

**Historical Recipes : Comparing Cooking Then and Now**  
**A home-based lesson plan**

The recipe below is from *The Virginia Housewife Or, Methodical Cook: A Facsimile of an Authentic Early American Cookbook* by Mary Randolph. *The Virginia Housewife* was published in 1824 and is one of the first cookbooks in America.

**To Roast Young Chickens**

When you kill young chickens, pluck them very carefully, truss and put them down to a good fire, dredge and baste them with lard; they will take a quarter of an hour in roasting; froth them up, lay them on the dish, pour butter and parsley on, and serve them up hot.

Now compare the recipe above to a modern recipe from *The Joy of Cooking* by Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer and Ethan Becker.

**Roasted Chicken**

*4 to 7 servings; about 1 pound chicken per person*

This is the simplest way of roasting a chicken. For the brownest skin, roast the bird on a rimmed baking sheet or in a shallow roasting pan.

Position a rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Lightly oil a shallow roasting pan or baking sheet.

Remove the neck and giblets from, then rise and pat dry: *1 whole chicken (4-7 pounds)*

Generously rub the body and neck cavities and sprinkle the skin with: *Salt*

Arrange the chicken breast side up in the pan. Brush the breast and legs with: *2 to 3 tablespoons melted butter*

Put the chicken in the oven and roast. If you prize moist breast meat, consider the chicken done when the thickest part of the thigh exudes clear juices when pricked deeply with a fork and registers 170 to 175 degrees on an instant-read meat thermometer. If you like the dark meat falling off the bone and are willing to risk a dry breast, roast until the thigh registers 180 degrees. The total roasting time for a 4-pound bird will be 55 to 65 minutes. For larger birds, figure on 1 hour for the first 4 pounds, plus about 8 minutes for each additional pound.

Remove the chicken to a platter and let stand for 10 to 15 minutes.

Carve and serve.

Discuss the two recipes. What do you notice that is similar and different? What do you need to cook the recipes? Do you have everything you need in your kitchen today?

*Bonus! Use math to figure out how long you would need to cook an 8-pound chicken based on the instructions from the second recipe. Excerpt - "For larger birds, figure on 1 hour for the first 4 pounds, plus about 8 minutes for each additional pound."*

During the 18th century, most of the food being recorded in cookbooks used by white women were based on European recipes. By the 19th century, you start seeing African-inspired dishes like pepper pots, okra stew, jambalaya and gumbo in cookbooks. Enslaved people received food rations - a small amount of meat and some corn meal. Other foods had to be grown in personal gardens and had to be tended to after working long, hard days. Slaves heavily flavored their greens and beans and used fat back in order to make their food taste better and give it more calories. Slaves relied on this high calorie diet to prevent them from malnourishment. For more information, check out *Bound to the Fire: How Virginia's Enslaved Cooks Helped Invent American Cuisine* by Kelley Fanto Deetz (available on Kindle).

Below you will find more historical recipes, some of which have been modified to modern kitchens. Would you like to make some of these recipes? Ask your parents or guardians to help you prepare a dish below.

#### **Mother's Spoon Bread\***

3 cups milk  
1 cup cornmeal  
1 teaspoon salt  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 large eggs

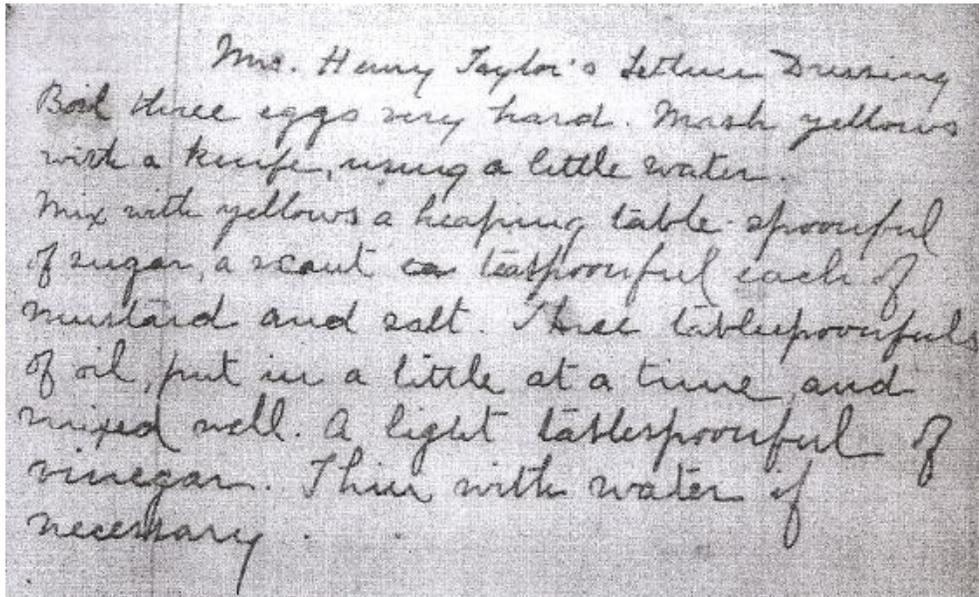
Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Combine two cups of milk and one cup cornmeal in a pan on the stovetop over medium high heat. Stir constantly until it boils and thickens. Remove from heat. Add the remaining cup of milk and other ingredients. Stir to combine and bake in a greased baking dish for 25-35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Serve immediately.

\*This recipe is from Nancy Carter Crump's book, *Hearthside Cooking: Virginia Plantation Cuisine*. The original recipe is from the Carter-Walker family papers.

**Mrs. Henry Taylor's Lettuce Dressing (Salad Dressing)\***

Boil three eggs very hard. Mash Yellows with a knife, using a little water. Mix with yellows a heaping tablespoonful of sugar, a scant teaspoonful each of mustard and salt. Three tablespoonful of oil, put in a little at a time and mix well. A light tablespoon of vinegar. Thin with water if necessary.

\*This recipe comes from a 1849 cookbook from Westend, a local historic property. See the original recipe below.



**Stewed Tomatoes and Corn\***

- 4 cups peeled and quartered ripe tomatoes\*\*\*
- 2 cups corn kernels
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1-2 teaspoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons butter

Simmer tomatoes and corn in separate covered saucepans over low heat. If needed, add just enough milk to corn to prevent sticking. Cook until vegetables are tender. Remove from heat. Combine tomatoes and corn in one saucepan. Add seasonings and butter. Return to heat and simmer mixture gently for about 10 minutes. Serve hot.

\*This recipe is from Nancy Carter Crump's book, *Hearthside Cooking: Virginia Plantation Cuisine*. The original recipe is from Mary Stuart Smith.

\*\*\*Have an adult prepare the tomatoes - Make an X on the bottom of your tomatoes and throw them into a pot of boiling water for no more than a minute. Fish them out with a slotted spoon, plunge them into a bowl of cold water (or an ice bath), lift them directly back out, and peel back the skin with a knife or your fingers.

### **Macaroni and Spinach Bake\***

1 (7-ounce) package uncooked dried elbow macaroni (or other pasta)  
¼ cup dried breadcrumbs\*\*\*  
1 tablespoon butter  
1 medium onion, finely chopped  
1 teaspoon fresh garlic, minced  
½ teaspoon marjoram (or other herb)  
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper  
1 (10-ounce) package chopped fresh or frozen spinach (If frozen, defrost and drain)  
1 ½ cups grated parmesan cheese (other other cheese)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In an uncovered pot full of salted water, boiling water, cook the macaroni for 10 minutes. Drain the pasta, and set aside. Sprinkle the breadcrumbs into a buttered, 3-quart casserole dish and set aside.

Melt the butter in a medium skillet until sizzling, and add the onion, garlic, marjoram, and pepper. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until the onion is soft (about 2 to 3 minutes). Stir in the spinach. Stir constantly until the spinach is heated through (about 3 minutes). Stir in the cooked macaroni and cheese, and remove from heat.

Spoon the mixture into the prepared casserole, pressing gently. Bake for 20 - 25 minutes.

\*This recipe is from Dave DeWitt's book, *Founding Foodies: How Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin Revolutionized American Cuisine*.

\*\*\*To make your own breadcrumbs: Preheat your oven to 350°F. Tear your bread into 1-2" chunks and spread the bread chunks out into a single layer over a large baking sheet. Bake the bread chunks, stirring every five minutes or so, until they are dry and just starting to turn a little golden on the edges. Remove them from the oven and let them cool for a few minutes. Place your dried and cooled bread pieces in a food processor and pulse until it has turned into crumbs.