

How to cook, frugally, with what you have on hand.

Too Broke to Shop and Can't Cook Anyhow!

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What others have said about this book:

I never knew you could eat so well, so quickly, for so cheap. With your tips I can cut my grocery bill in half! Thanks!

Susan C., Hermosa Beach, CA

Informative, entertaining, and best of all, this book will save me money!

Kathy S., Fair Oaks, CA

I would like to have this as assigned reading for everyone between the ages of 20 and 35. They will use this all their lives.

DeAnn P., Citrus Heights, CA

You wouldn't think a cookbook would be so entertaining, and it's saved me money too!

Patty A., Citrus Heights, CA

I'm not a cook, but reading your book was fun!

Fred P., Citrus Heights, CA

I was able to put this book to work right away, using only ingredients I already had on hand.

Ken U., Citrus Heights, CA

I love the idea of being able to go to my cupboard and to pull out fast quick items to throw together instead of having to run to the store every time I want to cook a meal for my family.

Paula S., Fair Oaks, CA

Only real life experience could have birthed this charming combination of kitchen savvy, common sense recipes, and helpful food tips. This book could help even my brother, a self-named kitchen-phobic, feed himself!

Kathy S., Davis, CA

I always joke that the guy I end up marrying will LOVE to cook – or at least like eating macaroni and cheese a lot (because it's the easiest meal for me to make!). However, after reading Suzy's book, I think that joke is history. Cooking is no longer some foreign skill only a fortunate few seem to master. I can go beyond macaroni and cheese . . . and venture into more delicious, appetizing meals. It's easier to do than I thought – plus I love the variety of simple recipes Suzy shares.

Catherine C., Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada

Suzy's book opened my eyes to the many creative ways I can eat interesting foods using just stuff around the house. When I'm at the grocery store now, I think of "meals per dollar," a concept that never even occurred to me before. I am sure that the time I invested reading the book will pay dividends for years to come!

Jim U., Arden-Arcade, CA

If you don't know how to cook, Suzy will take you by the hand and make it easy.

Cheryl M., Sacramento, CA

Too Broke to Shop and Can't Cook Anyhow!

**A "How to" Guide
to Frugal Cooking**

By

Suzy Sharpe

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For more information, contact
Sharpecooking@aol.com

Dedication

This book is dedicated to

Kenneth W. Umbach, Ph.D.

**His help was more than invaluable,
it was essential.**

Thank you so much.

What's In This Book?

Get ready, this isn't your typical cookbook. Sit back and enjoy the ride . . .

Chapter 1.

**Basic survival cooking, or:
If you have diapers and formula, it ain't an
emergency.**

This chapter explains how to make a variety of dinners from unlikely sources by mixing and matching anything that is sitting in your pantry and fridge. You will learn where to shop to save the most bucks, some gadgets that will make your life easier, and where to buy them really cheap!

Chapter 2.

**Emergency rations, or:
How not to get into that mess in the first place.**

What inexpensive things to keep on hand that will sit patiently until you need them, and won't go bad. The difference between paper economics and reality economics and how not knowing is like throwing your money out the window.

Chapter 3.

The easy bare basics of cooking, or: Granny didn't have to measure and neither do you.

The idea that cooking is hard is a conspiracy. Cooks just want to perpetuate that idea to make themselves look good. Anything looks hard until you know the basics. This chapter will teach you the ABCs of cooking. And how to cook up a storm and not have your kitchen look like a hurricane just blew through it.

Chapter 4.

The best sauces come in a can, or: Why Mr. Campbell is a saint.

This will show you how to camouflage those "cream of" soups to make great tasting dinners in a jiffy. No one will know you didn't make it from scratch. It will tell you how to hide those veggies so the kids won't know they're eating them.

Chapter 5.

They want me to bring WHAT! or: There's no luck in potluck.

What you can easily make to take to a gathering that won't break the bank or embarrass you.

Chapter 6.

How to impress your company or: If you can't do it, fake it!

You've got company coming and you don't want them to know you're a kitchen klutz. This chapter will hold your hand and show you what to make and how to dress it up so it looks like you know what you're doing.

Chapter 7.

Step by step cooking basics, or: If you already knew how to cook, you wouldn't be reading this, would you?

You will learn the things the cookbook authors never tell you because they assume you already know: the easiest way to cook a chicken, to mash potatoes so they don't turn to mush. How to know when pasta is done. (No, you don't throw it on the wall!)

Chapter 8.

Going beyond the basics, or: Dr. Seuss isn't so hard.

Some next steps and closing thoughts.

Foreword

Our grandmothers and great-grandmothers lived through very hard times. Many of them lived in the country. Stocking up on food for the hard winter months was a way of life for them. They grew gardens and canned vegetables and often raised their own meat. They made everything from scratch because there was no such thing as convenience foods. If you went out to eat, it was at a sit-down restaurant and it was a big deal. No take out, no drive-thrus, no boxes of Hamburger Helper® to make dinner quickly.

Then came decades of prosperity, and many forgot how to stock up for the lean times. Many don't know how to "make do" with little, and many of those are now facing a financial crisis.

We have the drive-thrus and the convenience foods, but eating there can double, or even triple your food bill. You can buy ten pounds of potatoes for the price of one small box of potatoes that will serve maybe four people.

So this book is for all of the single parents out there, for those who have lost their jobs, for the newlyweds trying to make ends meet, for anyone who is struggling financially. We can do without many things in life, but eating isn't one of them.

I hope I've helped them a little.

Suzy Sharpe

Chapter 1

Basic survival cooking, or: If you have diapers and formula it ain't an emergency.

This isn't an "eat healthy" cookbook. This isn't going to tell you 30 ways to serve tofu or how to make cute little canapés out of toast tips.

This is how to feed you and yours when you've run out of paycheck but you still have month left over. This is basic, survival cooking.

This chapter starts with what to do when there's nothing to eat in the house. Now, I'm going to say to cook the rice, or pasta, or potatoes, to boil things or simmer them. If you don't know how to do any of these things, don't worry. Chapter 7 explains how to do these and other basic things so thoroughly your baby sister could do it with her eyes closed. If you read something unfamiliar, look it up in Chapter 7.

With that said, let's get to it!

You've found yourself caught between a rock and that hard place you always hear about. You have nothing to eat, and no money to go out. The kids are banging their silverware on the table.

Don't panic! You probably have more than you think you do. What you do first is to take an inventory of

everything that is edible in the place. Leave out nothing! Put down ketchup and mayo, that half bottle of salad dressing, that one potato, the can of sardines. List everything!

Now divide this list into five groups:

- Starches: potatoes, rice, pasta, ramen, bread, box of pancake mix, potato chips, etc.
- Meat: tuna, sardines, 2 pieces leftover fast-food chicken, eggs (yes, I know eggs aren't considered meat, but they're protein, put them in anyway, same with cheese), bologna, cheese, except Parmesan.
- Veggies: half an onion, one limp celery stalk, a bag of frozen peas, a can of mushrooms, can of stewed tomatoes.
- List anything left over that isn't a condiment: can of cream of chicken soup, jar of spaghetti sauce, jar of Cheese Whiz, can of tomato soup.
- Everything not in another list, condiments, and spices: ketchup, relish, soy sauce, mayo, salad dressing, butter, olive oil, oregano, basil, Italian seasoning (Parmesan cheese would go here).

Now, let's make some dinner!

You will mix and match something from all 5 groups. Include at least one thing from every group, if you

have it. If you have a group with nothing in it, don't worry, that's OK.

If whatever is in the meat group is already cooked, great! If not already cooked, see Chapter 7.

Choose a starch and start it cooking. (Ditto the above if you don't know how.)

You will usually cut the meat into small pieces. This is how you can make those two pieces of chicken, or that tiny piece of leftover roast, or 4 slices of bologna feed four people. The more people to feed, the smaller the pieces.

Which spice to use where?

Brown spices are usually used for baking: cinnamon, nutmeg, pumpkin spice, etc.

Green spices usually for cooking: basil, thyme, parsley, sage, oregano.

Red spices are hot: cayenne, chili powder, paprika, but they make a good contrast if used sparingly. You know your family's "hot" comfort zone.

If your green spices are brown, best not use them!

When in doubt, parsley goes with anything!

In this book, I'm calling anything in a can in the spices section of the store a spice. If you know the difference between herbs and spices, and you want to argue with me, why are you reading this anyway?

See what is in group #4 that you can use to make the starch slippery. Isn't the purpose of spaghetti sauce to make the spaghetti slide down easier?

For example: If you have pasta shells or potatoes, you can use that half bottle of French salad dressing, or a can of cream of chicken soup, or the can of stewed tomatoes. The stewed tomatoes would work also with rice, as will soy sauce, or cream of anything soup. Even the chunky soups could be used this way.

Then put some of the veggies together with the sauce, the starch, and the meat. I want you to realize that the variations are almost endless. Depending on what is at hand, you can mix and match from the different groups and create many different meals.

You can mix and match

- Cut up leftover chicken without the bone, stir it in with any cold pasta, salad dressing of any kind (French, Ranch, Bleu cheese, Catalina, whatever the kids will eat or whatever you like) some raw or slightly cooked veggies, and you now have world famous chicken pasta salad!
- Add soy sauce to cooked rice until it is brown all over but still dry; scramble some eggs, stir-fry that half an onion, or thaw out some frozen peas; stir fry whatever veggies are on hand. Then you

have fried rice. (Stir fry is explained in Chapter 7.)

- Put potato slices in a baking pan. Over those, pour one of the "cream of" soups mixed with a can of either milk, broth, or water, and put chicken pieces on top. If the chicken is already cooked, cut it up and stir it in with it. Or put pork chops on top of peeled sliced potatoes with cream of mushroom soup. Bake for about an hour at 350 degrees while you do something else. The dish is done when you stick a fork in the potatoes and they are soft.
- Add a can of chunky soup to cooked rice, cooked pasta, or boiled cut up potatoes to stretch it to serve more people. Add some cut up cooked meat if available.
- Sauté some onions and celery (sautéing is explained in chapter 7), brown some hamburger, and add to it a couple of cans of beans (whatever beans your family likes). Spice it up with a can of chopped green chilies, or some chili powder if you have some. Go very slowly with that. You know your family's tolerance for hot stuff. Put in a little, taste it, then put in a little more if needed. You can always add more, but it's hard to take it out!
- Ramen noodles – I could write a whole chapter on ramen noodles alone! Add chopped meat and

some frozen veggies to the water in a pot. That will all cook as the water heats up to boiling; then add the ramen noodles and simmer (small bubbles around the edge of the pot) for 3 minutes. You now have a very hearty soup. Add soy sauce instead of the little flavor packet that comes with the ramen noodles. Cook up two or three packages like this *with* the flavor packet but drain the water off for a main dish. You can call it Chinese spaghetti. The kids will love it, and it takes less than 10 minutes.

- There is no law that says you have to serve traditional foods at traditional times. If the only meat you have is lunch meat, cut it up in strips, heat it in a dry pan with no oil until it is a little browned and add it to the fried rice, or to ramen noodles with the water drained off, or to pasta salad.
- Make pancakes for dinner, adding cut up hot dogs or lunchmeat to the batter. The kids will love it! You can make pancakes and add slices of banana, or that can of mandarin oranges that has been sitting in the cupboard for years.
- French toast is good at any time, and it will stretch out what eggs you have. It will also use up that stale bread. French toast is explained in chapter 7.
- If the only starch you have is pancake mix, make the batter thicker than for pancakes, more like a

sponge than something you can pour; spoon it over any simmering soup: chunky, "cream of," or tomato. Make sure the soup is only simmering (tiny bubbles). Cover it for about 10 minutes to make dumplings. Put leftover chicken in the soup before the pancake mix to have chicken and dumplings. Add chopped celery or frozen peas to have chicken stew with dumplings! If you are saving any milk you have for the kids' breakfast, add water or broth to the soup instead.

But you're missing one of the groups! Now what!

Let's say you don't have anything in the fourth group, nothing to make the starch slippery. You can pour yellow oil, either salad or olive oil, about 3/4ths of a cup. It doesn't matter what kind of cup, a regular coffee cup will do. Fill the rest of the cup with vinegar. Add whatever spices you have that are green, not brown. Pour them into your hand until you have a pile the size of a dime. Dump into the cup with the oil and vinegar and you now have vinegar and oil salad dressing.

Or you don't have any vinegar. Take a coffee cup, put mayo in it to about half. Add a soup spoon full of mustard. If you have brown mustard, that would be best, but if you only have yellow hot dog mustard, that will do too. Mix it together and stir it into cooked potatoes, or pasta to make a pasta or potato salad.

Now that you have the starch, the meat, and maybe some veggies, add something from the last group. Add Parmesan cheese, or parsley, or Italian seasoning. If you don't have a lot of cooking experience, just add one thing from the last group. Salt and pepper come last.

The last group is as much for appearance as for flavor. Cream of chicken soup on potatoes looks anemic until you sprinkle a little parsley on top. Now it looks like you're cooking! Dark colors on light foods and light colors (like Parmesan cheese) on dark foods.

Note: Most of the brown spices are used in baking. If you are cooking dinner, it's best not to go there. The red spices are a little hot so handle with care, thinking about your family's tastes. Most green spices are good with dinner, but use your judgment. Don't put Italian seasoning with Chinese fried rice. When in doubt, parsley – either fresh and cut up, or dried and sprinkled on – goes with anything.

Are you thinking outside of the box yet?

I will tell you in detail how to make dumplings from pancake mix, and how to scramble eggs and cook rice, everything I've mentioned here.

The purpose of this chapter has been to get you thinking about possibilities. If you're stuck with what is on hand, think about how to use what you do have instead of focusing on what you don't. Find a different way to use it.

You may find as you experiment with mixing various things, you get some combinations that don't taste good together. It isn't the end of the world.

Don't give up! Think of when you were learning to ride a bike. You took a lot of tumbles until you got the right balance. No one will die from what you made, even if the kids act like they will.

Just as you got back on that bike, get back to the kitchen. You will succeed. You can do this!

Baby powder makes a terrific, great smelling dry shampoo and cleaner. Pour it on a dry dirt spot on your carpet and rub it in. Let it set a little while, (or a day or two!) and vacuum it up.

You can use it when your cat or dog comes in covered with grease from under the car. Rub it in their coat, and brush it or blow it out with the hair dryer. If you don't get it all the first time, try it again.

Don't put it in their ears, but use it to soak up the oily medicine you put inside their ears that runs outside of their ears. Use it the same as for car grease.

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