What's Cookin': An invitation to dinner— do you arrive empty-handed?

Lori Gysel & Gerry Kentner

When you are invited to someone's house for dinner, what do you bring? Or do you bring anything?

This question arises because we had some friends over for dinner on Saturday night and both couples showed up with gifts a-plenty! Couple number one brought two bottles of wine and a fabulous arrangement of flowers (nice, as I rarely treat myself to this luxury). The other couple brought two bottles of wine, chocolate AND chicken. Chicken? Yes, chicken.

Now this is no ordinary chicken. The supreme cut of chicken is one that is difficult to find in your average grocery store. This is the breast of the chicken, skin on, bones removed, but with the wing bone still attached, standing up straight. It is a great looking cut— particularly for special events. So, what better gift for someone who loves food?

Apparently the whole idea of bringing some kind of gift to the hostess is a North American thing— my husband was explaining about having been at a party in his university days, where lots of people were invited, but of course, it goes without saying that everyone brings their own drinks. The host, if affluent enough, might supply a few bags of chips, but other than that you are on your own. Well a young Japanese foreign student came along to the bash and was disappointed to find out when he got there, that unless your BYOB'd, you were out of luck for drinks— apparently not so in his home country.

Generally I try to always bring something with me— wine at least, if not flowers, candy or some small gift. Every once in awhile, maybe even something homemade.

Funny though, for some reason, I don't tend to do this when invited over to my parent's house. Are we entitled to snub politeness with our parents? Or do we just expect the parents to keep giving forever, and as the kids, we are exempt— regardless of our age? Perhaps I ought to bring a gift the next time I go there!

Have fun and keep cooking!

Email questions and comments to whatscookin@independentfreepress.com

Lemon Meringue Pie

Ingredients

- 1 9-inch, baked pie shell
- 1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
- 6 tbsp cornstarch
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 cups water
- 3 egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 3 tbsp butter
- 1/2 cup lemon juice

Meringue

- 4 egg whites
- 1/4 tsp cream of tartar
- 6 tbsp granulated sugar

Method

1. Start by making filling. In a heavy bottomed saucepan, combine sugar, cornstarch and salt; gradually stir in water. Bring to a boil over medium high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium-low and boil gently for 3 minutes, stirring constantly.

2. Remove from heat. Whisk a little hot mixture into egg yolks; whisk back into saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, for 2 minutes.

3. Remove from heat. Stir in butter and lemon juice.

4. Let cool slightly, about 3 minutes. Pour into baked pie shell. Let cool slightly while making meringue.

5. In a bowl, beat egg whites with cream of tartar until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in sugar, about 1 tbsp at a time, until stiff peaks form.

6. Spread over hot filling, sealing to crust to prevent shrinking. With spatula, swirl meringue into attractive peaks. Bake in 350 degree oven for 10 to 12 minutes or until lightly browned.

7. Let cool thoroughly (at least 2 hours); do not refrigerate. Makes 6 servings.

Pizza Pizza pizza for cell phones

In honour of Earth Month, Pizza Pizza will be giving out free slices throughout the month of April to anyone who recycles a cell phone or handheld device through the Cells for Slices program. The program seeks to re-direct previously used cell phones and handheld devices from landfills. All of the proceeds will go to benefit Food Banks Canada and the food bank network as part of its Phones for Food program.

Win a Terra Cotta Inn dinner for twelve

Win a dinner for 12 in a private dining room at the Terra Cotta Inn. Ticket cost $50; value well in excess of $1,200. Three-course dinner with wine, prepared especially for you and your guests by Executive Chef Roberto Florindi. Maximum 200 tickets sold; the draw will be held on Wednesday, April 20, 7 p.m. in the Terra Cotta Inn pub.

Proceeds to Terra Cotta Community Hall Restoration. Info/tickets: Yvonne Sanchez 905-702-0480 or email gpsanchez@rogers.com.