

Cook's Country



Fried Chicken Tenders

We traveled to Manchester, New Hampshire, in a bid to help this American favorite graduate from the kids' table.

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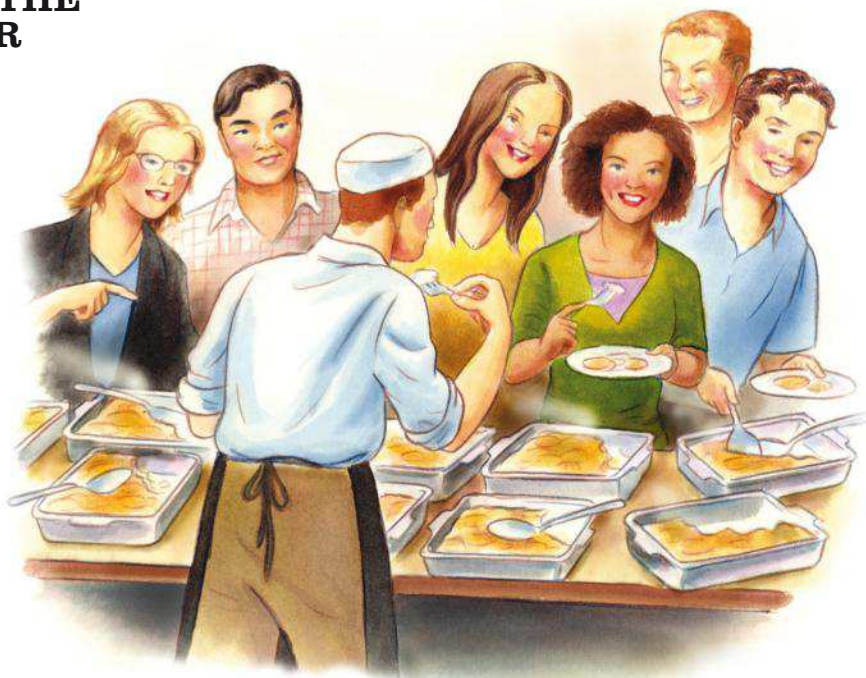


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



WE'RE KNOWN FOR being thorough here in the *Cook's Country* test kitchen, but even I am sometimes surprised by how relentless we can be. For example, we cooked 46 pounds of potatoes before finalizing our recipe for Salt-Crusted Fingerling Potatoes (page 20). A seemingly simple recipe for Stovetop Cauliflower with Garlic and Thyme (page 9) took dozens of tests to perfect. Five easy breadsticks? Don't ask.

But I shouldn't bat an eye at these numbers, because this is what we do. We strive to overturn every stone. We identify, and banish, our assumptions. We repeat successful tests to make sure they weren't flukes. We purposefully court failure.

Wait. What? Failure?

That's right. We try hard to fail. Let me explain.

We want every recipe to work. Not just in our kitchen but in your kitchen. Or in any kitchen, for that matter. Under as many conditions—positive and negative—as possible. Over and over again.

That's why, on any given workday, you'll find us in the test kitchen frying chicken in the wrong amount of oil, just to see what happens. You'll see us baking bread in an oven set 50 degrees lower than instructed, just to see what happens. We'll take a biscuit recipe that calls for heavy cream and substitute skim milk, buttermilk, whole milk, or half-and-half and then mercilessly assess the results. Just to see what happens. How important is it to call for cream? Only these "abuse tests" can tell us for sure.

Sometimes these tests reveal just how adaptable a given recipe is, and that's always a happy revelation. But more often, these tests help us warn you away from missteps before you take them. They help us hone our ingredient lists and instructions to razor-sharp precision so that when we tell you to use a specific ingredient or piece of equipment, you can believe us.

Failure? Bring it. We'll face it down.

TUCKER SHAW

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Illustration: Ross MacDonald

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On the cover: Puritan Backroom—Style Chicken Tenders



CAKES FOR EVERY OCCASION

The Perfect Cake

Whether you are looking for a party-worthy cake that's sure to bring smiles or a rustic treat for any time, you'll find it here. Rigorously tested to ensure the perfect outcome, the test kitchen's never-fail recipes, techniques, tips, and product picks will improve any baker's game. Order your copy online at AmericasTestKitchen.com/perfectcake.



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America's Test Kitchen is a real test kitchen located in Boston. It is the home of more than 60 test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand exactly how and why they work and eventually arrive at the very best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to **America's Test Kitchen** (AmericasTestKitchen.com) and **Cooks Country** from **America's Test Kitchen** (CooksCountry.com) on public television, and you can listen to our weekly segments on *The Splendid Table* on public radio. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram.



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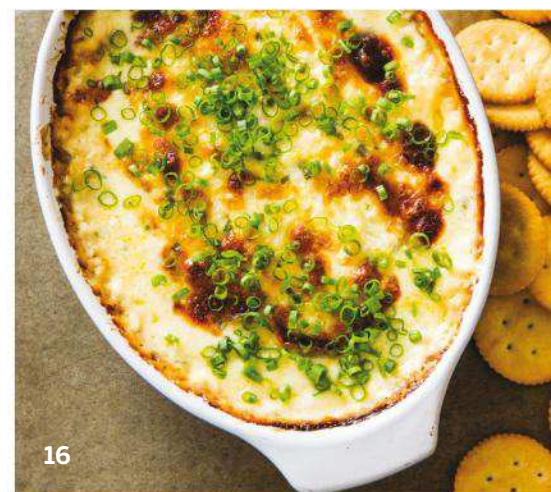
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by Morgan Bolling

Mint: More Than Just the Leaves

You advocate using cilantro stems (and not just the leaves) because they are tender and have a lot of flavor. Can mint stems be used similarly?

-Annie Keilman, Oakland, Calif.

In the test kitchen, we often use cilantro stems as we would fresh cilantro leaves. We've also found that it's fine to use the tender, thinner stems of basil, especially when they are pulverized into a pesto. One exception to the "use the stems" rule is parsley, as our tests have shown



that the stems can impart bitterness.

Thanks to your question, we put mint to the test. After washing several bunches, we tasted raw mint leaves and mint stems. We were surprised to find that the stems—especially the thinner parts near the leaves—had vibrant

mint flavor. A few tasters picked up on a grassy bitterness in thicker mint stems, but it was pretty mild. We also made two batches each of our Sautéed Peas with Shallots and Mint recipe, our Cucumber-Mint Lemonade recipe, and a mint pesto, using only mint leaves

in one group and an equal volume of leaves and tender stems in the other.

Tasters were put off by the slightly fibrous texture of the chopped mint stems with the creamy peas. But in the lemonade and the pesto, where the mint was strained out or finely chopped, tasters thought the samples made with stems were perfectly acceptable.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Mint stems, especially the portion closest to the leaves, have a lot of mint flavor and are fine to use in recipes where the mint is pulverized or strained out. Otherwise, the stems' slightly fibrous texture may be an issue.

Jar Head(s)

How does jarred minced garlic compare with minced fresh garlic?

-Katie Brimm, Ames, Iowa

We pitted jarred minced garlic against fresh garlic in our Classic Caesar Salad, Garlic Mashed Potatoes, and Quick Tomato Sauce recipes. We used a company standard, substituting 1 teaspoon of the

minced garlic for each fresh clove.

In every application, the jarred garlic provided minimal garlic flavor. Even in the mashed potatoes, which include 12 cloves (or 4 tablespoons) of garlic, tasters could barely taste garlic in the sample made with the jarred stuff. A few tasters did pick up on a sourness in the batches using the jarred garlic, most likely from added phosphoric

acid. The jarred product had weaker flavor because the flavor compounds in garlic are released when the garlic is chopped, and the compounds lose potency over time.

THE BOTTOM LINE: We don't recommend using jarred minced garlic, as its flavor isn't nearly as potent and clean as that of fresh cloves. Here's how we prep fresh garlic.



1. Lop Off Stem End Use a sharp knife to cut off the tough, hard stem end of each unpeeled clove; discard the stem piece.



2. Crush Place the flat blade edge atop the clove and, using the heel of your hand, smack the blade to lightly crush the clove.



3. Peel and Chop Slip off and discard the papery skin, and then chop, slice, or mince as desired.

Vanishing Vanilla

I saw clear vanilla extract at the grocery store. How does it compare with standard vanilla extract?

-Mary Payne, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Clear vanilla extract is a type of imitation vanilla extract often used by professional bakers to keep cakes, puddings, meringues, and icings bright white in color.

While scientists have determined that there are about 250 flavor and aroma compounds in real vanilla, imitation vanilla is built around vanilla's single most potent component, vanillin. In the test kitchen, we've found that imitation vanilla (which is much cheaper than the real McCoy) is a good substitute for real

vanilla extract in baked applications, as the heat of the oven destroys a good bit of real vanilla's complexity; we prefer real vanilla for recipes where the vanilla isn't cooked.

To see how clear imitation vanilla extract measures up, we ordered our winning real vanilla, McCormick Pure Vanilla Extract; our winning imitation vanilla; and the most widely available brand of clear vanilla, McCormick Vanilla Flavor-Clear (which is slightly more expensive than brown imitation vanillas but costs less than pure vanilla extract). We made batches of our Perfect Chocolate Chip Cookies, Classic Vanilla Pudding, and White Layer Cake with each of the three vanillas. In the cookies, the test was a draw, with

most tasters unable to pick out a difference in flavor.

In both the cakes and the puddings, there was a small visual difference, with the clear vanilla making for more starkly white products. In the puddings, where the extract is never cooked, there were significant flavor differences. Most tasters preferred the version containing real vanilla for its more "complex," "strongly vanilla" flavor as opposed to the "artificial" flavor from the clear imitation extract.

THE BOTTOM LINE: If aesthetics are a priority for your dessert, clear imitation vanilla extract can be a good option, especially in baked applications where its flavor would be less discernible from that of pure vanilla.

Homemade Poultry Seasoning

My "local" supermarket happens to be a 30-minute drive away; can I make a version of poultry seasoning from ingredients that I already have in my spice cabinet?

-Steve Wilson, Chinook, Mont.

Poultry seasoning is a blend of herbs and spices that is designed to pair well with—you guessed it—poultry. As a point of reference, we ordered a well-known national option, Bell's Seasoning, and tinkered with a homemade facsimile until we came up with a version that's a very close match.

HOMEMADE POULTRY

SEASONING Makes about ¼ cup

We suggest using a spice grinder to achieve a fine consistency, but the flavor will still match if you do not grind the ingredients.

- 4 teaspoons dried rosemary
- 3½ teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger

Combine all ingredients in spice grinder and process until finely ground, 30 to 40 seconds.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

It's easy to make your own poultry seasoning from spice-cabinet staples using our recipe.



Submit questions and shortcuts at CooksCountry.com/ask and CooksCountry.com/shortcuts.

KITCHEN SHORTCUTS

Compiled by Cecelia Jenkins



Quick Crumb Cleanup

Sally Payton, Corvallis, Ore.

I keep a tablecloth on my dining room table, but I hate to have to throw it in the washing machine when there are only crumbs on it. For quick crumb cleanup, I found that a few swipes of a lint roller work wonders.

A Fishy Solution

Pam Kentley, Salem, Mass.

I recently made a recipe that called for a single anchovy fillet. After opening a new tin, I didn't know how to store the rest (I wanted to get them out of the tin, which is impossible to reseal once opened). To avoid stinking up a plastic storage container, I put the anchovies and their oil in an empty and clean glass spice jar with a screw-top lid. The jar is the perfect size and doesn't take up a lot of room in my fridge; plus, it's easy to clean when all the anchovies are used up.



Compound Interest

Phyllis Meeker, Hickory, N.C.

I sometimes find myself with leftover fresh herbs, and I never seem to know what to do with them before they go bad. Lately I've taken to chopping them and mixing them into softened butter (sometimes with a little garlic added), rolling the butter into a log in plastic wrap, and storing the wrapped compound butters in the freezer. It's really handy to be able to take the frozen logs out of the freezer and use my box grater to shred some herb butter to sprinkle over foods such as hot popcorn, steak, or steamed vegetables—the heat from these foods melts the butter pretty quickly, and the butter provides a big hit of flavor. Plus, the compound butters can be frozen for up to two months.

If You're Cooking with Fresh Cherries, You Need a Pitter

by Miye Bromberg

12 Pitters 6 Tests

- Elimination round: Pit 10 cherries, timing process and disqualifying models that fail to pit 3 or more cherries or take longer than 1 minute
- Wash 5 times: once by hand and 4 times in dishwasher
- Pit 1½ pounds cherries, timing process
- Pit 10 olives, timing process
- Pit additional 8 pounds cherries (top 2 models only)
- Pit soft, delicate sour cherries (top 2 models only)

YOU CAN PIT cherries by hand, but a cherry-pitting tool can save lots of time, quickly removing pits from fruit

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

so that it can be used for preserves, pies, and more. These gadgets can also be used to pit olives.

Models generally come in two styles: single pitters and multipitters, which pit multiple cherries at once. We rounded up 12 models—eight single pitters and four multipitters—and nearly 50 pounds of cherries to find the best tool for the job. After an elimination round, only seven models remained; those that were unreliable were cut from our testing, since the last thing you want when eating cherry pie is to bite down on an errant pit. Other pitters fell in the rankings because they were too messy or because they were difficult to clean or operate.

Our winner, the Tovolo Cherry Pitter (\$15.28), didn't miss a single pit thanks to its large, straight plastic pitting dowels. It has the greatest capacity of any model in our lineup (seven cherries at a time) and was the fastest. Plus, it contained cherry juice spray and collected pits in its base for easy cleanup.



Our winner removes pits quickly and neatly.

Illustration: Traci Daberko

KEY Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

RECOMMENDED

Tovolo Cherry Pitter
Model: 81-4474
Price: \$15.28
Number of Cherries
Pitted at a Time: 7
Time to Pit 1½ lb of Cherries: 3 min, 30 sec



CRITERIA

Performance ★★★½
Ease of Use ★★★½
Neatness ★★★

Comments: No pit escaped this large multipitter's dowels, which punched oversized holes in the cherries, a sacrifice that most users were willing to make.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

Chef'n QuickPit Cherry Pitter
Model: 102-241-005
Price: \$9.99
Number of Cherries
Pitted at a Time: 1
Time to Pit 1½ lb of Cherries: 6 min



Performance ★★
Ease of Use ★★
Neatness ★★

Comments: The best of the single pitters, this model made it easy to insert and remove the cherries. It wasn't quite as neat or quick as our winner, but it is more compact.

Progressive Prepworks Cherry-It Pitter
Model: GPC-5005
Price: \$11.48
Number of Cherries
Pitted at a Time: 4
Time to Pit 1½ lb of Cherries: 4 min, 45 sec



Performance ★★
Ease of Use ★½
Neatness ★★

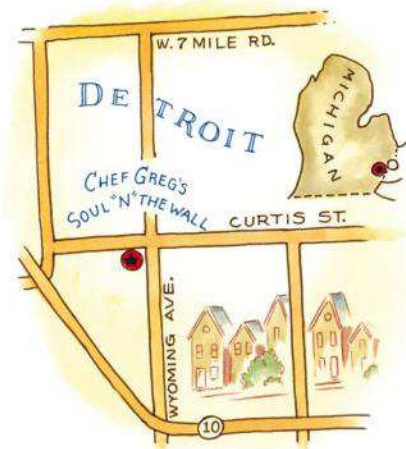
Comments: Our former favorite still performs well, but it was slower and slightly less accurate than our new winner. It's also harder to clean.



Go to CooksCountry.com/may18 to read the full story and to see the full testing results chart.



ON THE ROAD



Gregory Beard, left, saucing his signature Boogaloo Wonderland sandwich. Below, the facade of Chef Greg's Soul "N" the Wall restaurant. Below left, the makings of a Boogaloo hit the hot flattop grill.

New Life for an Old Sandwich

by Bryan Roof

I STEP PAST THE chain-link gate and knock on the kitchen door loudly enough to be heard over the hood vents inside, where Gregory Emilis Beard is wedged between a griddle and a fully loaded prep table. He pauses just long enough to pour me a glass of fluorescent-red Kool-Aid from a gallon jug. Tropical Punch, his favorite—and the only flavor he serves.

As we talk in the heat of the small kitchen, Beard doesn't stop moving. He smothers chicken wings in gravy, throws burgers on the griddle, and fires off a slab of meatloaf with sides of mac and cheese and mashed potatoes for a takeout order. He cooks, chops, stirs, and answers an endless stream of phone calls. Chef Greg's Soul "N" the Wall is a lean operation, and Beard can't afford to slow down. The nimble rhythm of his kitchen work shows me that he loves it, and as we hop in the car to deliver an order, he declares, "I turn down nothing but my collar."

Beard recalls that he was inspired early in life by his father, a self-made



businessman who owned both a collision shop and a small restaurant called the Sunset Inn, also in Detroit. He grew up working on cars but was drawn to the kitchen, looking forward to days spent shopping for groceries with his dad and watching him cook. He jokes that he "traded one grease for another."

At 20, Beard landed his first professional cooking job at a hotel in Los

Angeles. "When I saw what the cooking world had to offer—making gravies and dressings and soups and sauces from scratch—it opened my eyes." He learned that good food didn't need to be complicated.

Beard tells me he knew he was destined to open his own restaurant. Like his father, he wanted to connect with people and serve his own style of food, what he calls "urban flavor with a twist." The opportunity came in the summer of 2006 when a former restaurant space in a weathered, red-brick building just off West 7 Mile Road in Detroit opened up.

The spot was formerly occupied by Brother's Bar-B-Que, a locally owned joint with a loyal following. They specialized in barbecued ribs and chickens, sold by the whole, half, or quarter, but their most avid fans came for the so-called Boogaloo sandwich, a barbecue-flavored Sloppy Joe-style hero smothered with cheese and sauce and served on a sub roll.

As soon as Beard opened Chef Greg's Soul "N" the Wall, customers

began asking for the Boogaloo sandwich. The problem? Beard had never even heard of, much less tasted, a Boogaloo. But Beard isn't one to let customers get down. From the beginning, he's maintained an open-menu policy: "If you want it and I've got the ingredients, I'll cook it." So he set to work learning all he could about the Boogaloo.

Through trial and error and with plenty of feedback from fans, he finessed a recipe and brought the sandwich back to life. He named this new version the Boogaloo Wonderland sandwich in honor of his friend, Grammy award-winning songwriter and Detroit native Allee Willis, who wrote the song "Boogie Wonderland" for Earth, Wind & Fire in 1979.

As Beard sees it, he "found something old, borrowed the concept, and turned it into something new." When I ask him why it was so important to him to reinvent this sandwich, he collects his thoughts for a brief moment and says, "When you jump on the ride of life, it's important to bring something to the table."



Boogaloo Wonderland Sandwich

Don't call it a Sloppy Joe: This Detroit sandwich has a name all its own.

by **Matthew Fairman**

A BOOGALOO WONDERLAND sandwich bears a passing resemblance to the classic Sloppy Joe, but that comparison doesn't really do it justice. It's bigger and bolder, spicier and tangier. It's just as simple to make, but if you ask me, this Detroit original, little known outside the city, has more punch, personality, and oomph. And no one can deny that it has a much, much cooler name.

The Boogaloo's base ingredients aren't surprising; they include ground beef, melted American cheese, and sautéed onions on a sub roll. But what ties this sandwich together (and sets it apart) is its bold, brassy sauce, a glazy mix of sweet and savory flavors that soaks into the bread and makes the Boogaloo a beautiful mess to eat. Unfortunately, the original sauce recipe is top secret. I would have to puzzle out the recipe with my team in the test kitchen.

The original sauce lies somewhere between tomato sauce and barbecue sauce, so for a first crack at it I tested two versions, one using a canned tomato sauce base and the other a ketchup base. To each I added dried thyme (a signature ingredient), cider vinegar, brown sugar, and Worcestershire sauce to create a complex mix of sweet, tangy, and savory flavors. Tasters crowned the ketchup-based sauce the clear winner, praising its added body and concentrated flavor. But it still lacked the touch of heat, the hint of warm spice, and the oomph that a true Boogaloo requires.

To bump up the heat and spice, I reached for chili powder (a mix containing both chiles and cumin). As for the oomph, after trying some common flavor boosters—soy sauce, Dijon, horseradish, and even anchovy paste—I landed on dry mustard. It adds that bite you'd get from wasabi or horseradish, but rather than announce its own flavor too loudly, it sings in harmony with the rest of the Boogaloo choir.

I got my onion and ground beef (1¼ pounds of 85 percent lean, enough for four sandwiches) going in a skillet to brown. Then, once the onion started to soften and the meat began to sizzle, I stirred in the sauce, saving some to serve with the sandwiches

later. I laid out four rolls on a baking sheet, spooned saucy beef over the bottoms, covered each with a couple of slices of cheese, and popped the sandwiches in the oven to toast the buns a touch, melt the cheese, and give the sauce time to get acquainted with the bread. (This step also created lovely browned, faintly crunchy edges on the bread—not quite toasted but leaning in that direction.)

I lined up the finished Boogaloes for my tasters, and we dove in. I asked the assembled crowd for feedback, but they pretended not to hear me. They were too busy devouring the sandwiches.

BOOGALOO WONDERLAND SANDWICHES

Serves 4

Heinz Organic Tomato Ketchup and Heinz Filtered Apple Cider Vinegar are our favorites. Both light and dark brown sugar will work in this recipe. Don't be tempted to substitute another kind of cheese for the American; nothing melts like it. Serve with your favorite hot sauce, if desired.

SAUCE

- 1 cup ketchup
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- ¾ teaspoon dried thyme
- ¾ teaspoon dry mustard
- ¾ teaspoon granulated garlic
- ¾ teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

SANDWICHES

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1¼ pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- 1 onion, sliced thin
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 4 (6-inch) Italian sub rolls, sliced lengthwise with 1 side intact
- 8 slices American cheese

1. FOR THE SAUCE: Combine all ingredients in small saucepan and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Cook, whisking constantly, until slightly thickened, about 3 minutes.

2. FOR THE SANDWICHES: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat



The Boogaloo Wonderland Sandwich is a sassier, spicier, cheesier version of a Sloppy Joe.

until just smoking. Add beef, onion, pepper, and salt and cook, breaking meat into small pieces with spoon, until liquid has evaporated and meat begins to sizzle, about 10 minutes. Add 1 cup sauce and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until slightly thickened, about 1 minute.

3. Place rolls on rimmed baking sheet. Divide meat mixture evenly among roll bottoms. Top each sandwich with 2 slices American cheese. Bake until cheese is melted and rolls are warmed through, about 5 minutes. Divide remaining sauce equally among sandwiches. Fold roll tops over meat and serve.

Buy American

Yes, it usually contains stabilizers, but American cheese is deliciously milky and mild. And because it melts better than any other cheese, it's the perfect choice for our Boogaloo Wonderland Sandwiches. Our favorite American cheese is made by **Boar's Head**.



Are all Worcestershire sauces created equal? Go to CooksCountry.com/worcestershire to find out.

Steak Taco Salad

Restaurant taco salads often disappoint with dull flavors and tired ingredients. Could we create a brighter, livelier version that exploded with flavor?

by Morgan Bolling

MOST TACO SALADS fall into one of two categories: a crisp tortilla bowl filled with spiced ground beef, lettuce, cheese, salsa, and sour cream, or a fresher take with similar fixings heaped over lettuce, drizzled with dressing, and topped with seasoned steak. I don't turn up my nose at either version, but when I decided to take on this recipe, I had to pick a lane.

I put out a vote to *Cook's Country* readers, and the responses were almost 2 to 1 in favor of the fresher version with grilled steak. (We'll save the crispy tortilla bowl for another day.) But even with a narrower focus, I found that recipes for this version were incredibly varied. I made five recipes that covered many of the variables

and then enlisted my colleagues to cherry-pick their favorite components of each.

For the base of the salad, the pronounced flavor and superior crunch of chopped romaine lettuce won out over milder iceberg and Bibb lettuces. After testing sirloin, rib-eye, skirt, and

flank steaks, we found that we preferred skirt for its meaty flavor and its textured exterior, which can hold on to plenty of seasoning. Rare skirt steak can be chewy, but taking it to medium (135 degrees) kept it pink in the center and gave it the perfect texture.

On to the all-important avocado component. One recipe called for dolloping guacamole on top of the salad, another for adding diced avocado. But both of those approaches felt a little



Our homemade pico de gallo tastes much fresher than anything you can buy at the market.

half-hearted to an avocado lover such as myself. Instead, I made an incredibly flavorful dressing by buzzing half an avocado, buttermilk, lime juice, garlic, and cilantro in the blender; I then chopped the remaining avocado and added that to the salad. Refrigerated "fresh" pico de gallo from the supermarket proved to be a good option, but homemade popped much more brightly. Pleasantly creamy and mild pinto beans were a welcome addition, as was a generous amount of grated Monterey Jack cheese.

Finally, the tortillas. Cutting fresh corn tortillas into strips and frying them made for a nice garnish but felt like a little too much work here. Store-bought tortilla chips added a salty crunch but lacked richness. Better, we found, was another chip-aisle staple: Fritos, which brought a huge crunch and loads of corn flavor.

This salad-as-a-meal had it all: crisp lettuce, deeply seasoned steak, pico, cheese, beans, avocado, and chips, all tied together with a potently fragrant dressing. No more uninspired restaurant taco salads for me—I'll make my better, brighter version at home. Now, where's my margarita?

STEAK TACO SALAD Serves 4

We cook the skirt steak to medium so that it's less chewy than it would be at medium-rare. You can substitute 1 cup of store-bought pico de gallo for the homemade version if you prefer.

PICO DE GALLO

- 1 tomato, cored and chopped
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 teaspoons minced jalapeño chile
- 1½ teaspoons lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt

DRESSING

- ½ ripe avocado
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 1½ tablespoons lime juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

STEAK

- ¾ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (1-pound) skirt steak, trimmed and cut crosswise into 4 equal pieces
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

SALAD

- 1 (15-ounce) can pinto beans, rinsed
- 2 romaine lettuce hearts (12 ounces), cut into 1-inch pieces
- 4 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (1 cup)
- Salt and pepper
- ½ ripe avocado, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 cup Fritos corn chips

1. FOR THE PICO DE GALLO:

Combine all ingredients in bowl and set aside.

2. FOR THE DRESSING: Process all ingredients in blender until smooth, about 60 seconds.

3. FOR THE STEAK: Combine chili powder, cumin, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Sprinkle steaks with spice mixture. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook steaks until well browned and meat registers 135 degrees (for medium), 2 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer steaks to carving board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

4. FOR THE SALAD: Toss beans, lettuce, and ½ cup Monterey Jack with dressing in large bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to large serving platter. Slice steaks thin against grain. Layer avocado, pico de gallo, steak, and remaining ½ cup Monterey Jack on top of lettuce mixture. Scatter chips around salad. Serve.

Bowled Over

C.E. Doolin, the Texas entrepreneur who created Fritos (and Cheetos), opened his Casa de Fritos restaurant in Disneyland in 1955. One of the restaurant's signature offerings was small tacos served in "Tacups," little bowls made out of Fritos. Other restaurants took inspiration from the idea and started selling salads in larger bowls made from fried tortillas. Our taco salad isn't served in a tortilla bowl, but we add Fritos as a crunchy garnish and a nod to the dish's history.



Members of our Facebook group helped us choose a lane for this recipe. There's room for you, too! To join thousands of subscribers sharing tips and recipe results and to interact with test kitchen editors and test cooks, go to [CooksCountry.com/group](https://www.cookscountry.com/group).

Latin-Style Rice with Pork

Tender rice, rich pork, and lively seasonings power this homey Latin staple.

by **Cecelia Jenkins**



YOU'RE LIKELY FAMILIAR with the deeply comforting flavors of the one-pot Latin American dish *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken)—perhaps you're even among the many fans of our *Cook's Country* version. But you may not know that, especially in Cuban and Puerto Rican cuisines (both on those islands and in places such as Florida, where those cultures thrive), there is a similar comfort-food dish—*arroz con puerco*—that is made with pork. I set out to master this ultrasavory porcine version.

The existing recipes I found called for browning the pork (either chunks of well-marbled shoulder or cubes of lean tenderloin) in a Dutch oven; adding onion, bell pepper, and seasonings (collectively known as a *sofrito* in Latin cooking); stirring in rice and liquid; and covering and cooking until the rice is done. Since rice cooks in 20 minutes or less, the tenderloin in the first version I tried was dry and overcooked and the pork shoulder in the second version was still chewy when the rice was ready. I had two options: Use tenderloin and cook it less, or use shoulder and cook it more. I chose shoulder because it's more flavorful and forgiving.

I knew from experience that braising would be the best way to cook chunks of pork shoulder here; the relatively slow and gentle heat would tenderize this tough cut and coax out all its tasty richness. After several tests to eliminate superfluous spices and seasonings called for in most recipes, I ended up braising the pork chunks in water with just an onion, some garlic, a few bay leaves, and salt. The result was deliciously pure and porky without unnecessary distractions. A welcome bonus was the rich pork broth left behind, which I could use to cook the rice separately.

To get the rice going, I sautéed a sofrito of chopped red bell pepper, onion, and garlic with cumin and dried oregano in oil. When the vegetables had softened, I stirred in the rice—medium-grain is traditional and works best here (although long-grain rice is acceptable in a pinch)—and some Sazón, the staple Latin seasoning blend. Once the rice was coated in the flavorful sofrito, I added the pork and broth, covered the pot, and waited. When developing our recipe for *arroz con pollo*, we learned that it was best to fully cook the rice, remove it from

the heat, and let it sit, undisturbed and covered, for an additional 20 minutes so it could soak up any extra liquid and the flavors could meld and deepen; a side-by-side test proved that this was the right move here, too.

I uncovered the pot and finished the dish by stirring in the customary chopped green olives, peas, fresh cilantro, and a little red wine vinegar. The melange of rice and pork sang with deep, soul-satisfying flavors that said “comfort food” in any language.

LATIN AMERICAN PORK AND RICE

Serves 4 to 6

Sazón is a Latin spice blend. We developed this recipe using Goya Sazón with Coriander and Annatto (or *con Culantro y Achiote*). It can be found in the international aisle of most supermarkets; 1 packet equals about 1½ teaspoons. If you can't find Sazón, use an equal amount of our homemade version. Let the rice rest for the full 20 minutes before lifting the lid to check it. Long-grain rice may be substituted for medium-grain, but the rice will be slightly less creamy.

PORK AND BROTH

- 6 cups water
- 1¾ pounds boneless pork butt roast, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 onion, peeled and quartered through root end
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon salt

RICE

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups medium-grain rice, rinsed
- 1½ teaspoons Goya Sazón with Coriander and Annatto
- ½ cup frozen peas
- ½ cup pimento-stuffed green olives, chopped
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

1. FOR THE PORK AND BROTH: Combine all ingredients in Dutch oven



To brighten this hearty dish, we finish it with peas, olives, cilantro, and vinegar.

and bring to boil over medium-high heat, skimming off any foam that rises to surface. Reduce heat to low, partially cover, and cook until pork is tender, about 1 hour.

2. Set colander in large bowl and drain pork, reserving cooking liquid (you should have at least 4 cups; if not, add enough water to equal 4 cups). Discard onion, garlic, and bay leaves. (Cooled pork and broth can be refrigerated in separate airtight containers for up to 2 days.)

3. FOR THE RICE: Wipe pot clean with paper towels. Add oil and heat over medium heat until shimmering. Add bell pepper, onion, garlic, cumin, oregano, pepper, and salt and cook until vegetables are tender, 5 to 7 minutes.

4. Stir in rice and Sazón and cook until edges of rice begin to turn translucent,

about 2 minutes. Add pork and 4 cups reserved broth and bring to boil.

Reduce heat to low, scrape sides of pot clean of any rice, cover, and cook, undisturbed, for 20 minutes.

5. Keep pot covered and remove from heat; let stand for 20 minutes. Fluff rice with fork. Stir in peas, olives, cilantro, and vinegar. Serve.

HOMEMADE SAZÓN

Makes 1 tablespoon

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin

Combine all ingredients in bowl.

Asparagus Fries

How do you transform a common spring vegetable into something truly special? Turn it into “fries.” *by Alli Berkey*



Golden-brown, crunchy fried asparagus spears make a delicious appetizer or side dish.

Three Steps to Perfect Fried Asparagus



1. Trim Once you determine where the trimming point is (see recipe headnote), use that spear as a guide to trim the rest.



2. Rinse Moisten the spears under cold running water to help the breading stick evenly.



3. Bread Toss the moistened spears in flour, dip them in beaten egg, and coat them in bread crumbs before frying.

WHEN ASPARAGUS SEASON hits, it hits hard. I never tire of this ubiquitous-in-spring vegetable, but I am always looking for new ways to prepare it. When I tried an order of breaded and fried asparagus—crunchy on the outside, tender within—at a restaurant recently, I knew I wanted to create my own recipe.

My first step was to sort through the breading options. After several tests, I landed on a classic three-step process: dipping the spears in flour, then beaten eggs, and finally bread crumbs. We tested store-bought crumbs (both regular and crunchier panko) alongside fresh crumbs made by grinding bread in a food processor; the fresh crumbs won for their clean flavor and softer texture when fried. Adding a little flour to the crumbs while processing them made the coating more uniform. But the crumbs weren't sticking perfectly and were a little patchy in places. Rinsing the raw asparagus under the tap and then dropping the still-wet spears into the flour produced an even breading that stayed put throughout frying—and eating. Another bonus: The breading sopped up the moisture, so there was no splattering during frying.

Since I was using thinner (about ½-inch-thick) spears, they needed only a minute or two in the hot oil to cook through and for the coating to crisp. I found that it was easiest to bread a full pound of spears and let them rest on a baking sheet before frying one-third of them at a time. A simple mixture of sour cream, lemon juice, and Dijon mustard made a perfectly bright, sharp sauce for dipping.

ASPARAGUS FRIES

Serves 4 to 6

Do not use asparagus that is thinner than ½ inch here. The bottom 1½ inches or so of asparagus is woody and needs to be trimmed. To know where to cut the spears, grip one spear about halfway down; with your other hand, hold the stem between your thumb and index finger about 1 inch from the bottom and bend the spear until it snaps. Using this spear as a guide, cut the remaining spears with your knife.

- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup plus 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 large eggs
- 4 slices hearty white sandwich bread, torn into 1-inch pieces
- 1 pound (½-inch-thick) asparagus, trimmed
- 1 quart peanut or vegetable oil

1. Combine sour cream, lemon juice, mustard, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside sauce.
2. Place ¼ cup flour in shallow dish. Beat eggs in second shallow dish. Process bread, 1 teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and remaining 3 tablespoons flour in food processor until finely ground, about 1 minute. Transfer bread-crumbs mixture to 13 by 9-inch baking dish.
3. Place asparagus in colander and rinse under cold running water. Shake colander to lightly drain asparagus (asparagus should still be wet). Transfer one-third of asparagus to flour and toss to lightly coat; dip in egg, allowing excess to drip off; then transfer to bread-crumbs mixture and press lightly to adhere. Transfer breaded asparagus to baking sheet. Repeat with remaining asparagus in 2 batches.
4. Line large plate with paper towels. Heat oil in large Dutch oven over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. Carefully add one-third of asparagus to hot oil and cook until golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to prepared plate. Repeat with remaining asparagus in 2 batches. Serve with sauce.



Which food processor should you buy? Read our testing results at [CooksCountry.com/processor](https://www.cookscountry.com/processor).

Stovetop Cauliflower

We wanted roasty flavors without the oven.

by *Cecelia Jenkins*

CAULIFLOWER IS TOO often served raw on a crudité platter (bland and forgettable) or steamed as a side dish (sulfuric and mushy). But cauliflower deserves better. When carefully roasted in the oven, its lacy florets caramelize, turning buttery, nutty, and slightly sweet in the process.

However, on big occasions such as Easter, my oven is spoken for. I wanted a stovetop take. And I didn't want to have to add a bunch of extra ingredients to make cauliflower special.

The first order of business: Break down the head of cauliflower into florets. After removing the outer leaves and trimming the stem flush with the bottom of the head, I found that kitchen shears made quick work of snipping the tight branches of florets away from the core, making it easier to cut them up with a paring knife. (See “Crumb-Free Cutting”).

To promote even cooking and browning, I cut the large florets into uniform 1-inch pieces and the stems

into smaller ½-inch pieces—the stems are denser and thus needs to be cut smaller to cook at the same rate as the florets. But an entire cut-up head of cauliflower overcrowded the skillet and made the pieces difficult to stir.

After experimenting with batch cooking (which took too long) and covering the skillet (which turned the cauliflower mushy), I found that leaving the cauliflower undisturbed (more or less) in the skillet, uncovered, for the first few minutes of cooking made it more stirrable. For the final few minutes of cooking, I stirred it more frequently to ensure even tenderness and browning with no burning.

After trying amounts of olive oil ranging from 2 tablespoons to 6 tablespoons, I settled on ¼ cup. It sounds like a lot, but this amount helped the cauliflower cook through evenly.

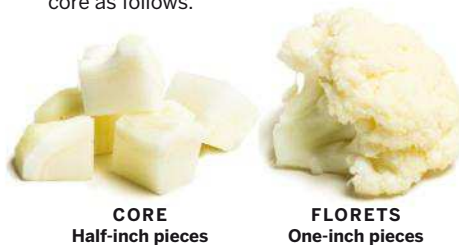
A bit of minced thyme and garlic enhanced rather than overshadowed the cauliflower's delicate, nutty flavors. Transformation complete.

Crumb-Free Cutting

Cutting right through a head of cauliflower can make a mess of your counter, leaving small white crumbs strewn all around. We found a neater, easier way to start prepping this vegetable.



Invert the head and use kitchen shears to separate the florets from the core. Next, use a paring knife to cut the florets and core as follows.



CORE
Half-inch pieces

FLORETS
One-inch pieces

STOVETOP CAULIFLOWER WITH GARLIC AND THYME

Serves 4

Kitchen shears make easy work of cutting the cauliflower florets away from the core, but you can use a paring knife if you prefer. The cauliflower pieces will not fit in an even layer in the skillet at the start of cooking in step 3. As the pieces cook, they will shrink so that all of them will be in contact with the skillet bottom.

- 1 head cauliflower (2 pounds)
- 1 teaspoon plus ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Salt and pepper
- Lemon wedges

1. Trim outer leaves of cauliflower and cut stem flush with bottom of head. Flip cauliflower so stem is facing up. Using kitchen shears, cut stems vertically around core to remove large florets. Cut florets through stem into 1-inch pieces.
2. Using knife, square off sides of core; discard scraps. Cut trimmed core into ½-inch pieces. (You should have about 7 cups cauliflower total.) Combine 1 teaspoon oil, thyme, and garlic in small bowl; set aside.



Deep browning adds rich, sweet flavor to this oft-neglected vegetable, making it holiday-worthy.

3. Heat remaining ¼ cup oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add cauliflower, sprinkle with ½ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper, and stir to combine. Spread cauliflower into even layer. Cook until cauliflower is evenly browned, about 15 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes.
4. Continue to cook until cauliflower is tender and dark brown in spots, 8 to 10 minutes longer, stirring gently and redistributing cauliflower into even layer every 1 to 2 minutes as needed. (Cauliflower should be dark brown, but if it starts to burn, reduce heat slightly.)

5. Push cauliflower to sides of skillet. Add thyme mixture to center and cook, stirring with rubber spatula, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Off heat, stir thyme mixture into cauliflower. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to platter. Serve with lemon wedges.

STOVETOP CAULIFLOWER WITH RED PEPPER FLAKES AND PECORINO ROMANO

Substitute ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes for thyme and garlic. Sprinkle with ¼ cup shredded Pecorino Romano before serving.

Easy Chicken Shawarma

Could we translate this takeout specialty—traditionally cooked on a spinning live-fire spit—into a recipe suitable for home kitchens? *by Alli Berkey*

IT'S NOT OFTEN that I get the urge to install a rotating spit in my small apartment kitchen. But, putting aside concerns about fire safety, I'd consider it for a good chicken shawarma. Shawarma, a Middle Eastern specialty, is made by layering marinated meats (chicken, lamb, beef, or turkey) into a large mass on a vertical spit that spins for hours in front of an open flame. As the meat rotates, a cook shaves off the beautifully charred exterior pieces, drops them into a fresh pita, and sends it down the line for toppings such as pickles, creamy tahini or yogurt sauces, tomato-cucumber salad, and a good squeeze of lemon juice. I wanted to find a way to make the same deeply seasoned, smoky, and tender meat (and sandwich) in a home kitchen—with bonus points awarded if I could make it fast enough for a weeknight dinner.

I knew a few things from the start: I wasn't going to install a spit, and I wasn't going to stack 30 pounds of chicken into a big torpedo that cooked for days. The broiler made sense here; its direct radiant heat is more like traditional spit-cooking than roasting in the oven or searing on the stove is. As for the cut of chicken, boneless, skinless chicken thighs had the best balance of meaty flavor and juicy texture and had a relatively quick cooking time.

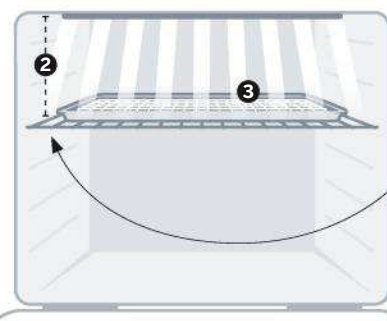
The recipes I found for homemade chicken shawarma called for marinating the meat for anywhere from 30 minutes to 24 hours in a mixture of olive oil and spices such as paprika, cumin, coriander, allspice, turmeric, chili powder, and cardamom, plus hard-to-find Middle Eastern seasonings such as sumac and *za'atar* (a spice blend that includes herbs and sesame seeds). Wanting to keep my recipe not only easy but also pantry-friendly, I did a series of tests to eliminate spices until I was left with just paprika and cumin. These two spices, along with olive oil, salt, and pepper, gave the chicken a bold, aromatic, and smoky profile. And the spices provided plenty of flavor when tossed with the chicken just prior to broiling—no marinating necessary. After 20 minutes of broiling on the upper-middle oven rack, the chicken was cooked perfectly: deeply charred on the outside, moist and tender within.



This colorful array of spiced chicken, vegetable accompaniments, and creamy sauce gets stuffed into split pitas.

To finish the shawarma, I let the chicken rest for 5 minutes and then sliced it thin. As I was squeezing lemon over the top, it occurred to me that I could deepen the lemon's flavor by broiling lemon halves with the chicken. This trick worked wonders, lending both brightness and additional smoky depth. With an easy cabbage-parsley slaw, some sliced tomatoes and diced cucumbers, and a lemony yogurt sauce to drizzle over all of it, I finally had the shawarma I'd been so badly craving. And it's fast enough for a weeknight.

Three Tips for Broiling Success



When broiling, it takes a keen eye to avoid burning. Here are some tips to make your broiling more successful.

1. When in doubt, go for "high." In our recipes, we don't specify broiler settings, but since the point of broiling is usually to expose food to intense heat, turn it up!
2. Measure the distance between the heating element and the oven rack; our recipes specify this measurement rather than a rack position such as "middle" or "top."
3. Elevate your food on a wire rack to prevent the bottom from steaming.

THE AMERICAN TABLE



Zaki Hashem, co-owner of Al Ameer, a popular Lebanese restaurant in Dearborn, Michigan, tends to a spit of lamb shawarma in his restaurant's kitchen.

Storefront restaurants across the United States serve shawarma, but the dish first broke through on street carts, where vendors sliced the savory meat onto warm pita bread for hurried customers on tight lunch breaks. It's just one example in a long and varied American tradition of workaday lunches born overseas, a tradition whose roots reach back. Way back.

German pretzel sellers in 19th-century Baltimore, Irish fishmongers in Gilded Age Boston, Cajun po' boy vendors in 1920s New Orleans, today's taco trucks in Everytown, USA—all have fueled working-class Americans for generations. And though most of the foods these vendors were selling were initially considered immigrant fare, all have become wholly American.

Shawarma is an ideal dish for a mobile kitchen; the vertical rotisserie frees up surface space to lay out all the fixings. Pita is held in a cupboard down below, sauce is ladled from a nearby pot, and cardboard dishes and plastic forks are stacked to the side.

The best of these talented and quick-working cooks move through their carts with uncommon dexterity and focus—necessary qualities when faced with a hungry construction crew or band of office workers, each on a tight schedule and each with a different order. Heavy on the hot sauce, hold the onions, and can I get a soda with that? It takes planning, precision, preparation, and patience to succeed. Not to mention the ability to get through the peak lunch hours with no breaks.

What's the next great American street food? Time will tell. But if you stumble on a line of hungry-looking workers queued up at a cart at lunchtime, you just may have found it.

CHICKEN SHAWARMA

Serves 4 to 6

If you're using table salt, cut the amounts in this recipe in half.

- 1 small head red cabbage (1¼ pounds), cored and sliced very thin (6 cups)
- ½ cup fresh parsley leaves
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 1 cup whole-milk yogurt
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice plus 1 lemon
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 3 plum tomatoes, sliced thin
- ½ English cucumber, cut into ½-inch dice
- Pita bread, warmed

1. Combine cabbage, parsley, ¼ cup oil, and 1 teaspoon salt in bowl; set aside. Combine yogurt, lemon juice, garlic, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in second bowl; set aside.
2. Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and set wire rack in sheet.
3. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Combine chicken, paprika, cumin, 2 teaspoons salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil in large bowl.
4. Place chicken in single layer on prepared wire rack, smooth sides down. Trim ends from lemon, then cut lemon in half. Place lemon halves cut side up on rack. Broil until chicken is well browned and registers at least 175 degrees, 16 to 20 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through broiling. Let rest for 5 minutes.
5. Slice chicken into thin strips and transfer to platter. Squeeze juice from 1 lemon half over chicken. Squeeze juice from remaining lemon half into cabbage mixture and stir to combine. Transfer cabbage mixture to platter with chicken. Arrange tomatoes and cucumber on platter. Serve with yogurt sauce and warm pita.



All yogurts are not equal; go to CooksCountry.com/yogurt to read our whole-milk yogurt tasting results.

Cumin Lends Its Warm Glow to Many Dishes—Which One Should You Buy?

by Carolyn Grillo

CUMIN ADDS DEPTH and warmth to dishes from Mexican, Latin, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, and Asian cuisines—all favorites in the United States. In the test kitchen, we use ground cumin in everything from spice rubs for meats and seafood to chili, tacos, and pasta dishes.

PRODUCT TASTING

To find out whether it matters which ground cumin you cook with, we rounded up five widely available products and tasted them raw in a carrot and chickpea salad, bloomed in olive oil and tossed with white rice, and in a rub for pan-seared chicken breasts.

While all the products tasted similar in the salad, their differences became much more pronounced when we cooked with them. We weren't surprised that their flavors became bolder—this is typical of blooming, or heating spices in fat. However, heat exaggerates all flavor compounds, and once cooked, some of the cumins became slightly too bitter for tasters. Bitterness can be the result of natural factors (such as the weather, the soil, or the strain of cumin seeds used) and/or differences in processing methods. Our top-rated cumins were robust without being bitter, both when heated and when raw; tasters called them “earthy,” “bright,” “sweet,” and “floral.”

Our tasters also picked up on slight textural differences among the five products, calling some “gritty.” We examined samples of each cumin side by side under a microscope. While all the samples had some variation in particle size, our two top-ranked products had more uniform grinds and a noticeably fine and soft texture. The bottom-ranked products were more fibrous and coarse. We learned that grind size can also affect flavor; our science editor explained that smaller, finer particles expose more of the aroma compounds, which may give the spice more balanced flavor.

Although we can recommend all the cumins in our lineup, our winner, Simply Organic Ground Cumin, stood out. It has a fine, consistent grind and “robust” flavor with “sweet,” “floral,” and “earthy” notes. It also didn't become bitter when heated. Visit CooksCountry.com/may18 to see the full results from this tasting.



Cumin seeds are harvested from an annual plant related to parsley.

RECOMMENDED

TASTERS' NOTES

Our Favorite

Simply Organic Ground Cumin
Price: \$8.59 for 2.31 oz
(\$3.72 per oz)
Source: India and Turkey



On chicken, this cumin was “flavorful” and “robust,” with “earthiness and warmth.” Tasters said it was “bright, with a touch of sweetness” on rice and liked its “warm notes” in the salad.

Spice Islands Ground Cumin Seed

Price: \$4.98 for 1.9 oz
(\$2.62 per oz)
Source: India



This “nutty” ground cumin was “sweet and floral” in carrot salad and “earthy” and “bright” on rice. A few tasters thought it was a bit “mild” and “subtle” when used on chicken, but others thought it had nice “floral” notes.

McCormick Ground Cumin

Price: \$3.99 for 0.75 oz
(\$5.32 per oz)
Source: India and Turkey



Tasters found this cumin “floral” and “bright” on chicken. In the salad, it was “earthy” and “citrusy.” We liked its “nutty” flavor on rice but noticed a slightly “gritty,” “grainy” texture; it was one of the coarsest products.

Morton & Bassett Ground Cumin

Price: \$5.84 for 2.3 oz
(\$2.54 per oz)
Source: India



Our tasters said this cumin tasted “woody,” “toasty,” and “earthy” on rice and “a little bit dusty” when used on chicken. It was a bit too mild in our carrot salad.

Badia Ground Cumin

Price: \$1.69 for 2 oz
(\$0.85 per oz)
Source: Various sources



Tasters liked this cumin raw in salad, finding it “warm” and “woody,” but it had a “noticeable bitterness” when bloomed. On chicken, it was a bit “gritty”; it was one of the coarsest products we tasted.

Fried Chicken Tenders

If they're good enough for presidents, we figure they're good enough for us.

by **Matthew Fairman**

AT THE PURITAN Backroom Restaurant in Manchester, New Hampshire, the owners know what the people want: chicken tenders. In fact, the restaurant, located in the biggest city in a political battleground state, is so popular for its tenders that the Backroom is now considered a must-stop spot for presidential nominees seeking to press some flesh.

To see why, a couple of colleagues and I paid the Backroom a visit (see "On the Road"). Frankly, I was worried about making a special trip for chicken tenders, which are so often an underwhelming afterthought for restaurants. It's as if they assume chicken fingers are just kids'-menu food and refuse to waste their time making them well.

This was decidedly not the case at the Puritan Backroom. The tenders we tried were crunchy on the outside, almost impossibly juicy inside, and deeply seasoned throughout, with a mild sweetness. Served in a heap alongside a dish of sweet, sour duck sauce, they were indeed fit for a POTUS.

If one thing sets the Backroom's tenders apart, it's that subtle sweetness. The Puritan cooks marinate their tenders overnight, but they wouldn't say what was in the marinade. Since the tenders they serve are so juicy, I was willing to bet that the marinade had a healthy dose of salt, which would flavor and season the chicken and help it retain moisture, as well as some sugar. However, when I tried soaking the chicken in a salt and sugar solution, it tasted great, but the coating, a classic combination of flour and cornstarch, emerged from the oil powdery and pale rather than crunchy, golden, and substantial.

I had a hunch why this might be. At Puritan, I noticed that the marinade was slightly viscous and the cooks breaded the tenders right after pulling them from the marinade so that the marinade mingled with the breading and coated the chicken in craggy bits. My marinade was watery by comparison, and I was shaking off any excess liquid before breading. I needed a new, thicker marinade.

Looking at my ingredient list, it hit me. Could the cooks at Puritan be marinating their tenders in the same duck sauce they use as a dipping sauce? That would explain both the sweetness and the thickness of the marinade.

I grabbed some duck sauce, thinned it with water to the consistency I remembered, and then bumped up the salt until it was brine strength. After giving the chicken an overnight soak, I tossed it straight from the marinade into the breading. I then let the breaded chicken rest in the fridge (on a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet) for an hour to ensure that the breading would cling to the tenders rather than slough off during frying. I slid the chicken into the hot oil with high hopes.

To my delight, in just 4 minutes, the tenders had turned a gorgeous shade of deep golden brown and the breading clung beautifully. What's more, the sugar in the duck sauce had the unexpected advantage of enhancing the browning in the breading.

As my colleagues devoured the tenders, I was reminded of the Puritan Backroom and its throngs of happy customers. This was food good enough to persuade all hungry people, no matter what their political leanings, to set aside differences and share a meal.

PURITAN BACKROOM-STYLE CHICKEN TENDERS *Serves 4*

For the best results, we prefer to let the chicken marinate overnight, but just 1 hour works if you are short on time. Plan ahead: The chicken needs to chill for at least 1 hour after coating. Use a Dutch oven with at least a 6-quart capacity. Serve the tenders with one of our dipping sauces (recipes follow).

- 1 cup water**
- ½ cup duck sauce**
- Salt and pepper**
- 2 pounds chicken tenderloins, trimmed**
- 1¾ cups all-purpose flour**
- ¼ cup cornstarch**
- 2 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1½ teaspoons garlic powder**
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- 3 quarts peanut or vegetable oil**

1. Whisk water, duck sauce, and 1 tablespoon salt in bowl until salt is dissolved. Add chicken to marinade, cover, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or overnight.

2. Whisk flour, cornstarch, baking powder, garlic powder, cayenne, 1½ teaspoons pepper, and 1 teaspoon salt together in large bowl. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Remove half of chicken from marinade, add



Dunk your tenders into our sweet-and-sour, honey-Dijon, and chipotle-barbecue sauces.

to flour mixture, and toss to coat, pressing to adhere. Transfer chicken to prepared rack. Repeat with remaining chicken and remaining flour mixture. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 2 hours.

3. Line large plate with triple layer of paper towels. Add oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 2 inches deep and heat over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. Add half of chicken to hot oil and fry until deep golden brown and registering 160 degrees, about 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Transfer chicken to prepared plate. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Return oil to 350 degrees and repeat with remaining chicken. Serve.

What Is Duck Sauce?

No, it's not a sauce made from ducks. This thick, sweet sauce is also called plum sauce, and it's made with plums and/or apricots, plenty of sugar, and seasonings (often including vinegar). And the name? The sauce is traditionally served alongside roast duck in Chinese cuisine.

Many of us are familiar with the clear plastic packets of the orangey, corn syrup-sweetened stuff that come with our Chinese takeout orders, but higher-quality versions can be found in the international section of most supermarkets.



Left: Platters of crispy chicken fingers await delivery to the Puritan Backroom dining room. Below right: Puritan owner Arthur Pappas has sold a lot of tenders in his day. Below left: the original confectionery. Bottom: Presidential candidates pressing the flesh at the Puritan Backroom.

PURITAN BACKROOM-STYLE SWEET-AND-SOUR SAUCE

Makes about ½ cup

Since the consistency of duck sauce can vary significantly from product to product, we call for a range for the amount of water.

- ½ cup duck sauce
- 4 teaspoons distilled white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Pinch ground ginger
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- 1–2 tablespoons water

Combine duck sauce, vinegar, soy sauce, salt, ginger, and cayenne in bowl. Add 1 tablespoon water and check consistency; sauce should cling to spoon but should not be gloppy or runny. Adjust consistency with up to 1 additional tablespoon water as needed.

CHIPOTLE-BARBECUE DIPPING SAUCE

Makes about 1 cup

Our preferred liquid smoke product is Wright's Liquid Smoke, which contains only smoke and water.

- ¾ cup ketchup
- 3 tablespoons molasses
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce
- ⅛ teaspoon liquid smoke (optional)
- Salt and pepper

Whisk ketchup, molasses, vinegar, chipotle, and liquid smoke, if using, in bowl until combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

HONEY-DIJON DIPPING SAUCE

Makes ¾ cup

Yellow mustard can be substituted for the Dijon, if desired.

- ½ cup Dijon mustard
- ¼ cup honey
- Salt and pepper

Whisk mustard and honey in bowl until combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.



ON THE ROAD



A Tender Side to a Political Battleground

by Bryan Roof

THE PURITAN BACKROOM restaurant in the swing state hub of Manchester, New Hampshire, has been well-known as a campaign stop for presidential hopefuls for decades. But that's not its only claim to fame. This locals' hangout, which grew out of a confectionery originally founded across town in 1917, is the birthplace of one of America's most iconic foods: chicken tenders.

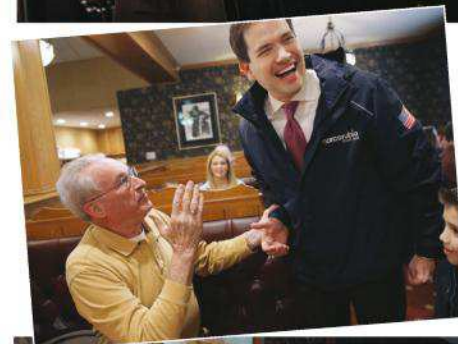
During the Great Depression, commerce in downtown Manchester slowed. In 1938, the Puritan relocated to a takeout window on Hookset Road on the outskirts of town and reset its menu. It sold hamburgers, hot dogs, and ice cream and built a loyal following. In 1974, the owners opened a sit-down restaurant, too, which they called the Puritan Backroom. The menu again demanded an expansion.

Third-generation owner Arthur Pappas recounts that soon after the Backroom opened, a salesman approached his father, Charles, wanting to unload an abundance of chicken "scraps." Charles bought the tenders, created a secret marinade, and then breaded and fried up the strips in batches. Soon the tenders outsold everything else on the menu. Today

the Backroom serves up to six tons of tenders in any given week and up to eight tons during Christmas vacation week. And in past election seasons, customers have included Clintons and Bushes, as well as Marco Rubio and Mitt Romney, just to name a few. During the 2016 campaign, Pappas says, at least 14 candidates stopped by for a plate of tenders and a photo op.

Standing in the kitchen beside two massive copper bowls, relics of the old confectionery that are now used for mixing batches of dipping sauce, Arthur tells me he still works 90-plus hours a week. "I was taught that way, and I don't know any better." He shares the workload with his son and fourth-generation co-owner, Christopher Pappas, who's started a second career as a politician and member of New Hampshire's Executive Council.

While it occupies a plum corner on the national stage, the Puritan Backroom remains a hometown affair and an ingrained part of the Manchester community. When I inquire what the future holds for him and how long he can keep working so many hours, Arthur grins. "My retirement will be [working] 40 hours a week . . . but don't tell my wife."



Classic Vanilla Pudding

“Vanilla” shouldn’t be a synonym for “boring.” *by Morgan Bolling*

VANILLA PUDDING IS the gray flannel suit of the dessert world: clean, classic, and, if not flashy, elegant and confident in its simplicity. I wanted to create a recipe so enticing—easy and delicious—that always having a batch in the refrigerator would be mandatory.

Most of the existing recipes I experimented with followed a simple method: Heat milk, half-and-half, or cream with sugar in a saucepan. Add cornstarch or flour and (sometimes) egg yolks. Simmer the mixture to thicken it before straining and chilling. A few recipes called for cooking a vanilla bean with the dairy to infuse it with flavor, but most instructed the cook to stir in vanilla extract at the end. I made five different recipes and, to cover all my bases, even whisked up a box of instant vanilla pudding to try. This lineup showed significant differences; some puddings were stiff, others were soupy, and many masked the vanilla flavor with too much sugar.

Since none of these versions were as lusciously creamy as I’d hoped they’d be, I started from scratch. Puddings are traditionally thickened with a starch (most often cornstarch but occasionally flour) and/or egg yolks. I tried using just cornstarch, but the pudding was chalky and the vanilla flavor was dampened. A pudding made with just egg yolks tasted too rich and eggy. After several tests I landed at a combination of three yolks and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of cornstarch for $2\frac{3}{4}$ cups of whole milk (enough for four servings), which produced the lusciously silky texture I was after.

I then tested swapping out the milk for half-and-half, cream, or various combinations of the three. But any half-and-half or cream in the mix made the pudding too rich and didn’t let the vanilla flavor come through. I stuck with milk, augmenting it with 2 tablespoons of butter to add just a little extra richness and create a beautiful shine in the finished pudding.

Now, about the vanilla flavor. I tried steeping a vanilla bean in the milk I was using, but my tasters preferred the stronger flavor produced by extract. I also found that adding a bit of salt and keeping the sugar to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup helped accentuate the floral vanilla flavor.

Tasting simply of good vanilla and milk, this sublime pudding shows how satisfying “plain” vanilla can be. The proof is in the . . . well, you know.



Ditch the box mix. This pudding is as simple to make as it is creamy, rich, and satisfying.

Three Steps to Smooth Pudding



1. Strain Using a rubber spatula to push the pudding through a fine-mesh strainer eliminates any lumps.



2. Cover Pressing parchment paper onto the surface of the pudding minimizes skin formation as the pudding chills and sets.



3. Whisk A quick stir with a whisk before serving ensures the smoothest texture.

CLASSIC VANILLA PUDDING

Serves 4

Straining the finished pudding ensures a perfectly silky texture. McCormick Pure Vanilla Extract is our favorite.

- $2\frac{3}{4}$ cups whole milk**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (3½ ounces) sugar**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (1 ounce) cornstarch**
- 3 large egg yolks**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, chilled**
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract**

- 1.** Heat $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk, sugar, and salt in large saucepan over medium heat until simmering, stirring occasionally to dissolve sugar.
- 2.** Meanwhile, whisk cornstarch and remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk in large bowl until no lumps remain, about 15 seconds. Whisk in egg yolks until fully incorporated, about 30 seconds.
- 3.** When milk mixture comes to simmer, remove from heat and, whisking constantly, slowly add milk mixture to yolk mixture to temper.
- 4.** Return milk-yolk mixture to saucepan. Return saucepan to medium heat and cook, whisking constantly, until pudding is thickened and registers 180 degrees in several places, about 1 minute. Off heat, whisk in butter and vanilla. Strain through fine-mesh strainer set over clean bowl.
- 5.** Spray piece of parchment paper with vegetable oil spray and press flush to surface of pudding to prevent skin from forming. Refrigerate until cold and set, at least 3 hours. Whisk pudding until smooth just before serving.

Strawberry Cheesecake Bars

We wanted this springtime dessert to actually taste like strawberries.

by Katie Leaird

CREAMY CHEESECAKE TOPPED with glistening red strawberries is a popular sweet treat and for good reason: The bright, floral strawberries, with just a hint of acidity, help balance the cheesecake's richness. Given the components' natural kinship, I thought turning strawberry cheesecake into handheld bars would be a breeze. I was mistaken.

I started with a favorite test kitchen cheesecake crust: graham cracker crumbs mixed with flour and butter to help them stay crisp and dry. I hand-packed the crumb mixture into a 13 by 9-inch baking pan and prebaked it. I then spread a filling of cream cheese, eggs, sugar, and vanilla over the prebaked crust. I knew to keep the oven at a relatively low temperature to ensure that the filling baked evenly.

These bars tasted good, but there was one problem: I couldn't extract them from the pan without totally mangling them. A foil sling (two pieces of aluminum foil pressed into the pan before pressing in the crust) solved the problem, making the baked and cooled bars easy to remove.

I hoped to incorporate the strawberries directly into the filling, so I tried stirring fresh strawberries—both chopped and pureed—into the cheesecake batter. In both cases, the moisture from the berries made for a soupy cheesecake. I tried stirring in strawberry jam, but it also was too wet and the cheesecake layer didn't set properly. I then spread a layer of jam over the crust before adding the filling, but this transformed the bars into a Slip 'N Slide; one sudden move and the cheesecake layer slid right off the crust.

If I couldn't get the strawberries into or underneath the cheesecake layer, I'd find a way to put them on top. Halved berries laid on top didn't stick—as soon as I lifted a bar up for a bite, strawberries tumbled into my lap. I tried a gelatin-based version, which stayed in place, but the Jell-O-like texture was unappetizing here.

A colleague mentioned that her mom added a baked sour cream topping to her cheesecakes, so I decided to give it a shot. I pureed fresh strawberries and stirred them into some sweetened sour cream. When the filling was almost cooked through, I carefully spread the pleasantly tangy topping over it and returned the pan to the oven. After letting the bars cool and chilling them,

I garnished each square with one strawberry slice. The result was perfect—strong strawberry flavor with no sacrifice of the cheesecake's signature creaminess. A lovely spring treat.

STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKE BARS

Makes twenty-four 2-inch squares

Be sure to let the crust cool completely before starting the filling.

CRUST

- 9 whole graham crackers, broken into pieces
- ½ cup (3½ ounces) sugar
- ¾ cup (3¾ ounces) all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

FILLING

- 1½ pounds cream cheese
- 1 cup (7 ounces) sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

TOPPING

- 6 ounces strawberries, hulled (1 heaping cup), plus 5 hulled strawberries
- ½ cup (3½ ounces) plus 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 cups sour cream

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Make foil sling for 13 by 9-inch baking pan by folding 2 long sheets of aluminum foil; first sheet should be 13 inches wide and second sheet should be 9 inches wide. Lay sheets of foil in pan perpendicular to each other, with extra foil hanging over edges of pan. Push foil into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing foil flush to pan. Spray with vegetable oil spray.

2. **FOR THE CRUST:** Process cracker pieces and sugar in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add flour and salt and pulse to combine, about 2 pulses. Add melted butter and pulse until crumbs are evenly moistened, about 10 pulses.

3. Using your hands, press crumb mixture evenly into bottom of prepared pan. Using bottom of dry measuring cup, firmly pack crust into pan. Bake until fragrant and beginning to brown around edges, about 20 minutes. Let cool completely.

4. **FOR THE FILLING:** In clean, dry processor bowl, process cream cheese and sugar until smooth, about



Tossing the strawberry slices with sugar and letting them sit briefly gives them a nice shine.

3 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. With processor running, add eggs, one at a time, until just incorporated, about 30 seconds total. Scrape down sides of bowl. Add vanilla and process to combine, about 10 seconds. Pour cream cheese mixture over cooled crust. Bake until center is almost set but still jiggles slightly when pan is shaken, about 45 minutes.

5. **FOR THE TOPPING:** Meanwhile, in clean, dry processor bowl, process 6 ounces strawberries and ½ cup sugar until pureed, about 30 seconds. Stir strawberry puree and sour cream in bowl until combined.

6. Remove cheesecake from oven. Pour strawberry mixture over cheesecake (cheesecake layer should be completely covered). Return pan to oven and bake until topping is just set, about 15 minutes.

7. Transfer pan to wire rack and let cheesecake cool completely, about 2 hours. Refrigerate until cold and set, at least 4 hours or up to 24 hours. Slice remaining 5 strawberries thin and gently toss with remaining 1 teaspoon sugar in bowl. Using foil overhang, lift cheesecake out of pan. Cut into 24 squares. Garnish each square with 1 strawberry slice and serve.



The browned top adds depth of flavor to this cheesy, creamy Southern dip.

THE AMERICAN TABLE

The Great Depression was not kind to rural Vidalia, Georgia, where farmer Moses Coleman pulled up a batch of onions in 1931, disheartened to find that they lacked fire; his low-sulfur soil had robbed them of their bite. Who'd want a crop of onions so sweet you could eat them like apples? Nonetheless, Coleman bagged them up and managed to find buyers at \$3.50 for 50 pounds. To his surprise, they came back for more. Soon the A&P and Piggly Wiggly grocery chains were both carrying Coleman's onions, and by 1975 the onions were available nationwide. Today, thanks to "controlled atmosphere" storage technology, you can bite into one almost any day of the year.



Vidalia Onion Dip

Time for this Georgia specialty to go national.

by *Morgan Bolling*

ONIONS ARE OFTEN relegated to a supporting role helping other ingredients shine. But down in Georgia, cooks have made a local onion the leading lady in a creamy party appetizer: Vidalia onion dip.

The specific area of Georgia where Vidalia onions are grown has soil and weather ideal for raising an onion so mild that it can be eaten raw, like an apple. In years past, it was tough to find these onions outside Georgia, but today markets across the country carry them.

To develop my own recipe for Vidalia onion dip, I chose five existing recipes to try. Some called for caramelizing the onions first to bolster flavor. These dips were good, but our favorite recipes took a simpler approach.

The basic formula: Mix Swiss or cheddar cheese with finely chopped raw Vidalias and the mother sauce of the South, mayonnaise. Then bake this mixture in a casserole dish until it's lightly golden on top, and serve it with crackers or toast points. If made with standard yellow onions, this dip would have a sharp, oniony flavor, but with the tempered taste of Vidalias, the dips had a sweet, mild, scallion-like flavor, a lovely and restrained counterpoint to the salty cheese and creamy mayonnaise.

But they weren't perfect. I found that many of them separated in the oven, leaving grease pooling atop the dip. And they were out of balance: too much mayo flavor and not enough onion. The solution to this was easy—I decreased the mayonnaise and increased the onions.

The two most common cheese varieties used in Vidalia onion dip recipes are Swiss and cheddar. After several rounds of testing with each in varying amounts, my tasters voted for 2 cups of shredded cheddar for its sharp, lively flavor. The downside? Cheddar cheese is prone to separating in the oven. More grease pools.

I tried adding cornstarch to fix this, but after tests with varying amounts, it failed. Sensing my frustration, a coworker suggested using American



cheese, which contains enough emulsifier to help keep cheese sauces and dips ultrasoft and creamy, even under high heat. Substituting $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of American cheese for some of the cheddar kept the dip from breaking.

A few scallion greens mixed in and a few more sprinkled over the top enhanced the fresh onion flavor and added just a little lipstick. I set out my dip with some crackers and tortilla chips and called over my tasters. Of course I wanted everyone's feedback, but it was my fellow Southerners whose judgment mattered most—and they loved it.

VIDALIA ONION DIP

Serves 6 to 8

Other sweet onions such as Maui or Walla Walla will work here. Do not use regular yellow onions. Serve with crackers or tortilla chips.

- 2 cups finely chopped Vidalia onions**
- 6 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (1½ cups)**
- ¾ cup mayonnaise**
- 2 ounces American cheese, chopped (½ cup)**
- ¼ cup thinly sliced scallion greens**

- 1.** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Combine onions, cheddar, mayonnaise, American cheese, and 2 tablespoons scallions in bowl. Transfer to 1-quart casserole dish.
- 2.** Bake until browned and bubbly, about 25 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes. Top with remaining 2 tablespoons scallions. Serve.



The Real McCoy

Vidalia onions have flatter shoulders and are slightly more squat than regular yellow onions. While we prefer the gentle sweetness of Vidalia onions in this recipe, Maui (from Hawaii) and Walla Walla (from Washington state) onions are fine substitutes (do not use regular yellow onions). Vidalia onions are more readily available nationwide than those other varieties.

1. Prep

Fried foods often have coatings, and in most cases, letting the coated food rest before frying helps the coating stick. A wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet elevates the food so the bottom coating doesn't stick to the sheet. Our favorites are the **Nordic Ware Baker's Half Sheet** (\$14.97) and the **Libertyware Half Size Sheet Pan Cooling Rack** (\$15.99 for a set of two).

SAFETY FIRST

Keep in mind that frying usually produces a small amount of splatter; always wear an apron to protect yourself from any oil that escapes from the pot. And do your best to minimize distractions; keep small children and pets away.



TAKE THE TEMP

Maintaining the oil temperature by adjusting your burner is key for even frying. Use a clip-on thermometer (our favorite is the **ThermoWorks ChefAlarm**, \$59.00) to monitor the oil temperature and an instant-read thermometer (our favorite is the **ThermoWorks Thermapen Mk4**, \$99.00) to check the food.



Go to [CooksCountry.com/fries](https://www.cookscountry.com/fries) for our unintimidating recipe for **Easy French Fries**.



2. Fry

To avoid splashing, carefully add food to the oil using tongs, a spider skimmer, or a slotted spoon. To keep coated foods from sticking together, hold each piece in the oil for a few seconds to let the coating set before releasing. When frying uncoated foods, pat them dry before adding them to the oil to minimize splatter. Follow recipe instructions, as some may call for a gentle stir as the food cooks in the oil.

3. Finish

Line a second rimmed baking sheet with a wire rack and/or paper towels (depending on what you're frying). Transfer food directly to this sheet to drain away excess oil from the surface. Salt foods immediately after removing them from the oil, while they're still hot, as salt sticks better to hot foods.

GETTING TO KNOW

Every deep-frying recipe is different, but most require a wide, deep pot; hot oil at the perfect temperature; a place to drain the crispy fried food; and the cook's full attention. *by Scott Kathan*

Deep Frying



DISPOSING OF USED OIL

Once the used oil is cool, you can filter it through a fine-mesh strainer lined with paper towels and return it to its original container. Refrigerate it, and use it three or four more times. When it's time to say goodbye, check with your municipality to see if recycling is available; if not, return the cooled oil to the original container, close it tightly, and toss it.

Do you need a special frying pot? Absolutely not. We usually deep-fry in our Best Buy Dutch oven from Cuisinart (shown here).

Crumb-Crusted Rack of Lamb

Special occasions call for big, festive flavors. Lamb answers the call.

by Morgan Bolling



A crunchy, garlicky crumb coating adds texture and complements the lamb's deep savoriness.

EACH AMERICAN EATS an average of just 1 pound of lamb per year (compared with about 50 pounds of pork). But it wasn't always this way, as lamb (and mutton) was once an essential component of the American diet; it was readily available, and its robust, sometimes gamy, flavor was considered a positive, not a negative.

I've been wanting to develop a recipe for rack of lamb for some time. This cut is not only handsome enough to shine as a festive centerpiece but is also easy to cook and, because of its size, doesn't take long. More important, though, is lamb's intriguing and wholly satisfying flavor, which adds a celebratory note to the holiday table.

To begin my testing, I gathered five recipes for rack of lamb, knowing from the start that I'd want to cook two racks (about 2 pounds total) to feed eight people. The first thing I noticed about the recipes was the disparity in target temperature: An older one called for cooking the lamb to 175 degrees, which turned it as dry as cardboard, while another called for cooking it to 125, which left the meat too rare and chewy for our taste. A few tests showed that we prefer lamb cooked to 135 degrees, a nice medium, where it is pink throughout but still perfectly tender.

Another thing I learned is that a great deal of lamb's gamy flavor resides in its fat. Even lamb lovers—which were many among my tasters—appreciated it when I trimmed the roasts of excess exterior fat before cooking (see “The Details Matter”). This dialed back the funkiness, with the added benefit of making the lamb less chewy and easier to eat.

Some recipes called for roasting the lamb racks in a hot 450- or 500-degree oven. This did give them nice dark crusts, but it also left grey bands of overcooked meat around the exteriors. If I'm paying for a beautiful roast, I want the meat to be perfect throughout. So instead of the high temps, I opted for a relatively low 300-degree oven. The meat still cooked perfectly in less than an hour; the only downside was the pale exteriors.

Searing the racks on the stovetop before roasting was an easy fix, as the seared-then-roasted racks now had nice browning and even more flavor. But I wanted to dress them up for the holiday table. Lamb can stand up to a wide range of assertive complementary

flavors, and I had a mustardy bread-crust in mind. After a few tests I landed on a potent coating starring crunchy panko crumbs seasoned with thyme, garlic, and lemon zest. Stirring some minced anchovies into the crumb mixture added a savory, salty punch. And sharp, tangy Dijon mustard did double duty as a flavorful glue to adhere the panko mixture to the lamb.

All that was missing was a serving sauce. To keep things easy, I whipped up a quick, stir-together lemony mint sauce that delivered bright springtime flavor. With perfectly cooked meat, crunchy crumbs, and a vibrant sauce to tie it all together, this recipe will make quick converts of any lamb skeptics.

CRUMB-CRUSTED RACK OF LAMB

Serves 6 to 8

We prefer the milder taste and bigger size of domestic lamb, but you may substitute lamb imported from New Zealand or Australia. Since imported lamb is generally smaller, if you can find only racks that are 1½ to 1¾ pounds, decrease the salt for each rack to ¾ teaspoon in step 2 and reduce the cooking time by about 5 minutes in step 3. Serve with Fresh Mint Sauce, if desired.

- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh thyme
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 anchovy fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and minced (optional)
- Kosher salt and pepper

- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
- 2 (1¾- to 2-pound) racks of lamb, fat trimmed to ¼ inch
- ¼ cup Dijon mustard

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Combine panko; 2 tablespoons oil; thyme; garlic; anchovies, if using; 2 teaspoons salt; and 1 teaspoon pepper in 12-inch nonstick skillet. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently and breaking up any clumps, until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Transfer to shallow dish. Stir in parsley and lemon zest.
2. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Pat lamb dry with paper towels, sprinkle each rack with 1 teaspoon salt, and season with pepper. Heat remaining 1 teaspoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Place 1 rack in skillet and cook until well browned, 2 to 4 minutes per side, using tongs as necessary to stand up rack to brown loin portion. Transfer to prepared wire rack. Pour off all but 1 teaspoon fat from skillet and repeat cooking with remaining rack of lamb. Let lamb cool for 5 minutes.
3. Brush lamb all over with mustard. Working with 1 rack at a time, transfer lamb to panko mixture, turning to coat all sides and pressing gently to adhere. Return lamb to wire rack, fat side up. Roast until lamb registers 135 degrees for medium, 40 to 50 minutes. Transfer to carving board and let rest for 15 minutes. Cut between bones to separate chops. Serve.

THE AMERICAN TABLE

“Ham or lamb?”

Not long ago, this was a common question hosts wrestled with in the weeks leading up to the big Easter feast. Lamb, like bunnies and eggs, has been a symbol of spring and renewal for centuries, making it a perfect Easter centerpiece. But things have changed, and lamb’s popularity has waned.

Sheep were ubiquitous during the colonial era, both in New England and in New Spain, and lamb had a place on the American table right through the 19th century and into the post-World War II era. It was a year-round staple; in 1960, Americans ate more than five times as much lamb as they do now. But dining trends in recent decades have favored milder meats such as beef, pork, and chicken.

Is lamb due for a resurgence? Producers are hopeful; it’s making a comeback in restaurants, and demand is increasing in large cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, where immigrant groups from Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Middle East keep the market robust.

FRESH MINT SAUCE

Makes about ½ cup

Use a good-quality extra-virgin olive oil here for the best results.

- ½ cup chopped fresh mint
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

Combine all ingredients in bowl.



The Details Matter



1. Trim Fat Much of lamb’s stronger flavor resides in its fat; we trim the fat on the racks’ exteriors to ¼ inch to control it.



2. Stand Up to Brown To ensure even cooking, brown the racks on all sides, including the “bottom” of the loin.

Lamb at the Market

Most of the lamb sold in U.S. supermarkets comes from either the western states (Colorado is a big lamb-producing state) or New Zealand and Australia. Because of differences in breeding and feed, imported lamb often has a fuller, richer, and slightly more gamy flavor than milder domestic lamb. Domestic cuts are usually also larger.

Butchers sometimes “french” both lamb racks and individual chops; this means the ends of the bones are stripped bare of the fat and meat that are naturally there. Frenching is really just about presentation—we like our lamb either way.



NOT FRENCHED
Meat and fat intact



FRENCHED
Fancier presentation

Salt-Crusted Potatoes

It took 46 pounds of potatoes, but we made these spuds worth their salt.

by Morgan Bolling

“CAN YOU BRING me 3 quarts of seawater?” This is one of the top five strangest texts I’ve ever sent (don’t ask about the other four). But I needed the seawater, and my coworker was at the seashore. It was for the sake of research. Stick with me.

In the United States, salt-crusted potatoes first became famous in Syracuse, New York, where creamy new potatoes coated in a crystallized sheath of salt were a cheap snack for thirsty barflies, many of whom worked in the local salt-producing industry. But as I dug into the history behind this treat, I learned that Syracuse was late to the game. Cooks from Colombia to the Canary Islands have been boiling fresh waxy potatoes in seawater since at least the early 17th century. The freshly dug potatoes are cooked in a small amount of ocean water until the liquid evaporates, leaving behind softened, salty potatoes.

Surprising? Yes. I’d never considered cooking with seawater before, but the idea sounded so alluring to me that I had to try it.

My coworker came through with the seawater, and I got to work. I picked up 2 pounds of fingerling potatoes, which I chose knowing that their oblong, irregular shape would provide plenty of surface area for salt to stick to. I boiled them in a shallow pot of seawater until the liquid evaporated.

My suspicions were correct: Each golden potato nugget was creamy and tender and had a unique mineral-y, briny flavor. The salt was present when it hit your tongue but faded after first contact into a pleasant, savory salinity. I was hooked.

That said, seawater was out. I didn’t

Before the Boil

We start 2 pounds of potatoes in 4 cups of water with just a teaspoon of salt; heat and evaporation take care of the rest.



want to trek to the beach (or send a friend) each time I craved these potatoes, and besides, not all seawater is the same. So I re-created the experience with a simple solution of 1 tablespoon of table salt to 4 cups of tap water, enough to nearly cover 2 pounds of potatoes in a skillet without overflowing. Unfortunately, once I boiled off the liquid, the potatoes were way too salty and not fully cooked, especially the larger ones.

In my next round, I reduced the amount of salt to 2 teaspoons and covered the skillet for the first 15 minutes to ensure that all the potatoes had time to cook through. I then removed the lid to let the water evaporate and the salt crust form. I got gorgeous, perfectly cooked, creamy, fluffy fingerlings. But they were still too salty.

After experimenting with different amounts of salt, I settled on 1 teaspoon of salt to 4 cups of water. This was still enough to give the potatoes a light salt coating and season them throughout without turning them into mini salt licks. (This salt-to-potato ratio is comparable to those in many other potato recipes in our archive.) For a final twist, I added two sprigs of fresh rosemary to the skillet, which provided an earthy, herbaceous backbone.

SALT-CRUSTED FINGERLING POTATOES Serves 4 to 6

Use potatoes of similar size to ensure consistent cooking. If you prefer to use kosher salt, you will need 2 teaspoons of Diamond Crystal or 1½ teaspoons of Morton. These potatoes can be served with melted butter, if desired.

- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 pounds fingerling potatoes
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary

1. Whisk water and salt in 12-inch skillet until salt is dissolved, about 15 seconds. Add potatoes and rosemary sprigs (potatoes may not be fully submerged; this is OK). Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until potatoes are nearly tender, about 15 minutes.
2. Uncover skillet and increase heat to medium-high. Simmer vigorously until all water has evaporated and potatoes are fully tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Discard rosemary sprigs. Serve.



These deeply seasoned, creamy potatoes are covered with a thin sheen of salt.

BACKSTORY

Cooking with seawater, an experiment we conducted while developing our recipe for Salt-Crusted Fingerling Potatoes, has ancient roots. Centuries ago, mariners from China to Rome used seawater to wash produce, preserve meat, and cook legumes or grains. Using this resource made sense during long voyages because it saved precious fresh water for drinking. Some seafarers still use the stuff today, filtering out pollutants and diluting it with fresh water to achieve the right salinity.

And believe it or not, some landlubbers are turning to seawater, too. A handful of restaurants on both U.S. coasts tout their use of seawater for steaming shellfish, claiming that it adds an ocean-y flavor. And some enterprising entrepreneurs even sell bottles of filtered seawater for use in home kitchens.

But simply dunking a bucket into the ocean to procure seawater produces inconsistent results. Seawater collected in different locations, or even at different times from the same spot, can have a dramatically different mineral makeup. And there’s always a risk of pollution.

Sugar Snap Pea Salad

We looked for ingredients to support, not sideline, this lovely springtime treat. *by Matthew Fairman*

CRISP, REFRESHING SUGAR snap peas are one of spring's sweetest pleasures, particularly if you're fortunate enough to have them growing in a vegetable garden out back. And while these crunchy lovelies are delicious on their own, they're even more fetching in a simple, refreshing salad. So I set out to create one.

I wanted my salad to have a variety of fresh seasonal flavors all in balance with one another, with the sugar snap peas at the fore. And I wanted it to be easy enough for a last-minute snack but beautiful enough for a holiday dinner.

After trying recipes with both blanched and raw snap peas, I decided that the peas were tastiest, crispest, and prettiest when left raw and simply sliced diagonally. I looked around the garden and the produce section for contrasting flavors, textures, and colors that would complement but not overshadow the crunchy star of the show.

A few handfuls of baby arugula added a pleasant, fresh pepperiness to set off the sweet peas. For a light touch of bracing heat and a splash of gorgeous color, I added thinly sliced red radishes. Slices of seedless English cucumber (the long, thin kind often sold shrink-wrapped) added even more fresh notes.

I dressed it all in an easy, creamy white wine vinaigrette bolstered with chopped dill and a bit of mustard for

personality. I tinkered with ingredient amounts until the vinaigrette had just enough body to cling to the snap peas and bring everything together. My tasters and I scarfed it down, leaving only a film of dressing in the salad bowl, which we sopped up with torn pieces of freshly baked bread.

SUGAR SNAP PEA SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

This salad can be refrigerated for up to 1 hour before serving.

- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- Salt and pepper
- 1 pound sugar snap peas, strings removed, cut in half diagonally
- 2 ounces (2 cups) baby arugula
- ½ English cucumber, halved lengthwise and sliced thin
- 6 radishes, trimmed, halved, and sliced thin (1 cup)

1. Whisk mayonnaise, oil, vinegar, dill, mustard, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl.
2. Add snap peas, arugula, cucumber, and radishes and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.



A tangle of peppery arugula—aka “rocket”—forms the base of this crisp, crunchy salad.

Pea Primer

Here are the three types of fresh pea pods you may see at the market.

English Peas

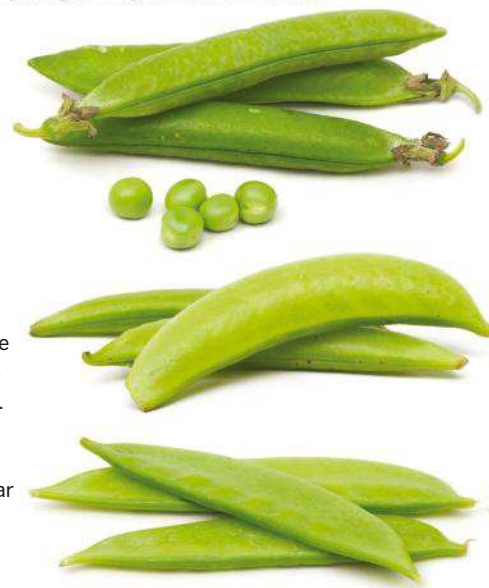
These are the green peas we're all familiar with. Supermarkets rarely carry whole pods, partly because they're a bit of work to shell and partly because the pods are usually too tough to eat.

Sugar Snap Peas

These peas are a cross between English peas and snow peas. Once the strings are removed, the entire pod is edible. Blanch them, or eat them raw.

Snow Peas

Thinner and more delicate than sugar snaps, snow peas take no time to cook. Add them to stir-fries at the last minute. They're great raw, too.



A Very Biased Opinion

Here's how to prep the sugar snap peas for this salad.



1. Remove Strings

Strip and discard the fibrous strings that run down the insides of the pea pods.



2. Cut on Sharp Bias

For the best presentation, slice each pod in half diagonally.

Hot Cross Buns

Breakfast? Dessert? Sweet Easter dinner roll? We wanted a balanced bun to fit every bill. *by Katie Leaird*



These satisfying buns don't wallop you with richness or sugar; their allure is in their simplicity, softness, and balance of flavors.

ONE LEGEND SAYS that if you hang a hot cross bun from your kitchen rafter, it will expel bad spirits. Another promises protection from shipwrecks if you carry a bun on your boat. While these ends sound nice, I wasn't looking for magical intervention; I just wanted a warm, slightly sweet, dried fruit-studded bun for Easter or any time.

The trick with hot cross buns, as with so many breads, is achieving the right structure. The light, airy buns are richer than most breads but not buttery like a brioche. And the lean icing cross often found on top of the buns whets my sweet tooth, but only just.

I used a stand mixer to knead together a basic dough from the usual suspects—flour, water, yeast, sugar, and salt. I knew I needed to let it go for a few minutes, because a nice long knead helps develop gluten and build elastic structure in the dough, trapping air and allowing the buns to rise to lofty heights. I also added some butter and eggs to make the dough richer and more flavorful—but not so much that it would weigh things down.

My next move was to look through cookbooks for traditional bells and whistles to embellish my hot cross buns. A colleague suggested including warm spice in the dough—not a mandatory addition, but it sounded good to me, so I added a bit of ground cinnamon to my next batch of buns.

I loved the aroma of the cinnamon baking bread wafting from the oven. But when I inspected my baked buns, my optimism deflated. They were dense and compact, a far cry from the pillowy rolls I'd baked before. I assumed I had simply mismeasured something, so I made a couple more batches of buns, measuring extra carefully, to check my work. Still bad.

What gives? A chat with our science editor shed light: He taught me that cinnamon contains a flavor compound called cinnamaldehyde, which can inhibit yeast activity and prevent bread from fully rising, especially when lightness is the goal. What's fine for a relatively dense cinnamon swirl bread can prove fatal to a soft, airy bun. That lovely, comforting spice was impeding my dough.

I ditched the cinnamon and moved on to the dried fruit. I made batches with both currants and raisins, and

my tasters much preferred the bigger, sweeter flavor of raisins plumped in warm water.

The real signature of a hot cross bun is its top. I tried the old English technique of making crosses from ropes of flour paste dough that are then draped over each bun and baked, but these were a pain to make and didn't add much fun. Besides, my tasters wanted icing. A simple confectioners' sugar and milk icing did the trick, piped in long, continuous stripes across the rows of baked buns in the pan to create a series of crosses.

Hot cross buns are great any time of day, but I especially like them at breakfast. So my final task was to make sure I could have freshly baked buns without having to get out of bed at the crack of dawn. After testing a few make-ahead methods, I found a winner: Make the dough the day before, form it into buns, tuck them into their pan, and let them proof as usual. Then refrigerate them overnight. Come morning, pop them into the oven to bake. Hot cross buns, with an emphasis on the hot.

HOT CROSS BUNS

Makes 12 buns

You can use either regular or golden raisins in this recipe. The buns can be served warm or at room temperature. Plan ahead: The dough will need to rise in two stages for a total of 3½ to 4½ hours.

BUNS

- ¾ cup raisins
- 2 tablespoons water, plus ¾ cup warm water (110 degrees)
- 3 large eggs, plus 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 4 cups (20 ounces) all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (3½ ounces) granulated sugar
- 2¼ teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 1¼ teaspoons salt

ICING

- 1 cup (4 ounces) confectioners' sugar
- 4 teaspoons milk
- ⅛ teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch salt

1. FOR THE BUNS: Combine raisins and 2 tablespoons water in small bowl; cover and microwave until steaming, about 1 minute. Let sit until softened, about 15 minutes. Drain raisins and discard liquid.

2. Whisk warm water, 3 eggs, and melted butter together in 4-cup liquid measuring cup. Using stand mixer fitted with dough hook, mix flour, sugar, yeast, and salt on low speed until combined, about 30 seconds. With mixer running, add egg mixture and mix until dough comes together, about 2 minutes.

3. Increase speed to medium and knead until dough is smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes. Reduce speed to low, add raisins, and knead until combined, about 2 minutes (dough will be sticky and some raisins may not be fully incorporated into dough at this point; this is OK).

4. Turn out dough and any errant raisins onto lightly floured counter and knead by hand to evenly incorporate raisins into dough, about 1 minute. Form dough into smooth, taut ball; transfer to greased large bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise until doubled in size, 2 to 2½ hours.

5. Grease 13 by 9-inch baking pan. Turn out dough onto lightly floured counter and divide into 12 equal pieces. Form each piece into rough ball by pinching and pulling dough edges under so that top is smooth. On clean counter, cup each ball with your palm and roll into smooth, tight ball. Arrange in prepared pan in 3 rows of 4 and cover loosely with plastic. Let buns rise until nearly doubled in size and starting to press against one another, 1½ to 2 hours.

6. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Brush buns with beaten egg. Bake until golden brown and centers register at least 190 degrees, 24 to 26 minutes. Transfer pan to wire rack and let buns cool until just warm, about 1 hour.

7. FOR THE ICING: Combine all ingredients in bowl until smooth (icing will be very thick). Transfer icing to small zipper-lock bag. Cut off very tip of 1 corner of bag. Pipe continuous line of icing across center of each row of buns, then pipe icing in lines perpendicular to first to form cross in center of each bun. Serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Make dough through step 5 and let rise until doubled in size. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Proceed with recipe from step 6, extending baking time by 5 minutes.



To see the results of our 13 by 9-inch baking pan testing, go to [CooksCountry.com/bakingpan](https://www.cookscountry.com/bakingpan).



Icing with Ease

Our simple icing for these buns contains just four ingredients: confectioners' sugar, milk, vanilla, and salt. You certainly could transfer the icing to a pastry bag fitted with a small round tip and pipe a crosshatch pattern of icing onto the buns, but it's easy to use a zipper-lock bag. Simply spoon the icing into a sandwich-size bag and squeeze the bag to force the icing into one corner. Then, using kitchen shears or scissors, snip off a tiny section of that corner of the bag to create a very small opening. Squeeze the bag to press thin strands of icing along the top of the baked buns.



BACKSTORY

These days, hot cross buns are a tradition for some and a curiosity for others, but the humble little rolls have a long history. Some say the first versions were baked by the ancient Greeks as honey-sweetened celebratory treats before they became a Good Friday tradition for Christians in the Middle Ages. But by the 16th century, they'd become common all year long. They were too common for some, including Queen Elizabeth I, who decreed in 1592 that hot cross buns could be sold in England only on Good Friday, on Christmas, or at funerals. The rest of the year, renegade bakers faced fines or even jail time for breaking the directive.



Quiche Lorraine

With a few simple tricks, making supersavory, creamy quiche is easy. *by Katie Leaird*



CLASSIC QUICHE LORRAINE

Serves 8

To prevent the crust from sagging during prebaking, make sure the protruding crimped edge overhangs the edge of the pie plate slightly. Also, use plenty of pie weights (3 to 4 cups). The quiche can be served warm or at room temperature. The test kitchen's favorite supermarket bacons are Farmland Thick Sliced Bacon and Plumrose Premium Thick Sliced Bacon.

CRUST

- ¼ cup ice water**
- 4 teaspoons sour cream**
- 1¼ cups (6¼ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- 1½ teaspoons sugar**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch pieces and frozen for 15 minutes**

FILLING

- 6 slices bacon, cut crosswise into ¼-inch pieces**
- 1 onion, chopped fine**
- 1¼ cups heavy cream**
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch**
- 5 large eggs**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ teaspoon pepper**
- 4 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (1 cup)**

1. FOR THE CRUST: Combine ice water and sour cream in bowl. Process flour, sugar, and salt in food processor until

combined, about 5 seconds. Scatter butter over top and pulse until butter is size of large peas, about 10 pulses. Add sour cream mixture and pulse until dough forms clumps and no dry flour remains, about 12 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.

2. Turn out dough onto sheet of plastic wrap and form into 4-inch disk. Wrap tightly in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour. (Wrapped dough can be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 1 month. If frozen, let dough thaw completely on counter before rolling.)

3. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Let chilled dough sit on counter to soften slightly, about 10 minutes, before rolling. Roll dough into 12-inch circle on lightly floured counter. Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it onto 9-inch pie plate, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into plate by gently lifting edge of dough with your hand while pressing into plate bottom with your other hand.

4. Trim overhang to ½ inch beyond lip of plate. Tuck overhang under itself; folded edge should be flush with edge of plate. Crimp dough evenly around edge of plate using your fingers. Push protruding crimped edge so it slightly overhangs edge of plate. Wrap dough-lined plate loosely in plastic and freeze until dough is firm, about 15 minutes.

5. Place chilled pie shell on rimmed baking sheet. Line with double layer of parchment paper, covering edges to prevent burning,

Step by Step



1. Make dough

Process flour, sugar, and salt until combined. Pulse in butter, then add sour cream and water and pulse until dough forms.

Why? The processor cuts in the butter without overworking the dough. Sour cream adds flavor and makes the dough pliable.



2. Chill dough

Turn out dough onto sheet of plastic wrap and form into 4-inch disk. Wrap tightly in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Why? Room-temperature dough can be sticky and messy to work with. Chilling the dough makes it easier to roll out.



3. Roll, place, and crimp dough

Roll dough into 12-inch circle. Use rolling pin to transfer dough to pie plate, letting excess dough hang over edge. Ease dough into plate, tuck overhang under itself, and crimp dough around edge.

Why? A 12-inch round provides plenty of dough to crimp.



4. Chill dough again

Wrap dough-lined plate loosely in plastic and freeze until dough is firm, about 15 minutes.

Why? Chilling the dough before prebaking the shell ensures that the crust won't heat too fast and slump in the oven.



5. Prebake crust

Line chilled pie shell with parchment paper and fill with pie weights. Bake until edges are light golden brown. Remove parchment and weights and bake until bottom is dry and light golden brown.

Why? A prebaked (or blind-baked) crust prevents a soggy quiche.

Core Techniques For Rolling Out Any Pie Dough



Refrigerate the Dough

Cold dough is less sticky and easier to evenly roll out.



Flour the Counter

Flour prevents the dough from sticking and tearing.



Roll in One Direction

For the best results, rotate the dough, not the rolling direction.

Bake Pie on a Baking Sheet

When prebaking the empty shell and baking the filled crust, we set the pie plate on a rimmed baking sheet. The metal conducts heat well and promotes browning for both bakes. Additionally, baking the filled prebaked crust on the baking sheet saves your oven from mess in case the filling sloshes out during transfer.

Who Is Lorraine?

The Lorraine here is not a who but a where: the Lorraine region of northeastern France, which shares much history and culinary tradition with the neighboring area of Germany. This quiche, which features bacon, Gruyère cheese, and sometimes onion, became an American culinary sensation in the 1950s and helped ignite the quiche craze that followed.



Essential Gear and Ingredients

Gruyère Cheese

Good Gruyère has a sweet, fruity tang and a bit of pleasant funk and is a bit crumbly, with a slight crystalline crunch. When we tasted nationally available Gruyères, one stood out: **1655 Le Gruyère AOP**. Our tasters loved its “deeply aged, caramel-like” flavor and “crystalline structure.”

Rolling Pin

We prefer a long, straight wooden rolling pin to tapered pins or those with handles; we find that it gives us a better feel for the dough and allows us to roll more precisely and efficiently. The slightly textured finish of our favorite, the **J.K. Adams Plain Maple Rolling Dowel** (\$13.95), holds a light dusting of flour that keeps dough from sticking. A bonus: Its left makes tasks such as crushing peppercorns a breeze.



Pie Plate

The **Williams-Sonoma Goldtouch Non-stick Pie Dish** (\$18.95) is our winning pie plate. This golden-hued metal plate bakes evenly browned crusts—even bottom crusts emerge crisp and flaky. We also like this plate’s smooth lip, which allows for lots of flexibility when you’re crimping the edge (scalloped-edged plates allow only one option).

and fill with pie weights. Bake until edges are light golden brown, about 20 minutes. Remove parchment and weights, rotate plate, and bake until crust bottom dries out and turns light golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. If crust begins to puff, pierce gently with tip of paring knife. Set aside. (Crust needn’t cool completely before adding filling.)

6. FOR THE FILLING: Meanwhile, cook bacon in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until crispy, 5 to 7 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet. Add onion to skillet and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until softened and lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Set aside to cool slightly.

7. Whisk $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cream and cornstarch in large bowl until cornstarch dissolves. Whisk in eggs, salt, pepper, and remaining 1 cup cream until mixture is smooth.

8. Scatter bacon, onion, and Gruyère evenly over crust. Pour custard mixture over top. Tent quiche with lightly greased aluminum foil. Bake on baking sheet until toothpick inserted in center of quiche comes out clean and center registers 170 degrees, 50 minutes to 1 hour. Transfer to wire rack, discard foil, and let rest until cool to touch, about 2 hours. Slice and serve. (Quiche can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.)



6. Crisp bacon

Cook bacon until crispy, 5 to 7 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer to paper towel-lined plate. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet.

Why? Precooking the bacon ensures that it will be crispy once baked into the quiche.



7. Cook onion

Add onion to skillet and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until softened and lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes.

Why? Cooking the onion in the rendered bacon fat infuses it with the bacon’s flavor.



8. Whisk custard together

Whisk $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cream and cornstarch in large bowl until cornstarch dissolves. Whisk in eggs, salt, pepper, and remaining 1 cup cream until mixture is smooth.

Why? Cornstarch protects the custard from curdling.



9. Assemble and bake

Scatter bacon, onion, and Gruyère evenly over crust, then pour custard mixture over top. Tent quiche with lightly greased foil and bake.

Why? We cover the quiche with foil to prevent the exposed crust from burning as the filling cooks.



10. Let cool and serve

Transfer to wire rack, discard foil, and let rest until cool to touch, about 2 hours. Slice and serve.

Why? The quiche will appear soft and jiggle just out of the oven; it needs time to set before becoming sliceable.

Chicken Tikka Masala

Let your slow cooker deliver this rich, fragrant, tangy chicken and rice dish.

by Matthew Fairman



The flavors of the sweet, creamy, tomatoey sauce are both comforting and distinctive.

The Words Behind the Dish

Chicken tikka masala just might be the world's favorite Indian dish. Loosely translated, *tikka* means "pieces of meat" and *masala* means "spice blend." Regardless of the dish's origin (various sources claim that it was invented in India, London, and Glasgow), it's become woven into the culinary fabric of the United Kingdom. Brits love the dish so much that it surpassed meat pies and fish and chips to become a "true national dish" of Great Britain, according to former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook.

Cook Whole; Then Chop

Keeping the chicken breasts whole in the slow cooker helps ensure that they stay moist over several hours of cooking. Chop 'em at the end.



CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA, the dish of yogurt-and-spice-marinated chicken chunks in a sweet, mildly spiced, creamy tomato curry, is wildly popular in Indian restaurants in America and abroad. The traditional method involves skewering and searing the chicken in a live-fire tandoor oven; most recipes for homemade tikka masala (including ours) call for cooking the chicken under the broiler. I wondered if I could forgo both the tandoor and the broiler and find tikka masala success in the slow cooker.

For my first test, I marinated chicken breasts in plain yogurt with salt and pepper. Then I stirred the sauce ingredients—crushed tomatoes, chopped onion, garlic, ginger, garam masala (a common Indian spice blend), minced serrano chile, a little sugar, and cream—into the cooker, dropped the seasoned raw chicken on top, covered it, and cooked it for about 4 hours on low until the chicken was done.

The chicken was tasty and moist, but the sauce needed work. Its flavor was promising, but the onion was still a bit crunchy, the tomato tasted acidic and undercooked, and without the relatively high heat of the stovetop, the dry spices tasted raw, sharp, and dusty. I had run into this problem before with similar recipes, and I knew just what to do. Before slow-cooking, I simply sautéed the chopped onion until softened and then added the garlic, ginger, garam masala, and a little tomato paste to bloom in the hot oil. This softened the onion's crunch and brought out the flavors of the spices and aromatics.

But I wasn't quite done yet. A few tasters commented on the extreme tenderness of the chicken in the finished dish. It's not a complaint I've heard often, but they thought the chicken might be too tender, bordering on mushy—which makes sense, as the acid in the yogurt marinade can make meat a bit squishy. With all the strong flavors in the dish, did I even need the yogurt marinade? In a side-by-side test of tikka masala made with and without marinating the chicken, the nonmarinated version won out for its superior texture.

How good is this version? The proof is on the plate, and this version features tender—but not too tender—chicken bathed in a beautifully aromatic, intensely flavored, and slightly sweet sauce. The slow cooker delivers again.

A Winning Combination



Garam masala is an Indian blend of warm spices: Black pepper, dried chiles, cinnamon, cardamom, and coriander are staples; some versions also include cloves, cumin, fennel, or nutmeg. Our favorite is the "mellow," "well-balanced" blend from McCormick.

SLOW-COOKER CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

Serve 4 to 6

Serve with white rice, preferably basmati. You can substitute 2 teaspoons of ground coriander, ½ teaspoon of pepper, ¼ teaspoon of ground cardamom, and ¼ teaspoon of ground cinnamon for the garam masala. A jalapeño chile can be substituted for the serrano. For a spicier dish, reserve and add the chile seeds.

- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 1 serrano chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- Salt and pepper
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
- ⅔ cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

1. Combine tomatoes and sugar in slow cooker. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Add serrano, garlic, ginger, tomato paste, garam masala, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.

2. Transfer onion mixture to slow cooker and stir to combine. Season chicken with salt and pepper and nestle into slow cooker. Cover and cook until chicken registers 160 degrees, 3 to 4 hours on low.

3. Remove chicken from slow cooker and cut into 1-inch pieces. Stir cream and chicken into slow cooker. Serve, sprinkled with cilantro.

Breadsticks

With our simple method, it's easy to make these restaurant favorites at home. **by Alli Berkey**

I'VE NEVER THOUGHT twice about investing the amounts of time and effort it takes to cook up a big Italian meal—long-simmered sauce, homemade pasta, antipasti, the works. But adding homemade breadsticks to the mix has somehow always seemed a bridge too far. Recently, however, a co-worker mentioned that she sometimes makes breadsticks from store-bought pizza dough and that they're really good—warm, pleasantly chewy, and easy to customize with different flavors. Mind blown.

I set out to develop an easy recipe for homemade breadsticks. For my initial test, I ordered some supermarket pizza dough, divided it into 12 pieces, rolled each piece into a rope, and baked. The good: The ropes emerged golden brown. The bad: They shrunk dramatically, becoming small, compact sticks that didn't taste like much.

Fixing the shrinking was a simple matter of letting the refrigerated dough come to room temperature before rolling it out. But I still wasn't happy with the stick shape, especially since the

more I tried it, the more I found that the results varied from dough to dough; there's no good way to tell how much a supermarket dough has been frozen and thawed or how much it will rise in the oven. One thing I did know was that the less I worked the dough, the better the rise would be. The minimalist shaping method I landed on was to split 1 pound of dough in half, roll and stretch each half into a 9 by 5-inch rectangle, and then score each rectangle so that individual breadsticks would be easy to tear off once baked.

I tried brushing the rolled and stretched dough with olive oil but found that melted butter provided more flavor. And when the dough was moistened with savory butter, herbs and seasonings readily adhered. My master recipe features garlic, oregano, and thyme. Onion and rosemary bring robust flavor to one variation, while another option features the flavors of everything bagels—sesame seeds, poppy seeds, and dried onion. Parmesan and red pepper flakes add pep to a third version, and a sweet version is perfumed with cinnamon and ginger.



Scoring the dough before baking makes it a cinch to pull apart the baked sticks.



ONION AND ROSEMARY



EVERYTHING



SPICY PARMESAN



CINNAMON-SUGAR

GARLIC AND HERB BREADSTICKS

Serves 4 to 6

If possible, buy bagged pizza dough that is still partially frozen; the yeast is more likely to be active, which will give the breadsticks a better rise during baking. It's important to let the dough come to room temperature before beginning the recipe. Do not use Pillsbury Pizza Crust here. Wait to make the thyme mixture until just before you're ready to sprinkle it; otherwise, the moisture from the fresh thyme can cause it to clump.

- 1** pound store-bought pizza dough, room temperature
- 2** teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- 2** teaspoons dried oregano
- 1** teaspoon granulated garlic
- ½** teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼** teaspoon pepper
- 3** tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

- 1.** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 2.** Divide dough into 2 equal pieces. Roll and stretch 1 piece of dough into 9 by 5-inch rectangle on lightly floured counter. Transfer dough to half of prepared sheet, with short ends parallel to long sides of sheet. Repeat with remaining dough piece and place on other half of sheet.
- 3.** Stir thyme, oregano, granulated garlic, salt, and pepper together in

bowl. Using pastry brush, brush doughs with half of melted butter. Sprinkle doughs with half of thyme mixture. Flip doughs, brush with remaining melted butter, and sprinkle with remaining thyme mixture.

4. Using bench scraper or chef's knife, cut doughs crosswise at 1-inch intervals to create nine 5-inch breadsticks on each piece of dough, but do not separate breadsticks. Bake until golden brown, 9 to 12 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes. Pull breadsticks apart at seams. Serve.

ONION AND ROSEMARY BREADSTICKS

Substitute 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary and 1 tablespoon dried minced onion for thyme and oregano.

EVERYTHING BREADSTICKS

Substitute 2 tablespoons sesame seeds, 1 tablespoon dried minced onion, and 2 teaspoons poppy seeds for thyme and oregano.

SPICY PARMESAN BREADSTICKS

Substitute ¾ cup grated Parmesan cheese and ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes for thyme and oregano.

CINNAMON-SUGAR BREADSTICKS

Substitute 2 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, and ½ teaspoon ground ginger for thyme, oregano, garlic, and pepper. Reduce salt to ⅛ teaspoon.

Chicken with Braised Spring Vegetables

This comforting, fresh chicken braise shows familiar vegetables in a brand-new light.

by *Cecelia Jenkins*

PART OF THE appeal of rich, hearty, long-cooked winter braises is that they're made in just one pot. But with the slow turn from winter to spring comes a gradual change in how most of us want to eat; our cravings for substantial braises lessen as we yearn for brighter, vegetable-laden dishes. I set out to create a quicker-cooking, vegetable-packed one-pot braise that would add complexity and interest to fresher, lighter ingredients.

To start, I used a favorite test kitchen recipe for Braised Spring Vegetables—radishes, asparagus, and peas. Braised radishes might sound surprising, but the gentle cooking removes their sharp, sulfurous edge and turns them tender and sweet. The whole dish is infused with the bright, expressive flavors of garlic, orange zest, and lemon zest, and it really does taste like spring in a bowl. To turn it into a substantial meal, I wanted to add chicken and red potatoes. But success wasn't as simple as adding everything to the pot to braise at once; I found I had to add the ingredients in stages to ensure that everything was cooked correctly.

After a good bit of trial and error that focused primarily on getting some color on the chicken while not overcooking it, I landed on browning just one side of boneless, skinless chicken breasts in a Dutch oven before removing them from the pot. In went garlic, shallot, and seasonings, followed by the potatoes, radishes, and water. Once the mixture came to a boil, I placed the

chicken on top, covered the pot, and simmered until the chicken was done (about 10 minutes). Then I removed the chicken and stirred in peas, 2-inch lengths of asparagus, and some lemon and orange zest. After about 10 more minutes, the vegetables were tender and the broth was incredibly fragrant. I sliced the chicken and returned it to the pot to warm through while I called my tasters.

They loved the robust-yet-fresh flavors of this braise. Those new to braised radishes were quick converts. But the dish was missing a final flourish. I found it in a sprinkle of licorice-y tarragon and a drizzle of olive oil, both of which infused the dish with more fresh, satisfying flavor. I was happy to see that my tasters, with bowls and crusty bread in their hands, left not a drop of broth behind.

ONE-POT CHICKEN WITH BRAISED SPRING VEGETABLES Serves 4

Be sure to use ½-inch-thick asparagus in this recipe. Serve with crusty bread to sop up the broth.

- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed**
- Salt and pepper**
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 shallot, sliced thin**
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced thin**
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme**
- Pinch red pepper flakes**
- 12 ounces red potatoes, unpeeled, cut into 1-inch pieces**



Gentle braising turns peppery radishes surprisingly sweet and mild.

- 8 radishes, trimmed and quartered lengthwise (halved if small)**
 - 1¼ cups water**
 - 1 pound asparagus, trimmed and cut into 2-inch lengths**
 - 2 cups frozen peas**
 - 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest**
 - 2 teaspoons grated orange zest**
 - 1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon**
- 1.** Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add chicken, smooth side down, and cook until browned on 1 side, about 5 minutes. Transfer chicken to plate, browned side up.
 - 2.** Add shallot, garlic, thyme sprigs, pepper flakes, and 1 tablespoon oil to now-empty pot and cook until shallot is softened, about 2 minutes. Stir in

- potatoes, radishes, water, and ¾ teaspoon salt and bring to boil. Place chicken on top of potato mixture, browned side up. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until chicken registers 160 degrees, about 10 minutes.
- 3.** Transfer chicken to plate and tent with aluminum foil; set aside. Stir asparagus, peas, lemon zest, orange zest, and ½ teaspoon salt into potato mixture. Cook, covered, until vegetables are tender, 7 to 10 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking. Remove from heat.
- 4.** Discard thyme sprigs. Slice chicken on bias ½ inch thick. Place chicken, browned side up, on top of vegetables in pot. Add any accumulated chicken juices. Sprinkle with tarragon and drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Serve.

Recipe Breakdown



1. Sear 1 side of chicken and remove from pot.



2. Cook aromatics, then add vegetables and water.



3. Place chicken on top of vegetables; cover and cook.



4. Remove chicken and add asparagus, peas, and zests.



5. Slice chicken and return it to pot; serve.

Glazed Meatloaf

We were unwilling to sacrifice tender, moist texture in our bid for fewer portions. *by Alli Berkey*

WE LIKE OUR meatloaf here in the test kitchen and have a wealth of recipes to prove it. But after a big meatloaf dinner and a few days of leftovers, even meatloaf lovers can find it hard to polish off the last few portions. I set out to make a meaty, flavor-packed loaf that served two hungry diners with few or no leftovers.

The first decision when making meatloaf is always which meat(s) to use; we have recipes that call for beef, pork, veal, turkey, and many combinations thereof. While most markets sell a combination of ground beef, pork, and veal labeled “meatloaf mix,” it’s inconsistent from store to store. Instead, I opted for the straightforward convenience of 90 percent lean ground beef. To increase its savory complexity, I added a mix of sautéed mushrooms and onion; the food processor made quick work of chopping them, and a quick turn in a hot skillet cooked off their excess moisture. Fresh thyme, garlic, and Dijon mustard rounded out the flavors.

Flavor is paramount, but texture can make or break a meatloaf. One sure path to a tender, moist meatloaf is to combine the meat with a panade—a mixture of bread and liquid (usually milk) that we also use in meatballs. I tried folding panades made with milk and white bread, panko bread crumbs, and crushed saltines into three batches of meatloaf; the saltines took top honors for their clean flavor and because they produced the least gummy texture. Since I already had the food processor out, it was easy to use it to crush the crackers. A single egg helped hold everything together.

What cooking vessel is best for a small meatloaf? I tested several options (including a mini loaf pan, a small cake pan, and a small roasting pan), but nothing was an improvement on the nonstick skillet I’d already used to sauté the mushrooms and onion. My last move was to make a quick, no-cook ketchup-based glaze to slather on the raw meatloaf. But the glaze burned before the meatloaf was cooked through. Brushing on the glaze halfway through cooking was the answer; this gave the glaze enough time to concentrate in flavor and texture without scorching.

This for-two meatloaf may be reduced in size, but it is definitely not reduced in flavor.

GLAZED MEATLOAF FOR TWO

If using a nonstick skillet larger than 10 inches in diameter, increase the water to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup in step 5.

GLAZE

- 3 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 teaspoons packed light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cider vinegar
- Dash hot sauce

MEATLOAF

- 10 saltines
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup whole milk
- 4 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 large egg
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper
- 1 pound 90 percent lean ground beef

1. **FOR THE GLAZE:** Combine all ingredients in bowl; set aside.
2. **FOR THE MEATLOAF:** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Process saltines in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Transfer to large bowl and stir in milk; set aside. Add mushrooms and onion to now-empty processor and pulse until finely chopped, about 12 pulses.
3. Heat oil in 10-inch oven-safe nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add mushroom mixture, thyme, and garlic and cook until moisture has fully evaporated and mixture is lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Transfer to plate and let cool for 5 minutes.
4. Whisk egg, mustard, salt, pepper, and mushroom mixture into saltine mixture. Using your hands, mix in beef until thoroughly combined. Transfer meatloaf mixture to now-empty skillet and shape into 7 by 4-inch loaf. Bake meatloaf for 20 minutes.
5. Remove skillet from oven. Using pastry brush, brush top and sides of meatloaf with glaze. Add 2 tablespoons water to skillet. Return skillet to oven and continue to bake until meatloaf registers 160 degrees, 20 to 25 minutes longer. Let cool for 5 minutes. Serve.



A concentrated sweet-tart glaze punches up the meatloaf's flavor.

A Splash of Water

It might be tempting to skip adding the 2 tablespoons of water to the skillet before returning the glazed meatloaf to the oven for the final baking stint. But this step can save a lot of effort when it comes time to clean the skillet. Without the water, some of the sweet glaze that inevitably drips off the meatloaf combines with the meat juices and burns into a tar-like mess on the skillet's surface. The addition of a small amount of water keeps this from happening—and just might keep your smoke alarm from sounding.



Multicookers

The Instant Pot is incredibly popular. But is it really the best multicooker on the market? *by Hannah Crowley*

5 Multicookers 12 Tests

- Pressure-Cooked Beef Stew
- Slow-Cooked Beef Stew
- Pressure-Cooked Braised Chicken Breasts with Tomato and Capers
- Slow-Cooked Braised Chicken Breasts with Tomato and Capers
- Pressure-Cooked Baked Beans
- Slow-Cooked Baked Beans
- White rice
- Brown rice
- Track the temperature of water under low and high pressure
- Track the temperature of water while slow-cooking on low and high



We evaluated five models to find the best.

AMERICAN COOKS ARE downright fanatical about Instant Pot, a brand of multipurpose electric pressure cookers. There are countless blogs dedicated to these appliances. They sell like hotcakes online. People love them.

But when we tested the Instant Pot and other multicookers last year, we weren't impressed. While these machines promise to replace a pressure cooker, slow cooker, rice cooker, and more, we found that they don't stack up against said equipment and require recipe rejiggering to get good results. Still, the appeal of their versatility is undeniable. So we went back into the test kitchen and spent a year studying multicookers and developing recipes dialed in to their specific functionality.

Armed with these new recipes, we tested again, selecting five multicookers priced from \$88.79 to \$199.95, including the best-selling Instant Pot model and our previous winner, the Fagor LUX. All had a large 8-quart capacity, giving us a broad cooking surface and a roomy interior.

We started by evaluating the pressure-cooking function on each machine and found that all but one (which had a droopy gasket that didn't reliably seal) made great pressure-cooked food: Beef was meltingly tender after just 25 minutes, bone-in chicken breasts were juicy and fully cooked in 17 minutes, and presoaked dried beans were perfectly creamy in 50 minutes.

Since pressure cookers are essentially extremely tightly sealed pots, they cook faster than traditional methods; the boiling point of water, and thus the cooking temperature, is higher in

a pressurized environment. To understand a machine's pressure cooking capability, we filled each model with a precise amount of water and tracked the temperature on both low and high. None got quite as hot as a good stovetop pressure cooker, which reaches about 250 degrees on high; the models in our lineup ranged from about 238 to 247 degrees on high, with the Instant Pot getting the hottest (though it also took the longest to come up to pressure). This means that multicookers will generally cook slightly slower than stovetop pressure cookers, though still much faster than other methods.

Multicookers also promise to replace rice cookers. Since multicookers pressure-cook the rice, there is little evaporation, so the finished rice is a bit stickier than rice cooked via other methods. Still, every machine except the one with the sealing issue made acceptable white and brown rice.

We were feeling pretty optimistic until we tried to slow-cook. Here, we found two problems. First, multicookers heat up really fast, while slow cookers gently warm to the target temperature. So we often had to reduce the cooking time to make slow-cooker recipes work in multicookers.

Our second slow-cooking problem wasn't as simple. All the machines cooked unevenly to a certain extent, with the food on the bottom of the inserts cooking faster than the food at the top. The location of the heating elements and the shape of the inserts played a role here. In a multicooker, the heating element sits below the insert, while in some slow cookers,

RECOMMENDED

Our Winner

Fagor LUX LCD Multicooker
Model: 935010063
Price: \$199.95



CRITERIA

Pressure Cooking ★★★
Slow Cooking ★★★
Rice Cooking ★★★
Searing/Sautéing ★★★
Ease of Use ★★★
Maneuverability ★★★

Comments: This model is great at pressure cooking, requires some recipe tweaking when slow-cooking, and excels at searing and sautéing. The lid is easy to latch and stays cool. Its LCD interface is easy to use. Two great extras: a sensor that alerts you when the lid isn't properly sealed and a control panel lock so no one can accidentally change or cancel your settings.

Fagor LUX Multicooker
Model: 670041960
Price: \$169.95

Comments: Cooks as well as our winner but has fewer extra features.



Pressure Cooking ★★★
Slow Cooking ★★
Rice Cooking ★★★
Searing/Sautéing ★★★
Ease of Use ★★½
Maneuverability ★★★

Best Buy

GoWISE USA 8-Quart 10-in-1 Electric Pressure Cooker/Slow Cooker
Model: GW22623
Price: \$89.95

Comments: Very good at pressure cooking and sautéing. Interface is a bit confusing.



Pressure Cooking ★★★
Slow Cooking ★★
Rice Cooking ★★★
Searing/Sautéing ★★★
Ease of Use ★★
Maneuverability ★★★

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

Instant Pot Duo 7-in-1 Multi-Use Programmable Pressure Cooker
Model: DUO80
Price: \$129.95

Comments: Great at pressure cooking, inconsistent at slow cooking.



Pressure Cooking ★★★
Slow Cooking ★
Rice Cooking ★★★
Searing/Sautéing ★★★
Ease of Use ★★½
Maneuverability ★★

NOT RECOMMENDED

Aobosi Electric Pressure Cooker
Model: YBW80-120G
Price: \$88.79

Comments: Droopy gasket thwarts efficient pressure cooking.



Pressure Cooking ★
Slow Cooking ★★
Rice Cooking ★★★
Searing/Sautéing ★
Ease of Use ★★
Maneuverability ★

including our favorite, the heating element wraps around the perimeter of the pot like a belt. Also, multicooker pots are generally tall and narrow, while slow-cooker pots are short and broad. This means that food is piled higher in multicookers and the heat has to travel farther to get through all the food. In a slow cooker, the heat doesn't have to travel as far.

To understand the machines' heating patterns during slow cooking, we heated precisely 5 pounds of water in each for 5 hours. Whether on low or high, the Instant Pot was significantly cooler—and thus slower—than other models. Thick, large-volume foods such as beef stew and chili con carne

took upwards of 16 hours to cook in the Instant Pot, and other dishes, such as spareribs, never finished cooking.

After weeks of testing with recipes developed specifically for multicookers, we liked these machines much more than before. They aren't as good as the individual products they promise to replace, but if you want just one machine to do it all, a multicooker is a good option—if you buy the right one. Our winner, the Fagor LUX LCD Multicooker (\$199.95), cooks well on all modes and is intuitive and easy to use.



Go to CooksCountry.com/may18 to read the full testing story and see the complete results chart.

Creamy Peanut Butter

The average family of four goes through a jar of peanut butter every two weeks. Are you buying the right one? *by Lauren Savoie*

AMERICANS GO NUTS for peanut butter—not just spread on PB&Js but also baked into cookies, pies, and cakes; swirled into brownies and frostings; and even stirred into soups and sauces.

There are a ton of options: creamy and crunchy styles, of course, but also flavored, organic, “no-stir,” and “natural” peanut butters. The last category has expanded significantly, with major brands, including Skippy and Jif, offering natural options, too.

For this tasting, we focused on creamy peanut butter; it’s more popular than crunchy peanut butter, and it’s the type we use most often in recipes. We tried nine top-selling creamy peanut butters—three traditional and six natural, priced from \$2.69 to \$6.01 per jar—plain, in peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and in peanut butter cookies.

At its most basic, peanut butter is made by grinding shelled, roasted peanuts with a bit of salt. But the light brown, homogeneous peanut butter most Americans know is sweetened with sugar and has oil added to prevent separating and facilitate easy spreading.

The products in our lineup fell into three categories. First, there were the aforementioned familiar peanut butters, made with hydrogenated vegetable oil and sugar, from Skippy, Jif, and Peter Pan. The second category consisted of peanut butters labeled “natural” that swap hydrogenated oils for palm oil. (Hydrogenated oils have been chemically treated to be solid at room temperature, while palm oil is naturally solid at room temperature, hence the “natural.”) This category included Skippy Natural, Jif Natural, and Peter Pan Natural. The final category consisted of peanut butters made with just peanuts and salt, which were also labeled “natural”: Adams, Smucker’s, and Teddie.

Once we tallied the results, our rankings were sorted almost exactly according to type of peanut butter (hydrogenated oil on top, then palm oil, and then just peanuts and salt). Why the divide?

Products made from just peanuts and salt separate into two layers (dense solids topped by oil) and need to be

mixed before serving. Even then, they don’t come close to the ultrasmooth texture of products with added oil; instead, they were largely thin, runny, and gritty, and they oozed out the sides of our sandwiches.

The type of oil in each peanut butter also made a major difference in baking. This is because saturated fats are solid at room temperature but start to liquefy when exposed to heat. So the less saturated fat a peanut butter has, the less it will spread when used in baking, and the more saturated fat it has, the more it will spread.

Products made with just peanuts and salt have naturally occurring peanut oil; compared with peanut butters made with added palm oil or hydrogenated oil,

these products had the least amount of saturated fat: 2.5 grams per tablespoon. Cookies made with these simple peanut butters spread less during baking, turning out tall, cakey, and a bit lean-tasting. On the other end of the spectrum were peanut butters made with palm oil, which had 3.5 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon; cookies made with these peanut butters spread significantly, flattening into thin, crumbly disks. The best cookies were made with peanut butters that used hydrogenated oil, which has a comparatively moderate amount of saturated fat, 3 grams per tablespoon. These cookies tasted rich and had a thick, chewy texture with just the right amount of bend.

While there is some natural sugar in peanuts, both the hydrogenated oil and the palm oil peanut butters add more in the form of granulated sugar or molasses. Added sugar produced a brighter, more complex flavor. These peanut butters also had a touch more salt, which helped balance them against sweet jams in sandwiches.

For a truly great peanut butter for snacking and baking, go with our prior and once-again favorite, Skippy Creamy Peanut Butter. It balances sweetness, salt, and roasted peanut flavor.



TEXTURE COUNTS
Our winner is ultrascreamy.



Go to CooksCountry.com/may18 to read the full testing story and see the complete results chart.

RECOMMENDED

Our Favorite

Skippy Creamy Peanut Butter
Price: \$2.69 per 16.3-oz jar (\$0.17 per oz)
Style: Hydrogenated oil
Added Sugar: Yes **Saturated Fat:** 3 g
Sugar: 3 g **Sodium:** 150 mg
Cookie Thickness: 0.4 in



TASTERS' NOTES

“Tastes like childhood,” said one taster about this peanut butter, which was praised for its “balance of sweet and salty.” We loved its “classic,” “creamy” smoothness, especially in sandwiches, where it was “spreadable,” with a “nutty” roastiness. It made cookies that were perfectly chewy.

Jif Creamy Peanut Butter
Price: \$3.29 per 16-oz jar (\$0.21 per oz)
Style: Hydrogenated oil
Added Sugar: Yes **Saturated Fat:** 2.5 g
Sugar: 3 g **Sodium:** 135 mg
Cookie Thickness: 0.4 in



Another “familiar” offering, this peanut butter was “airy” and “smooth,” with “mild” sweet notes of “caramel” and “honey.” It produced “well-balanced” sandwiches and had a “slightly roasted” savoriness that tasters enjoyed. Cookies were “chewy” and “moist,” though a bit lacking in roasted peanut flavor.

Peter Pan Natural Creamy Peanut Butter
Price: \$4.93 per 28-oz jar (\$0.18 per oz)
Style: Palm oil
Added Sugar: Yes **Saturated Fat:** 3.5 g
Sugar: 3 g **Sodium:** 130 mg
Cookie Thickness: 0.3 in



Tasters thought this “natural” Peter Pan offering (which switches out the hydrogenated oil for palm oil) was “fluffy” and “spreadable,” with a “rich,” “roasty” flavor that “wasn’t easily overpowered by jelly” in sandwiches. Cookies were a bit too “thin” and “flat,” however, with some tasters noting that they seemed a tad “greasy.”

Skippy Natural Peanut Butter Spread
Price: \$2.69 per 15-oz jar (\$0.18 per oz)
Style: Palm oil
Added Sugar: Yes **Saturated Fat:** 3.5 g
Sugar: 3 g **Sodium:** 150 mg
Cookie Thickness: 0.3 in



The “natural” offering from the same brand as our winning peanut butter, this product swaps hydrogenated oil for palm oil. Like other palm oil products, it made cookies that were “a touch too flat.” But tasters loved this peanut butter on sandwiches, where it was “creamy,” with “a hint of sweetness” and a “pleasant nutty aftertaste.”

Jif Natural Creamy Peanut Butter Spread
Price: \$3.29 per 16-oz jar (\$0.21 per oz)
Style: Palm oil
Added Sugar: Yes **Saturated Fat:** 3 g
Sugar: 3 g **Sodium:** 80 mg
Cookie Thickness: 0.3 in



This “natural” peanut butter made with palm oil had a “roasty,” “sweet” flavor and a “thick,” “tacky” texture that made a sturdy, substantial sandwich. Cookies spread more and seemed “heavy” and a “bit wet,” but most tasters appreciated the “fluffy” lightness of this peanut butter when sampling it plain and in sandwiches.

Adams Natural Creamy Peanut Butter
Price: \$6.01 per 26-oz jar (\$0.23 per oz)
Style: Just peanuts and salt
Added Sugar: No **Saturated Fat:** 2.5 g
Sugar: 1 g **Sodium:** 105 mg
Cookie Thickness: 0.5 in



This product, which needs to be stirred well, pleased tasters who were looking for an “unadulterated” peanut butter. Its texture was “loose” and “runny,” which caused it to be a bit “drippy” in sandwiches. Still, most enjoyed its “pure peanut” flavor. It made “cakey” cookies that had a nice “roasted” aftertaste.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

Smucker’s Natural Creamy Peanut Butter
Price: \$4.29 per 16-oz jar (\$0.27 per oz)

Even after stirring, this “deep roasted” peanut butter was “goopy” and “runny.”



Peter Pan Creamy Original Peanut Butter
Price: \$3.59 per 16.3-oz jar (\$0.22 per oz)

A “stale” after-taste meant lower scores for this “classic”-tasting, “fluffy” peanut butter.



Teddie All Natural Smooth Peanut Butter
Price: \$3.79 per 16-oz jar (\$0.24 per oz)

This “loose” product oozed out of sandwiches. Cookies were dry. Its flavor was “very nutty.”





Boiled Peanuts

“My parents used to keep my sister and me quiet on long car rides by buying us a paper bag full of boiled peanuts at a roadside stand. They’re salty, earthy, and fun to snack on. Now, as a displaced Southerner, I have to make my own. If you want to sound authentic, in eastern North Carolina the last two letters of ‘boiled’ are silent.”

—MORGAN BOLLING
Associate Editor



BOILED PEANUTS

Makes about 16 cups

If you're using fresh green peanuts, which are available in late summer and early fall, reduce the cooking time to about 2 hours.

- 2 pounds raw, shell-on peanuts
- 2 gallons water
- 1 cup salt

Combine peanuts, water, and salt in 12-quart stockpot. Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until peanuts are tender, about 6 hours, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and let peanuts cool completely in water, about 2 hours. Strain and serve.

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more, that always come out for the holidays, and that have earned a place at your table and in your heart through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit CooksCountry.com/recipe_submission (or write to Heirloom Recipes, Cook's Country, 21 Drydock Avenue, Suite 210E, Boston, MA 02210) and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to Cook's Country.



COMING NEXT ISSUE

Summer's almost here—and so is the June/July issue of Cook's Country. Look for our recipe for **One-Batch Fried Chicken** and our tasting of supermarket **hot sauces** to go with it! We traveled to south Florida to uncover the mysteries behind **Grilled Mojo Chicken**, and big appetites will appreciate our recipe for **Philadelphia Pork Sandwiches**. Be sure to save room for our easy **Blueberry Cobbler** and **Chocolate Revel Bars**.

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FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location, and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our favorite multicooker, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to Cook's Country. To enter, visit CooksCountry.com/rooster by April 30, 2018, or write to Rooster AM18, Cook's Country, 21 Drydock Avenue, Suite 210E, Boston, MA 02210. Include your name and address. Darliene Farrar of Beaverton, Oregon, found the rooster in the December/January 2018 issue on page 13 and won our favorite inexpensive blender.

WEB EXTRAS

Free for four months online at

CooksCountry.com

Easy French Fries

Tasting Creamy Peanut Butter

Tasting Ground Cumin

Tasting Dijon Mustard

Tasting Whole-Milk Yogurt

Tasting Worcestershire Sauce

Testing Cherry Pitters

Testing Food Processors

Testing Multicookers

Testing 13 by 9-Inch Baking Pans

Yellow Layer Cake Batter



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Chicken and Rice Soup
with Ginger and Scallions



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Shrimp Fried Rice



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Parmesan-Crusted Pork Cutlets
with Chive Mashed Potatoes



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Balsamic-Glazed Strip Steaks
with Roasted Broccoli Rabe



30-MINUTE SUPPER



Shrimp Fried Rice

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Using the pasta method for the rice cooks it in half the time and removes starch that might lead to clumping.

- 1½ cups long-grain white rice**
- 3 tablespoons fish sauce**
- 3 tablespoons lime juice, plus lime wedges for serving**
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar**
- ¼ cup vegetable oil**
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten**
- 1 pound large shrimp (26 to 30 per pound), peeled, deveined, and tails removed**
- 1 large shallot, minced**
- 4 garlic cloves, minced**
- ½ cup torn fresh basil leaves**

1. Bring 3 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over high heat. Add rice and cook, stirring occasionally, until just cooked through, about 12 minutes. Drain rice in fine-mesh strainer or colander. Combine fish sauce, lime juice, and sugar in bowl; set aside.
2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until shimmering. Add eggs and stir with rubber spatula until set but still wet, about 15 seconds. Transfer eggs to large bowl. Add shrimp and 2 tablespoons fish sauce mixture to now-empty skillet and cook until shrimp are opaque, about 2 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer shrimp to bowl with eggs.
3. Add shallot, garlic, and remaining 3 tablespoons oil to juices left in skillet and cook until mixture begins to brown, about 2 minutes. Add rice and cook until sizzling and popping loudly, about 3 minutes. Add basil and remaining fish sauce mixture and cook, stirring constantly, until thoroughly combined, about 2 minutes. Stir in shrimp and eggs. Serve with lime wedges.



Balsamic-Glazed Strip Steaks with Roasted Broccoli Rabe

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Adding a little sugar to the broccoli rabe before roasting balances its natural bitterness.

- 2 (1-pound) strip steaks, 1 inch thick, trimmed and halved crosswise**
- Salt and pepper**
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1½ pounds broccoli rabe, trimmed**
- 2 teaspoons sugar**
- 3 shallots, sliced into thin rounds**
- ⅓ cup balsamic vinegar**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter**

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook steaks until well browned and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 3 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to plate, tent with foil, and let rest while finishing sauce and broccoli rabe.
2. Meanwhile, toss broccoli rabe with sugar, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and 3 tablespoons oil on rimmed baking sheet. Roast until tender, about 10 minutes.
3. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil to now-empty skillet and heat over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add shallots and ⅛ teaspoon salt and cook until beginning to soften, about 1 minute. Add vinegar, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until slightly thickened, about 1 minute. Off heat, whisk in butter. Serve steaks with sauce and broccoli rabe.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Trim 1 inch off the bottom of the broccoli rabe; the lower part of the stems can be dry and woody.



Chicken and Rice Soup with Ginger and Scallions

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We use rotisserie chicken for convenience and punch up the flavors with cilantro and grated fresh ginger.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 1 onion, chopped fine**
- 4 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced thin**
- 2 tablespoons grated fresh ginger**
- Salt and pepper**
- 8 cups chicken broth**
- ½ cup long-grain white rice**
- 1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)**
- 2 scallions, white parts sliced thin, green parts cut into 1-inch pieces**
- ½ cup fresh cilantro leaves**

1. Heat oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion, mushrooms, ginger, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until just beginning to brown, about 4 minutes.
2. Add broth and rice, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until rice is tender, about 12 minutes. Stir in chicken and scallions and continue to cook until heated through, about 2 minutes longer. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer soup to serving bowls, sprinkle with cilantro, and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can freeze the rotisserie chicken bones and use them to make chicken stock.



Parmesan-Crusted Pork Cutlets with Chive Mashed Potatoes

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We add an extra flour dip to the three-step breading method to ensure that the coating sticks and cooks up crispy.

- 2 pounds red potatoes, unpeeled, sliced ¼ inch thick**
- ¾ cup whole milk**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- Salt and pepper**
- ¼ cup chopped fresh chives**
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten**
- 4 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (2 cups)**
- 8 (3-ounce) boneless pork cutlets, ½ inch thick, trimmed**

1. Combine potatoes, milk, ¼ cup oil, 1½ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Microwave, covered, until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes, stirring halfway through microwaving. Using potato masher, mash potato mixture until nearly smooth. Stir in chives and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and set aside.
2. Meanwhile, place 1 cup flour in shallow dish. Beat eggs in second shallow dish. Combine Parmesan, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon pepper, and remaining 2 tablespoons flour in third shallow dish. Season cutlets with salt and pepper. Working with 1 cutlet at a time, dredge cutlets in flour, dip in egg mixture, dredge in Parmesan mixture, and return to flour, pressing to adhere.
3. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until just smoking. Cook 4 cutlets until golden brown and cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to paper towel-lined plate. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels and repeat with remaining 2 tablespoons oil and remaining 4 cutlets. Serve cutlets with mashed potatoes.

Hearty Grain and Vegetable Bowls with Goat Cheese



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Grilled Pork Tenderloin and Summer Squash with Chimichurri



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Cuban Burgers



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Roasted Chicken with Orzo Salad



30-MINUTE SUPPER



Grilled Pork Tenderloin and Summer Squash with Chimichurri

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We pound pork tenderloins into thin, uniform steaks for exceptionally fast cooking.

- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley**
- ¼ cup minced fresh cilantro**
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano**
- Salt and pepper**
- 2 (1-pound) pork tenderloins, trimmed and pounded ½ inch thick**
- 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar**
- 4 yellow summer squashes, cut lengthwise into ½-inch-thick planks**

1. Combine ¼ cup oil, parsley, cilantro, vinegar, garlic, oregano, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside. Sprinkle pork with sugar and season with salt and pepper. Brush squash with remaining 2 tablespoons oil and season with salt and pepper.
2. Place pork on grill over hot fire. Grill until pork is lightly browned and registers 140 degrees, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer pork to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest while grilling squash.
3. Grill squash until charred and tender, 3 to 5 minutes per side; transfer to platter. Slice pork on bias ½ inch thick and transfer to platter with squash. Top with chimichurri and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can use fresh mint in place of the cilantro in the chimichurri sauce.



Hearty Grain and Vegetable Bowls with Goat Cheese

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We toss the hot farro with vinaigrette and let it sit while sautéing the mushrooms to give the flavors time to meld.

- 2 cups farro**
- Salt and pepper**
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 3 tablespoons juice**
- 1 small garlic clove, minced**
- 4 carrots, peeled and shaved with vegetable peeler lengthwise into ribbons**
- 4 ounces (4 cups) baby spinach**
- 1 pound cremini mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin**
- 2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (½ cup)**

1. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan. Add farro and 1 tablespoon salt. Return to boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until farro is tender with slight chew, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain.
2. Whisk ¼ cup oil, lemon zest and juice, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Add carrots, spinach, and farro and toss to combine.
3. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add mushrooms, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook, covered, until mushrooms release their liquid, about 5 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook until liquid has evaporated and mushrooms begin to brown, about 3 minutes longer. Divide farro mixture evenly among 4 serving bowls. Top with goat cheese and mushrooms. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: We prefer whole-grain farro. Pearled or quick-cooking farro can be used, but cooking times will vary.



Roasted Chicken with Orzo Salad

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We brown the chicken on the stovetop to build a base of flavor and then make the orzo salad while the chicken finishes cooking in the oven.

- 8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed**
- Salt and pepper**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 cup orzo**
- 2 ounces (2 cups) baby arugula, chopped coarse**
- 6 ounces cherry tomatoes, halved**
- 4 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (1 cup)**
- 2 tablespoons capers, plus 1 teaspoon brine**
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in oven-safe 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add chicken, skin side down, and cook until well browned, about 7 minutes. Flip chicken, transfer skillet to oven, and roast until chicken registers 175 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan. Add orzo and 1½ teaspoons salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Drain orzo and transfer to rimmed baking sheet. Toss with 1 tablespoon oil and let cool completely, about 15 minutes.
3. Combine arugula, tomatoes, feta, capers and brine, lemon zest, ¼ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, orzo, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil in bowl and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve orzo salad with chicken.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: For best results, don't move the chicken while it browns in step 1.



Cuban Burgers

Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We combined two classic sandwiches, the Cuban and the hamburger.

- 1 pound 85 percent lean ground beef**
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder**
- Salt and pepper**
- 4 teaspoons yellow mustard**
- 4 teaspoons mayonnaise**
- 4 hamburger buns, toasted**
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil**
- 8 thin slices deli Black Forest ham, folded in half**
- 8 thin slices deli Swiss cheese, folded in half**
- ¼ cup dill pickle chips**

1. Divide beef into 4 equal portions, then flatten into ½-inch-thick patties, about 4½ inches wide. Combine garlic powder, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl and sprinkle both sides of patties with garlic mixture. Spread 1 teaspoon mustard and 1 teaspoon mayonnaise on each bun; set aside.
2. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over high heat until just smoking. Transfer patties to skillet and cook, without moving them, for 3 minutes. Flip patties and cook for 1 minute. Top each burger with 2 slices ham and 2 slices cheese. Cover and continue to cook until cheese is melted, about 1½ minutes longer.
3. Transfer burgers to bun bottoms. Top with pickles and bun tops. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: The test kitchen's favorite hamburger buns are Martin's Sandwich Potato Rolls.

Rhubarb Ribbon Cake

**GREAT
AMERICAN
CAKE**

TO MAKE THIS CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:

- 1½ pounds rhubarb, trimmed
- 1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar
- 1 recipe yellow layer cake batter*
- 1 pound (4 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 32 pieces and softened
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 cups (1 pound) confectioners' sugar

FOR THE CAKE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease three 8-inch round cake pans, line with parchment paper, and grease parchment. Using vegetable peeler, peel 1 ribbon from each side of each rhubarb stalk. Toss ribbons and ¼ cup granulated sugar together in bowl. Slice remaining peeled rhubarb thin (you should have 4 cups) and toss with ¼ cup granulated sugar in second bowl. Arrange half of rhubarb ribbons in 1 prepared pan in neat single layer to cover entire pan bottom, cutting edges to fit. Arrange remaining ribbons over top, perpendicular to first ribbon layer, cutting edges to fit. Arrange 1 cup sliced rhubarb in even layer in each of remaining 2 pans. Distribute cake batter evenly among pans. Bake until tops are light golden and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 22 to 25 minutes. Let cakes cool slightly, about 15 minutes. Using paring knife, loosen cakes from sides of pans; invert onto wire racks. Discard parchment and let cakes cool completely.

FOR THE FROSTING:

Combine remaining 2 cups sliced rhubarb and remaining ½ cup granulated sugar in medium saucepan and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Cook until tender, about 2 minutes. Using immersion blender, process rhubarb mixture until smooth, about 30 seconds; let cool completely. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk attachment, whip butter, salt, and cooled rhubarb mixture on medium-low speed until combined. Slowly add confectioners' sugar and continue to mix until smooth, about 2 minutes longer. Increase speed to medium-high and whip frosting until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes.

TO ASSEMBLE:

Reserve cake with rhubarb ribbons for top layer. Place 1 cake layer, rhubarb side up, on cake plate and spread 1 cup frosting evenly over top, right to edge of cake. Repeat with second cake layer and 1 cup frosting. Top with ribbon cake. Frost sides of cake with thin layer of frosting, about ¾ cup. Using basketweave pastry tip, pipe remaining frosting in horizontal bands around sides of cake. Serve.



To make the most of rhubarb's unique ruby hues, we use shaved ribbons to create a lacquered look.

by Katie Leaird



*Go to [CooksCountry.com/yellowcake](https://www.cookscountry.com/yellowcake) for our Yellow Layer Cake recipe, or use your own recipe.

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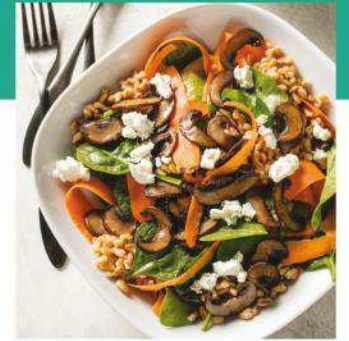
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