The WellFem-in-Law ®

A column on well-being for I.O.W.A.

®

Column #4-2002:

Dear I.O.W.A.:

SPRING…New Beginnings

Spring on the farm means calving time. Each year brings different challenges—some years it's all of the March snows that make extra work, other years it's the mud; and this year the March cold caused some of the babies to be really slow at getting up and some not get started nursing. And, as we well know, a calf that doesn't nurse doesn't live long. So, we made a lot of extra bottles to start babies and a lot of extra trips to the barn! It seems like every pen had a cow/calf pair this year… long days and long nights.

Our bottle baby is an abandoned twin—"Buddy," and I guess I am his mom. Every day I feed him 4 bottles on a regular schedule and let him out of his pen to run around to help develop his large muscles. When he was born, he must have been too crowded in the womb with the other twin, as his back legs didn't work right and he couldn't get up for quite a while. It took both my husband and I lifting and holding for him to finally get his back legs working. Even today when he was bouncing around, I could see that his one rear leg still is not as stable as it should be. I guess it is good that we are caring for him as he has every chance now to grow up to be a big strong calf.

One day for his exercise, I let him follow me across the driveway to my husband's mother's house. She is 87 years old. It has been a long time since she has petted a baby calf so she enjoyed this very much. "Buddy" actually came right up her sidewalk to her back steps. He's a cutie!

As we raise this calf baby, I am trying to figure out how to get him a chance to run and play with the other baby calves without their mothers kicking him or butting him too much. In another week I am hoping he'll be strong enough to try integrating him back with the herd. Meanwhile, I watch that we keep the gates all closed so that he doesn't just get out on the road. Even like two-legged toddlers, this four-legged baby does not know "Stop, Now!" In fact, when I step back and look at the situation, the socialization processes between species, two-legged and four-legged, are really remarkably similar!

With the annual renewal of life on the farm, each day brings change of some form. Yesterday I watched the early budding of our shrubs. I saw the bluebirds in the pasture so we stopped to clean out a bluebird box while on calf rounds. The geese are wanting some prairie grass for their floating nest—another matter urgently needing tending! And…it is time to put in those early onions, spinach, and lettuces.

Non-Meat Protein & Whole Wheat Tortilla Roll-ups

As I look at changes in my own life, I see some progress along with some challenges. On the nutrition side, I'm getting real used to having daily flax seed, especially ground. The benefits to the entire digestive system are really, really good!

It is worth the couple of minutes a day it takes to grind the flaxseed and incorporate it into something in the blender that I am making into a smoothie or for my salad topping.

Learning new non-meat protein sources continues to be a challenge. Recently I've been experimenting with hummus and ghanoush (eggplant w/ tahini). I like making a wheat flour tortilla, lightly browned in my stir fry skillet. Spread the tortilla with either the hummus or the ghanoush and crumble dried tomatoes over it. Spread that with some of the small variety greens chopped and some red onion. Fold the tortilla over and then roll it over tightly so it forms a snug square package. Cut it on a diagonal and enjoy! Serve either plain or with a salsa sauce of choice. I am going to experiment with some chutneys and see how they are as a complement and will report later on that. These filled tortillas are delicious, filling and nutritious meat substitutes.

Tagine anyone….?

I recently used the North African Tagine Clay Pot for the first time. It consists of a large, shallow base and a tall, conical lid. The food goes in the base. As it cooks, the moisture stays in the pot, making the dish very moist and delicious with flavor. These cooking pots are traditionally glazed clay earthenware. Some of the modern ones have a cast iron base, but mine does not. I took a nice sirloin steak and cut off every bit of the fat and then browned it in a skillet using a small amount of olive oil. Pepper the meat with freshly ground pepper. At the same time, in another skillet, I sautéed onions until lightly caramelized. Sprinkle the onions liberally with garlic salt. Place a layer of the onions in the bottom of the Tagine, add the steak pieces, and then another layer of the onions, along with a small can of mushrooms, drained, and about 4 oz. of roasted red peppers (these come in a jar, pre-roasted, hooray for us!) Put just a little water over all, not more than 1/8 cup. Bake in the oven at 300 degrees for 1 3/4 to 2 hours, but check at 1 1/2 to see how it is doing and make adjustments to cooking time as necessary and also check that the meat is staying nicely moist. It may be done already. I ended up with less than 1/8 cup of the most wonderful juices that we drizzled over our meat at mealtime. Serve this with a nice green salad, some steamed broccoli, and a small baked potato. My husband found this blending of flavors in the Tagine to be both interesting and satisfying to his taste buds, so I am encouraged to try more recipes in this clay pot. If you have a favorite clay pot recipe, please email me!

The downside to having one of these cooking pots is that they are indeed fragile and cannot be banged around like the good old cast iron skillets. So, I keep my Tagine stored separately away from all of my daily cooking utensils. However, it does clean up beautifully.

Lower Fat Pie Crust …that is flaky and delicious…

My favorite pie crust recipe which works smashingly well for Quiche and for pies and my favorite, "Apple Pizza," has 6 tbsp. Butter and 4 tbsp. Solid shortening. No lard! I use the health food store semi-solid canola, non-hydrogenated and it substitutes so well as the solid shortening, it is amazing. Use ice water. Roll out between waxed paper. Chill for a few minutes if it seems too sticky. This makes a flaky, wonderful crust. For years I wouldn't even

try to make pies or anything requiring a crust as I couldn't make a decent crust. Then I found this recipe in *Cooks Illustrated*, Sept / Oct 1994, page 8. I've been using it ever since and have found that it is even better with this non-hydrogenated canola spread as the solid shortening substitute. I also like to use 50 / 50 wheat flour for more fiber.

1 1 / 3 cup 50 / 50 wheat flour
1 tbsp. sugar
1 / 2 tsp. Salt
6 tbsp. Butter, cut into small pieces
4 tbsp. Solid shortening substitute (try the canola non-hydrogenated)
cut this in with a pastry cutter until nice and crumbly
4-5+ tbsp. ice water.

Use just enough ice water so you can take a fork and push the crust mixture into a "ball" and from there using your hands, gather it up and put it on the waxed paper, kind of incorporating the loose flour into the ball as you make it. Cover; chill a bit if you think it is too sticky or roll it out and chill a bit before removing the paper, if needed. Most of the time I find it works quite well to just roll it out between the sheets of waxed paper and put it directly then over the pan or dish, removing one side of the waxed paper first, then over turning it onto the pan and removing the other sheet of waxed paper.

This crust really holds a Quiche nicely and is great the next day warmed in the toaster oven.

On Spring and Exercise…

By now we are all out in our gardens and yards, busily getting everything planted for the new season. It is important for our body's production of Vitamin D that we get out into some sunshine as often as we can, daily if possible. We also need this exercise which puts gravity on to our bones, which is what walking does over biking. As I have been romping with the baby calf to give it (and me) exercise, it occurred to me that you could do the same thing, essentially, if you have kids or a dog. The kids and the dog will love it and you for the extra attention and your body will benefit the most from the movement, the deep breathing and cleansing of the lungs, as well as the overall relaxation that comes from simple play. All of this restores the soul. There is just something special about spending time with our kids and our pets in the simple activity of playing. No rules, no time lines, no competition, no winning, no losing… just playing. Good for all of us!

The world is a sacred vessel, which must not be tampered with or grabbed after.
Tao Teh Ching, No. 29.

Meanwhile, be good to yourself. ***Keep deep breathing****…new studies show a connection with weight loss. 'Til next time, when we'll explore more on body-mind-spirit issues affecting our health in "The WellFem-in-Law™" column.*

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