and variety of said beds is incredible. Do I want the kind where the plants spread their roots into the ground beneath the beds? Do I want raised beds that limit the root growth, but are higher in the air so I don't have to bend my stiff back over quite so far? There are even portable garden beds on wheels, so you can chase or limit the plant's exposure to the sun, depending on what's growing.

As those who know me can attest, when I do something like this, I'm usually way too "rammy" and go all out and all in, only to lose interest and let the project sag. So, this time, I'm thinking smaller. Maybe two small beds where I can plant some beans and peppers and a few herbs. Maybe throw in some cherry tomatoes and leaf lettuce for salads and see how it goes.

At any rate, I can't afford to spend too much time working in a garden, because my golf game constantly needs LOTS of work and we all know that's going to be my focus when push comes to shove. OK. Small beds it is. And if they fail miserably, you'll know where to find me. I'll be the guy at the farmer's market, dressed in golf attire.

Your personal border wall

Real Life Wellness

By Dr. Bill Hemmer

We have been discussing diet and its effect on your health over the last few weeks and this article will describe one of the least talked about but most important parts of your entire digestive system. We have touched on this before, but I'm going to describe in detail how your gut lining leads you towards health or to disease. It is really that important.

If you spread out the lining of your digestive tract it would cover the entire length and width of a tennis court! This lining is one cell layer thick. It is about one tenth the width of a human hair and these cells are held together by even more microscopic structures allowing each of your cells to communicate with all the cells around it. If one cell can't communicate with the other cells around it, that isolated cell will turn into a cancer cell.

Just imagine the only border you have between the outside world and your inner world is only one cell layer thick! When your one cell layer is healthy, nutrients, protein, fats and carbohydrates pass through this layer and is then taken away by the lymphatic system and your blood vessels to feed your body.

I have also talked about your mucous layer before. The mucous layer sits on top and inside of single cell layer of your digestive tract and contains your bacteria, viruses, enzymes and antibodies that help to break down, attack and destroy invaders. This mucous layer helps to protect the single cell layer of your digestive tract from damage. But sometimes, if the mucous layer and the cell layer of your digestive tract fail, it leads to something called a Leaky Gut.

To put it simply, if your gut is leaking, you will create inflammation and causes an immune response quickly. Your gut will usually leak undigested particles, parasites, large viruses, bacteria and other toxins that will eventually lead you down the road to an autoimmune disorder. The more your gut leaks, the worse the inflammation gets and the more immune system problems you cause.

Another single layer border you have in your body is the tubules in your kidneys. Again, this one layer of cells is the boundary between your blood and your urine. These tubules are how your body gets rid of toxins out of your blood.

So the most effective way to make sure these single cell layers of tissue stay health is to stay hydrated, eat real food, stay away from pesticides and herbicides and alcohol. I know I beat this dead horse about hydration a lot, but every place I look, dehydration continually is a major factor.

A new trick I have learned to help stay hydrated is to squeeze a half of a lime or lemon into your water before you drink it. Not only does it give your water flavor, but it will also change the pH of the water making it easier for your body to absorb it. Using a pinch of sea salt either in your water or on your food, will also help you stay hydrated.

Next week, I'm going to describe more about how important water is to our health by explaining how they now know there is four phases of

Italian Beef great for superbowl parties

Let's Cook

By Linda Hoskins

This week I have a recipe that would be great for your Super Bowl party. This recipe for Italian Beef comes from Linda Moon of Villa Grove. She says "my aunt that worked in a restaurant in the 50s got this recipe. She gave it to all our family; everyone really loves it." It is a simple recipe yet sounds delicious! It calls for ingredients that many cooks already have on hand.

Italian Beef

submitted by Linda Moon

3 lb. beef chuck roast
1 tsp salt
1 tsp garlic salt
1 tsp onion salt
1 tsp black pepper
1/2 tsp red pepper
1/2 tsp oregano
1/2 tsp Italian seasoning

Place roast in a large pot. Add enough water to cover. Add the spices and simmer 1 hour per pound. When the roast is tender, shred the meat and return to broth. Simmer for 30 more minutes.

I think Italian beef is best served on hoagies or crusty rolls. Have some sliced pepperoncini to add to top of sandwich for some extra zing!

If you are still looking for a special dessert for Valentine's Day, but don't want to make a whole cake or pie or a lot of cupcakes, try this one! The recipe makes two servings, but you could easily make as many as you want. I have made these sundae cups several times, and it always impresses. It does take a little time but is not difficult. You will need a pastry brush to make these beautiful and impressive desserts.

Strawberry Sundae Cups

makes two servings

4 squares bittersweet chocolate
1 cup strawberry ice cream
whipped cream

Melt three squares of chocolate in the microwave according to package instructions. Brush the melted chocolate evenly into the insides of a foil muffin cups. Freeze for ten minutes. Repeat brushing and freezing two more times.

Melt remaining chocolate, place in a small plastic bag. Cut a small hole in one corner. Pipe the chocolate onto waxed paper into desired shape. (for Valentine's Day, make outline of a heart!) Freeze until set.

Just before serving, peel off the foil muffin cups. Fill the chocolate cup with a scoop of ice cream. Garnish with a dollop of whipped cream. Insert tip of chocolate heart into the whipped cream so it is standing up.

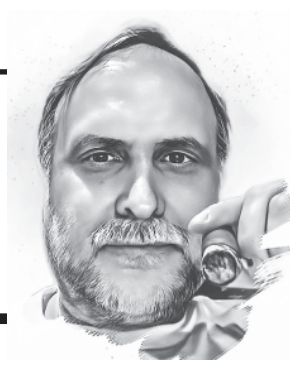
You can use this recipe for any holiday! I have made these at Christmas time and made outlines of stars and bells. You can use whatever flavor ice cream you want, but strawberry works nicely for Valentine's Day. If you choose to make these, be sure to use foil cups without paper liners. The foil peels off easily if the chocolate is well frozen, but be gentle so you don't break the chocolate cup! I also prefer to use a can of Redi Whip for this rather than Cool Whip. The Redi Whip is a little stiffer for supporting your garnish shapes. Also, if you want the chocolate heart to stand up, be sure to keep it small. If too big, it won't stand up nicely. An inch to one and half inch size works nicely.

If you have a recipe to share, please send to letscook!@heraldpubs.com or mail to Mascoutah Herald, PO Box C, Mascoutah Illinois 62258. Thanks and Happy Cooking!

Comparing life to backgammon, sort of

Ramblin' Man

By David Porter



Life is like a game of backgammon. Not really. It just sounded profound.

That's what I try to do sometimes. I try to create some kind of allegory to fake wisdom. It's my dirty little secret. Really, I just want to play a game of backgammon on my computer, but I have a deadline to meet. So, I take whatever I'm thinking about and try to twist it into something useful or at least useable.

If I was thinking about going fishing, I'd have said life is like fishing. It's just a writing tool.

Normally, I think about whatever I'm thinking about first, figure out the angle and then write it down. I'm skipping some steps today and just writing it as I think about it. It will come to no surprise to anyone that this is not the first time that I skipped the thinking part. Or the angle figuring part. Or the wisdom and profundity.

As a member of the grammar police, I'm compelled to point out that the use of the word profundity is redundant and duplicative. But if you want to sound smart, you have to use fancy words. The irony is that I'm being less smart in an effort to sound smart.

Another irony is that using the words redundant and duplicative is also redundant and duplicative. I'm just full of irony today.

So, anyway, back to the allegory. In backgammon, you roll the dice and take your chances. That's like life. Sometimes, you roll a good number, and other times, you roll numbers that leave your pip exposed. Nobody wants an exposed pip.

There are offensive and defensive strategies. I try not to offend people, so I tend to play more of a defensive game. It's more about keeping my opponent trapped than sending him to the rail.

If you don't know how to play backgammon, that explanation might not make a lot of sense. I'm hoping the context will carry me through. Otherwise, I have to explain how to play the game and we don't have time for that. Plus, if you do know the game, you'd be bored with that. I don't want to be boring although I often can't help myself.

I think the computer backgammon game is rigged. I can be on the rail with five of the six spots open and roll doubles for the one spot that's closed. Then, when my turn comes around again, I roll the same doubles. I can't get doubles when I need them.

When I'm on the rail, it usually takes me eight to 10 turns to land back on the board. My electronic opponent, on the other hand, usually gets out of jail with only one or two rolls even if there is only one available spot on the board. It helps that he's in control of the dice.

And that's like life, too. It's not always fair. It seems like some people get all the breaks while the rest of us just get broke.

See what I did there? Just a little wordplay. It's fun, isn't it? It's fun for me.

You may be wondering where backgammon got its name. If you weren't wondering before, perhaps you are now.

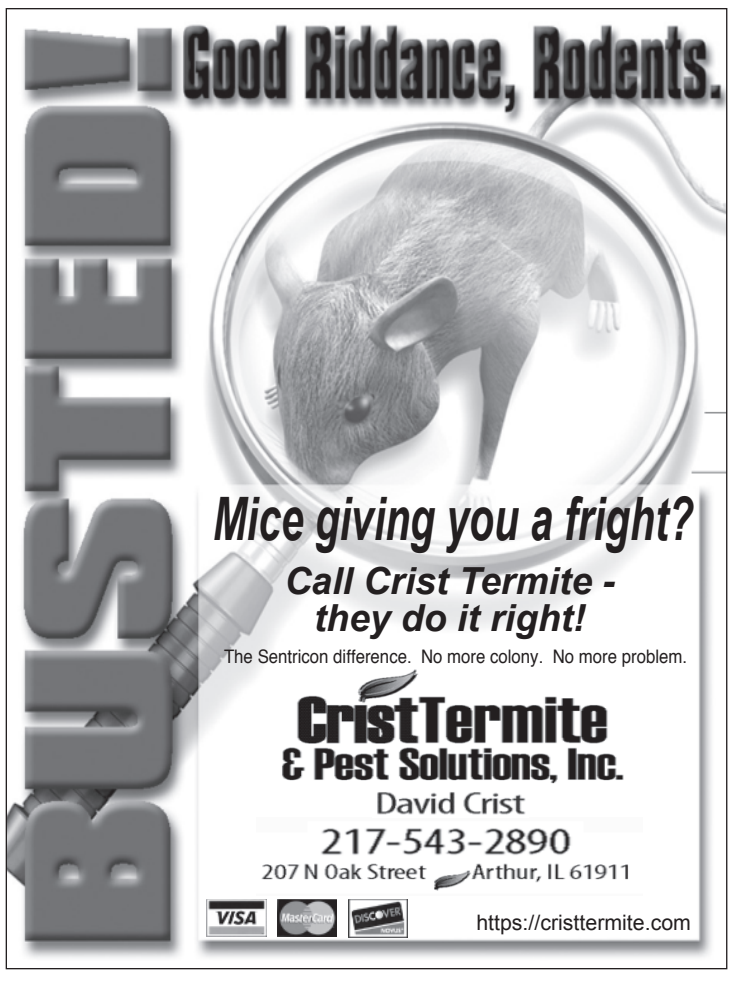
Nobody knows for sure. The Welsh phrase bach cammaun means "small battle." Backgammon is a game for two people, so maybe that's it. Another possibility is a Middle English term, baec gamen, which means "back game." The object of the game is to get your pips back home and off the board, so that makes sense.

If you break it into two words, the first, back, needs no explanation. But what's a gammon? It's a ham. I'm pretty sure the name of the game has no correlation to pork.

By the way, backgammon is believed to have been invented in Mesopotamia, which is now Iraq, some 5,000 years ago. Except it wasn't called backgammon then. I should note that the artifacts found were similar to backgammon.

The game has had many names and variations. The name backgammon was coined in 1645. For some 400 years prior to that, it was called tables.

And that's like life. Things change. Adaptations are made. Aw, heck, can we just dispense with the allegory already? Every story doesn't have to have some nugget of wisdom. And that's like life.

Ugh. Enough.

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