

An award-winning cookbook and cooking guide for beginning cooks.

Help-I Gotta Cook!

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# Help-I Gotta Cook!

Ed Dugan

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#### DEDICATION

The Creator made my wife Lynne and then threw away the recipe,  
which left me with the only perfect woman in the entire world.

With love and affection to Lynne, my daughters Patricia and Pamela,  
and my sons Mark and Craig.

In the novel ***Lying in Wait*** by best-selling author J. A. Jance, Detective J. P. Beaumont laments, “There wasn’t a stick of edible food in the house. When Karen and I split up, that was one of the first and hardest lessons I had to learn about living on my own. Food doesn’t automatically transport itself from grocery store shelves to refrigerator and cupboards or table. Someone has to go to the store and actually bring it home. And meals—especially balanced ones—don’t appear on the table magically. They require advance planning and preparation. When it comes to cooking, I’m a complete flop.”

Help- I Gotta Cook!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff of BookSurge for their help and patience in taking me through the publishing process. Their promptness in addressing issues and their professionalism are superb. As a first-time author, I couldn't have asked for better people to work with and BookSurge should be congratulated on having these outstanding individuals working for them; Sarah Davis, Sarah Southerland, Aaron Voelker and Julie Burnett.

In particular, I want to thank Ronald L. Donaghe an incredible editor who really read every word in my book and polished it like I could never do.

As always, I want to thank my partner in this venture, my wife Lynne, who managed to maintain her sanity while saving mine.

Ed Dugan

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## 346 PICNICS AND TAILGATE PARTIES

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Hippie salad  
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Mediterranean rice and lentils  
Waldorf salad  
Potato, tomato, and tuna salad  
Stuffed tomatoes  
Mediterranean salad

Keep in mind that it will probably be hours between the time you leave home and the time you eat. So think about the food you are going to serve and don't make a sandwich ahead of time that will likely turn soft and drippy before you serve it.

# TRAINING WHEELS MEALS

I have taken nine recipes in this chapter from the cookbook to help you get started on your new culinary adventure. This may be too elementary for some of you, but people who are not accustomed to cooking need to gain some confidence in the kitchen, and that's the reason for this chapter. I know, as in this first recipe, that I do not need to tell you to open the can of tomatoes. What I am suggesting is that you read the recipe carefully (be sure to read the entire recipe first), get all of the food assembled and ready to go, and then start cooking. If you are ready to use the tomatoes, why start searching for the can opener? If the can is open, you just have to pick it up and pour. You are focused on making the dish, not opening a can.

If you are cooking for the first time, relax and think of it as fun, not a task. Just remember to control your heat—less is best. Also, review the Cooking Guide once more before you start. And, in the unlikely event that you ruin the meal, for any reason, remember that's what garbage disposals are for. Better that than forcing yourself to eat a bad meal.

### **Picadillo with Rice, Green Salad, and Crusty Bread**

1 cup uncooked rice (which you are going to cook while you make the rest)  
 1 lb lean ground beef  
 2 tablespoons olive oil  
 1 14-oz can crushed tomatoes or diced tomatoes  
 ¼ cup raisins  
 ¼ cup green olives with pimentos, sliced in half  
 1 tablespoon juice from olive jar  
 2 tablespoons capers  
 1 medium onion, chopped  
 1 bay leaf  
 2 tablespoons parsley  
 1 clove garlic, minced  
 1 bag pre-washed salad greens of your choice  
 Salad dressing of your choice

Before you start, measure out the olives (sliced in half), capers, and raisins into a single small dish. Add a tablespoon of olive juice to the dish. Open the can of tomatoes.

Heat the oil in a heavy skillet for one minute, over medium heat, and add the beef, breaking up the clumps with the bottom of a large spoon. Stir, turning over the beef until it is uniformly browned.

While the beef is browning, dice the onion using the method I described in the Cooking Guide (see *Onions* as well as *Sizing*). Don't worry about how neat your onion pieces are. Peel the garlic by putting the side of

your chef's knife over it and smashing down lightly with the heel of your hand. Peel off the skin, cut off the root end, and mince the garlic with the chef's knife into very small pieces.

When the beef is browned, add the onion, parsley, bay leaf, and garlic, mix with the beef, and continue to cook until the onions turn somewhat soft, about four minutes.

Add the olives, capers, raisins, and olive juice with a little salt and pepper, and cook for an additional three minutes. Add the can of tomatoes, cover, and simmer over low heat for ten minutes.

While the Picadillo is simmering, put 1 cup of rice and 2 cups of water into a saucepan with a little salt. Bring to a boil, turn down to the lowest setting on your stove, cover, and cook for twenty minutes. You can turn off the heat at this point, and let the rice sit covered for twenty minutes or more.

When the Picadillo is done, remove the bay leaf. Place the salad greens in a bowl and toss with whatever salad dressing you like.

Spoon a portion of rice onto each plate and add a generous portion of Picadillo on top of it. Serve with the salad and some nice, crusty bread.

### **Last Meal Pork Chops with Mashed Potatoes and Green Beans**

*When shopping for the pork chops, make sure they are extra thick, at least 1 inch or more. You only need one per person.*

This meal is for four people. Cut everything in half for two people, except the cream.

4 pork chops, 1 inch thick with bone in  
 2 large sweet onions  
 1 cup of heavy cream  
 Salt and pepper  
 4 Russet potatoes  
 2 cans cut green beans  
 Butter  
 Milk  
 Mayonnaise

Peel the potatoes, cut them into large chunks, and put them in a pot of cold water with 2 tablespoons of salt. Set aside.

Open the cans of beans, drain them, and put them in a microwavable bowl. Add salt and pepper and drizzle the top with a little olive oil. Put them in the microwave, but do not cook them yet.

Cut the onions in half, stem to stem, pull off the outer layer of skin, cut off both ends, and slice very thin. Set aside.

The pork chops will probably have a layer of fat around them; trim some of it off and put it into a heavy skillet (the skillet must have a lid to go with it). If there is no fat, use 2 tablespoons of olive oil.

Heat the fat over medium-low heat until it begins to brown slightly and give up its liquid. Discard the fat pieces, turn the heat up to medium high, and brown the pork chops on both sides. They don't need to be very brown, just a nice, light tan.

Smother the chops in onions, add salt and pepper, cover, and reduce the heat to VERY low. Cover the skillet, and cook for two and a half hours. DO NOT LIFT THE LID DURING THIS TIME!

About forty five minutes before the chops are done, turn the heat on under the potatoes, and cook until they can be pierced easily with a knife. Turn off the heat, and pour them into a colander to drain for a few minutes. Return them to the same pan, over the warm burner, and let them steam a little to get rid of moisture. Add a generous amount of butter and, with a fork, break up the potatoes, and mix in the butter. When the butter is melted, add a half cup of milk, and 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise. Beat with an electric beater until the potatoes are nice and smooth. If they need more milk, add it. After beating in the additional milk, don't beat anymore or the potatoes will get pasty. Salt and pepper to taste, and keep warm by covering them and turning on the burner to the lowest possible setting.

After the allotted cooking time, uncover the chops and remove them to a warm oven. Pour the cream into the skillet with the onions and juices, turn up the heat to medium high, and reduce the mixture until it has a sauce-like consistency. This will be when it clings to a spoon like gravy.

Meanwhile, heat the beans in the microwave for two minutes on high.

Place a chop on each plate along with a large helping of mashed potatoes. Spoon lots of sauce over the chops and some on the potatoes. Serve the beans as a side dish.

### King Ranch Chicken with Combination Salad

4 skinned and boned chicken breast halves  
 2 tablespoons butter  
 1 tablespoon safflower oil  
 1 green bell pepper, chopped  
 1 medium onion, chopped  
 2 10-oz cans Rotel diced tomatoes with chilies  
 1 can cream of mushroom soup  
 1 can cream of chicken soup  
 12 6-inch corn tortillas cut into quarters  
 8 oz shredded cheddar cheese  
 1 can chicken broth  
 1 cup water  
 Combination Salad—see Salad Chapter for ingredients

NOTE: This recipe can easily be halved for fewer people. In that case, you will have two half cans of soup left over. Just combine them and have them for lunch.

Combine the can of chicken broth and the water in a skillet, heat to the simmer, and add the chicken breasts. Cover and cook over low heat for twenty minutes. Remove the breasts, let cool, and cut into one-inch chunks or shred. Set aside.

While the chicken is poaching, chop the green pepper and onion, open all of the cans, and set aside.

Lay four of the tortillas on a cutting board, and cut into quarters. Set aside. Do the same with four more tortillas, set aside in a separate pile, and repeat for the remaining tortillas, setting them aside in a separate pile. The reason we are doing it this way is that the tortillas are laid out in the casserole in thirds, and this way you won't need to do any counting at the last minute.

Heat the butter and oil in a sauce pan, and add the onions and green peppers. Cover and sweat over low heat, until the vegetables are soft. Transfer them to a large bowl and add the cut-up chicken, diced tomatoes, and both cans of soup. Stir well.

NOTE: You can make this dish in a rectangular baking dish, but I prefer a round one because the tortilla quarters fit so nicely. If you don't have a round soufflé or other dish, use an all stainless steel saucepan.

Arrange one third of the tortillas neatly around the bottom of the dish, and top with about one third of the chicken mixture. Sprinkle a generous portion of cheese over the top. Lay the next third of the tortillas over the

cheese, and add another third of the chicken mixture. Sprinkle cheese on top. Add the final third of the tortillas and the remaining chicken mixture. Reserve the rest of the cheese.

Cover the dish loosely with foil, and bake in a 325-degree oven for thirty-five minutes. Remove foil; sprinkle the rest of the cheese on top, and bake for an additional five minutes. Remove the dish from the oven, and let it rest for fifteen minutes.

Serve King Ranch Chicken with the Combination Salad in the Salad Chapter.

### Poached Whole Chicken with Lemon Sauce

*If I were teaching a cooking class to a group of people who had never cooked a single thing in their entire lives, this is the recipe I would start with. It is not only a wonderful meal in itself, but yields many other wonderful meals with the leftovers.*

NOTE: Pay attention to the timing because the only way to ruin the meal is to overcook the chicken.

1 2½–3 lb chicken  
1 bay leaf  
1 carrot, scraped  
1 onion stuck with 2 whole cloves  
1 tablespoon salt  
Water

NOTE: You can tie the chicken legs together with some kitchen twine if you wish. This is called trussing and it helps the chicken hold its shape. In some recipes, this is important, when the chicken is stuffed, for instance. In this case, it makes little difference.

Place the whole chicken in a deep pot, and cover halfway with water. Add the bay leaf, carrot, onion, and salt. Cover tightly. Bring to boil, then simmer gently for forty five minutes.

The key here is to have the water at a bare simmer. If the water boils, the chicken will be tough. Remove from heat, uncover, and let chicken rest in broth until the broth is cool, about another thirty minutes. Remove chicken, discard vegetables and bay leaf, and strain broth, if necessary.

Sauce:

2 tablespoons butter  
3 tablespoons flour

Salt and pepper  
1 cup strained chicken broth  
1 tablespoon of herbs of your choice (tarragon is nice)  
½ cup heavy cream  
2 tablespoons lemon peel, chopped fine  
Juice of half lemon, or to taste

Melt butter in saucepan over medium heat, add flour, and stir for one minute. Remove from heat and stir in chicken broth, lemon juice, lemon peel, salt, pepper, and herbs. Return to heat, bring to a slow boil, and cook for two minutes or until sauce thickens. Add cream and cook for one minute.

NOTE: Since this dish yields great leftovers, I like to start with serving thick slices of breast meat. Buttered noodles, boiled potatoes, or rice should accompany the chicken. Spoon the sauce over all. Any green vegetable or salad will go nicely with this meal.

A few treatment suggestions for leftovers: chicken salad, chicken ala king, chicken and dumplings, chicken hash, chicken Tettrazzini, chicken soup. Don't forget to freeze the leftover broth.

### Johnny's Quick and Easy Fajitas with Refried Beans and Salad

1½ lbs beef, 1 inch thick (I like sirloin)  
1 12-oz jar of salsa of your choice  
2 tablespoons oil  
1 package of 10-inch flour tortillas  
1 can refried beans  
1 packaged salad of your choice  
Salad dressing of your choice

NOTE: This dish is also good made with pork or chicken.

Cut the beef into half-inch or smaller cubes. Heat the oil in a large skillet until it is almost smoking and brown the beef, about five minutes. Pour on the salsa and mix well. Reduce heat to medium low, and cook for thirty minutes, stirring every so often.

NOTE: I think you get better results if you let the salsa reduce over medium low heat for an hour or more. It needs to almost disappear, just coating the meat.

Prepare the tortillas. The number of tortillas you will need will depend on how much of the meat mixture you put into each one. This recipe

should make at least eight. The proper way to prepare tortillas is to heat them, one at a time, in a hot, ungreased skillet. Place the tortilla in the skillet for fifteen seconds, turn, and do the same for the other side. You will see the tortilla lift a little in places and this is good. When finished, wrap them in foil, and keep warm in a 250-degree oven.

Pour the refried beans into a sauce pan with a quarter cup of water. Mix well, heat, and keep warm over low heat.

When the beef has absorbed most of the salsa, and most of the moisture has evaporated, take each tortilla, spoon a quarter cup or 3-4 tablespoons of the meat mixture down the center, fold in the ends, and roll it up. You know, the way they do it at Taco Bell.

Serve fajitas with the refried beans and your choice of salad.

NOTE: The first time we had these, they were at room temperature and were delicious. It occurred to me that they would be wonderful to take for lunch or a picnic.

### **Pan-fried Catfish with Lemon Butter and Capers Sauce, Baked Potatoes, and Cole Slaw**

NOTE: In place of catfish, you can use any firm fleshed fish filet like snapper, mahi mahi, or tilapia.

2 catfish filets  
 3 tablespoons butter  
 1 tablespoon olive oil  
 4 tablespoons capers, drained  
 ¼ cup flour  
 1 large lemon, quartered - divided use  
 2 baking potatoes  
 1 package of pre-made shredded cabbage (produce section)  
 1 teaspoon celery seed  
 2 tablespoons vinegar  
 2 tablespoons sugar  
 Mayonnaise

The first thing you do is turn the oven on to 450 degrees one and a half hours before you want to serve. After fifteen minutes of pre-heating the oven, put the potatoes in.

Next, you want to make the cole slaw. Put the vinegar and sugar in a large bowl, and stir until the sugar is dissolved. Taste. Some people like sweet cole slaw, and some like it a little tart. Play around with the

mixture, adding either sugar or vinegar until you like the taste. Add as much shredded cabbage as you think you might need, about half the package, and toss well. Sprinkle on the celery seed and let the cabbage mixture sit for thirty minutes, stirring occasionally.

When you add mayonnaise, the cabbage mixture will compact and reduce in size considerably. Make sure you put in enough cabbage. After thirty minutes, mix in mayonnaise. Again this is a matter of personal taste. Start with two tablespoons. If it looks drier than you want, keep adding mayonnaise until it looks good to you. Cover, and refrigerate.

NOTE: I like a mixture of mayonnaise and salad dressing better than all mayonnaise.

You are now ready to cook the fish. Keep in mind: the fish only take eight to ten minutes from start to finish, so it's best to wait until the potatoes are done. If you squeeze the potatoes with a towel and they give, they are done. Just turn the oven off and leave them in to keep warm. Also make sure your lemon is quartered and your capers drained before you start the fish.

Spread the flour on a large plate and dip the fish filets into it, coating both sides.

Over moderate heat, warm the butter and oil in a skillet, and sauté the filets for about three to four minutes on each side. They should be a golden brown. Set aside on two warm plates. Quickly turn up the heat, squeeze two quarters of the lemon into the pan, and add the capers. Pour this sauce over the filets and serve with the remaining lemon quarters.

Serve the sauced fish with the baked potatoes and the cole slaw.

### **Greek Chicken and Potatoes, with a Tomato, Green Pepper, and Onion Salad in a Sweet and Sour Vinaigrette**

NOTE: Rather than cut up a chicken, you can buy one already cut up, or just use the parts you like. This is especially good with boneless, skinless chicken thighs. What you are doing here is making a casserole of chicken, potatoes and vegetables, all mixed together with olive oil and broth.

1 chicken, quartered, or 1 cut-up chicken  
 2 Russet potatoes, peeled and quartered lengthwise  
 1 large sweet onion, quartered  
 2 large garlic cloves, chopped

½ cup chicken broth  
 ½ cup olive oil  
 ½ cup lemon juice  
 1 teaspoon dried oregano  
 1 can green beans  
 Tomato, Green Pepper, and Onion Salad—see below for ingredients.

Peel and quarter the potatoes lengthwise, and quarter the onion. Peel and chop the two garlic cloves (see Picadillo recipe above regarding treatment of garlic).

Arrange chicken, potatoes, onion, and garlic neatly in a casserole dish. Whisk chicken broth, olive oil, lemon juice, and oregano in a separate bowl until combined. Pour evenly over the casserole.

Bake at 375 degrees for about one hour and fifteen minutes, basting occasionally with the pan juices. Add beans for the last fifteen minutes. Serve directly out of the casserole.

*Tomato, Green Pepper, and Onion Salad in a Sweet and Sour Vinaigrette:*

2 medium ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into 1 inch dice  
 1 small green pepper, cut into ½ inch dice  
 1 medium sweet onion, cut into ½ inch dice  
 2 tablespoons sugar  
 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar  
 Salt and pepper

Mix the sugar and vinegar in a bowl and taste—just as you do for cole slaw. You might want more sugar or more vinegar. Add salt, pepper, and the vegetables. Toss well, and if you have time, chill. Otherwise, serve immediately.

Serve chicken dish and salad with some crusty French bread to sop up the juices.

### **Fettuccine with Shrimp and Vegetables, and Packaged Caesar Salad**

1 small zucchini  
 1 small yellow squash  
 3 Roma tomatoes, diced  
 ½ lb shrimp  
 1 lemon  
 3 tablespoons olive oil  
 Grated parmesan cheese

Salt and pepper  
 ½ lb fettuccine  
 1 package of Caesar Salad

Although this meal is simple to prepare, using a packaged salad makes it even easier.

Cut zucchini and yellow squash into quarter-inch slices. Blanch in salted boiling water for one minute. Drain and set aside.

Boil shrimp in salted water until just pink. Remove, peel, and de-vein. Place in small bowl, and toss with a little lemon juice.

NOTE: If your supermarket has a good seafood section, you can use pre-cooked shrimp. If you do, bring them to room temperature before tossing with the hot pasta. Don't forget to toss the shrimp with lemon juice before tossing with pasta.

Boil fettuccine until done (if you're not familiar with cooking pasta, read the directions on the box). When the pasta is done, leave it in the pot while you make the Caesar Salad, following the directions on the package.

Drain the pasta in a colander, then return it to the pot, and toss with a little olive oil. Add all other ingredients and additional olive oil. Add salt, pepper, and a little lemon juice, and toss with parmesan cheese just before serving.

Serve the shrimp dish and salad with some crusty bread.

### **Firehouse Pork Chop Casserole**

*This is a very simple dish that is always well received. It truly is a firehouse veteran, so you know that timing isn't too important. Serve with the salad of your choice, sliced tomatoes with a vinaigrette maybe, or a tossed green salad. Some warm, crusty bread will also go well with the meal.*

What you are doing here is building several layers of food, starting with the chops, then the onion, then thick-sliced potatoes, then lima beans, finally adding some beef broth, salt, and pepper.

2 thick-cut bone-in pork chops  
 2 medium Russet potatoes, peeled and thickly sliced (about ½ inch)  
 1 can lima beans  
 1 can beef broth  
 2 medium onions, sliced thin  
 Salt and freshly ground pepper

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Peel the potatoes, slice them thick (about  $\frac{1}{3}$  inch), and put aside in a bowl of water so they don't turn brown.

Peel the onions, cut them in half (any way you want), and slice them thin. Set aside.

Open the can of lima beans and drain.

The pork chops should have a layer of fat around part of them; slice this off, and put the fat in a skillet. Turn the heat to medium and cook for about ten minutes, or until the fat pieces are brown and crisp and have given up their fat. Discard the pieces.

Turn the heat up slightly, place the chops in the skillet, and brown them on both sides.

Layer the onion slices over the chops, then the lima beans, then the potatoes.

Pour enough beef broth over the mixture to a depth of about three-quarters inch. Salt and pepper to taste, and cover.

Turn the heat to low and simmer for one hour or more. If you still have time before you want to serve, turn off the heat, and let the dish sit. Warm it up before serving.

# INDEX

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