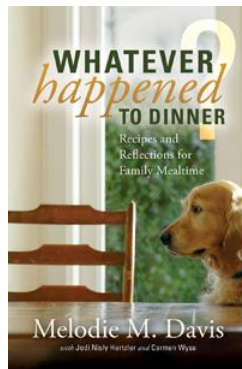


10 Easiest Recipes from Whatever Happened to Dinner?

Recipes & Reflections for Family Mealtime



By Melodie M. Davis

With Jodi Nisly Hertzler and Carmen Wyse

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO DINNER?

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You can also follow my personal blog, www.FindingHarmonyBlog.com where I post recipes almost every weekend.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Why I Created This Mini-PDF: *Can a Guy Learn to Cook at 93?* ... 3

Recipes

Bread

Tortilla 5

Main Dishes

Michelle's Chicken Casserole 6

Tanya's Mix 7

Dave Schrock's Tuna/Egg Skillet Supper 8

Sides

Easy Mac and Cheese 9

Pasta and Broccoli Alfredo 10

Oven Fried Potatoes 11

Salads

Broccoli Salad 12

Easy Cranberry Salad 13

Dessert

Magic Cookie Bars 14

Introduction

Why I Created This Mini-PDF Cookbook

Can a Guy Learn to Cook at 93?

8 Great Tips from Women Who Care

Dedicated to Harold & Lizzy

On my blog and in my Another Way column back in September, I shared the cooking adventures of 12-year-old Lizzy, who cooks almost every weeknight for her family. And loves it. If you missed it and go online, find it at: <http://tinyurl.com/CookingWithLizzy>.

But I never expected to receive a letter like this in response:

Your column on Lizzy gave me courage to ask whether I could begin to learn to cook. . . . This is very late for a 93-year-old [man] to be asking that question. I may not become much of a chef but I could begin. Do you have something to suggest for a beginning cook—when a partner of an aged person can no longer function as cook, and the other one has to take over? —Harold

I loved the letter and the question, because for many men, in particular, it can be extremely daunting to pick up cooking in older years if they have not learned to cook earlier in life. Especially if you gaze at the many cooking gadgets and gizmos online or in a gourmet cooking store.

I put the gist of this question—how does an elderly guy start learning to cook—out on Facebook, and people responded with great ideas. I'm not sure I would have thought of all these angles!

1. Lauree went back to her days of learning to cook and remembered that it might be good to master just a few favorite recipes that you both like to eat and can make often. Her go-to meals were chicken and rice soup, skillet hamburger macaroni, tuna noodle casserole, and oven fried chicken. I would add that oven baked chicken tenders covered with Italian dressing make a great meal; adding some noodles, rice, or salad makes a complete and easy meal.
2. Lauree further suggests, "I would advise him to keep it very simple; don't have expectations of fixing a big sit-down dinner every day. It would be best to have lots of nutritious, tasty foods handy to easily heat up whenever one of them is feeling the need to eat something." She points out that leftovers from a big cooking endeavor are good, but so are sliced fresh fruit, cheese and crackers, chicken salad to quickly make a sandwich, or a tossed salad made of pre-rinsed and pre-cut veggies.
3. Ronda suggested that crockpot meals or main dishes are an easy place to start. If gadgets agree with you, she also suggests a panini maker for those tasty, restaurant- or deli-style toasted sandwiches. Casseroles—or other one-dish meals—are also an easy start. Jane gave an "amen" to this suggestion of going crock pot.

4. Evelyn mentioned the popularity of “five-ingredient recipes, one-pot meals, and semi-homemade meals (utilizing canned or boxed products). If limited income is an issue for an elderly person, look for inexpensive ingredients.”
5. Ruby suggested a list that sounds good to me too: “Simple soups, egg dishes, Hamburger Helper or macaroni and noodle dishes with some ground meat (turkey, beef).”
6. Beverly, who also lives alone, notes that if you go the crockpot direction, today there are lovely small-sized crockpots that suit older eaters better.
7. Pat suggested finding someone to go shopping with to get started. I second that!
8. Elsie simply suggests my old standby, spaghetti and meat sauce. In this case, buy jars of canned spaghetti sauce in any of a huge variety of particular flavors (so many choices!) and add meat if you like. I recently subbed in ground turkey instead of beef and there was absolutely no difference in taste, in my opinion.

I do hope that Harold coming forward with his question will give courage to others who might be toying with the same idea—no matter what age, no matter what gender. There are so many helps out there it can be overwhelming, but I think these readers have offered some awesome starters.

And now, to the recipes!

Tortillas

Carmen Wyse

On one camping trip, I tried making breakfast tacos out of store-bought tortillas. They were crumbly and weren't working well. A camping companion said she always makes her own tortillas. I figured if she could, I could too, and I have been making them ever since. I usually make a double batch and keep the leftovers for snacks throughout the week. I can always count on a big hug from my twelve-year-old son when he sees me starting to make these.

3 cups / 750 ml flour (I use up to 1 cup whole wheat)

1 teaspoon salt

½–1 teaspoon baking powder

1/3 cup / 75 ml vegetable oil

1 cup / 250 ml warm water

Mix the dry ingredients together. Add the vegetable oil, and mix with pastry cutter or forks until crumbly like cornmeal. Add 1 cup warm water. Knead a bit to bring it together, cover with plastic wrap, and let it sit for 30 minutes to several hours. Form into 12 balls.

Heat a cast-iron (or whatever you have) skillet to medium high. Roll each tortilla out as thin as you can, and pop it in the hot skillet. When it starts blistering, turn it over for about 30 seconds. Sometimes I hold the edges down some to keep the tortilla from puffing up. Put it in a tortilla warmer or under several kitchen towels.

(Serving idea below: Breakfast tortilla with egg, cheese and chives.)



Michelle's Chicken Casserole

Melodie Davis

This is an easy recipe from my oldest daughter, Michelle, who liked recipes with exact proportions as she was learning to cook. She was frustrated with my instructions to put in a little of this or that, so she was happy to get this very specific and simple recipe from a friend. Similar to other recipes of this type, it makes an easy one-dish meal. Substitute cooked and cubed chicken tenders or any leftover chicken.

1 10-ounce / 300 g package frozen, chopped broccoli

1 can (10¾ oz) / 330 g condensed cream of broccoli soup

1 large can (9.75 oz) / 300 g white chicken, drained

2 cups / 500 ml cheddar cheese, shredded

Preheat oven to 350° F/ 180° C. Cook broccoli according to package directions, in a pan or in the microwave. Drain. Put the broccoli in the bottom of an ungreased 9x13-inch baking dish. Add soup and chicken, and top with cheese. Bake for 30 minutes, until bubbly. Makes 4–6 servings.

Suggestion: This recipe makes an excellent topping for baked potatoes.

Tanya's Mix

Melodie Davis

This evolved out of my second daughter Tanya's experiences at camp, cooking "tin foil" dinners over the open fire. This adaptation can include whatever vegetables the kids want, such as chopped cabbage or carrots, for what is essentially a stove-top casserole. Quantities can also be adjusted according to whether it is for one person or six. This is a great recipe for using up leftover green beans or corn from your fridge or freezer.

1 pound / 500 g hamburger meat

2–3 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed

1 15- or 16-ounce can / .38 L green beans, or approximately 1 pint / 500 ml

[ED: I'm not familiar with Canadian can sizes, but it seems 500 ml of beans (above) would be equal to a half-liter can.]

½ can corn (or approximately 1 cup / 250 ml frozen corn)

½ teaspoon salt

Pepper to taste

Fry hamburger in skillet. When most of it is turning brown, add cubed potatoes. When hamburger is cooked through, drain extra grease. Add seasoning. Keep stirring hamburger and potatoes while potatoes cook. When potatoes are almost soft (10–15 minutes), chop beans into small pieces and add them. Add corn. Cook all together 5–7 minutes.

Note: to speed cooking time, consider microwaving potatoes a minute or two before cubing.

Dave Schrock's Tuna/Egg Skillet Dinner

Melodie Davis

This is a one- or two-person meal that I adapted from one of the guys who made it (greatly multiplied) for a houseful of students who lived in a big old house during my sophomore year at Eastern Mennonite University. That year of sharing one-dish meals with a long table of twelve to fourteen people was a glimpse of true community. This recipe serves one or two. So simple, but hearty and tasty, it is basically a variation of fried rice.

1 can tuna, drained

2 eggs

2 teaspoons margarine or olive oil

1 cup / 250 ml cooked rice (fix according to package directions)

Fry eggs in a skillet over medium heat, gently chopping them up with the side of a spatula so that the eggs are mixed and chopped (but not scrambled). Push eggs to the side of the skillet, so they won't get overly brown, while you brown tuna for 2–3 minutes, stirring. Add cooked rice. Stir tuna, eggs, and rice together, and brown several more minutes. Serve with soy sauce, if desired.



Easy Macaroni and Cheese

Carmen Wyse and Jodi Nisly Hertzler

One of the first foods either of us thought of when working on the “comfort foods chapter” is macaroni and cheese. And to our surprise, we discovered that we both use the same recipe, which is a quick stove-top version that Alton Brown from the Food Network developed. It comes as close to boxed mixes as we’ve found; it’s nearly as easy and kids like it just as well. The following is Carmen’s adaptation.

1 13–16 oz / 325–500 g package pasta, any shape

5 tablespoons butter

2 eggs

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup / 175 ml milk

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon hot sauce

1 teaspoon salt

Pepper to taste

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon dry mustard

2 cups / 500 ml grated sharp cheddar cheese

Cook pasta to al dente and drain. Return to the pot and melt in the butter, tossing to coat.

Whisk together the eggs, milk, hot sauce, salt, pepper, and mustard. Stir into the pasta and add the cheese. Over low heat, continue to stir for 3 minutes or until creamy.

Makes 6–8 servings.

Pasta & Broccoli Alfredo

Jodi Nisly Hertzler

I found a variation of this recipe on the Internet when I was newly married and not very experienced in the kitchen. I was looking for lower-fat versions of some of our favorite foods. This is one of the few recipes from that kitchen-disaster-prone period of my life that has endured. It's quick, simple—and my whole family likes it. Freshly grated Parmesan cheese really adds something to this dish, but if you're in a hurry, the bagged kind works too.

1 pound / 500 g pasta (we prefer thin spaghetti)

1 pound / 500 g broccoli florets (thawed, if using frozen)

1 12-ounce / 340 g can nonfat evaporated milk

2 tablespoons flour

1½ cup / 375 ml shredded Parmesan cheese

Cook pasta according to directions, adding broccoli during the last 5 minutes. Cook until tender. Drain.

While pasta cooks, blend evaporated milk and flour over low heat, whisking frequently until hot (don't boil—you want it just warm enough to melt the cheese). Whisk in the cheese gradually, melting each handful before adding the next. As soon as all the cheese is melted, pour over pasta and broccoli, toss well, and serve. Makes 6 servings.

Oven French Fries

Melodie Davis

This is adapted from the actual recipe in Whatever Happened to Dinner to make it easier. Idea from Elva Honeyager, a cook at my elementary school in Middlebury, Indiana, and a neighbor of ours. These can also be cooked in a pan on the grill for yet another taste. As "homemade" potato chips or oven fries, these are a special treat.

3–4 medium potatoes

¼ cup / 50 ml margarine or olive oil

Seasoning salt, OR salt and pepper, sea salt, chopped fresh or dried herbs such as rosemary, thyme, or oregano

Preheat oven to 450° F / 230° C. Cut raw potatoes into slices about ¼-inch thick. Meanwhile, melt margarine or heat olive oil in the preheating oven in a baking dish (baking dish with low sides, 9x13-inch or larger). When the oil has spread over the pan, remove from oven, and place raw potato slices in a single layer on top of the oil. Return to oven, bake for 10-12 minutes; take out of oven and carefully turn each potato slice over to brown on other side. Bake another 8-9 minutes, then remove from oven and immediately place baked slices in dish with paper towel to absorb excess oil. Serve right away.



Broccoli Salad

Melodie Davis

There are many recipes for broccoli salad. This is a basic one, which came from a friend of a friend, Joyce Thomas. Even people who think they don't like broccoli salad seem to love this.

In large bowl, combine:

1 large head of broccoli, or several crowns, chopped (substitute half cauliflower, if you like)

1/3 cup / 75 ml of raisins or craisins

3 spring onions, chopped (or ¼–½ cup chopped red onion)

4 slices of bacon, fried and crumbled

½ cup / 125 ml chopped pecans, almonds, sunflower seeds, peanuts, or walnuts (optional)

Dressing:

1 cup / 250 ml salad dressing (such as Miracle Whip)

1–2 tablespoons vinegar (to your taste)

¼ cup / 50 ml sugar

Stir dressing ingredients together and pour over the salad. Best if refrigerated several hours or overnight.



Easy Cranberry Salad

Melodie Davis

My mother and grandmother's recipe and process for cranberry salad was long and complicated. After purchasing expensive cranberry salad from delis for several years to satisfy my cravings, I got this much easier recipe from a church friend, Alisa Hillary.

1 small box jello

1 can whole cranberries in sauce

1 cup / 250 ml chopped celery

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup / 175 ml chopped nuts (pecan or walnut)

1 cup / 250 ml chopped apple pieces

1 cup / 250 ml chopped orange pieces

Make jello according to package instructions, but use only 1 cup water to dissolve. Mix all together. Let jell in refrigerator 3–4 hours.



Magic Cookie Bars

Melodie Davis

My husband's favorite Christmas treat. Easy to make, and you dirty only one cake pan. The recipe is from a condensed milk can and a high-school home economics class.

½ cup / 125 ml butter or margarine

1½ cup / 375 ml graham cracker crumbs

1 cup / 250 ml chopped nuts

1 cup / 250 ml chocolate or butterscotch chips (or ½ cup / 125 ml of each)

1 1/3 cup / 325 ml shredded coconut

1 15-ounce / 450 g can sweetened condensed milk

Preheat oven to 350° F/ 180° C. Melt butter or margarine in a 9x13 pan in the oven as it preheats. Crumb graham crackers with rolling pin until you have 1½ cup. (Put crackers in an old bread bag and take a rolling pin to them.) Sprinkle graham cracker crumbs over the melted butter or margarine as evenly as you can. Sprinkle on the chopped nuts, then chocolate or butterscotch bits, then coconut, then drizzle the condensed milk over the whole mixture.

Bake for 25 minutes. Cool 15 minutes, then cut into bars. Be sure to cut and remove within 15 minutes, or they stick badly to the pan.

