

Cook's Country



Ultimate Bacon Burger

We weren't satisfied with bacon just piled on top of the patty. We wanted bacon inside.

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Grill-Fried Chicken Wings
Yup, Grilled Fried Chicken

Pork Fried Rice
Better Than Takeout

Texas Grilled Chuck Roast
Big, Beefy, and Spicy

Chicken Florentine for Two
Classy Weeknight Dinner

Corn and Cucumber Salad
Cool Summer Favorite

Carolina Cheese Biscuits
Fluffiest and Cheesiest Ever

Pimento Mac and Cheese
A Classic Goes Southern

Rating Paring Knives
Cheapest One Wins

One-Pan Chicken Dinner
With Couscous and Carrots

Easy Blueberry Cobbler
In the Oven in 7 Minutes

Banana Snack Cake
After-School Favorite

Braised Zucchini
Trust Us—You'll Love It

Best Bottled BBQ Sauce
We Tested Seven Top Sellers

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



WHERE IS COOK'S COUNTRY?

WHERE IS COOK'S COUNTRY? The easy answer, of course, is Boston. That's where our kitchens are, and that's where we live and work. But Boston is just a tiny speck on the map of *Cook's Country*—a massive, sprawling map.

Cook's Country covers the entire United States, from Maine to Hawaii, Key West to Nome. We travel incessantly across the nation, from the wide-open fields of Wisconsin to the bustling streets of New Orleans, to learn who's cooking what, why, and—most important—how.

We're equally passionate about rural traditions and urban traditions, as well as the traditions of all those in-between places. We love down-home food as much as uptown food, because in our minds, it's all part of this great country we call home.

In this issue, you'll notice some exciting changes. New designs, new typefaces, new ideas. We hope you love them as much as we do.

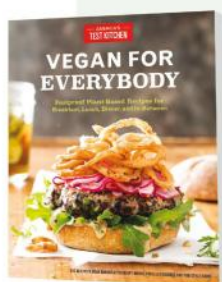
But what hasn't changed matters even more: rigorously tested and carefully perfected recipes for everyday dishes and regional favorites that reflect the way America cooks—past, present, and future.

Where is *Cook's Country*? Right here in your hands. Take a look around! And welcome home.



TUCKER SHAW

Executive Editor



VEGAN FOR EVERYBODY

Let Us Help You Reimagine Mealttime

The benefits of consuming fewer animal products are many, but following a vegan diet can seem overwhelming: Will it be flavorful? Satisfying? Easy to make? In this book, the test kitchen addresses head-on what gives people pause: finding great-tasting and filling vegan protein options, cooking without dairy, preparing different vegetables and grains, and even baking. Order online at AmericasTestKitchen.com/vegan.



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On the cover: Ultimate Bacon Burgers
Keller + Keller, Catrine Kelty

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

America's Test Kitchen is a real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside 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 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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Primary Burners

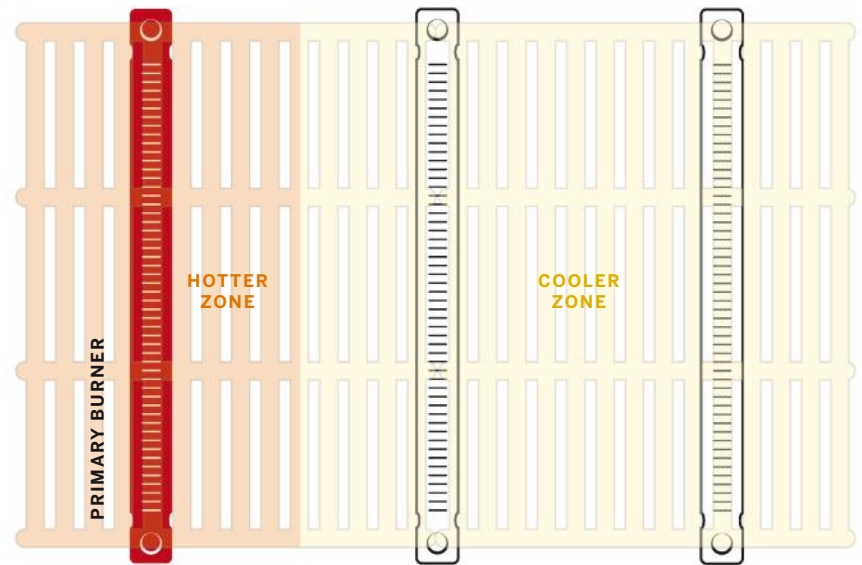
In your grilling recipes, you often refer to a “primary burner” on a gas grill. How do I know which burner is the primary burner on my grill?

—Thomas Flynn, San Diego, Calif.

Most gas grills feature two or three burners (depending on the manufacturer and the age of the grill). In our gas-grilling recipes, we often call for adjusting the primary burner to a specific heat level and adjusting any secondary burners to a different heat level (or even turning them off) to set up hotter and cooler zones. These adjustments allow for indirect cooking (grill-roasting) in the cooler zone or cooking a variety of ingredients at different temperatures (searing steaks in the hotter zone while grilling delicate vegetables in the cooler zone, for example).

As for grill design and burner orientation, most newer gas grills—including our winning model, the Weber Spirit E-310—feature burners that run from the front of the grill to the back. Since gas grills do not typically have a default primary burner, we suggest designating either the burner on the far left or on the far right side of your grill as your primary burner. That way you have plenty of real estate on the rest of the cooking grate to place your food. If you happen to have an older gas grill with fewer burners or burners that run from side to side, you can designate either the front or back burner as your primary burner.

THE BOTTOM LINE: You choose which burner you use as the primary burner on your gas grill. We recommend using one positioned on the far left or far right side of the grill to allow the most space for cooking.



INDIRECT COOKING ON A GAS GRILL

Select a burner on one end of the grill as your primary burner; once the cooking grate is preheated, adjust the heat levels of the primary and secondary burners before placing the food 6 to 8 inches away from the primary burner so that it will cook gently.

Freezing Corn

There is nothing I love more than fresh, sweet summertime corn. Is there a good way to freeze it?

—Norman Gendron, North Conway, N.H.

To determine the best way to freeze fresh corn, we tried freezing whole husked cobs as well as kernels that we'd stripped from the cobs. We froze half the stripped kernels raw; we blanched and shocked (cooked them for 30 to 60 seconds in salted boiling water and transferred them to ice water to halt the cooking) the remaining kernels before freezing them. We sampled all the thawed corn plain and in our recipes for Double-Corn Cornbread and Cheesy Corn Casserole.

Our tasters preferred corn kernels that had been frozen raw—great news because you don't have to devote any time to blanching and shocking.

To cut the kernels from the cobs,

remove the husks and silk from the cobs and use a chef's knife to cut the cobs in half. Stand the cobs on their cut ends (for stability) and use the knife to carefully slice the kernels from the cobs. Spread the kernels evenly (to keep them from freezing in clumps) on a rimmed baking sheet or plate and place in the freezer. Once they are frozen, transfer the kernels to a zipper-lock bag and freeze them for up to two months.

While the raw frozen kernels provide great flavor, don't expect them to have the same crisp texture as fresh kernels. They won't. That's why we use frozen corn only in recipes that specifically call for it, such as breads, soups, and casseroles.

THE BOTTOM LINE: To freeze corn kernels, cut them from the cobs and freeze them in a single layer on a plate or rimmed baking sheet. Transfer the kernels to a zipper-lock bag and freeze them for up to two months.



Remove Kernels

Cut the corn cobs in half to create a flat, stable surface, and then turn each cob on its cut end to slice off the kernels in strips.



Freeze in Even Layer

Spread the cut kernels on a baking sheet to freeze them without clumping. Transfer them to a zipper-lock bag once frozen.

Homemade Italian Seasoning

I often see Italian seasoning mixes at the grocery store. Can I make my own?

—Mary Jenkins, Waltham, Mass.

Italian seasoning mixes typically contain a combination of dried oregano, thyme, basil, rosemary, and sage.

For a make-at-home version, we tasted two common grocery store mixes, McCormick Perfect Pinch Italian Seasoning and Simply Organic Italian Seasoning, and then stirred together different amounts of each herb until we arrived at a balanced facsimile.

THE BOTTOM LINE: It's easy to make homemade Italian seasoning.

HOMEMADE ITALIAN SEASONING

Makes about ½ cup

To achieve a finer consistency, crush the dried rosemary by hand into smaller pieces or pulse it in a spice grinder (three to four pulses).

- 2½ tablespoons dried oregano
- 2½ tablespoons dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 1 tablespoon dried rosemary
- 1 tablespoon dried sage

Combine all ingredients in bowl.

Chill Your Chips

A friend told me that storing opened bags of potato chips in the refrigerator would keep them fresher longer. Is this true?

—Laura Shea, New Orleans, La.

Stale potato chips make us sad, so we were excited to order multiple bags of our favorite chips, Lay's Kettle Cooked Original, and put this theory to the test. We removed half the chips from each bag, sealed each bag securely with a bag clip, and stored half the bags in the refrigerator and half in the pantry.

After two weeks, tasters noted that the refrigerated chips were crisp and fresh-tasting, while the chips stored in the pantry were a bit stale. Not surprisingly, after a month this difference was more pronounced. After two months, longer than most of us can make a bag of chips last, tasters noted stale flavors in both samples but strongly preferred the crunchy texture of the refrigerated chips to the softer texture of the chips from the pantry.

Why does the refrigerator help chips stay crunchy? First, its low-humidity environment means there's not as much moisture in the air for the chips to absorb and become soft. Second, potato chips are starchy; as starch molecules cool (as when refrigerated), they crystallize, becoming firm. This firmness makes for crunchier chips.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Storing opened bags of potato chips in the refrigerator can help keep them crisp.



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

compiled by Morgan Bolling

KITCHEN SHORTCUTS

Corn for a Cookout

Ted McBride, Macon, Ga.

We serve a lot of corn on the cob at our backyard summer gatherings. To keep it hot and serve a crowd, I cut husked cobs in thirds, boil them, and drain. Then I melt a stick of salted butter on high in my slow cooker. Once the butter is melted, I turn the cooker to “warm” and toss in the boiled corn (and sometimes other seasonings such as garlic powder or hot sauce), give it a stir to coat, and throw on the lid. The cooker holds a lot of the mini cobs, and they’re already buttered, so guests can easily grab one without stopping to doctor it.



Taco Tip

Greg Gullage, East Longmeadow, Mass.

Hard taco shells can be a challenge to fill because they don’t stand up on their own. I’ve discovered that I can use my long grilling tongs, in the closed position, to easily hold two or three shells upright at a time for filling.

Chill Your Glasses

Shawn Tucker, Houston, Texas

Houston summers can get pretty sticky. For maximum refreshment, I keep glass tumblers in the freezer so they are frosty when my kids need some lemonade or soda to cool off. I found that the glasses get even frostier if I put them in the freezer when they’re still a little wet from the dishwasher. I’m not a beer aficionado, but I suspect this would work pretty well for suds, too.



compiled by Cecelia Jenkins

Testing Ice Packs

by Lauren Savoie

SODA. BEER. SELTZER. Juice. Water. Whatever your preferred beverage, few things are better than a frosty drink on a hot summer day. A cooler

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

loaded with loose ice is the standard way to keep your drinks cool—and your sandwiches from spoiling—in the heat of the sun, but we wondered if there was a better solution.

To find out, we selected eight ice packs priced from \$3.49 to \$29.99 and put them through their paces in the test kitchen, using laboratory probes and a computer to track their temperatures during a range of tests. The ice packs came in two basic styles: hard-sided packs of varying sizes and soft “ice blankets” that can be used to line the bottom of a cooler. We also tested plain ice, purchased in 5-pound bags from a local market.

Will our results surprise you? They surprised us—and made us think twice about how we’ll pack our coolers.

8 Ice Packs 5 Tests

1. Freeze the packs and track their temperatures as they thaw.
2. Submerge the frozen packs in room-temperature water and track the water temperature as it cools.
3. Fill coolers with frozen packs, add 24 cans of soda to each cooler, and monitor the temperatures for 36 hours.
4. Cut open the ice packs to extract the contents and weigh each.
5. Freeze 75 grams of each liquid and gel in identical containers and track how long each takes to reach room temperature.



Associate editor Lauren Savoie analyzed the liquids and gels she extracted from the packs.



BEST PERFORMER

Loose ice distributed its cooling power more efficiently than any of the ice packs we tested.



RUNNER-UP: BEST ICE PACK

The Arctic Ice Alaskan Series, X-Large (\$20.99) was compact, contained lots of freezable liquid, and didn’t bulge when frozen.



NOT UP TO SNUFF

These skimpy ice “blankets” contain lots of plastic and little liquid, so they failed to keep our food and drinks well chilled.



Go to CooksCountry.com/july17 to read the full testing results and see the complete results chart.



ON THE ROAD

Deep in the Heart of Clod Country

Forks fall by the wayside at Kreuz Market in Lockhart, Texas, where the focus is on one thing only: meat.

by Bryan Roof



IN 1999, THE year Kreuz Market in Lockhart, Texas, celebrated its 99th anniversary, Roy Perez shoveled several pounds of smoldering coals from the restaurant's barbecue pit into a metal washtub. With a few media representatives in tow and a police escort to divert traffic, he and a coworker dragged the washtub down the road to the establishment's new location, where he carefully emptied the coals into a brand-new pit. The gesture was more than a photo op; this fire had been burning continuously for a century, and pit master Perez refused to allow it to go out on his watch. Superstition? Maybe, or maybe just efficiency: Kreuz's hungry regulars

expected barbecue even on moving day, and Perez, determined to serve them, needed a hot fire.

Seventeen years later, I made the trek to Kreuz Market on a quest for shoulder clod, a regional barbecue specialty. The immensity of the place engulfed me as I passed through a cavernous concrete hallway toward the barbecue pit where the mutton-chopped Perez spends most days. The stripped plywood walls held a patchwork of antique signage, black-and-white photos, and rusted butcher's tools. A menu above the counter offered promise: ribs, brisket, smoked ham, shoulder clod. Despite its magnitude, there was a warmth to the place, and wood-fire aromas perfumed the air.



Barbecued Chuck Roast

Step one: Find an easier substitute for a giant shoulder clod.

by Morgan Bolling

BEEF SHOULDER CLOD, a large boneless cut taken from the shoulder, delivers supremely beefy flavor underneath a dark crust spicy with black pepper and cayenne and well seasoned with salt. But shoulder clod can range from 13 to 21 pounds of meat. Twenty-one pounds!

I'm strong, but 21 pounds is a bit much for me, and besides, I couldn't find a local butcher with clod on hand. I looked instead for a more manageable cut of meat with similar characteristics. I considered top and bottom blade roasts, both cut from the shoulder, but soon settled on chuck-eye roast, a versatile piece of meat cut from a portion of the shoulder clod.

I rubbed my first roast (weighing in at 5 pounds, enough for a small crowd plus leftovers for sandwiches) with salt, cayenne, and pepper before cooking it over indirect heat on a hot grill outfitted with a packet of soaked wood chips (oak and hickory chips are the traditional choices to add smoky flavor to clod). About 2 hours later, when the roast had reached 140 degrees, I pulled it off the grill. After giving it a short rest, I sliced through the brown crust to reveal just a touch of pink in the center.

While it was deeply beefy in flavor, I found the roast chewy and underseasoned. Salting it overnight helped on both counts. Still not fully satisfied, I let my next roast cook a bit longer, until it reached 155 degrees, when the chewiness gave way to buttery tenderness. This took a little over 2 hours and was well worth the wait.

I knew that one last key to a tender serving of this roast was to slice it very thin. I let the roast rest for 20 minutes and then chose my sharpest carving knife to create thin, even slices. Tasters declared my shoulder clod—er, chuck-eye roast—tender, savory, and supremely beefy.

Perhaps the best compliment I got that day came when I asked if anyone wanted barbecue sauce. My tasters all said no, because none was needed; this showstopping clod-style chuck roast, with its richly seasoned bark and subtle smoky flavors, spoke for itself.



Go to CooksCountry.com/grills to learn which inexpensive gas grills rated highest in our testing.



Barbecue fans say that Kreuz Market has some of the best shoulder clod in the country. At left, the giant pits contain flames from a fire that's been burning for more than a century. Below left, pit master Roy Perez and a coworker drag a bucket of smoldering coals from Kreuz's previous location to the new building on opening day.

I waited in line until I was called on to place my order, which I did with a mild fear of being recognized as the outsider I was. I ordered clod along with some sliced brisket and ribs, all in ½-pound increments. The cashier turned toward the pit and called out the order in a thick, rapid-fire patois that I struggled to understand.

Perez speared the meat with a large carving fork and moved it from the pit to a chunky, round butcher block well-greased from years of slicing fatty meat. Post oak logs burned in shallow craters at the ends of the sooty brick pits, and sawdust covered the surrounding floor to sop up errant drips of fat. A young man wrapped my order neatly in paper, propped a stack of sliced white bread on top, and handed it over to me as the next customers, a pair of police officers, stepped up to the counter.

I made my way to the dining room and found a seat at one of the long, unfinished wood tables, where paper towels and bottles of spice mix were stationed every few feet.

I noticed a sign declaring "No Forks (They're at the end of your arm)." Empowered, I tore into the shoulder clod with my fingers, a little self-consciously at first but then with abandon as I surrendered to the primal pleasure of using my bare hands to eat meat—profoundly gratifying meat—that had been cooked over a century-old fire.



Slicing the meat very thin ensures tender bites.

BARBECUED CHUCK ROAST

Serves 8 to 10

The roast must be seasoned at least 18 hours before cooking.

- 1½ tablespoons kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoons pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 (5-pound) boneless beef chuck-eye roast, trimmed
- 2 cups wood chips

1. Combine salt, pepper, and cayenne in bowl. Pat roast dry with paper towels. Place roast on large sheet of plastic wrap and rub all over with spice mixture. Wrap tightly in plastic and refrigerate for 18 to 24 hours.
2. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8 by 4½-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet.
- 3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with

charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Place wood chip packet on coals. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set cooking grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner [or, if using three-burner grill, primary burner and second burner] as needed to maintain grill temperature of 350 degrees.)

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place roast on cooler side of grill. Cover grill (positioning lid vent directly over roast if using charcoal) and cook until meat registers 155 to 160 degrees, 2 to 2½ hours. Transfer roast to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 20 minutes. Slice thin and serve.



Texas-Style Pinto Beans

This unfussy barbecue side dish proves that sometimes the simplest way is the best.

by *Cecelia Jenkins*

OFTEN, LUNCH AT barbecue spots around Texas includes a scoop of brown pinto beans on your plate. Different from mashed or refried versions, these beans are long-simmered with pork in a velvety, savory broth and are tender, flavorful, and creamy.

Dried pinto beans are the traditional choice for this dish. They are speckled, Jackson Pollock-style, until you cook them, and then the speckles disappear. They were ideal for a home on the range in the days before refrigeration: light enough to transport, packed with protein, shelf-stable for long chuck wagon journeys, and perfectly happy to bubble away unattended while homesteaders took care of other tasks.

To bring this tasty side dish to the test kitchen, I armed myself with heavy pots and several pounds of pinto beans and got to work on some existing recipes for my tasters to sample. A few called for chili powder, which overwhelmed the earthy bean flavor and subtle sweetness of the pork. Other versions tasted unpleasantly salty or totally washed-out. And most simmered into muddy-looking, starchy messes.

I tackled bean texture first. Dried beans took several hours to cook, and a quick-soak method (adding the beans to boiling water and then letting them soak for an hour off the heat before simmering them) rushed the process too much; the beans swelled unevenly and burst. The best and simplest solution? Soak the beans in water overnight, a step often taken to gradually rehydrate them so that they cook relatively quickly (in about 1½ hours rather than 3 or 4 hours) and more evenly the next day.

Since I was soaking the beans, I added salt to the water to create a brine. Just as a salty brine penetrates chicken and makes it more moist, a brine similarly seasons beans. It also softens the beans' skins, making them more pliable so that when you boil them the next day, the skins stretch but don't burst.

When I was ready to cook the beans, I drained them and covered them with fresh water (3 quarts was just enough). I added a little salt to the cooking water; our science editor advised that this would ensure fully tender skins.

With the lid on my pot as the beans cooked, I couldn't easily monitor their progress, and I worried they'd stick to the bottom of the pot. Cooking the



While traditionally served as-is, these beans are even better when garnished with chopped onion, pickles, chiles, or tomatoes.

beans uncovered meant that I could easily keep an eye on them. Another benefit was that the cooking liquid reduced, and I ended up with just the right amount for serving.

You'll be tempted to taste these beans before they're done, and you should. But even if you can bite through them after 30 or 45 minutes, they're likely to be unevenly cooked at that stage. Let them go for the full 1½ hours; they'll turn supremely creamy and will be infused with sweet and savory pork flavor. Plus, the reduced sauce will take on a soft, velvety

texture, and you'll have just enough to serve with the beans.

To keep things simple, I skipped the spices and relied solely on pork for flavor. But which pork product to use? Bacon lost its flavor after simmering, and the slices turned into fatty strands that were hard to fish out. Salt pork added much better pork flavor but was much too salty—even when I tried it without any extra salt. But a smoked ham hock was the real winner. This powerhouse ingredient added smoky complexity, rich pork flavor, and meaty, buttery sweetness to the broth.

A Case for Dried Beans

We tried canned beans in this recipe and boy, were we shocked. They were sour, tinny, and pasty. Compared with the dried beans, the difference was as vast as the west Texas scrubland. Stick with dried.



WORTH THE TIME
In this three-ingredient recipe, flavorful dried beans are a must.

Smothered Cabbage

Who knew such humble ingredients could be so satisfying?

by Alli Berkey

TEXAS-STYLE PINTO BEANS

Serves 8

If you can't find a ham hock, substitute 4 ounces of salt pork, omit the salt in step 2, and season to taste once finished. Monitor the water level as the beans cook: Don't let it fall below the level of the beans before they're done. If it does, add more water. Good garnishes include finely chopped onion, dill pickles, jalapeños, and/or tomatoes. Use the meat from the ham hock within a few days to flavor another dish. Plan ahead: The beans need to be brined for at least 8 hours before cooking.

Salt

- 1 pound (2½ cups) dried pinto beans, picked over and rinsed
- 1 (10-ounce) smoked ham hock

1. Dissolve 1½ tablespoons salt in 2 quarts cold water in large container. Add beans and soak at room temperature for at least 8 hours or up to 24 hours. Drain and rinse well. (Soaked beans can be stored in zipper-lock bag and frozen for up to 1 month.)
2. Combine 12 cups water, ham hock, beans, and 1 teaspoon salt in Dutch oven. Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until beans are tender, about 1½ hours, skimming any foam from surface with spoon. Remove from heat and let stand for 15 minutes. Reserve ham hock for another use. Season with salt to taste. Serve.

Smoked Ham Hock



The lower portion of a hog's hind leg, a ham hock contains muscle, bone, fat, and connective tissue, which, when cooked for a long period of time over low heat, break down and add a rich, satiny texture to our beans. Most hocks, which are cut into 2- to 3-inch lengths, are cured or smoked.

THE PULLED PORK, brisket, and chicken legs offered at any given barbecue joint are only part of the story. Sides matter, too—think macaroni and cheese, coleslaw, baked beans, and fried okra. Everyone's got a favorite side dish for barbecue, and mine is smothered cabbage. This dish features roughly chopped cabbage leaves braised with onions and potatoes. When done right, the cabbage is buttery and tender, a mild counterpoint to the flavorful, spicy meat it's served with.

For the perfect texture—soft and tender, with just a hint of bite—I chose green cabbage over the savoy and napa varieties, cutting the large leaves into 1-inch pieces. And I learned that cooking the cabbage for 12 to 15 minutes in a Dutch oven with just 1½ cups of liquid gave me the perfect texture.

If cooked to the proper tenderness, cabbage retains and even deepens its

sweetness, but its other flavors—the sharp, earthy notes—tend to fade. To help ensure that this dish maintained some complexity, I added some sliced onion, and for savory depth, I used chicken broth rather than water to braise it. And I added butter, of course, for a silky, rich finish.

Potatoes add bulk to this dish; plus, they soak up some of the inevitable—and delicious—meat juices that collect on your plate. Yukon Golds held up the best in the pot, and ensuring that they'd cook at the same rate as the cabbage was only a matter of cutting them into 1-inch pieces.

The final step in this recipe—removing the lid from the pot to allow the accumulated liquid to evaporate—left me with soft, tender cabbage leaves lightly coated with a savory butter sauce. Now all I needed was some 'cue.



This soft, savory side is ideal for soaking up the juices that run from barbecued meats.

Cabbage Primer

All cabbage is crisp and has a high moisture content. No matter the variety, look for tight, compact heads.

Green

Very crisp, firm texture and mellow flavor



Red

Interchangeable with regular green cabbage, though it is sweeter and more floral



Napa

More tender, milder, and slightly sweeter than green cabbage



Savoy

Loose, wrinkled leaves with mild earthy flavor and delicate texture



SMOTHERED CABBAGE Serves 4 to 6

We recommend buying larger Yukon Gold potatoes to ensure that you can cut 1-inch pieces. Potatoes cut smaller will overcook.

5 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 onion, sliced thin

1 large head green cabbage (3 pounds), cored and cut into 1-inch pieces

1½ cups chicken broth

10 ounces Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces

1½ teaspoons salt

½ teaspoon pepper

1. Melt butter in Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion and cook until soft, about 4 minutes. Stir in cabbage, broth, potatoes, salt, and pepper and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until cabbage is wilted and potatoes are fork-tender, 12 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Increase heat to medium-high, uncover, and cook until liquid has nearly evaporated, about 12 minutes, gently stirring occasionally with rubber spatula. Serve.

Grilled Sausages with Bell Peppers and Onions

Like a walk-off home run, this ballpark favorite is all about timing.

by Ashley Moore

IT DOESN'T GET better than sitting at the stadium watching your favorite team with the sun shining on your face, an ice-cold beverage at your feet, and a plump, juicy grilled sausage, nestled in a soft roll and covered with slightly sweet onions and peppers, in your hand. But why should I have to wait for game day to have a grilled sausage sandwich in my hand? I set out to make this ballpark favorite at home.

Sausages need to be grilled over moderate heat—if the heat's too high, the casings can burst, dripping flavorful juices and causing flare-ups before the sausages are cooked through. The result: Dry, chewy sausages. I needed to find a balanced approach to achieve juicy sausages with just enough char from the grill.

After I'd experimented with a few existing recipes, one stood out. It delivered sausages ideally charred on the exteriors and perfectly cooked in the interiors, and the onions and peppers were soft and savory-sweet. This recipe started the sausages over low grill heat and then finished them on the hotter side of the grill. It also called for using a disposable aluminum pan to cook the peppers and onions, giving me the same results as if they had been cooked on the flattop grill at the ballpark. The pan provided an even surface on which they could sizzle away and develop slightly browned exteriors. The only problem was, the peppers and onions took much longer to cook through than the sausages. Nearly an hour, actually.

I wanted a faster method. Could I jump-start the cooking of the vegetables in the kitchen? I turned to the microwave. I figured I could lightly season the vegetables with a bit of vinegar, salt, pepper, and sugar before they went into the microwave and then transfer the softened vegetables to a disposable aluminum pan to finish them off on the grill.

Still hungry? No worries. Go to CooksCountry.com/pretzels for our Ballpark Pretzels recipe.



A quick spin in the microwave ensures that the vegetables are done at the same time as the sausages.

It worked. I still had to have the parcooked vegetables on the grill for about 20 minutes to achieve the texture and browning that I wanted, but I'd saved quite a bit of time.

About that grill: I built a half-grill fire, arranging 6 quarts of lit charcoal briquettes on one side of the grill to create a hotter side. I put the disposable pan containing the vegetables directly over the coals and placed the sausages on the cooler side of the grill.

Once the sausages hit 150 degrees (I checked the temperature with an instant-read thermometer), I flip-flopped the pan of vegetables and the sausages so that both would finish cooking at the same time.

One more thing I learned: A few flare-ups are inevitable; there is no way to prevent a bit of sausage fat from dripping down onto the charcoal. But these minimal flare-ups—which last only a moment or two—are actually

beneficial. They kiss each sausage link and add some color and slight char, ideal for grilled sausages.

Once the sausages' internal temperature hit 160 degrees, I knew they were done. I placed them in the pan with the tender vegetables, removed the pan from the grill, and covered it with aluminum foil for 5 minutes before spooning it all into rolls. My tasters were as happy as kids at a Saturday doubleheader—all that was missing was the crack of a bat.



Too much cheap beer helped turn this 1974 Major League matchup into an all-out brawl.

Baseball fans go to the ballpark to watch the game, of course, but another part of the ballpark experience is the food: hot dogs, boxes of Cracker Jack, salty soft pretzels, and sausage-and-pepper subs. And to wash it all down? Beer, naturally. Nothing wrong with that.

THE AMERICAN TABLE

That is unless you're talking about the ball game played on June 4, 1974, between the Cleveland Indians and Texas Rangers at Cleveland Stadium, promoted locally as Ten-Cent Beer Night.

Other than a few well-intentioned streakers early in the game (hey, it was the 1970s, after all), the night was unremarkable until the late innings, when rowdy fans, fueled by an estimated 60,000 cups of beer sold, started pelting Texas players with hot dogs. In the ninth inning, things took an ugly turn when one Cleveland fan ran onto the field and threw a punch at a Texas right fielder. According to the *Beaver County Times*, thousands of fans followed suit, streaming onto the field for an all-out brawl. Chairs were cracked over players' heads, spectators were trampled—even game officials were bloodied before cops swarmed in to restore the peace. Umpire Nestor Chylak called a forfeit in favor of the Rangers, one of only a handful of forfeits in Major League Baseball history.

Substitutes for Sub Rolls

When we're shopping for sub rolls, we can't always locate the ideal size to serve with sausages. If you find yourself in the same predicament, consider one of these options. (It's also fine to serve the sausages with no rolls at all.)



TRY HOT DOG BUNS
Often a good fit for smaller sausages.



CUT LONG SUB ROLLS IN HALF
Place 1 sausage in each half.



HOW ABOUT A HAMBURGER BUN?
Split sausage lengthwise; lay halves side by side.

Don't Sweat the Flare-Ups

In most instances we try to avoid flare-ups by rearranging the food on the cooking grate. Here, since the sausages are on the hotter side of the grill for only 2 or 3 minutes, a few flare-ups can be beneficial, adding smoky char to their exteriors.

GRILLED SAUSAGES WITH BELL PEPPERS AND ONIONS

Serves 6

You can substitute hot Italian sausages for sweet, if desired. Minimal flare-ups are to be expected when grilling the sausages on the hotter side of the grill; they give the sausages color and flavor. Our favorite instant-read thermometer is the ThermoWorks ThermoMapen Mk4.

- 3** red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into ¼-inch-wide strips
- 2** onions, halved and sliced ¼ inch thick
- 3** tablespoons distilled white vinegar
- 2** tablespoons sugar
- 1** tablespoon vegetable oil
- ½** teaspoon salt
- ½** teaspoon pepper
- 1** (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum pan
- 2** pounds sweet Italian sausages
- 12** (6-inch) sub rolls (optional)

1. Toss bell peppers, onions, vinegar, sugar, oil, salt, and pepper together in bowl. Microwave, covered, until vegetables are just tender, about 6 minutes. Pour vegetable mixture and any accumulated juices into disposable pan.

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner [or, if using three-burner grill, primary burner and second burner] as needed to maintain grill temperature between 375 and 400 degrees.)

3. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place disposable pan on hotter side of grill (over primary burner if using gas). Cover and cook for 20 minutes.

4. Place sausages on cooler side of grill and stir vegetable mixture; cover and cook for 8 minutes. Flip sausages and stir vegetable mixture again; cover and cook until sausages register 150 degrees and vegetables are softened and beginning to brown, about 8 minutes.

5. Transfer sausages to disposable pan with vegetables; slide disposable pan to cooler side of grill, then transfer sausages from disposable pan to hotter side of grill. Cook sausages, uncovered, turning often, until well browned and registering 160 degrees, 2 to 3 minutes (there may be flare-ups).

6. Return sausages to disposable pan with vegetables. Remove disposable pan from grill, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Divide sausages and vegetables among rolls, if using. Serve.

A Three-Step Process

We shift the sausages and vegetables between the hotter and cooler sides of the grill to ensure even cooking.



Start microwaved bell peppers and onions in disposable pan on hotter side of grill, then arrange sausages on cooler side.



When sausages register 150 degrees, move them to hotter side of grill. Transfer pan with vegetables to cooler side of grill.



When sausages register 160 degrees, place them in pan with vegetables. Remove pan from grill, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes.

Grill-Fried Chicken

We wanted the crunch of fried chicken without the frying. So we took it outside.

by Diane Unger

I HAVE A weakness for fried chicken—any sort of fried chicken. Deep-fried wings are my favorite because their small size makes it easy to get flavor all the way through the meat. And the high coating-to-meat ratio means more crunch per bite. But heating 3 quarts of oil to 350 degrees on a hot midsummer day? No thanks. I wondered if there was a way to get that deeply seasoned flavor and a thin, crispy coating using my grill.

I found very few existing recipes for this method and was disappointed by each one. The coatings failed on the grill, cooking up thick, hard, dry, and chalky and sticking to the grate.

Gnawing on a subpar drumette, I realized I was on my own—I'd have to start from scratch. So I brined 3 pounds of split chicken wings, deeply seasoning the meat so it would stay moist on the grill, and then put together a heavily seasoned flour coating. Hoping to help the coating adhere, I firmly pressed it into the chicken and put the wings in the fridge to rest (often helpful with coatings like this) before heading out to start my grill.

I knew that the wing pieces, although small, would take some time on the grill in order to render the excess fat in the skin. I loaded up my chimney starter and banked the hot coals into a mound on one side of the grill. I oiled the grate and then set the wings on the cooler side of the grill, with their fattier sides facing up.

The results? Decidedly mixed. On the positive side, the meat was juicy and flavorful, and I didn't have to flip



Allowing the dredged chicken to rest before grilling helps the coating adhere.

the wings as they cooked. But the dry, dusty coating was a total letdown.

I wanted a crispy coating, but I also wanted it to glisten like deep-fried chicken. Oil is key to glistening chicken, so I tried creating a coating with some vegetable oil whisked in, but the wings cooked up greasy. I decided instead to experiment with brushing oil on the wings as they cooked.

I tested brushing the wings with oil before they went on the grill, but my results didn't improve. So I tried brushing them halfway through, at about the 30-minute mark. This gave the coating time to set up before I applied the oil. The light layer of oil soaked gently into the coating, creating a shiny exterior. Just 3 tablespoons was all I needed.

After the wings had spent another 30 minutes on the grill, I lifted the lid to discover that their coating had turned golden brown. My tasters devoured them, remarking on the satisfyingly crunchy coating and deeply seasoned meat.

GRILL-FRIED CHICKEN WINGS

Serves 4 to 6

We prefer to buy whole chicken wings and butcher them ourselves because they tend to be larger than wings that come presplit. If you can find only presplit wings, opt for larger ones, if possible. Ideally, 12 whole wings should equal 3 pounds, which will yield 24 pieces of chicken (12 drumettes and 12 flats, tips discarded) once broken down. Do not brine the chicken for longer than 3 hours in step 1 or it will become too salty. Charcoal grills tend to produce more-intense heat than gas grills do, hence the difference in cooking times.

Salt and pepper

¼ cup sugar

3 pounds chicken wings, cut at joints, wingtips discarded

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon granulated garlic

2 teaspoons paprika

½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

1. Dissolve ¼ cup salt and sugar in 2 quarts cold water in large container. Add chicken and refrigerate, covered, for at least 1 hour or up to 3 hours.

2. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Whisk flour, granulated garlic, paprika, cayenne, 1 tablespoon pepper, and 1 teaspoon salt together in large bowl. Remove chicken from brine. Working in batches of four, dredge chicken pieces in flour mixture, pressing to adhere. Place chicken on prepared rack. Refrigerate chicken, uncovered, for at least 30 minutes or up to 2 hours.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter mounded with charcoal briquettes (7 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour into steeply banked pile against side of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn primary burner to high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner [or, if using three-burner grill, primary burner and second burner] as needed to maintain grill temperature of 425 degrees.)

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place chicken, fatty side up, on cooler side of grill, arranging drumettes closest to coals. Cook chicken, covered, until lightly browned and coating is set, about 30 minutes for charcoal or about 45 minutes for gas.

5. Brush chicken with oil until no traces of flour remain (use all oil). Cover and continue to cook until coating is golden brown and chicken registers between 180 and 200 degrees, about 30 minutes longer for charcoal or about 45 minutes longer for gas. Transfer chicken to clean wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes. Serve.

BUFFALO-STYLE GRILL-FRIED CHICKEN WINGS

Add ½ cup Frank's RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce to brine in step 1. While chicken is cooling, microwave ½ cup Frank's RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce and 4 tablespoons unsalted butter in covered large bowl until butter is melted, about 1 minute. Whisk to fully combine. Add chicken and toss to coat before serving.



Brushing the chicken with oil halfway through cooking helps brown the coating.

Pimento Mac and Cheese



Fans of creamy, tangy pimento cheese love it on sandwiches. We wanted it with macaroni.

by Alli Berkey

PIMENTO CHEESE LIVES in the hearts and the kitchens of many Americans, mostly in the South, but it's far too often relegated to sandwiches or crackers. There's nothing wrong with pimento cheese sandwiches, but why limit its range? I wanted to use this concoction—a mixture of sharp cheddar cheese, creamy mayonnaise, and tangy pimentos—in a warm, comforting macaroni and cheese casserole.

After a bit of research, I found a few recipes to try out. The worst were gloppy, chalky, greasy failures. One recipe stood out for its creamy cheese and punchy note of tanginess, but it was a bit too complicated, calling for homemade mayonnaise and a slew of different cheeses. I wanted a more straightforward route.

Many recipes for macaroni and cheese rely on a béchamel sauce for a base. This quick, flour-thickened milk sauce helps create a cheese sauce that stays silky and pliable without breaking or leaching grease—a common pitfall when using sharp cheddar (see “The Trouble with Aged Cheese”). I tested béchamel sauces made with plain milk, canned evaporated milk, and a combination of milk and cream; it was this final combination that was the creamiest, keeping the melted sharp cheddar in silky suspension. And rather than stir in mayonnaise, I added cream cheese—it provided tanginess as well as creaminess.

For a big flavor punch, I turned to pungent dry mustard and savory Worcestershire sauce, in combination with black pepper and hot sauce. And, of course, I added a cup of minced ruby-red pimentos.

I was hoping to avoid precooking the macaroni and instead simply stir everything together and bake it in a casserole dish, but the elbows were still crunchy when they came out of the oven. So I gave them a quick initial swim in boiling water (they were just short of *al dente*); they finished softening in the oven.

My savory, tangy pimento macaroni and cheese achieved every flavor and texture goal I was after. I may never eat plain macaroni and cheese again.

PIMENTO MAC AND CHEESE

Serves 8 to 10

We used Frank's RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce for this recipe. Barilla makes our favorite elbow macaroni.

- 1 pound elbow macaroni
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon dry mustard
- 2 cups whole milk
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 pound extra-sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (4 cups)
- 2 ounces cream cheese
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 3 (4-ounce) jars pimentos, drained, patted dry, and minced

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in Dutch oven. Add macaroni and 1 tablespoon salt and cook for 5 minutes. Drain macaroni; set aside.

2. Add butter to now-empty pot and melt over medium-high heat. Stir in flour, mustard, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon pepper, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt and cook until mixture is fragrant and bubbling, about 30 seconds. Slowly whisk in milk and cream and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until sauce is thick enough to coat back of spoon, about 2 minutes, whisking frequently.

3. Remove pot from heat. Add 3 cups cheddar, cream cheese, hot sauce, and Worcestershire to sauce and whisk until cheese is melted. Add pimentos and macaroni and stir until macaroni is thoroughly coated in sauce. Transfer to 13 by 9-inch baking dish and sprinkle with remaining 1 cup cheddar. Bake until edges are lightly browned and filling is bubbling, 18 to 20 minutes. Let rest for 20 minutes. Serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Fully assembled casserole can be wrapped tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 24 hours. When ready to serve, remove plastic and bake until heated through, 40 to 45 minutes.



Dry mustard and Worcestershire sauce add pungency and savory depth.

The Trouble with Aged Cheese

Aged cheeses such as cheddar are notoriously difficult to melt smoothly. That's because the aging process causes the cheese to lose a lot of water, which allows its protein clusters to move closer together and form stronger bonds. Cheddar also contains a lot of fat. This fat can melt long before the protein begins to flow, resulting in a separation of the fat and protein—a greasy, messy problem known as “breaking.” Our recipe minimizes breaking by stabilizing the cheddar with flour. The starch in the flour coats the protein clusters, preventing them from coming apart and releasing droplets of fat as they melt.



What's a Pimento?

Though they look a lot like jarred roasted red peppers, jarred pimentos are made from a heart-shaped variety of red pepper that is slightly sweeter than a red bell pepper. In addition to being jarred or canned in an acidic brine, pimentos are stuffed into pitted green olives or dried and finely ground to make paprika.

Chicken Francese



A lemony, buttery pan-fried cutlet is appealing. Chicken wrapped in burnt scrambled eggs is not.

by **Katie Leaird**

DESPITE ITS NAME, chicken Francese is neither French nor Italian in origin. Yet this beloved egg-dipped, pan-fried chicken cutlet dressed in a tangy lemon-butter sauce—reportedly a 1970s invention from Rochester, New York—is still found on scores of Italian American restaurant menus across the United States.

Typically, when breading a cutlet (think chicken Parmesan), you use a three-step process: Dredge the cutlet in flour, dip it in eggs, and coat it in bread crumbs. For Francese you stop at the second step, sliding the egg-dipped cutlet into the skillet to cook. At its best, this creates a silky, delicate coating that absorbs the flavorful butter sauce. At its worst, you end up with an omelet-coated chicken breast.

For such a simple, ubiquitous ingredient, eggs can be vexing. Cook them too long and they scramble and burn; not long enough and they run. But after a few experiments, I realized that heat and time weren't my only challenges here—the real key to success was using the right cut of chicken. A breast proved far too thick to cook through before the eggs burned. Cutlets were much more promising. But precut chicken cutlets varied too much in size, and I couldn't control the outcome. I found that slicing boneless, skinless chicken breasts in half horizontally and then gently pounding them to a ¼-inch thickness was the most reliable and successful technique; throughout all my testing, my cutlets cooked through evenly in just a few minutes—before the coating could burn.

Now, about that coating. On my first try, I simply dredged my cutlets in flour and then in beaten eggs, but I ended up with a gloppy, gluey mess. Whisking some milk into the



Briny capers provide a sharp counterpoint to the deeply savory sauce.

eggs made the coating more fluid and easier to manage, but there was still a pasty quality to the dish that wasn't quite right. I switched from flour to cornstarch and found that it helped keep the egg coating in place and also eliminated the pastiness.

I wanted the right balance of butter and lemon for a velvety, slightly tangy sauce. So once all the chicken was fried and set aside, I added garlic, capers, chicken broth, and lemon juice to the skillet and reduced the mixture to concentrate the flavors before adding butter to thicken it. But this method cooked all the brightness out of the lemon, leaving me with a dull, one-note sauce.

I added a splash of white wine to my next batch for a bit of acidity and let it simmer with the chicken broth. I saved the lemon juice to stir in at the very end, with the butter, to preserve its fresh tang. The egg-coated chicken cutlets absorbed the silky sauce, making each bite lemony and luscious.

Cutting Chicken Breasts into Cutlets

Place one hand on top of the chicken breast. Position a sharp chef's knife parallel to the cutting board at the thick end of the breast and slice through the middle of the breast horizontally. Pound the pieces between two sheets of plastic wrap into ¼-inch-thick cutlets.



CHICKEN FRANCESE WITH LEMON-CAPER SAUCE

Serves 4

Freezing the chicken breasts for just 15 minutes makes them easier to slice into cutlets. To help keep the fragile egg coating in place, use a fork instead of tongs to flip the cutlets. Reese Non Pareil Capers are our favorite capers.

- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed**
- ½ cup plus 1 teaspoon cornstarch**
- 2 large eggs**
- 2 tablespoons milk**
- 1 cup chicken broth**
- ½ cup dry white wine**
- Salt and pepper**
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces**
- 2 tablespoons capers, rinsed**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley**

- 1.** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 200 degrees. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Place chicken breasts on large plate and freeze until firm, about 15 minutes.
- 2.** Meanwhile, place ½ cup cornstarch in shallow dish. Whisk eggs and milk together in second shallow dish. Whisk broth, wine, ¼ teaspoon salt, and remaining 1 teaspoon cornstarch together in bowl.
- 3.** Working with 1 breast at a time, starting at thick end, cut breasts in half horizontally. Using meat pounder, gently pound each cutlet between 2 pieces of plastic wrap to even ¼-inch thickness. Pat cutlets dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Working with 1 cutlet at a time, dredge cutlets in cornstarch, shaking off excess; dip in egg mixture to coat, letting excess drip off; then place on large plate in single layer.
- 4.** Melt 2 tablespoons butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Transfer 4 cutlets to skillet and cook until golden brown and cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes per side, using fork to flip. Transfer to prepared rack and place in oven to keep warm. Repeat with 2 tablespoons butter and remaining 4 cutlets.
- 5.** Add capers and garlic to now-empty skillet and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add broth mixture to skillet and bring to boil. Cook until reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Off heat, stir in lemon juice and remaining 2 tablespoons butter.
- 6.** Transfer chicken to serving platter. Spoon sauce over chicken and sprinkle with parsley. Serve.

Pork Fried Rice

The fastest route to this Chinese American favorite is the phone. But the better route is your stovetop. **by Matthew Fairman**

WHEN THE DELIVERY driver's peeling out of our driveway and we're prying open the paper boxes from the Chinese restaurant a few blocks away, pork fried rice is always in one of them. And for good reason. Fried white rice makes a simple, texture-rich backdrop for flavorful pork and scrambled egg; the savory sauce brings it all together.

But can it be better—fresher, hotter, more delicious—at home? If you follow the traditional rule prohibiting the use of freshly cooked rice, then the answer is no. But I get ornery waiting for rice to cool down and dry out, so I took to the kitchen to see if I could test my way to a better, faster pork fried rice.

It was easy to choose a cut of pork. After rejecting loin and chops, I settled on widely available country-style pork ribs. Chopped and marinated briefly in soy sauce, brown sugar, baking soda (for tenderness and browning), and cornstarch (to help create a velvety texture), the pork cooked up juicy, tender, and beautifully browned.

The sauce took some doing. I began with a simple combination of soy sauce and brown sugar, but the rice just tasted monotonously salty. Traditional recipes call for hard-to-find ingredients such as Shaoxing wine (a Chinese rice wine) and fermented shrimp paste to punch up savoriness, so I opted for substitutes. Dry sherry is the test kitchen's go-to sub for rice wine, and it worked here, adding a pleasing nutty complexity. In place of the shrimp paste, I turned to more commonly available oyster sauce. For a little extra sweetness and brightness to bring this sauce home, I chose a surprising ingredient: ketchup. The blend of tomato, vinegar, and sugar acts as a three-in-one ingredient, adding depth and tang.

Ketchup? What Gives?

The ketchup called for in this recipe isn't as out of place as it might seem. Besides contributing a wide variety of flavors—sweetness, sharpness, savoriness, and more—it actually has deep roots in Asian cuisine. In Hokkien Chinese, the word *kê-tsiap* refers to a (tomato-free) condiment of fermented fish that made its way to Malaysia and Indonesia and proved very popular with 17th-century British and Dutch adventurers. Over time, *kê-tsiap* became *ketchup*, a catchall term for a wide range of multi-ingredient condiments, eventually including the tomato ketchup we know today. Our favorite supermarket ketchup is Heinz Organic Ketchup, which we love for the well-rounded range of flavors it provides—it's not just a hamburger topping.

With my sauce done, I was now ready to tackle the rice. It turns out there's a good reason not to fry freshly cooked rice: You create mushy clumps of steamy rice instead of distinct grains. But there's another way of cooking rice that I hoped might work here: the pasta method. Cooking rice like pasta helps ensure that it won't stick together, since the abundance of water sloughs away excess starch.

Skeptical yet hopeful, I tried it. I was delighted when the cooked rice hit the pan with a satisfying sizzle, broke up easily into individual grains when pressed with a spatula, and began frying just as the leftover stuff had. In minutes, I served up the fastest (and tastiest) pork fried rice I'd ever made.



Its ingredient list is a little long, but this dish comes together quickly.

SIMPLE PORK FRIED RICE

Serves 4

The stir-fry ingredients can be prepped while your rice cooks, but be sure to have all the ingredients ready and close by before step 3 so you're equipped for fast cooking. We preferred the slightly higher fat content and heartiness of country-style pork ribs, but pork blade chops can be substituted with similar results (be sure to account for the weight of the bone when purchasing, though).

- 8 ounces boneless country-style pork ribs, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 4 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 2 tablespoons oyster sauce
- 1 tablespoon dry sherry
- 1 tablespoon ketchup
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups long-grain white rice
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 6 scallions, white and green parts separated and sliced thin
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ cup frozen peas, thawed

1. Combine pork, 2 teaspoons soy sauce, sugar, cornstarch, and baking soda in bowl. Let pork mixture sit

for at least 15 minutes, or cover and refrigerate for up to 1 hour. In separate bowl, combine oyster sauce, sherry, ketchup, salt, pepper, and remaining 2 teaspoons soy sauce; set aside.

2. Meanwhile, bring 3 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over high heat. Add rice and cook, stirring occasionally, until just cooked through and tender, about 12 minutes. Drain rice in fine-mesh strainer or colander.

3. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until just smoking. Add pork in single layer and cook, without stirring, until browned, about 2 minutes. Stir pork and continue to cook, stirring frequently, until dark brown on all sides, about 3 minutes longer. Transfer to clean bowl.

4. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over high heat until shimmering. Add eggs and stir with rubber spatula until set but still wet, about 15 seconds. Push eggs to 1 side of skillet. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil, scallion whites, and garlic to empty side and cook until fragrant, about 15 seconds.

5. Add rice and stir to break up clumps and any large egg curds. Cook until rice begins to sizzle and pop loudly, about 3 minutes. Stir in peas, oyster sauce mixture, pork, and scallion greens and cook, stirring constantly, until thoroughly combined, about 2 minutes. Serve.

Bringing Pork Fried Rice Home



Boil and Drain the Rice

There's no need for leftover rice. Cooking and draining rice like pasta rids it of starch, so it won't clump when you stir-fry it.



Use a Skillet, Not a Wok

Woks are designed to be used in an open cooking pit. A nonstick skillet provides better contact with a flat Western burner.

Ultimate Bacon Burgers

Why put bacon on your burger when you can put bacon *in* it?

by **Cecelia Jenkins**

PERFECTLY CRISPED strips of salty bacon teeter atop a meaty burger piled high with your favorite toppings. You circle it, strategizing the perfect bite. Sound familiar?

Topping a burger with crispy strips of bacon is nothing new, but what about incorporating bacon into a burger? Now there's a wacky idea. Changing the bacon from an add-on to an add-in promised savory, bacony bliss in every bite, no plan of attack required. Now, how to execute it?

I found a few recipes that called for mixing chopped-up strips of bacon (raw in some recipes, cooked in others) with ground beef, shaping the mixture into patties, and grilling the patties. It sounded simple enough, so I got to work. Assembling batches of patties with different amounts of bacon and beef prepared in different ways, I eagerly anticipated a range of flavorful bacony samples.

I was sorely disappointed. Most of the bacon burgers were bland, and some cooked up tough, dry, and crumbly. How could an idea with so much potential be so underwhelming?

I felt robbed.

Determined to have tender, juicy, supremely bacony burgers, I zeroed in on the star ingredient. Though it seemed logical to mix raw chopped or ground bacon with raw ground beef before forming and grilling the patties, I soon discovered that combining sticky minced bacon and sticky ground beef led to overworked, compressed patties and tough, dry burgers despite the bacon fat that should have kept them juicy. (When we make meatloaf or meatballs, we avoid this problem by using a panade, a mixture of bread and liquid that adds moisture and guards against toughness. But I wanted bacon burgers, not meatloaf burgers.)

For the next batch, I tried mixing cooked bacon that I'd crumbled by hand into the ground beef. It was easier to form patties with this mixture than it was when working with raw bacon,



To take the bacon flavor over the top, we use the excess rendered bacon fat to cook the onion.

and spreading the beef out on a baking sheet, sprinkling the cooked crumbles on top, and combining the two with a fork helped distribute the bacon more evenly and made the mixture harder to overwork.

At eight slices of cooked and crumbled bacon, I'd reached the threshold; any more bacon tempted a grease fire on the grill. I wondered if I could achieve more bacon flavor throughout by processing the raw bacon in the food processor before cooking it to render out some of the excess fat. This step would also create even smaller bits of bacon, which were easier to incorporate into the meat mixture.

This worked but created an almost

crunchy consistency, so for my next round I undercooked the bacon, rendering some fat but not taking it to a fully crispy texture.

Finally, I'd hit on the delicious bacon flavor and juiciness I wanted, and with 85 percent lean ground beef (15 percent fat), the burgers were tender but not delicate or crumbly (as they were when I tried using leaner 90 percent lean ground beef).

To take this burger to new heights, I topped it with crumbled blue cheese (a classic pairing) and onion that I'd sautéed in some of the leftover bacon fat. These additions took this already ambitious burger right over the top. Just where I wanted it.

Bacon in Every Bite

For bacony goodness in every bite, we fold tiny pieces of partially cooked bacon into the ground beef. Grind eight slices of bacon to a paste in a food processor, and cook the paste gently in a nonstick skillet for just 5 minutes. Strain off the fat (reserve it for cooking the onion) before incorporating the cooled bacon into the beef.



FLAVOR FLECKS
We mix bacon bits deep into each patty.

Making a Good Impression

When we make burgers, we always form a shallow indentation in the center of each patty before cooking it. That's because the collagen, or connective tissue, in ground meat shrinks when heated. This causes the bottom and sides of the meat to tighten like a belt, which forces the surface of the burger to expand. To prevent a bulging burger, press a ¼-inch-deep divot into the center of each patty. When the collagen tightens, it will cause the divot to fill out so that it is level with the rest of the patty.



Shopping for Burger Buns

Ultimate burgers deserve top-notch buns. Our favorites are **Martin's Sandwich Potato Rolls**: They boast a mild sweetness that pairs well with a rich, salty beef burger. They also have a particularly light, tender, moist texture. That's because instead of hydrating the dough with water, Martin's uses a mixture of potato flakes, milk, and butter (essentially mashed potatoes). Mashed potatoes are hefty and substantial, but in potato rolls, the milk protein and butterfat weaken the structure of the dough, leaving the rolls softer, moister, and more tender.



BEST BUNS: LIGHT, TENDER, MOIST



GRILLED BACON BURGERS WITH CARAMELIZED ONION

Serves 4

Martin's Sandwich Potato Rolls are our favorite hamburger buns, and Oscar Mayer Naturally Hardwood Smoked Bacon is our favorite thin-sliced bacon. Be gentle when shaping the patties, taking care not to overwork the meat, or the burgers will become dense. Serve the burgers with lettuce and tomato, if desired.

- 8 slices bacon
- 1 large onion, halved and sliced thin
- Salt and pepper
- 1½ pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- 4 ounces blue cheese, crumbled and chilled (1 cup) (optional)
- 4 hamburger buns, toasted

1. Process bacon in food processor to smooth paste, about 1 minute, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Cook bacon in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until lightly browned in spots but still pink (do not cook until crispy), about 5 minutes, breaking up pieces with spoon. Drain bacon in fine-mesh strainer set over bowl. Transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate and let cool completely. Reserve bacon fat.
2. Add 2 tablespoons reserved fat to now-empty skillet and heat over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook

until well browned, about 20 minutes. Transfer to bowl and set aside.

3. Spread beef in even layer in rimmed baking sheet. Sprinkle bacon, 1 teaspoon pepper, and ½ teaspoon salt over beef. Gently toss with 2 forks to combine. Divide beef mixture into 4 equal mounds. Gently shape each mound into ¾-inch-thick patty about 4½ inches in diameter. Using your fingertips, press center of each patty down until about ½ inch thick, creating slight divot. (Patties can be covered and refrigerated for up to 24 hours.)

4A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

4B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on high.

5. Clean and oil cooking grate. Season patties with pepper. Cook patties divot side down, uncovered, until browned, about 3 minutes. Flip patties and top each with ¼ cup blue cheese, if using. Cover and continue to cook until burgers register 125 degrees (for medium-rare) or 130 degrees (for medium), about 2 minutes longer. Transfer burgers to buns, top with onion, and serve.

Is Crumbled Blue Cheese Any Good?

by Hannah Crowley

FOR MANY KITCHEN tasks—dips, dressings, salads, sauces—crumbled blue cheese is an easier alternative to the stinky, sticky task of crumbling a wedge yourself. In search of the best crumbled blue cheese, we chose five products carried in national supermarkets and tasted them in a series of blind taste tests: plain, in blue cheese dressing, and toasted on crostini. The goal was a rich, creamy cheese with an unmistakably pungent (but balanced) blue-cheese funk.

We noticed right away that tasters preferred the amplified funk of cheeses that were bluer in color to whiter cheeses, which they thought tasted more like “feta” or “cheddar.” The trend held for dressing, too; those made with whiter cheeses lacked blue cheese’s signature “blue” flavor and thus tasted more like ranch or mayonnaise. Not surprisingly, the “blue” flavor in blue cheese comes from the blue mold. Why do some blue cheeses have more blue mold?

To produce blue cheese, mold spores are added to the milk early in the cheese-making process. Like seeds in soil, the mold spores germinate and grow in the cheese as it ages. We assumed that the bluer cheeses simply had more mold spores added, but according to Dean Sommer, cheese and food technologist at the Center for Dairy Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, that’s not the case. Mold needs oxygen to grow, and how much flavorful blue mold develops depends largely on how much oxygen the spores are exposed to. Cheese makers can control this by making cheese with more natural air pockets or by piercing the developing cheeses with metal rods to create airflow. The sharper blue cheeses in our lineup were exposed to more oxygen during production.

Two other keys to success: using raw milk, which makes for a more complex, nuanced cheese, and the addition of potato starch—not the cellulose many manufacturers use—to prevent clumping. Our winner, Roth Buttermilk Blue Crumbles, hit all the marks and impressed tasters with its moist texture and bold but balanced funk.

RECOMMENDED

TASTERS' NOTES



Roth
Buttermilk Blue Crumbles
Price: \$3.99 for 4 oz
(\$1.00 per oz)

“Now that’s blue cheese!” wrote one taster about this top-rated product. It was “assertive yet dignified.” Or, as another taster put it, this cheese had a “good amount of funk without tasting like feet.” Its “clear, clean blue cheese” flavor had a “well-balanced” acidity, and its “lush” crumbles were “soft and creamy” both cooked and uncooked.



Boar's Head
Creamy Blue All Natural
Cheese Crumbles
Price: \$6.49 for 6 oz
(\$1.08 per oz)

This “creamy” cheese had a nice smooth texture both cooked and raw. With a “sharp, punchy tang,” it was “ripe,” “intense,” and “assertively funky,” with some “savory” and “floral” notes. Most blue-cheese lovers liked this “mega blue,” but it was too assertive for a few: “Packs a punch.” “Too strong for me.”



Athenos
Crumbled Blue Cheese
Price: \$4.29 for 4.5 oz
(\$0.95 per oz)

This product uses cellulose to keep its crumbles separate but was not as dry as other cheeses with cellulose added. Tasters noted that the crumbles were slightly dry when tasted plain but deemed them fine in the dressing and “mostly melty and smooth” on the crostini.



Go to CooksCountry.com/ **July 17** to see the full results of our crumbled blue cheese tasting.



Broiling the stuffed tomatoes for just 5 minutes unlocks their deepest flavors.

Hasselback Tomatoes

This trendy side dish made us skeptical—until we tried it. *by Ashley Moore*

YOU MAY HAVE heard of Hasselback potatoes, the accordion-like, sliced-yet-still-in-one-piece potatoes covered in butter, topped with cheesy bread crumbs, and baked. You may have seen Hasselback squash or even eggplant. But what about tomatoes?

“Hasselbacking” is nothing new. Back in the 1950s, cooks at the Hasselbacken Hotel in Stockholm, Sweden, were peeling and partially slicing large potatoes, brushing them with butter, sprinkling them with bread crumbs, and baking them. Customers took to them for their striking look but also for the range of textures this process creates. They are still on the hotel’s menu today.

But I was focused on tomatoes, not potatoes. I wondered if a similar

technique would have an equally big impact. After consulting with my test kitchen coworkers, I decided to double down on summery flavors, stuffing the tomatoes with vibrant pesto and soft, flavorful cheese.

I started by making a homemade pesto of basil leaves, garlic, Parmesan cheese, and olive oil in the food processor, adding some crunchy panko bread crumbs. I set this aside and sliced several slits into some cored plum tomatoes, almost to their bottoms, leaving about ¼ inch intact (see “Prepping the Tomatoes”). I seasoned the tomatoes with salt and pepper, spread the pesto mixture evenly throughout the tomatoes, and sprinkled them with Parmesan cheese. I baked them until

the cheese was bubbling and called down my team to taste.

The consensus? These were OK, but they lacked punch. I knew the basil was powerful, so for my next test I swapped out the Parmesan for more pungent, flavorful Gruyère cheese. By the time they’d baked long enough for the cheese to melt, the tomatoes were soggy and unappetizing.

I decided to ditch the baking in favor of broiling; this switch would limit the amount of time the tomatoes spent in the oven and allow them to hold on to some summery freshness. I was right: A short blast under the broiler did the trick. Now I had warm but fresh-tasting tomatoes, melty cheese, and crunchy crumbs. Just right.

HASSELBACK TOMATOES

Serves 4 to 6

For the best results, we recommend buying ripe tomatoes of similar weight and size. We developed this recipe with tomatoes that averaged 3 ounces in weight and 2½ inches in length.

- 8 ripe plum tomatoes, cored**
- 7 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (1¾ cups)**
- 1½ cups fresh basil leaves**
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ cup panko bread crumbs**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- Salt and pepper**

- 1.** Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and set wire rack in sheet. Using serrated knife, cut ¼-inch-thick slice from 1 long side of each tomato. Turn tomatoes onto cut sides so they sit flat, then slice crosswise at ¼-inch intervals, leaving bottom ¼ inch of each tomato intact.
- 2.** Process ¾ cup Gruyère, basil, oil, panko, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in food processor until smooth, scraping down sides of bowl as needed, about 10 seconds.
- 3.** Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Combine ¾ teaspoon salt and ¾ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Carefully open tomato slices and sprinkle with salt-pepper mixture. Using small spoon, spread basil mixture evenly between tomato slices (about 2 tablespoons per tomato).
- 4.** Arrange tomatoes on prepared wire rack. Sprinkle remaining 1 cup Gruyère over tomatoes. Broil until cheese is golden brown, about 5 minutes. Serve.

Prepping the Tomatoes



Using paring knife (see our favorite model on page 30), remove core.



Using serrated knife, cut ¼-inch-thick slice from 1 long side of each tomato. Turn tomatoes onto cut sides so they sit flat, then slice crosswise at ¼-inch intervals, leaving bottom ¼ inch intact.

Smoke

Smoke is a fragrant, visible suspension of particles in air that rises from burning materials. Along with drying and salting, smoking is one of the oldest known methods of preserving and flavoring foods: Archaeologists think our ancestors of more than 3,000 years ago were using this technique. Here is what you need to know to add smoke to your culinary arsenal.

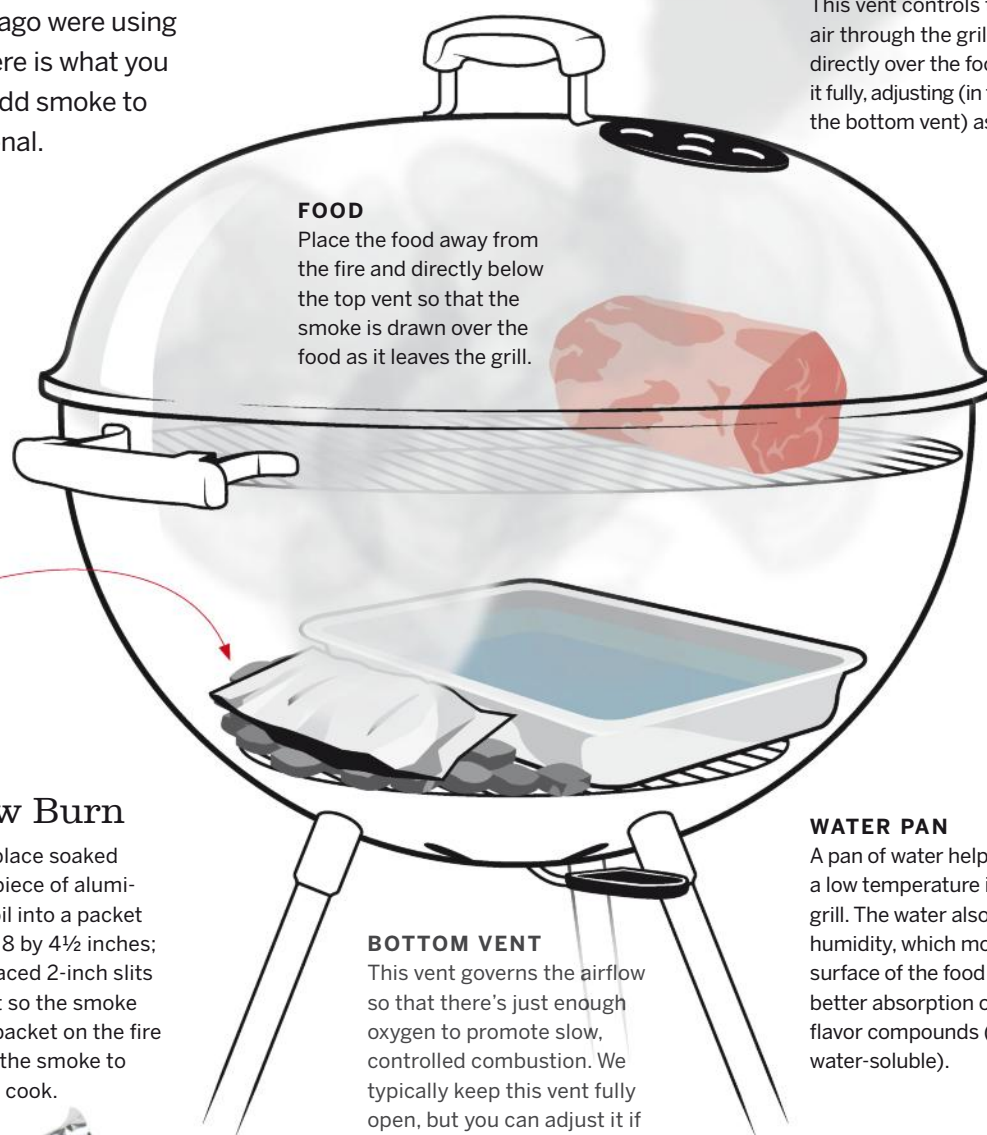
by **Scott Kathan**

Making Smoke Work for You

Most of our recipes for smoking call for food to stay on the grill for anywhere from 2 to 6 hours—so why do we use smoke only at the start? It's because the flavor compounds in smoke are water-soluble, and meat contains more water when it is cooler and uncooked. Since smoke doesn't penetrate much beyond the surface of meat, it is mostly the meat's exterior that absorbs smoke flavor. The cleanest, easiest way to smoke food on a backyard grill is to use wood chips (soaked in water to make them burn slower and smoke longer) wrapped in aluminum foil (wrapped in aluminum foil. The foil packet further ensures a slower burn and thus more smoke.

TOP VENT

This vent controls the draw of air through the grill. Position it directly over the food and open it fully, adjusting (in tandem with the bottom vent) as necessary.



FOOD

Place the food away from the fire and directly below the top vent so that the smoke is drawn over the food as it leaves the grill.

FOIL PACKET

Position the packet with the vent holes facing upward so that you can better direct the flow of smoke.

Key to a Slow Burn

To make a foil packet, place soaked wood chips on a large piece of aluminum foil and fold the foil into a packet that measures roughly 8 by 4½ inches; then cut two evenly spaced 2-inch slits in the top of the packet so the smoke can escape. Place the packet on the fire and wait 5 minutes for the smoke to build before starting to cook.



BOTTOM VENT

This vent governs the airflow so that there's just enough oxygen to promote slow, controlled combustion. We typically keep this vent fully open, but you can adjust it if you find that your charcoal is burning too hot.

WATER PAN

A pan of water helps maintain a low temperature inside the grill. The water also creates humidity, which moistens the surface of the food to allow for better absorption of smoke's flavor compounds (which are water-soluble).

Can You Smoke on Gas?

We prefer to use a charcoal grill for smoking because the vents allow for better control of the flow of air and smoke, but you can get good results on a gas grill. The trick is to preheat all burners, and then turn off the all but the primary burner and place the foil packet directly on it (under the cooking grate). Once the smoke starts wafting, place the food on the grill 6 to 8 inches away from the lit burner. Note that the smoke vents out the back of gas grills, so placing your food toward the back of the grate will expose it to more smoke.

Smoke Varieties

MAPLE

While we liked maple smoke on every meat we tried, some of our tasters found it "resin-y" on smoked salmon.

APPLE AND CHERRY

These relatively "mild" and "sweet" smokes are versatile but are especially good with mild foods such as whitefish, pork, and chicken.

HICKORY

We found this "balanced," "intense" smoke to be a strong all-around choice for chicken, fish, beef, and pork.

OAK

This "nutty," "mild" smoke is very well balanced and is the traditional choice in much of American barbecue.

ALDER

Its notes of "coriander" and "juniper" were great with fish.

MESQUITE

Mesquite smoke's strong flavor matches well with stronger-tasting cuts of beef, pork, lamb, and game.

Smoke Without Fire

The test kitchen is fond of two pantry ingredients that can add great smoke flavor without having to fire up the grill.

Liquid smoke is a potent flavoring agent made by channeling wood smoke through a condenser. The resulting liquid is great in barbecue sauces, dressings, and glazes. Our favorite is Wright's Liquid Smoke, which has a heady smokiness.



Chipotle chiles are smoked and dried jalapeños; they are commonly sold canned in a vinegary tomato-based adobo sauce. We like to mince the chiles and add them to all manner of Mexican and Tex-Mex dishes for a bold hit of smoke and heat. Leftover chipotles will keep in the refrigerator (in a nonreactive container) for up to three weeks.



North Carolina Cheese Biscuits

What makes a better biscuit? In some parts of the Tar Heel State, cheese.

by **Christie Morrison**



A light-colored cake pan helps us achieve the perfect golden color—not too light and not too dark.

Filling the Biscuits with Cheese



1. Using your hands, squeeze $\frac{1}{3}$ cup shredded cheese into firm ball. Repeat to form 5 more balls.



2. Using greased $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup dry measuring cup, transfer 6 portions of dough to prepared sheet. Dust top of each with flour.



3. Flatten each dough ball into $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch circle and coat with flour. Enclose cheese ball in center of dough and pinch to seal.

THE CATHEAD BISCUITS found in the region around Rocky Mount, North Carolina, are big, golden, and stuffed with molten, gooey cheese (see “Lining up for Biscuit Love”). These giant buttermilk biscuits, described as “big as a cat’s head,” are fluffy rather than flaky, partly due to the lower-protein Southern flour (such as White Lily) or self-rising flour traditionally used. The structure helps them keep their shape even when stuffed with cheese.

To develop a recipe here in my New England kitchen, I started with more commonly available all-purpose flour. And instead of lard, I chose butter for its rich flavor and because it’s so much easier to find.

While experienced biscuit makers can cut fat into flour without thinking twice, I used a food processor instead, pulsing the chilled butter into the flour until the texture was like crumbly cornmeal. I used a lighter hand to incorporate some buttermilk, knowing that if I worked the dough too hard, I’d overdevelop the gluten in the flour and end up with tough, not tender, biscuits. I then greased a $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup dry measuring cup and divided the dough into 6 equal portions.

Regional cheese biscuit recipes call for hoop cheese, a yellow cheese common in North Carolina but hard to find elsewhere. After tasting a few more widely available options, I settled on yellow sharp cheddar cheese for its tangy flavor and meltability. And while cheese biscuit pros easily stuff a loose handful of shredded cheese into a wad of wet dough in a messy dance perfected by years of practice, I found that first pressing the cheese into more firmly packed balls made assembly much easier and didn’t sacrifice meltability. (Experiments with just a wedge or slice of cheese led to unmelted middles.) I placed a cheese ball in the center of each slightly flattened circle of dough and gently pulled the edges up and around to seal the cheese inside.

Baking the biscuits in a round cake pan helped give them structure and kept most of the cheese from escaping, but the biscuits’ texture was slightly gummy. So I took a cue from a favorite test kitchen recipe for mile-high biscuits, which called for twice as much buttermilk as I was using; the theory was that a wet dough would have a



Carolina hoop cheese can be hard to find, so we stuff our biscuits with sharp cheddar.

higher rise and a more tender, fluffy texture due to the increase in trapped steam. I gave it a shot, dusting my hands with a bit of flour to keep the dough from sticking as I shaped and stuffed the biscuits. Once they were nestled into a cake pan, I slid them into a hot oven to bake.

As the soft biscuits rose in the pan, their flexible structure expanded outward, building tender but still impermeable walls around the cheese. After about 20 minutes, my biscuits had turned a beautiful golden brown. I let them cool briefly before tearing one open and biting into the cheesiest, fluffiest biscuit I'd ever tasted.

NORTH CAROLINA CHEESE BISCUITS

Makes 6 biscuits

Look for sharp or mild yellow cheddar cheese; extra-sharp cheddar doesn't melt as smoothly. The biscuit dough will be very wet and soft. Keep your hands well floured and don't be afraid to sprinkle extra flour on the biscuits to keep them from sticking. To keep the biscuits tender and prevent overbrowning, use a light-colored cake pan; our favorite is the Nordic Ware Naturals Nonstick 9-Inch Round Cake Pan.

- 8 ounces yellow sharp cheddar cheese, shredded (2 cups)**
- 3½ cups (17½ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- 1 tablespoon baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ¼-inch pieces and chilled, plus 2 tablespoons melted**
- 1½ cups buttermilk**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Grease light-colored 9-inch round cake pan. Working with ⅓ cup cheese, use your hands to squeeze cheese tightly into firm ball. Repeat with remaining cheese to form 5 more balls; set cheese balls aside.

2. Pulse 2¼ cups flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in food processor until combined, about 6 pulses. Add chilled butter and pulse until mixture resembles pebbly, coarse cornmeal, 8 to 10 pulses. Transfer mixture to large bowl. Stir in buttermilk until just combined. (Dough will be very wet and slightly lumpy.)

3. Spread remaining 1 cup flour in rimmed baking sheet. Using greased ½-cup dry measuring cup, transfer 6 portions of dough to prepared sheet. Dust top of each portion with flour from sheet.

4. Using your well-floured hands, gently flatten 1 portion of dough into 3½-inch circle and coat with flour. Pick up dough and place 1 cheese ball in center. Gently pull edges of dough over cheese to enclose and pinch together to seal. Shake off excess flour and transfer to prepared pan. Repeat with remaining dough and cheese, placing 5 biscuits around edge of pan and one in center. (Biscuits will be soft and will spread slightly as they sit.)

5. Brush biscuit tops with melted butter. Bake for 5 minutes, then reduce oven temperature to 450 degrees. Continue to bake until biscuits are deep golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes longer. Let biscuits cool in pan for 2 minutes, then invert onto plate. Break biscuits apart and turn right side up. Let cool for 5 minutes; serve warm.

Lining up for Biscuit Love

by Bryan Roof

IT'S 8:30 ON a Thursday morning in Wilson, North Carolina, and the line of cars for the drive-through window at Flo's Kitchen trails around the building and back out onto the street, where it stretches for several blocks. The traffic jam is a reliable morning occurrence as Flo's regulars line up for massive cathead biscuits stuffed with local hoop cheese. Waitresses approach cars, notepads in hand, to take orders. It's an efficient process; biscuits are churned out with such speed that many patrons get their food before they even pull up to the window to pay.

I have to dodge cars to get to the front door, but once inside I spy a stack of 5-gallon buckets of lard under the counter, a sure sign that I'm in the right place. The hustle in the air makes the place feel bigger than its tiny footprint should allow. Behind the counter, it's controlled chaos—two focused women work the griddle and deep fryer, preparing the eggs, bacon, and fried chicken patties that they'll tuck into split cheese biscuits. Behind them are two more employees on nonstop biscuit duty: shape, fill, bake, and repeat. Presiding over it all is the matriarch of Flo's, Linda Brewer, who works the cash register and delivers fresh biscuits and sandwiches to her customers, all of whom, first-timers and regulars alike, are named "sweetie," "honey," or "sugar."

Flo's isn't the only game around. Sixty miles to the east in Washington, North Carolina, you can find Alice Matthews churning out equally large—and no less cheesy—biscuits at Mom's Grill. While the pumps at this bright yellow gas station have long since emptied, customers still swing by religiously to fuel up on biscuits.



ON THE ROAD



At Flo's Kitchen in Wilson, above, patrons entering or exiting on foot have to dodge the line of cars waiting for service at the drive-through window. Alice Matthews of Mom's Grill in Washington, below, stuffs and shapes dozens of cheese biscuits each morning. Just as at Flo's, most regulars use the drive-through window to pick up their daily biscuit.



Corn and Cucumber Salad

The key to coaxing the most from these subtle summer players was supplying the right supporting cast. *by Ashley Moore*

CUCUMBER AND CORN, two iconic farmstand ingredients, can be refreshing and lovely on their own. But exciting? Well, let's just say their charms are understated. Subtle. I wanted to create a salad that gave these two ubiquitous midsummer stalwarts a chance to be surprising.

A handful of existing recipes for corn and cucumber salad gave me poor results—some were tossed (or doused) in creamy dressings, others in tangy, vinegary ones. A few came off more like salsa than salad, with long lists of add-ins. None allowed the corn or the cukes to shine.

I took a step back and looked at the two primary components. First, corn. Should it be cooked? Raw? I nixed blanching the loose kernels cut from four ears of corn—corralling those kernels in simmering water took too much effort, and they overcooked quickly. Raw corn was too . . . raw. The best option was to lightly sauté the kernels in some olive oil for about 7 minutes, which turned them ever-so-slightly brown and deepened their sweetness.

Next, cukes. I chose an English cucumber, which has minimal seeds and less water than the American variety and delivers lots of crunch and a clear, clean flavor. I halved the cucumber lengthwise and sliced it into half-moons.

I whisked together a simple vinaigrette of lime juice, olive oil, salt, and pepper and added some sharp sliced red onion and minced jalapeño to this mixture; after it sat for a minute, the vegetables' sharp flavors and crisp textures softened slightly. I tossed the cooled corn, the sliced cucumbers, and the dressing together and sprinkled some salty feta cheese on top along with some torn fresh basil leaves. The restrained but still punchy dressing played well with the corn and cucumber, but the salad needed one final touch.

After a quick discussion with my team, I decided to introduce a creamy element to provide a soft, silky counterpoint. I stirred together a portion of the lime vinaigrette with a bit of tangy sour cream. I made the salad again and, after tossing it all together, drizzled this sour cream mixture over the top. Instead of covering up the vegetables' sweet, refreshing flavors, this creamy finish served as a launching pad, boosting the pop of sweet corn and the crunch of crisp, fresh cucumber.



A tangy lime and sour cream mixture, spooned over the top, adds a punch of flavor.

Which Cukes Are Best?

Long, slender English cucumbers are our top choice for salads. They have tiny seeds and more-tender skins, while American cucumbers have large seeds and thick skins that are typically coated in wax.

AMERICAN CUCUMBER
Too wet and seedy



ENGLISH CUCUMBER
Less water, tiny seeds, and an appealing crunch

CORN AND CUCUMBER SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

To make this dish spicier, reserve the jalapeño seeds and add them to the lime vinaigrette. For the best results, use the freshest corn you can find and do not substitute frozen corn.

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 ears corn, kernels cut from cobs
- Salt and pepper
- 5 tablespoons lime juice (3 limes)
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ½ red onion, sliced thin
- 1 jalapeño chile, stemmed, halved, seeded, and sliced thin
- 1 English cucumber, halved lengthwise and sliced thin
- 3 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (¾ cup)
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves, torn

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add corn and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender and spotty brown, 7 to 9 minutes; transfer to large bowl. Refrigerate corn until completely cool, about 45 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, whisk lime juice, remaining 7 tablespoons oil, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Transfer ¼ cup lime vinaigrette to separate bowl and whisk in sour cream; set aside. Add onion and jalapeño to remaining lime vinaigrette; let sit while corn is cooling, at least 15 minutes.

3. Add cucumber and onion-jalapeño mixture (including vinaigrette) to bowl with corn and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste and transfer to serving platter. Drizzle with sour cream mixture. Sprinkle with feta and basil. Serve.

CORN AND CUCUMBER SALAD WITH RED BELL PEPPER AND CILANTRO

Add 1 red bell pepper, cut into ¼-inch pieces, to skillet with corn in step 1. Substitute 1 tablespoon minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce for jalapeño. Top salad with 1 ripe avocado, cut into ½-inch pieces, and substitute fresh cilantro leaves for basil.



Got more corn? Go to CooksCountry.com/huskgrilledcorn for our grilled corn recipe.

Braised Zucchini

We've all been scarred by slimy zucchini. We think it's time to heal.

by **Alli Berkey**

YOU CAN'T ESCAPE zucchini at the height of summer. The little green squashes (and some not so little) are piled high at the farmers' markets and supermarkets. If you haven't got it growing in your backyard, you've got a neighbor trying to unload the extra zukes as a "gift."

Unfortunately, more often than not, after dutiful prepping and cooking, zucchini shows up at the table slimy and dull. I wanted to rewrite this script so that the final scene featured a fresh and summery but still warm side dish of gently cooked zucchini that was filled with vibrant vegetable flavor—hold the slime.

After cooking through several recipes, I learned a few things. Lesson number one: Always choose small to medium zucchini (less than 8 ounces each) for the best flavor. Like many seeded vegetables, when zucchini grow too large, their flavor fades and their texture becomes mealy.

Lesson number two: Even with the right size zucchini, if the pieces you cut are too small or if you cook them for too long, the flavor all but disappears, and you've got nothing but sad, stewed chunks.

Lesson number three (and this is the good news): Both of these obstacles are easy to clear if you shop and cook carefully.

Most methods for braising vegetables call for cooking them through in a very small amount of liquid before or after you've browned them. In this case, I wanted a cooking liquid that would allow the natural flavor of zucchini to shine rather than cover it up. After auditioning chicken stock and vegetable stock, I settled on the easiest possible cooking liquid: water. I doctored it with a bit of olive oil for flavor, two sliced cloves of garlic for a bracing counterpoint, a couple of sprigs of basil for freshness, and just enough red pepper flakes to contribute a restrained prick of heat.

I experimented with different-size pieces of squash. I found that when cut too small (½-inch cubes), the zucchini would cook into flavorless mush way too quickly. And when cut too big, it would turn a sad, muddy green before it cooked through. Two-inch pieces proved perfect; after 8 minutes on the stovetop, they were tender but still held their structure.



The flavorful cooking liquid makes for a fresh, satisfying sauce.

Braised zucchini benefits from a couple of finishing touches. I introduced some halved cherry tomatoes to the skillet near the end of cooking, tossing them in for just the last minute or two so that they'd brighten in color and not release too much juice. And I served lemon wedges alongside; a spritz of lemon added a final burst of fruity freshness.

Vibrant, supersummery, and flavorful, this was a cooked zucchini dish that even squash haters could love. Served warm, it's perfect for al fresco midsummer suppers.

Next time the neighbors come around with armfuls of zucchini from their overproductive garden, maybe I won't hide in the basement.

BRAISED ZUCCHINI

Serves 4

Zucchini no larger than 8 ounces are best. Larger zucchini have more seeds and moisture and are blander. Stir with a rubber spatula because it's gentle on the zucchini, which has a tendency to break apart. Zucchini skin can be sandy, so scrub it well when washing.

- 4 zucchini (8 ounces each), quartered lengthwise and cut crosswise into 2-inch pieces**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ cup water**
- 2 sprigs fresh basil**
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced thin**
- Salt and pepper**
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- 3 ounces (½ cup) cherry tomatoes, halved**
- Lemon wedges**

1. Bring zucchini, oil, water, basil sprigs, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and pepper flakes to boil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium, cover, and simmer until zucchini is fork-tender, about 8 minutes, stirring with rubber spatula every 2 minutes.
2. Gently stir in tomatoes and cook, uncovered, until tomatoes are just softened, about 2 minutes. Discard basil sprigs. Transfer zucchini mixture to platter. Serve with lemon wedges.



THE AMERICAN TABLE

The good news for home gardeners is this: Zucchini are very easy to grow, and they thrive in many different climates and soil conditions. The bad news for gardeners is also this: Zucchini are very easy to grow. So easy, in fact, that come midsummer, backyard botanists across the nation find themselves faced with a surfeit of this vegetable that doesn't take well to canning or freezing. What to do with that bounty? Give it away, of course.

According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, August 8 is National Sneak Some Zucchini onto Your Neighbor's Porch Day. As writer Doreen G. Howard explains, "To celebrate it, you simply wait until the dead of night and quietly creep up to your neighbors' front door, leaving plenty of zucchini for them to enjoy."

Your other option is to let them grow, and grow they will. *Guinness World Records* lists the longest zucchini ever measured as 8 feet, 3 inches long, grown by Giovanni Scozzafava in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.

Cherry Streusel Bars

We wanted a three-layer cookie bar without three times as much work.

by **Katie Leaird**

EATING A BATCH of three-layer cookie bars can be a joy. But making a batch? Intimidating. Because really, does a baked good with triple the components yield a final product that is truly three times better than a standard dump-and-stir option? And would it take three times the work? After tasting a three-layer cherry streusel bar—featuring a crisp cookie base, a jammy filling, and a delicious streusel topping—I was determined to find out.

I started in the middle, with the cherry filling. I can imagine a similar three-layer bar with raspberry, apricot, or nearly any other kind of fruit, but I picked cherries for their multidimensional, sweet-tart flavor. The filling needed to be juicy but not runny; it needed to stay put in the bar. To start, I threw some pitted cherries into a saucepan with sugar and let them stew into a homemade jam, hoping to find just the right texture (I had to take into account the fact that the filling would also bake in the oven and would therefore thicken further). I boiled the jam down to my best guess and then waited for it to cool. And waited.

I couldn't risk melting the crust and sacrificing its structure by dumping boiling cherry liquid over it, but a saucepan full of hot, sugary jam takes its sweet time cooling down. As I waited, frustrated, I pondered whether I could bypass cooking the filling by using another cherry product.

There are many cherry products to choose from: frozen cherries, canned cherries, dried cherries, cherry liqueur, cherry preserves, cherry pie filling, and maraschino cherries. I tried them all, but the winning move was mixing chopped frozen cherries into jarred cherry preserves. With a squeeze of lemon for brightness, a pinch of salt, and a few drops of almond extract to deepen the flavor (almond and cherry are famously friendly), I had a delicious no-cook

cherry filling. To further simplify things, I threw it all together in the food processor, which took about 10 seconds.

On to the cookie base and streusel topping. The base ingredients are simple: flour, sugar, butter, and salt. Streusel ingredients are pretty much the same, so I decided to streamline the work. I made a big batch of crust in the food processor and set aside a portion of it as the beginning of my streusel before pressing the rest of the buttery crumbs into a baking pan. I stirred some oats and almonds into the reserved mixture for some crunch, added a little more sugar and butter, and . . . streusel.

I baked the crust on its own to ensure a crisp bottom. Then I spread the cherry filling over the still-warm crust and sprinkled the streusel over the top. In the end, I had three delicious layers with distinct flavors and textures, but I had made only one dough and hadn't cooked anything on the stovetop. Streamlined, yes. Fussy, no. Three times better? Absolutely.

CHERRY STREUSEL BARS

Makes twenty-four 2-inch squares

Measure the cherries while they are still frozen, and then transfer them to a paper towel-lined baking sheet to thaw. One 12-ounce jar of cherry preserves is more than enough preserves for this recipe.

CRUST

- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- ⅔ cup (4⅔ ounces) granulated sugar**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces and chilled**

CHERRY FILLING

- 2 cups (9 ounces) frozen sweet cherries, thawed**
- 1 cup cherry preserves**
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice**
- ¼ teaspoon almond extract**
- Pinch salt**

STREUSEL

- ½ cup (1½ ounces) old-fashioned rolled oats**
- ½ cup slivered almonds, chopped**
- ¼ cup packed (1¾ ounces) brown sugar**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces and softened**



A tiny bit of almond extract enhances the cherry flavor in these bars.

1. FOR THE CRUST: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 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, smoothing foil flush to pan. Spray foil lightly with vegetable oil spray.

2. Process flour, sugar, and salt in food processor until combined, about 5 seconds. Add butter and pulse until mixture resembles wet sand, about 15 pulses.

3. Transfer 1¼ cups dough to medium bowl and set aside. Transfer remaining dough to prepared pan and use your hands to evenly distribute it over bottom of pan (dough will be slightly dry). Using bottom of dry measuring cup, firmly press dough into even

layer. Bake until light golden brown, 16 to 18 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.

4. FOR THE CHERRY FILLING: Meanwhile, wipe processor bowl clean with paper towels. Pulse all ingredients in food processor until finely chopped, about 7 pulses; set aside.

5. FOR THE STREUSEL: Add oats, almonds, and sugar to reserved dough and toss to combine. Add butter and rub mixture between your fingers until butter is fully incorporated and mixture forms small clumps. Set aside streusel.

6. Transfer filling to pan and spread evenly over crust (crust needn't be cool). Sprinkle streusel evenly over filling (do not press streusel into filling). Bake until filling is bubbling and streusel is deep golden brown, 24 to 28 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Transfer pan to wire rack and let bars cool completely. Using foil overhang, lift bars out of pan. Cut into 24 squares and serve.

Banana-Chocolate Chip Snack Cake

Dense, moist banana bread is great. But tender, fluffy banana snack cake is something else again.

by **Cecelia Jenkins with Diane Unger**

WHEN I WAS growing up, snack cake was a one-layer affair cut into squares and packed into my lunchbox or ready to eat when I got home from school. It was simple to make, it didn't require decoration (aside from perhaps a smear of frosting), and—most important—I didn't need a special occasion to enjoy it. It was approachable and welcome anytime, whenever hunger struck.

I hadn't thought about snack cake in a while, but then a friend shared a recipe for banana snack cake from her trove of family recipes. Banana cake? Wasn't that just banana bread?

Easy answer: No. The ingredients are nearly the same, but the outcome is entirely different. A slice of banana bread has a dense, heavy crumb and a crusty exterior. Banana cake, on the other hand, is baked in a shallow cake pan rather than a loaf pan, and you don't eat a slice, you eat a piece. It is crustless and has a fluffier, more tender, less moist crumb than banana bread.

One of the biggest differences between the two lies in the fat. Banana bread recipes call for combining wet and dry ingredients by hand and often contain oil, which contributes to a denser texture. To achieve a lighter, cake-like crumb, I drew on many years of test kitchen knowledge and reached for a stick of butter and my stand mixer.

Beating a stick of softened butter with sugar, a process called creaming, incorporates more air into the mixture, which helps create the lighter structure a cake needs. Once the batter was light and fluffy, I added two large eggs, one at a time, mixing between additions; I then alternated adding the dry and wet ingredients, including 1 cup of mashed bananas (from two or three speckled bananas). The result was just the cakey texture I wanted.

About those mashed bananas: Ripeness proved critical to creating a strong banana flavor in the cake. Out of three batches of cake—one made with slightly green, underripe bananas; one made with speckled, ripe bananas; and one made with completely brown bananas—tasters noted that the under-ripe bananas yielded cake with bland, somewhat bitter banana flavor, whereas the other two cakes had strong banana flavor (see “Ripe Bananas Are Key”).

To really make my tasters happy, I added a cup of chocolate chips to the

mix. As the kitchen around me filled with the aroma of freshly baked banana cake, I was suddenly very popular. Tangy cream cheese frosting paired deliciously with the sweetness of the bananas, so I polled the eager crowd: To frost or not to frost? Their answer: This cake's a hit no matter how you slice it.

BANANA-CHOCOLATE CHIP SNACK CAKE *Serves 8*

Ripe bananas contain nearly three times as much sugar as unripened bananas. Don't use anything less than speckled bananas in this recipe, or your cake will be bland. If you like, serve this cake frosted with Cream Cheese Frosting (recipe follows). Be sure to let the cake cool completely before frosting.

- 2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- ¾ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- 1½ cups (10½ ounces) sugar**
- 2 large eggs**
- 1 cup mashed ripe bananas (2 to 3 bananas)**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- ½ cup whole milk**
- 1 cup (6 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips**

- 1.** Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour 8-inch square baking pan. Whisk flour, salt, and baking soda together in bowl.
- 2.** Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter and sugar on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, and beat until combined. Add bananas and vanilla and beat until incorporated.
- 3.** Reduce speed to low and add flour mixture in 3 additions, alternating with milk in 2 additions, scraping down bowl as needed. Using rubber spatula, stir in ½ cup chocolate chips. Transfer batter to prepared pan and smooth top with rubber spatula. Sprinkle remaining ½ cup chocolate chips evenly over top. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 45 to 50 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking.
- 4.** Let cake cool completely in pan on wire rack. Serve. (Cooled cake can be wrapped in plastic wrap and stored at room temperature for up to 2 days.)



A full cup of semisweet chips ensures the best chocolate flavor.

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Makes about 1 cup

Use softened cream cheese to avoid lumps in the finished frosting.

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- 1 cup (4 ounces) confectioners' sugar**
- 4 ounces cream cheese, cut into 4 pieces and softened**
- ¾ teaspoon vanilla extract**

Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add cream cheese, 1 piece at a time, beating after each addition until fully incorporated. Add vanilla and mix until no lumps remain.

Ripe Bananas Are Key

We recommend using ripe bananas for this recipe. Because bananas sweeten as they ripen, speckled bananas are sweeter than unspiced. To hasten their ripening, place bananas in a loosely closed paper bag. The bag will trap the ethylene gas produced by the fruit, which triggers ripening. Since ripe fruit emits the most ethylene, placing an already-ripe banana in the bag will further speed up the process.



Grilled Vegetable Salad

Too often vegetables come off the grill crunchy and scorched or watery and soggy.

Here's how to cut and cook them for perfectly tender, lightly charred results. **by Katie Leaird**

Prepping Vegetables and Herbs

TEST KITCHEN
TIPS FOR
PRODUCE



To loosen their skins, cover hot bell peppers with plastic wrap for 5 minutes.

Bell Peppers: Use Steam to Remove Skins

To make their skins easier to remove, place grilled bell peppers in a bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and let the bell peppers sit for 5 minutes. The steam created by the heat in the sealed bowl loosens the skins from the flesh, making them easier to separate. Slip the loosened skins off and discard.

Eggplant: Brush with Oil Last

Eggplants are filled with both air pockets and water, which means they can absorb large amounts of oil, resulting in a greasy mess. For this reason, we brush all the other vegetables with oil first and use only what is left to oil the eggplants.

Herbs: Chop Them Like a Pro

To chop fresh leafy herbs, some home cooks make thin, loose piles of leaves on their cutting boards and then run their knives back and forth over the piles. But this isn't the most efficient approach, and often the leaves are chopped inconsistently. Here's the best way to chop leafy herbs.



Gather the washed, dried leaves into a tight pile and hold them with your nonknife hand. Using your chef's knife in a rocking motion, slice the leaves thin, working your way through the pile. Turn the slices about 90 degrees, gather them tightly again, and repeat cutting to form small pieces.

Making Vinaigrette

Use the Right Ratio

Many modern recipes call for a 4:1 ratio of oil to acid (vinegar or citrus juice), but the test kitchen generally prefers the classic ratio of 3 parts oil to 1 part acid for a well-balanced, pleasantly vibrant flavor.

3:1
OIL VINEGAR

How Emulsification Works

Vinaigrette relies on the principle of emulsification. An emulsion is a combination of two liquids that don't ordinarily mix—for example, oil and an acidic liquid such as vinegar or lemon juice. The only way to mix them is to whisk strenuously so that one of the two ingredients breaks down into tiny droplets—eventually so tiny that they remain separated by the other liquid. The two liquids are now effectively one. Many vinaigrettes contain mustard, which acts as an emulsifying agent, helping the oil and vinegar combine into a unified sauce and stay that way.

Great vinaigrette starts with high-quality ingredients. Here are some of our favorites:

Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

A good extra-virgin olive oil will provide fresh, fruity flavor to a vinaigrette, but since olives are highly perishable, the oil can degrade quickly. It's important to seek out a reputable product.



California Olive Ranch Extra-Virgin Olive Oil

(\$9.99 for a 500 ml bottle) Our favorite supermarket extra-virgin olive oil is "fruity" with a "complex finish." In fact, its flavor rivaled that of our favorite high-end extra-virgin olive oil.

Dijon Mustard

Mustard helps emulsify a vinaigrette. The best Dijon versions are creamy, with more body than conventional yellow mustard, and pack a good amount of heat.



Trois Petits Cochons Moutarde de Dijon

(\$6.99 for a 7-ounce jar) This Dijon's heat "kicks in gradually" and "builds."



Maille Dijon Originale

(\$4.49 for a 7.5-ounce jar) This "well-rounded" Dijon was "fairly spicy but not too sharp."

Ten Simple Steps



1. Make vinaigrette

Whisk lemon juice, mustard, garlic, salt, and pepper together in large bowl. Slowly whisk in oil, then stir in basil.

Why? Adding mustard to the mixture and slowly whisking in the oil emulsifies the vinaigrette so that it won't break.



2. Prep bell peppers

Slice off tops and bottoms of bell peppers and remove cores. Make slit down 1 side of each bell pepper, then press flat into 1 strip, removing ribs and remaining seeds as needed. Halve strips crosswise.

Why? Long, flat strips are easy to handle on the grill.



3. Score eggplant and zucchini

Using sharp paring knife, cut ½ inch crosshatch pattern in flesh of eggplant and zucchini, being careful not to cut through skin.

Why? Cutting through the flesh of these watery vegetables helps them release excess moisture during grilling.



4. Keep onions intact

Push toothpick horizontally through each onion round.

Why? The toothpicks keep the onion rounds intact, making them easier to flip.



5. Oil and season vegetables

Brush vegetables with oil. Season with salt and pepper.

Why? A generous coating of oil ensures that the vegetables won't stick to the cooking grate. Seasoning the vegetables well ensures a flavorful salad.



GRILLED VEGETABLE SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

Serve as a side dish to grilled meats and fish; with grilled pita as a salad course; or with hard-cooked eggs, olives, and premium canned tuna as a light lunch.

VINAIGRETTE

- 1 **tablespoon lemon juice**
- 2 **teaspoons Dijon mustard**
- 1 **garlic clove, minced**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ **teaspoon salt**
- $\frac{1}{8}$ **teaspoon pepper**
- 3 **tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 **tablespoons chopped fresh basil, mint, chives, or parsley**

VEGETABLES

- 2 **red bell peppers**
- 1 **eggplant, halved lengthwise**
- 1 **zucchini (8 to 10 ounces), halved lengthwise**
- 1 **red onion, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick rounds**
- 4 **plum tomatoes, cored and halved lengthwise**
- 3 **tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- Salt and pepper**

1. **FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:** Whisk lemon juice, mustard, garlic, salt, and pepper together in large bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in oil. Stir in basil and set aside.
2. **FOR THE VEGETABLES:** Slice $\frac{1}{4}$ inch off tops and bottoms of bell peppers and remove cores. Make slit down 1 side of each bell pepper, then press flat into 1 long strip, removing ribs and remaining seeds with knife as needed. Cut strips in half crosswise (you should have 4 bell pepper pieces).

3. Using sharp paring knife, cut $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch crosshatch pattern in flesh of eggplant and zucchini, being careful to cut down to but not through skin. Push toothpick horizontally through each onion round to keep rings intact while grilling. Brush tomatoes, bell peppers, zucchini, and onion all over with oil, then brush eggplant with remaining oil (it will absorb more oil than other vegetables). Season vegetables with salt and pepper.

4A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

4B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium-high.

5. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place vegetables on cooking grate, cut sides down, and cook until skins of bell peppers, eggplant, and tomatoes are well browned and interiors of eggplant and zucchini are tender, 10 to 16 minutes, flipping and moving vegetables as necessary to ensure even cooking and transferring vegetables to baking sheet as they finish cooking. Place bell peppers in bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let steam to loosen skins, about 5 minutes.

6. When cool enough to handle, peel bell peppers and tomatoes, discarding skins. Using spoon, scoop eggplant flesh out of skin; discard skin. Chop all vegetables into 1-inch pieces, transfer to bowl with vinaigrette, and toss to coat. Serve warm or at room temperature.



6. Prepare grill

Pour single layer of hot coals into charcoal grill or turn all burners of gas grill to high.

Why? A hot grill imparts flavorful char to vegetables quickly and ensures that they won't stick to the cooking grate.



7. Grill cut side down

Arrange vegetables on cooking grate with their cut sides facing down and cook, turning occasionally, until well browned and tender.

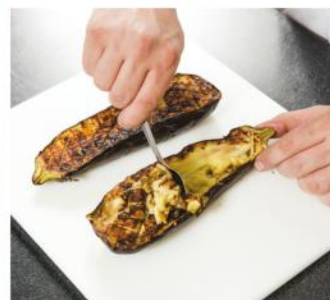
Why? Grilling cut side down browns the flesh first. Finish on the skin side, which can withstand longer exposure to heat.



8. Peel away skins

When tomatoes and bell peppers are cool, remove charred skins.

Why? Blistering the skins makes removing them easier. Simply slip the grilled tomato skins off with your fingers. Use our steam method (see "Prepping Vegetables and Herbs") for the bell peppers.



9. Scoop eggplant

Using spoon, scoop eggplant flesh out of skin.

Why? The eggplant flesh becomes tender during grilling, but the skin toughens. Discard the charred skin and use only the soft eggplant flesh.



10. Cut and toss

Chop all vegetables into 1-inch pieces, transfer to bowl with vinaigrette, and toss to coat.

Why? Dressing the vegetables soon after they come off the grill causes them to absorb more vinaigrette.

Chicken with Couscous and Carrots

Our goal: Juicy chicken plus vegetables and starch, all in one skillet. *by Cecelia Jenkins*

THE BEST SUMMERTIME meals are on the lighter side, but all too often “lighter” means no starch. This sounds fine in theory—a piece of chicken served alongside a bunch of vegetables can be gorgeous—but without a starchy component to round out the meal, I’m often left wanting more. I set out to create a simple skillet chicken supper that cut a bright flavor profile but was filling and complete, too.

I grabbed a skillet and got to work. After searing eight chicken thighs on both sides to maximize the flavorful browned bits in my skillet (my tasters preferred the richer flavor of chicken thighs to that of breasts), I moved them to a plate and discarded the excess fat. Then I added an onion and a few handfuls of sliced carrots; the vegetables contributed lovely sweet-savory flavors, and their moisture helped me release the browned bits from the skillet into the dish. Next I added aromatic garlic and earthy paprika and cumin, followed by 2 cups of water and 1 cup of dry couscous.

Couscous (often mistaken for a grain because of its tiny size) is actually a pasta made from semolina. Traditionally used as a sauce absorber beneath North African stews and braises, it cooks in a fraction of the time required for rice, potatoes, or larger pasta shapes. After placing the chicken atop the other ingredients, I covered the skillet and slid it into the oven for a few minutes so the couscous could absorb all the liquid and the chicken could cook through.

One pitfall of couscous: With too much liquid, it can turn gummy. Lifting the lid to see a soupy mess, I immediately knew that 2 cups of water (plus the juices released from the chicken thighs) was too much. I tried 1 cup—still too much. I scaled back the water to just ½ cup, but this resulted in some stray crunchy bits of couscous. Three-quarters of a cup of water turned out to be the perfect amount in which to cook the couscous so that once I had taken it out of the oven, I could fluff it with a fork into separate “grains” before adding some last-minute lemon juice to brighten it.

For a bit of textural interest, I stirred in a can of drained and rinsed chickpeas; they added a touch of creaminess to the dish. With a handful of fresh parsley tossed in as a finishing touch, I had a satisfying, superflavorful one-pot meal.



Plenty of minced parsley and a healthy dose of lemon juice give this dish a final lift.



What Is Couscous?

Although it is often mistaken for a grain because of its tiny, granular shape, couscous is, in fact, a pasta made of durum semolina—the same wheat flour used to make Italian pasta. Even in its homeland of North Africa, couscous is rarely made from scratch anymore; the laborious process of dampening semolina and then rolling it gently beneath your fingertips until it forms tiny balls is too laborious. Instead, most cooks turn to packaged, precooked couscous that simply needs to be rehydrated in hot water or broth.

One-Pan Process

Once the chicken has been browned and set aside, we cook carrots and onion with aromatics and spices in the residual fat. Chickpeas, water, and couscous are added, and then the chicken is returned to the skillet (along with any accumulated juices) to cook through.



NORTH AFRICAN FLAVORS
We cook the vegetables in a skillet until they're softened before adding minced garlic, paprika, and ground cumin.

ONE-PAN CHICKEN WITH COUSCOUS AND CARROTS

Serves 4
The chicken will crowd the skillet in step 2 but, if left undisturbed, will still brown well. Don't worry if the skillet lid does not fit snugly in step 4; it will still trap enough heat.

- 8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed**
- Salt and pepper**
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil**
- 1 pound carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch lengths, thin pieces halved lengthwise, thick pieces quartered lengthwise**
- 1 onion, chopped**
- 4 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 teaspoon paprika**
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin**
- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed**
- ¾ cup water**
- 1 cup couscous**
- ⅓ cup minced fresh parsley**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice, plus wedges for serving**

- 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.
- 2.** Heat oil in 12-inch oven-safe skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add chicken, skin side down, and cook until skin is crispy and golden, 7 to 9 minutes. Flip chicken and continue to cook until golden on second side, 7 to 9 minutes longer. Transfer chicken to plate, skin side up.
- 3.** Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet, then heat over medium heat until shimmering. Add carrots, onion, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until onions are softened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic, paprika, and cumin and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in chickpeas and water and bring to boil, scraping up any browned bits.
- 4.** Stir in couscous, scraping down any that sticks to sides of skillet. Return chicken, skin side up, and any accumulated juices to skillet, pressing chicken into couscous mixture. Cover, transfer to oven, and bake until chicken registers 175 degrees, about 18 minutes.
- 5.** Transfer chicken to clean plate. Add parsley and lemon juice to couscous mixture and fluff with fork. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Return chicken to skillet, skin side up. Serve with lemon wedges.

Pineapple Salsas

To cut down on the cutting, we leaned on the food processor. **by Ashley Moore**

ON A RECENT steamy summer afternoon at a local restaurant, a friend ordered a fruity salsa. Tangy, slightly spicy, a bit sweet, and totally refreshing—it contained pineapple, jalapeño, red onion, lime juice, and cilantro—the salsa collected perfectly in the curve of a tortilla chip, a refreshing bite that cooled me down even as it pricked my tongue with mild peppery heat. I decided to make my own at home.

I started with a few existing recipes. Most used sturdy pineapple as a base, a flavorful choice that I loved, so I started by dicing pineapple into ¼-inch pieces. I'm pretty handy with a chef's knife, but by the time I'd chopped the pineapple, red onion, and other salsa ingredients, my hand hurt. So for my next round I ditched my knife and turned to my food processor.

I now needed only to cut the fruit and vegetables into rough chunks. I tossed some pineapple pieces, a big handful of cilantro leaves, some jalapeño slices, a roughly chopped red onion, lime juice, and salt and pepper into the processor and pulsed it all together. The result? Watery and way too oniony.

I reduced the amount of onion and tried again. This salsa was more balanced but still too wet. A colleague wondered whether adding the lime juice and salt for that initial round of processing was causing the fruit to break down and exude too much liquid; she recommended waiting until everything else was chopped up before adding the lime and salt. She was right: Waiting kept the salsa from turning too watery.

After a few more flavor tweaks, my sweet-hot, chip-ready pineapple salsa was exactly what I wanted and was ripe for variations. For my first variation, I replaced the cilantro with mint and stirred in some diced cucumber with the wet ingredients. To add sweetness to another version, I incorporated chunks of ripe mango along with mild chives. A third salsa was made both savory and colorful by the addition of chopped roasted red peppers. For my final iteration, I substituted fresh basil for the cilantro and half a habanero for the jalapeño and, once everything was processed, stirred in some diced watermelon. (Processing the watermelon made things much too runny.)

My salsas were a hit and not just on chips: I spotted coworkers spooning them over chicken breasts, into a fish taco, and even atop a turkey burger.

PINEAPPLE SALSA

Makes about 2 cups

Do not use canned pineapple in this recipe. For a spicier salsa, reserve and add the jalapeño seeds.

- 2 cups (12 ounces) 1-inch pineapple pieces**
- 3 jalapeño chiles, stemmed, seeded, and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves**
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped red onion**
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled**
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice**
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**

Pulse pineapple, jalapeños, cilantro, onion, and garlic in food processor until coarsely chopped, about 6 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Transfer to serving bowl. Stir in lime juice, oil, salt, and pepper. Serve.

PINEAPPLE-CUCUMBER SALSA

Decrease pineapple to 1½ cups.

Substitute ½ cup fresh mint leaves for cilantro. Add 1 cup (6 ounces) ¼-inch English cucumber pieces to bowl with lime juice.

PINEAPPLE-MANGO SALSA

Decrease pineapple to 1½ cups.

Substitute ¼ cup chopped fresh chives for cilantro. Add 1½ cups (9 ounces) 1-inch mango pieces to processor with pineapple.

PINEAPPLE-ROASTED RED PEPPER SALSA

Add ¼ cup rinsed and patted dry jarred roasted red peppers to processor with pineapple.

PINEAPPLE-WATERMELON SALSA

Decrease pineapple to 1½ cups. Substitute ½ habanero chile for jalapeños and ½ cup fresh basil leaves for cilantro. Add 1 cup (8 ounces) ¼-inch watermelon pieces to salsa with lime juice.



Above: the makings of Pineapple Salsa before being processed. Below, clockwise from top left: Pineapple-Cucumber Salsa, Pineapple-Mango Salsa, Pineapple-Roasted Red Pepper Salsa, Pineapple-Watermelon Salsa.



These salsas are delicious on tacos. Go to CooksCountry.com/fishtacos for our California Fish Tacos recipe.

Ropa Vieja

Some dishes need extensive adaptations to work in a slow cooker. This one is tailor-made for it.

by Matthew Fairman

ROPA VIEJA, CUBA'S national dish and a favorite in Cuban neighborhoods throughout the United States, is elemental and beautifully simple—a beefy braise of flank steak in a sauce that balances tomato and white wine with sweet peppers, onions, and garlic. Cumin and oregano add warmth while briny olives and bright vinegar cut the richness of the meat and make the flavors pop. Served over rice, it's a comforting meal.

The backstory goes like this: A man, too broke to afford meat for his family, stirred some old clothes (“ropa vieja” in Spanish) into a pot of broth. He then prayed over the pot and later, after some divine assistance, ladled out a rich stew of beef and vegetables. It's a fitting story for a satisfying dish made with humble ingredients.

Traditional recipes require that you cut up and sauté vegetables twice, once for a homemade beef broth and once for the finished stew. The method takes time and the results are worth it, but I wanted an easy recipe that was ready when I came home and still had the complexity of old-school versions. So I turned to the slow cooker.

A few tests of existing recipes identified my top problems: meat that was too difficult to shred and a final stew that was too soupy. Choosing the cut of beef was easy: Flank steak, the traditional choice, won out over chuck (greasy and hard to shred), skirt (mushy after long cooking), and brisket (a little fibrous and not always easy to find). Flank, with its lean, large muscle fibers all running in one direction, not only was the easiest cut to shred but also stood up best to long, slow cooking without turning greasy.

I set out to address the other issue: soupiness. The versions I'd tested produced a watery broth rather than a rich stew. So I ditched the beef broth altogether—in the closed environment of the slow cooker, I didn't need the added liquid. Soy sauce and tomato



A quarter-cup of tomato paste adds deep flavor and color to this Cuban American favorite.

paste added back the savoriness I'd lost. But the dish still had too much liquid.

Traditionally, ropa vieja gets its complex sweetness from a *sofrito*—a mixture of onions, peppers, garlic, and tomato—that is cooked down and concentrated. I'd been adding the raw sofrito ingredients straight into the slow cooker, but it was clear they were exuding too much liquid. So I tried making a sped-up version of a sofrito by sautéing the vegetables and aromatics for just 10 minutes. Doing so not only drove off that excess moisture but also began to caramelize and faintly sweeten the vegetables. I added them to the meat and other ingredients.

When I lifted the lid 5 hours later, I was heartened by the heady aroma. The shredded beef was tender; the sauce that clung to it was intricate and substantial. My teammates loved it. The old clothes were transformed.

Speedy Sofrito



Cubans cook a *sofrito*—onions, peppers, garlic, tomato—over a low flame for a long time to evaporate moisture and concentrate flavor. We shorten the process by sautéing the mixture quickly in a skillet until it softens and browns. We then transfer it to the slow cooker to simmer with the meat.

SLOW-COOKER ROPA VIEJA

Serves 4 to 6

The contents of the slow cooker will look dry at the start, but the ingredients will release moisture after a couple of hours of cooking. Our favorite tomato paste is from Goya. Serve this dish with steamed white rice.

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 onions, halved and sliced thin
- 2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and sliced into ½-inch-wide strips
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 (2-pound) flank steak, trimmed and cut crosswise against grain into 4 equal pieces
- ¾ cup pitted green olives, sliced
- 1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar

1. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onions and bell peppers and cook, covered, until softened and spotty brown, 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Push vegetables to sides of skillet. Add tomato paste, garlic, cumin, oregano, and ½ teaspoon salt to center and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir vegetables into tomato paste mixture. Add wine and cook until nearly evaporated, about 2 minutes. Transfer vegetable mixture, soy sauce, and bay leaves to slow cooker. Season steak with salt and pepper and nestle into vegetable mixture. Cover and cook until meat is very tender, 6 to 7 hours on low or 5 to 6 hours on high.
3. Transfer steak to cutting board. Discard bay leaves. Using 2 forks, shred steak into bite-size pieces, then return it to slow cooker. Stir in olives and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

No Liquid Needed

Most slow-cooker recipes call for added liquid, but our version doesn't need any. As the meat cooks, it will exude plenty of liquid, producing a saucy dish.



Chicken Florentine

This buffet-line favorite was due to be freshened up. Not to mention sped up.

by **Alli Berkey**

HIT THE BUFFET at any given fund-raiser or corporate function and you'll likely run into chicken Florentine. A riff on cordon bleu or other chicken breast dishes, this one features spinach in a mild cream-and-Parmesan sauce—sometimes stuffed inside, sometimes stacked on top. But for all its potential, chicken Florentine so often disappoints: dry chicken, soggy spinach, and a stodgy sauce. I love each of these three components individually, so I knew I could make this dish better and do it faster—and scale it back to serve just two people.

My first decision was to nix stuffing the breasts: too much work for a weeknight supper. I started with spinach, which, as anyone who's recently shopped for spinach knows, isn't as straightforward as it sounds. After sampling curly-leaf spinach, frozen spinach, and bagged baby spinach, my tasters and I decided to stick with baby spinach for its delicate texture. A simple sauté in a large skillet with a bit of oil and salt was all it needed. I transferred it to a colander to drain—no need to hang on to the grassy-tasting runoff. On to the chicken.

Because I wanted a speedy supper, I gently pounded two chicken breasts ½ inch thick. I knew these thin cutlets would cook quickly in the same skillet I'd used for the spinach (wiped clean with a paper towel). About 4 minutes on each side over medium-high heat gave me golden-brown cutlets without drying them out. The bonus of a relatively thin cut? More browning and more flavor. I set the chicken aside under an aluminum foil tent to stay warm while I made my sauce.

I returned the skillet to the heat, eyeing the browned bits left behind by the chicken; I knew that they'd add savory depth to the sauce. After quickly cooking some garlic and a shallot, I deglazed the pan with chicken broth, scraping up the browned bits. Next came heavy cream, which I whisked in before bringing it all to a simmer to reduce. After 10 minutes, I removed the skillet from the heat, whisked in 2 tablespoons of Parmesan cheese (I'd add a bit more later for garnish), and hit the mixture with some lemon juice and zest for vibrancy. I placed the chicken on plates, whisked the accumulated juices into the sauce, tasted it for seasoning, and returned the spinach to

the sauce to warm through. I covered the chicken with the saucy spinach, sprinkled on a little more Parmesan, and rang the dinner bell.

Bad buffet food? No more. This redo was better, and faster, than that.

CHICKEN FLORENTINE FOR TWO

Draining the wilted spinach in a colander rids it of excess moisture that would water down the sauce.

- 2 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts**
- Salt and pepper**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 6 ounces (6 cups) baby spinach**
- 1 small shallot, minced**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- ½ cup chicken broth**
- ½ cup heavy cream**
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese**
- ¼ teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 teaspoon juice**

1. Place chicken between 2 sheets of plastic wrap and pound to even ½-inch thickness. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper; set aside.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add spinach and ⅛ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until wilted, about 2 minutes. Transfer spinach to colander set in sink and allow any excess liquid to drain off. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels.

3. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium heat until just smoking. Cook until chicken is golden brown and registers 160 degrees, about 6 minutes per side. Transfer chicken to plate and tent with aluminum foil.

4. Add shallot and garlic to skillet and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Whisk in broth and cream, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to boil. Cook until reduced to about ⅓ cup, about 7 minutes. Off heat, stir in 2 tablespoons Parmesan and lemon zest and juice.

5. Transfer chicken to individual plates and stir any accumulated chicken juices into sauce. Season sauce with salt and pepper to taste. Stir spinach into sauce to warm through. Top chicken with spinach and sauce and sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons Parmesan. Serve.



A bit of lemon—juice and zest—adds a light note to this deeply flavorful dish for two.



BACKSTORY

Why do we use the term “Florentine” to describe dishes that feature spinach (eggs Florentine and chicken Florentine quickly come to mind)? Legend suggests it's a carryover from the 16th century, when Catherine de' Medici, an Italian noblewoman from Florence, married Henry II of France and moved to Paris.

What's in a name? Just a bit of spinach.

There, she overhauled the royal kitchen, installing her own Italian cooks and refining the traditional court menus to suit her tastes.

Among Catherine's favorite ingredients was spinach. Though it was already widely used in France, she heightened its popularity, and many spinach-based dishes have since been named “Florentine” to indicate Catherine's, and Florence's, influence.

Paring Knives

For precision cuts, call on the (cheap) little guy.

by Hannah Crowley



Our winner hulled strawberries with ease.

8 Knives 8 Tests

1. Test initial sharpness by slicing copy paper
2. Slice cheddar cheese
3. Peel and slice fresh ginger
4. Peel, quarter, and core apples
5. Section oranges
6. Hull strawberries
7. Have multiple users test and evaluate
8. Test final sharpness by slicing copy paper

A GOOD PARING knife is a small but mighty addition to any knife collection. We choose this diminutive blade over a chef's knife for three primary tasks where control is paramount. One: poking things without stabbing too widely or deeply, as when scoring chicken skin to help the fat render, piercing boiled potatoes to gauge doneness, or nipping into salmon fillets to see if they're cooked through. Two: incisions, such as splitting open dates to fill with blue cheese for our Devils on Horseback, slicing pockets into pork chops to stuff them with herbs and cheese, hulling strawberries, or coring tomatoes. Three: peeling fruits and vegetables such as apples, oranges, ginger, or stubborn celery root.

To find the best paring knife, we tested eight models priced from \$8.76 to \$49.95, including our previous winner from Wüsthof and our previous Best Buy from Victorinox. We limited our testing to knives with blades that were between 3 and 4 inches long, as

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Victorinox

Swiss Army Fibrox Pro 3¼" Spear Point Paring Knife
Model: 47600 or 40600, depending on packaging **Price:** \$9.47
Weight: 17.52 g
Usable Blade Length: 3.25 in
Spine Thickness: 1.12 mm



CRITERIA

Comfort ★★½
Sharpness ★★★
Agility ★★★

This knife was "superadepth"; its sharp, flexible blade nimbly hugged curves, so we could surgically remove peels or cores without plunging too deeply. It was the lightest knife we tested, with a slim handle that a few testers found insubstantial but most praised for its ability to disappear in your palm and become an extension of your hand: "There's no disconnect between my brain and the blade."

Winning Traits:

- Sharp
- Lightweight
- Slightly flexible blade
- Comfortable, secure handle
- Blade between 3 and 3.25 inches long
- Spine thickness of about 1.3 millimeters or less

RECOMMENDED

Wüsthof

Classic 3½" Paring Knife
Model: 4066-7/09 **Price:** \$39.99
Weight: 61.98 g
Usable Blade Length: 3.25 in
Spine Thickness: 1.59 mm



Comfort ★★★
Sharpness ★★½
Agility ★★½

Zwilling J.A. Henckels

Four Star 3" Paring Knife
Model: 31070-083 **Price:** \$49.95
Weight: 44.79 g
Usable Blade Length: 3 in
Spine Thickness: 1.10 mm



Comfort ★★½
Sharpness ★★★
Agility ★★½

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

OXO Good Grips

Pro 3.5" Paring Knife
Model: 11191100
Price: \$11.46
Weight: 69.25 g

KitchenAid

Professional
 3½" Paring Knife
Model: KKFTR3PRWM
Price: \$44.84
Weight: 74.01 g

Mercer Culinary

Millennia 3"
 Slim Paring Knife
Model: M23900P
Price: \$8.76
Weight: 28.16 g

Dexter Russell

Sani-Safe 3¼"
 Cook's Style
 Paring Knife
Model: 15303 S104
Price: \$9.20
Weight: 31.44 g

Shun Sora

Paring Knife
Model: VB0700
Price: \$31.95
Weight: 58.36 g

we knew from past testing that shorter blades can't reach through the food and longer blades are difficult to control.

While all the knives we tested were at least decent, we did find an awesome new favorite. But I'd bet you \$100.00 that if you stopped strangers on the street and asked them to choose one of the knives we tested to take home, they would choose the wrong one. That's because—there's no other way to say it—our winning paring knife looks cheap. And it is cheap, selling for less than \$10.00. It's light and small with a plastic handle and none of the heft, snazzy looks, or authoritative air some of the other knives have. But it was the best performer nonetheless.

What separated this small, unassuming blade from the pack? For one, the slight, no-frills plastic handle was comfortable, a quality that might be more important for a paring knife than for any other knife. That's because, unlike chef's knives, paring knives are often used in the air, off a cutting board: You

hold a strawberry in one hand and hull it with the knife held in your other hand. Thus, using a paring knife often requires the user to cut in different directions on different planes, swerving around, say, bumps on a piece of ginger root or the curved exterior of an orange. When we made these cuts with heavier paring knives or with those that had larger handles, our hands got tired. Fatigue wasn't an issue with our light, slim winner.

We also liked its blade, which was sharp and felt particularly smooth in use: "I'm not pushing, just guiding," said one tester. All the knives were sharp out of the box; a few were less so at the end of testing, possibly due to the lower quality of their metal. Sharp knives are easy to work with and safe—the risk of injury increases when using a dull blade because you have to push harder.

Flexibility was important. With a chef's knife a firm, rigid blade inspires confidence, but with paring knives you want some flex so the blade can worm



Go to CooksCountry.com/july17 to read the full story and see the expanded testing chart.

its way into tight spaces or conform to curves for cleaner cuts. Knives with stiffer blades were harder to turn and took off a bit more fruit with their peels.

Spine thickness also impacted our preferences. The spine is the top of the blade, opposite the sharp edge. When peeling apples and oranges, we noticed that knives with thicker spines, around 1.5 millimeters, felt duller because we had to pull more metal through the fruit than we did with blades with slimmer spines of about 1.3 millimeters or less. Finally, we preferred knives with pointy tips. One knife had a notably dull, rounded tip, and it cored strawberries like a shovel.

The knife from Victorinox edged out the competition to take the top spot. "I think it's giving me better knife skills," said one tester. What more could you ask for?

Bottled Barbecue Sauce

Last year Americans spent more than \$700 million on supermarket barbecue sauce. Did any of those bottled sauces earn a spot on our grocery list? *by Emily Phares*

THE BIRTHPLACE OF barbecue sauce is shrouded in mystery—one theory is that Christopher Columbus discovered a version in the Caribbean during his travels. Regardless of its origin, this centuries-old condiment is now an American staple. Today there are many styles of barbecue sauce, each with its own regional riff, but the most ubiquitous of the bunch hails from Kansas City. Most supermarket sauces are modeled after this thick, sweet, and tangy tomato-based style.

Since we last tasted supermarket barbecue sauces, our former favorite product, Bull's-Eye Original BBQ Sauce, changed its recipe to include high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) instead of sugar. So we rounded up the seven top-selling national barbecue sauces, including the new version of Bull's-Eye, and tasted again to see how the supermarket sauces stacked up. We like our bottled sauce to be versatile, so we sampled each sauce plain, stirred into pulled pork, and as a dip for chicken fingers.

Sweetness had a big impact on our preferences. The sauces we fully recommend all list either HFCS or cane sugar as their primary ingredient, and the two products with the most sugar (each with 16 grams per 2-tablespoon serving) both landed in that category. The two sauces with the least sugar (one with only 4 grams per 2-tablespoon serving) dropped to the bottom

THE AMERICAN TABLE

Styles of American barbecue sauce vary widely not just by region but also by city, neighborhood, or even from house to house. But while sauce aficionados in Kansas City might take umbrage, most Americans, and certainly most national retailers, associate “Kansas City style” with the sweet, smoky, tomato-based style of barbecue sauce commonly sold in supermarkets. Why? Some point to the rise of KC Masterpiece Original Barbecue Sauce, which in the 1980s became a top-selling supermarket barbecue sauce across the country. Other companies followed suit, creating similar sauces that customers would find familiar while tweaking minor flavor notes (spiciness or smokiness, for example) to stand apart.

of our rankings. However, while the sauces with the most sugar scored well, neither one was our winner, as the true sweet spot was a slightly lower sugar level. Our winner had 11 grams of sugar per serving, about 30 percent less than the runner-up.

We wondered if the type of sugar played a role in determining which sauces we liked best. To find out, we contacted Dr. Jean-Xavier Guinard, a sensory scientist in the University of California–Davis’s Food Science and Technology department. We asked Dr. Guinard if some sugar sources—such as HFCS, the main sweetener in more than half the products—taste inherently sweeter than others. He explained that different sweeteners do have different potencies, but the intensity of what we taste is usually a reflection of the volume of sweetener and not the type. Overall, tasters didn’t prefer one sugar source to another—our winning product used HFCS as its primary sweetener, whereas the runner-up used cane sugar.

Aside from preferring moderate sweetness, our tasters liked sauces that had a pronounced tomato flavor as well as smoke, spice, and tang. In other words, they liked sauces that were complex and balanced rather than having one dominant flavor. All seven products contained tomato in some form, either paste or puree, but there was no clear reason why some sauces tasted more “tomato-forward.” Products that ranked lower in tomato flavor played up smoke and spice instead and weren’t as well-rounded.

Consistency was also important. Products ranged from watery to gelatinous, with most tasters preferring a middle-of-the-road ketchupy thickness. Our least favorite barbecue sauce was runny and thin; water was its first ingredient. This product walloped us with tomato but skimmed significantly on sugar; the resulting lack of sweetness was another reason it finished in last place.

In the end, our winner once again was the aptly named Bull's-Eye Original BBQ Sauce. This moderately sweet, tomatoey sauce offered just enough spice and smoky, producing a well-balanced medley of flavors and exhibiting a texture that was neither too thick nor too thin. It will remain our go-to bottled sauce.

RECOMMENDED

Bull's-Eye
Original BBQ Sauce
Price: \$2.59 for 18 oz
(\$0.14 per oz)
Sugars: 11 g

Our Favorite



TASTERS' NOTES

This “all-purpose” product won over tasters with its “balanced sweetness,” “tomatoey” flavor, “subtle smoke,” and “nice tang,” all “without any of the flavors overwhelming each other.” This “straightforward” barbecue sauce was “immediately pleasing to the palate” and “not as gloppy” as some others.

Heinz
Classic Sweet & Thick BBQ Sauce
Price: \$2.79 for 21.4 oz
(\$0.13 per oz)
Sugars: 16 g



Though some tasters found this product “a tad too sweet,” others enjoyed this “bold” barbecue sauce’s “very sweet” and “peppery” flavor combo, as well as the “bit of tang” and “nice smoky aftertaste.” This “viscous” product’s “smooth” texture and “addictive flavor” led one taster to declare, “The more I eat, the more I like it.”

Sweet Baby Ray's
Barbecue Sauce
Price: \$2.69 for 18 oz
(\$0.15 per oz)
Sugars: 16 g



This pleasantly “sugary” and “robust” product’s “instant hit of flavor” and “tangy bite” added up to “pretty perfect” flavor for some tasters, even though it seemed “supersweet” to others. This product’s “ketchupy” texture made it an “excellent barbecue sauce for dipping” while the “good spiciness” lent a “touch of heat.”

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

KC Masterpiece
Original Barbecue Sauce
Price: \$1.69 for 18 oz
(\$0.09 per oz)
Sugars: 12 g



Most tasters enjoyed this product’s “pleasantly smoky” and “supersweet” flavor; its “good cling” and “thick” texture further won over tasters. A few took issue with the sauce’s “unassuming” taste, saying the flavor was “too weak” and “needed a little more of a kick.”

Kraft
Original Barbecue Sauce & Dip
Price: \$1.99 for 18 oz
(\$0.11 per oz)
Sugars: 13 g



This “candy-like” sauce’s “unique flavor” reminded tasters of “pumpkin-spiced barbecue” and “roasted fruit.” Even though this “very sweet” product was overwhelming for some and the “almost plummy” flavor “may not be mainstream enough,” the sauce was lauded for its “nice heat” and “hint of smoke.”

Jack Daniel's
Original No. 7 Recipe Barbecue Sauce
Price: \$2.99 for 19 oz
(\$0.16 per oz)
Sugars: 9 g



“It tastes exactly like a campfire,” noted one taster, describing this product’s “woody” and “liquid smoke” flavor. The “deep and smoky” sauce was “delicious,” “pure barbecue flavor” to some, but others found it “artificial” and thought this “meaty and savory” sauce “could use a pinch more sweetness.”

NOT RECOMMENDED

Stubb's
Original Legendary Bar-B-Q Sauce
Price: \$4.49 for 18 oz
(\$0.25 per oz)
Sugars: 4 g



Tasters likened this Texas-style (rather than Kansas City-style) product to “spicy, watery ketchup” that “was not sweet at all.” The “tart” and “sour” flavor reminded one taster of “old tomato puree,” while others took issue with the “metallic aftertaste” and “very thin” texture.



Go to CooksCountry.com/july17 to read the full story and see the expanded tasting chart.

Sugar amounts based on 2-tablespoon serving size.

Easy Blueberry Cobbler



Dessert is never a tough sell for my kids. Fresh fruit, on the other hand, can be hit or miss. Luckily we've reached a compromise with this fresh blueberry "cobbler," passed on from a family friend.

—BRYAN ROOF

Executive food editor and Cook's Country TV presenter

EASY BLUEBERRY COBBLER

Serves 8 to 10

Serve with vanilla ice cream.

- 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk**
- 1¼ cups (6 ounces) self-rising flour**
- ½ cup whole milk**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**
- 10 ounces (2 cups) blueberries**
- ¼ cup (1¾ ounces) sugar**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Whisk condensed milk, flour, milk, and melted butter together in bowl. Pour batter into prepared baking dish. Sprinkle blueberries and sugar evenly over surface.
2. Bake until deep golden brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, about 35 minutes. Transfer cobbler to wire rack; let cool for 10 minutes. Serve warm.



We're celebrating the 10th season of Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen, which airs this autumn on PBS and features a great cast, including hosts Bridget Lancaster and Julia Collin-Davison. Check your local PBS listings for details. In the meantime, to revisit earlier seasons and find your favorite Cook's Country recipes, visit CooksCountry.com. You may also submit a favorite family recipe (or write to Heirloom Recipes, Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447). Include your name and mailing address. If we print your recipe, you'll win a one-year subscription to Cook's Country.



COMING NEXT ISSUE

We love backyard cooking in Cook's Country. Next month, we'll hit the grill with recipes for big **Grilled Porterhouse Steaks**, **Grilled Butterflied Chicken**, and a superflavorful **Grilled Sweet Potato Salad**. Peak summer produce will find its way into our **Simple Tomato Salad** and **Easy Summer Fruit Tart**, and we'll hit the road to uncover the secrets to **Detroit Pizza**, North Carolina **Lazy Strawberry Sonker**, and Gulf Coast **Shrimp Po' Boys**. For dessert? The best **Coconut Cream Pie** ever.

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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 paring knife, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to Cook's Country. To enter, visit CooksCountry.com/rooster by July 31, 2017, or write to Rooster JJ17, Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Joy Nakfoor of Lansing, Michigan, found the rooster in the February/March 2017 issue on page 6 and won our favorite immersion blender.

WEB EXTRAS

Free for four months online at CooksCountry.com

- Ballpark Pretzels
- California Fish Tacos
- Husk-Grilled Corn
- Lightly Sweetened Whipped Cream
- Tasting Bottled Barbecue Sauce
- Tasting Crumbled Blue Cheese
- Testing Gas Grills Under \$500
- Testing Ice Packs
- Testing Paring Knives
- Yellow Layer Cake Batter

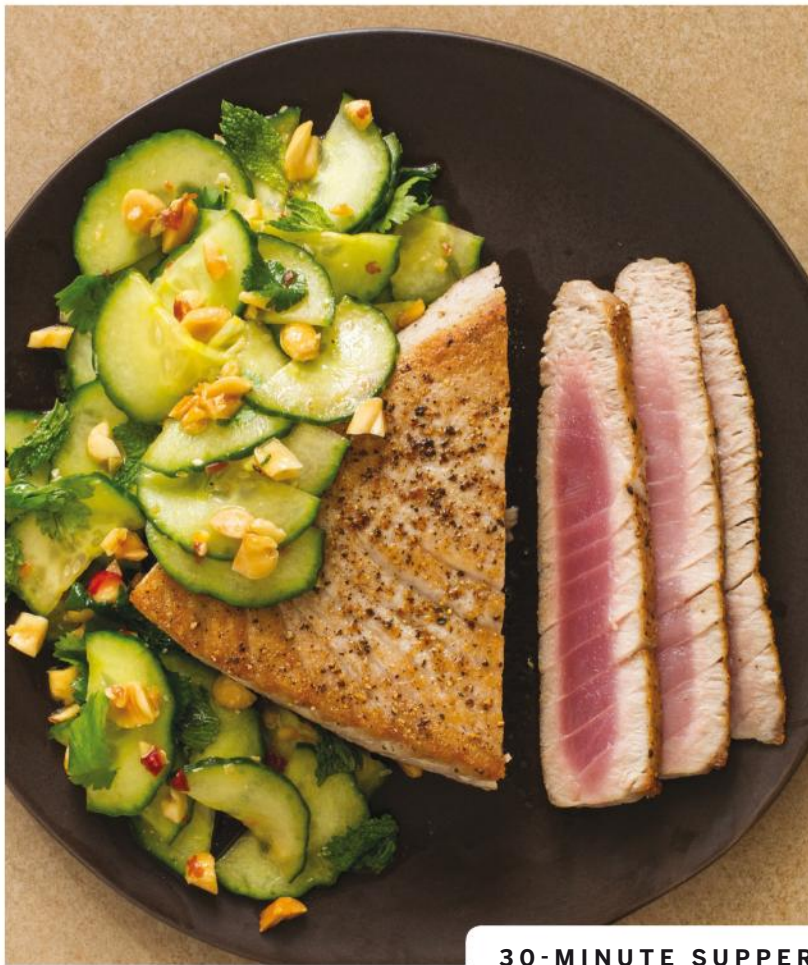


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RC=Recipe Card

Tuna Steaks with Cucumber-Peanut Salad



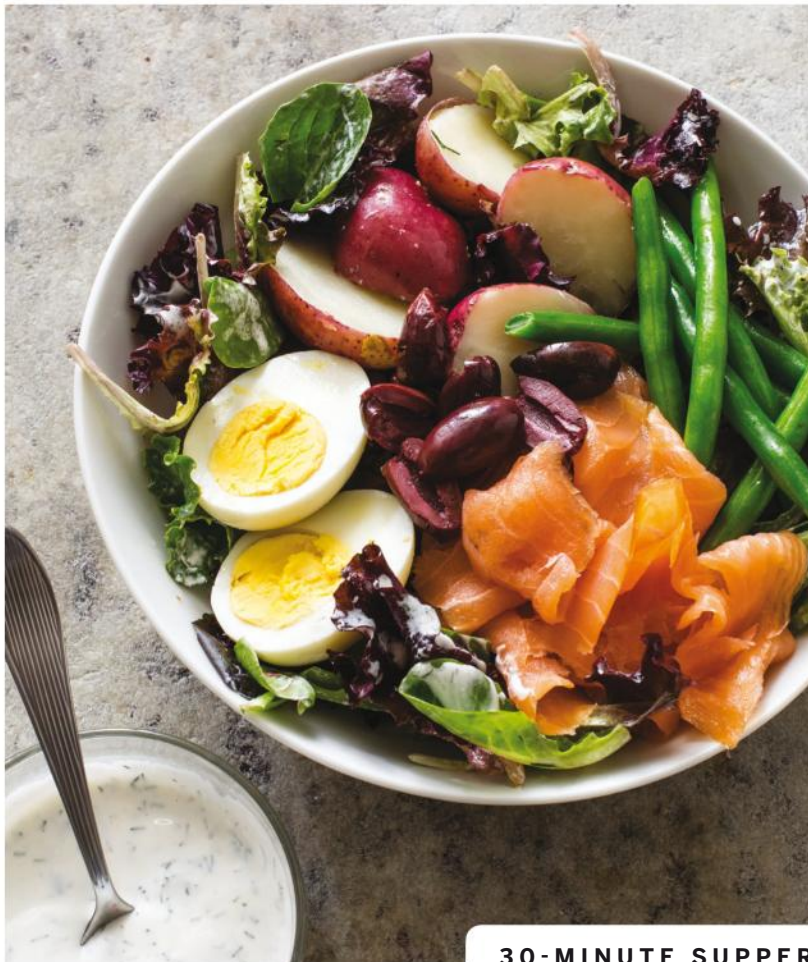
30-MINUTE SUPPER

Spiced Beef Pitas



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Smoked Salmon Niçoise Salad



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Hash Brown Frittata



30-MINUTE SUPPER



Spiced Beef Pitas *Serves 4*

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Pumpkin pie spice takes the place of the usual assortment of warm spices to simplify preparation while keeping the depth of flavor.

- ¼ cup tahini**
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 3 tablespoons water**
- Salt and pepper**
- 1 (14-ounce) bag green coleslaw mix**
- ½ cup fresh parsley leaves**
- 1 pound 85 percent lean ground beef**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- ½ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice**
- 2 (8-inch) pita breads, halved**

1. Whisk tahini, lemon juice, water, and ½ teaspoon salt together in medium bowl. Add coleslaw mix and parsley and toss to combine. Combine beef, garlic, cumin, pie spice, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in separate bowl. Shape beef mixture into four 6 by 3-inch oval patties.
2. Place patties in 12-inch nonstick skillet and cook over medium-high heat until browned on bottom, about 4 minutes. Flip patties and continue to cook until browned on second side and just cooked through, about 2 minutes longer. Stuff each pita half with 1 patty, then divide cabbage mixture evenly among pita halves. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Garnish with diced tomatoes and plain yogurt.



Tuna Steaks with Cucumber-Peanut Salad *Serves 4*

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Peanuts give the cucumber salad a crunchy contrast, and the fish sauce and lime juice in the dressing complement the tuna.

- 1 English cucumber, halved lengthwise and sliced thin**
- ⅓ cup unsalted dry-roasted peanuts, chopped coarse**
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves**
- ¼ cup fresh mint leaves, torn**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 1 tablespoon lime juice**
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce**
- 1 teaspoon Asian chili-garlic sauce**
- Kosher salt and pepper**
- 4 (8-ounce) tuna steaks, 1 inch thick**

1. Toss cucumber, peanuts, cilantro, mint, 1 tablespoon oil, lime juice, fish sauce, chili-garlic sauce, and ¼ teaspoon salt together in bowl. Set aside.
2. Pat tuna dry with paper towels. Sprinkle each side of each steak with ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook tuna until well browned on each side (but centers remain red), about 2 minutes per side. Serve with cucumber salad.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: To cook the tuna to medium-well, increase the cooking time in step 2 to about 4 minutes per side.



Hash Brown Frittata *Serves 4*

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Lining the pan with shredded potatoes creates a unique crunchy crust and a potato side dish all in one.

- 12 large eggs**
- ⅓ cup whole milk**
- Salt and pepper**
- 8 ounces asparagus, trimmed and cut into ¼-inch pieces**
- ¼ cup minced fresh chives**
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- 1 pound Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, shredded and squeezed dry**
- 4 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (1 cup)**

1. Whisk eggs, milk, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Stir in asparagus and chives and set aside.
2. Melt butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add potatoes, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until potatoes begin to brown, about 4 minutes. Using rubber spatula, spread and pack potatoes into even layer in bottom of pan. Pour egg mixture over top and sprinkle with Gruyère.
3. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook until egg mixture has set, 12 to 14 minutes. Remove from heat and let rest, covered, for 5 minutes. Transfer to cutting board, slice into wedges, and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: To remove the moisture from the potatoes, squeeze them in a clean dish towel.



Smoked Salmon Niçoise Salad *Serves 4*

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Starting the potatoes first and adding the green beans later ensures that both vegetables finish cooking at the same time.

- 1 pound small red potatoes, unpeeled, halved**
- Salt and pepper**
- 8 ounces green beans, trimmed**
- ⅔ cup sour cream**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill**
- 10 ounces (10 cups) mesclun**
- 4 hard-cooked large eggs, halved**
- 8 ounces sliced smoked salmon**
- ½ cup pitted kalamata olives, halved**

1. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add potatoes and 1½ tablespoons salt; return to boil and cook for 10 minutes. Add green beans and continue to cook until both vegetables are tender, about 4 minutes longer. Drain.
2. Combine sour cream, lemon juice, 2 tablespoons water, dill, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper in small bowl. Toss mesclun and ¼ cup sour cream mixture together in large bowl. Divide dressed mesclun, potatoes, green beans, and eggs evenly among 4 bowls. Divide salmon and olives evenly among bowls. Drizzle salads with remaining dressing. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Use small red potatoes measuring 1 to 2 inches in diameter.

Jalapeño Chicken Quesadillas



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Teriyaki Chicken Kebabs with Grilled Bok Choy



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Orzo with Sausage and Broccoli Rabe



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Grilled Pork Chops with Plums



30-MINUTE SUPPER

Teriyaki Chicken Kebabs with Grilled Bok Choy *Serves 4*



WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: We brush the teriyaki sauce on the chicken toward the end of grilling so that it stays bright and sweet rather than burning and turning bitter.

- 4 heads baby bok choy (4 ounces each), halved**
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
Salt and pepper
- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts,**
trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ pineapple, peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch pieces**
- ½ red onion, cut into 1-inch pieces**
- ½ cup teriyaki sauce**
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds**

1. Toss bok choy, oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Cover and microwave until beginning to soften, about 5 minutes.
2. Thread 1 chicken piece, then 1 pineapple piece, then 1 onion piece onto each of eight 12-inch metal skewers. Repeat pattern 2 more times on each skewer. Season all over with salt and pepper.
3. Grill bok choy and kebabs over hot fire until bok choy is char-streaked and tender and chicken registers 160 degrees, about 10 minutes, flipping halfway through cooking. Brush ¼ cup teriyaki sauce onto kebabs and continue to cook until lightly charred, about 2 minutes longer. Transfer kebabs and bok choy to platter, brush chicken with remaining ¼ cup teriyaki sauce, and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You will need eight 12-inch metal skewers for this recipe. Serve with rice.

Jalapeño Chicken Quesadillas *Serves 4*



WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Weighing the quesadillas down with a heavy pot evens out the cooking and promotes crispy tortillas.

- 1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded,**
meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)
- 8 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (2 cups)**
- ¾ cup jarred pickled jalapeños, chopped fine**
- ½ cup fresh corn kernels**
- 4 scallions, sliced thin**
- ¼ teaspoon pepper**
- 4 (10-inch) flour tortillas**
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil**

1. Combine chicken, Monterey Jack, jalapeños, corn, scallions, and pepper in bowl. Spread 1 heaping cup chicken mixture over half of each tortilla, leaving ½-inch border at edge. Fold tortillas over filling, pressing firmly to seal.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Place 2 quesadillas in skillet, weigh down with large saucepan, and cook until browned and cheese has melted, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to cutting board. Repeat with remaining 1 tablespoon oil and remaining 2 quesadillas. Cut into wedges and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Serve with sour cream and salsa.

Grilled Pork Chops with Plums *Serves 4*



WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Thin-cut chops grill up in a flash, and the brown sugar in the rub aids in browning.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- 4 plums, halved and pitted**
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar**
- 1½ teaspoons ground coriander**
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger**
Salt and pepper
- 4 (6-ounce) bone-in pork rib or center-cut chops,**
½ inch thick, trimmed
- 3 ounces (3 cups) baby arugula**

1. Whisk oil and lemon juice together in medium bowl; set aside dressing. Rub cut sides of plums with 1 tablespoon sugar. Combine coriander, ginger, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and remaining 1 tablespoon sugar in small bowl. Pat pork dry with paper towels and sprinkle all over with spice mixture.
2. Cook pork over hot fire until browned and meat registers 140 degrees, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer to platter, tent with foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Cook plums over hot fire until caramelized and tender, about 3 minutes per side.
3. Add plums and arugula to bowl with dressing and toss to combine. Transfer to platter with pork and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Peaches can be substituted for the plums, if desired.

Orzo with Sausage and Broccoli Rabe *Serves 4*



WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Sweet, spicy, salty Peppadew peppers liven up this sausage-studded dish.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 8 ounces broccoli rabe, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch pieces**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced thin**
- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage, cut into 1-inch pieces**
- 2¼ cups chicken broth**
- 1¼ cups orzo**
- ¼ cup dry white wine**
- ½ cup thinly sliced jarred hot Peppadew peppers**
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese**

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add broccoli rabe and salt, cover, and cook until wilted, about 2 minutes. Stir in half of garlic and continue to cook, uncovered, until broccoli rabe is tender, about 2 minutes longer. Transfer to plate and tent with foil.
2. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add sausage and cook until browned, about 3 minutes. Add remaining garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
3. Stir in broth, orzo, and wine and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium, cover, and cook until orzo is al dente and nearly all liquid has been absorbed, 6 to 8 minutes. Sprinkle broccoli rabe, peppers, and Parmesan over top. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: For a spicy kick, use hot Italian sausage.



PIG PICKIN' CAKE

In some states, this light, fruity cake is served at a whole-hog roast, or “pig pickin’” party. But we think it would be a hit at any barbecue.

TO MAKE THIS CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:

- 1 (15-ounce) can mandarin oranges in light syrup, drained
- 1 recipe yellow cake batter*
- 2 tablespoons cake flour
- 1 teaspoon orange extract
- 1 (20-ounce) can pineapple rings in syrup, drained
- 3 cups lightly sweetened whipped cream*
- 1 cup store-bought vanilla pudding (about 3 snack cups)

FOR THE CAKE:

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour two 9-inch round cake pans and line with parchment paper. Set aside 19 orange segments for topping. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat cake batter, flour, orange extract, and remaining oranges on medium-high speed until oranges have broken down, about 1 minute. Divide batter evenly between prepared pans. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pans halfway through baking. Let cakes cool in pans on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove cakes from pans, discarding parchment, and let cool completely on rack, about 2 hours.

FOR THE FILLING AND FROSTING:

Cut 4 pineapple rings into quarters and set aside. Chop remaining pineapple fine and place in bowl (you should have about 1 cup). Fold whipped cream into pudding. Gently fold 1 cup pudding mixture into chopped pineapple.



*Go to CooksCountry.com for our Yellow Layer Cake Batter and Lightly Sweetened Whipped Cream recipes, or use your own recipes.

TO ASSEMBLE:

Place 1 cake layer on plate or pedestal. Spread pineapple mixture in even layer over top. Top with second cake layer. Spread top and sides of cake with remaining pudding mixture. Alternate reserved pineapple quarters and 16 reserved orange segments around outside edge of top of cake. Place remaining 3 orange segments in center of cake. Serve.

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RC Teriyaki Chicken Kebabs



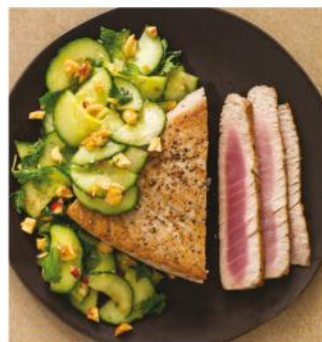
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