

Magic in a Beer Can

When I was in seventh grade, a friend of mine responded to an advertisement in a comic book for the Northwestern School of Taxidermy... in my name. The advertisement for their school in Omaha, Nebraska, stated, "How YOU can learn the secrets of taxidermy in your own home!" I discovered this prank when I received a congratulatory letter along with the first of a multitude of lessons, along with the first of a multitude of invoices. The first lesson was for how to stuff alligators. There weren't many 'gators where I lived, unless they resided in the sewer system. MAGIC IN A BEER CAN

That's an "artificial virtual garden."
No, it's a "medieval rotating hotel."
It looks like a "changeable rubber apparatus."
Can't you see, it's a "transparent aquatic event."

Make any sense to you? Well it shouldn't because it comes from an Idea Generator. You click on this little screen device, it spins like a slot machine, and three random words come out. When a person is bereft of ideas, this is meant to inspire movement in a stuck brain. I have a brain made of mud, but I don't see how this would get me unstuck. In fact, like many old people, my brain has been traveling on the same old railroad for years.

I've often been puzzled when searching for a topic to write about, and that's probably apparent. I thought the Idea Generator might be a method, but it seems it's not going to help. So this month, I will address the topic of "dancing chickens", "bum in the beer chickens", "drunken chicken", or simply "beer can chicken", they're all the same, along with some peripherally related gustatory topics.

Most of you, if not all, have heard or experienced this method of chicken preparation. It's simply a whole chicken with an open half-filled beer can crammed up it's butt, barbequed in a standing position. This results in a moist succulent chicken, unsurpassed by any other cooking method. You rub the skin first with a piquant combination of salt, paprika, brown sugar, liquid smoke and whatever else you fancy. I figured I was a dancing chicken expert until I bought a 309 page cookbook, "Beer Can Chicken", which expounds endlessly on this common theme.

If you own a barbeque, and have never tried this, you *have* to give it a go. Even if you don't, even if you must attempt it in a plain old oven, try it. If you need help with instructions, call me. You'll be so glad you tried it you will probably want to send me gifts or money, but altruistic person that I am, I will not accept. Spreading the drunken chicken gospel will be reward enough.

Now on to Tomato Pie. I went to dinner at a

friends house (yes, I have a friend), and for a vegetable he served tomato pie. Actually, not just tomato pie, County Tomato Pie. It's tomatoes in a pie shell, slathered with a bunch of onions, garlic, mayonnaise and other stuff and baked for half an hour. Well, it was great. It was so good that I tried cooking it myself, and believe it or not, the dish was not substantially degraded by changing chefs. I think it would be good in the winter when all you have are those hard, tasteless tomatoes shipped up green from Peru or somewhere. Even better, of course, with fresh County field tomatoes. Tomato pie. Who would have guessed such a thing?

I bought some tomatoes from Vicki to make a pie, and traditionalist that I am, requested red ones. Vicki, of course has tomatoes that are almost black, almost white, and every shade in between. She prevailed upon me to try a yellow one. I would not have chosen to eat it, but Vicki was insistent, claiming that the red skin contains more acid than the pale skin, and therefore the pale ones are sweeter. She was right, of course, the tomato tasted like it had been sprinkled with sugar. Next time, a tomato pie with yellow tomatoes.

Earlier this year, I wrote about the value of coltsfoot as a healing herb and said I was going to try it, and true to my word, I did. I made a cough medicine of it, but seeing as I have no cough, I didn't try it. I did, however, dose a visitor who proclaimed that it tasted

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