



Karen Anderson

## Pardon me, but can you spare a dollop of fig-peppermint-lime sauce?

*Club Columnist Karen Anderson spent the holidays whipping up a bevy of dishes for friends and family. But now, the time has come to get rid of all that “weird food” still sitting in the cabinets and refrigerator.*

At our house, there are two very different kinds of food.

I’m not talking about high-fat or low-fat, high-carb or low-carb, or even vegetarian or “non-veggie.” And it’s not a question of junk foods versus health foods or ethnic cuisine versus just-like-Grandma-made-it comfort foods.

The big difference at our house is between real food and weird food.

Real food is the kind we eat or cook with every day. It’s pasta, cereal, eggs, tuna, greens, carrots, onions, soups, butter, bread, milk, yogurt, cheeses, apples, oranges, bananas, coffee, tea, sugar and, of course, chocolate. In the summer, add tomatoes, peaches, grapes and berries.

By contrast, weird food is the kind that sits at the back of our kitchen cabinets or in the bottom of the refrigerator. It’s important to have it there in case I’m overcome some day with the urge to oven-roast a goat shoulder in fig-peppermint-lime sauce.

The winter holidays are prime weird food season, and this year we really took a hit: We received chocolate bars filled with jalapeno peppers, violet-flavored mustard, orange-peel-infused balsamic vinegar, and candied chestnut paste. I understand from reading gourmet-cooking magazines that we were lucky not to have received such weird food delicacies as baked tarantula, cheese nacho mints, and Sumatran civet coffee.

Unfortunately, not all of the weird food cluttering up our cabinets can be blamed on our foodie friends. Quite a bit of it got here because we bought it – probably after reading some exotic recipe in the Sunday newspaper.

So now our cabinets are stuffed with dried lily buds, chickpea flour, cream of tartar, pickled beets, powdered meringue, and something called “liquid aminos” that I bought on the advice of a health food fanatic friend. The stuff looks like blackstrap molasses with an attitude. No one has the nerve to open that bottle.

While I’m trying to figure out what to do with the weird food, it’s recruiting more weird items. Soon there is no room for my cans of tuna, my bottles of milk, or the leftover roast chicken. I try to ignore it, but last week we’d reached the breaking point. I opened the cabinet, the weird food shoved from behind, and a big can of pear tomatoes fell on my toes.

Ouch! It was time to fight back. I emptied the shelves and marveled at our collection of truly weird food.

We had seven bottles of blueberry jam, fourteen boxes of herbal teas with names like “Fuzzy Sleepy Teddy Bear,” nine containers of rancid nuts, and an ancient plastic bag filled with something that might have been bulgur wheat, steel-cut oats, or that trendy grain that no one can pronounce. There were tapenades, caponatas, flavorings, rubs, dips, marinades, and a chutney with a caution label that read: “Serve with fire extinguisher.” There was an herb mix in an artsy, asymmetrical bottle with a list of ingredients that started with “pre-tenation.”

It took me the better part of the afternoon to get rid of all that weird food. The outdated items I opened with caution and dumped in the compost. Those few items that still qualified as edible I put in a box and gave to the Scholarly Gentleman. He dropped them off at the food bank on his way to the grocery store.

By the time he got back with the groceries, our normal food was back in the cabinets and I was enjoying a cup of plain black tea. He

turned on the oven and started to unwrap a roast.

“What are you making?” I asked.

“I thought I’d try that recipe for oven-roasted goat shoulder,” he said. “Hand me the bottle of fig-peppermint-lime sauce, would you?”

