

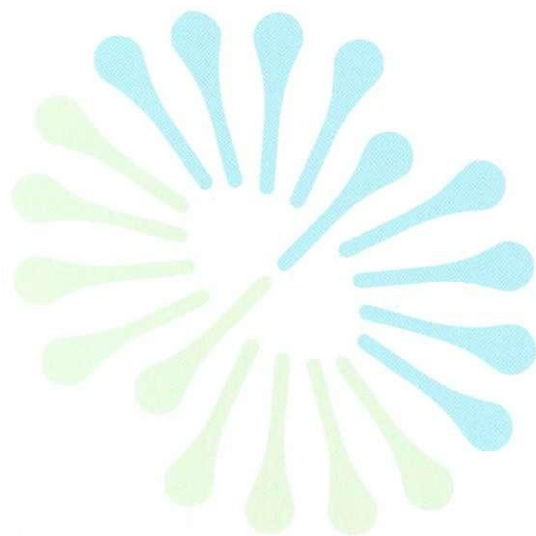


Perfect Recipes for Having People Over

Pam Anderson

Author of the best-selling PERFECT RECIPE

P E R F E C T
R E C I P E S
F O R
H A V I N G
P E O P L E
O V E R



P A M A N D E R S O N

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RITA MAAS



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Boston New York

C O N T E N T S

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction x

T H E B I G S T U F F



Main Courses

- 2 Kitchen Gatherings
- 54 Outdoor Affairs
- 70 In the Dining Room
- 95 Breakfasts for Company

A L L T H E R E S T

Appetizers and
First Courses 114

First-Course Soups 154

Salads 165

Side Dishes 194

Breads 223

Really Simple Desserts 233

Drinks 281

Index 294

I N T R O D U C T I O N

When I first started cooking, back in the late 1970s, entertaining was a production. I starched and ironed the tablecloth and napkins, polished each glass, and set the table at least a day before the big event. I slavishly followed menus, trekking from store to store to find the exact ingredients. No recipe was too long, no meal too elaborate. In fact, I thrived on multistep dishes that required days of attention and care: puff pastry, layered pâtés and vegetable terrines, miniature sweet and savory tarts.

I still love to have friends over, but something happened along the way. First one daughter was born, then a second. Part-time work evolved into a full-time job. Casual hobbies became passionate avocations. With all these activities fighting for my time, I had to change the way I cooked.

My menus are simple and flexible now, and my parties mostly spur-of-the-moment. I love potlucks and shared suppers, and kids are always welcome. The food's fun, the atmosphere's casual, and family and friends always gravitate to the kitchen.

My standards haven't slipped—great food helps make a great party—but great food doesn't have to be difficult. My Rosemary-Scented Roast Pork Loin is succulent, juicy, beautiful, and utterly simple. Molten Chocolate Cakes are wonderfully oozy and chocolaty—many people think they're better than a chocolate layer cake. Made in muffin pans, they can be assembled in just a few minutes and then baked in the time it takes to clear the dinner dishes and put on a pot of coffee.

Because it's so easy, Chicken Chili (red or white) always makes it onto my short list when I host a crowd. Although it tastes authentic and long-simmered, it's made with convenience items—rotisserie chickens, store-bought chicken broth, and canned beans—and it cooks in less than forty-five minutes.

Whether you're sharing a meal with family, kicking back with a few friends, or hosting half the neighborhood, having a set of simple, foolproof recipes makes it easy to focus on the all-important goal of bringing people together around the table.

Sharing a Meal

The greater end of table fellowship was brought home to me forcefully a few years back. I had just arrived home from a months-long book tour. Since I was teaching in a different city nearly every day, my life had become strangely unreal. I was feeling depleted and altogether uninspired on my return home, when our friends Monty and Anne invited us for an impromptu lunch. Monty said they were grilling chicken breasts, with a black bean and corn salad. He suggested I bring a dessert that would go with fruit. I didn't have the energy to make anything, so I sped to the grocery store and grabbed a container of sliced pound cake and a can of whipped cream.

"Even with such short notice, they're expecting more from me," I thought. I should have known better. Anne had wrestled with cancer. Staring down Medusa-eyed death until it blinked, Anne was the realest person I knew.

We arrived as one of her friends was cutting up the grilled chicken to add to the black bean and corn salad. The six of us carried the meal—including plates, flatware, and glasses—to an outdoor table. That shared meal was a timeless moment of simplicity and plain beauty. We spooned the black bean salad from a metal mixing bowl, and we picked up salad greens with our hands straight from the salad spinner. We ate from plastic plates, sipped ice tea from an array of plastic cups collected from fast-food restaurants, and talked.

We changed into swimsuits for a quick dip in the pool, then ended with dessert—my store-bought pound cake, lightly toasted, with a salad of fresh plums, peaches, strawberries, and blueberries, flavored with mint from Anne's garden. My husband and I had arrived harried and bickering. We left calm and relaxed.

Stop Entertaining

We all understand the importance of gathering with friends and family. So why don't we do it more often? It's fear—fear that we don't have the time or skill to pull off a meal that will be good enough.

That's why it's important to stop entertaining and just have people over. The very word "entertain" makes most people cringe. A recent Gallup poll found that Americans rank entertaining—along with filing tax returns and visiting the dentist—as the number-one stress-related event in their lives. Entertaining scored even higher on the stress chart than childbirth.

How could something so ultimately satisfying cause so much anxiety?

It's because "entertaining" doesn't imply simply making a nice dinner for a few of your friends. It means you have to cook something fancy — something you've probably never made before. You've got to head to the wine store and hope the salesperson knows his stuff. You've got to buy candles and a flower arrangement. You have to iron the tablecloth and napkins. You can't just pick up the house, you have to scrub it. By the time the guests arrive, you'll be in no mood for a party.

If you're entertaining, in short, you've got to have your place looking as if the photo crew from *Architectural Digest* is about to drop in. But if you're having people over, all that can wait.

At our house, the chores still have to get done, of course, but my husband and I have succeeded in unhooking these from food and friends. If there's time to clean up and organize the stacks of magazines, catalogues, and unpaid bills, fine. If not, we just straighten them. If the garden was worked over last week, fine. If not, my husband picks out the towering weeds, and we let it go.

Deciding when to have people over can be a little like waiting for the perfect time to get married or have a baby or buy a house: you may never get around to doing it if you delay until all the conditions are right. It takes courage to invite them, ready or not, but it's powerful when you do.

And here's the reality: most people cook so infrequently that any home-cooked meal is special. In fact, I've found the more down-home the food and the more casual the setting, the livelier and happier the party.

A Menu That Works

There are two different ways to have people over. The first way — preferable to most cooks — is to plan a menu that can be prepared almost completely ahead, so there's very little to do (and very little that can go wrong) during the party. Really Good Lasagna, for instance, is an uncomplicated crowd-pleaser, refined enough for a formal dinner party yet right at home at a potluck. Oven-Barbecued Pork has all the flavor and appearance of meat that's been lovingly tended over an outdoor fire all day, but it literally cooks while you sleep. Simple Cassoulet is robust and rustic, and unlike the traditional version, which must be started a day or two in advance, it can be made in a few hours.

The second way to have people over is to do a little of the cooking during the party. Easy Baked Risotto and Roast Rack of Lamb with Vinegar-Mint Pan Sauce are impressive dinners that demand very little up-front time or effort and can cook unattended while you enjoy cocktail hour.

Better yet, have guests do some of the cooking—they may not even realize that you've enlisted them to do half the work! For Shish Kebabs—the perfect meal for satisfying both strict vegetarians and ravenous carnivores—set out bowls of marinated meat and cut-up vegetables and let your friends skewer their own.

Get Comfortable with the Meal You've Chosen

Because the rest of the meal follows naturally after you've picked a main course, I've organized the book by placing the main courses ("The Big Stuff") first, followed by the appetizers, soups, salads, side dishes, breads, desserts, and drinks ("All the Rest"). To help you quickly find what you need, I've divided the main-course recipes into those suitable for casual get-togethers, warm-weather events, more formal affairs, and morning fare.

So you can get comfortable with your choice and make sure it's right for the occasion, each recipe is accompanied by a shaded box with answers to important questions. When should I serve it? How can I vary it? Any shortcuts? What should I serve with it? How far ahead can I make it? What about leftovers?

For instance, when you've decided to have a sit-down dinner for eight people and you're considering rack of lamb for the main course, if you scan the box, you'll be reminded that this cut is expensive and also demands last-minute cooking and carving. That's not what you had in mind, so you look for another main course.

You want to have a couple dozen friends over for drinks and appetizers. Since you're short on time and money and it's a group with mixed tastes, you think about the appetizer bar (see page 126). This attractive hors d'oeuvre buffet of breads, spreads, and colorful toppings really makes a splash. The box tells you it offers incredible variety, is relatively inexpensive, and, since guests assemble their own nibbles, requires minimal preparation. Bingo! The question about shortcuts lets you know that you could also use store-bought pita and tortilla chips and grocery-store salad bar items for some of the toppings.

Sensible Steps—Shop, Set, Cook

Before you go any further, be sure you're being realistic about the time you can devote to shopping and cooking. Make up your mind to be flexible—at the store, in the kitchen, at the table. If the recipe calls for watercress but the bunch you see in the

market looks ready for the compost heap, let the market keep it. Buy a baby lettuce blend or arugula instead. Or consider a head of mild butter lettuce mixed with assertive radicchio. If the grocery store flowers look unexceptional and you don't have time to arrange them anyway, head back to the produce department and pick up some apples or lemons or strawberries for a centerpiece bowl.

Setting the table in advance sends guests the welcome message that you're ready—even if you're not. And if you're behind when they arrive, it's easier to ask for help slicing a cucumber or topping toasts than to send someone off to try to set the table.

After the table is ready, you can relax a little. From here on out, it's just cooking. With a decently stocked kitchen, you can pull things together by the time your company comes—even if it's not everything that you planned.

If you find yourself running behind, stay calm and rely on backup ingredients in the cupboards. When there's no time to make the quesadilla appetizers or smoked salmon toasts after all, don't fret. Proudly set out a big bowl of pistachios and cherry tomatoes. Or just skip the toasts and serve the smoked salmon with some nice crackers, and let your friends assemble their own. Instead of the dessert you planned on, put a couple of scoops of sorbet in nice goblets and garnish with a little fresh fruit. You don't have beautiful berries? Thinly slice or mince an apple for a handsome garnish.

Planning for Big Get-Togethers

If you find yourself frequently hosting dinners for two or three dozen people, it may be time to buy a few things for such occasions. I invested in a couple dozen nice but inexpensive white plates, cheap wineglasses that work for any beverage, and a few sets of silverware. This way, I don't have to call the rental company or try to piece together enough from my cupboards every time I have a buffet. I store all of these in the basement, separate from my everyday dishes and china, bringing them up when it's time to prepare and returning them to their place after I've cleaned them.

Whenever possible, mix disposable tableware with the real stuff to lend an air of substance. Plates and silverware are easy to pop in the dishwasher, so you could pair them with disposable plastic glasses. Or consider real dishes for the main course and paper ones for dessert.

For glasses, be sure to figure on about one third more than the number of guests you've invited, to take into account people who'll lose theirs or switch drinks between cocktails and dinner. If you don't have enough glassware, put out what you have with

a stack of disposables as backup. You'll also need an ice bucket and a metal tub (or a large cooler) for icing down beer, wine, and sodas.

You may want to invest in a small folding table to serve as a bar (which frees up the dining room and kitchen tables for dinner seating) and a thirty-cup coffeepot. Since most buffets include a big salad, you'll want a gigantic salad bowl.

Two large roasting pans will save you hours of kitchen time. Here's how: You've decided to make beef stew for your dinner for twenty-four. For a crowd that size, you will need to brown at least nine pounds of beef cubes, which would take you more than an hour in a Dutch oven (eight batches at eight minutes per batch). Instead, heat up those roasting pans over two burners and reduce your number to two batches per pan, or a total of sixteen minutes. You've saved forty-eight minutes.

Roasting pans work for other cooking techniques as well—sautéing onions, simmering chili, or steaming green beans for a crowd. The larger the surface is, the more you can cook at a time, and the more time you can spend relaxing with your guests.

Large disposable roasting pans can also be used. Although they're a little thin for browning and searing meat, they work beautifully for sautéing, steaming, and simmering. Just watch the heat a little more carefully and stir a little more frequently.

Going with the Flow

No matter how organized you may be, though, there are times when life intervenes to thwart your plans. Not long ago, my husband and I commissioned our artist nephew to do two large paintings. As part of the deal, he would deliver them, and we'd use the occasion to host a mini family reunion. When the time came for him to make the trip, he talked his father into driving out with him for the Memorial Day weekend. A few days before they arrived, he called to say they were able to get away a day earlier. Since I had to work that day, I didn't get around to figuring out a menu until midafternoon. I had enough sense to plan a simple grocery store menu of Perfect Roast Chicken served with Lemon-Artichoke Sauce with Garlic and Parsley, but I didn't get home from shopping until late afternoon.

I had managed to fry the tortillas for the Tortilla Sundaes and ready the chickens for the oven when the doorbell rang—two hours early. We broke open a bottle of bubbly to celebrate and spent the next hour chatting and admiring the paintings. A piece of me was enjoying the moment, but deep down I was panicked. At 7:30, just as

I was heading back to the kitchen, my brother- and sister-in-law and their three kids pulled into the driveway. I was living my worst anxiety dream.

Sharing anxiety does wonders for stress, and in a moment my sister-in-law and her kids were helping me assemble Easy Butternut Squash Ravioli for the first course. My niece and nephews seemed to be having fun. The guys carried in the luggage and made up the guest room while my sister-in-law set the table.

I put the chickens in the oven, refilled the nut bowl, and opened some more sparkling wine. When apocalypse threatens, let them sip champagne! There was so much family bonding going on that no one cared that dinner was delayed.

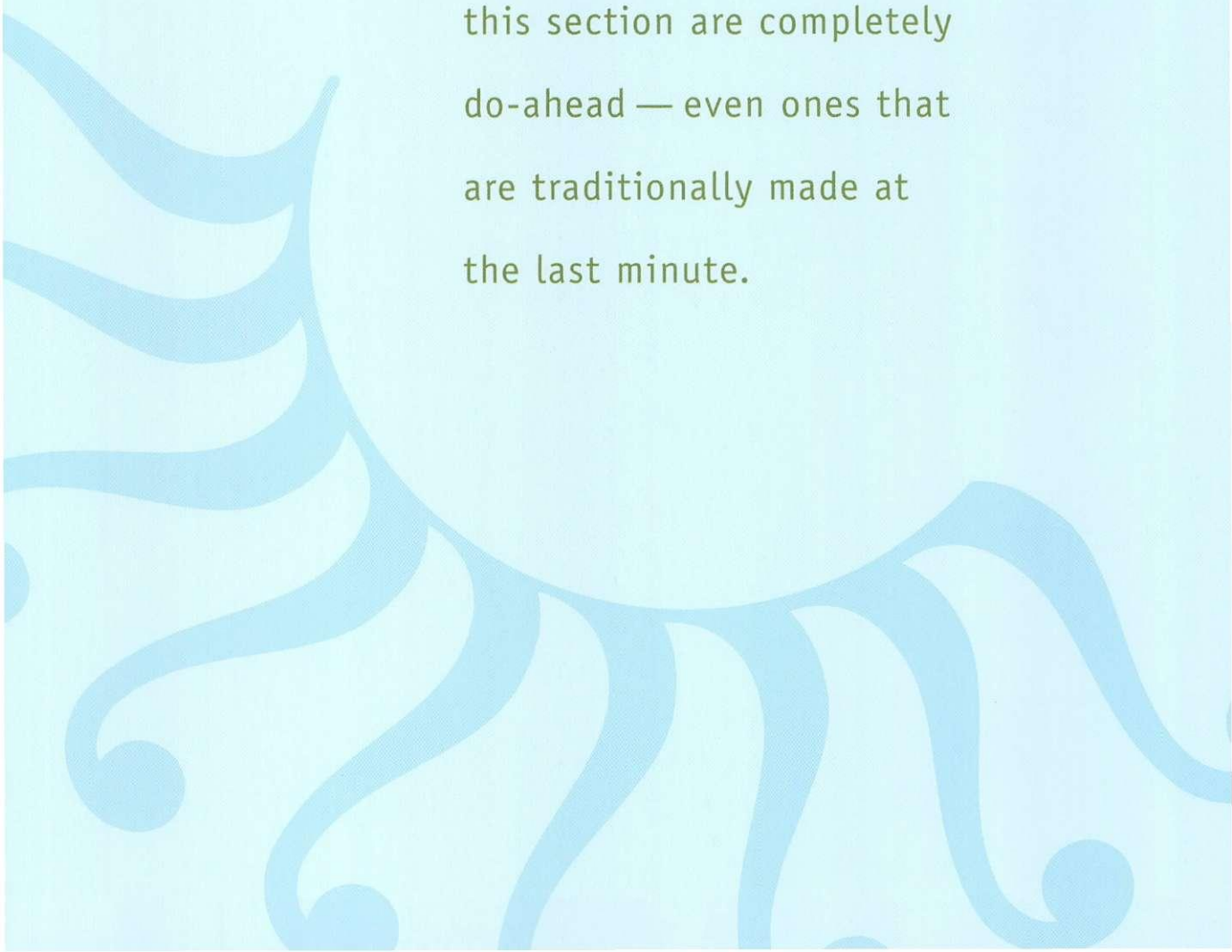
Finally the chickens were roasted, and I made the sauce. We cooked the ravioli, put them on plates, and garnished them. After the first course, I piled the carved chickens and bright green asparagus on a platter, and we passed it around family-style. I was beginning to unwind. The conversation was lively, and our usually quiet niece and nephews were especially talkative. The platter was passed again, and we devoured all the food. It worked its magic around the table.

I often think back on that dinner. More than the embarrassment of being caught unprepared, what I remember is my sister-in-law's satisfaction at being able to help someone who was usually well prepared. I recall the pride in my niece's and nephews' faces as they made a real contribution to dinner. And I won't forget my brother-in-law's comment a few months later. "You're always so relaxed when you have people over," he said. "You just seem to roll with whatever happens."

I would prefer not to preside over that kind of dinner party often, but it was a good reminder that having people over is a selfless act. Even if things aren't perfect — and often precisely because, blessedly, they're not — people appreciate your gift of time and self. As much as I care about food, dinners like that remind me that the food is not the ultimate point — the people are. And when I remember that, it is much easier to have people over.

KITCHEN GATHERINGS

These are the dishes to consider when you want to keep it casual and friendly. Most of the recipes in this section are completely do-ahead — even ones that are traditionally made at the last minute.





CHICKEN SOUP FOR COZY NIGHTS

The first spoonful of this soup evokes an ahhh. I often make it the night houseguests arrive, and it's on the short list of dishes my daughters request when they come home from college. Light yet satisfying and nourishing, it's perfect for people who are tired, road-weary, and unsettled from snacking on junk all day. It's also great the next day, when you've been playing tour guide and there's no time to make lunch. Pull out the soup and heat up an honest loaf of bread. Serve some apple chunks, maybe some cookies. Or drop off a pot of soup for someone who has just moved, had a baby, or is feeling under the weather.

MAKES
3 1/2 TO 4 QUARTS;
SERVES 8

From-scratch chicken soup doesn't have to start with a raw chicken. Soup made from a store-bought roast chicken is just as flavorful and oh-so-simple. By shredding the meat and simmering the bones and skin with cartoned or canned chicken broth, you knock hours off the cooking time but end up with soup that tastes as good as if you'd started from scratch.



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

For weekend houseguests
As one of the offerings at a soup party
For casual suppers and potlucks
For low-budget entertaining
For intergenerational gatherings

ANY SHORTCUTS?

Although the soup will lack that rich, full-bodied broth, you can skip simmering the bones in the broth.

Stick with the basic chicken noodle and chicken rice versions.



WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

You've got a complete meal in a bowl. If you'd like to serve a first course before the soup (or another course after it), consider one of the salads (pages 165-93).

Desserts:

One of the cakes made from the recipe for Simple, Tender Yellow Cake (pages 257-61)
Saucer-Size Oatmeal Cookies (page 238)



HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

The soup base can be refrigerated for up to 3 days. Return it to a simmer and add the ingredients for the individual soups, along with the peas, fresh herbs, and seasoning.

WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

Although the peas and herbs will fade and the noodles swell, the soup will still be very satisfying for at least 3 or 4 days.



I've given you a formula so you can make a simple chicken noodle soup or more elaborate soups—from tortellini to pasta and white beans—using the same proportions and method. These soups are warm and comforting enough to heal the sick, but they're also meant for tired cooks who need to prepare a soul-satisfying meal in a bowl—quickly. Before adding the extras, you can split the broth mixture and make different kinds of soup. Just remember to halve the added ingredients.

For even more impromptu gatherings, make a store-bought broth doctored with Asian or southwestern flavorings, lay out an array of ingredients and condiments, and let guests finish making the soups themselves to their liking. (See the recipes on pages 8 and 9.)

- 2 quarts chicken broth
- 1 store-bought roast chicken, meat picked from bones and pulled into bite-size pieces, bones and skin reserved
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 large onions, cut into medium dice
- 2 large carrots, peeled and cut into rounds or half rounds, depending on size
- 2 large celery stalks, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick
- Additional ingredients from the soup of your choice (recipes follow)
- 1 cup (5 ounces) frozen green peas
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped fresh herbs (see recipes)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Bring broth and 4 cups water to a simmer in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add reserved chicken bones and skin, reduce heat to low, partially cover, and simmer until bones release their flavor, 20 to 30 minutes. Strain broth into a large bowl; discard bones and skin.

Return pot to burner set on medium-high. Add oil, then onions, carrots, and celery, and sauté until soft, 8 to 10 minutes. Add chicken and broth and bring to a simmer.

Add ingredients from soup of choice. Simmer until tender, 10 to 20 minutes more, depending on starch (if any). Stir in peas and herbs, and adjust seasonings, adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

CLASSIC CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

- 3 cups egg noodles
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- Chopped fresh parsley

CLASSIC CHICKEN AND RICE SOUP

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup long-grain white rice
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- Chopped fresh parsley

CHICKEN TORTELLINI SOUP WITH ZUCCHINI AND TOMATOES

- 1 package (9 ounces) refrigerated small cheese tortellini or 1 bag ($8\frac{1}{2}$ ounces) dried
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 2 medium zucchini, cut into medium dice
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- Chopped fresh parsley

Serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

CHICKEN SOUP WITH BLACK BEANS AND CORN

- 2 cans (16 ounces each) black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen corn
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and minced
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- Chopped fresh cilantro

Omit peas. Serve with tortilla chips, grated Monterey Jack cheese, and lime wedges.

CURRIED CHICKEN SOUP WITH CHICKPEAS AND CAULIFLOWER

- 2 cans (16 ounces each) chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (13.5 ounces) coconut milk (optional, but very good)
- 2 cups bite-size cauliflower florets
- 2 tablespoons curry powder
- Chopped fresh cilantro

CHICKEN SOUP WITH PASTA AND WHITE BEANS

- 1 can (14.5 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 2 cans (16 ounces each) white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup small pasta, such as ditalini
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
- Chopped fresh parsley

Serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

CHICKEN SOUP WITH ASIAN FLAVORINGS

This soup gives your guests a chance to assemble their own meal in a bowl, choosing from a wide assortment of colorful possibilities. Since the ingredients will be at room temperature, it's important for the broth to be piping hot. Keep it simmering on the stove or a hot plate, if you've got one. Don't use large shallow soup bowls; they will make the soup cool too quickly. Instead, use small deep bowls. Smaller bowls also encourage guests to come back for a second round, with a new set of flavoring ingredients. After they've helped themselves, ladle the simmering broth into each bowl.

SERVES 18 TO 20

- 6 quarts chicken broth
- 9 thin slices fresh ginger
- 18 2-inch cilantro stems
- 9 scallions, trimmed to white part only
- 6 strips lime zest, removed with a vegetable peeler

Combine all ingredients in a large pot, bring to a simmer, and simmer to blend flavors, about 10 minutes. Strain, return to pot, and if not serving immediately, cover and keep warm; return to a simmer before serving.

POSSIBLE ADDITIONS

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1/2 pound cooked shrimp, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1/4 pound thinly sliced rare roast beef
- 1/4 pound firm tofu, patted dry and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 bag (6 ounces) radishes, thinly sliced and cut into thin strips
- 6 ounces (about 2 cups) fresh bean sprouts, rinsed and drained
- 1/4 pound shiitake or white mushrooms, stemmed and thinly sliced
- 1 can (8 ounces) water chestnuts, drained and rinsed
- 1/4 pound bok choy, thinly sliced
- 2 packages (3 ounces each) ramen noodles, flavoring packet discarded, noodles broken into bite-size pieces
- 3 ounces (2 cups) chow mein noodles
- 1 cup roasted unsalted peanuts, coarsely chopped
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced
- 1 handful each fresh basil leaves, fresh mint leaves, and cilantro sprigs
- 1 lime, cut into 8 wedges
- 1 jalapeño, sliced into thin rounds
- Soy sauce
- Thai or Vietnamese fish sauce

CHICKEN SOUP WITH SOUTHWESTERN FLAVORINGS

- 6 quarts chicken broth
- 18 2-inch cilantro stems
- 9 sun-dried tomato halves
- 6 garlic cloves
- 6 strips lime zest, removed with a vegetable peeler
- 1 jalapeño

Combine all ingredients in a large pot, bring to a simmer, and simmer to blend flavors, about 10 minutes. Strain, return to pot, and if not serving immediately, cover and keep warm; return to a simmer before serving.

POSSIBLE ADDITIONS

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1/2 pound cooked shrimp, cut into bite-size pieces
- 4 ounces pepper Jack cheese, grated
- 1 jar (8 ounces) nacho cheese sauce
- 1 bag (12 ounces) Fritos (original strip shape)
- 1 bag (12 ounces) tortilla chips
- 1 each red and green bell pepper, cut into thin strips and sautéed (see page 127)
- 1 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed
- 1 bag (6 ounces) radishes, thinly sliced and cut into thin strips
- 1 cup chopped tomatoes
- 1 can (4.5 ounces) chopped mild green chiles
- 1 can (2.25 ounces) sliced black olives
- 1 can (16 ounces) pinto or black beans, drained
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced
- 1 handful cilantro sprigs
- 1 lime, cut into 8 wedges
- 1 jalapeño pepper, minced
- 1 jar (8 ounces) green salsa
- 1 jar (8 ounces) red salsa
- 1 bottle each green and red hot pepper sauce



SAUSAGE AND WHITE BEAN SOUP

Most of us enjoy a good pot of ham and bean soup, but often we don't have a ham bone on hand or the time to soak and simmer dried beans. Minced prosciutto instantly transforms chicken broth into a ham-flavored soup base. Italian sausage reinforces the pork flavor and makes the soup satisfying and substantial. Canned beans work as well as dried ones, and mashing some of them thickens the soup and gives it body.

SERVES 8

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ pounds Italian sausages
- 2 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, minced
- 2 medium onions, cut into medium dice
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into medium dice
- 2 medium celery stalks, cut into medium dice



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

Fall picnics or tailgate parties
A fall or winter lunch or casual supper—especially when time's short



HOW CAN I VARY IT?

Substitute smoked cooked sausage: kielbasa or chorizo.
Other varieties of canned beans can be substituted as well.



WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

Breads:
Moist, Savory Corn Muffins (page 226) or other interesting breads

Salads:
Carrot Salad with Cumin Vinaigrette (page 178), served before the soup

- 1 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
- 1 quart chicken broth
- 3 cans (16 ounces each) canned great northern or other white beans, undrained

Heat oil in a large deep pot over medium-high heat until hot. Add sausages and cook, turning once or twice, until well browned on all sides, about 5 minutes (sausage will not be fully cooked). Remove with a slotted spoon; when cool enough to handle, cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices.

Meanwhile, add prosciutto, onions, carrots, celery, and thyme to pot and cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are well browned, 8 to 10 minutes.

Add broth and sausage. Smash 1 can of beans with a fork, then add to soup with remaining beans. Cover, and bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, to blend flavors, about 20 minutes. Turn off heat and let sit for 10 minutes to let flavors develop.

Return soup to a simmer and serve.



Pear Halves with Blue Cheese and Toasted Nuts (page 166), served after the soup
Cheeses and fall fruits, like apples, pears, and grapes, served after the soup



Desserts:
Saucer-Size Oatmeal Cookies (page 238)
Perfectly Simple Pumpkin Cheesecake (page 274)
Moist, Tender Spice Cake (page 259)



HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

The cooled soup can be refrigerated up to 3 days.

WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

Leftover soup can be refrigerated up to 3 days, and it freezes well.





CHICKEN CHILI—RED OR WHITE

SERVES 12

If you want a chili that brings people back for seconds and always makes them ask for the recipe, try one of these. Chicken gives chili the broadest possible appeal when you're serving a big group.

Both the red and white versions have the look and flavor of serious chili, yet they are easy to prepare. The meat of rotisserie chicken is perfect for this dish—it's deeply seasoned, tender, and easy to shred, and using it shaves a couple hours off the cooking process. Adding garlic at the end makes the chili pleasantly potent. If you'd prefer a chunky beef or pork chili, consider Stew with Southwestern Flavorings (page 52).

QUICK RED CHICKEN CHILI

This may seem like a lot of chili powder, but the chocolate rounds out the flavor, resulting in a rich, full-bodied stew. You can make it in a large pot instead of a roasting pan, but allow extra time for the onions to sauté and the chili to simmer.

- 2 store-bought roast chickens, meat picked from bones and pulled into bite-size pieces, bones and skin reserved
- 2 quarts chicken broth
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 large onions, cut into medium dice
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup chili powder
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons ground cumin
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons dried oregano
- 2 cans (28 ounces each) crushed tomatoes
- 2 cans (16 ounces each) pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 6 medium garlic cloves, minced
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
- 3 tablespoons cornmeal

Accompaniments: See page 14 for suggestions

Combine chicken bones and skin, chicken broth, and 4 cups water in a large pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low, partially cover, and simmer until bones release their flavor, about 30 minutes. Strain broth into a large bowl; discard bones and skin.



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

At casual parties like Super Bowl Sunday or other sports gatherings, Halloween, family reunions, or potlucks

At large gatherings with lots of guests who don't eat red meat

For a casual lunch or supper, especially when you have house-guests

ANY SHORTCUTS?

Simmering the bones in the chicken broth gives the chili a more homemade flavor, but skip this step if you're short on time.

Use ready-peeled garlic.

HOW CAN I VARY IT?

Substitute leftover turkey or chicken (7 to 8 cups) for the rotisserie chicken.

For the white chili, substitute canned white beans, such as great northern or cannellini, for the hominy.

WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

Drinks:

Instant Frozen Margaritas (page 287)

Sparkling Coolers (page 283), especially limeade

Beer



Appetizers and Salads:

Quesadillas for a Crowd (page 138)

Salads:

Chopped Caesar Salad (page 172)

Boston Lettuce and Baby Spinach Salad (page 176)

Accompaniments:

Fried Corn Tortilla Triangles (page 123–24) or 1 bag each tortilla and corn chips

Shredded sharp cheese (two 12-ounce bags)

1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced

1 cup fresh cilantro leaves

1 jar (12 ounces) sliced jalapeños

1 bottle each red and green hot pepper sauce

1 container (24 ounces) sour cream

2 cans (2.25 ounces each) sliced black olives

1 jar (8 ounces) red or green salsa (improve the flavor by stirring in 1 to 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro and squeezing in a little fresh lime juice)

1 lime, cut into wedges

Guacamole:

Peel and seed 4 avocados, mash with a fork, then season gener-



ously with a couple pinches each salt and pepper and ¼ cup fresh lime juice.

Sides:

Moist, Savory Corn Muffins (page 226–27)

Desserts:

Tortilla Sundaes with Minted Mango Salsa (page 241)

Hot Fudge Brownie Sundaes (page 244)

HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

You can pick and shred the chicken and simmer the broth the day before making the chili.

The chili can be made up to 3 days ahead.

WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

The chili freezes very well for 2 months.

Heat oil in a large roasting pan set over two burners on medium-high heat. Add onions and sauté until soft, 4 to 5 minutes. Add chili powder, cumin, and oregano, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring, until spices are fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in chicken, tomatoes, and broth and bring to a simmer. Reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally, to blend flavors, 25 to 30 minutes.

Stir in beans, garlic, and chocolate and simmer to blend flavors, about 5 minutes. Sprinkle cornmeal over chili, stir in, and simmer to thicken chili, 1 to 2 minutes longer. Turn off heat, cover, and let stand for 5 minutes.

Ladle into bowls and serve with accompaniments of your choice.

QUICK WHITE CHICKEN CHILI WITH HOMINY

Their pale color and mild corn flavor make hominy and shoepeg corn the perfect replacement for pinto beans in this white variation. Hominy (soft, chewy corn kernels from which the hull and germ have been removed) is found in the canned-vegetable aisle in supermarkets. Frozen white shoepeg corn is more delicate than yellow corn.

- 2 store-bought roast chickens, meat picked from bones and pulled into bite-size pieces, bones and skin reserved
- 2 quarts chicken broth
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup ground cumin
- 4 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 large onions, cut into medium dice
- 2 jars or cans (4.5 ounces each) diced mild green chiles
- 2 cans (20 ounces each) hominy, rinsed (about 6 cups)
- 6 medium garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups frozen corn, preferably white shoepeg

Accompaniments: See page 14 for suggestions

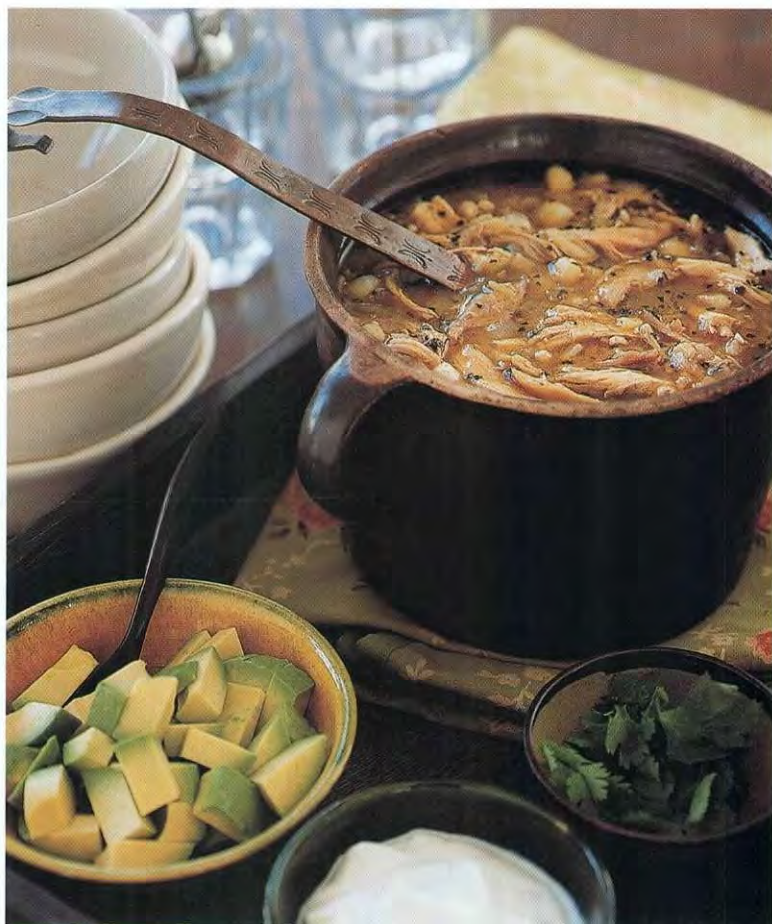
Combine chicken bones and skin, chicken broth, and 4 cups water in a large pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce

heat to low and simmer until bones release their flavor, about 30 minutes. Strain broth into a large bowl; discard bones and skin.

Meanwhile, heat oil in a large roasting pan set over two burners (or a large pot) on medium-low heat. Add cumin, oregano, and cayenne and cook, stirring, until spices sizzle and are fragrant, about 1 minute. Add onions, increase heat to medium, and sauté until soft, 4 to 5 minutes. Add chicken and chiles and stir to coat. Add 4 cups hominy and all but 1 cup broth and bring to a simmer. Reduce heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, to blend flavors, 25 to 30 minutes.

In a food processor, process remaining 2 cups hominy and reserved 1 cup broth until silky smooth. Stir into simmering soup. Stir in minced garlic and corn and simmer to blend flavors, about 5 minutes. Turn off heat, cover, and let stand for 5 minutes.

Ladle into bowls and serve with accompaniments of your choice.



OVEN - BARBECUED PORK FOR SANDWICHES OR CARNITAS

I love pulled pork, but I don't have time to spend all day standing at a charcoal grill, coddling a pork shoulder to fall-off-the-bone tenderness. I've discovered, however, that you can pat the shoulder with a dry rub, shove it into the oven, and let it slow-roast for 10 to 12 hours overnight. The next morning, the pork emerges tender and mahogany-colored. Once the meat cools, pull it into bite-size shreds and moisten it with the pan drippings. The pulled pork can be spooned onto buns for barbecue sandwiches or wrapped in corn tortillas for a carnita party. Few dishes allow you to serve such a large group with so little effort.

SERVES 12 TO 20

A whole pork shoulder consists of the front part of the leg, called the picnic, and the butt, also known as Boston butt roast or Boston-style butt. Either cut is good here. If choosing the picnic, however, pull off the thick rind before brushing the meat with mustard, using a sharp knife to facilitate the process. Once the roast reaches 165 degrees, you can increase the oven temperature to 325 degrees to speed up the cooking process if you like.

- 3 tablespoons packed light or dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons paprika
- 1½ teaspoons salt, plus more for sprinkling
- 1½ tablespoons coarsely ground black pepper
- 1½ tablespoons garlic powder
- 1 bone-in pork shoulder butt roast or fresh picnic shoulder (8–9 pounds)
- ½ cup Dijon mustard

Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 250 degrees.

Mix brown sugar, paprika, salt, pepper, and garlic powder in a small bowl. Pat roast dry and place on a rack set over a foil-lined shallow baking sheet. Lightly sprinkle top and sides of roast with salt, brush with half the mustard, and sprinkle with half the spice rub. Carefully turn roast over. Sprinkle with a little salt, brush with remaining mustard, and sprinkle with remaining spice rub.



Roast until a meat thermometer registers 170 degrees, 9 to 11 hours, depending on size. Transfer pork to a platter and let cool enough to handle, about 1 hour.

Meanwhile, if making sandwiches or if pork needs a little more moisture, pour off any fat and scrape pan drippings into a small saucepan, add 1 cup water, and bring to a simmer. Remove from heat.

Cut roast into 1- to 2-inch chunks and shred meat into a large bowl. Add enough pan drippings to moisten pork and stir to combine.



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

For any large casual event—Super Bowl party, pre- or post-sports meals, family reunions

ANY SHORTCUTS?

Roast 2 smaller pork shoulder roasts rather than one big one. You'll save a couple of hours of roasting and cooling time.

Buy a good spice rub instead of making your own.

HOW CAN I VARY IT?

Add a couple tablespoons of cumin to the spice rub if you like—especially if you're making carnitas.

Make Pulled Chicken Barbecue Sandwiches instead. For about 15 sandwiches, to serve 10 people, pick and shred the meat from 2 to 3 rotisserie or roast chickens (see Perfect Roast Chicken, page 38) to yield 10 to 12 cups shredded meat. Reserve the chicken juices, and add



enough chicken broth to equal 1 cup. Heat the shredded chicken, 1¾ to 2 cups of your favorite barbecue sauce, and chicken broth in a large covered pot over medium-low heat until hot. Serve on sandwich buns.

WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

Drinks:

Distinctive bottled beers and sodas (cream and black cherry soda, root or birch beer) or Sparkling Coolers (page 283), lemonade, and iced tea

Appetizers:

Peanuts in the shell
Curried Popcorn (page 116)
Perfect Deviled Eggs (page 120)
For carnitas, Quesadillas for a Crowd (page 138)

Sides and Salads:

For barbecue sandwiches,
Slaw with Creamy American Dressing (page 181)



Fresh Corn Salad with Cabbage and Bell Peppers (page 184)
Quick Southern-Style Baked Beans (page 218)

For carnitas,
Fresh Corn Salad with Cabbage and Bell Peppers (page 184), doubled

Desserts:

Hot Fudge Brownie Sundaes (page 244)
S'more Bars (page 236)

HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

Roast and shred the pork up to 3 days ahead; refrigerate. Reheat in a roasting pan set over two burners over low heat, adding a little water if necessary.

WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

Leftovers can be packaged in freezer bags and frozen for up to 3 months.

PULLED PORK SANDWICHES

SERVES 18 TO 20

Oven-Barbecued Pork (page 17)

- 1 cup barbecue sauce of your choice, plus (optional) extra for serving
- 18–20 large sandwich buns

Heat pulled pork and barbecue sauce in a large covered pot over low heat, stirring frequently. Serve with buns and extra barbecue sauce, if desired.

CARNITAS

SERVES 12

Oven-Barbecued Pork (page 17)

- 24 corn tortillas
- Slaw with Salsa Verde Dressing or Orange Cumin Dressing (page 181), doubled
- Scant 3 cups Guacamole (page 14)
- 1 container (24 ounces) sour cream

Twenty to 30 minutes before serving, adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees.

Slowly heat pulled pork in a roasting pan set over two burners over low heat, stirring frequently, adding a little water if necessary.

Meanwhile, lay a damp paper towel on a 24-by-18-inch piece of heavy-duty foil. Set 2 stacks of 4 corn tortillas each side by side on towel. Cover with another damp paper towel. Seal foil completely. Make 2 more foil packets. Bake until steamy, about 5 minutes.

Pull tortillas from oven as needed, and let guests fill them with pork, slaw, guacamole, and sour cream, as they like.





GROWN - UP SLOPPY JOES

I make these sloppy joes, along with a salad, for family reunions. After the guests arrive in the afternoon, a team of us can put together dinner for forty people in about half an hour. Everyone loves the meal—toddlers and teen cousins, middle-aged siblings, even Grandpa. Those who are watching carbohydrates skip the buns. One of my nephews says he’s never had sloppy joes as good as these.

**MAKES ABOUT
30 SANDWICHES;
SERVES 20**

- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 5 medium-large onions, chopped
- 5 pounds lean ground beef or turkey
- 4 cups (1 quart) ketchup
- 1 1/4 cups Dijon mustard
- 2/3 cup soy sauce
- 1/4 cup Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon hot pepper sauce
- 2/3 cup packed light or dark brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 30 sandwich buns



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

For casual suppers, including family reunions

For kids’ and teen parties

For a quick main course that can be made in advance or at the last minute



ANY SHORTCUTS?

If you use a disposable roasting pan, cleanup is a breeze. Make sure to reduce heat to medium.



HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

The sloppy joe mixture can be made up to 3 days ahead. Reheat slowly in a roasting pan set over two burners, stirring frequently and adding water if necessary to keep it from burning.

Heat oil in a large roasting pan over two burners on medium-high heat. Add onions and cook, stirring, until tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Add ground meat and cook, stirring frequently to break up large clumps, until no longer pink. Drain or spoon off any excess fat.

Mix remaining ingredients, except buns, in a medium bowl and stir them into meat. Continue to cook, stirring frequently, until mixture is thick, 5 to 8 minutes.

To warm sandwich buns, heat oven to 325 degrees. Place 1 bun per person in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake until buns are warm throughout, 8 to 10 minutes. Warm more as needed.

Spoon a portion of meat onto each bun and serve.



WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

Drinks:

Beer and soda

Appetizers:

Baskets of chips and pretzels

Salads:

Any of the salads (pages 165–93)

For a large crowd, set up a salad bar.



Desserts:

Hot Fudge Brownie Sundaes
(page 244)

S'more Bars (page 236)

Saucer-Size Oatmeal Cookies
(page 238)



WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

The sloppy joe mixture freezes well for 1 month. Thaw and then reheat as directed above.



BAKE-AHEAD PIZZA FOR A CROWD

The word “party” just naturally follows pizza. Making it from scratch for a crowd is difficult, though. The problem is oven space—the crust has to be baked on the bottom rack so it will brown, which means you have to bake the pizzas one at a time.

**MAKES 4 PIZZAS;
SERVES 6**

I’ve found two tricks that make it possible to serve pizza for a crowd. First, change the shape. If you form the pizzas into long rectangles, you can bake two at a time. The smaller sizes of dough are easier to manage than a large one, and the centers will crisp up better. You can also sauce the pizzas and bake them several hours ahead. Then, shortly before serving, top them (or better yet, let guests do it), and reheat them at the last minute in a low-temperature oven to melt the cheese and recrisp the crust.

Like good French and Italian bread, a good pizza crust is made with bread flour, which is available in health food stores and many supermarkets. If you use bleached all-purpose flour, the crust will be tough and less crisp. You can, however, substitute a higher-protein unbleached all-purpose flour, such as King Arthur.



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

For a casual party, especially for young people

As an appetizer

ANY SHORTCUTS?

Here are some ideas, but if you take too many shortcuts, something very special will turn ordinary.

The dough will rise more quickly in an oven that’s been preheated to about 100 degrees, then turned off. Set the covered bowl of dough on the oven rack with a dish towel beneath to protect it from the



direct heat of the rack.

If you don’t have time to make pizza dough, buy it. Many grocery stores sell it in the refrigerated section.

Although grating fresh Parmesan cheese (preferably Parmigiano-Reggiano) makes a remarkable difference in flavor, you can use a good packaged grated cheese.

Use packaged grated mozzarella cheese.

Use as many no-prep toppings as possible (see page 28).

Make just one sauce. If you’re



hosting a pizza party, however, it’s nice, and more festive, to have a second type.

HOW CAN I VARY IT?

If you like barbecue chicken or ham and pineapple, for example, on your pizza, follow the dough and sauce recipes, then create your own toppings.

WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

Drinks:

Zippy red wines, such as Zinfandel or Chianti
Beer and soda

- 1 package (2¼ teaspoons) active dry yeast
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 cups bread flour
- 2 teaspoons salt
- Red and/or White Sauce for Pizza (recipes follow)
- Toppings of choice (see page 28)
- 1 cup (4 ounces) grated part-skim mozzarella (or other soft cheese, such as Fontina or even pepper Jack; crumbled feta is nice too)
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Cornmeal for dusting pan

Pour ¼ cup warm tap water into a 2-cup Pyrex measuring cup or a small bowl. Sprinkle in yeast and let stand until yeast swells, about 5 minutes. Add cool tap water to the 1½-cup line (1¼ cups water if using bowl), then add olive oil to the 1¾-cup line (¼ cup oil if using bowl), and whisk to mix.

Pour flour and salt in a food processor and pulse to mix. Add yeast mixture and process to form a soft, supple, dough ball; pulse in another tablespoon or so of water if dough feels tight, like clay. Process until smooth, 20 to 30 seconds longer.



Appetizers:

Keep it simple. Set out a dish of roasted pistachios and serve a green salad before or with the pizza.

Salads:

Chopped Caesar Salad (page 172)
 Mixed Green Salad with Fresh Herbs (page 168)

Desserts:

Frozen Tiramisu with Coffee
 Mascarpone Sauce (page 250)
 Sorbet- or Ice Cream-Filled Crisp
 Cinnamon Cups (page 246)
 S'more Bars (page 236)

HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

The white sauce can be made up to 3 days ahead; since the tomato sauce is so easy, throw it together at the last minute.

The sauced pizzas can be baked up to 2 hours before topping.

Most of the topping ingredients can be prepared 1 to 2 days ahead.

WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

If you heat it up right, pizza is almost as good the second time around. To reheat a few slices, set a large skillet or griddle over medi-

um heat. While the skillet heats, microwave the pizzas just enough to take the chill off (not too much, or you'll end up toughening the crust). Set the slices in a single layer in the skillet and heat until the bottom crisps up and the pizza is heated through. You can heat larger quantities of leftovers in a low-temperature oven, setting the slices directly on an oven rack.

Toss leftover pizza sauce with pasta or spoon over polenta.



Turn dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead for a few seconds to form a ball. Place in a large bowl coated with cooking spray. Cover with plastic wrap and let stand in a warm place until doubled in size, 1½ to 2 hours.

Meanwhile, make sauce(s), prepare toppings, and grate cheese.

About 30 minutes before baking, adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Lightly sprinkle cornmeal onto each of two parchment-lined cookie sheets, at least 18 by 12 inches. (Do not use insulated cookie sheets, which would prevent crusts from crisping.)

Without punching it down, turn dough onto a lightly floured surface. (It's fine if dough deflates; just don't work or knead it, because that will make stretching more difficult.) Quarter dough with a dough scraper or sharp knife.

Working with 1 portion of dough at a time, stretch each into a rough 18-by-5-inch rectangle. (Don't sweat the shape. You just want 2 pizzas per sheet.) Transfer to a prepared pan; spread with ½ cup sauce. Repeat with another portion of dough, and bake pizzas until bottoms are a crisp golden brown, about 15 minutes. Stretch and sauce remaining 2 portions pizza dough, then bake when first pizzas come out of oven. Set aside at room temperature.

When ready to serve, adjust oven racks to middle and top positions and preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Top pizzas as desired, sprinkle with mozzarella, and bake directly on oven racks until crisp and hot, 7 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board, sprinkle with Parmesan cheese, and bring to the table. Cut with kitchen shears and serve.

RED SAUCE FOR PIZZA

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS (ENOUGH FOR 4 PIZZAS)

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (16 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- Salt to taste

Mix all ingredients together and spread on pizza.

COOKED RED SAUCE

You can also cook the tomato sauce. Add olive oil and garlic to a 10-inch skillet and cook until garlic starts to sizzle. Add tomatoes and salt and bring to a boil, then simmer to blend flavors, about 10 minutes. Spread on pizza.

WHITE SAUCE FOR PIZZA

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS (ENOUGH FOR 4 PIZZAS)

- 1¹/₄ cups 2% or whole milk
- ³/₄ cup chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 2 large garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¹/₄ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt

Combine milk, broth, and garlic in a 1-quart Pyrex measuring cup or a microwave-safe bowl (or a medium saucepan) and microwave (or slowly heat in a medium saucepan) until very hot and steamy. Let stand for 5 minutes to soften garlic.

Meanwhile, melt butter in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. When butter starts to sizzle, whisk in flour. Add milk mixture all at once, then whisk until smooth. Cook until thick and bubbly (since milk is hot, this will take only a minute). Stir in cheese and season with salt. Pour mixture back into measuring cup or bowl and cover with plastic wrap, placed directly on surface of sauce, for up to 2 hours, or until ready to use. Spread on pizza.

POSSIBLE PIZZA TOPPINGS

SIMPLE TOPPINGS:

- Canned chopped clams—¹/₂ cup drained clams per pizza (from a 6¹/₂-ounce can)
- Sliced pepperoni or prosciutto
- Canadian bacon or ham, cut into small dice
- Your favorite olives, pitted
- Canned artichokes, drained, quartered, and tossed with a little extra-virgin olive oil
- Jarred roast peppers
- Jarred pesto

VEGETABLE TOPPINGS (1 POUND PER 4 PIZZAS):

Vegetables that need to be sautéed:

- Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When oil starts to shimmer, add one of the following vegetables and a sprinkling of salt. Cook, stirring often, until soft, about 5 minutes.
- Onions, halved and thinly sliced
- Bell peppers, stem removed, cored, seeded, then thinly sliced into ¹/₄-inch-thick strips
- Mushrooms, sliced ¹/₄ inch thick (or buy packaged sliced)

Vegetables that need to be steam-sautéed:

- Place one of the following prepared vegetables, ¹/₃ cup water (omit water if using spinach), a scant ¹/₂ teaspoon salt, and 2 teaspoons olive oil in a deep skillet or Dutch oven. Cover and steam over high heat until vegetables are bright colored and just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Turn out onto a plate to cool.
- Broccoli, florets cut into bite-size pieces; stalks peeled and cut into ¹/₄-inch-thick coins
- Asparagus (medium-thick), tough end of stalks trimmed, spears cut into 1-inch lengths
- Spinach (buy triple-washed), stems removed

Vegetables that need to be broiled:

- Adjust oven rack to highest position and preheat broiler. Lightly brush both sides of vegetables with oil and sprinkle with salt. Broil, turning once, until spotty brown on each side, 7 to 10 minutes.
- Zucchini or yellow squash, cut into ¹/₃-inch-thick rounds
- Eggplant, cut into ¹/₃-inch-thick rounds

MEAT TOPPINGS (1 POUND PER 4 PIZZAS):

- Ground sausage, beef, or turkey, browned
- Bacon, cut into ¹/₂-inch-wide pieces and cooked until crisp



BUTTERMILK-HONEY FRIED CHICKEN FINGERS

Chicken fingers often overcook before they brown. To solve the problem, I add a little honey to the buttermilk bath, which makes them brown more quickly, and they turn out juicy.

SERVES 8

- 4 teaspoons honey
- Salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Flavoring of choice (pages 29 and 31)
- 1 1/3 cups buttermilk
- 2 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 6 large),
each cut crosswise into 8 or 9 strips
- 1 quart oil (vegetable, canola, peanut, or corn)
- 3 cups all-purpose flour

In a large bowl or shallow baking dish, mix honey, 1 teaspoon salt, pepper, and flavoring into buttermilk. Add chicken and turn to coat.

Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Heat oil in a large (12-inch) skillet over high heat to 375 degrees.

Meanwhile, mix flour and 1 tablespoon salt in a doubled paper bag. Drop about 8 chicken strips into flour, close bag, and shake to coat chicken. Place chicken pieces on a wire rack set over a baking sheet (or newspaper for easy cleanup). Repeat with remaining chicken.

Working in 4 batches, drop chicken pieces into hot oil and fry until golden brown, turning if necessary to ensure even browning, about 3 minutes. Transfer to another wire rack set over a baking sheet to drain. Keep first batches warm in oven while you cook remaining chicken, returning oil to 375 degrees after each batch.

CLASSIC FLAVORING

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder

MARYLAND-STYLE FLAVORING

- 1 tablespoon Old Bay or other Maryland-style spice blend



CURRY FLAVORING

- 1 tablespoon curry powder



WHEN SHOULD I SERVE IT?

For gatherings of kids and adults when you're comfortable enough to fry in front of guests

For children's and teen parties

At a picnic (served at room temperature)

As a substantial hors d'oeuvre before a light main course

ANY SHORTCUTS?

Buy chicken already cut into strips.

HOW CAN I VARY IT?

Choose from five different garnishes:

Sprinkle hot chicken with a big handful of chopped fresh herbs—basil, chives, and parsley. Serve with lemon wedges, which guests can squeeze over the chicken.

Sprinkle hot chicken generously with toasted sesame seeds and sliced scallion greens. Serve with hoisin dipping sauce (1 cup hoisin sauce, ¼ cup rice wine vinegar, and 2 tablespoons soy sauce).

Sprinkle hot chicken generously with chopped peanuts and sliced scallion greens. Serve with your favorite Thai peanut sauce.

Sprinkle hot chicken generously with chopped fresh cilantro or

CUMIN FLAVORING

- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder



parsley and sliced scallion greens.

Serve with curry chutney dipping sauce (1 cup Major Grey chutney, ¼ cup rice wine vinegar, and 2 teaspoons curry powder, heated and served warm, or served at room temperature).

Sprinkle hot chicken generously with chopped fresh cilantro and sliced scallion greens. Serve with lime wedges, which guests can squeeze over chicken, and your favorite jarred salsa or salsa verde.

WHAT SHOULD I SERVE WITH IT?

Drinks:

A playful cocktail—A Pitcher of Mojitos (page 290), Instant Frozen Margaritas (page 287), or Cosmopolitans by the Pitcher (page 288)

A crisp, fruity white wine, such as a Sauvignon Blanc

Iced tea and lemonade

Appetizers:

Curried Popcorn (page 116)

Perfect Deviled Eggs (page 120)

First Courses and Salads:

Year-Round Classic Gazpacho (page 162)

Boston Lettuce and Baby Spinach Salad (page 176)



Mixed Green Salad with Fresh Herbs (page 168)

Baby Spinach Salad with Shaved Parmesan and Garlic

Vinaigrette (page 170)

Carrot Salad with Cumin Vinaigrette (page 178)

Sides:

Any of the slaws (pages 180–81)

Creamy Baked Macaroni and Cheese (page 32)

Broiled or Grilled Asparagus (page 195)

Slow-Roasted Plum Tomatoes with Pesto-Flavored Crumbs (page 204)

Desserts:

Hot Fudge Brownie Sundaes (page 244)

S'more Bars (page 236)

Saucer-Size Oatmeal Cookies (page 238)

HOW FAR AHEAD CAN I MAKE IT?

The chicken can soak overnight in the buttermilk.

WHAT ABOUT LEFTOVERS?

Toss leftover warmed chicken fingers with mixed greens for a satisfying lunch salad.