

HOW TO COOK

A Guide for Men Who Don't

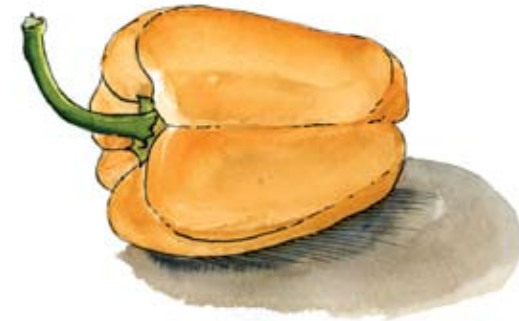


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Peppers come in a rainbow of colors, sizes and flavors.

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Visit: www.cookitgood.com for more recipes and information.



What's for Dinner?

Introduction

MY FATHER COULD COOK a hot dog or steak or burger on the grill with no problem. Not much to clean up either. He fried an egg occasionally and loved to throw some onions and baloney in a warmed skillet when there was no one around to make him a meal. He was a great gardener and in his later years made the best chile sauce you could imagine. He and I never talked recipes, never cooked for the Thanksgiving dinners and never did a whole lot of food shopping other than the mandatory stop for a six-pack of beer. Aside from flipping a burger, I didn't learn much about cooking from my dad. Back then, I never thought of asking my mom.

Like you, I started out being fed by my mother, grandmother and aunts. They all took great pride in what they prepared for me and I ate whatever they served. I certainly didn't care too much about the process of cooking. My only concern was the result – a full belly and hopefully something that was tasty. Until I turned 18, I never had to consider how to make a meal. Then, it was off to college and my own apartment and a roommate.

Suddenly, and I mean suddenly, I had to fend for myself. The going-away dinner only stuck to my ribs for a few hours. I had a limited budget, so eating out was not an option. You learn that pretty quick, college or not. It was time for me to plan, shop, cook and clean up. Holy smokes!

But, I learned, or should I say, taught myself through that innate power of survival. Unfortunately there was no such guide as the one you're reading. It was hit or miss. Did you know that if you buy chicken, you had better eat it within a day or two or it starts to smell like old feet? Don't even buy fresh fish unless you are going to cook it within hours. Or that the most important device you can own is the toaster oven? And, there is a limit to the amount of boxed macaroni and cheese you can eat in one week.

After college, I married and found myself being fed by women yet again. My first wife and her mother and aunts made some incredible dishes for their families. Their Sunday dinners and summer picnics were great New England feasts. She did have an uncle who made the best clam chowder. He was a culinary pioneer among men. Funny thing is, he only prepared his dish outside in an old pot over a gas burner. He couldn't quite get comfortable performing in the kitchen.

During our separation and subsequent divorce, I again found myself having to cook my own meals. By this time though, I had started to accumulate a little bit of knowledge. I also started to experiment. I recall throwing a holiday party for a number of clients. I actually roasted my own turkey for the event. It was good and it was gone. That's when I realized I could cook and it was okay for a guy to cook well.

A few twists occurred in my life that steered me to this inevitable story. I remarried, moved out of state and had

two wonderful children with the most patient woman in the world. My business forced me to take a position with a firm outside of Boston. Many long hours meant my wife became the head chef in the house. Because of a physical condition that prevented her from eating and digesting red meats and hot spices, we were eating a lot of chicken, fish and vegetables. By osmosis, I basically became a non-meat eater as well. That altered my choice of foods and style of cooking. I found myself preparing a lot less meals.

Eventually, I left the firm and started my own business again. My wife took a second shift job to help supplement our health care costs and manage our child care situation. I was now working from home and responsible for feeding the kids dinner as well as shopping for the food. What began as a chore, soon became a hobby. I liked cooking again. My wife liked my cooking and my kids liked my cooking. Even the dog liked my cooking. That's when I really started to experiment and try new things. It's also when I started thinking about this book. I realized there must be many other men out there with various degrees of cooking ability who might benefit from my experience.

You have to start off slow though. You can't learn everything about cooking in a weekend. What you can do is begin with Chapter 1 and get yourself to Chapter 8. Don't just use my book alone. You will find there are over 68,000 books on cooking. Look for recipes that suit your taste. Collect them and save them in a scrapbook about the size of this one. Think of this like planning a trip, or planning a project. You have to want to do this, otherwise you can just eat out for the rest of your life, count on your wife's or girlfriend's cooking or mom's leftovers. And, I have to say, this could be fun for you. There is a basic sense of pride one achieves by being able to prepare your own delicious meals and a certain satisfaction in cooking for others.

There are a number of national brand foods mentioned in the following pages. This is not to be interpreted as an endorsement of, or from any of these companies. Use whatever brand you like. I am only making these suggestions based on my experiences and satisfaction with them.

Remember that this is not a gourmet guide, nor a contest to see who can make the best meatloaf. I am not a trained chef. I do not speak with a British accent. I am providing some information that I think will be of help to you. Adjust my recipes and suggestions to your lifestyle and palate. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Visit the web site if you need more help. Involve your kids, especially your sons in the process. This is about learning to cook for you and your loved ones and to maybe feel a whole lot better about yourself in and out of the kitchen.

And one last note; some people live to eat and some eat to live. Unless you are a culinary expert or professional chef, make the food experience a thread of life, not the blanket.

Bon Appetite!

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The Basics

YOU WAKE UP AND YOU'RE HUNGRY. You go to work and you're hungry. You come home and you're hungry. Your kids are always hungry. Your wife is hungry, but not for the same food as you or the kids.

If you haven't made your breakfast or had it made for you, there are always those coffee shops every quarter mile that you can pull into and get a bagel and a latté. That's \$5.00. At lunchtime you can go down to the cafe or the local deli and get a soda, sandwich and chips. That's \$7.00. On the way home you decide Chinese would be good, because your wife has an early PTA meeting and the Monday night game is on and the kids are going to want some dinner. So, a four dish meal plus egg rolls sets you back \$36.00.

Now you've just spent \$48.00 in one day for other people to feed you. And you would do that every day if you could, right? But, you can't, because you'd end up dropping close to \$250.00 a week and that doesn't include weekends or your kid's and wife's breakfast and lunch.



Oh, the Artichoke!

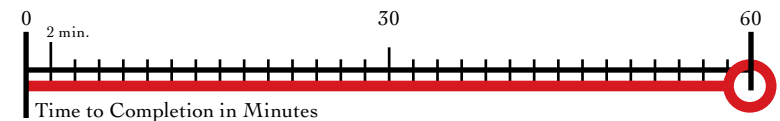
It is a formidable vegetable that has been around for thousands of years. If you are at the learning stage of cooking, I would not suggest that you attempt baking and stuffing one of these just yet.

They will truly test your timing skills in the kitchen.

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Timing & Quantity

IF TIME IS THE MASTER, THEN WITHOUT A DOUBT you will need to master timing in the kitchen. It isn't all split-second stuff, but there are occasions when it will make all the difference between a nice warm meal and a soggy cold one. Usually you can find a timer right on your stove. If not, watch your watch, the clock or buy one of those little crank timers you can find in the store.



You will notice this handy timing bar at the bottom of each recipe.

It is a simple visual guide to let you know how much time you should expect to prepare a particular meal.

As much as you may want to –
DO NOT MULTI-TASK WHEN COOKING.

By that I mean you can not clean the gutters in between cooking a meal. You can't paint the trim while cooking a meal. You can't expect to see the entire basketball playoff while cooking a meal. Something will suffer. Your gutters, your trim, your recollection of the game, or your Lasagna – something's going to break, spill, burn, whatever. Believe it or not, a telephone conversation is going to wreak havoc with your concentration as well. Unless you are waiting for a casserole to come out of the oven, forget about sending those 5 e-mails.

When you wash your car you know not to leave the soap on until it bakes the dirt back into the finish. You have to rinse frequently. Well, the same goes for cooking. A good portion of the timing and control of your food preparation has to do with the proper regulation of liquids and moisture. A baked chicken or turkey requires a certain amount of basting during its time in the oven. As you are boiling or steaming or sautéing vegetables, you have to keep an eye on them. Stir them. Mix them. Add more water or oil if needed. If you are having a salad with dinner, you should concentrate on the cooked portions of the meal first and save the cutting up of cold vegetables for the latter stage of your prep. Likewise, if sauces and pastas are being served, start the water for boiling before you start the sauce so the pasta can be served warm and fresh with the sauce. Look for the timing bar attached to each recipe in the back of this book. It will give you an estimated time of completion. This should help you plan accordingly.

There is the timing of the preparation and cooking part of the meal, but there is also the timing of the gathering of ingredients. French-style breads and baguettes only last a

day. Poultry and meats can be purchased a day before or the day of the meal. Seafood should always be purchased the day of and as close to the meal as possible. Shellfish in particular can be very volatile if not timed correctly. Hopefully you will stock up on all of those ingredients and materials we talked about in Chapter 5. You may just need to pick up some fresh meat on the way home. But, if you have a special event, barbecue, holiday dinner, romantic evening; then you should probably do your gathering a day in advance.

Speaking of the list in Chapter 5... on a busy day, you can whip something up with a combination of those ingredients alone. Its important to have sufficient materials on hand so you don't have to worry about creating your dinner in the frozen food aisle every night.



Measure twice, cook once.

This brings us to the quantity portion of our program. For the sake of simplicity, I base my recipes and ingredients on serving 2 or 4 people. If you are serving 2 people, just halve the quantities for a 4 person recipe. If you are serving 6 people, then add an additional half of the ingredients. If you are a self-serving kind of guy, make enough for 2 so you'll have leftover ingredients for another meal. Simple, right? Unless your guests eat like birds or weigh several hundred pounds, I'd use the following guide:

- Pasta:** 1 lb. Box for 4 people or 1/4 lb. per person
Rice: 1 1/2 cooked cups per person
Potato: 1 large per person
- Steak:** 1/2 lb. per person
Burgers: 1/4 lb. per person
Meatballs: 3 per person or 1 lb. of meat for 4 people
- Chicken:** 1 breast per person or an 8 lb. bird for 4 people
- Fish:** 1/3 uncooked lb. per person
Shrimp: 1 lb. frozen large bag for 4 people
- Eggs:** 2 large per person
Bacon: 1/4 lb. per person
- Vegetables:** 1 handful per person

If you are making my Green Garden salad, the quantities break down like this for 4 people:

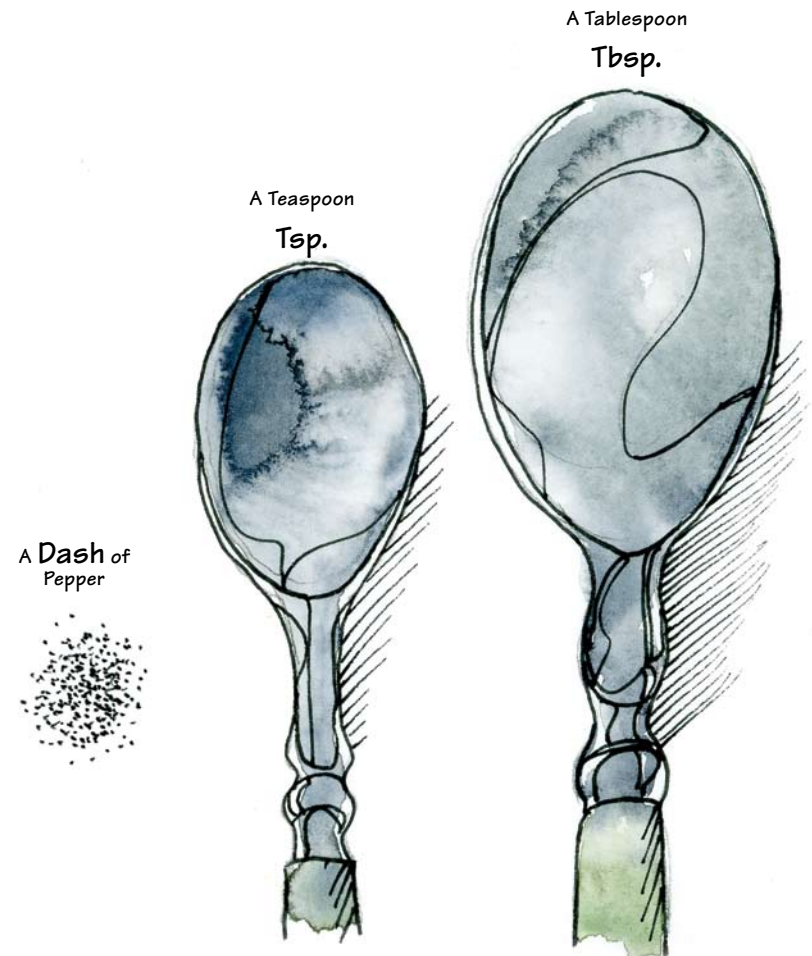
- 1/2 head of iceberg lettuce
- 1 large cucumber (8"-9") or 2 small (4"-5")
- 1 celery stalk
- 1 carrot shredded
- 2 small (palm size) tomatoes

If you are making sautéed peppers, onions and zucchini for 4 people:

- 1 large sweet onion
- 2 large green or red peppers
- 2 large zucchinis (8"-9") or 4 small (4"-5")

This formula seems to work pretty well, but again, you can always adjust for your circumstance. When making rice and pilafs from a box, precise measuring is fairly important. When you are throwing a simple plate of spaghetti and sauce together, a box of pasta and a jar of sauce is as precise as you need to be. If you are following a recipe, certain quantities and measurements are essential to the final outcome, but with practice you will know a cup from a teaspoon from a quarter pound.

Learn these 3 measures (actual size).



Hunting & Gathering

The (oohh Scary!) Supermarket

GRONK AND HIS EARLY CRO-MAGNON friends enjoyed the absolute freedom of killing their prey in the forests and dragging them home to the cave to be cooked by the women-folk. That was it. No calls on the cell phone asking to pick up some unscented fabric softener. No scratching of heads to wonder which wine would go well with gopher. And, thank God they didn't have to contend with the dreaded cereal aisle.

I know the supermarket can be very intimidating in many ways. I feel the same when I try to buy a copper fitting at Home Depot®. But, let's break this Mecca of madness, this unholy maze of confusion, this magnet of mayhem and manly self-doubt, down to a process, a plan; dare I say – an adventure.

Perhaps, as men, we have some deep-seeded psychological angst about the grocery store. After all, as very young children, we were strapped into these cold, steel carts that seemed to be 20 feet off the ground. Our mothers would push us around for hours, filling the enormous cage with food. Remember the bloody meats? Sure, every now and then, you would get a treat from an opened box of graham crackers or a fresh grape picked off the bunch, but mostly I can't recall it being a fun experience. Especially not when your mother forgot something in aisle 1. And you were in aisle 27. She pushed you in that 20 foot high loaded cart at 40 miles an hour back to aisle 1 so she could get a lemon and zip back to the checkout and rush the ice cream home before it melted. Yeah, those were the days. My kids had these cool, red, fire engine shopping cart vehicles and they could steer the fake wheels on them while totally oblivious to the chaos in the basket above their heads.

So, first we need to get over this shopping cart thing. You can start off with a basket. However, if you are going to buy everything in Chapter 5 you will need a cart. Don't be afraid. You will never have to sit in one again.

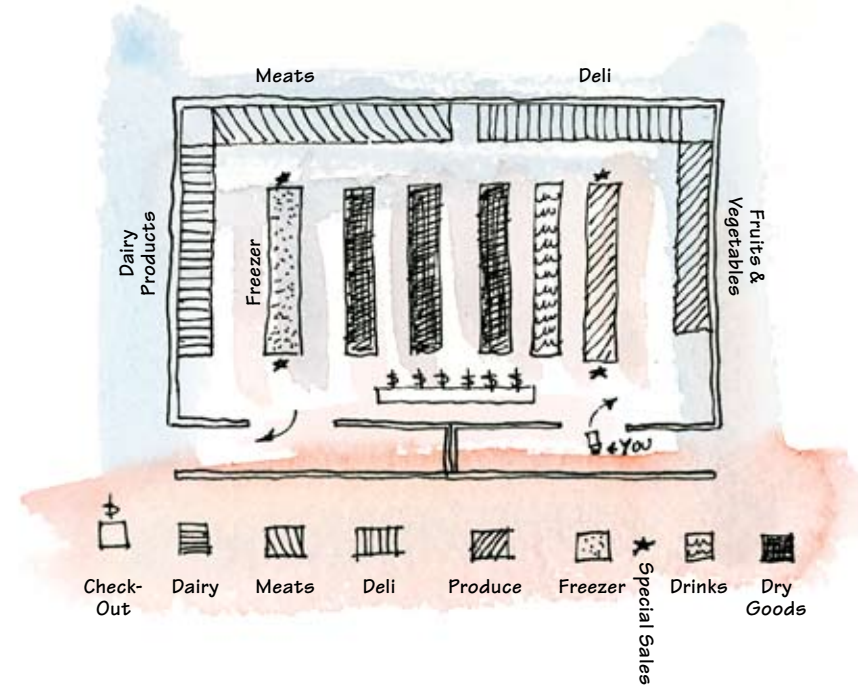


The dreaded shopping cart,
When you start pushing one of these around, you know you're committed.

You pick a cart. The biggest one you can find. You enter the gates of the Super-Doooper Shop & Save a Lot. Now what? Where do you turn? Left or right? Don't EVER ask for directions when you first enter one of these places. And never pick the cart with the squeaky wheels. You might as well put a sticker on your head that says "Virgin Shopper". By the way, there are certainly smaller markets that you can go to that may be less intimidating, but usually you will pay more for your items. They also have the mini carts, which may be less of a struggle at first.

Pretend you've done this before. Look down at your list. You made a list? You have a list? There is a copy of the list on the web site that you can print out. You have to have a list. The list tells you why you're here in the first place. The list keeps you from buying what you want and focuses you on buying what you need. Now, if you look up, you will see really crappy, vague, directional signs that tell you what you will supposedly find in that aisle. Baking Goods? Cookies? There is never a sign that says "Red Apples" or "Green Olives". You're supposed to figure that out.

Not to worry though, I have a map. It is a crude map. But, it is a useful guide that will help you navigate most food stores, except for the ones that also sell TV's. I conveniently attached a copy of the map to the list, which you hopefully brought along with you. What this map tells you is something so utterly obvious that I don't understand why there isn't a 12 foot high version in the front of every Super-Doooper Shop & Save a Lot. The only thing that could screw you up is if you enter from the left side of the store instead of the right. Or if the store you are in switched around what is on the right side of my map with the left side. You could do a reconnaissance visit the day before you actually are going to shop and have a look see for yourself. It doesn't matter.



Basic Grocery Store Layout

All you need to know to survive the market.

It is more the principle of the map than the actual detail. Kind of like a treasure map. Who cares how you get there as long as you get the treasure? Okay. Here goes. When you enter these stores, you will ALWAYS find the Vegetables, Meats and the Dairy products ON THE OUTSIDE WALLS. Its all about power, refrigeration, and plumbing. Usually, frozen foods and beverages are in one aisle from the outside aisles. As you navigate towards the center of the store, you come closer to DRIED goods. Pet supplies, household cleaners, paper products, and health care items are usually in adjoining aisles. Junk food and cookies tend to be in the center. Most stores have a traffic flow. Try to stay with the flow.

Think about it. You don't want to pick up dairy and frozen items too early in your journey because they may begin to degrade before you reach check out. Vegetables and dried goods are perfectly happy rolling around in your cart for hours. Meats can go either way. They seem to be in the middle of the store so you can get them half way in your journey. Once you have collected everything you need, you will realize you have forgotten something in aisle 1, and you're in aisle 27. Sound familiar?

You are almost there. Now comes check out. Unless you are prepared for yet another embarrassing moment, DO NOT USE the AUTO-SELF-CHECK-OUT. You must have a Ph.D. in botany and economics to go through one of these unscathed. Once you have completed your check out with a human, proceed to your vehicle. Carefully load the contents of your cart into the trunk. Watch out for the eggs. The bag person probably put them in with the cans and jars on top of the bread. You have to watch these people. When you get home, here are a few tips I have found helpful. Put everything that needs refrigeration away first. Don't leave things like cucumbers and zucchinis and tomatoes in their plastic bags. They will get slimy pretty quick. Don't put the bananas in the fridge. Let meats, poultry and fish stay in their plastic bags to keep them fresh.

That's it. You have just completed your first major food shop. You're probably exhausted from the experience. I would open a beer (You did buy beer? It was on the list). Order a pizza and start cooking tomorrow. No, no, no! Yes to the beer part. Pull yourself together man. You have just done an amazing thing. You survived your first major shop. Try cooking something with the fruits of your hunt.

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What, Where, & When to Hunt

Location/Geography/Seasonality

YOU KNOW WE ARE NOT ACTUALLY HUNTING HERE. Well, you could be. For instance, if you live along the coast and you and your buddies go fishing and catch something edible, then you are technically hunting. Or, if you like venison and you really shoot the deer with a gun or a bow, gut it, and bring it home on the roof of your car, then you are a serious hunter. Incidentally, I have a recipe for venison in the back of this book you may be interested in. The average guy doesn't always have the ability to hunt in the previously mentioned sense. The average guy must hunt in the suburban and urban markets available to him. He must uncover the fish markets, butcher shops, vegetable markets and specialty shops using nothing more than his wits and his GPS.



*Everything you've heard about the after effects of
Asparagus are true.*

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Recipes

I HOPE YOU DIDN'T WAIT TO READ THE WHOLE BOOK before you got here. You had to be curious. What kind of recipes could possibly be so easy that anyone could use them?

Well, hold on to your meatballs, 'cause here we go. I did try to arrange these chronologically. I figured I'd start with Breakfast and end with Dessert. Here they are:

Breakfast

Please don't ask me how to make toast or a bowl of cereal.

Lunch

Soups, Salads & Sandwiches

Snacks/Appetizers

Quick & Easy

Dinner

Meats, Pastas & Seafood

Desserts

Short & Sweet

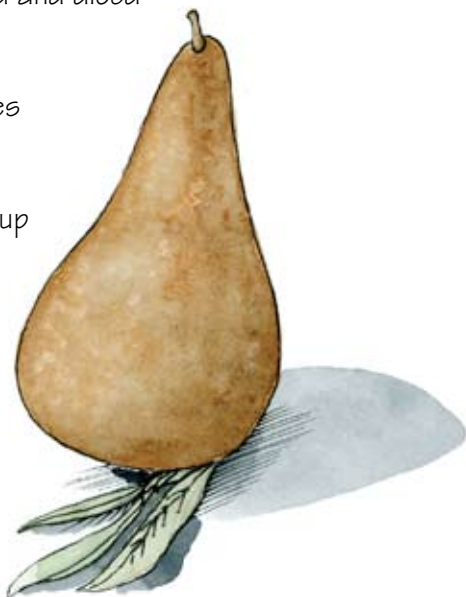
One thing you will find is that even though these recipes are arranged in a given order, you can do a lot of mixing and matching to come up with great tasting combinations.

Sweet Sausage & Sage Soup

Serves 6

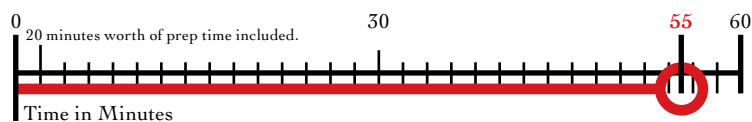
- 2 Packs (8) Sweet Apple Chicken Sausages, sliced
- 3 Medium Parsnips, sliced
- 3 Large Carrots, sliced
- 1 Large Onion, chopped
- 6 Medium Red Potatoes, sliced, do not peel
- 1 Large Pear, cored and diced

- a. 4 Tbsp. Olive Oil
- b. 1/2 Cup Sage leaves
- c. 1 Tsp. Salt
- d. 1 Tbsp. Sugar
- e. 2 Tbsp. Maple Syrup
- f. 3 Qrts. Water



In an 8 Quart pot, add **a. – f.** Bring heat to medium. Add Sausage, Parsnips, Carrots, Onion, Potatoes and Pear. Stir well.

Cook on medium/high covered for 40 minutes.



Winter Chicken Soup

Serves 6

- 2 Large Chicken Breasts, chopped
- 3 Stalks Celery, chopped
- 3 Large Carrots, sliced
- 1 Large Onion, chopped
- 1 Cup Fresh Parsley, chopped
- 1 lb. Bag Egg Noodles

- a. 4 Tbsp. Olive Oil
- b. 1 Tbsp. Salt
- c. Dash Pepper
- d. 2 Tbsp. Chicken Bouillon
- e. 1 Tbsp. Rosemary
- f. 1 Tbsp. Sage
- g. 1 Tbsp. Thyme
- h. 4 Qrts. Water

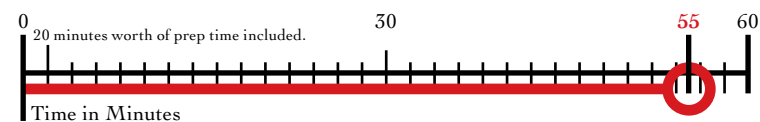


In an 8 Quart pot, add **a. – g.**, 1 quart of water and Chicken. Bring heat to medium and cover for 10 minutes.

Add Celery, Carrots, Onion and Parsley and remaining 3 Quarts of Water. Stir well. Cook on medium/high for 40 minutes.

Boil water for Noodles in a large pot. Cook Noodles and drain when done. Serve soup over Noodles.

You can put the whole Chicken Breasts in the pot to begin with and remove them after about 15 minutes. It's easier to cut them into smaller chunks and return them to the broth.



Salads

Each Serves 4

Start off each of these in a large salad bowl.

a. Green Garden

- a. 1 Head Iceberg Lettuce, Romaine or Red/Green Leaf
- b. 1 Lrg. Red Tomato
- c. 1 Lrg. Cucumber
- d. 1 Stalk Celery
- e. 2 Lrg. Carrots
- f. 1 Med. Green, Red or Orange Bell Pepper

Chop Lettuce into bit-sized pieces. Cut Tomato into wedges. Peel and slice Cucumber and Carrots. Chop Celery. Cut top off Pepper and remove seeds and pulp from inside. Slice or chop. Combine and toss all in bowl. Serve with choice of dressing.

For a Dinner meal, add grilled Chicken, Tuna or Beef.

b. Cole Slaw

- a. 1 Head Green or Red Cabbage
- b. 2 Lrg. Carrots
- c. 2 Tbsp. Sugar
- d. 1/4 Cup Milk
- e. Dash Salt and Pepper
- f. 2 Cups Mayonnaise

Cut Cabbage into thin slices and chop. Peel and shave Carrots. Combine and toss all in bowl. Add c. through f. and mix well. Put in fridge for 10 minutes before serving.



c. Cucumber, Tomato, Pepper & Onion with Vinaigrette

- a. 2 Lrg. Cucumbers
- b. 2 Lrg. Red Tomatoes
- c. 1 Lrg. Red Onion
- d. 2 Med. Green, Red or Orange Bell Peppers
- e. 1/2 Cup Balsamic or White Vinegar
- f. 1 Tbsp. Oil
- g. Dash Salt and Pepper

Peel and slice Cucumber. Cut Tomato into wedges. Slice Red Onion. Cut top off Pepper and remove seeds and pulp from inside. Slice or chop. Combine and toss all in bowl. Add e. through g. and mix well.

