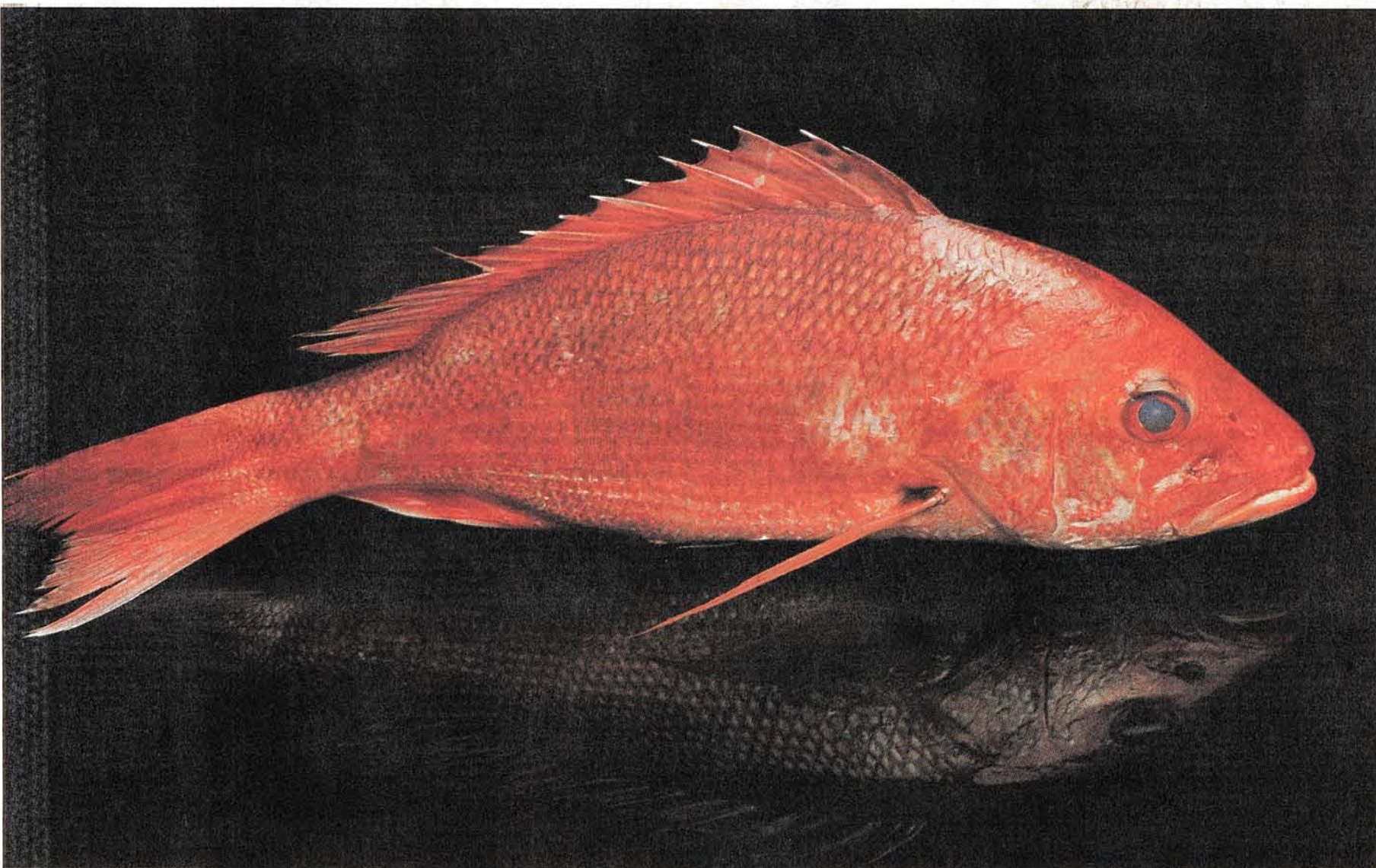


Food

CHINESE NEW YEAR



Jeff Thompson/Gazette Staff

Year of the Horse gallops in



Chinese New Year, determined by the lunar calendar, always is celebrated sometime between January 20 and February 20. It falls on the date of the second new moon after the winter solstice.

In ancient China, the New Year's celebration lasted for two weeks, until the Feast of the Lanterns, but the modern-day Chinese holiday officially lasts three days.

According to legend, the celebration began when a household deity returned to heaven and demanded that the emperor destroy the Earth because mankind had fallen into a sad state.

Other gods urged the emperor to visit Earth to see the conditions for himself. Forewarned, the people not only set their affairs straight but offered the god lavish food and drink as an atonement. The impressed ruler then called off the destruction.

In the Chinese Zodiac calendar, 1990 is the Year of the Horse. Traditionally it is considered a good year for businesses.

Those born in the Year of the Horse usually are cheerful, popular and smart with money, but may be too talkative and showy. They are wise, talented and good with their hands. Crowds, fun and action attract them.

Officially, the Chinese use the Gregorian calendar, in keeping with the rest of the nations. Celebration of the Chinese New Year is merely a tradition, Cuning Zheg, a spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said.

— Irene Wassell

There's nothing fishy about whole red snapper — available at American Fishermen's Market — as an entree for the Year of the Horse.

Fish is the dish for Chinese New Year

By Sarah Fritschner

Gannett News Service

The fish is to Chinese New Year what turkey is to Thanksgiving — the center of the table, the ultimate entree around which multifarious other dishes take their place to create a spread that is at once lavish and significant.

A whole fish, with head and tail intact, generally is served, according to Nina Simonds, author of "Chinese Seasons" (Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95). It is such a powerful symbol that some families won't eat the fish. Instead, they use a wooden fish as the centerpiece for the dinner and surround it with edible dishes.

But for those who want to eat their fish, not just look at it, one done in black bean sauce is as standard as fried chicken is in this country. You'll find it in nearly any Chinese cookbook.

Black beans are strongly flavored — a little goes a long way. But the wine, garlic and ginger complement the black beans and make an aromatic and unusual sauce.

Nina Simonds' Steamed Fish With Black Bean Sauce

For the Chinese, a whole fish represents bounty and abundance, and it is considered de rigeur for any special occasion. The head of the fish, as custom dictates,

See FISH/4F

By Irene Wassell
Gazette Staff

Chinese New Year's celebrations are a lot like Christmas ones.

"Families all get together to have a good meal and be happy," said Dereck Lee, a native of China.

Asked recently how he would celebrate the Chinese holiday, Lee said he would be hosting a party for 30 to 40 family and friends.

His father and mother will travel from California to celebrate with Lee and his sisters and brothers who also live here. Others included in the celebration will be the staff at the Royal Palace Chinese restaurant, where Lee is manager and part owner.

Though Lee, who has lived in this country for eight years, was born in Cambodia, his mother and father grew up in Canton, China, and they observed Chinese traditions.

"I remember as a child, one month before the New Year, we start getting ready. We clean house, buy new clothes, and decorate the house by putting up lucky signs," Lee said. "And for little kids, we always put money in little red envelopes."

It is important, he said, to give the children "brand new money so you don't dirty their hands."

He said he also remembers elaborate New Year's meals that often consisted of six or seven courses.

Lee's celebration this year probably won't include more than four courses, with items like roast duck, braised prawns, and black mushrooms sauteed with abalone, he said.

Danny Sun, who was born in northern China but grew up in Taiwan, said he remembers New Year's Day

as a special time for children.

The mothers always cooked dumplings, enclosing a coin in just one of them. The child who found the coin supposedly would have good luck all year. The mothers would try subtly to help their child select the coin-filled dumpling, said Sun, manager and co-owner of Hunan Chinese restaurant, 2924 South University Ave.

There always was a good party with children and ladies wearing their best clothes, Sun said.

Housewives always did their best to make everything better than usual, Sun said.

"Where I was born in northern China, it was a very poor village, and we didn't have

See CHINESE/4F



W. L. "Pat" Patterson/Gazette Staff

Guo tie nestle on Blue Canton china by Mottahedeh from Fifth Season. Chopstick rest is from Kazuko Oriental Arts.

Try these little dumplings

Chinese fried dumplings, known as *guo tie* but commonly called *pot stickers*, are the result of a cooking catastrophe.

They were discovered when a cook in the Chinese Imperial Palace kitchens was making boiled dumplings and neglected to check them, according to Gary Lee in his *Chinese Tasty Tales Cookbook*.

The water in the dumpling pot had evaporated, leaving the dumpling bottoms fried to a crusty brown. In desperation, the cook served them anyway. The new taste was met with such astonishing enthusiasm that it became a new way of preparing them.

The dumplings, filled with meat sauce, are first pan-fried and then steamed with a little water. The tops are soft, but the bottoms become a crisp golden brown. Because the inside is juicy, it is suggested that, when eating them, they be picked up with chopsticks and transferred to a soup spoon so none of the juice is lost when biting into them.

It takes an hour or two to prepare *guo tie*, but they may be assembled ahead of cooking time and refrigerated, or frozen for later use. Using store-bought wrappers will save a good portion of preparation time.

The following fried dumpling recipe, with slight modifications, is from "Florence Lin's Complete Book of Chinese Noodles, Dumplings and Breads."

Fried Dumplings, Beijing-style

Guo Tie Dough:
2 cups all-purpose flour

See DUMPLINGS/4F



1 After cutting and flattening the dough, use a rolling pin to make 3-inch circles.



2 Place about 1 tablespoon of the beef filling in the center of a round of dough.



3 Fold the dough in half to cover the filling and press down the edges to seal.



4 Pleat the edge by pressing it at intervals between the thumb and index finger.



5 Place in a hot skillet to lightly brown, steam, then crisp to a golden color.

Food groups become fun groups

By John Tanasychuk
Knight News Service

If we try really hard we can all remember, of course, the basic four food groups: meat, fish and poultry; dairy; fruit and vegetables; bread and grains.

But when the *Village Voice* recently asked the question of Mojo Nixon, creator of the rock classic "Debbie Gibson is Pregnant With My Two-Headed Love Child," here's what he said:

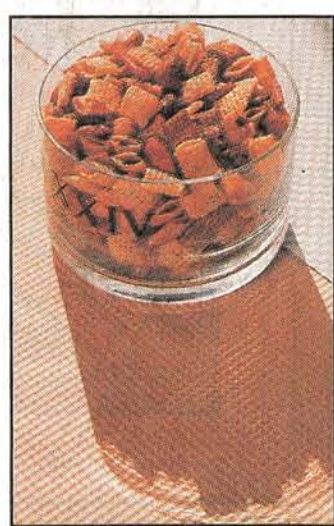
"You got your Orange Group. That's Cheez-its, Cheese Nips, toasted cheese and carrots on

religious holidays, y'know, like Elvis' birthday and whenever Otis the Drunk appeared on "Andy of Mayberry."

"Then there's the Green Group. Mountain Dew, Sundrop, Gatorade, green Jell-O, green Slurpees. That's all your Green Group there.

"Then there's your Clear Group. Gin, vodka, moonshine. Oh, I forgot to say, under Green is Tanqueray.

"The Red Group is barbecue, all barbecue sauce, especially pork ribs. You got Redd Foxx and Otis Redding to feed your soul, under the Red Group."



Super treat: See how it Chex out

By Marilyn Myers
Gazette Staff

Would you believe it? About 110 million people will be watching Super Bowl XXIV this Sunday.

And most of them will be keeping their hands occupied snacking.

What else is there to do?

Bowled over with sweet treats in dish — that comes minus the Roman numerals — from Fifth Season.

W. L. "Pat" Patterson/Gazette Staff

Besides, the crunch of eating crispy things — popcorn, tortilla chips, pretzels, potato chips — blends in nicely with the crunch of helmets smashing against shoulder pads.

For this national holiday, you can, of course, simply buy bags of already prepared items.

But for those who want to put in a little extra effort and make something positively marvelous, I'd like to encourage you to consider this sweetened alternative to the traditional Chex snack mixture that has been

around for decades.

It uses a blend of butter (and I'd encourage you to use the real item that comes from a cow for the best flavor) and brown sugar poured over a trio of my favorite Chex cereals and a threesome of my most adored nuts.

The whole passel then gets toasted in the oven and comes out even more crisp and divine.

Best of all, this can be made ahead of time and stored in a metal tin — though you might want to tuck it out of sight to avoid random snacking ahead of

See CHEX/4F