

Yet More Food to Improve

Grab Something Here and Something There and Make it Edible and Hopefully, Tasty

A lot of how I learned to cook came from watching TV cooking shows and later finding new and interesting cookbooks. My mother was a good cook, but she didn't explore a lot and just cooked from recipes. It was mostly basic American food (I distinctly remember having macaroni and cheese a lot from my early years), but, now and then, something exotic or from ancestral roots would appear, especially during holidays and other celebratory events. I put this down to her being a working mother, as she just didn't have the time to do much else.

However, since my father was a hunter, interesting game would occasionally appear, whether he shot it or obtained it from a friend. I remember eating whale meat at one time long ago. It tasted like beef cooked in a pan that you had just cooked fish in. Another time, a bucket of white bait appeared...tiny whole fish no more than 1 1/2-2" long that were deep fried, salted, and eaten like french fries. I also came to really like horse meat, though it was very hard to obtain, other than pet food grade. It's similar to beef but much leaner and sweeter. Quail were hunted in the canyon below our house, and, early on, I learned to clean and cook them. There was a pheasant farm about a half mile down the road and we sometimes got meat and eggs from them.

It's interesting to note the foods that have disappeared from markets over the years. Chicken giblets, liver, calves brains, all used to be in the refrigerated display in the grocery store when I was a kid. They were all in round cottage cheese style white buckets with clear lids. Even as late as when I was in college, I could buy lamb kidneys pre-packaged at the grocery. Now, I don't even see these things in a butcher's display.

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When the Old Town shopping center was first created, a fairly large artist community developed in Los Gatos including painters, sculptors, pottery makers, jewelry makers, and other arts and crafters, many of whom had studios in the building. Gatherings and parties became frequent and eventually grew into the annual Fiesta de Artes Arts & Wine Festival held every September. It was an outdoor event held on the town square with art exhibits and stalls where you could buy food, beer and wine, and, of course, a commemorative wine glass.

On one occasion, a good sized group of artists decided to have a California version of a New England Clam Bake. One of the guys had a fairly large back yard and it was decided to hold the party there. They got a 55 gallon steel drum and thoroughly

cleaned it out and set up a propane fired gas burner in a pit in the ground. Once it was ready to go, some of the guys made a trip of about a hundred miles up the California coast to an oyster farm to pick up several hundred oysters, along with some fresh kelp and gallons of sea water. When they returned, the drum was set up on the burner and filled. First the kelp and sea water went in the bottom and a mesh basket was suspended over it. The basket was filled with the oysters, chicken pieces, sausages, and whatever other meats people contributed, until it was about 3/4's full. The lid was put on and the burner set on a very low heat. It simmered for about 4 or 5 hours, gently steaming the contents. When the beer and wine was chilled, the lid was lifted, and the food brought out, we all sat down to eat. Those were the best oysters I ever had, tender and moist and the texture of fresh baked bread, and all the other ingredients helped to flavor each other, creating a wonderful mixture of tastes.

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I used to believe that what I watched on TV was gospel truth about food preparation. But, after years of watching chefs criticizing each other for not doing it right, I realized that they were just telling everyone that this was how they cooked. So, it's all arbitrary and all come down to, "Does it taste good?" And a lot of that, comes down to "Are the ingredients tasty?" and "What do I like?"

Well, what do I like? There's always a buttery tender blood rare filet mignon with Bernaise sauce accompanied by a fluffy baked potato gently dressed with a pat of butter and a grace of sour cream...but those days are seldom (and to be rightly relished when they do come!). That's one of the problems. There are so many good flavors out there in the world and it's up to the imagination about what to do with them. This is when I turn to the cookbooks...suggest something that I can build from and give me some ideas of what flavors you think go together!

As usual, most of these recipes are for 2 servings. And though many reflect how I regularly cook, most of these are trying to make something out of what I have handy in the freezer or pantry, trying to use up the food we have before we have to move.

Oh, I can finally empty the big jar of red sauce. I found a bag of shrimp in the freezer...yay!

I never had a microwave that needed a doorstop before...those plastic latches can really dig into your hand as the door swings shut on you while trying to get a hot pot out of the oven. My previous oven sat in the same place and it was level!



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Man vs. Nature

When I was young and learning gardening from my mother, we always had a compost pile and I learned the value of returning nutrients to the soil. In later years, reading and learning from experts, I believed their opinions on aging compost and diluting compost tea to avoid burning plant roots.

Later, I wondered about the truth of this. Our chickens poop on the ground and that doesn't bother any plants. Years ago, my mother had a compost bin that sat on the ground next to the trunk of our grapefruit tree. The tree was, and still is, extremely healthy and provides us with lots of grapefruit, the full year around. When we went to empty the bin to spread the compost through out the yard, we found that the grapefruit roots had grown up into the bin practically filling it with roots and eating most of the compost.

Several months ago, I gave away my compost bin to a neighbor, as I wasn't going to take it when we move and since then I am just maintaining a small compost pile to take care of veg and fruit waste.

I gave away all of my fruit and veg seeds as well. But, when cleaning out some garden tools, I found a bag of melon seeds I had reclaimed from some kind of a melon some years back. They had to have been over 10 years old, and I doubted that they would still be viable, so, I added them to the compost heap. Three weeks later, they are happily growing in raw compost.

Human authorities may proclaim, but Nature says, "NYET!"

Another trick I learned many years ago...about composting related things. In the past, I've gotten reprimands for composting fat, but, really, everything decomposes.

But, I've found that placing a small chunk of fat in your yard, far from the house, keeps the sweet and grease eating ants out of your house. They take the fat, hang out there looking for more, and leave you alone.



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The Kitchen Witch

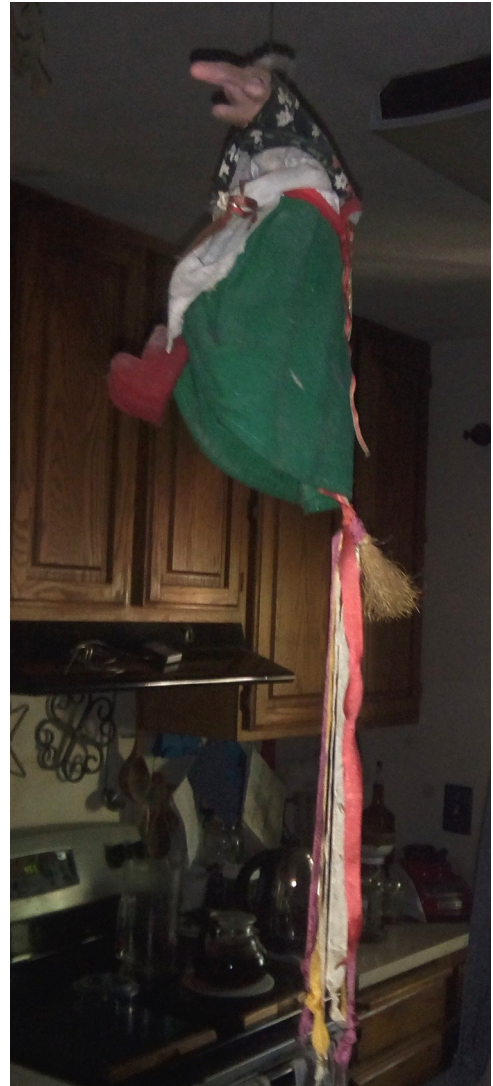
For a long time I have had a kitchen witch hanging/flying by a thread in my kitchen. I don't remember where or when I bought her, but she's been there for decades.

The concept of a kitchen witch dates back centuries and it is unsure where it originated. Thoughts are Scandinavia or somewhere in Europe, though I have learned that something similar exists in folklore in Russia. The intent is that she is basically a doll that is made as a good witch to ward off evil spirits, bring good luck to the kitchen, and help with the preparation of food.

About 20 years ago, when Jerry and I were more involved with the Monroe Institute, in Virginia, the concept of intent was often discussed. And it was surmised that more than often the observer was part of the experiment. One puts their intent out to the Universe with the hope that good will come of it. We pray to God for good results. It's there in many religions and spiritual pursuits. "Ask and you shall receive." "God helps those who help themselves."

For a few years before we sold our domain name and acquired the money which allowed us to visit Russia, we had been intending to somehow move there. We hadn't intended to find a buyer for the domain, we hadn't even thought of selling it as we didn't think it would bring much money; but the buyer came out of the blue with enough money to get everything started. But, we had intended to somehow come up with the money to do it. Spirit kept saying, "It will come, but you won't expect from where." Well, it did and we didn't.

It's the same thing with selling our house. The economy is in terrible shape and our house is old and needs a lot of work. Could we sell it for enough money after taxes and agent fees to be able to make our move? No idea! But the contractor, that our



neighbors hired to tear down their house and build a new one, instantly offered to buy our house as soon as he learned that we wanted to move.

A wise good friend once advised me to trust Spirit, because, really, what other choice do we have? Worrying about the future only upsets the stomach and wastes energy. And you certainly don't want to have an upset stomach if there's good food around!

Making a doll in the image of a human puts that kind of life into it and when you give something life, you have to respect that, because now you have allowed it to act for itself. Look at how small children treat their favorite dolls and pets. Putting that much love into a supposedly inanimate thing or unintelligent being should never be ignored or taken lightly. Love is a very powerful force.

Many "primitive" peoples saw the spiritual life in natural elements and things. I don't think they were that primitive. I think they were very wise. They were not "pagans". They saw God's influence in the nature that they shared life with. They may have used different names for the "god" in each aspect of nature, but they saw it there none the less. Even Christianity recognizes 3 aspects of God. How is this so different?

I do not understand why so many religions have to war with each other. Why do these faiths have a need to convert every one else to their beliefs? Can't we just agree that we have different cultures and different names for god, and let it go at that?

Treat nature with respect and kindness. Talk to your plants and animals. You will begin to realize that they understand that you are respecting them. I greet my fruit trees and other plants when I'm in the yard. And considering how little time I actually spend "gardening", the bounty of my yard is amazing. We haven't bought fruit or veg in years, make that decades, with the exception of cabbage and lettuce. Our climate is a bit harsh on greens and it's much cheaper to buy them than to spend the money on watering them. We get floods from late November to early May, then nothing but hot dry weather the rest of the year.

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Since we closed our business on June 30th, 2020, we've been spending most of our time sorting out our things. Determining what we want to take with us when we move and what we don't. Of course food is an unknown until we talk with the movers, except, of course, perishable items, which is most of what I am trying to use up. I have about a half of a small chest freezer of meat and fish left to go through, plus what overflow is in the kitchen freezer. And most of that is vegetables.

But, back to the other stuff. And it is a bit mind boggling how we came to have all this stuff...though it does seem to be a common thing. I know very few people that have a garage empty enough to allow parking a car in it. Most are filled with boxes and boxes of stuff. So, where does it all come from?

My parents, and probably Jerry's and a lot of other people our age as well, were children of the Depression. I remember as a kid being told to not throw anything away, because it could be of use. And so, the lesson stuck. Things get piled up...and not touched for years. And with the economy getting worse and worse over the last few decades, we became "preppers", buying in bulk and saving for bad times. That certainly didn't help.

In the early 2000's, Jerry's mother died and his brother, with whom she had been living at the time, packed up all of her books, records, photos, camera equipment, music boxes, and sundry other momentos along with stuff that Jerry had since he was a kid, and shipped it all to us. That succeeded in filling up one of our spare rooms with very large boxes. Being busy with work, we just piled up the boxes to wait for some time when we had a chance to go through them. And so they sat until recently when we decided that we have to go through them and not just ship them to our new house. So, one by one, they were unpacked and sorted into categories to either be kept or gotten rid of. But, a lot of it is still just sitting there waiting for decisions.

We've been living in a house that has gotten more and more cramped as time went by. I don't want our new house to be cramped like this. I want open space between furniture that is to be used by people and not filled with clutter. So, the purge began. A first pass and then a second and third and so on getting rid of things that have only served to take up space and harbor dust, along with clothes that no longer fit. We are selling what we can and just giving the rest away. The only things that we are not getting rid of are books and videos in English, as we will have English students that will want to practice their language skills. The rest of it...well, if we really miss not having something, we can buy a new one. I have been looking at things with the attitude of where will it reside in the new house...if I don't have a place for it, do I really need it?

So, back to what food we can take...Nadia's been going through stuff with a Russian customs agent she knows and been relaying info to us as she gets it. So, big no-no's include any powder, as it could conceal drugs, and no cans, as they can't x-ray them, and no oils, as they could be flammable. Well, that eliminates the majority of my spice cupboard, all of my flour, sugar, salt, bath salts, and whatever else falls into that category. We don't have too many canned goods at the moment, so we should be able to use them up before we leave. As far as oils, we weren't planning to take anything more than a bottle of olive oil and maybe some bath oils. Well, time to start giving stuff away.

And one more...no grain. It could contain bugs. At this point, we'll wait until just before we get ready for the movers and see what the current regulations are. And in between eat the stuff we like the best.

The only thing I am assured we can ship is my jars and jars of dried fruit from my garden, mostly peaches and apricots. I apparently have 3 hungry Russians eager to try my fruit and wanting to learn about dehydrating...we will teach!

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Here we are in the last week of August of 2020. The Russian border is still closed to Americans. The smoke from the local forest fires is still making it hard to breathe. And, our new house is not yet ready for us. And the virus panic is still frightening most of the world as scientists take a back seat to politicians and sensationalist media. Oh yes, as long as you are “peaceful” protesting with guns and bombs, you are immune to infection and don’t need to wear masks and maintain social distance, not that any of those mandates do any good. The only time we wear masks is when we enter a building that mandates we must. And the masks we wear are purely theatrical as they are purposely useless. Forgive my rant, but a virus as tame as this one does not merit this sort of reaction. Hopefully, rational thinking will prevail at some point, though I have my doubts that the West will ever wake up and emerge from this blanket of propaganda.

Time is both flying by and creeping along at a snail’s pace, as we continue to sort our belongings for what to take. Our first list of furniture is proving to be far too expensive to be worth the nostalgic attachment. So, now it’s time to minimize and decided what we really want to keep. Probably, most of the furniture and all of the iron work (except the fireplace screen, as the new fireplace was sized for it!) will stay here, and most of the books and art work will be shipped along with most of our clothes. We are aiming for the cheapest moving expense that we can muster. And, in the long run, that will make unpacking at the other end both a lot simpler and easier. We figure we will replace furniture as we find we need it. Over the years, we have accumulated way too much stuff and it’s about time to simplify.

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As is perhaps obvious, I almost never do the same recipe twice. There’s always a missing ingredient or an odd quantity available or a leftover or some such. I think the only thing I’m consistent in is making pastry, which is an exact science, not necessarily with all of the ingredients such as flavorings, but with measurement and handling. But, since I seldom do pastry, except for an occasional pie...well, you know.

This is likely the last cookbook chapter I will write in America. It’s time to discover a whole new country of delicious food in Russia that I can document once we are there!

Anyhow, on with the recipes...

Greek Potato Salad

Cut about 5 to 6 medium red potatoes into bite sized cubes and place them into a microwave safe dish. Cover and microwave until potatoes are tender (I gave it about 10 minutes on high, checking often for tenderness). Stir to make sure that none of the potato pieces have glued together during cooking and allow it to cool a bit.

Stir in about a half cup of pitted Kalamata olives sliced in half lengthwise, about 3 heaping tablespoons of capers (drained of vinegar), about half of a sweet onion cut into slivers.

Dressing: 3 parts olive oil, 1 part Meyer lemon juice, several grinds of black pepper, a heaping tablespoon of dried oregano, and a small handful of chopped dried tomatoes. Stir together and let stand to rehydrate dried ingredients.

Pour dressing over salad and stir it in. Top with a sprinkle of garlic granules and Fleur de Sel (or other sea salt) and stir in.

Refrigerate to mellow the flavors. Test for any additional salt needed before serving.

The dressing could stand to have more lemon juice. It lacked the sharpness to offset the blandness of the oil. Perhaps 2 parts lemon juice to 3 parts oil. Unfortunately, the imbalance was not noticed until after the potatoes had absorbed the dressing.

The salad could also use more onion, at least double the quantity, as the dressing took away its sharpness.



Chicken in BBQ Sauce

This recipe was to use up the last few ounces in a bottle of commercial BBQ sauce. The ingredients on the label listed tomato paste, vinegar, sugar, salt, spices, oil, onion, garlic, paprika, and liquid smoke.

So, I put a half pound of cubed chicken breast and a quarter of a sweet onion, thinly sliced, in a microwaveable pie plate and covered it with the sauce. There was still a little in the bottom of the bottle, so I rinsed it out with about an ounce of pepper vodka and added it to the chicken. I put a goodly pinch of Herbs de Provence and a few grinds of black pepper over the chicken, stirred it together and put it in the fridge to marinate for a couple of hours.

Then I allowed the plate to come up to room temperature and cooked the chicken on 30 second bursts of high until it was just done and still tender.



The sauce came out amazingly good. I reserved the excess sauce (about a half cup) in the fridge for another use...it was that good!

Chicken in BBQ Sauce, Revisited

I cut up 2 boneless skinless chicken thighs into bite sized pieces. Added some sliced sweet onion and some chopped thawed frozen cauliflower and stirred in the leftover BBQ sauce and left it to marinate for a bit.

I rinsed out a jar of commercial salsa that had about an ounce of salsa left in it and added about a half cup of stock to it. I added enough water to make a cup and a half of liquid. To this, I added a teaspoon of tomato flavored chicken bouillon and a healthy pinch of red pepper flakes. Then microwaved it briefly to dissolve the bouillon and left it to stand to develop the flavor. I used this stock to cook 150g of penne pasta in with additional water as needed.

Before cooking and after. Well, I was going to put a picture of the finished casserole, but, I guess we were too hungry and forgot to take the photo until the last bite. It was good, though.



Inside Out Burritos Or How to Recover from a Minor Culinary Disaster

Burritos: flour tortillas, refried beans, ground meat, onion, olives, salsa, and cheese.

What started out to be a quickie dinner on a busy work day...didn't! We've been out of store bought tortillas and I had a cookbook that had a recipe for tortillas made like crepes, so I thought I'd try it. I've made crepes in the microwave before and I figured that would be a quick and easy recipe as opposed to making flour tortillas from scratch. The recipe called for cornmeal, bread flour, salt, an egg, and water. It also made way more than I wanted, so I cut the recipe in half (except for the egg...an extra half egg shouldn't make any difference). I also substituted some old milk I had in the freezer that I was saving for baking bread, thinking that it would make the batter richer. It went together fairly easily, until I went to cook them.

In the microwave, the edges cooked, but the center remained raw. So, I got out a frying pan and went to cook the next one that way. I melted some butter (the recipe called for a lightly greased pan) and poured in the next scoop of batter. It started cooking OK, the edges started to lift, but the center was still gooey. As it cooked further, I used the spatula to see if it was loose enough to turn over. That's when I discovered the center had scorched and was stuck to the pan. I scraped out the bits and put the pan aside with some water to soak out the scorch.



So, I decided to pause on that and cook the meat mixture to go inside of the tortillas. I had about a half pound of ground turkey, about a half of a thinly sliced sweet onion, and a handful of sliced Mission olives. The turkey was a bit lean, so I added a few bits of butter. I went to put it in the microwave and as it started to cook, the microwave began to make strange popping sounds. It was doing that when I tried cooking the batter, but I just figured that it was the batter letting off steam.

OK, time to figure out what's going on. There was plenty of mixture in the plate, so there shouldn't be a steam issue, besides the butter hadn't even begun to melt. The sound was kind of like what it would sound like if the turntable was imbalanced or off its track. Now the pie plate I was using for the meat was centered on the glass table, so that shouldn't be the issue. I checked, it was fine. The glass table had just been washed in the dishwasher the night before, so all was well with that. Started the oven again and more popping sounds. By now, Jerry was helping to troubleshoot. He took the glass plate out and checked that the turntable wheels were working...they were. Started it again...more popping! Well, grrr! He took everything out and ran his hand over the floor of the oven where the wheels sit. He then asked for a damp sponge. I handed it to him and he wiped out the oven. He put everything back in the oven and started it again. No popping! Apparently there was some invisible crumbs in the track of the wheels and they were climbing over them as it turned around.

OK, got the meat mixture cooked and back to the tortilla dilemma. I figured that the easiest and quickest out was to make a sort of filled cornbread. I put the meat mixture into a toaster oven pan and stirred in some of the salsa that would have gone over the meat in the tortillas. I also shredded the failed tortillas into the meat mixture to absorb any excess moisture, and well, why throw them away.



Then, I poured the tortilla batter over the meat mixture and stirred it lightly to let the batter flow down into the meat mixture.

Next, put the pan into the toaster oven and baked it on 250°F for the maximum time on the dial (15 minutes). Still not cooked, so, repeated for a little shorter time, this time 10 minutes. Almost there, so kept repeating until a tester came out clean.





Finally! Dinner! After plating, we sprinkled some grated Cheddar and Jack cheese blend over the cornbread and popped it into the microwave just long enough to melt the cheese.

The refried beans were eaten separately with some more cheese melted over them.

Oh, the tortilla batter was 1/2 c. cornmeal, 1/4 t. salt, 1/4 c. all purpose flour, 1 lightly beaten egg, and 1 c. milk. Too bad it didn't cook right. But, at least, it made a good cornbread meatloaf. It certainly tasted good.

Russia Day Celebration, 2020

Pirozhki! Beer! Fireworks! & Vodka!



These tiny fireworks are called Senko Hanabi (translates to “all ages” “flowers of fire”). They are very rare and are expensive and time consuming to make...but are very beautiful!

Fruit Kvass Experiment (Lemon Peach)

A series of tangential ideas led to this experiment. We were watching a video of our favorite musical group having a discussion during a fund raiser. They were seated at a table and drinking a strange deep green liquid which we later found out to be called, тархун, a soda made from tarragon. The concept was such an interesting flavor idea that it led us to research. After much web digging and taking a chance, we found a bottle at our favorite Russian deli (a LOT cheaper than online). Bought it and put it in the fridge to chill. It's not a bad soda at all. It wasn't as medicinal as some web blogs described it, but mildly sweet and kind of reminiscent of Jello.



So while doing the web search for more information on it led me to someone's page that had a recipe for fruit kvass. She used honey and a mix of fresh berries, lemon and mint.

I'm out of those ingredients but have a lot of dried fruit, so...in a clean one quart mason jar: 1 rounded teaspoon of raw honey, and about a cup of filtered water. Heat briefly in the microwave (30 seconds on high) to dissolve the honey; it was pretty crystallized. Add a small handful of dried sliced peaches (maybe a half cup) and about the same of dried sliced Eureka lemons, all from my garden. Fill the jar with filtered water, cover and let stand at room temperature.

This photo is after a couple of hours and a few bubbles are gathering on the surface.



I think that the kvass experiments I did with grain (see Cookbook, Part 2), though tasting OK, were fermented too long. There was no carbonation remaining and that led to a more "flat" taste. This time, I plan to stop and refrigerate the kvass while it is still quite bubbly (I hope).

Well, after 2 days, the taste test revealed only the slightest amount of carbonation and the flavor was good but heavy on the lemon. I will check it again in another day.

Day 3, starting to get quite a few bubbles. Did a taste test...good, but quite sour. I think too many lemons, will use less on future experiments.

So, I added 2 tablespoons of brown sugar to see what that would do, and put the lid back on. I didn't stir the sugar in, just let it melt down in. Will check it again later.

The next day, another taste test...perfect!! The extra brown sugar offset the sourness of the lemons, but didn't make it overly sweet. I strained out the fruit and discarded the lemon slices...there wasn't much left except for the peel. The peaches were very tasty, a bit fizzy, and not too sweet, so I put them into the fridge to chill for snacks. And poured the kvass into a clean plastic soda bottle and put it in to chill.



So, 3 days at room temperature, then add 2 tablespoons brown sugar, ferment another day and done!

Fruit Kvass Experiment, Continued (Lemon Rhubarb)

Several years ago, I had a bumper crop of rhubarb. After freezing several bags worth, I decided to try drying some. That didn't work well. The chopped rhubarb dried OK, but when I went to reconstitute it, it just refused to get soft. I ended up composting what I had.

However, in cleaning out part of the pantry today, I found another bag of it. Well, how about trying a kvass with it...same method as before, but 2 tablespoons of brown sugar instead of honey, dissolve in some hot filtered water, add about a cup of dried rhubarb and about a half cup of dried lemon slices, and top with filtered water. Put a lid on and let it stand.

Day 2, taste test: getting nice and bubbly, tastes good, but a bit too sour. I plan to let it go a couple more days and add some more brown sugar towards the end.



Day 3, taste test: bubbles have died down, flavor about the same as the previous day. I added 2 tablespoons of brown sugar, just letting it melt down in, and put the lid back on. I'm figuring it will be done in one more day.



Day 4, I think it's done! It has a little mild carbonation and the taste is good. It's not sweet, but also not too sour.

I strained out the rhubarb and lemon and added just one more tablespoon of brown sugar for taste and put it in the fridge to chill.

After refrigerating both the peach and rhubarb kvass blends for a couple of days to chill well, I tried both. They came out really good! And, I can't decide which I like better.

The peach has a lot more carbonation, but the bubbles are really tiny as opposed to the larger bubbles in commercial soda.

And the rhubarb is more like a mild wine in

consistency. The flavors are distinct and are true to the taste of the fruit. And, the addition of the extra brown sugar at the end gave both a depth of flavor that complimented well without adding too much sweetness. I will definitely do these again along with other fruit experiments.

One More Kvass Experiment: Ginger Lemon

A few, maybe more, at this point I don't remember, years ago I bought some fresh Hawaiian ginger at Costco. So, you know, it was a big box...way more than I could use while it was still fresh. So, I cut it up into pieces and froze bags of it to be used later, mostly for tea. So, the raw ingredients: ginger, dried lemon, brown sugar and water.



I will use the same method as before, adding some more brown sugar on day 3 and straining and chilling on day 4.

I did another kvass with ginger. I let it ferment the same amount of time, but apparently that was too long and it started to deteriorate becoming slimy. The weather has been very hot lately and I assume that contributed to the problem. I ended up throwing it into the compost.

I just finished a second attempt with just plain ginger and brown sugar and only let it ferment for one day. That worked better, but the flavor was much weaker.

Kvass with Hops

I have had a jar of hops sitting in my spice cupboard for a long time...so, OK, why not? About a cup of hops, 2 tablespoons brown sugar, and for a change, top with boiling water to coax the hops to let off flavor.

I will use the same method as before, adding some more brown sugar on day 3 and straining and chilling on day 4.

The taste was acceptable, but a little on the strong side, perhaps next time cut the amount of herbs in half.



Apple Kvass

Another experiment was dried apples...about a half cup of dried sliced apples and just a few dried sliced lemons, 2 tablespoons brown sugar and enough water to fill a quart Mason jar. 3 days fermenting and it came out very good. I didn't add any additional brown sugar as it was plenty sweet already.

Kasha with Wasabied Pork

All of this is cooked in the microwave on short bursts on high, stirring as needed.

Cut one large boneless pork loin chop into bite sized pieces and place into a microwaveable plate along with a little fat. Sprinkle with granulated garlic and stir to evenly coat the meat. Add a small handful of chopped scallions and let stand to allow the garlic to flavor the meat.

In a small bowl, combine equal parts of Japanese wasabi powder and soy sauce and let stand about 15 minutes to develop the flavor. Taste to see if more wasabi or soy sauce is needed.

Wasabi blends vary, so some may be hotter than others. Also, some soy sauces may be saltier than others. Cooking wasabi will destroy its heat, so add it to food at the last minute.



In another microwaveable dish, add some coarsely chopped frozen spinach and a goodly pat of butter. Cook until spinach is lightly sauteed in the butter.



Add 1 1/2 cups of a mixture of stock, water and chicken bouillon and 3/4 cup of kasha. Cook, stirring often until the kasha is tender. And let stand to absorb any excess moisture.

Cook the pork mixture until the meat is just done. Pour the wasabi sauce over the pork

and stir it in. Then stir the mixture into the kasha. Let stand a few minutes and serve.

Almost forgot to take a photo of the final dish. Fortunately, there was a little left in the pot before we ate it all.



Mixed Pasta with Beef, Green Beans & Horn of Plenty Mushrooms



Soak about a half ounce of Horn of Plenty dried mushrooms in a half cup of water for about 15 minutes or until softened. Remove mushrooms and cut any big pieces into bite sized pieces. Carefully pour off the soaking liquid allowing any sediment to remain in bottom. Add to the mushroom liquid about a half a cup of stock and enough water to make 1 1/2 cups of liquid. Add to this 1 teaspoon of tomato flavored chicken bouillon and heat briefly to dissolve powder.

In a microwave safe plate, add 2

tablespoons butter, a fourth of a sweet onion, thinly sliced, about a half cup of thawed frozen green beans cut into 1 inch lengths, and the mushrooms. Microwave on high in short bursts, stirring often until onions are translucent and the beans are tender.



Add about a half pound of strip steak, cut into bite sized pieces, and sprinkle with granulated garlic and let stand to develop flavor.

Cook meat mixture on high until meat is just done, stirring often, then set to one side.



In a microwaveable casserole, add stock mixture and heat. Stir in 75g of whole wheat spiral pasta and 75g of white spiral pasta. Heat on high in 1 minute bursts, stirring often until pasta is al dente.

Stir in meat veg mixture, heat briefly if needed and serve.

Sauerkraut with Other Good Stuff

In a microwaveable casserole, add 2 medium red potatoes cut into dice, 2 tablespoons of butter, and a finely chopped slice of bacon. Cover and microwave in short bursts on high, stirring often, until potatoes are just tender, about 8 to 10 minutes and set aside.

Thinly slice a quarter of a sweet onion, a large leaf of cabbage, and place in a microwaveable plate with about 2 tablespoons of butter.

Drain the juice from about a half cup of homemade sauerkraut (my last package!), along with the juice from about a half cup of thawed frozen peas, and add enough water to make a half cup. Add one rounded teaspoon of balsamic mustard and 1 teaspoon of chicken bouillon. Heat briefly to combine. Set the veg to one side.



Cut up a large pork steak into bite sized pieces and set aside.

Transfer the potatoes to a toaster oven pan and cook in the toaster oven at 300°F for about 10 minutes or until they are lightly browned.



Meanwhile, transfer the onion, cabbage, and the butter to the casserole, cover and cook in the microwave until the onions are translucent. Add the peas and sauerkraut and cook until the peas are tender.

Add the pork to the potatoes and return to the toaster oven and cook until the meat is just done. Add the pork and potatoes to the casserole. Pour the sauce over the casserole and briefly reheat to serve.

Tortillas, Revisited

Since the experiment I did in the last chapter with adding corn meal did not give the texture we wanted, I decided to go back to my original recipe. While Jerry likes corn chips, neither of us really like corn tortillas. Most of the time, we make burritos with various fillings, but the basic meat, refried beans, salsa and cheese are the staples, and corn tortillas just don't fold well...so flour tortillas are it!

The method is the same as in the previous chapter (page 30), but here are the ingredients: 2 cups all purpose flour (this time I substituted 1/2 cup of the AP flour with white whole wheat flour, which worked OK...remember, I have a pantry to use up), 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking powder (I used 2 teaspoons, because my baking powder is old and is losing its punch), stir together and cut in 1/3 cup butter, cut into small pieces (just like making pie crust). Add 3/4 cup of milk or water (water is fine, but milk makes a richer dough). This time, I used water, but stirred in about a teaspoon of dry milk that I am trying to use up. Knead together and let rest, covered, for about 30 minutes. I usually refrigerate the dough during this time to help relax the dough better.

Cut the dough into 8 equal pieces. Roll a piece into a ball and flatten as much as possible keeping the remainder covered to prevent drying. Then, place the piece between a couple of sheets of plastic wrap and place in a tortilla press. A light dusting with flour helps everything from sticking together. The tortilla press is not necessary, but it helps to get the initial 4" circle of dough nice and even and ready for rolling out the rest of the way. It helps a lot during the rolling process to dust the surface of the dough with a little flour every time you turn it, as it keeps it from sticking to the rolling surface and rolling pin. Sticking means tearing and that's bad. Try to roll the dough out to an 8 to 10 inch circle, keeping it as round as possible. Well, trying to, that is, I don't seem to manage it. There's always one edge that's too thick and gets out of round.



This last time, I rolled out all of the tortillas in advance of cooking and stacked them between sheets of lightly floured plastic wrap (unfloured plastic wrap sticks to the next sheet in the stack and that's a pain), so they could rest until ready to cook.

That made less of a hassle during cooking, having to not keep up with the tortilla cook as these things cook fast. About 1 minute on the first side and 3/4ths of a minute on the second. The cooking process is the same as in the previous chapter.

The meat mixture is a store bought chimichurri seasoned sirloin steak, cut bite sized, thinly sliced sweet onion, and Mission olives. Add in refried beans, salsa, and cheese.



Pizza Dough, Revisited

I modified my pizza dough recipe (part 2, page 21) to get a better crust. I increased the amount of water from 1/2 cup to 3/4 cup, which would necessitate more flour and result in more dough, which would equal a thicker and more tender crust. I also increased the amount of salt from 1 teaspoon to 1 1/2 teaspoons. I also left out the cornmeal for more tenderness. The rest of the ingredients remain the same and all flavorings are optional.

I shortened the pre-bake time (in a conventional oven, 350°F) from 10 minutes to 5 minutes (I think could be a little longer). The final baking time was about 25 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and lightly browned. The final result was much tenderer.

Another Mexican Style Pizza

I decided to not make refried beans and tortillas until after we move...pizza is easier. For this dough: 1/2 c. starter, 3/4 c. water, 1 t. yeast, 1 t. dry milk, 1/2 c. masa harina (corn flour), 1 c. white whole wheat flour, and enough bread flour to make a smooth dough. For the topping: a few spoons of salsa spread across the pre-baked dough and topped with a pre-cooked mixture of boneless pork loin chops (cubed), green bell peppers, onion, Mission olives, and some Southwest seasoning (ground ancho, onion, garlic, paprika, lemon peel, chipotle pepper, red pepper, jalapeno, smoke flavoring). Top all of that with a Mexican blend of grated jack and cheddar cheeses and bake as usual.



Pasta with...Well, Stuff

The stock: I had some leftover juices from the chimichurri steak, about a fourth of a cup, which I had combined with juice from a can of diced tomatoes and water and tomato chicken bouillon and used to make a simple tomato based pasta. And, which at the last minute, for some unknown reason, the canned tomatoes let go of a lot of juice and turned the pasta into soup, which is weird because I let them drain for a good half hour. I had already added mozzarella cheese to the dish. So, to rescue the pasta, I drained off and refrigerated the excess, now, cream sauce (about a half cup). So with that leftover sauce and the liquid drained off the thawed frozen zucchini (see next paragraph) and enough water to make one and a half cups and along with an added teaspoon of tomato chicken bouillon, I have today's tomato cream stock. Heat briefly in the microwave to dissolve the bouillon and add about 2 teaspoons dried dill weed, stir in and let stand to develop flavor. Try again...3rd time's a charm?

The meat and veg: I cut a fourth of a sweet onion into thin slivers and added it to a microwaveable pie plate. I took about a cup of thawed frozen sliced (in rounds) zucchini and cut them into quarters and added them to the onion. Then topped them with a few thin pats of butter. I microwaved the veg for about a minute and a half until the onion became translucent. Then I added flank steak cut into 1/2" cubes and sprinkled all with granulated dried garlic, and let it stand in the fridge to develop flavor. When ready, microwave in short bursts til almost done and set aside.

Cut a few ounces of dill flavored Havarti Cheese into 1/4" dice and set aside.



Heat the stock mixture in a microwaveable casserole, add 150g penne pasta and cook in short bursts until al dente, stirring often. When ready to serve, stir in the meat mixture and top with the cheese. Reheat briefly to melt the cheese and stir it in.

Raccoon, again

Found another bag of unlabeled raccoon meat in the freezer.

This appears to be the upper part of the tail, a couple of ball joints, and a couple of flat pieces of meat that are probably from the back.



Whenever I put food in the freezer, I tend to look at it and say, well, that's obvious, I don't have to label it. Then, later when I take it out, it's a guessing game as to what it is. The only clue I usually have is by color: fish is sort of flat and pale, unless it's salmon or tuna and those are all pretty obvious, poultry is sort of beige, beef and lamb is red, and game is dark red.

But, I probably won't change my method. Why spoil an adventure?

So, what to do with this? It's a tough meat, so slow cooking is the best way. I took the 2 flat pieces and cut them 1" squares and cut what I could off the ball joints...wasn't much to get there, too intricate...will have to wait until it's cooked to get the rest of the meat off, same with the tail piece.

I guess you could use a papain based meat tenderizer, but I haven't used any thing like that in a very long time. I just don't care for the flavor it imparts plus a lot of them have added salt and I prefer to salt meat at the end of cooking. But, that does remind me of a tenderizing experiment that I did a long time ago that went very wrong. I wanted to cook a turkey breast and in my experience they tend to be very dry meat. I had some juice left over from a can of pineapple chunks and decided to marinate the turkey in it...there's so little connective tissue in turkey, that I ended up with mush. Not cool!

Into the big crock pot: a bay leaf, 10 juniper berries (slightly crushed), a half ounce of pepper vodka (that being the last of the bottle), the meat and white wine to just cover. Let it set for about an hour to marinate. Turned the pot to high for the first hour, then down to low...probably about 4 hours total cooking time.

Turned off the heat and removed the meat to cool so I could debone it. Removed the bay leaf and sieved the stock to remove the berries. The stock was pretty thin, so I added the last tablespoon of Bisto gravy mix in the jar to some of the cooled stock. Then mixed that into the rest of the stock and heated it to see if that would thicken it a bit. It didn't. I tasted it for seasoning and found the flavor to be a bit flat. So, I added about a tablespoon of some tomato vinegar and a rounded teaspoon of balsamic mustard and that helped to give it a bit of an edge. One of the issues with any wild

game is that meat is very strongly flavored and when cooked can be on the sweet or flat side. Mustard or horseradish can help to offset those flavors. I returned the meat to the stock and set it aside to reheat later.

With this meat and sauce, some wild rice and green beans. I took the last half of the package of dried Horn of Plenty mushrooms and put them in a cup with just enough water to cover to soak. In another pot, I put a half cup of wild rice. These are broken pieces, so they will cook a lot faster. To that I added a chunk of butter and a teaspoon of chicken bouillon. When the mushrooms are softened, I cut any large pieces down to bite sizes, and added them to the rice. I poured off the mushroom water into a measuring cup, leaving any sandy dregs behind and added enough water to make one cup and added that to the rice. When making any kind of grain, I like to under measure the liquid and add more water as necessary during cooking.

The green beans were frozen and kind of on the long side. So, I thawed them and cut them into 1" pieces, added some butter to the pot and microwaved it til done.



Another Bag of Squid, Ready to Cook

This one is simple. Thaw and drain the squid and toss with butter and a lot of sliced garlic. Reserve the liquid and add enough water to make a cup and half. Add a teaspoon of chicken bouillon and a large pinch of saffron (or two, or three). Cook 150g of spiral pasta in the broth. Quickly saute the squid and add to the pasta. Done!



Potatoes, Pork, and Brussels Sprouts

2 medium red potatoes cut into bite sized pieces and cooked in about 2 tablespoons of butter.

In a little fat, saute a fourth of a medium sweet onion, thinly sliced, about a half cup of thawed frozen Brussels Sprouts, halved, one large boneless pork loin chop cut into bite sized pieces and about a half slice of bacon cut into bits.

Sauce: 1/4 cup jellied stock, 2 rounded teaspoons of tarragon mustard, 1/4 cup sauerkraut juice, and 1 teaspoon chicken bouillon. Heat briefly to combine.

Combine all ingredients and reheat briefly.



Two Kinds of Fish with Pilaf



Pilaf: 3/4 cup Basmati rice and 1/4 cup orzo and about a cup of coarsely chopped, thawed frozen tatsoi (an Asian green of the mustard family, that is similar in taste to bok choy or mildly flavored spinach) that has been squeezed to remove excess juice.

Stock for cooking pilaf: the reserved liquid from a can of sardines that were packed in olive oil, the tatsoi juice, and enough water to make a cup and a half of stock along with 1 teaspoon of tomato chicken bouillon, briefly heated to dissolve bouillon. Add additional water as needed to pilaf during cooking.

For the fish: in a microwaveable pie plate: 2 tablespoons butter, one quarter of a sweet onion, thinly sliced, 2 tablespoons capers, 13 Kalamata olives cut in half lengthwise, plus 1 salmon filet and 1 tilapia filet cut into cubes. Cook on short bursts, stirring often until fish is done. Serve over pilaf.



Another Squirrel?!

My freezer is full of surprises! OK, pieces thawed and rinsed off and into the little crockpot with a bay leaf and enough white wine to barely cover the meat. I also found a small chunk of salt pork in bag in the freezer. It wasn't any bigger than 1" x 1" x 3". Squirrel is rather lean meat, so I cut the salt pork into 4 pieces and tossed it into the pot. I put it on to cook, using the solar battery which runs a little lower than the wall outlet, at around 9 in the morning and let it simmer until about 5pm (17:00). At that time, I removed the meat to a plate and ladled off a half cup of the stock, refrigerating the rest for another time.

I added a half cup of water to the stock along with a teaspoon of chicken bouillon and heated it briefly to dissolve the bouillon. I put that into a microwaveable Corning Ware pot along with a half cup of wild rice and some dried mixed gourmet mushrooms (about a half ounce/14g of Porcini, Shiitake, Crimini, Maitake, Oyster & Chanterelle), and let it soak for about 30 minutes. I added about 2 tablespoons of butter and started cooking it in short bursts, gradually lowering the temperature setting of the microwave and stirring often, occasionally adding more water, a bit at a time, as needed, until the rice was almost cooked.

I then added a thinly sliced quarter of a sweet onion, and about a cup of halved thawed frozen Brussels Sprouts and cooked everything on low until the vegetables were tender. Then...dinner!



Salmon Burgers with Pasta and a Sauce of Leftovers

I found an unopened package of 12 salmon burgers in my freezer. When I opened it I found that there was no separating paper or plastic between the burgers, so they had frozen into a solid block. And since they had been in the freezer for quite a while, they had lost a lot of their liquid to ice. It's called "freezer burn". I don't like to waste food, so...the first challenge was to separate the burgers. Once I got the frozen block out of the bag (it was a wedge fit), I put them in a tray to hopefully thaw enough so that I could separate them enough to take out the 2 that I wanted for dinner and put the rest back into smaller bags of 2 each back into the freezer. I let it stand for about a half hour with absolutely no evidence of thawing. Getting a serrated bread knife, I chiseled off what I could of the ice chunks. This is a sturdy knife, and since I planned to cut the burgers into smaller pieces anyhow, used the knife to saw between the burgers. Slow going, but it worked, so I put the burgers I was planning to use into the fridge to finish thawing and the rest went back into the freezer.

After they thawed I cut the 2 burgers into 32 half inch cubes. They were pretty dry and I hoped that the other ingredients would moisten them up a bit. I put the salmon cubes into a Corning Ware pie plate and added a quarter of a sweet onion, thinly sliced. Over that, I poured the reserved liquid from a tin of sardines packed in olive oil, about 1 1/2 oz. and sprinkled the top with dried dill weed. I stirred it all together and put it into the fridge to marinate for a while. Though there seemed to be a lot of oil, the fish did a good job of absorbing most of it. Cook in the microwave on short bursts until the burger pieces and onions are done.

Pasta sauce: the sauce from a can of large sardines packed in tomato sauce (about a half cup), about a half cup of the stock from cooking the previous squirrel, and another half cup of water that was used to rinse out the last teaspoon of Dijon mustard from its jar. Plus about a half teaspoon of tomato chicken bouillon (the tomato sauce from the fish was already slightly salty) and a healthy pinch of red pepper flakes. All this to cook 150g of penne pasta in the microwave, adding water as needed, until al dente.



Combine all at the last minute.

Kasha with Beef in Horseradish

Soak about a quarter cup of dried sliced Crimini mushrooms in enough water to cover until they are rehydrated and remove mushrooms to microwavable casserole, reserving liquid. Add a quarter of a sweet onion, thinly sliced, about a cup of sliced cabbage, and a couple of tablespoons of butter. Cook until the onions are translucent, the cabbage is wilted and the mushrooms are tender.

Cut up a piece of Tri-Tip roast into bite sized pieces and saute in butter until just cooked. Stir in a couple of spoonfuls of prepared horseradish and set aside to allow flavors to develop.

To the reserved mushroom liquid, add about a half cup of stock and enough water to make a cup and a half. Stir in a teaspoon of chicken bouillon and heat briefly to dissolve the bouillon. Add the stock mixture to the vegetables, heat briefly and add 3/4 cup kasha. Cook until the kasha is tender and has absorbed the liquid, adding additional water, if needed.

At the last minute, stir in the meat and horseradish and let stand a few minutes to allow the meat to reheat.



Dilled Salmon Burgers with Arborio Rice, Mushrooms and Asparagus

I took out two more of the salmon burgers to thaw along with a package of frozen asparagus cut into 1" lengths (about a cups worth). Took about a fourth cup of dried sliced white button mushrooms and put them to soak in about a fourth cup of water.

Later drained the mushrooms (reserving all liquids) and added them to a microwaveable Corning Ware casserole, along with the drained asparagus, about 2 tablespoons of butter, and the burgers cut into 32 cubes.

To the reserved juices from the mushrooms and asparagus, I added the liquid from a tin of sardines packed in olive oil (maybe about a tablespoon in all), about a half cup of stock and enough water to make 1 1/2 cups total, and added a teaspoon of chicken bouillon and about a quarter teaspoon of tomato chicken bouillon, and heated it briefly to dissolve the powders. I poured this over the fish and veg and sprinkled a half teaspoon of dried dill weed and a small handful of frozen chopped scallions over everything.



I let it stand to let the flavors develop and then brought it to heat and added 3/4 cup of Arborio rice and cooked until the rice was done, stirring often and adding additional water as needed. Served with Parmesan cheese sprinkled on top.

I know fish and cheese is supposedly a no-no, but it seemed like it would take the bite off the store bought burgers and give them a smoothness. I've similarly found that a bit of sour cream (or mayonnaise, or a mix of the two, whatever is your preference) adds a lot of moisture to canned tuna and canned salmon in casseroles.

Most canned fish tends to be over-cooked during the canning process and all of its moisture is driven out of the flesh and into the packing liquid and it never soaks back into the fish.

Bratwurst Nuggets with Potatoes and Pseudo-Sauerkraut

I've run out of frozen bags of sauerkraut, but I do have a jar of sauerkraut juice in the fridge (the stuff keeps forever...and a teaspoon of it is a cure for digestion issues, I've heard it's good for stomach ulcers). So, shredded cabbage, some slivered sweet onions, and an ounce or two of sauerkraut juice simmered until the cabbage is tender and most of the liquid has evaporated...and presto! Pseudo-sauerkraut!



A couple of bratwurst sausages cut into 3/4" nuggets and cooked in the microwave on short bursts until done. A couple of red potatoes cut into wedges, coated with a little olive oil, and cooked in the microwave until tender, then browned in the toaster oven at 450°F for about 5 minutes.



Stir the meat and potatoes along with a teaspoon of balsamic mustard into the sauerkraut, reheat and serve. (Use real sauerkraut if you have it...unfortunately, I don't.)

Mystery Meal

This one is truly unknown...I found a package of some kind of marinated meat in the freezer. It fairly positively looked like some kind of boneless poultry and given the color and thickness of the sauce, it looked like a curry. This would have been something direct from a grocery as I never freeze a marinated meat. This is truly an experiment in how well our senses can identify an unknown.

After it thawed, the odor of the sauce belied curry as it had a definite citrus overtone. Separating the meat, proved it to be pieces of turkey breast as the pieces were too large to be chicken and the few tendons in the meat were also too large for chicken. So, what to do with this mystery meat?

It seemed right to cut it up into bite sizes as the pieces were large and irregular in shape. Also, it seemed like it would go with either pasta or rice. I have a lot of stranded pasta: spaghetti and linguine. Linguine was handy, so I went with that.

Next...vegetable? From the citrus aspect, I'm guessing that the sauce is either Mexican or Central American, so the odds are that it's somewhat spicy. Onion pretty much goes with everything, so thinly sliced sweet onion. And, I have a jar of sliced Mission olives in the fridge that needs to be used...so, that won!

I cooked 150g of noodles in 1/4 c. of mild stock, plus enough water to make 1 1/2 cups of liquid and added a teaspoon of tomato chicken bouillon. Tasting a piece of cooked meat proved that it was a bit spicy, but could use more, so I added a goodly pinch of red pepper flakes. All in all, seemed to have worked just fine.



Salmon Burger Casserole with Freekeh and Orzo Pilaf

2 salmon burgers cut into 32 rough cubes, lightly sauteed with a thinly sliced quarter of a sweet onion in a couple of tablespoons of butter, and a few grinds of pepper, and set aside.

One half cup of freekeh (see cookbook, part 2) and one quarter cup of orzo, plus a couple of tablespoons of dried tomato, about a cup of coarsely chopped thawed frozen spinach, and a couple of teaspoons of crumbled dried basil, cooked in a mixture of one half cup stock, enough water to make 1 1/2 cups of liquid and 1 teaspoon of tomato flavored chicken bouillon.



Add fish and onions and reheat to serve. Top with grated Parmesan cheese as desired.

Lemon Chicken with Golden Noodles

Saute together a couple tablespoons butter, a quarter of a thinly sliced sweet onion, a small handful of thinly sliced garlic, a tablespoon of capers, 2 boneless skinless chicken breasts cut into bite sized pieces and marinated in the juice of one small Meyer lemon, and a few grinds of black pepper. Cook until the meat is just done and set aside.

Cook 150 g fettuccine in 1/2 c. of stock plus enough water to make 1 1/2 c. of liquid along with 1 teaspoon of chicken bouillon, about a teaspoon of turmeric, and about 1/4 teaspoon of smoked sweet paprika. Add any additional water as needed and cook, stirring often to prevent sticking, until pasta is al dente.



Add lemon chicken mixture to pasta and reheat as necessary. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese as desired.

Chimichurri Seasoned Sirloin Steak and Freekeh Orzo Casserole

Cook together store bought chimichurri seasoned sirloin steak cut into bite sized pieces, about a half of a sweet onion thinly sliced, a small handful of thinly sliced garlic, and some thawed frozen cut up green bell pepper on short bursts in the microwave, stirring often, until the meat is almost done. Then, set the mixture aside.

Stock mixture: 1/2 cup of stock, a tablespoon of tomato vinegar (or red wine vinegar), enough water to make 1 1/2 cups of liquid and add one teaspoon of tomato flavored chicken bouillon. Heat briefly to dissolve the bouillon. Into a microwaveable Corning Ware dish place about a tablespoon of dried tomatoes and pour over the stock mixture. Allow to stand for about a half hour to let the tomatoes rehydrate. Bring to heat and add in 1/2 cup freekeh and 1/4 orzo and simmer until grain is tender, adding any additional water as needed.



When the grain is tender, add in the meat mixture and reheat as necessary. Top with grated cheese as desired.

Rescue Rice

How to save another kitchen disaster...I'm at the point in the freezer of the occasional freezer burnt meat. I hate to throw food away, and if there's any chance of saving something, I give it a try. This is one of those.

I found 4 turkey wing sleds (the part with two bones). They had the skin on and from my experience freezer burnt poultry skin and fat gets very bitter. After thawing them, I took one of our best skinning knives and removed all of the skin and fat and cut away some of the cartilage that looked too discolored.

I put them in my small crock pot and covered them with about a half cup of some leftover dressing from a Greek potato salad (olive oil, Meyer lemon juice, several grinds of black pepper, a heaping tablespoon of dried oregano, salt, and a couple of tablespoons of tomato vinegar). I let them cook for 6 hours until done. I tasted the sauce and added a little more of the tomato vinegar to spike it up a bit. I removed the wings and let them cool enough to be able to handle them and deboned the meat cutting it into bite sized pieces. It was still a bit tough and could use more cooking, but the meat had a good taste.

I added the meat along with the cooking liquid to a Corning Ware dish with about a half cup of thawed frozen chopped spinach, the same amount of dried sliced Crimini mushrooms, about 2 tablespoons of butter, one cup of milk that was starting to get a bit old and was saved for cooking, and 3/4 cup of arborio rice. I cooked everything until the rice was tender, adding additional milk as needed. And served with optional grated Parmesan cheese.



Tandoori Balti Chicken

Now that I know I have to leave pretty much all of the food we have behind and I was really hoping to take some of my spices, we're concentrating on using the stuff we like the best and letting the rest go til later. Two of my favorite Indian spice blends are Tandoori and Balti. As with most indigenous people's spice blends, they vary in ingredients from household to household. The blends I have were created by the spice merchant who sold them, so I doubt I will find any similar blends in Russia.

The ingredients listed for these are:

Tandoori (from Punjab): coriander, cumin, sweet paprika, garlic, ginger, cardamom, and saffron. Note: Tandoori blends are usually a bright red. I suspect a food coloring is added to most blends. This blend is not bright red.

Balti (from Baltistan): coriander, garlic, ginger, cumin, dundicut chilies, Ceylon cinnamon, brown mustard seeds, cardamom, cloves, fennel, fenugreek, charnuska, star anise, ajwain, black cardamom, cilantro, anise seed, and bay leaf.

My favorite way of using these is to blend them half and half as a rub for meat. So, this recipe used 2 small boneless skinless chicken thighs and 1 medium boneless skinless chicken breast, all cut into bite sized pieces, combined with a quarter of a sweet onion, thinly sliced, and a little fat. All generously sprinkled with the spices and left to marinate in the refrigerator.

I combined 3/4ths cup of basmati rice with about a half cup of chopped thawed frozen spinach and a cup and a half of stock, water, a little turmeric and chicken bouillon and cooked it until the rice was done. Meanwhile, I allowed the chicken mixture to come up to room temperature, then cooked it until the meat was just done but still tender. Combined the two and ready to serve.



Fish with Saffron Couscous

1 piece of salmon and 1 red snapper filet cut into bite sized cubes into a plate with butter and liberally sprinkled with granulated garlic and left to marinate in the fridge.

About a cup of thawed frozen green beans drained of their liquid placed into a microwaveable dish along with a couple of tablespoons of butter, and about a quarter of a medium sweet onion, thinly sliced.

Allow fish to come up to room temperature before cooking. Then microwave on short bursts until the fish is cooked.

Add enough water to the reserved bean liquid to make a cup and a half. Add to the liquid 1 teaspoon of chicken bouillon and a generous teaspoon of saffron. Heat to dissolve bouillon and let stand for a few minutes to allow the saffron to absorb the broth. Then pour the stock over the vegetables. Heat the vegetable mixture and stir in 35g of orzo. Cook, stirring often, until the orzo is almost done. Then add 115g of Israeli Couscous and cook until the couscous is done. Additional water may be added as needed.

Stir the fish cubes into the pot and serve.



Celebration of Laundry

Today we got our new house's washer and drier scheduled for delivery. So, let's celebrate! Homemade dark rye bread, Russian beer, and caviar! Russian chocolate for dessert and more fireworks!



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