







Mealtime-What Are You Going To Cook?

Grab a paper and pen. Write a few foods and meals that you like to eat at restaurants or that you remember from other times in your life. Find the recipes for making foods you enjoy. For fresh ideas, look for books at second hand stores and the library or ask friends for recommendations.

Find recipes from different cultures. Buy cookbooks and watch videos or follow cooks online that you like. I used a video to learn how to roll fresh spring rolls. There is a big selection so find a cook that you enjoy listening to. You will find some of my favourite recipes later in the book.

Cooking is a time for experimenting. Start with a recipe and adjust it to what you like and what you have available on the pantry shelf or in the fridge or freezer.

Recipe Selection

What do you enjoy eating? What are your favourite foods?

When choosing recipes, consider:

- what you want to eat
- the food on your shelves and in your fridge
- how much time you have for preparation (chopping and cooking)

- your skill level in using knives and preparation
- also the equipment and supplies you have available

There are a lot of recipes all around us from friends, family, cookbooks and all the social media sites.

Recipes - Saving and Organisation

Organising your favourite recipes will save you time when deciding what to cook.

Recipes can be saved on paper and online. Use both or whichever works for you. Organising the recipes will take a short amount of time and will save you from the frustration of searching endlessly for one that you want.

Separate the recipes into categories that make sense to you. The categories can be seasonal (spring, summer, etc) or by occasion (potluck, picnics). Or sort them by categories like Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner and Snacks.

SUGGESTION: Add the category “Want to try” for times that you want to experiment with your cooking. Gather a few good recipe books that are useful for learning and getting ideas for meals.

Paper copies - Organise printed copies in a binder. If you’re feeling crafty, use scrapbook making supplies to create a beautiful cookbook for yourself or simply buy a binder for recipes.

Suggestion: I use plastic sleeves to protect the pages in my binder.

Online recipes - Recipes can be saved in an online program with programs like One-Note and Notion, which are free. There are templates for using One-Note to easily create your own online cookbook.

HINT: When using recipes, make notes on the pages when you make changes so you can remember what you did last time.

Next we will look at how to identify recipes that will work for you because the key to good cooking is selecting the right recipe.

Consider:

- Is it something you enjoy eating or want to try making?
- Are the instructions clear, simple, and easy to read and follow?
- Do I have the ingredients or if I buy the ingredients, would I use the rest of the package?
- Do I have the skills to make this recipe and if not, am I interested in learning? As a Cooking Coach and personal chef, I help people to develop their cooking skills. I could hand you a pile of recipes but if you do not know how to follow the recipe or do not have the ingredients, you still will not enjoy cooking for yourself.

TIP: Read the comments under the recipes which are found online. In the comments, you will find corrections or suggestions that improve the recipe. People are surprised when I tell them about reading the comments. They come back later and tell me that reading the comments really helped.

A Dash of Mary: While visiting a good friend, I looked in her fridge. She had half an avocado. I asked what it was for. She said it was left over from another recipe and she didn't know what to do with it. In her fridge, I found some sour cream, green onions and salsa. I made a Guacamole Dip with her leftover avocado and we served it with some crackers.

BONUS TIP: Look on the internet for recipes with a particular ingredient. Spending a bit of time looking for recipes for your ingredient may help you to discover the next great dish to make!





Ingredients for your Recipes

Having a well stocked pantry and fridge makes cooking easier. Consider the ingredients that you use regularly when selecting recipes. Stock up on those ingredients when possible.

Basic supplies include different types of dry pasta and tins of beans like garbanzo, butter, black, pinto, kidney, mixed and romano. If you have these types of foods on the shelf, it will be much easier for you to make dinner.

Fun items to buy are Hearts of Palm, sun-dried tomatoes, black olives and artichokes. They are a little different and will add some interest to dishes like a salad or a stir-fry.

As your selection of recipes grows, you will discover different foods to make for your meals. Be creative, flexible and adventurous.

TIPS TO HELP YOU

- Be flexible. For example, if you're making a seafood dish and you only have shrimp, use the shrimp.
- Be creative. Learn about spices and herbs so you can buy them and know how to use them. There is a basic list in the Appendix. Remember to start small and simple. You don't need every kind today!

- Cooking your own meals will help reduce your total food bill.
- Buy food items when they are on sale if they have a long shelf life, which could be months or years. Examples include rice and oats.
- Splurge on special items that you like to eat or that you would like to try - one more reason for having a shopping list!
- Discuss cooking with friends and family or join online forums. These are sources for information and suggestions to help you in developing your cooking. Perhaps you will help them to start cooking more often too.
- Rotate the food supplies on your shelves so you are using the oldest one first.

TIP: When you are ready to eat the food you prepared, guess the cost of the meal as if you were eating in a restaurant. Compare the estimated amount to the actual amount you paid. For example:

- ★ At home, the cost is \$15 per person
- ★ In a restaurant, it would have been \$50 per person plus the wine, tips and taxes!