



Recipes from The Pantry Primer

These recipes will help you build your pantry faster and allow you to make the most of what you have, even when you are on a tight budget, by repurposing leftovers and not wasting a bite of food. If you're new to scratch cooking, you will find that some of these basic recipes and skills can help you to extend your food just a little bit further.

For even more savings, the DIYs will help you to cut your budget and stop buying expensive specialty items.

In my opinion, recipes are more like "suggestions" than "rules". Use the recipes as guidelines and enjoy experimenting based on the items you have available!

*(The recipes and guides here are in order of their appearance in my book, *The Pantry Primer: A Prepper's Guide to Whole Food on a Half Price Budget.*)*

With more and more people dealing with lactose intolerance and dairy allergies, alternative milks are all the rage. However, they can come with a pretty hefty price tag. You won't believe how easy they are to DIY! **Rice milk**

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of cooked rice (brown or white)
- 4 cups of water
- 1 tsp of vanilla (optional)

Directions:

1. Put all of the ingredients into a blender.
2. Process until smooth.
3. For the best flavor, keep cold. Shake well before using.

Because of the potential toxicity of a heavy consumption of rice (remember how we talked about arsenic?), for long-term usage, you may wish to go with almond milk, which is slightly more involved.

Almond milk

Almond milk has a couple of extra steps – soaking the almonds before processing them in the blender, then straining the finished product through cheesecloth or a flour sack towel.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of almonds
- 4 cups of water (plus more for soaking)

Directions:

1. Place one cup of almonds in a glass dish. Cover them with water and allow them to soak overnight. You can cover the bowl with a tea towel to keep any contaminants out. Soaking will soften the nuts and make the processing easier and more thorough.
2. Drain the soaking water from the almonds, then place them in your blender with 4 cups of water.
3. Process until smooth.
4. Use a flour sack towel over a clean container to strain the contents of the blender. Don't throw out the almond sludge that you strain out of the milk! This can be dried and added to baked goods and recipes.
5. Like rice milk, almond milk will taste better when cold. Shake well before serving.

Pot Roast

Ingredients:

- Pork or beef roast (plan on 1 pound per person so you have leftovers)
- 1 large onion
- 1 potato per person
- 2 carrots per person
- 2 cloves of garlic, whole
- ½ cup of water
- 1/2 cup of another liquid, which can be one or a combination of these ingredients: water, beef broth, red wine, apple juice (for pork), cola, strong unsweetened coffee)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp of flour and 2 tbsp of butter for making gravy *Directions:*

1. Cut an onion in half and lay it, flat side down, in the bottom of a slow cooker (crock pot).
2. Cut the carrots and potatoes into bite sized chunks and add them to the bottom of the crockpot.
3. Place your roast on top of the vegetables, then add the garlic cloves to the top of the roast.
4. Season the roast with salt and pepper.
5. Pour the liquid on top of the roast.
6. Put the lid on the crockpot and cook this on low for 8-10 hours. The long cooking time means that you can go with a lower quality cut of meat and it will still be fork-tender.
7. At serving time, melt butter in the bottom of a skillet on the stove top. Once the butter is melted, quickly whisk in 2 tbsp of flour until you have a white creamy concoction with no lumps.
8. Ladle out 1 ½ cups of the liquid from the crockpot and pour it into the skillet.
9. Using your whisk, incorporate the flour and butter mixture with the liquid. Reduce the heat to low and allow this mixture to gently simmer while you

get the meat and vegetables ready to serve. You may need to thin the gravy with an additional half cup of water.

10. Remove the meat and vegetables from the slow cooker, reserving the remaining liquid for your future stew.

11. Slice the meat, reserving a third of it for stew. (If you put all of the meat out, chances are you won't have leftovers, because this is melt-in-your-mouth good.)

Serve meat and vegetables with gravy.

Leftover Roast Stew

Ingredients:

- Leftovers
- Water or broth *Directions:*

Most of the prep for this stew is done when you are putting away your leftovers. Stirring in the additional liquid before you put this in the refrigerator will allow the flavors to meld until you are ready to make your stew.

1. In a large storage container, stir 1-2 cups of water or broth into your reserved cooking liquid. If you have leftover gravy, stir that in, too.
2. Cut the rest of your roast into bite sized pieces, then add it to the liquid.
3. Add any leftover vegetables to the meat and liquid.
4. Add 1 can of mixed vegetables, including liquid.
5. Put this in the refrigerator for 1-2 days.
6. Heat on the stove top at a simmer for 20 minutes. You can serve this with crusty bread. If there isn't quite enough for a family meal, serve it over wide noodles or rice for a filling, hearty dinner.

Pantry Spaghetti Sauce

Ingredients:

- 1 can of crushed tomatoes
- 3 cloves of garlic

- 1 medium onion
- 1 tbsp of sugar
- 1 tsp of salt
- 1 tsp of thyme
- 1 tsp of oregano
- 1 tbsp of basil
- black pepper to taste
- 1 pinch of paprika (smoked Hungarian if you can find it)
- 2 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil
- Optional: ½ cup of fresh sliced mushrooms and ½ cup of diced bell pepper
- Optional: 1 pound of ground beef
- Fresh grated Parmesan for the top

Directions:

1. In a food processor, place a small amount of the crushed tomatoes, garlic, onion, spices, sugar, and optional bell peppers if you're using them. Process until pureed.
2. Pour the rest of the crushed tomatoes, the pureed mixture and the optional mushrooms into a stockpot.
3. If you want to add meat, stir in your uncooked ground meat or meatballs now too.
4. Simmer on a low heat for about 3 hours. (You can cook it for longer if you want to, or you can cook this all day on low in the crock pot.) Drizzle with olive oil and allow it to cook for another 15 minutes.
5. Serve over pasta, topped with Parmesan.

Spaghetti Pie

This is a great way to make the most of your spaghetti dinner leftovers.

Ingredients:

- Leftover spaghetti with meat sauce
- 1 serving of cooked pasta for each family member
- 1-2 eggs
- 1 cup of cottage cheese
- ¼ cup of fresh-grated Parmesan cheese, plus additional for the top
- 1 tsp of garlic powder
- ½ cup of toasted bread crumbs
- Optional: extra chopped fresh vegetables like tomato, mushroom, bell pepper, spinach, and onion

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs and cottage cheese with garlic powder and Parmesan cheese. Alternatively, you can also blend this together in a food processor.
3. Stir in cooked pasta until it is well coated.
4. Stir in leftover spaghetti sauce and optional chopped vegetables.
5. Pour the mixture into a greased oven-proof pie plate or skillet. (I use my cast-iron frying pan for this.)
6. Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes in your preheated oven.
7. Mix extra Parmesan and toasted breadcrumbs for the topping.
8. Increase heat to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove foil, top with additional Parmesan and toasted breadcrumbs, and bake for an additional 15 minutes, until the top is lightly crisped.
9. Remove the pie from the oven and allow it to set for 15 minutes before slicing.

Slow Cooker Ham and Potatoes

Ingredients:

- Diced or sliced ham (this is the other half of the ham you bought for sandwiches)
 - Potatoes, thinly sliced (Count on 2 medium potatoes per family member)
 - 2 tbsp of butter for the sides and bottom of the crockpot
 - 1 large onion, minced
 - 2 cloves of garlic, minced
 - Salt and pepper to taste
 - Optional: Favorite herbs and spices (We like thyme and paprika in this dish)
 - ½ cup of water
 - ½ cup of milk
 - 1 cup of cottage cheese, pureed *Directions:*
1. Coat the sides of the crockpot with butter.
 2. Add potatoes, onion, garlic, salt, pepper, and optional seasonings if you're using them, and water to the crockpot. Stir to combine.
 3. Top with ham.
 4. Put the lid on and cook on low for 4-6 hours.
 5. Mix milk and pureed cottage cheese together. Then remove the lid from the crockpot and gently stir the mixture in, being careful not to break up the potatoes too much.
 6. Replace the lid and continue to cook on low for another 2 hours.

Leftover Potato and Ham Soup

Ingredients:

- 2-3 cups of leftover Slow Cooker Potatoes and Ham
 - 1 cup of milk
 - 2 cups of water *Directions:*
1. Once you're finished with your potato and ham dinner, add 1 cup of milk and 2 cups of water to the left overs before refrigerating.

2. When you're ready to make your soup, use a potato masher to break up the potatoes well. If you want, you can run the entire batch through the food processor, but my family prefers the chunks of meat and potatoes.
3. Stir the soup together well once the potatoes have been mashed up.
4. Heat this up, bringing it to a simmer. If it's too thick, you can add more milk or water. (Milk will make it richer, but if your supplies are limited, water will be fine.)
5. Top the soup like you would a baked potato, with Greek yogurt or sour cream, shredded cheese, and chives.

Homemade yogurt

Ingredients:

2 cups of milk

½ cup of yogurt with active cultures (your starter) *Directions:*

1. Heat the milk to 165-185 degrees F (use a candy thermometer – or, if you don't have one, wait until you are starting to see some bubbles rising but the milk is not yet boiling).
2. Remove the milk from the heat and allow it to drop to 105-110 degrees F.
3. Meanwhile, put hot water in your thermos to warm it up.
4. Gently stir in the starter. You want it to be well-combined but don't use anything crazy like an immersion blender. Remember, the good bacteria that create the yogurt are alive, so don't kill them with too much heat or overly vigorous mixing. Just a whisk will do.
5. Pour the hot water out of the thermos.
6. Immediately place the mixture into the thermos that has been warmed with hot water and put the lid on.
7. Keep the thermos cozily wrapped in towels overnight (8-24 hours). It has to stay warm. When we lived in an off-grid cabin, I tucked the wrapped

thermos behind the woodstove at night to keep it at a warm enough temperature.

8. Get up and enjoy some delicious, rich, thick yogurt.

Tips:

- The longer you leave it, the thicker and more tart your yogurt will be. If you intend to use it in place of sour cream, leave it longer.
- If you are using raw milk, heat it up only to 160.
- Always save a little of your yogurt to be a starter for the next batch. I like to put a half cup in the fridge, stored separately so it doesn't accidentally get eaten.

Homemade yogurt cheese

Yogurt cheese isn't actually cheese, but it can be used in place of cream cheese in many different recipes or applications. Yogurt cheese is simply yogurt with the whey strained out.

Ingredients:

□ 1 cup of unflavored yogurt *Directions:*

1. Line a sieve with a piece of cheesecloth or a flour sack towel. Place it over a large bowl.
2. Scoop one cup of plain yogurt onto the fabric.
3. Cover the whole thing and place it in the refrigerator for a minimum of 2 hours. The longer you allow it to drain, the thicker the end consistency will be.

When it's done, transfer your cheese to a bowl and season it up.

For sweet cheese:

This makes a delicious spread for bagels or toast, and a nice quick topping for cupcakes.

Stir in any combination of the following:

- 1 tbsp or honey or sugar
- Cinnamon
- Nutmeg
- Allspice
- ½ tsp of vanilla extract **For savory cheese:**

This makes a tasty spread for sandwiches or filling for stuffed vegetables or chicken breasts.

Stir in any combination of the following to taste:

- Salt
- Pepper
- Garlic (finely minced or powder)
- Onion (finely minced or powder)
- Horseradish
- Cayenne pepper
- Thyme
- Basil
- Chives
- Finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes and Mediterranean spices like oregano and basil

Homemade cottage cheese

The thing that shocked me the most the first time I made my own cottage cheese was that I made this creamy deliciousness with only 3 simple ingredients:

- organic milk
- white vinegar
- salt

To compare, I looked up the ingredients of a common brand of cottage cheese. Here is the rather horrifying list¹:

Cultured Fat Free Milk, Buttermilk, Nonfat Dry Milk, Cream, Salt, Citric Acid, Lactic Acid, Phosphoric Acid, Natural Flavoring, Guar Gum, Mono and Diglycerides, Xanthan Gum, Carob Bean Gum, Titanium, Dioxide (artificial color), Maltodextrin, Cultured dextrose, Potassium Sorbate, Calcium Chloride, Enzymes

This is, for real, the easiest thing that I've ever made. Even better, it's far less expensive than purchasing a ready-made container of organic cottage cheese.

Ingredients:

- 2-1/2 cups of 2% milk or raw milk
- 1/4 cup of white vinegar
- dash of salt (optional - it's just for flavor)

Directions:

1. In a large saucepan bring the milk almost to a boil. As soon as bubbles begin to rise to the top, remove the saucepan from the heat.
2. Immediately stir in the white vinegar and the salt (if using). The milk will begin to curdle right away.

¹ <http://www.baremandairy.com/lowfatcottagecheese.pdf>

3. Allow the mixture to cool completely - about 1 hour at room temperature. (The longer you leave it to cool, the more curds you will have. You can even put it in the fridge overnight before draining.)
4. Using a mesh strainer, separate the curds and the whey. (Hints of Little Miss Muffet!).

The result will be a delicious, light and fluffy cottage cheese. This recipe falls just short of 1 cup of cottage cheese and just over a cup and a half of whey. If the flavor is a bit sour (more common with pasteurized milk and very rare with raw milk) you can rinse the curds gently under running water, then drain again.

Don't throw out your whey! Here are some uses for it:

- Substitute for water or milk in baking
- Use instead of water when cooking rice or pasta
- Use it for smoothies
- Use it in oatmeal or other porridge

Roasted Chicken

This is a very simple meal, but classic and delicious enough to serve to guests.

Ingredients:

- 5-6 pound whole chicken
- 1 medium onion, peeled and cut in half
- 1 head of garlic
- Salt, pepper, and herbs to taste

Directions:

1. Preheat your oven to 425.
2. Rinse the chicken, inside and out under running water. (Be sure to wash out your sink with a bleach solution afterwards to keep your kitchen free of bacteria that could cause foodborne illness.)
3. If there is a package of “giblets and guts” inside your chicken, remove it. You can use this later for gravy, add it to your homemade stock, or cook it up for the pets. Keep in mind that liver will give an off-flavor to your stock.
4. Insert the entire head of garlic into the cavity of the chicken. You don't have to peel the garlic first – just put the entire head in there for a rich, garlic-flavored meat.
5. Cut the onion in half and place it, cut side down, in the roasting pan. This will keep the chicken raised up out of the drippings. If you are using a roasting pan with a rack, you can put the onion in the cavity with the garlic.
6. Sprinkle the chicken liberally with salt, pepper, and herbs.
7. Place this in the oven, uncovered for about an hour and a half. Using a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the breast, check to see if it is done. The temperature should be 180 degrees Fahrenheit. If you don't have a meat thermometer, gently give the leg a twist. When the chicken is completely cooked, the leg should separate very easily under the lightest pressure.
8. Remove the chicken from the roasting pan and allow it to rest for 15 minutes at room temperature.

9. Carve the chicken, discarding the garlic and onion from the cavity. Put aside the skin for use in your broth, later.

How to make gravy

This basic guide will work to make any type of gravy: beef, pork, poultry, etc.

Ingredients:

- Pan drippings
- 2 tbsp of flour
- 1-2 cups of water or broth
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Add hot drippings to a saucepan and turn the heat on your stove to medium.
2. When the drippings are hot enough that a tiny bit of water splashed in with your fingertips sizzles on contact, use a whisk to mix in 2 tbsp of flour. Whisk vigorously until the flour and fat are completely incorporated with no lumps. You should end up with a smooth, creamy-looking mixture. (This is called a roux.)
3. Stir in the water or broth. Broth gives a slightly richer flavor, but gravy made with water is still delicious and much more frugal. Using the whisk, mix the roué and water thoroughly.
4. Cook, whisking almost continuously, for 3-5 minutes until your gravy reaches a uniform consistency and the desired thickness. If it is too thick, whisk in more liquid, half a cup at a time.
5. Keep warm over the lowest heat your stove allows.

Chicken broth

Don't throw out that chicken carcass! You can get more bang for your poultry buck by making broth with it. Use this same process for turkey broth.

1. After dinner, remove most of the meat from the bones and place it in the refrigerator. You'll be left with a rather desolate-looking carcass.
2. Put that in your crockpot along with the reserved skin, neck, and giblets (if you didn't use those for gravy). Add some veggies like carrots, peppers, and celery. Add a couple of tablespoons of salt, a head of garlic and 4-6 onions. Note: there's no need to peel the vegetables as long as they are organic - just wash them well.)
3. Fill the crockpot with water and add your favorite spices (not sage, if you intend to preserve the broth - it tastes terrible when canned or frozen). I like to use whole peppercorns, salt, oregano, and bay leaves.
4. Put the crockpot on low for 12-14 hours and let it simmer undisturbed overnight.
5. The next day, strain the contents of the crockpot into a large container - I use a big soup pot and a metal colander.
6. After allowing the bones to cool remove any meat that you would like to add to your soup. Take all of the meat that you put in the refrigerator the night before and cut it into bite-sized pieces. I like a mixture of light meat and dark meat for this purpose. Also cut up the meat you removed from the crockpot.

Canning the broth

(See the canning instructions in Part V of this book for specific instructions on sanitizing jars, pressure canning, and adjusting for altitude.)

1. Place approximately 1 cup of poultry in each of your sanitized jars. If you're only canning the broth, skip this step.
2. Add 1-2 cloves of garlic to the jars.
3. You will have a rich, dark beautiful stock from the overnight crockpot project. Ladle this into the jars over your cut-up poultry and garlic. Leave 1 inch of headspace at the top of the jars. If you run out of broth, top it up with water - don't worry - your broth will still be very flavorful.
4. Wipe the lip of your jars with a cloth dipped in white vinegar. Place the lids on and process them in your pressure canner for 90 minutes at 10 pounds of pressure, being sure to adjust for altitude.

Your result will be a deep golden, rich meaty soup. This is an excellent base for poultry and dumplings, as well as any type of broth-based soup.

Freezing the broth

1. Allow your broth to cool completely. Use a heavy-duty freezer bag (I like the kind with the actual zipper.)
2. If you are adding poultry to the broth, place the desired amount in the bottom of the freezer bag. If you aren't adding the poultry, skip this step.
3. Ladle the cooled broth into the bag, leaving 2 inches of headspace at the top.
4. Seal the bag securely, then lay it flat on a cookie sheet. Repeat this process until all of the broth is bagged up.
5. Freeze the broth flat overnight. After that, it should be frozen solid. Label the bags with a Sharpie, including the date. The flat bags of broth can be stacked in the freezer for about 6 months.

Baked brown rice

Lots of people complain that brown rice is tricky to cook. Take it off of the stovetop and cook it in the oven for absolutely perfect rice every time. For efficiency, bake your rice when you are cooking something else in the oven.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups of brown rice
- 2 ½ cups of water, broth, or stock
- 1 tbsp of butter or olive oil
- Salt, pepper, and herbs to taste
- Optional: dried sweetened cranberries *Directions:*

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. On the stovetop, bring rice, liquid, seasonings, and fat to a boil in an oven-safe pot.
3. Immediately put the lid on it, remove it from the stovetop, and place it in the oven.

4. Bake for 1 hour. Do not remove the lid during the cooking time.
5. Fluff the rice with a fork and serve immediately.

Leftover rice can be refrigerated and used in a casserole or stir-fry.

Chicken fried rice

This is a great way to extend a single serving of meat to provide dinner for an entire family. Feel free to get creative and use other types of meat and additional veggies. If the vegetables are pre-cooked, add them at the very end, giving them just enough time in the skillet to get warmed up.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of cooked chicken (or other meat), cut into bite-sized pieces
- ½ cup to 1 cup of cooked rice per person
- 1 small onion, minced
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ¼ cup of shredded carrot
- 1-2 eggs (Use 1 egg per 2 cups of rice, not to exceed two eggs.)
- 1 cup of frozen green peas
- 2 tbsp of soy sauce
- 1 tsp of Asian fish sauce (optional but it adds a lot of depth and does not impart a “fishy” flavor)
- 1 tsp of powdered ginger
- 1 tbsp of cooking oil (I like sunflower or organic canola – oil must stand up to high heat cooking methods) **Directions:**

1. In a large skillet or wok, heat cooking oil over a medium heat.
2. Crack eggs and mix them in a bowl with a whisk. Reserve them for later in the cooking process.
3. Add garlic, onion, and chicken. Stir fry for a few minutes until everything is lightly golden.
4. Add carrots and stir fry for another minute or two.

5. Add eggs and let them cook for 1 minute without stirring so they get a little bit firm. Then, stir constantly for a couple of minutes so that they break up as they're cooking, leaving only tiny pieces of egg throughout the mixture of ingredients.
6. Sprinkle with ginger powder, then stir in soy sauce and optional fish sauce.
7. Increase heat to high, then stir in rice and peas.
8. Stirring constantly, cook until everything is heated through.

Serve topped with chopped green onion and optional dried crushed chili peppers.

For a Thai-twist, add ¼ cup of peanut butter and 1 tsp of cilantro during step 6.

Chili

Chili is a family favorite in our house. One of my favorite things about it is that it can be easily made from food storage items. Here's a version that is largely from the pantry. You can use a slow cooker or simmer it on low on the stovetop. If necessary, it can be put together quickly and just cooked until the ingredients are done, but it won't be nearly as flavorful and delicious.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of ground meat (whatever you have on hand: beef, turkey, venison, pork)
- 2 cans of beans (pinto, kidney, black) – do not drain
- 4 cloves of minced garlic
- 1 diced bell pepper (or 1/3 cup of dehydrated bell pepper)
- 1 diced onion
- Tomatoes: Use any combination of the following, equaling 3 large cans: crushed tomatoes, diced tomatoes, tomato-vegetable juice
- 1 cup of beer or red wine (optional but delicious if you are using a slow cooker)
- 1-3 tbsp of chili powder
- 1 tsp of cumin powder
- 1 tbsp of brown sugar

Slow Cooker Directions:

1. Stir together tomato products, alcohol, and spices until well combined.
2. Add beans and liquid, stirring to combine.
3. Add garlic, peppers, and onions, stirring to combine.
4. Add uncooked ground meat. Stir gently to combine it into the mixture in your slow cooker.
5. Set the slow cooker on low and cook for 8-10 hours, or on high and cook for 4-5 hours. (It's best when cooked all day on low.)

Stovetop Directions:

1. In a skillet, brown meat, garlic and onions until the meat is cooked – about 5 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a large pot, combine tomato products, beans, peppers, and spices.
3. Add cooked meat, garlic, and onions to the large pot.
4. Bring the mixture to a low boil, then reduce heat.
5. Simmer, covered, for 2-3 hours.

Bernadine’s “Chili Mac”

If you have leftover chili, but not quite enough to make a meal for everyone, try this classic dish I adapted from a recipe created by my honorary childhood aunt, a lovely lady who just turned 100 years old and ran a school cafeteria for much of her adult life, back when the food served there was made from scratch, from real ingredients, and on a strict budget.

Don’t let the name fool you, there’s no macaroni in sight, making this safe for those on a gluten-free diet. (If you absolutely insist, you *can* use macaroni instead of rice.)

Ingredients:

- 2-4 cups of leftover chili
- 4-6 cups of cooked rice (brown or white will work)
- 1 cup of shredded cheddar cheese
- Butter for the baking dish

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Grease the bottom and sides of a glass baking dish.
3. In a large mixing bowl, stir together the chili and the rice.
4. Pour the chili and rice mixture into the baking dish and cover it tightly with foil.
5. Put it in the oven for 30 minutes.
6. After 30 minutes, remove the foil and top the casserole with shredded cheese.

7. Return it to the oven for another 5 minutes, or until cheese is melted and bubbly.
8. Allow the dish to cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Haystack Cookies

Ingredients:

- 3 cups of oatmeal
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of milk
- 5 tsp of cocoa
- 1 tbsp of vanilla extract
- 1 cup of natural peanut butter

Directions:

1. Line a large baking sheet with waxed paper.
2. In a sauce pan, stir together all of the ingredients except for the peanut butter and the oatmeal.
3. Heat until these ingredients are combined then add peanut butter, stirring constantly until boiling gently.
4. Boil for one minute, stirring intermittently.
5. Remove from heat and pour into a bowl containing the oatmeal.
6. Stir to combine, working quickly before the mixture can solidify.
7. Make the cookies by placing large spoonfuls of the mixture onto the paperlined baking sheet. Press them down gently with the back of the spoon.
8. Alternatively, use your hand to roll balls of the mixture and then press down – this will make the resulting cookies a bit rounder if you prefer a tidier looking cookie. (Be careful, though – the mixture is hot, that whole boiling thing, you know!)
9. Place the cookie sheet in the refrigerator overnight, uncovered, to allow cookies to become solid.
10. Store in an airtight container in cool conditions – keep them in the fridge if the weather is warm. Reuse the waxed paper by placing it in between the layers of cookies.

Cooking Beans from Scratch

Do you know what to do with all of those bags of beans? It's silly to buy them if you don't learn how to prepare them. As cheap as they are, they do your budget little good sitting there in storage containers.

There are minor differences in soaking and cooking times with different types of beans, but if you follow these basic directions, you'll be successful. The obvious, common sense difference is that smaller beans require a shorter cooking time than larger beans.

Prepping the beans for cooking:

1. Start with one pound of dried beans. Our favorites are pinto beans and navy beans.
2. Pour them into a bowl and pick through them, discarding any beans that are dry and shriveled, and any little stones or twigs.
3. Using a large colander, rinse the beans well under running water.
4. Place your beans in a large stockpot. Cover them with water by 3-4 inches.
5. Turn the stove on high and bring the beans to a boil. Turn off the heat immediately, soak them, covered. You can soak them overnight, or a minimum of 4 hours.
6. Drain the beans using a colander, then rinse them well under running water.

Cooking directions:

1. Return the soaked beans to the stockpot.
2. Cover them with 6 cups of water per 2 cups of beans.
3. If you want, you can also add some meat at this point. Salt pork, ham, and bacon are popular choices. If you aren't using meat, add a tablespoon of vegetable oil. The fat not only adds flavor, but keeps the beans from foaming.
4. You can also add onions, garlic, and herbs to the beans now. Don't add anything acidic until they are fully cooked.
5. Bring the beans to a boil, then immediately reduce the heat to keep them at a simmer.

6. Stir occasionally to be sure the beans aren't sticking. The beans must always stay covered with water. You may need to add water during the cooking process.
7. Simmer for 2-3 hours. To test whether they are done, remove a bean from the pot and let it cool. Taste it – it should be tender, but not mushy. There are lots of variables that will affect how long they take to cook – weather conditions, altitude, and the age of the beans can affect cooking times.
8. When they're done, you can leave them in the cooking liquid or drain them, based on personal preferences. (I grew up down south, where my family always enjoyed them in the "bean broth.")

Serve your cooked beans as a dish on their own, or use one of the following variations.

Pork and Beans

You can start this recipe with home-cooked beans or canned beans. It can be made on the stovetop or baked in the oven.

Ingredients:

- 6 cups of cooked beans
 - ½ cup of bean broth (If you're using canned beans, drain them and use this liquid)
 - 1 tin of tomato paste
 - 1 cup of diced smoked pork or ham, or ½ pound of diced bacon
 - 2 tbsp of brown sugar
 - 1 tsp of chili powder
 - 1 tsp of onion powder
 - 1 tsp of garlic powder
 - Salt and pepper to taste
- Directions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine bean broth, tomato paste, sugar, and spices until well blended.
2. Stir in beans and pork.
3. If you are cooking this on the stovetop, put the mixture into a pot and bring it to a simmer. Put the lid on and cook it on low for 30 minutes.

4. If you are cooking it in the oven, preheat it to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a baking dish with cooking oil or butter, then pour in the mixture. Cover it with foil, and bake for 45 minutes.

Mexican Beans and Rice

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of cooked beans (You can use leftover pork and beans for this, too)
- 2 cups of cooked rice
- ½ cup of bean broth
- 2 tbsp of tomato paste
- ¼ cup of diced onion and/or ¼ cup of diced bell peppers (optional)
- 1 tbsp of cooking oil
- 1 tbsp of chili powder □ 1 tsp of cumin
- 1 tsp of garlic powder
- 1 tsp of onion powder
- Salt and pepper to taste *Directions:*

1. In a large skillet, heat cooking oil.
2. Add onions and bell peppers, if you're using them, and sauté lightly over medium heat.
3. Stir in bean broth, tomato paste, and spices.
4. Stir in rice, then when it is combined, gently stir in beans, taking care not to break them up when mixing them in.
5. Reduce the heat, cover, and cook for 15-20 minutes on low. If you need to, add ¼ cup of water to keep the mixture from sticking.

Serve topped with cheese, sour cream, and/or salsa.

Cornbread

This quick bread was a staple when I was growing up. My dad, who was a child of the Great Depression, loved nothing more than a big slice of cornbread topped with pinto beans in their own broth. Unless perhaps it was cornbread broken up

into a glass of buttermilk and eaten with a spoon, a dish I never personally enjoyed.

Some people like their cornbread sweet, while others don't like the addition of any sugar or honey. This ingredient is entirely optional. This recipe is naturally gluten-free, so it doesn't rise much. If you want a fluffy cornbread, replace half of the cornmeal with flour. Maybe I'm a traditionalist, but in my humble opinion, cornbread is at its best when cooked in a cast iron skillet.

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of cornmeal
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp of salt
- 1 tsp of baking soda
- 2 tsp of baking powder
- 4 tbsp of butter or cooking oil + extra for greasing your skillet
- 1 ½ cups of milk
- 1 tbsp of white vinegar
- 4 tbsp of brown sugar or honey (optional) *Directions:*

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. In a bowl, mix white vinegar and milk and set it aside for at least 5 minutes to allow it to sour.
3. Grease the skillet well with oil or butter.
4. Meanwhile, in a large mixing bowl, combine all of the dry ingredients with a whisk, including sugar if you are using it.
5. Add eggs and honey (if you're using it) to the sour milk. Whisk until wellcombined.
6. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients until they are just combined.
7. Pour this mixture into the cast iron skillet.
8. Bake the cornbread for about 20 minutes. The top should be golden brown and crispy, and a toothpick inserted in the middle should come out clean.

Variations:

Mexican cornbread: Add 1 cup of cooked corn, a couple of diced jalapenos, and a cup of shredded cheese to the batter. Reduce the sweetener by half.

Blueberry cornbread: Add one cup of fresh, frozen, or rehydrated blueberries to the cornbread batter. Sugar and honey should definitely be used when making blueberry cornbread.

Chicken and Dumplings

This is an easy, “from-scratch” way to make a hearty meal out of some of the chicken and broth that you have canned or frozen. *Ingredients*

- 4-6 cups of chicken broth with meat
- 2 cups of flour (You can use a gluten-free flour blend)
- Extra flour for dusting the counter and the rolling pin
- 1 egg
- 1 cup of water
- Salt, pepper, and parsley to taste *Directions:*

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour and seasonings. Stir in water and egg, combining well. You will have a dry crumbly mixture.
2. Squeeze the dough by handfuls and put it on a counter that has been dusted with flour.
3. Roll out the dough until it is flat, about ¼ inch thick.
4. Using a pizza cutter or a sharp knife, cut the dough into strips or squares, according to your preference. Allow it to dry on the counter for up to 2 hours.
5. When it’s time for dinner, bring broth and chicken to a hard boil on the stovetop, using a high heat.
6. Drop the dumplings in, being careful not to splash yourself with the hot liquid.
7. When the dumplings rise to the top, they are done. To be certain, dip out one dumpling and cut it in half to let it cool. Taste it to make sure it isn’t still dough-y inside. If it needs more cooking time, return the other half to the pot and cook it for a few more minutes.
8. Serve dumplings and broth piping hot.

Shepherd's Pie

This is a great way to use up mashed potatoes and leftover vegetables. This is another food that cooks up wonderfully in a cast iron skillet.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of ground meat (any kind will work – the traditional is lamb, but we often use beef, pork, or turkey)
- 1 tsp of olive oil
- ½ onion, minced
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- ½ cup of mushrooms, finely chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2-3 cups of drained cooked vegetables, any combination (we like corn, peas, and carrots)
- 3 cups of mashed potatoes
- 2 tbsp of butter, optional

Directions:

1. On the stovetop, heat cooking oil in the cast iron skillet over a medium heat. Lightly sauté garlic and onion.
2. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
3. Add the ground meat to the skillet and brown it thoroughly.
4. Season the meat mixture with salt and pepper.
5. Remove the skillet from the heat, then stir in the cooked veggies.
6. Press the mixture into the skillet with the back of a spatula.
7. Top it with mashed potatoes. If you want, you can add a little butter to the top of the potatoes.
8. Bake this in the oven for 35 minutes or until the top of the potatoes are very lightly golden brown and crisp.
9. Remove the casserole from the oven and allow it to rest for 10 minutes. Slice it into triangles like a pie and serve.

Power Outage Food Guide

I like to keep some foods on hand that require no cooking or heating. In the event of a power outage, sometimes it's nice to have no-hassle foods so that you don't have to heat up the house in the summer with a fire or go outside in a raging storm to use an off-grid cooking method.

These foods aren't quite as nutritious and non-processed as the things I normally serve. Following are some "recipes" for power outage food. Okay, "recipe" is a stretch - perhaps just some "tasty combinations." You can improve the nutritional value by opting for organic, less processed versions wherever possible.

No-Power Nachos

Layer organic tortilla chips with canned cheese sauce, salsa, and canned jalapenos.

'S'mores

Top graham crackers with Nutella (or another healthier chocolate-nut spread) and marshmallow fluff.

Wraps

Soft tortillas filled with canned meat, a touch of mustard or mayo, and veggies from the fridge.

No-cook Soft Tacos

Soft tortillas with canned meat (we use our home canned chicken or taco meat for this), salsa, and canned cheese sauce.

Main Dish Tuna Salad

Combine a can of tuna, a can of white beans, chopped onion, chopped peppers and chopped black olives (veggies are optional). Top with Italian dressing mixed with Dijon mustard to taste.

Pudding cones

Drain canned fruit of choice and stir it into vanilla pudding. Serve in ice cream cones for a kid-friendly treat. (We do this with yogurt also.)

Mexican Bean Salad

Combine 1 can of black beans, drained and rinsed; with 1 can of organic corn, drained. For the dressing mix 1/2 jar of salsa; 1/2 tsp each of chili powder, onion powder, and garlic powder; 3 tbsp of lemon juice. Toss well. Serve as a salad, in a soft tortilla or mixed with a pouch of pre-cooked rice.