



THE LEGENDARY EDEN FOODS CHAPATI

By Michael Erlewine

This blog is about food in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and a particular food that I not only like, but if I had to take one food with me to a deserted island, I would take the Eden Chapati, meaning the particular lunch food that Eden Foods in Ann Arbor offered for just a few years when they ran a food and lunch business off a little alley at 330 Maynard St.

I'm talking here about a simple whole-wheat sourdough chapati filled with vegetables that, of all

the foods eaten by me in my lifetime, this food comes to mind more often than anything I have ever eaten. If I ever go to Heaven, so to speak, this is what I would ask for at the Heavenly Lunch counter.

And I have spent many moments remembering the Eden's Chapati, a sourdough, open flame-scorched sesame-studded chapati filled with veggies and a creamy Tahini dressing. For me, it does not get better than that. And after some years of looking, I managed to actually find the recipe for the Eden Chapati and its filling, which I want to share here so it does not vanish from this world.

Here are some notes from Michael Potter, the founder of this branch of Eden Foods and a longtime friend, in his words:

"I founded, built, staffed, opened, and ran Eden at 330 Maynard St. The sourdough, open flame cooked chapati itself was brought back to Ann Arbor from Toronto, Canada by a friend who joined our team. His name was Mark Cook and he developed most of the chapati filling recipes. If an individual callout is made about the Eden chapati, it should go to Mark Cook." Original Eden Foods logo designed by Michael Erlewine.

"We used fresh stoneground hard red Spring wheat flour. Sourdough starter we acquired from a natural foods bakery in Toronto. They had brought it from Europe. It was passed forward into daily batches by adding a reserved clump of the day before's sourdough."

“The dough was left overnight in warm spot to sour. It would puff up, so the first thing you did in the morning was punch it to release the built-up carbon dioxide.”

“The dough was removed from the batch for each chapati and formed into a ball, rolled out flat, and the round sprinkled with sesame seed, put on a stovetop gas burner to cook it, flip it over at just the right moment to do the other side.”

“Timing and flip sequences had to be mastered so the chapati would puff and separate to the edges with equal thickness on each side. When done, they were set aside to cool. To use them, the edge was cut off to have a deep pocketed, sourdough chapati to fill.”

At some point Michael Potter sold the Eden Lunch part to Tim Redmond and Betsey and Peter Murray. And there were a few other people from the Boston macrobiotic community. But at that time the warehouse and the restaurant/store pretty much parted ways.

Michael Potter writes: “It was not too much later that one day several years later a couple guys from Saudi Arabia walked in and offered to buy the Restaurant and store and Tim and Peter said yes! C’est la vie. That was around 1984?”

THE CHAPATI RECIPE INSTRUCTIONS - FOR 20 CHAPATIS

A baker would understand the ratio as 100% flour hard-red winter wheat, 75% water (room temp) and 2% (or no) salt. To translate this for a home baker, we concluded:

You will also need:

- Enough sesame seeds to coat the chapati.
- Cornmeal for rolling the dough out.
- 35.3 ounces (1000 grams) flour.
- 26.5 ounces (750 grams) Water
- 0.705 ounces (20 grams) Salt (I would use none)

In a mixer stand:

- Mix flour and salt.
- Add water and beat on low speed for 2 minutes.
- Increase speed to high and beat 10 minutes.
- You will need to add the sourdough mother or starter.

- 1. Divide resulting dough into 20 pieces, 2.8 oz (80 grams) each.
 2. Then roll each piece in sesame seeds to fully coat.
 3. At this stage (or BEFORE dividing into pieces), cover with cloth and let sit overnight.
 4. In the morning, after spreading cornmeal on a board, take a rolling pin and roll each piece flat into 6-inch circles.
 5. Heat a grill, pan, or griddle to medium-high heat.
 6. Place each chapati piece on the flat grill or pan and roast it lightly.
 7. Flip when firm (edges won't droop if center is lifted with spatula)

8. Then grill the other side to the same amount of doneness.

9. After which, using tongs, move the chapati onto a low gas flame, with first-grilled side facing down.

10. When air bubbles form, turn heat up full, and flip over with tongs and hopefully it will fill like a balloon with air. [No one gets it right the first couple of tries. It is a skill learned with practice.]

11. The grill should barely toast cornmeal and pop sesame seeds.

12. If a hole forms in the dough, use tongs to clamp down the hole so the rest of dough can fill with air.

13. When done with the chapati, cooked and a little scorched by the flame, cut off a thin edge (1/3 of the chapati) in order to stuff with sandwich fillings. What I liked I believe was called a “Creamy.”

Note: If left out, these pieces of raw dough dry out quickly. Cover tightly and use within 3 days.

CREAMIES FILLING RECIPE AND INSTRUCTIONS –

This should make 4-6 servings.

Eden food’s recipe from about 1974, made every day:
You will need:

- 2 onions sliced.
- 1/2 head med. sized cabbage, sliced.

- 1 butternut squash peeled and cut into large cubes.
- 1/2 rutabaga (or other hard squash or sweet potatoes), peeled and cubed.
- 2 Tablespoons oil, salt to taste

Cooking the filling:

1. Place all ingredients in a heavy bottomed pan.
2. Turn stove on medium high heat and stir, paying attention until liquid forms from the veggies. If needed, add small amount of water to prevent sticking.
3. Lower heat, cover, and let cook until squash is very soft, about 45-60 minutes.
4. Remove from heat and stir briskly until squash has mashed.
5. And then to the veggie mixture was added 1/2 cup cooked bulgur. It just absorbs the liquid so it makes a thicker filling for a chapati. Wet fillings would be a mess and leak out. [Michael Potter says the bulgar was never used when they started serving the Eden Chapati.]
6. Then stir together 1/3-1/2 cup tahini and 1/4 cup tamari (use less tamari if you want to have lower salt).
7. Add this while the veggies are hot and stir well. Adjust taste to your liking.

Most of the above recipe was provided by the kindness of Betsey Murray Ready. Thank You!

Betsey Ready writes some addition comments:

"I worked at Eden's from 1976-1982. When I arrived the basement on Maynard street was shared by Sun Bakery run by Nick Boots. They made the chapatis for several years. Besides a huge Hobart mixer for the dough, there was a conical machine that took the small dough chunks (cut and weighed) and turned them into perfect balls."



Basic Vegies for the Eden Chapati



Cooking it down



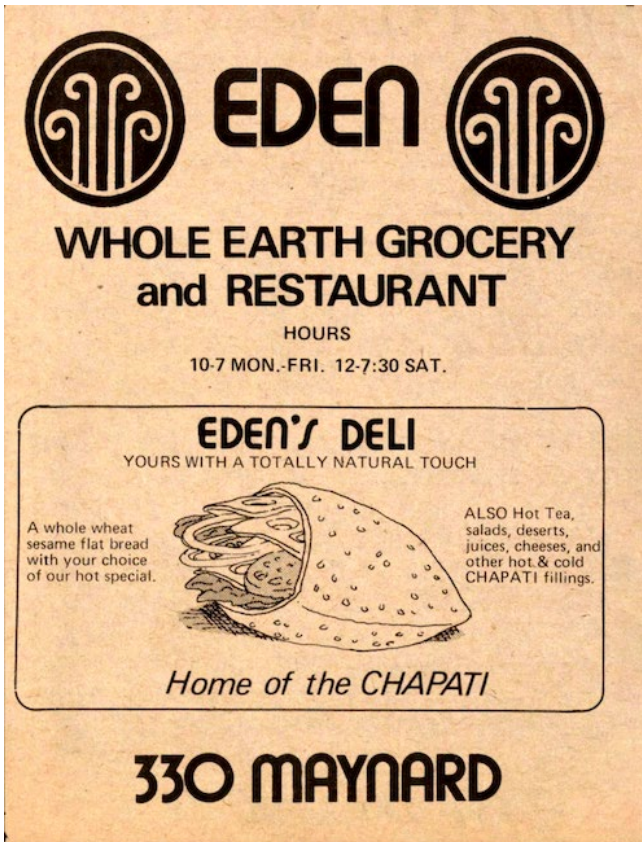
Open Flame Cooking



Tahini and Tamari



Putting it Together



Eden Whole Earth Grocery and Restaurant, and the original logo and poster Michael Erlewine created for them back in 1969.

"These were hand rolled into sesame seeds. Then another machine flattened the balls into disks. I believe, like a pasta machine does, and each ball went through the machine 3 times, each iteration making it flatter. And so ,it was a long process before the disks made it to the flame. It was also noisy.

My guess was a daily batch was 180 chapatis. 6 days a week. For a while the menu had 6 numbered chapatis of cold fillings and 4 hot fillings. The hot fillings were Rice and Veggies, 'Creamies', plus daily specials of a vegan casserole and a cheese casserole."

The 'cold' chapatis were:

- 1) Hummus, lettuce, tomato
- 2) Cheese, lettuce, tomato, mayo
- 3) Hummus lettuce, tomato, cucumber (or sprouts)
- 4) Cheese, lettuce, tomato, cucumber (or sprouts)
- 5) Herb cream cheese, lettuce, cucumber
- 6) The complete protein: mayo, hummus, cheese, lettuce, tomato, sprouts

(Another version, which I never tried was the famous 'Eden Chapati #4', with mayo, hummus, Munster cheese, tomato and lettuce and sprouts. I never tired of the 'Creamies'. -Michael Erlewine)

Betsey Ready continues, "The Number 6 was the most popular. When Sun Bakery moved to their own building, several awesome guys became Chapati makers. During my years there, Tom Kenney and Tom Yeager were especially dedicated. It was a hot job to stand in front of the stove and cook them all. I remember a day after the fall time change, that 'TK' forgot about the time change so missed his bus and we didn't have any Chapatis to start the lunch rush. Many disappointed customers that day."

"There was a newspaper article about Madonna's time living in Ann Arbor and it listed the places she had lived and frequented. Edens was her favorite place to eat. Small claim to fame."

I want to thank Michael Potter and Betsey Murray Ready for providing much of the information shared here. May the Eden Chapati long live and be available, as mentioned, probably my favorite food memory, ever.