

SPICE, THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Issue 23

January 2025

Happy New Year!

I hope this newsletter finds you all happy, healthy and eager to start your new year!

January is a weird month where you are exhausted from all of the activity from the previous month, but you feel compelled to start the new year off full of energy, determination and the best of intentions for getting your life and your world in order.

While I can't help you with most of that, I decided that January might be a great time for an issue of tips, hacks and shortcuts in the kitchen.

While the kitchen is a happy place for most of us, we can always make it happier by making things easier, so enjoy and good luck with those New Year's Resolutions!

Gwen



Cooking Tips and Hacks

As I read various articles, books and websites looking for information for the newsletter, I frequently come across random, but helpful tidbits of information. I have been keeping them on a word document, trying to decide what to do with them and it dawned on me that I could turn them into an issue. So, here we are. Get ready for a chaotic, but fact filled journey through my collection.

Bits and Pieces

With the cost of food soaring, nobody wants to waste food. But what do you do with those random pieces left at the end of a cook?

Here are some ideas:

Eggs – If you have a recipe calling for only yolks or whites, did you know that egg yolks will last for about 4 days in the refrigerator, while the whites will last about a week. That gives you plenty of time to come up with something.

Tomato paste – if you are using tomato paste from a can and do not use the whole can, you can portion out the remaining paste by the tablespoon into an empty egg carton and freeze. Once frozen, you can place them in a zipper lock bag for future use.

Meat and vegetable trimmings- You should always keep 3 zipper lock bags in your freezer. One for vegetables, one for meat scraps and one for chicken bones and scraps. When the bags are full, you can throw them in a

pot with water and make your own stock. Then you can freeze the stock in ice cube trays and use as one of the *layers* of your cooking.

Garlic - If you have trouble using up a full head of garlic, then try mincing the whole head and freezing in one clove portions using the empty egg carton again. That way when you are cooking you can grab as many cloves as you need (they defrost very quickly) without worrying about the rest drying up.

Substitutes

There is very little more frustrating than getting halfway through a recipe only to discover that you are out of an ingredient! Here are some ideas for some quick substitutions for many of cooking's basic ingredients.

If the recipe calls for	You can use
Fresh garlic	½ tsp dried, minced garlic for one clove of fresh
IT prepared mustard	1 tsp dry, ground mustard
IC shortening	⅔C oil
IC cream	IC evaporated milk, if you are using it for thickening a soup, use skim and add 1½ tsp of cornstarch
IT flour for thickening	1½ tsp cornstarch
IC Half and Half	1½T melted butter and enough milk to bring it up to IC.
1 tsp vinegar	2 tsp lemon juice
½C chopped fresh onion	3T dried, minced onion
Ricotta	small curd cottage cheese (and vice versa)
Teriyaki sauce	IC soy sauce + ½C sugar + 2 cloves garlic + 1 tsp ginger - heat until sugar dissolves and liquid gets a bit thick.
Brown sugar	IC white sugar + 1-2T molasses
Buttermilk	1T lemon juice + 15T milk
Cream of Tartar	2 tsp lemon juice or vinegar

Converting Dried Ingredients to Cooked

Sometimes it's hard to know how much pasta or grains and legume to cook. There is a pretty standard formula for all of those.

Pasta – 8 ounces of dried pasta will cook up to 3½ -4 cups of cooked pasta. This will be a little off for some of the larger sizes, but it's a good starting point.

Legumes - 1 pound of dried beans will yield about 6-7 cups cooked.

Grains – Generally 1 cup of grains will require 2 cups of water and will yield 3-4 cups of cooked product.

Cooking Times and Temps

Timing is everything they say, and it is never truer than in the kitchen. Here's some tips to help make sure your food is cooked perfectly.

Fish – Cook fillets or steaks over medium high heat for 10 minutes per inch of thickness.

USDA Minimum Meat Cooking Temperatures

Product	Minimum temp
Beef, Pork & Veal -steaks, chops, & roasts	145° F (this equates to medium doneness)
Ground meats	160° F
Poultry	165° F
Ham	145° F
Eggs	160° F
Fish & Shellfish	145° F
Leftovers & Casseroles	165° F

Converting Slow cooker to Oven cooking times and vice versa

Stovetop/Oven Cooking Time	Low setting	High Setting
15-30 minutes	4-6 hours	1-2 hours
30 minutes – 1 hour	5-7 hours	2-3 hours
1-2 hours	6-8 hours	3-4 hours
2-4 hours	8-12 hours	4-6 hours

Random One-Off Tips

Okay, here's where a bit of the chaos comes in. These are the ones that didn't fit into any specific category, but they are just as helpful.

-Really, really want a baked potato but don't want to heat up the whole kitchen, try the slow cooker. Spray the potato with cooking spray and sprinkle whatever seasonings you want and wrap it in foil. Place in the slow cooker, add ½ cup water and cook on slow for 6-7 hours or high for 4-5.

- Can't find your clay brown sugar saver? Try throwing a couple of marshmallows or slices of bread into the cannister.

- For creamier mashed potatoes, put the potatoes in cold water and bring everything to boil together.

- Did you know that Instant mashed potatoes can work wonders as a thickener in soups and stews?

- Having trouble getting the crock of your slow cooker really clean? Try filling it with water and white vinegar, with a tsp or two of baking soda and turn on low for 4 hours.

- When adapting a recipe for the slow cooker, cut the liquids in half. Conversely, if starting with a slow cooker recipe and adapting to the oven or stovetop, double the liquid.

- Dusting chicken with baking powder makes for crispier skin. You can even use the baking powder to make wings if you are sensitive to gluten, just use a thicker coating.

- Make double, freeze half in portion sizes. Many sites have these sort of gigantic ice cube trays that hold 1-2 cups. You can freeze stock, stew, soup in serving sized portions, then transfer them to bags.

-Invest in a vacuum sealer.

And last but not least,

- Use an empty water bottle to separate the egg yolk from whites. Squeeze the bottle, place it over the yolk, then stop squeezing the bottle and pull it up. The yolk will be pulled up into the water bottle!



See you next month!

Gwen

What's new

While I won't be at any shows until March, the store will be open for business as usual!

I'll be busy working on all of the projects I mentioned last month, so I hope you will stay in touch.

Happy new year!