

A decorative border of fresh ingredients surrounds the central text. It includes a halved tomato at the top left, a sprig of mint at the top center, a halved avocado at the top right, a sliced red onion on the left, a sprig of parsley on the left, a slice of orange at the bottom left, a whole tomato on the right, a strawberry on the right, and another sliced red onion at the bottom right.

We Laugh We Cry We Cook Recipes

*Becky Johnson
and Rachel Randolph*

Recipes

by Category

veg — Vegetarian

v — Vegan

gf — Gluten free

(see “Recipe Notation Glossary on page 5 for definitions)

Note: Any required substitutions or modifications are listed at the end of the recipe.

The Main Attractions

Becky and Rachel’s Spicy Puttanesca Sauce (veg/V/gf), 6
Becky’s Layered Italian Veggie Casserole (veg/gf), 12
Bourbon Brown Sugar Pork Loin (gf), 18
Chili Lime Southern Style Catfish (gf), 22
Grilled Stuffed Avocados (veg/V/gf), 26
Momma’s Sweet n’ Spicy Meatloaves (gf), 33
Nate’s Favorite Hairy Cheese Pizza (veg), 29
Pecan Mushroom-Stuffed Zucchini (veg/V/gf), 20
Pesto Parmesan Chicken, 14
Rustic Sausage and Peppers Skillet (veg/V/gf), 14
Sundried Tomato and Artichoke Bowtie Pasta (veg/V/gf), 13
Sweet and Spicy Oven “Blackened” Tilapia (veg/V/gf), 9
Tomato Basil Stackers (veg/V), 9

One Bowl Wonders (Soups, Stews, and Chilis)

Fresh Corn and Roasted Poblano Chowder (veg/V/gf), 16
Stewed Summer Veggies (veg/V/gf), 23
Sweet Potato Lentil Chili (veg/V/gf), 32
Tortilla Soup (veg/V/gf), 25
Yellow Pepper Soup (veg/V/gf), 21

Show-Stealing Sides

Broccoli Carrot Slaw (veg/V/gf), 24
Lindsey O’Connor’s Refreshing Watermelon, Mint & Feta salad (veg/V/gf), 33
Orange Glazed Carrots (veg/V/gf), 35
Oven-Blistered Potatoes (veg/V/gf), 24
Roasted Red Pepper Quinoa (veg/V/gf), 31

Party Pleasers (Appetizers and Snacks)

“Carrot Cake” Chutney & Cream Cheese Topping for Nana’s Beloved Crackers (veg/V/gf), 18
Cashew Queso (veg/V/gf), 30
Jared’s 15-Alarm (and 3-Fire-Truck) Roasted Corn Bean Salsa (veg/V/gf), 10
Killer Chipotle and Roasted Pepper Salsa (veg/V/gf), 12
Warm Stuffed Dates (veg/V/gf), 10
White Bean Guacamole (veg/V/gf), 11

Morning Munchies

Cinnamon Raisin Oatmeal (veg/V/gf), 27

Sweet Potato Pecan Pie Oatmeal Bake (veg/V/gf), 15

Sweet Treats

90% Fruit Soft Serve, 29

Aunt Etta's Chocolate Pie, 6

Blueberry-Raspberry Oat Bars (veg/V/gf), 22

Caramelized Toast (veg/V), 8

Coconut-Covered Cherry Freezer Bites (veg/V/gf), 17

Four-Day Coconut Cake, 8

Granny's Oat and Fruit Gems (V/gf), 7

Mama's All Natural (No Sugar) Apple Crisp Skillet (veg/V/gf), 19

Michele Cushatt's Famous Chocolate Chip Cookies (veg), 34

No-Bake Apricot Bars (veg/V/gf), 30

Pineapple Coconut Cloud Cake, 26

Happy Sips

No Stress Sangrias (veg/V/gf), 20

Super Hero Green Smoothie (veg/V/gf), 28

Recipes **by Chapter**

CHAPTER 1: Favorite Family Recipes

Becky and Rachel's Spicy Puttanesca Sauce (veg/V/gf), 6

Aunt Etta's Chocolate Pie, 6

Granny's Oat and Fruit Gems (V/gf), 7

Four-Day Coconut Cake, 8

CHAPTER 2: Foolproof Recipes for the Distracted Home Cook

Caramelized Toast (veg/V), 8

Sweet and Spicy Oven "Blackened" Tilapia (veg/V/gf), 9

Tomato Basil Stackers (veg/V), 9

Warm Stuffed Dates (veg/V/gf), 10

CHAPTER 3: Recipes That Texans Go OCD Over

Jared's 15-Alarm (and 3-Fire-Truck) Roasted Corn Bean Salsa
(veg/V/gf), 10

White Bean Guacamole (veg/V/gf), 11

Killer Chipotle and Roasted Pepper Salsa (veg/V/gf), 12

CHAPTER 4: Recipes for an Italian Feast

Becky's Layered Italian Veggie Casserole (veg/gf), 12

Sundried Tomato and Artichoke Bowtie Pasta (veg/V/gf), 13

Rustic Sausage and Peppers Skillet (veg/V/gf), 14

Pesto Parmesan Chicken, 14

CHAPTER 5: *The Freezer is a Mom's Best Friend*

(Recipes to Freeze for Your Future Self)

Sweet Potato Pecan Pie Oatmeal Bake (veg/V/gf), 15

Fresh Corn and Roasted Poblano Chowder (veg/V/gf), 16

Coconut-Covered Cherry Freezer Bites (veg/V/gf), 17

CHAPTER 6: *Celebration Recipes*

“Carrot Cake” Chutney and Cream Cheese Topping for Nana’s
Beloved Crackers (veg/V/gf), 18

Bourbon Brown Sugar Pork Loin (gf), 18

Mama’s All Natural (No Sugar) Apple Crisp Skillet (veg/V/gf), 19

No Stress Sangrias (veg/V/gf), 20

CHAPTER 7: *Gourmet Recipes from the Aisles of Walmart*

Pecan Mushroom-Stuffed Zucchini (veg/V/gf), 20

Yellow Pepper Soup (veg/V/gf), 21

Blueberry-Raspberry Oat Bars (veg/V/gf), 22

CHAPTER 8: *Romantic Dinner for Two on a Budget*

Chili Lime Southern Style Catfish (gf), 22

Stewed Summer Veggies (veg/V/gf), 23

Oven-Blistered Potatoes (veg/V/gf), 24

Broccoli Carrot Slaw (veg/V/gf), 24

CHAPTER 9: *Beachin’ Recipes*

Tortilla Soup (veg/V/gf), 25

Pineapple Coconut Cloud Cake, 26

Grilled Stuffed Avocados (veg/V/gf), 26

CHAPTER 10: *Recipes Kids Love to Eat and Make*

Cinnamon Raisin Oatmeal (veg/V/gf), 27

Super Hero Green Smoothie (veg/V/gf), 28

90% Fruit Soft Serve, 29

Nate’s Favorite Hairy Cheese Pizza (veg), 29

**CHAPTER 11: *Dairy, Egg, & Meat Free Recipes the Whole Family
Will Love***

Cashew Queso, 30

No-Bake Apricot Bars (veg/V/gf), 30

Roasted Red Pepper Quinoa (veg/V/gf), 31

Sweet Potato Lentil Chili (veg/V/gf), 32

**CHAPTER 12: *“Bringing the Meatloaf” – Recipes that Show Tangible
Love in a Casserole***

Lindsey O’Connor’s Refreshing Watermelon, Mint, and Feta Salad
(veg/V/gf), 33

Momma’s Sweet ’n’ Spicy Meatloaves (gf), 33

Michele Cushatt’s Famous Chocolate Chip Cookies (veg), 34

Orange Glazed Carrots (veg/V/gf), 35

Recipe Notation Glossary

You might be asking yourself, “What’s the difference between *vegan* and *vegetarian*, and who is this *gluten* and why are we trying to free him?” Here’s a quick glossary to help you understand the terms following the recipes in this book. Some recipes can be easily modified to be vegetarian, vegan, or gluten free. In those instances, we’ve followed the term with the substitutes or omissions to make that variation. We want to show how easy it is to adjust meals for yourself or guests with dietary preferences. Of course, if you have dairy milk, real butter, or chicken stock on hand and a vegan or vegetarian recipe calls for almond milk, margarine, or vegetable stock, you could certainly make those substitutes as well.

- **Vegetarian:** Recipes marked *vegetarian* do not have meat or fish products; they may include eggs or dairy.
- **Vegan:** Recipes marked *vegan* do not contain meat, fish, dairy, or eggs. By its nature, a recipe that is vegan is also vegetarian, so for clarity we’ve marked these recipes “vegan/vegetarian.”
- **Gluten free:** Recipes marked gluten free do not have any gluten (wheat, barley, or rye).

Note: Some products may vary from brand to brand, so please read labels carefully if you are cooking for someone with a special diet or allergy. Look for the allergy warnings at the end of ingredient labels. It typically says if it contains eggs, milk (dairy), wheat (gluten), or fish. You may have to read more carefully to see if it’s cooked with meat (look for things like chicken stock or lard). Unless allergies or food preferences are severe, it’s often okay if it says it “may contain” these ingredients. Check with your guests first, though, as some allergies are severe.

Mother's Intuition

FAVORITE FAMILY RECIPES

Becky and Rachel's Spicy Puttanesca Sauce

After making this dish together, we thought, "Wouldn't it be great if we could share a kitchen more often, despite one of us living in Texas and the other in Colorado?" Thus the idea for our virtual kitchen at www.welaughwecrywecook.com was born and eventually led to this book, another extension of our kitchens to yours.

Serves 4.

- ½ cup chopped onion
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup chopped vegetables (broccoli, zucchini, squash, eggplant, carrots, whatever you've got on hand)
- ½ cup marinated artichoke hearts, quartered
- 1 tablespoon capers or 2 tablespoon olives (any variety), pitted and chopped
- 2 tablespoons pesto sauce (optional, but toss it in if you have it on hand)
- 2 tablespoons pepperoncini peppers, diced
- 2 tablespoons sun-dried tomatoes, diced
- 1–2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes with basil and garlic
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning or oregano
- ⅛ teaspoon salt and pepper (or to taste)

16 ounces dry pasta, cooked per package instructions

Optional: ½ pound of cooked ground beef and ½ pound cooked Italian sausage, or 1 can garbanzo beans, roasted (see instructions)

In a medium-hot skillet, sauté onion and garlic in olive oil for 2 minutes. Add other vegetables; cook about 5 more minutes. Add remaining ingredients except spices and pasta. Turn heat to medium high. Stir and simmer until sauce is thick and chunky. Stir in optional meat or garbanzo beans. Season with salt, pepper, and Italian spices to taste. Add more brown sugar if more sweetness is desired. Simmer 5 more minutes. Serve atop pasta.

To Roast Garbanzo Beans: Heat oven to 400°. Rinse garbanzos (also called chickpeas) and pat dry. On baking pan, mix garbanzos with 1 tablespoon olive oil, 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar, 1 teaspoon Italian seasonings (we love McCormick's Italian Herb Seasoning Grinder), and ¼ teaspoon sea salt. Roast for 10 minutes, shaking the pan a couple of times during the cooking. (You can also do this on the stove top over medium heat for 5–7 minutes, shaking every minute.) Check for seasoning; sprinkle with more salt or balsamic if desired.

- Vegetarian (leave out meat)
- Vegan friendly (leave out meat; use dairy-free pesto or just omit it)
- Gluten free (substitute pasta with spaghetti squash or gluten-free pasta, like the ones made of quinoa, corn, or rice)

Aunt Etta's Chocolate Pie

This pie is more milk chocolate than dark chocolate. You may have never tasted a pie quite like this, but once you do, you'll never forget it. This family treasure is written exactly as my Aunt Etta gave it to me, back when phones had "hooks." —Becky

Makes filling for two 9-inch cream pies.

4 cups whole milk, heated until hot but not boiling (you can do this in the microwave to speed things up if you like)

1¾ cups sugar

3 tablespoons cocoa

½ cup plus 1 tablespoon and 1 teaspoon more of flour

3 egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 baked and cooled 9-inch pie shells (I like mine a little on the brown and crispy side, as they are less inclined to get soggy.)

In a saucepan, combine hot milk with sugar, cocoa, and flour. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring constantly as it thickens. (*Becky's note:* I use a heat-proof spatula for stirring.)

Beat egg yolks until foamy in a small bowl. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of hot mixture from saucepan to yolks to temper them; then add this back to the pan. Cook again until very thick, at least 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. (I take my phone off the hook.) This is your most important step. The mixture will seem thick enough after one minute, but if the yolks are not cooked thoroughly, after the custard is cold it breaks down and runs.

Take off heat and add 1 teaspoon vanilla. Never put a lid on the mixture while it is cooling. The “sweat” that accumulates on lid will be absorbed back into the custard and cause it to break down and become runny. Just stir the mixture occasionally to keep it from running or pour it directly into the pie crusts and allow it to cool there, and don't worry about a film over the top. That tastes good too.

Top with whatever you prefer: meringue, Cool Whip, or real whipped cream.

• *Vegetarian*

Granny's Oat and Fruit Gems

These make healthy snacks and great grab-'n'-go breakfasts.

Serves 18.

2 bananas, mashed

2 peeled apples, grated

3 cups old fashioned oats

½ teaspoon sea salt

½ cup raw organic sugar

½ cup dried chopped fruit (dates, dried cranberries, coconut, raisins, apricots all work well)

1 cup nuts and/or seeds, chopped (walnuts, pecans, almonds, sunflower seeds all work well)

½ teaspoon almond extract (or 1 teaspoon vanilla)

grated zest of one orange

Preheat oven to 350°. Mix all of the above together in a large mixing bowl. Spray or oil muffin pans. Fill them about ⅔ full and gently press down with back of spoon. Bake for 20 to 30 minutes or until just golden brown around edges and top. When cool to touch, gently remove from pan.

• *Vegan/vegetarian*

• *Gluten-free friendly (use gluten-free oats)*

Four-Day Coconut Cake

This cake is so simple to make, just hard to wait to eat! It is perfect, however, for holidays because you can make it ahead of time and forget about it until it is time to serve. It's so pretty at Christmas and Easter, especially. It gets very moist as the cake soaks up some of the yummy frosting. Slices and serves "like a dream," my mother Ruthie says. —Becky

Serves 16 slices.

Day 1

- 2 cups sour cream
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 12-ounce packages frozen coconut (This can be tough to find but is usually near the frozen fruit in small flat packages. It is easiest to find in Southern states or Asian markets. If you find it, it makes a remarkably fresh-tasting cake. If you can't find the frozen coconut, use 4 lightly packed cups of a moist packaged pre-sweetened coconut instead, and cut sugar back to ½ cup.)

Day 2

- 1 package yellow cake mix, baked according to directions in two greased and floured 9-inch round cake pans

Combine sour cream, sugar, and frozen coconut in a large bowl and let sit overnight. The next day bake the yellow cakes and cool. Carefully flip the cakes out of the pans and cut each round into two layers, leaving four layers total. You can use a thread, tied around the cake evenly, then pull both ends and it "cuts" the cake for you! Ice the cake using all the coconut mixture between layers on top and all around. Wrap cake with plastic wrap and leave in fridge for at least 3 days; 4 is even better.

- Vegetarian

Chapter 2

I Say "Tomato"; She Says, "Did I Burn It?"

FOOLPROOF RECIPES FOR THE DISTRACTED HOME COOK

Caramelized Toast

"Salted caramel" is all the rage, and this quick 'n' easy toast, with its combination of melted butter and brown sugar, creates a wonderful sweet-salty-caramelly tasting treat. A nice alternative to cinnamon toast on a chilly morning or for an after-school snack. —Becky

1 Serving.

- 1 slice bread, any kind you like
- 1–2 teaspoons salted butter
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar (may use less for smaller pieces of bread)

Spread a slice of bread generously with butter. Sprinkle with brown sugar, all the way to the edges.

Broil about 4 inches from heat until brown sugar has melted and starts to bubble. Remove; let cool a bit. Cut into triangles (I use kitchen shears) and serve.

- Vegetarian
- Vegan (substitute vegan margarine such as Earth Balance)
- Gluten free (use gluten-free bread)

Sweet and Spicy Oven “Blackened” Tilapia

Imagine my delight when “blackened food” became popular among food lovers. Of course, “blackening” doesn’t really mean “burnt”; it comes from the heating of spices onto a piece of meat until a flavorful crust is formed. This sweet-smoky, spicy blackened tilapia is not only full of flavor, but it cooks in no time at all. I make it at least once a month. Rachel loves making a vegan version, using Earth Balance instead of butter and tofu slices instead of fish. —Becky

Serves 2.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 medium to large tilapia fillets
- 2 tablespoons smoked paprika
- 2 tablespoons cumin
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- salt and pepper
- 1 lemon, cut in half

Pre-heat oven to 350°. Put oil and butter in rectangle pan (large enough to hold tilapia without overlapping) and put in oven until butter has melted. Tilt pan until it is evenly coated. In small bowl, mix paprika, cumin, and brown sugar. Lightly salt and pepper both sides of 4 fillets. Lay tilapia fillets side by side in the buttery pan. Turn over so both sides are coated with oil/butter. Generously sprinkle tops of tilapia with the brown sugar-spice mix (using all of it), patting it in gently. Squeeze one half lemon over all. Put in oven for 15 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Then turn oven to broil and, watching carefully, broil the tops of the fish until the spice mixture starts to caramelize. Remove and serve with the remaining lemon half; cut in pretty slices as garnish.

- Vegetarian (sub a block of tofu gently pressed to remove excess water and sliced into four “fillets”)
- Vegan (sub vegan margarine such as Earth Balance)
- Gluten free

Tomato Basil Stackers

This is one of my favorite summer snacks when basil is growing like a weed and tomatoes are vibrant red, sweet, and juicy. During that short season, I’ve been known to eat it every day for weeks. The combination of avocado, garlic, and basil is like an Italian flavor explosion in your mouth. Also, the presentation is lovely and cheery and simply makes me happy. It would be perfect for a summer brunch or done in smaller open-faced stacks as an Italian dinner appetizer, a vertical tomato bruschetta of sorts. —Rachel

Serves 1.

- 1 whole-grain English muffin, split in half (I especially like the Ezekiel 4:9 brand)
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3 slices of vine-ripened tomato
- 6 fresh basil leaves, gently torn
- ½ avocado, pitted and sliced
- salt
- fresh cracked pepper
- drizzle of high-quality olive oil

Turn your oven on low broil. In a small bowl, mix olive oil with minced garlic. Spread garlic and oil on the inner side of the English muffin slices. Place directly on the top rack of your oven and broil until it’s light brown and crispy (about 1 minute). Slightly smash the avocado onto the toasted English muffin halves. Then on one of the halves, layer two basil leaves and a tomato slice three times, sprinkling with salt, fresh cracked pepper, and a small drizzle of high-quality olive oil after each tomato slice. Top with the other half of the English muffin.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free (use gluten-free bread)

Warm Stuffed Dates

With just two ingredients, dates and almonds, and done in under two minutes, this is almost not a recipe, but they are so delightful I had to share them. When warmed, the inside of the dates get soft and gooey, like rich caramel. Wrapped around crunchy almonds, they make a healthy two-bite dessert, an energizing anytime snack, or an elegant party appetizer guests go nuts over. — Rachel

Serves 1

1 Medjool date

2–3 roasted almonds (I love the oil roasted, unsalted ones, if you can find them)

Turn oven to broil. Cut a slit down the side of the date and pop the pit out. Generously stuff dates with 2 to 3 almonds and reseal the slit (dates are sticky, so it just sticks back together). Broil for 1 minute; flip them and broil for 30–60 more seconds. Let cool slightly before serving. (Easily distracted cooks prone to burning things under the broiler can cook these at 350° for 5–10 minutes if preferred.)

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

Chapter 3

Diet for a Small Palate

RECIPES THAT TEXANS GO OCD OVER

Jared's 15-Alarm (and 3-Fire-Truck) Roasted Corn Bean Salsa

After the fire-truck fiasco, Jared and I agreed to find a compromise between my simple recipe and his cough-inducing version. This one has a friendly level of heat, approved by friends and family. If you are a hardcore spice fanatic, feel free to add more jalapeños or throw in a serrano pepper for a real kick. — Rachel

Makes about 2 cups.

1 can black beans, rinsed, drained, and patted dry

1½ cups frozen corn (or 1 can, rinsed, drained, and patted dry)

nonstick cooking spray (or olive oil)

½ of a red bell pepper (yields about ½ cup), diced to size of corn kernels

¼ cup of finely diced onion

2 jalapeños, seeded and finely diced (can use serranos for more spice or ½ a poblano pepper for less spice, or omit and use the other half of the red bell pepper for a mild version)

½ teaspoon seasoning salt

½ teaspoon cumin

½ teaspoon smoked paprika (or regular paprika)

¼ teaspoon salt

1 clove garlic, minced or very finely diced

½ cup loosely packed cilantro, chopped

squeeze of lime juice to taste

Preheat oven to 400°. Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray or lightly oil. Put corn, bell peppers, onion, and jalapeño on the pan. Spray the veggies with cooking oil or very lightly coat with olive oil. Sprinkle on the spices and toss together. Put in oven for 15 minutes. Remove, add the garlic to the pan, stir, and put back in oven for 10 more minutes, stirring halfway. Remove and let cool. In a serving bowl, combine beans, corn mixture, cilantro, and a squeeze of lime juice to taste. Add a little more salt if desired. Chill and serve with chips. Will keep in the fridge for up to 2 days.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

White Bean Guacamole

By blending white beans into guacamole, it not only increases the protein and fiber and lowers the fat per serving, but it also stretches your buck when avocado prices are high. The pureed bean base gives the guacamole an extra creaminess too, but you'll never even know they're in there. —Rachel

Makes about 3 cups.

- 1 15-ounce can white beans (like cannellini or navy), drained with 1 tablespoon liquid reserved
- 2 avocados, halved and pitted
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1½ tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 cup fresh cilantro

In a food processor, blend beans and reserved liquid until beans are pureed. Scoop the avocado flesh and chopped peppers into the food processor and pulse a few times. Add the lime juice, salt, pepper, garlic powder, and cilantro. Pulse until the desired consistency (I like a little bit of texture and a few chunks of avocado in mine). Serve with crackers or chips. I really like brown rice crackers even better than chips with this.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

Killer Chipotle and Roasted Pepper Salsa

This makes a lot, so I often freeze half to use at a later time. —Becky

Makes about a quart of salsa.

- 1 28-ounce can organic crushed fire-roasted tomatoes
(divided in half)
- ½ red onion
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 3 small mini peppers (yellow, orange, or red) or ½ large red
pepper, roasted (Alternatives: if roasted hatch chilis are
in season, these are delicious replacements or additions!
Or you can use a couple of roasted peppers from a jar,
small can green chilies, or roast some tomatillos.)
- ½ cup of cilantro
- 2 large fresh jalapeños, seeded
- 2 chipotle peppers in adobe sauce
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- sea salt to taste
- ½ fresh lime, squeezed
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika (this just adds to the smokiness,
but is not essential)

Put half of the crushed tomatoes and remaining ingredients in a food processor. Pulse until mixture has the consistency you like for salsa. Then stir in the rest of the crushed tomatoes, which will give it a nice chunky texture. Check seasonings once more. Grab a bag of chips, a margarita, and enjoy.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

Chapter 4

Shower the People We Love with ... Lots of Showers

RECIPES FOR AN ITALIAN FEAST

Becky's Layered Italian Veggie Casserole

A slice of Italian veggie heaven. This is a wonderful healthy casserole to make at the beginning of the week, then slice and re-heat for lunches or side dishes. —Becky

Serves 10 to 12.

- 1–3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 eggplant, peeled, sliced into ¼ inch rounds (If you don't like
eggplant, you can substitute 3 portobello mushrooms, sliced,
instead)
- 2 small or 1 large potato, unpeeled, sliced into ¼ inch rounds
- ⅓ cup water
- 4 cups marinara sauce
- 6 slices or 1 cup grated Swiss or Gruyère cheese
- 4 zucchini squash, sliced into ¼ inch rounds
- 4 yellow squash, sliced into ¼ inch rounds
- ⅔ cup grated Parmesan
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1½ cups crushed buttery whole wheat crackers
- 1 teaspoon oregano or Italian seasoning
- salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 350°. In large skillet, pour enough olive oil to coat the bottom of the skillet. Heat to medium high. Sauté eggplant slices for about a minute per side or until partially cooked. Using tongs, place eggplant in a layer in bottom of 11x13 inch baking dish. Partially cook potato in same skillet, adding ⅓ cup water. Then add this layer on top of the eggplant. Lightly salt and pepper the eggplant-potato layer. Pour 2 cups marinara sauce on top of potato and eggplant. Lay Swiss cheese on top of this layer. Next (using same skillet), lightly sauté zucchini and yellow squash together, adding more oil if needed. Put this layer on top of Swiss cheese. Lightly salt and pepper the squash. Pour 2 more cups of marina on top of squash. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Melt butter with olive oil in skillet, add crushed crackers, and stir until evenly coated. Pour buttered crackers atop casserole. Sprinkle with oregano or Italian seasoning. Bake at 350° until cheese is hot and melted and crackers are golden brown, about 20 to 30 minutes.

• Vegetarian

Sundried Tomato and Artichoke Bowtie Pasta

Without any pasta sauce on hand, I added some white cooking wine and the flavorful herb-packed oil from my jar of sundried tomatoes to a simple pasta with diced veggies, sundried tomatoes, artichokes, and gently wilted spinach. This is so pretty and flavorful. It makes a stunning centerpiece at the table. Top with roasted chickpeas (see Puttanesca Sauce recipe in Chapter 1) or vegan sausage to make it a complete one-dish meal. — Rachel

Serves 4.

16 ounces whole wheat bowtie pasta
 1 can quartered artichoke hearts
 1 6-ounce jar sundried tomatoes packed in olive oil and herbs
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 small onion, chopped
 1 zucchini, chopped
 1 yellow squash, chopped
 2 cloves of garlic, minced
 2 cups fresh spinach
 3 tablespoons white cooking wine
 salt and pepper to taste
 2 tablespoons chopped parsley (optional)

While prepping the veggies, boil the water and cook the pasta as directed on the box. If the sundried tomatoes are whole, chop them up, reserving the oil in the jar. In a large pan, heat about a tablespoon of olive oil on medium heat; add onions and a sprinkle of salt. Sauté for 2–3 minutes. Add zucchini, squash, and sauté for about 3 more minutes. Add the garlic and a touch more oil if needed. Sauté until garlic is translucent. Add artichokes, sundried tomatoes, spinach, and white cooking wine and sauté until spinach is just wilted. Gently toss the drained pasta in with the veggies. Pour in just enough of the oil and herbs from the sundried tomatoes to lightly coat everything. Season with salt and pepper to taste and garnish with fresh chopped parsley.

• Vegan/vegetarian
 • Gluten-free friendly (substitute gluten-free pasta, like the ones made of quinoa, corn, or rice)

Rustic Sausage and Peppers Skillet

My first real job was as a hostess at an Italian restaurant with an open kitchen. From my hostess stand, I could see the chefs tossing pizzas into the wood oven and dropping pasta into boiling water. This recipe was inspired by a hot skillet dish they served. You always knew when someone ordered it because a cloud of smoke would plume into the air as they poured the sauce into the piping hot pan. The cloud followed the waiter all the way to the table, making a dramatic presentation for our guests. Though I've toned down the smoke and mirrors here, the flavor is just as exciting as I remember theirs to be more than a decade ago. —Rachel

Serves 2.

- ½ package of whole wheat spaghetti, cooked al dente
(1 minute less than recommended cooking time)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, sliced in thin strips
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced in strips
- 2 links of Smoked Apple Sage Field Roast Sausages,
sliced into ½ inch rounds
- 2–3 cloves of garlic, sliced into thin “chips”
- 2 cups of spicy pasta sauce such as arrabiata or spicy marinara
(my recipe for arrabiata sauce is available on our blog)

Generously coat a large skillet (iron or stainless steel work better than a nonstick for this recipe) with olive oil, and heat on medium heat. When warm, add onions and sauté for a few minutes until they start to get soft. Add bell peppers and sausage, and turn to almost medium-high heat. Stir every minute or so until the onions, bell peppers, and sausage are slightly charred. Turn off heat. Stir in garlic chips for a couple of minutes until translucent, being careful not to let them burn. Stir in al dente pasta and pasta

sauce. Turn heat back on to low and heat until warmed through. Serve immediately.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free (Field Roast is made with wheat gluten, so substitute chickpeas – or a cooked sweet Italian sausage if you eat meat – and gluten-free pasta, like the ones made of quinoa, corn, or rice)

Pesto Parmesan Chicken

This is the best Chicken Parmesan I've made; better yet, the prettiest Chicken Parmigiano I've ever seen. The chicken inside stays incredibly tender, and when you cut through it, you can see the pretty layer of green pesto, golden panko, red marinara, and white cheese. Now that's amore! It's excellent served with a side of angel-hair pasta that has been tossed in a little extra pesto. —Becky

Serves 2 people (with big appetites).

- 2 large boneless chicken breasts
- salt and pepper (to taste, to sprinkle lightly on chicken)
- 2 cups marinara sauce (your favorite bottled brand or
homemade; my recipe for quick marina is available
on our blog)
- ¼ cup fresh or grated mozzarella
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- ½ cup pesto
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided

Preheat oven to 400°. Heat the marina in a saucepan until hot. Put olive oil and butter in a large ovenproof skillet (such as cast iron or stainless steel) and heat to medium high.

Rinse and pat boneless chicken breasts dry. Sprinkle both sides lightly with salt and pepper. Put pesto in a shallow bowl. In another shallow bowl mix panko and ½ cup Parmesan cheese. Lay chicken breasts, one at a time, into pesto first, coating both sides of breast and edges thoroughly, and then in panko-Parmesan mixture, coating both sides and edges of breasts thoroughly again.

Sauté the breasts in the oil and butter on both sides until the coating is crispy and golden. You may have to add a little more oil depending on size of breasts and your pan. (Drain off excess oil, if there is a lot of it, before putting in oven.)

Then put the entire skillet into the oven and cook for about 5 minutes. Remove from oven and ladle each breast with ¼ cup marinara, 2 tablespoons mozzarella, and 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese. Place back in the oven for 5 to 10 more minutes or until cheese is melted and chicken breasts are cooked, but not overly so. (A meat thermometer is helpful here — thickest part of chicken should be 160°–165° — but if you don't have one, just cut through the middle of one of the breasts to check for doneness.) Before serving, ladle each breast with more marinara and sprinkle with more Parmesan cheese.

Quick Method: Use thinner chicken breasts or pound smaller chicken breasts thin. Put sauce and cheese on immediately after pan frying, and cook in oven only until cheese melts.

Chapter 5

Stocking Up, Nesting, and Losing Control

THE FREEZER IS A MOM'S BEST FRIEND (RECIPES TO FREEZE FOR YOUR FUTURE SELF)

Sweet Potato Pecan Pie Oatmeal Bake

This is one of those dishes I make over and over. It freezes well, transports easily, and is always a crowd pleaser. Since it's already dairy- and egg-free and can easily be made gluten- and soy-free, it's perfect for a crowd with multiple food sensitivities. I also like to bring it to new nursing moms (who are often avoiding at least one of these foods for their baby's sake). — Rachel

Makes 8 large servings (as a main entree) or 16 smaller servings.

Sweet Potato Oatmeal

- 4 cups water
- 4 cups unsweetened almond milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 cups old-fashioned oats (not quick-cooking)
- 2 cups baked or boiled sweet potato (about 2 large sweet potatoes) or 15 oz sweet potato puree
- 1 cup golden raisins (optional)
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 4 tablespoons maple syrup (or two ripe bananas to reduce sugar)

Optional: 2 tablespoons chia seeds and an additional cup of liquid (adds fiber, protein, and healthy omegas; doesn't change taste or texture as seeds absorb liquid and soften)

Pecan Pie Topping

- 2 cups chopped pecans
- 4 tablespoons wheat germ (could replace with flour if you don't have wheat germ or grind pecans or almonds into a flour to make it gluten free)
- 4 tablespoons vegan margarine, such as Earth Balance (or coconut oil)
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar

Preheat oven to 400°. In a large sauce pan, bring water, milk, and salt to a boil. Stir in oatmeal, reduce to medium heat, and add the remaining ingredients. Cook for about 7 minutes or until most of the liquid is absorbed. (You could stop now and serve this as is, and it would be a delicious bowl of oatmeal.) Pour the oatmeal into one 9x13 or 2 8x8 casserole dishes (or into lined muffin tins—good for freezing individual servings).

In a small bowl, use your fingers to combine pecans, wheat germ, brown sugar, and Earth Balance. Sprinkle it over the top of the oatmeal and bake for 10 minutes or until golden brown and crunchy on top.

Reheating: Thaw casseroles in refrigerator overnight; cook for 20–30 minutes at 350° in the morning (until heated through). Broil for the last 2 minutes. Individual muffins can be microwaved for a minute and then crisped under the broiler (remove paper liners) for another minute.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free (use gluten-free oats and substitute pecan or almond flour for the wheat germ)*

Fresh Corn and Roasted Poblano Chowder

Rachel and I made this one afternoon at her house. She left the room, leaving me careful instructions to watch the homemade croutons that were toasting in the oven for a garnish. The smoke alarms sent her flying back to the kitchen just in time to see her mama running out the back door, carrying a pan covered in square piles of black ash, a trail of smoke following behind. “Just like the good old days,” Rachel deadpanned, grabbing a chair and turning off the smoke alarm. Unlike the burnt bread, this soup has just the right kind of smokiness and heat from the roasted poblano peppers and smoked spices, balanced perfectly by the sweet creamy corn. —Becky

Serves 4.

- 3 cups fresh cooked, grilled, or boiled corn on cob (about 4 large ears)
- 2 large peppers, cut, seeded, and broiled (skin side up) until blackened and blistered (I used one poblano and one hatch chili—or use peppers of your choice)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter or vegan margarine (such as Earth Balance)
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon Hungarian (or regular) paprika
- 3 cups almond milk
- 1 cup vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- Optional:* 1 cup torn kale, sausage (such as Field Roast vegan sausages), croutons

Once the cooked corn is cool to touch, cut kernels off the cob into a bowl, and then rub the knife along the cob again to capture any “corn milk” juices that you can as well. After rubbing off most of the charred portion of the skin with a paper towel, dice the roasted peppers. Melt oil and butter in large, deep skillet or soup pan. Sauté onions and garlic; add spices, corn, and peppers. Let simmer over medium-high heat until hot and fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add almond milk, vegetable broth, salt, pepper, and sugar. Simmer until hot and bubbly, stirring regularly.

Carefully ladle half of the soup mixture into a food processor or blender and blend until smooth. Pour back into pan and stir into the waiting corn-pepper-spice mixture, until just reheated. Check to see if it needs more salt and adjust seasonings to your liking. If freezing, let cool and pour into labeled Ziploc bags or freezer-safe containers at this point. Defrost and heat until warm and add any of the optional additions below.

Optional: Add about a cup of torn kale to soup after you stir the blended portion into the other half (or when reheating), and cook until kale is tender. Toast up some bread cubes under the broiler for quick croutons. Slice and brown sausages in a little olive oil. Sprinkle atop the soup to make it a hearty one-bowl meal.

Omnivore Options: Use dairy milk to replace almond milk and chicken broth to replace vegetable broth if you prefer. Drizzle with heavy cream, sour cream, or Greek yogurt, or sprinkle with cheese and crisp bacon.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

Coconut-Covered Cherry Freezer Bites

If life is just a bowl of cherries, I want my life to be a bowl of these coconut-covered cherry bites. It would be a sweet and bright life, full of health and energy and little bites of bliss that make you stop and say, “Wow,” “Mmmm,” and “More please.” I like to keep a bowl of these in my freezer at all times, because every day needs at least one wow moment. —Rachel

Note: When full fat coconut milk gets cold, the coconut water settles at the bottom of the can, leaving a thick cream at the top. If you open the can upside down, you can just pour the liquid out (save or freeze it for smoothies) and scoop out the cream.

Makes about 15 Cherries.

- 2 tablespoons cream from full fat coconut milk that has been refrigerated for at least an hour (avoid coconut milk with preservatives or it may not separate)
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 15 frozen or fresh pitted cherries
- parchment or wax paper

In a bowl, mix coconut cream, sugar, and vanilla until the sugar dissolves. Dip the frozen cherries into the cream a few at a time and place on a parchment- or wax-paper lined pan. If the cream isn’t sticking well, pat the cherries dry with a paper towel. Place in the freezer for 20–30 minutes until the cream coating is completely frozen. Transfer to air tight zip-top bag or container. Enjoy straight from the freezer.

Variations:

- Add 1 teaspoon cocoa powder for chocolate covered cherries.
- Use banana slices with a maple-cinnamon coconut dip.
- Roll in sprinkles or shredded coconut.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

Unto Us a Baby Texan Is Born

CELEBRATION RECIPES

“Carrot Cake” Chutney and Cream Cheese Topping for Nana’s Beloved Crackers

Years ago, for my birthday, my sister sent me a jar of Carrot Cake Chutney from a gourmet specialty store with instructions to plop a bit on top of a good cracker with cream cheese. It was heavenly and left a taste memory for years. Recently I tried my hand at recreating it, and by golly, I think I did it! —Becky

Makes about 1¼ cups.

- 5 medium-sized organic carrots peeled, rough chopped to ready for food processor
- ⅓ cup well-drained crushed pineapple
- ⅓ cup agave nectar
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- pinch of salt
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 3 tablespoons raisins
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar

Process carrots in a food processor or blender to a tiny dice (as you would for a carrot salad). Mix the carrots with all the remaining ingredients and simmer in a skillet on medium low for about 5 to 8

minutes or until the carrots are tender crisp and the syrup is thick and reduced by at least half, most of it absorbed into the carrots and raisins, with only a tablespoon or two of syrup remaining in pan. If you’d like your chutney to have a bit more kick to it, add another teaspoon of vinegar or a squeeze of fresh lemon once you’ve removed the pan from the burner. Cool and put in a tightly covered container in the fridge to let the flavors mingle and intensify. Serve cold with a small spoon, alongside a plate of crackers and a small bowl of whipped cream cheese.

- Vegetarian
- Vegan (serve with vegan cream cheese)
- Gluten free (serve with rice crackers)

Bourbon Brown Sugar Pork Loin

This is Greg’s favorite main dish, and guests swoon over it so much that I never use any other recipe for pork loin. Pork never had it so happy, swimming in bourbon, butter, and brown sugar—who wouldn’t be tender? The bonus is that it is also fabulously easy and fast to cook. —Becky

Serves 3 to 4 (easily doubled for a bigger group).

- 1 small pork tenderloin
- 1½ teaspoons Cajun seasoning (I like Tony Chachere’s brand)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- ¼ cup bourbon, whiskey, or scotch

Heat oven to 350°. Rub the pork tenderloin all over with Cajun seasoning. Put oil and butter into an iron skillet (or other oven-proof skillet) over high heat. Once the oil is very hot, put the tenderloin into the pan, turning heat down a bit, and brown until golden on all sides, turning with tongs. Don’t worry about getting

it done in the middle; just get it pretty and brown on the outside. Remove pan from heat. Sprinkle brown sugar and pour bourbon all over and roll the tenderloin in the juices now in the pan. Cover lightly with foil and place in oven. Cook for about 25 minutes or until just done in the middle. Pork loin is often overcooked and this is what makes it tough. If you have a meat thermometer, cook until it registers 140°. Remove from oven. Let it sit for at least 5 minutes, covered to let juices redistribute.

Slice just before serving in thin slices, ladling a little of the pan juices over it. Delicious with baked sweet potatoes and a green veggie or salad.

Vegan Variation: This method can also be used to cook slices of tofu. Just do not cover it when you put it in the oven and remove earlier, after about 10 minutes.

- *Vegan (see variation above)*
- *Gluten free (those with extreme celiac disease may react to bourbon, but most are fine with it)*

Mama's All Natural (No Sugar) Apple Crisp Skillet

Every cook needs at least one “no sugar” recipe to keep on hand for people who have sworn off the white stuff. This apple crisp is the perfect answer; no one will suspect there is no sugar within. —Becky

Apple Layer

- 2 tablespoons butter or vegan margarine, such as Earth Balance
- 2 tablespoons coconut sugar
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 3 cups fresh organic apple slices, loosely packed, ¼ inch thick, peel left on (about 5 small apples or 3 large apples)
- 2 tablespoons raisins or dried berries

Topping

- 1 cup old-fashioned oats
- ½ cup walnuts
- 2 tablespoons hemp, chia, or flax seeds
- ¼ cup coconut oil (or grape-seed oil, butter, or margarine)
- 3 tablespoons coconut sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt (unless nuts above are salted, then omit)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon pure maple syrup
- Optional:* 2 tablespoons roasted pumpkin seeds for garnish (or sunflower seeds or slivered almonds)

Preheat oven to 350°. In a 10-inch iron skillet, melt butter over a low flame. Mix rest of apple-layer ingredients into the melted butter. Put all topping ingredients, except the maple syrup, into a food processor. Process until mixture is crumbly, about the size of Grape Nuts cereal. Sprinkle over the apples. Drizzle 1 tablespoon of maple syrup over all. Bake at 350° for about 30 minutes or until topping is brown, apples are soft, and juices beneath are thick and syrupy. Top with pumpkin seeds, if desired. Serve plain or with a scoop of vanilla ice cream, yogurt, or coconut milk-based ice cream.

- *Vegetarian*
- *Vegan (use Earth Balance)*
- *Gluten free (use gluten-free oats)*

No Stress Sangrias

My son, Gabe, an excellent cook, served this to me one hot July afternoon on his back porch, alongside a delicious grilled lunch. I could not believe it was so easy, and it fast became my favorite summer cocktail. —Becky

- 1 part chilled lemon-lime or grapefruit soda
- 1 part chilled Merlot or Cabernet
- slices of citrus
- Ice

In a glass or pitcher, mix equal parts soda and red wine. Mix with ice and any slices of citrus you like. That's it!

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

Chapter 7

Walmart Gourmet

GOURMET RECIPES FROM THE AISLES OF WALMART

Pecan Mushroom-Stuffed Zucchini

Delicious served alone as a vegetarian meal or as a side dish for any occasion. I like these so much I will munch on the leftovers cold, straight from the fridge! —Becky

Serves 4–6.

- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup butter or vegan margarine, such as Earth Balance
- 4 zucchini squashes, cut in half lengthwise with the middle cut or scooped out like a canoe (dice the scooped-out part for the stuffing)
- 8 ounces of mushrooms, any kind, diced (to yield 1½ to 2 cups)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pieces whole wheat bread made into crumbs (use your hands or a food processor to crumble)
- ½ cup pecans, chopped (walnuts are also great)
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, divided
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 8 cherry or grape tomatoes, sliced for garnish
- fresh basil or oregano (enough for garnish)

Heat oven to 375°. Put hollowed-out zucchini “boats” in a heat-proof rectangular pan, lightly salt and pepper them, and microwave for 6 minutes. In the meantime, heat oil and butter together in a

skillet and add the reserved chopped zucchini, mushrooms, and garlic. Stir and cover, cooking over medium heat for about 5 minutes, so that juices accumulate and don't evaporate. When veggies are soft, translucent, and "juicy," toss in bread crumbs, ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, pecans, salt, and pepper. Stir. Turn off heat. Stuffing should be moist. (If dry, add a little more butter, oil, and/or water.)

Fill the "nuked" zucchini with stuffing, decorate with sliced tomatoes, cover pan with foil, and bake for 15 minutes. Remove from oven, uncover, and sprinkle with remaining ¼ cup Parmesan. Turn oven to broil, and put back in under the broiler, watching carefully until Parmesan starts to melt and tomatoes start to brown just a little. Garnish with fresh basil or oregano leaves.

Variation: Add cooked crumbled sausage for the omnivores in your family to make a complete meal-in-one.

- Vegetarian
- Vegan (use vegan margarine. Omit cheese or substitute with vegan Parmesan)
- Gluten free (use gluten-free bread)

Yellow Pepper Soup

I first tasted this soup on a trip to Florida, when a dear friend, Maxine Bland, served it up on her sunny back porch. It was February, but 70 degrees. I was not a big fan of soups back then, but it was love at first spoonful when I tasted this creamy dish. There's something in the combination of the roasted peppers and sweet potato that is simply ... bliss on a spoon. —Becky

Serves 6 to 8.

- 4 yellow bell peppers, medium sized, seeded, rough chopped, and sautéed until just tender. (You can also roast them for a bit more flavor, peeling off the charred skin before seeding and chopping.)
- 1 cooked (baked, boiled, or nuked) sweet potato, peeled and rough-chopped
- 3 cups organic vegetable broth
- ½ onion, rough chopped
- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup (or brown sugar)
- ¼ teaspoon fresh grated nutmeg
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 6 tablespoons heavy cream or unsweetened vegan creamer (1 tablespoon for each of 6 bowls)

Into a blender, toss all the ingredients except the salt and pepper, nutmeg, and cream. Blend until it's as smooth as you can get it and transfer to a sauce pan. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, about 10 to 15 minutes, until any raw onion or garlic taste is gone and it is heated through. Add salt, pepper, and nutmeg; check for seasonings and adjust to your liking. Serve in bowls, swirling 1 tablespoon heavy cream into each bowl, gently, using the tip of a spoon just before serving.

- Vegetarian
- Vegan (use unsweetened vegan creamer instead of cream)
- Gluten free

Blueberry-Raspberry Oat Bars

These bars taste complex but are incredibly easy as you use the same mix for the bottom crust as you do for the topping, and it's all blended up in a food processor. Not too sweet and filled with oatmeal and berries, these buttery bars will satisfy a sweet tooth without sending you into sugar orbit. I've lost count of how many times I've made this recipe and shared it with someone who asked for it! —Becky

Serves 12–15, depending on how big you cut the bars.

- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar or coconut sugar
- 1¾ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups oatmeal
- ½ cup chopped nuts (walnuts, pecans, almonds, or whatever nut you like)
- 1 cup fresh blueberries (or frozen blueberries, thawed, and juices drained)
- 1 cup fresh raspberries (or frozen raspberries, thawed, and juices drained)

Preheat oven to 375°. Put the first four ingredients into a food processor and pulse until crumbly. Add the oatmeal and nuts. Process just until blended. (You can also do this with a mixer or use clean hands for the job.) Press half of the mixture into a greased 9x13-inch pan. Spread berries over the crust and sprinkle with the remaining oatmeal mixture (like a crumb topping). Bake 25 minutes or until golden brown. Cool 10 minutes before cutting into bars.

If you have any leftovers (and this is a big IF), I've found they stay freshest when wrapped well and refrigerated: then nuke the portion you want to eat for a few seconds in the microwave.

- *Vegetarian*
- *Vegan (substitute butter with vegan margarine, such as Earth Balance, or coconut oil, or a combination of both)*
- *Gluten free (substitute flour with almond or oat flour and use gluten-free oats)*

Chapter 8

Lost in Mom Space

ROMANTIC DINNER FOR TWO ON A BUDGET

Chili Lime Southern Style Catfish

I grew up in the South surrounded by lakes and fish fries, so I've eaten my share of catfish. This is how great catfish should taste. The coating is crisp without being heavy, and full of flavor! —Becky

Serves 2.

- 4 medium-sized catfish fillets
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon grill seasoning (or ½ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon garlic powder)
- 1 teaspoon Tajins chili-lime spice (you can find this in the Mexican food aisle of most grocers, or you can substitute ½ teaspoon ground red pepper, zest of one lime, and ½ teaspoon salt)
- 1 fresh lime, cut in half
- sea salt
- ½ cup oil (I like a combination of coconut and olive oil to equal about ¼ inch in your pan)

Heat oil in iron skillet on medium high until it is sizzling hot. Gently rinse fish fillets with fresh water and pat dry. Squeeze a little fresh lime juice over all the fillets, both sides. Then sprinkle both sides of the fillets with some good sea salt. Pour cornmeal on a plate or shallow wide bowl and mix in the grill seasoning and chili lime spice. Place fillets, one at a time, in cornmeal mixture, pressing the fish into it until it is lightly coated all over.

Using tongs, lay each fillet into the sizzling oil. Let cook until the bottom is golden brown and crisp, and then turn over and cook the other side. Don't crowd the pan too much; cook in batches if needed. When done, place on a paper-towel-lined plate and let any extra oil drain off. Test a bite to see if it needs more seasoning, and if so, sprinkle with additional Tajin or sea salt while it is still hot. Serve with tartar sauce, fresh lemon or lime, or cocktail sauce.

- *Gluten free*

Stewed Summer Veggies

I love to make this in the summer when Jared's uncle brings me bags full of vegetables from his organic garden. If you have a garden, or a generous gardening friend, this is the ultimate budget meal—almost free! Even though it's a warm soup, it's nice and light and isn't too filling for a romantic dinner for two under the stars. —Rachel

Serves 3–4.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 4 small potatoes, chopped into bite-size chunks
- 1 yellow squash (or zucchini), cut into bite-size chunks
- 3 cups of tomatoes (I use a combination of whole cherry tomatoes and chopped larger tomatoes)

- 1 tablespoon white-wine vinegar
- 3 stalks of kale, torn off the rib and into pieces
(or 2 cups of baby spinach)
- 1 cup of water or vegetable broth
- 1 can of cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- ¼ teaspoon seasoning salt (like Lawry's or Tony Chachere's
Cajun seasoning)
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika
- salt and pepper to taste

Pour olive oil into a large tall-sided skillet or sauce pan and heat on medium. Add onions and a dash of salt and sauté for about 5 minutes. Add potatoes, squash, tomatoes, water or broth, and vinegar. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in kale and gently mash the cherry tomatoes so they release their juices. If it needs more liquid, you can add another cup of water or broth. Gently stir in the beans and season to taste with seasoning salt and smoked paprika (use just a pinch for a nice smoky flavor). Taste and adjust as needed, using salt, pepper, smoked paprika, and seasoning salt. Cook until greens are wilted.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

Oven-Blistered Potatoes

At least once a week, you'll find me tossing these babies in the oven to make a quick and easy side dish that tastes and looks complicated.

—Becky

Serves 2–4 people (depending on size of potatoes and appetites).

- 2 large or 3 medium Idaho potatoes, washed but not peeled, sliced thin (about ¼ inch or less)
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- sea salt (fresh ground if you have it)
- 1 tablespoon chopped green onions or chives (optional)
- ¼ cup catsup, barbecue sauce, or ranch dressing for dipping (optional)

Place sliced potatoes in a shallow bowl and sprinkle with vinegar. Using clean hands, toss them around until they begin to soak up some of the vinegar. Add in the oil and do the same.

Lay “chips” on a big cookie sheet, spread apart and not touching each other. Lightly sprinkle them with sea salt. Broil about 4 inches from broiler on one side for 3 minutes or so, or until golden brown in spots. Remove from oven and turn over all the chips; sprinkle this side with more salt and put back under the broiler until the tops are golden brown. Remove from oven. The bottom side of the potatoes will have by now “blistered” and turned an even prettier shade of brown. Taste one as soon as they are cool to see if more salt may be needed. Garnish with chopped green onions or chives if you like. Serve with a side of ranch dressing, barbecue sauce, or catsup if desired.

Variations: Try it with different vinegars, like pomegranate balsamic or malt vinegar; or different salt combinations such as Cajun, lemon-pepper, or garlic.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

Broccoli Carrot Slaw

Ever wonder what to do with that big stem on the broccoli? This slaw uses every part of the broccoli to stretch your dollar but tastes and looks like it came out of a top chef's kitchen. —Rachel

Serves 2.

- 2 cups broccoli crowns and stems, thinly sliced into small flat ribbons
- 2 cups carrots, thinly sliced into small flat ribbons (a vegetable peeler works well for this)
- 4 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon salt

Put all of the ingredients in a bowl and toss. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to let the flavors mingle and the carrots and broccoli soften up. Can be served chilled or at room temperature.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

“Whither Thou Beachest, I Will Beach”

BEACHIN' RECIPES

Tortilla Soup

I adore this soup, especially when I need to serve a crowd. People love adding their own “fixin’s” (which I put out on a buffet), and by doing so, you create a one-bowl wonder. Add some cornbread, and dinner for a dozen is done. —Becky

Serves 10–12.

- 1 seeded red bell pepper
- ½ red onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 teaspoons poultry seasoning
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 to 2 chipotle peppers in adobo sauce (medium to hot heat level), available in small cans in Mexican and Spanish food section of market.*

*I keep the leftover Chipotles in Adobo Sauce in a small Ziploc bag in the freezer and break off what I need to add depth of flavor and heat to other Mexican dishes.

- 1 28-ounce can fire roasted crushed tomatoes, divided in half
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth (divided 1 and 3)
- 3 to 4 cups deli roasted chicken, pulled off bone and diced or shredded
- 1 cup frozen corn
- 1 zucchini, diced
- steak or grill seasoning (or salt and pepper), to taste
- ¼ cup barbecue sauce
- ½ cup heavy cream (optional)

Topping Options: crushed tortilla chips, grated cheese, chopped green onions, diced avocados, sour cream or Greek yogurt, wedges of fresh lime, cilantro

In a blender or food processor put the first seven ingredients (bell pepper through chipotles), half of the crushed tomatoes, and one cup of broth. Blend well. Pour this mixture into a big soup pot and add the rest of the crushed tomatoes and broth. To this, add chicken, frozen corn, and zucchini. Simmer over medium heat until zucchini is tender and soup is heated through. Season with steak or grill seasoning (or salt and pepper) to taste. To make a creamier soup, add ½ cup of cream.

To serve, put a handful of crushed tortilla chips in the bottom of each soup bowl. Carefully ladle on soup, and then top with your choice of toppings.

- *Vegetarian (use vegetable broth, and pinto, ranch-style, or black beans in place of chicken)*
- *Vegan (follow steps above and omit cheese and cream)*
- *Gluten free*

Pineapple Coconut Cloud Cake

My mother, Ruthie, introduced this light-as-a-feather cake to our family a few years ago to rave reviews. When we discovered the cake itself has two ingredients, needs no mixer, and is low in fat and calories, we all begged for the recipe. —Becky

Serves 12.

- 1 angel food cake mix
- 1 20-ounce can crushed pineapple
- 3 cups whipped topping*
- ½ cup shredded coconut for sprinkling on top
- Optional:* toasted, sliced almonds

Preheat oven to 350°. In a big bowl, stir or whisk together one box of angel food cake mix and a large can of crushed pineapple with juice. Pour into a 9x13-inch ungreased pan. Bake until golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes.

To cool, turn the cake upside down, propped up on 4 cans or cups of equal height, at corners. When completely cool, frost cake with whipped cream or topping, garnish with flaked coconut and optional toasted sliced almonds. Serve and enjoy. Keep in fridge, covered.

• *Vegetarian*

* My mom loves Dream Whip, which she makes from a box. I'm a real cow's whipping cream kind of a girl. Cool Whip is the most convenient for occasions when there may not be a mixer handy. Coconut-milk whipping cream is also great—use the thick cream that floats from the top of two cans of full fat refrigerated coconut milk and whip, and then sweeten just as you do whipping cream with vanilla and sugar.

Grilled Stuffed Avocados

Serve these at your next barbecue with Mexican rice and beans and no one will even miss the meat. —Rachel

Serves 2 entrees (4 appetizers).

Stuffed Avocados

- 2 ripe but firm avocados, cut in half lengthwise and pitted
- 2 ears of corn with husks, soaked for 30 minutes and silks removed;
pull husks back but don't remove from cob
- 1 poblano pepper
- ½ red onion, sliced into ½ inch thick rings
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- juice of ½ a lime (about 1 tablespoon)

Cilantro Lime Sour Cream Sauce

- ¼ cup vegan or regular sour cream
- ¼ cup cilantro
- ½ tablespoon lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 clove garlic

Light coals for charcoal grill. You want the coals to be all white and no longer flaming when ready. (You can also use a gas grill on medium-low flames.)

In a blender or food processor, blend all ingredients for the cilantro lime sour cream sauce. Set aside.

Mix canola oil, salt, and lime in a small bowl. Brush corn with canola oil mixture and pull husks back up around kernels. Brush onions with canola oil mixture. Put corn, onions, and poblano pepper (left whole) on the grill. Apply canola mixture with a grill

brush as they cook and turn veggies so they cook evenly on all sides. When poblano is charred on all sides, remove it and put it in a bowl covered with plastic wrap for a few minutes to loosen the skin. Remove the skins with a wet paper towel. Grill onions and corn for 15–20 minutes until they are cooked through and lightly charred. Cut corn off the cob; dice onions and poblanos about the same size as corn kernels. Toss together in a bowl.

Brush avocados with canola mixture and grill flesh side down for 3–4 minutes. Ideally, you'll get nice grill marks across the avocado. Nestle the grilled avocados in a bed of Mexican rice, top with corn, onion, and poblano mixture, and drizzle with cilantro sour cream sauce. Serve with a side of black beans for a complete meal or as a healthy side dish or appetizer.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

Chapter 10

Family Bonding in the Kitchen

RECIPES KIDS LOVE TO EAT AND MAKE

Cinnamon Raisin Oatmeal

Jackson, now eighteen months old, happily eats this breakfast every day, and has done so for months. I make a batch each weekend, we all eat a bowl, and then I freeze the rest into ice cube trays for his weekday breakfast. — Rachel

Serves 4 adult-size portions (8 child portions).

- 3 cups of water
- 2 cups of milk of choice (I use organic unsweetened almond or coconut)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups thick-cut rolled oats (not quick-cooking)
- 2 tablespoons hemp seeds (optional, but if you leave out, reduce water by ¼ cup)
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds (optional, but if you leave out, reduce water by ¾ cup)
- 1 cup organic raisins or a diced or grated organic apple
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 banana (very ripe mushy ones work best)

In a large sauce pan, bring water, milk, and salt to a low boil. Watch closely or you'll have a great big mess if it boils over. (Don't ask me how I know this.) Reduce heat to medium-low and add all the remaining ingredients. Cook on medium-low to low for about 10 minutes, stirring and mashing the banana occasionally, until the liquid is just absorbed. Serve immediately or freeze for later.

Freeze for later: Scoop oatmeal into ice trays and, with a spoon or spatula, spread it out evenly among the cubes, pressing down gently to make sure it's packed firmly. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and freeze. Once frozen, pop out and transfer to freezer bags. Reheat cubes in microwave with a splash of milk or a full-fat coconut milk. (I freeze leftovers when I don't finish a can.)

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free (use gluten-free oats)*

Super Hero Green Smoothie

I made this smoothie for Jackson's first birthday morning. From his reaction, you'd have thought we bought him a new car. He applauded the blender as it pureed the greens and fruit into a delicious cold smoothie. (He delights in all things with a motor—vacuums, blow dryers, lawn mowers, anything that goes “vuvrooom.”) And he let out an “abbbb,” after a big gulp from his sippy cup. — Rachel

Serves 2 (and a toddler).

- 3 tablespoons oats (optional)
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds plus 3 tablespoons warm water (optional)
- 1½ cups greens (I used a Power Greens mix of spinach, chard, and baby kale)
- 1 date, pitted
- ½ organic apple, seeded
- 1 clementine, peeled
- 1 banana, frozen or fresh
- 1 cup fresh or frozen pineapple
- ¼ teaspoon almond or vanilla extract
- 1 cup unsweetened coconut or almond milk
- ice

Soak chia seeds in warm water, stirring occasionally until all the water is absorbed and the chia seeds are soft. Grind oats in blender into a fine dust. Turn off and add (in this order) chia seeds, greens, date, apple, clementine, banana, pineapple, almond or vanilla extract, and milk. Blend until smooth. Add a handful of ice if desired and blend again until smooth.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free (use gluten-free oats)*

90% Fruit Soft Serve

Why I didn't discover this simple trick to instant all-fruit ice cream years ago, I don't know. Last summer I made this several times a week for a refreshing dessert that I feel good about serving. It's fun to experiment with all kinds of fruit and combinations. —Becky

Serves 2–3.

- 1½ cups frozen fruit (such as black cherries, blueberries, strawberries, peaches, bananas, or a combination)
- ¼ cup of yogurt or almond milk or juice (really, any liquid you like)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla or any extract you desire (zest of lemon or lime or orange can also be used)
- pinch of salt
- 2–4 tablespoons sugar or agave nectar or any other sweetener of your choice, to taste
- any stir-ins you may like, such as chopped nuts, chocolate chips, coconut, peanut butter, and so on

Put all ingredients into a good food processor. Begin to pulse it, scraping as you go. Once the fruit is starting to pulverize, let the processor run several seconds as it works to turn the frozen fruit into a creamy texture. You will have to pause and scrape the sides of the food processor a few times and you may have to add a bit more liquid. Repeat this until you have a nice soft-serve fruit-based ice cream.

It takes a little patience. You can put the whole thing in the freezer for about 5 minutes to firm it up a bit more, or serve right away as is. Add any stir-ins you might want, or any toppings.

Suggested variations: bananas and chocolate syrup; bananas with rum flavoring and a stir-in of plumped raisins; pineapple with coconut milk; mango with orange juice; cherries with almond flavoring and chopped nuts; frozen apples with cinnamon; or kiwi and watermelon with green tea.

- Vegan/vegetarian (depending on mix-ins)
- Gluten free

Nate's Favorite Hairy Cheese Pizza

Though you could add a nice tomato sauce or other fancy toppings, this simple pizza, created by six-year-old Nate, is surprisingly tasty as is.

—Becky

Makes 1 pizza.

- 1 piece naan bread (I like Whole Food's garlic flavor)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ cup finely grated cheese, preferably using a Microplane grater (Nate likes a sharp white cheddar cheese the best)
- ½ avocado, diced
- any other toppings you like, such as turkey pepperoni, olives, or sundried tomatoes

Heat oil in a flat grill or pancake pan. Brown both sides of the naan bread until golden and crispy-crunchy. Cover with cheese and place in microwave or under broiler just until cheese melts. Dot with fresh avocado or any other toppings you like. Cut and serve.

- Vegetarian (unless adding meat toppings)

Going Vegan in Cattle Country

DAIRY-, EGG-, AND MEAT-FREE RECIPES THE WHOLE FAMILY WILL LOVE

Cashew Queso

My omnivore friends beg me to bring this to all of our parties. I pinky-promise you, it looks and tastes just like real cheese dip, but it's seriously guilt free. Every ingredient is good for you. Bake your own chips and you've got yourself a truly indulgent tasting, yet completely healthy plate of nachos! — Rachel

Makes 3 cups.

- 1¼ cups raw, unsalted cashews (roasted, unsalted work too if you can't find raw ones)
- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast (available at Whole Foods or health food stores)
- 2 tablespoons onion powder
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ½ roasted orange or red bell pepper* (I've also used a small jar of pimentos)
- 2 cups water
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice

*You can buy roasted peppers in a jar, but making your own is easy. Just place a whole bell pepper directly on a gas burner flame, rotating them a few times with heat-proof tongs, or place them on a pan under the broiler until the skin gets charred and black in several spots. Then put them in a bowl tightly covered with plastic wrap for about 5 minutes. Rub off most of the skin with a damp paper towel. Voila, roasted peppers!

In a food processor, blend cashews, nutritional yeast, salt, and onion powder into a fine dust. Add about ½ cup of the water and the roasted bell pepper and blend again. Pulse in the rest of the water and lemon juice. Transfer mixture to a pot and heat on medium heat, stirring often until it has thickened to the consistency you like. Keep warm in a small Crock-Pot for entertaining, stirring every so often. If it gets too thick, just stir in a little more water.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

No-Bake Apricot Bars

If I had to pick a favorite recipe, it would be this one. It was inspired by one of my favorite vegan food bloggers, Angela Liddon's recipe for "5 Ingredient No Bake Vegan Date Squares" (www.ohsheglows.com). I've since made several variations, and they've become a family staple among my mom, Granny, and Aunt Rachel. They are filling enough for breakfast, sweet enough for dessert, and healthy enough for a guilt-free anytime snack. Just make them. You won't regret it. — Rachel

Serves 12.

Crust

- 1½ cups whole cashews (toasted, roasted, honey roasted—whatever you have)
- 1½ cups regular or thick-cut oats (not quick-cooking)
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt (omit if cashews are salted)
- 10–15 dried apricots (about half a cup), roughly chopped
- ¼ cup coconut oil, melted

Filling

- 25–35 dried apricots roughly chopped (2 cups)
- ½–1 cup water

Crust: Spray a muffin tin (my preference) or an 8x8 pan with nonstick cooking spray. In a food processor, process cashews, salt, and oats until a fine crumble forms. Add apricots and process until crumbly again. Add coconut oil and process until sticky. Remove from processor. Set aside $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the mixture for later. Press remaining mixture into cupcake molds or pan to form a crust. For muffin tins, put a heaping tablespoon into each mold; then use the back of the spoon to press down and smooth out the layer.

Filling: Process the apricots and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water in the food processor (I've found a smaller bowl works better than a large one if you have a full-sized food processor—in fact, I just use my mini one for this step) until a paste forms, stopping to scrape down the sides and adding a little more water as needed (don't exceed 1 cup). Scoop out the apricot mixture into the pan or evenly into the muffin tins and gently spread out to cover the crust.

Sprinkle on the reserved crust and gently press down into the apricot mixture, just so it sticks. Freeze for at least an hour or until firm. Cut squares or pop out of muffin molds and wrap individually with plastic wrap. Store in freezer. Enjoy straight from the freezer or slightly thawed as a delicious healthy treat!

Variations: Try it with dates and almonds or dried cranberries and pecans or dried cherries and walnuts.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten-free friendly (use gluten-free oats)

Roasted Red Pepper Quinoa

Quinoa (pronounced KEEN-wah) has the highest protein content of all grains and is a complete protein. I like to have it on hand for quick dinners because it cooks in about 20 minutes (compared to 45 for whole-grain rice). It's similar to couscous, but much better for you.

This is my go-to recipe. It would be perfect with the tofu version of my mom's Blackened Tilapia recipe in Chapter 2 and some steamed broccoli. —Rachel

Serves 4.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup quinoa (rinsed if the package doesn't say it's pre-rinsed)
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of juice from a jar of roasted red peppers
(or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup more water)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roasted red peppers, chopped (I use jarred peppers for this recipe because I like to use the juice too, but you can roast your own [see Cashew Queso recipe for instructions] and use all water instead)

In a skillet or sauce pan, sauté onions in the olive oil until soft, add the garlic and sauté a few minutes longer.

With a Rice Maker: Transfer the onions and garlic and any remaining oil into the rice maker; add the quinoa, water, salt, and red pepper juice. Stir, cover, and start the rice maker. (If your rice maker has a tendency to stick, add about a teaspoon of extra oil before stirring.) When the rice maker goes off, add in the chopped roasted red peppers.

Without a Rice Maker: Add the quinoa, water, red pepper juice, and salt to the sauce pan. Cover, bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer, and cook until all the liquid is absorbed (about 15 to 20 minutes). Stir in the chopped roasted red peppers.

- Vegan/vegetarian
- Gluten free

Sweet Potato Lentil Chili

I have a spicy version of this chili on our blog, but I made this milder, sweeter version for myself when the baby was coming. If you like spice, though, feel free to use more peppers. This makes a lot, so you can freeze leftovers and have a vegan, gluten-free, nut-free, and soy-free meal on hand if a guest with allergies pops in for dinner. —Rachel

Makes about 3 quarts.

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 carrots, chopped
- 1 celery rib, chopped
- ½ cup sweet red, yellow, or orange peppers (for spicy version use a poblano instead or add a jalapeño or serrano pepper to the mix)
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger (if you have it)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 chipotle in adobo sauce, seeded and chopped fine (or 1 teaspoon chipotle powder) (optional)
- 1 sweet potato, chopped
- 1 28-ounce can of diced fire-roasted tomatoes
- 1 15-ounce can of sweet potato puree (pumpkin or butternut squash work too)

1½ cups dry green lentils, sorted for dirt and rocks* and rinsed

8 cups water

2 cups of frozen corn, thawed

2 cups kale, removed from stem

Other: brown rice, quinoa, or crackers to serve with

In a large pot, heat olive oil and sauté onions, carrots, celery, peppers, garlic, and ginger with 1 teaspoon salt on medium heat until veggies are soft. Stir in cumin, chili powder, and the optional chipotle. Add chopped sweet potato, tomatoes, sweet-potato puree, lentils, and water. Cover and bring to a boil. Lower to a simmer for 30 minutes with the lid tilted, stirring occasionally. Remove the lid. Add corn and kale (if freezing, don't add kale yet). Bring back to a boil and then lower to simmer for another 10 minutes or until you reach the desired consistency. Season with salt to taste.

Serve over brown rice, quinoa, or with crackers.

- *Vegan/vegetarian*
- *Gluten free*

*Before cooking any dried legumes, pour them onto a few paper towels and sort through them looking for sticks, little rocks, or clumps of dirt. Please don't skip this step. I find something in probably half my dried beans. You don't want you or your guests to bite into a rock!

Tangible Love in a Casserole

“BRINGING THE MEATLOAF” — RECIPES THAT SHOW TANGIBLE LOVE IN A CASSEROLE

Lindsey O’Connor’s Refreshing Watermelon, Mint, and Feta Salad

This is one of my absolute favorite summer side dishes. —Becky

Serves 4.

Salad

- 4 cups of cold, cubed watermelon (cut in 1-inch squares)
- 1 cup cubed or crumbled feta (if dicing, make them about ½-inch square)
- ¼ cup finely minced mint leaves

Vinaigrette

- a piece of watermelon to equal about ¼ cup
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil (*Becky’s note:* dressing may be served without the addition of oil if you prefer it lighter)

Place watermelon, feta, and mint in large salad bowl. Blend ingredients for vinaigrette together in blender; gently toss with other ingredients and serve.

- Vegetarian
- Vegan (omit feta)
- Gluten free

Momma’s Sweet ’n’ Spicy Meatloaves

This meatloaf will cure anything from hunger to heartache. You’ll never need or want another meatloaf recipe after you try this one.

—Becky

Serves 6 to 10.

Meatloaf

- 1 package of dry Lipton onion soup mix
- 2 slices of soft wheat bread
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup water
- ⅓ cup catsup
- 2 pounds ground lean beef or bison (preferably organic, grass-fed, no antibiotics)

Sauce

- ⅔ cup catsup
- ⅓ cup bottled chunky-style salsa
- ⅓ cup brown sugar

Put the first five ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend. Pour this mixture into a big bowl along with 2 pounds of ground beef (or bison). Using your hands (I put little disposable

sandwich bags on as “gloves”), work the seasoning-bread mixture into the beef. Pat into a 9x13 casserole dish. Using the side of your hand or end of a wooden spoon, “cut” the flat loaf into equal “mini loaves.” It will look like little irrigation ditches alongside the mounds of meat. Bake 20–30 minutes or until loaves are cooked through, draining off any grease as the meatloaves bake—once about halfway through cooking, and once more when the meatloaves are done.

While meat is cooking, make the sauce: put catsup, brown sugar, and salsa in sauce pan; heat and stir until sugar melts. When meatloaves are done, ladle the sauce over the top. (If you have some left over, save it and serve with the meal for those who want extra.) Put loaves-with-sauce back in oven and turn to broil. Broil until sauce is thickened and caramelized.

• *Gluten free (use gluten-free bread)*

Michele Cushatt's Famous Chocolate Chip Cookies

I hope you treat this recipe like the gold it is, because Michele's chocolate chip cookies are hands down the best I've ever eaten. Such a treat for her to share them with all of us. —Becky

Makes about 4 dozen regular-size cookies, but Michele makes them bigger-than-average-in size, to yield about 3 dozen.

1 stick (½ cup) real butter, softened	¾ cup sugar
½ cup butter-flavored Crisco	2¼ cups flour
1 teaspoon vanilla	1 teaspoon salt
2 eggs	1 teaspoon baking soda
¾ cup brown sugar	12 ounces Ghirardelli or Nestlé chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350°. Put butter, shortening, vanilla, eggs, and both sugars in a mixing bowl and cream on medium speed until light. Add flour, salt, and soda and mix until blended. Stir in chocolate chips. Drop by spoonfuls onto cookie sheet and bake for 12 minutes or until golden brown. Then deliver to your favorite people.

• *Vegetarian*

Orange Glazed Carrots

Sometimes it is the simplest things that elevate a lowly veggie. Butter, brown sugar, and orange juice work magic on carrots. —Becky

Makes four ½-cup servings.

2 cups diced or mini carrots
1 tablespoon water
½ cup orange juice
¼ cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon butter
sea salt to taste

Put the carrots and a tablespoon of water in a tightly covered microwave-proof dish and nuke for about 12 minutes or until just tender. (You can also steam them if you prefer.) While the carrots are cooking, put orange juice, brown sugar, and butter into a pan on the stovetop. Turn burner on high until it reaches a boil; then turn down to a simmer and simmer for about 6 minutes or until the mixture reduces and starts to get syrupy. Add the cooked carrots to the orange syrup and simmer 1–2 minutes more until carrots are coated with thick buttery syrup and taste like heaven. Sprinkle with a little sea salt and serve.

- *Vegetarian*
- *Vegan (use vegan margarine, i.e., Earth Balance)*
- *Gluten free*

Recipes taken from *We Laugh, We Cry, We Cook*
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