

Hogtown HomeGrown™

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Making do when money is tight

Dad was born in 1930, which, as he often said, was “the year my father lost his store” due to the Depression. With six children, money was tight, but everyone got fed because Jiddo grew some of their food and Sitto made everything from scratch. From the infamous exploding home-canned tomatoes (that’s a story for another day) to brined grape leaves from their arbor, putting food by helped them survive and thrive.

My mom was born in 1931 and though times were not quite as tight at that point, her mother knew the challenge of cooking meals and drying diapers in the open fireplace of a dirt-floor cabin. While in later years there were delicious tomatoes to harvest from their back yard, as a young married couple Granny and Granddaddy relied on fresh food from the farming cousins and grocery staples from Cousin JP’s country store. What was not eaten was put by in the pantry and freezer, to ensure a steady food supply during lean months.

For a time, when our sons were young, we relied on one income and what were then known as food stamps. We learned very quickly—beans and rice were our friends, the farmers market stretched our fresh food dollars and putting food by for a “rainy day” was essential to keep the tough times a little tastier. No one feels deprived if a winter supper of cornbread and vegetable soup is augmented by a dessert fashioned from peaches frozen during last summer’s bounty.

These days, faced with ever-increasing food prices as we look toward the belt-tightening of retirement, I am brushing up on my frugal ways. In recent weeks, I created three meals using a two dollar bag of fish trimmings, rehydrated dried shiitakes to make soup for brown bag lunches and gravy base for the freezer and harvested our very own beautyberries which cooked down to a half dozen jewel-colored jars of jelly. Yes, it takes time, but I often have more time than money! Plus, much of the time, especially while things are cooking, I’m not stuck in front of the stove, but free to work around the house.

There’s an art to making do with less, but with even just the practical skill of planning ahead and the required discipline of dedicating the time necessary, anyone can make a difference in the amount of money they spend on food. Buy vegetables and fruit when they are in season for the best value and the ripest, best-tasting produce. Eliminate waste by eating leftovers as another meal or transforming them into a new dish. Learn to “cook once and eat twice”—double any recipe that can be frozen so you can stash an emergency dinner in the freezer. Remember to buy a little extra of your favorites when they’re in season and put them by so when you crave summer’s blueberries in the middle of December, you can just reach into the freezer or the pantry. And finally, cook fresh food every day to help “Save the World—One Dinner at a Time.”

What's Fresh Right Now?

Bananas

Beans—green/purple long

Cucumbers—slicers, kirby

Eggplant—oriental, italian, fairytale, graffiti, long

Figs

Garlic—chives

Ginger

Grapes—purple, bronze, green

Greens—collards

Herbs—tulsi, thai/italian/red stem basil, lime leaf, curry leaf

Honey—orange blossom, gallberry, wildflower, everglades

Kohlrabi

Lettuce—green leaf, green romaine

Melon—golden crisp

Moringa

Mushrooms—chanterelle, dried shiitake

Okra—red/green

Onions—red/yellow, green

Pears

Peas—white acre, black eyes

Pecans

Peppers—red/green/yellow/orange sweet bell, aji, poblano, cayenne, shishito, jalapeño

Persimmon—astringent, non-astringent

Pineapple

Potatoes—red/white, creamer, blue, fingerling

Radishes—daikon

Shoots and Sprouts

Squash—butternut, spaghetti, kabocha, seminole pumpkin, acorn, yellow, zucchini

Tomatoes—cluster, green, red roma

Turmeric

Local and Fresh— Turmeric Root

A dark gold-orange cousin to ginger root and native to India and Southeast Asia, turmeric is locally grown and sold. Recognized as a major component of curries, it adds deep color and a peppery flavor to any recipe. It may also be eaten raw, brewed into tea or applied to the skin.

Its major ingredient, curcumin, is known for its anti-inflammatory powers. Many health claims have been based on that, from lessening the pain and swelling of arthritis to possible reduction of plaque in the brain of dementia patients. While I make no health claims or predictions for anyone else, I use this broth for its anti-inflammatory and natural antibiotic powers when I need to stop a cold or a diverticulitis attack.

Turmeric, Garlic and Ginger Broth

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup turmeric root

1/4 cup garlic cloves

1/4 cup ginger root

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

4 cups no-chicken or veggie broth

Apple cider vinegar

DIRECTIONS

Wash and finely slice turmeric root.

Smash, peel and chop garlic. Allow to sit at room temperature for 10 minutes.

Wash and finely slice ginger root.

In a lidded pot over medium heat combine turmeric, garlic and ginger with broth.

Bring to a boil, lower heat, cover and cook for one hour. Stir in black pepper.

Serve hot or warm in 1/2 - 1 cup portions with a drop or two of apple cider vinegar.



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Fish Stock and Fish Bits

INGREDIENTS

1 onion, quartered
2 ribs celery, coarsely chopped
2 carrots, coarsely chopped
2-3 pounds fish trimmings, bones with meat still attached
1 Tablespoon salt

DIRECTIONS

In a lidded stockpot, place all ingredients except salt and cover with water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir in salt, cover, lower heat and simmer for one hour.

Remove from heat and allow to cool for at least 30 minutes. Remove fish skeletons from pot and place in a large bowl or pan.

Strain stock to remove veggies and bones. Separate veggies and set aside. Portion stock as desired and refrigerate immediately.

Meticulously remove the small bits of fish meat clinging to the bones and set aside. Dispose of bones. Carefully pick through meat again to remove any undiscovered bones. Portion as desired and refrigerate immediately.

Freeze stock and meat as desired or use within three days. Puree veggies and refrigerate or freeze to use in chowder base.

Layered Eggplant Casserole

INGREDIENTS

2 large italian eggplant
1/2 cup olive oil
2 cups favorite marinara

DIRECTIONS

Preheat broiler to high. Set rack 6 inches from broiler.

Peel eggplant if desired. Cut into thin slices. Brush each slice with olive oil on both sides and lay in one layer on baking sheet. Place under broiler for 5 minutes. Flip and cook until fork tender. Let cool slightly.

Pour 1/4 cup of sauce in bottom of 8x8 pan. Place one layer of eggplant slices in the bottom of the pan and top with 1/4 cup of sauce. Alternate layers of eggplant and sauce until all the eggplant is used. Cover the top with remaining sauce. Drizzle with a little olive oil.

Casserole may be made ahead and refrigerated. Let sit out for 1 hour before baking.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Bake 30-45 minutes until bubbly and edges are very brown. Cover and let sit 5-10 minutes before serving. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.
Cheese Option: Sprinkle 1/4 - 1/2 cup of finely grated parmesan or romano over the top of the baked hot casserole and cover. The cheese will be perfectly melted when the casserole is served.

**Three meals
from on one bag
of fish trimmings**

Seafood Risotto

3 cups fish stock
2 cups fish bits

Use your favorite recipe and stir in the fish bits just as the rice finishes cooking. We use olive oil, shallot, arborio rice and pinot grigio, then we finish it with a little olive oil or butter.

Seafood Salad

1 cup fish pieces

Try this with mayonnaise, celery and green onion as a simple tuna-type salad, or add curry powder, grated carrot and apple.

Chowder Base

4-6 cups fish stock
pureed veggies

Make chowder with additional chopped celery, carrots and onions, plus potatoes. Just before serving add a fish filet or other seafood, a cup of milk and a splash of sherry, if desired. Cook until seafood is done and serve immediately.



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What's in a name?

As a recent convert to the refreshing simplicity of traditional egg creams, I was delighted to create one made with the Dave's Coffee Syrup I bought in Rhode Island last May. By happy coincidence, we had some coffee ice cream in the freezer.

In a creative mood, we married the ingredients and techniques used for egg creams with an ice cream soda. Dad's oldest sister, my Aunt Weeza, a professional waitress, taught me the names and ingredients of the many soda fountain specialties. I think she'd approve of the name and the taste of this new creation.

Coffee Egg Cream Soda

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons coffee syrup

1/4 cup cold whole milk

8-12 ounces cold unflavored seltzer water, divided

1 small scoop coffee ice cream (preferably Italian Coffee from Day Dreams or Sweet Dreams)

EQUIPMENT

Tall 16 ounce glass with straight sides—a tall water or pint glass

Long-handled spoon (look for your old iced tea spoons in the back of your silverware drawer)

Straw, paper, glass or metal

DIRECTIONS

Pour coffee syrup and milk in bottom of glass. Stir together leaving streaks of syrup.

Add 1/2 cup seltzer water and mix vigorously until foam forms. Add additional seltzer while stirring until glass is 2/3 full.

Gently place ice cream into foamy mixture. Stir just once and top off with seltzer.

Serve with spoon and straw. Should be consumed quickly while still fizzy and cold.

VARIATIONS: Follow recipe as written using these replacements.

New York Traditional: Use 2 Tablespoons Fox's U Bet Chocolate Syrup from Brooklyn.

Nutty Southerner: Use 1-2 Tablespoons cane syrup and a scoop of butter pecan ice cream.

Nutty Northerner: Use 2 Tablespoons of maple syrup and a scoop of maple walnut ice cream.

Tropical Vacation: Use 2-3 Tablespoons pureed mango and a scoop of mango sorbet.

Hogtown SweetTart: Use 2 Tablespoons roselle syrup and a scoop of vanilla ice cream.