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### A Note from Glen

Happy New Year! To begin this New Year, an Irish toast comes to mind: May the most you wish for be the least you get. My wish for you is that 2008 is one of the best years ever.

With this edition, this newsletter begins the first full year of existence. I hope to provide you with at least some valuable, or interesting, information each month. Thanks for your past interest and feedback which has given me incentive to continue. I have enjoyed the time I have spent preparing this publication each month. Remember, your comments are welcome.

There is much more to [Glen's Place](#) than recipes and food. Please take time to explore if you haven't done so recently.

### Brain Teaser

What are the next two letters in the following series and why?

W A T N T L I T F S

See page 3 for the answer.

Happy New Year

### Label Lingo

Now that you have made the annual New Year's Resolutions to lose weight, eat healthier, and exercise more, it may be time to take a closer look at food labels. What does light, reduced-fat, organic, and all that other lingo actually mean. Here are some FDA guidelines that may be helpful.

- **Light** – one third the calories or one half the fat compared to the traditional form of the product
- **Sodium Free** – having less than 5 milligrams of sodium per serving
- **Sugar Free** – less than half a gram of sugar per 100g or 100ml
- **Calorie Free** – less than 5 calories per serving
- **Low Calorie** – no more than 40 calories for a given reference amount
- **Trans-fat Free** – having less than half a gram of trans-fat per serving
- **Reduced Fat** – having at least a 25% reduction in fat compared to the traditional product
- **Low Fat** – the food contains 3 grams of total fat or less per serving
- **Organic** – having at least 95% organically produced ingredients. In order to be 100% organic, all ingredients must be organically produced. Before a product can be labeled "organic," a Government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards.
- **Natural** – the food appears very close to its natural state, has been minimally processed, and has no artificial ingredients or added color.

These labels can still be confusing. Organic, natural, and low fat foods may still be high in sugar content and calories. Fat free cookies for example may have no fat but more sugar which may save few or no calories. Foods that are trans-fat free may not be fat free and may still contain saturated fat which can raise cholesterol.

What this all means is that you should take a few minutes to read the nutrition facts label on the product. This is the only way you can know the actual nutrients and calories per serving.

## Tips and Techniques

To keep mushrooms looking bright, wipe them with a paper towel dipped in lemon juice.

To avoid the mess when coating baking sheets with nonstick spray, set them on an open door of a dishwasher. The door catches any excess spray, preventing the need for cleanup.

## Food Fact

Here's a secret for getting the most iron from spinach. Have a glass of orange juice! Our bodies are far better able to access the iron in iron-rich plant foods, fortified grains, legumes, and dark greens, if eaten with something acidic such as citrus juice or tomato sauce.

## Quotable Quote

Strength is the capacity to break a chocolate bar into four pieces with your bare hands- and then eat just one of the pieces. ~ Judith Viorst

People who work sitting down get paid more than people who work standing up.  
~ Ogden Nash

## Fun Facts and Trivia

When it is born, a koala is only about the size of a large jelly bean.

Koalas eat 1 to 1.5 pounds of eucalyptus leaves each day. (Eucalyptus leaves are poisonous to most animals, but koalas have special bacteria in their stomachs that break down the toxic oils.)

Koalas eat only eucalyptus leaves and don't get many calories from their diet, but they conserve energy by moving slowly and by sleeping as much as 20 hours each day.

## Mushrooms: The Frivolities of Gastronomy

Even though mushrooms are listed as a vegetable, they are actually a fungus. They have no roots, flowers, seeds, or leaves. Unlike most other plants, mushrooms thrive in the dark. The fact that most mushrooms you find in the market are grown in “controlled” environments has resulted in increased production; therefore the prices are more affordable.

Even plain white domestic mushrooms add a wonderful earthy quality to dishes. Since mushrooms don't weigh that much, and a little goes a long way, even more exotic ones are affordable.

Many different varieties of mushrooms are available in local markets. Some of the more common ones are described below.

❖ **White or Button Mushrooms** range in color from white to beige. They are mild when eaten raw, but the flavor increases when cooked. The flavor does not change with the size of the mushroom.



❖ **Crimini mushrooms** are sometimes known as Italian or Italian Brown. They are also labeled as “baby bellas” in some supermarkets. The flavor is similar to button mushrooms.



❖ **Portabella mushrooms** are essentially giant criminis. They have a wide, flat cap, usually 4 to 5 inches in diameter. They have a firm texture and meaty flavor which makes them ideal for grilling or roasting. They are sometimes used as a meat substitute.



❖ **Shitake mushrooms** are grown on oak logs, both in the wild and in cultivation. They have a brown, umbrella like cap. The long thin stem is inedible, but the cap is full of woodsy flavor.



❖ **Oyster mushrooms** have a shell like shape which reminds people of oyster shells. They have a thick soft texture and are quite chewy. Their color varies from gray-brown to pink to off-white and sometimes yellow.



The best way to bring out the flavor of mushrooms is to sauté them in butter or olive oil. Prepare them this way before adding them to other dishes. Mushrooms go well with garlic, scallions, shallots, thyme, and parsley. They also add flavor to many dishes from sautéed green beans to risottos and pasta. So, go ahead and try a different variety the next time you go to the supermarket!

## The Wine Corner



**Cooking with wine** is an easy way to add special flavor to ordinary, everyday dishes. Wine is known to release flavors in many foods that otherwise would not be experienced. It is amazing the difference that cooking with wine can make in a wide variety of foods.

The type of wine you use is very important. You should cook only with wine that you would drink. Try using a mainstream white or red. As you get more accustomed to using wine as an ingredient in your dishes, you will be more likely to experiment. The more you cook with wine, the better you will become at predicting how a specific wine will enhance your menu.

Here are some tips for using wine in your cooking:

1. When a recipe calls for water, replace the water, or part of it, with your favorite wine.
2. Stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons of a full-bodied red into brown gravy. Let simmer to create rich brown gravy for red meat.
3. Mix wine with your favorite oil to baste meat and poultry.
4. Dry red wines have better chemistry with heavier red meats.
5. Serve the same wine with dinner that you cooked with, as they will balance each other. If you prefer to use a fine wine during dinner, try to stay within the same wine family.

Final Thoughts: Cooking with wine can be a pleasure and a great enhancement to the final taste. Just be sure that you don't cook with wine you would not drink!

## Recipe of the Month

I don't know about you, but January sounds like a good month for a hot bowl of soup. Here is one that is wonderful for a midweek meal on a cold night. Some people turn their nose up at the sound of lentils, but this soup will convert them! Leave out the ham for a vegetarian soup. Serve with some hot cornbread. Yummy!

### Lentil Soup

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, cubed
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 1 can (14.5 ounce) diced tomatoes
- 3/4 cup diced ham
- 1 cup lentils, soaked, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 cans (14-ounce) chicken broth
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 sprig fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

In a large stockpot, sauté the onions in oil until they are glossy. Stir in garlic, paprika, celery, carrots, and ham. Sauté for 10 minutes. Once the vegetables have sautéed for 10 minutes, stir in tomatoes, chicken broth, lentils, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Stir well, then add the wine and bring the mixture to a boil. Slowly reduce the heat and simmer for 1 hour, or until the lentils are tender. Sprinkle the soup with parsley and Parmesan before serving.

## A Final Word

Thanks again for reading this newsletter. I hope 2008 is off to a good start for you. It's time to start acting on that promise you made to yourself about losing those extra pounds you gained during the holidays! I know it's time for me to get started.

Comments and questions regarding this newsletter (or anything else) are welcome. Send them along to [glendal@glensplace.com](mailto:glendal@glensplace.com).

Until next time, remember: No one gets to choose their lot in life but we can all choose what we build on it.

**Answer to Brain Teaser:** The letters are the first letters of the words in the question. Thus, the next two letters are A and W.