

RECIPES FOR LEAVING HOME

by

C. Michel Boucher

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After cooking for my family for ten years or more (my wife does not cook but she bakes well) I proposed, as the children were heading into their mid-teens, to show them how to cook a dozen simple and variegated meals to their taste from my repertoire of family favourites.

My cooking principles are simple: a meal must be nutritious, easy to prepare and take rarely more than 30 minutes of your time. It must also not require extensive equipment or very odd ingredients. It must be favourable and easily adapted to changing resources.

One of our most fundamental bases is beans: red kidney beans, black beans, chick peas, romano beans, lentils. We eat little meat, mostly chicken or fish, although now and again I will cook some pork or lean beef.

I have reduced salt to almost nothing in our diet by a judicious use of spices. After years of trying to cook food that was either too high in meat content or too bland, I opted for Indian cuisine as a standard. The level of taste which spice mixtures such as *garam masala* provide far outweighs any such western standards as salt and pepper, although they also have their place.

So, in this project, the purpose was to create twelve dishes that each child could learn to cook with few implements and that would provide nutrition and taste.

IMPLEMENTS

To begin with, a kitchen must be stocked with basic tools:

- a stove
- a proper frying pan (two of different sizes would be better)
- a cooking pot
- a 10 litre cooking pot
- a large metal spoon
- a few wooden spoons
- a small (deep) and a large (shallow) baking disk (preferably Pyrex)
- a slotted spoon
- two good knives and two cutting boards
- a sharpening stone
- a large strainer

On the matter of the frying pan, the subject is open for discussion. Some prefer pans with a non-stick coating. Myself, I prefer cast iron. It has numerous advantages inasmuch as it never wears out and requires little maintenance (save scraping) and can be used also as an open oven dish with no deleterious side effects.

INGREDIENTS

Some things are always worth having at almost any price:

- extra virgin olive oil (not for frying but for flavouring)
- regular low hydrogenated fat cooking oil (canola is best)
- *garam masala*
- dal (small lentils, either yellow, orange or dark brown, I prefer dark brown)
- asafoetida
- fresh ginger root
- coriander seed
- cumin seed
- mustard seed
- red pepper flakes
- chili powder
- black peppercorns
- white pepper, ground
- chinese egg noodles
- canned beans and chick peas (much less trouble than cooking and freezing portions)
- canned tomatoes (28 oz. size)
- red onions, small yellow onions
- garlic (lots)

It must be noted here that the notion that cooking by beginners is tasteless and overdone comes from the fact that basic knowledge about cooking is rarely imparted to them properly so that young people leaving home have few nuggets of wisdom regarding nutrition and usually end up making Kraft Mac'n'Cheese (not that there's anything wrong with that! :-)).

Some things you have to shop for, and anything canned can be had at a reasonable price if bought in sufficient quantities. The point is not to buy the cheapest, but to buy the best that you can afford. Food, after all, is more than just a basic need; it has a social function. Unless you eat alone all the time, you want to be able to prepare food that will interest those eating it to come back (or offer similar fare in return).

TERMS

All measurements are in Imperial standard as these are still widely in use in Canada along with the metric standard, but conversion tables can easily be found. Basic measurements are:

- 1 lb. - 450 gm
- 1 cup (8 oz.) - 250 ml
- 1 tbsp. - 15 ml
- 1 tsp. - 5 ml.
- 1 can 14 oz. (fluid) - 380 ml (approx)
- 1 can 28 oz. (fluid) - 760 ml (approx)

Many measurements can be approximated and don't need to be on the button. A few ml's one way or the other won't make any significant difference.

Wilt: Wilting is similar to softening, but not cooking until the colour changes significantly. On high heat, onion will wilt in less than two minutes. If there is a danger of burning, it is preferable to remove the pan from the heat while finishing the preparation of other ingredients.

Mince: Cut as finely as possible. The best method involves cutting first in a lengthwise fashion in as many small strips as possible, then cross-cutting into very small pieces. When doing this with garlic, it is easier if the garlic clove has been cut in two, and possibly again in two if it is very large.

Slice: In this text, I have used slice as a measurement for ginger. What I mean is a slice about 0.5cm thick and not much more in diameter than 2cm.

Add water to cover: This does not mean to add water to the top of the pot, but rather to cover the vegetables or whatever is in the pot (and generally no more).

Rice: There are two ways of cooking rice: a. until it has absorbed ALL the water, or b. *à grande eau*. The first means that exact measurements of rice and water are necessary, it being 2 volumes of water for one volume of rice (slightly more water if you are cooking brown rice, 2.25 volumes). The rice is added to the boiling water and let to simmer for 15 minutes in the case of white rice and 45 minutes in the case of brown rice. Cooking rice *à grande eau* is a process which makes rice tender. Using a large volume of water (considerably more than 2/1 ratio) the rice is added to the boiling water and cooked for 15 to 30 minutes depending. The rice is then removed from the water. Rice cooked in this fashion can be used for rice pudding, but is also good for eating straight.

RECIPES

1. PEA SOUP

This is the easiest and best if made in large quantities. It can be frozen. The proportions are simple:

15 cups of water
1 lb. of yellow split peas
1 large onion chopped
1 large carrot grated

Boil water, add peas, onion and carrot, reduce to simmer, cook for three hours.

This soup calls for salt and white pepper for flavouring. The soup is best if allowed to sit for a day in the fridge. It will be watery if served right away, much thicker if reheated and served on the second or some other day. Best if served with a hearty black bread such as a dark rye or pumpernickle.

To make larger quantities, just increase the ingredients in proportion. I have made as much as 45 cups at one time with no loss of quality. This dish is made with no fat whatsoever.

2. FAJITAS AND REFRIED BEANS

These can be made with chicken or beef, generally white meat for the chicken and a single sirloin steak for the beef. The quantity of meat is based on taste; for chicken, two medium-sized half breasts would be ample for four persons, or about half an lb.

1 quantity of meat, cut in strips
1 large red pepper, cut in strips
1 large green pepper, cut in strips
1 medium onion cut in slices
Worcestershire sauce
3 tbsp. fruity steak sauce such as PC Steak and Barbecue sauce
soya sauce
1 tbsp. cooking oil
flour tortillas

Wilt onion in heavy frying pan on high heat, add meat and cook until it is no longer pink. Generously sprinkle Worcestershire sauce on meat and allow to evaporate, add soya sauce until the meat had changed colour to a dark brown, add the fruity steak sauce, mix. Add the peppers and let cook for one or two minutes to allow the peppers to soften slightly. Serve with sour cream and salsa.

If you increase the amount of peppers, you can reduce the amount of meat.

REFRIED BEANS

1 19 oz. can romano or pinto beans, washed (you can also use red kidney beans or black beans)
1 onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
chili powder or *garam masala*
1 tbsp cooking oil

In a smaller frying pan, heat oil and add onion and garlic. Sprinkle chili powder or *garam masala* to the onion and mix well. When onion has begun to wilt, add beans, mash with a fork, mix well, let cook on slow simmer for about ten minutes to evaporate the water. Serve with fajitas or as a side dish.

3. COWBOY PIE

This is a variation on shepherd's pie (it has beef, not lamb).

1 lb. ground beef, lean
1 medium onion, chopped
1 large green pepper, cut in small pieces
2 large potatoes, boiled and mashed
1 can 14 oz. creamed corn
cooking oil
barbecue sauce

Wilt the onion in a small amount of oil, brown the beef, season with barbecue sauce, transfer to oven dish (should fill no more than 50%). Add green pepper, mix, top with creamed corn, top corn with mashed potatoes. Bake in oven for 30 minutes at 350° F. Serve with salad.

4. RICE AND BEANS

This is a great leftover dish for lunches, eaten hot or cold.

6 cups of cooked rice (basmati is best)
1 large onion, chopped
2 large cloves of garlic, chopped
slice of ginger root, peeled and minced
2 19 oz. cans of beans (black or kidney), washed
1 jar of prepared tomato sauce
garam masala
cooking oil
parmesan cheese

Wilt the onion, garlic and ginger in the oil. Sprinkle *garam masala* to taste. Add beans and mix to flavour. Spread rice in large oven dish, cover with beans mixture and mix in small amounts of the tomato sauce, enough to colour the rice. This should be done gradually to achieve the colouring effect. The tomato sauce will also prevent the rice from drying out in the fridge as you will have leftovers, unless you have invited friends and they were VERY hungry. This should use half a 1 litre jar of tomato sauce.

Sprinkle with parmesan, bake in oven for twenty-five to thirty minutes at 350° F.

5. EGGPLANT MUSHY

I'm sure this has a name. I've eaten something very much like it in my local Lebanese fast food restaurant.

1 medium onion, halved and sliced
2 cloves garlic, crushed and sliced
slice ginger root, peeled and minced
cooking oil
2 large eggplants, dégorgé, skinned and cubed
1 jar prepared tomato sauce
garam masala
1 19 oz. can of chick peas, washed
1 fresh red bell pepper, sliced and cut into smaller strips

Slice, skin the eggplant, and set in salted water.

Wilt the onion, ginger and garlic in the oil. Sprinkle *garam masala* to taste. Cube the eggplant slices, add to the pan and cook until almost darkened and soft. Add tomato sauce to mix, without overpowering the eggplant (i.e. do it gradually). Let cook for a few minutes, add chick peas, mix well, and let cook again for a few minutes. Add peppers, cook again for two minutes.

Can be eaten cold or hot, with fresh pita bread. Serve with a salad if you wish to make a meal of it.

6. OVEN CHICKEN

This is where a cast iron frying pan comes in handy.

Chicken breasts, skinned and boned and trimmed

1 medium onion, sliced

garam masala

1 clove garlic, crushed and sliced

slice ginger root, peeled and minced

cooking oil

1 jar prepared tomato sauce

1 jar extra chunky salsa, mild

Wilt the onion, ginger and garlic in the oil. Sprinkle *garam masala* to taste. Lay the pieces of chicken on the sliced onions and let them begin to brown. Turn them over. When at least 75% of the surface has changed colour, pour on tomato sauce mixed with chunky salsa, enough to cover the chicken. Place in 350° F oven for twenty-five to thirty minutes.

Serve with a salad.

7. SPICY CHICK PEAS WITH COUSCOUS

2 cups instant couscous, cooked (follow directions)

1 19 oz. can chick peas

1 clove garlic, crushed and sliced

1 small onion, chopped

garam masala

cooking oil

Wilt onion and garlic in oil. Sprinkle *garam masala* to taste. Add chick peas and mix well to flavour.

Fluff the couscous with a tablespoon of butter or margarine.

Serve hot.

8. BAKED SQUASH WITH SPICY TOMATO SAUCE

1 large squash, cut into large pieces

1 28 oz. can of diced tomatoes

1 medium onion, chopped

2 cloves garlic, crushed and sliced

slice ginger root, peeled and minced

1 19 oz. can chick peas

cooking oil

garam masala

1 red bell pepper, sliced in strips

Bake the squash pieces with the skin on until they are tender.

Wilt onion, ginger and garlic in oil. Sprinkle *garam masala* to taste. Add can of tomatoes, reduce on high heat, ensuring that it does not stick to the pan, until it has a thick consistency. Add chick peas, mix to flavour. Add red bell pepper and let cook another two minutes.

Skin cooked squash and cut into pieces on plate. Spoon tomato sauce onto squash pieces.

9. LEEK SOUP

1 very large, or two medium leeks, sliced thin (white and tender green portion)
1 potato diced
1 small onion, chopped
chicken bouillon (either canned or dry, dry retains a nice colour)
cooking oil
ground sage
salt
white pepper

Wilt the leeks, onion and potato in the oil. Add bouillon to cover and a bit more. Flavour with salt, white pepper and ground sage. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook for twenty minutes.

10. SPICY POTATOES

3 or 4 large potatoes, diced
1 large onion
cooking oil
garam masala or chili powder

Microwave the potatoes and onions mixed with a drizzle of oil, 5 to 10 minutes on high heat, depending on amount. Transfer the cooked mixture to a frying pan, sprinkle selected spice over the mixture, mix well and roast gently on low-medium heat until the desired colour. Do not add oil unless the potatoes are drying out and then only a slight drizzle to moisten the pan. Certain types of potato are mealier and absorb oil faster. This is a judgment call. For best results, use Yukon Gold potatoes. You can also combine various amounts of potato and yam or sweet potato for different taste and texture.

Serve with meat or vegetable dishes.

11. ALL-PURPOSE PROTEIN MEAL

1 19 oz. can beans (red kidney, black, romano, whatever you prefer)
1/2 28 oz. can of diced tomatoes
1 medium onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, crushed and sliced
slice ginger root, peeled and minced
garam masala
cooking oil

Wilt onion, ginger and garlic in oil. Sprinkle with *garam masala* to taste. Add tomatoes and reduce until thickened. Add beans to flavour, cook on low heat for a few minutes. Serve with plain rice.

I use fresh tomatoes in the summertime. Quarter two large tomatoes, microwave for five minutes and remove skin with a knife and fork, taking care to leave as much of the flesh as possible. Use as you would canned tomatoes, except that you should mash them with a fork as well.

12. DAL

Dal is all-purpose food. It is usually served on basmati rice.

4 cups of water
4 oz. (volume) dal, brown dal gives the richest colour
1 small onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
slice ginger root, peeled and minced
cooking oil
1 tsp. mustard seeds
garam masala
1 large fresh tomato, chopped
asafoetida

Cook the dal in the boiling water for 20 minutes or until tender.

Sauté the mustard seeds in oil, add the onion and garlic and wilt, flavour with *garam masala* and a pinch of asafoetida. Add the tomato and cook briefly. Dump mixture into the dal.

Serve on hot basmati rice.

13. INDIAN QUICK BREAD

4 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup cold water
1 egg, beaten
1 tsp. salt

Mix everything until you get a lump. Knead the lump on a floured surface to make it smooth. Separate the lump into twelve equal portions. Form each into a ball, let stand for thirty minutes.

Oil surface, spread the ball out with fingers until it is as thin as it can get. Fold back in the shape of an accordion and roll. Perform same action on each ball.

Take a roll and flatten with your palm until it is about 6 inches in diameter. Make all rolls as flat cakes. Sauté flat cakes in frying pan with a small amount of oil. Serve with dal, or with spicy or savoury sauces.

14. OVEN-BAKED SPINACH

Make a béchamel. Flavour with paprika and a pinch of ground cloves.

Take one package of fresh spinach, cull out the questionable parts and cook down the spinach in a covered pot until it is soft. This does not require water. Mix spinach and béchamel, using some of the spinach liquid. Cover with bread crumbs, dot with butter.

Bake uncovered in 350° F oven for thirty minutes. Serve as a side dish.

BÉCHAMEL

Also known as white sauce.

1 cup milk
2 tbsp. butter
2 tbsp. all-purpose flour

Melt butter in saucepan, add flour and whisk. Let it cook a minute or so. Add milk. Mix well with whisk, cook for a few minutes until thickened. A béchamel can be

- a. Thicker - use more flour and butter (1/2 tbsp. of each)
- b. Thinner - use more milk (1/2 cup more)

Flavour the béchamel with your choice of salt, pepper, curry powder, sage, or whatever strikes your fancy. For a slightly more pronounced taste, add a small chopped onion to the butter and wilt it before adding the flour.

15. QUICK CABBAGE SOUP / QUICK TOMATO SOUP

1 small cabbage, cut in small strips
1 medium onion, chopped
1 tbsp butter
1 small handful of quick cooking oatmeal
salt
pepper
whole milk

Melt butter in saucepan, add cabbage and onion, wilt cabbage slightly. Add water to cover, season to taste, let simmer 15 minutes or so, until cabbage is cooked, but still slightly crunchy. Add handful of oatmeal and simmer another five minutes for the oatmeal to cook.

Add milk gradually to the soup until it has a nice rich milky colour. Serve hot.

A variant on this is **QUICK TOMATO SOUP**. Replace the cabbage with a 28 oz. can of whole tomatoes. Once the tomatoes are broken up (a matter of a few minutes), add the oatmeal. Simmer for 5 minutes then add the milk. The soup will have a pinkish colour. You can put this soup in the blender and make it into a purée if you prefer. Serve with saltines.

16. CHICKEN WITH GARLIC NOODLES

This has been a family favourite for a long time. This is a fairly rich recipe so it's not on our standard menu anymore, but I still make it from time to time.

1 large chicken breast (all white) cut into small pieces (easiest if the meat is defrosting)
1 medium onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
cooked spaghetti noodles for 4 (we make a lot more and my wife eats it for a snack)
butter or margarine
salt
pepper
half and half cream

Cook noodles *al dente*, add garlic and butter while still hot, mix well, let stand.

Cook the onion in a small quantity of butter and add the chicken once it has begun wilting. Cook the chicken until the fat has disappeared and the meat and onion are roasting (on fairly high heat). Be careful not to burn the chicken, but if pieces of the meat and onion stick to the bottom, so much the better.

Once the meat is sufficiently cooked, remove from the pan everything that isn't nailed down, and pour cream into the frying pan. Using a spatula, scrape the bottom of the pan to mix the burnt stuff with the cream. When the cream has achieved a nice rich brown colour, put it back on the heat and let reduce until it has thickened. Add the cooked chicken and onion. Mix, let simmer a few minutes to blend flavours.

Serve chicken mixture on top of garlic flavoured noodles.

17. QUICK NOODLE SOUP

This is good for sick people who have no particular appetite.

Cook two packages of Chinese egg noodles per person in a sufficient amount of water. This usually takes no more than three minutes. In a large bowl, drain some of the cooking water and add a teaspoon of chicken broth powder, mix well. Remove the noodles from the cooking water and add to the broth. Serve hot.