

MILLE COPIES

in the kitchen

they're not fancy, but they
are the ideal source for a
no-fail menu

peanut butter pie

½ cup chunky peanut
butter
4 ounces cream
cheese, softened
¼ cup powdered sugar
1 tub (8 ounces) of
Cool Whip, thawed
1 chocolate piecrust
Chocolate shavings

Mix all ingredients
together by hand.
Pour into crust.
Freeze and remove 30
minutes before serving.
Garnish with chocolate
shavings. Serves 8.
from *Desert Treasures*,
Junior League of Phoenix,
Arizona

junior-league cookbooks, major-league meals

You've plundered the *Joy of Cooking* and had all you can take of arugula, chèvre and Martha Stewart's omelettes-for-60. That's when it's time to get your mitts on a junior-league cookbook, one of America's best-kept (and best-loved) secrets.

For those who have heard of junior leagues, but always thought they referred to a young-persons' baseball team, some background: These are actually traditional, long-established women's organizations, found in towns across the country, that concentrate primarily on community-service projects. The cookbooks—to which members contribute recipes and vast amounts of testing time—are a primary source of fundraising. They don't look like much: Most are bound with plastic rings; a few take the more elegant approach of including photographs. But the biggest difference between junior-league cookbooks and the regular kind lies in the fact that the junior-leagues are filled with recipes that have been handed down from generation to generation, are consistently great-tasting and are easy for even the novice to prepare. (They haven't much regard for current health trends, though; salt, Crisco, MSG, canned fried onions and bacon show up frequently.)

Cooking from these books does mean putting aside any attachment to current chic and being open to the idea of Campbell's soup as a respectable flavoring. The results, however, are well worth any embarrassment. I have relied on something known as Cheesy Broccoli Bake for years and, until recently, have fought off the relatives who asked for the recipe—mostly because it contains shameful amounts of sour cream, eggs, mayonnaise and Cheddar (and the requisite can of Campbell's). But when I saw my mother, a confirmed gourmet cook, quietly jotting the recipe down, I stopped feeling like Roseanne.

On the upside, it's becoming quite stylish to prepare homey, substantial dishes these days. In fact, savory slabs of meat loaf, green-bean casseroles and pies rich with Cool Whip (a version of which we include on this page) are currently flooding the tables of better restaurants. The thing is, the trend will last only a few years; and while food faddists will go on to the next craze, junior-leaguers will be happily oblivious, churning out volume after volume of recipes that have nothing whatsoever to do with arugula.

For those who rather enjoy the subject of food, junior-league cookbooks also make for an amusing read. Many of them feature chatty, unpretentious how-to sections, often with the flavor of the town from which the book originated (my volume—from Lake Charles, Louisiana—spends a lot of time talking about gumbo). You'll also get a kick out of the contributors' names: generally something along the lines of "Mrs. Herbert (Buffy) LaCrosse III." To obtain a copy of your local junior-league cookbook, simply call the organization in your area. For out-of-town editions, contact the Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc., in New York City (212-683-1515). For additional recipes, see page 210.

—Hillary Michael Quinn

