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To: Caswell ECA Club Members

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Some Food for Thought Newsletter Fall 2015

Greetings!

Happy Fall everyone! I know some time has passed since my last newsletter due to staff changes within Cooperative Extension; however, hopefully soon things will be a little better. This has truly been a fast paced year of change. The weather has definitely changed, and it's a reminder that things do change sometimes but life goes on and we must adjust and survive. Please visit us on Facebook or on the web at caswell.ces.ncsu.edu for updates and additional information.

ECA State Council Meeting

The ECA State Council meeting will be held on October 26-28 in Concord at the Embassy Suites Hotel/Convention Center. The registration information was mailed out from the state office to all ECA club members. If you did not receive the packet and would like to attend, please give me a call at 694-4158.

ECA Achievement Night

The 2015 Achievement Night program will held on November 12 at 6:00 pm at the Caswell Senior Center. This year's theme is "ECA...The Spice of Life". An educational program on using spices to enhance our meals will be presented. Each club will decorate a table centered around the theme, and the best decorated table will win a prize for their club. The cost to attend is \$11 per person. Please encourage your friends and family members to join us for a fun night of food, entertainment and fellowship.

Reports and 2016 Dues

Please be sure to complete your volunteer hours and bookworm reports prior to Achievement Night, and please remember to submit payment of \$11 for 2016 dues by November 27th. They are due to the state office by December 1.



10 Quick Tricks for Healthy Weekday Dinners

With cooler evenings and busier schedules, it seems like the whole family is hungrier than ever at dinnertime these days. You can get everyone fed, healthy, and happy without wearing yourself out with these ten quick and easy shortcuts:

1. When you have a little downtime, sauté large batches of onions and garlic in a minimal amount of oil. Cool and freeze in flat, shallow containers so you can break off a piece of it easily. It adds fast flavor to purchased soup, tomato sauce, omelets, or just about any main course.

2. Many home cooks think of it as a slow food, requiring lengthy simmering on a back burner. The truth is that a filling main course soup can be assembled in half an hour or less. Use prepared stock as a starter, to be enriched with fresh or leftover-diced meat and vegetables, according to what you have in the fridge. Toss in a handful or two of raw pasta. Bring to boil, cover, and simmer for 20-30 minutes.

3. Make friends with your oven. A roaster filled with sliced fresh vegetables can bake alongside a pan full of pork chops for a satisfying supper with minimal fuss and efficient use of energy. *TIP:* While you have the oven on, throw in a couple of scrubbed whole beets in a mini-baking pan. The roasted beets will become the fixings for a simple yet unusually delicious salad tomorrow night.

4. Save time but still make sure your family gets their vitamins. Wash a heap of salad fixings all in one shot to be used up over several days. Wrap romaine lettuce leaves in a damp towel to keep them crisp in the refrigerator.

5. Remember that frozen vegetables are a much better option than none at all and in fact may have a higher nutritional

value than fresh. You must store frozen produce at temperatures below 0 degrees F until you are ready to use them.

6. You can cook frozen fish without defrosting it first. Drizzle with a little oil (preferably olive oil), then panfry, bake, or broil. You will need to add a few minutes to the total cooking time.

7. Repackage fresh meat or seafood as soon as you bring it home from the store, and before stashing it in your freezer. A few ready portions of skinless, boneless, chicken breasts or burgers you have prepared (make them thin for less calories) can be a sanity saver on a busy night. These may also be cooked from a frozen state.

8. Alternatively, cook up a batch of ground beef. Combine beef with ground turkey in a 50/50 ratio for a heart-friendlier mix. Add in minced vegetables like bell peppers and/or carrots and sauté until browned all the way through. Freeze in supper-size quantities, as fast fixings for spaghetti sauce, cottage pie, or tacos.

9. Discover whole grain couscous. Just add water or broth and let it sit for 5 minutes. Voila! An instant complex carb! Serve as a base for main dishes like tofu paprika, or stir in sliced green onions, cucumber and tomato chunks, pesto, and a generous sprinkle of feta cheese to create a hearty salad.

10. Whole wheat pitas are another great basic that make what is essentially a sandwich seem more like dinner. Stuff them with cold cuts, leftover rotisserie chicken, or for a vegan alternative, fried Portobello mushroom slices, hummus and fine-chopped salad.

How To Organize Holiday Meal Preparation

Thanksgiving Day's crowning glory is turkey and those special family side dishes. The meal only comes out perfect, however, if you do a little advance strategizing. Once you've decided on your menu, think through how to cook it. If all of your dishes have to go in the oven--and at different temperatures and times--you might have trouble. Modify your menu so that you get the turkey done first; then choreograph the rest of your prep time so that all your dishes come out together. The tips we offer will help you develop a plan, whether you're working with new recipes such as the ones here or trusted favorites.

Turkey Tricks

It can take two to three days to thaw a frozen turkey. So, buy it ahead of time while the selection is still good, and plan when and how you'll thaw it. Find defrosting charts attached to the turkey, or visit www.butterball.com.

After the turkey thaws, stick your hand into the cavity and pull out the neck and giblets. They're usually wrapped in paper. If you forget this step and find these after you've finished cooking, your turkey is still safe to eat; just pull 'em out, enjoy a laugh, and go on.

Once you remove the turkey from the oven, cover it loosely with foil to allow the bird to rest. The juices absorb back into the turkey, and it carves easily. This resting is prime oven time for additional casseroles or dessert.

The Roasting Pan

A turkey is best cooked on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. If your roasting pan

is missing the rack, line the bottom with 1 1/2 inches of roughly chopped fruits and vegetables (onions, celery, carrots, apples). These elevate the bird off the pan and add wonderful flavor. Plus, the rich pan drippings make a delicious gravy. Here are some things to keep in mind when it comes to picking roasting pans.

- For ease of cleanup, choose a large aluminum foil disposable pan, available at the supermarket. You may need to place it on a baking sheet for support.
- Avoid deep Dutch ovens with high sides (more than 4 inches), and don't use a lid; you'll get a steamed turkey rather than a browned roasted one.
- A good roasting pan costs from \$45 to \$60. We like a stainless exterior with a dark nonstick interior and sturdy handles.

Essential Gadgets

- A bulb baster makes easy work of gathering pan drippings for basting the bird.
- Turkey lifters help you move the hot bird safely from the roasting pan to the serving platter or carving board.
- A timer/thermometer guarantees a completely done turkey that is moist, tender, and never overcooked. A turkey breast should cook to 170°; turkey thighs (or dark meat) should cook to 180°.
- Replacement racks for roasting pans are very inexpensive and available at grocery stores.
- At the supermarket, pick up an aluminum foil oven liner for easy cleanup. Simply slide the flat sheet under the heating element on the

bottom of an electric oven to catch spills and drips. They work well on the bottom of gas ovens too. (Check your oven manual and package directions to see if they'll work in your oven.)

In the Oven

The turkey's done. Decide whether you can fit one or two baking dishes into your oven, and position the racks accordingly. For older ovens, allow extra baking time if the oven contains more than one item. You may also need to rotate the dishes halfway through the bake time for even baking and browning. For newer ovens, the technology allows them a standard baking time, regardless of what's in the oven.

Multiple items may be baked at the same time if they require the same baking temperature. When you're selecting your menu, keep an eye on temperatures and bake times to make coordination easy.

What About Convection Cooking?

Convection ovens force hot air around food and cook it about 25% faster than conventional ovens. You save time and energy with this method, and there's the added bonus that food loses less moisture and retains most of its nutrients. Several companies combine convection and conventional options in the same oven. That's a great choice regardless of the size of your household.

No special equipment is required but it helps to know which pans work best. For best results with convection cooking, keep these tips in mind:

- Use shallow, uncovered casserole dishes (no more than 2 inches deep).

- Use baking pans with sides no higher than an inch or so, such as cookie sheets and jelly-roll pans.
- Deep roasting pans, oven roasting bags, and covered casserole dishes keep the heat from circulating around the food and block the efficiency of convection cooking. Aluminum foil tents will blow off a dish from the force of circulating air. Switch to the conventional cooking method when you're using either of these.

Most manufacturers suggest one of the following options for converting cooking times and temperatures for a convection oven.

- Bake at the same temperature, but for less time.
- Reduce the temperature by 25°, and then bake at the same time the recipe calls for.
- Bake for a little less time, and reduce the oven temperature.

After you bake the first cake or cornbread and roast a chicken and vegetables, you'll know exactly what adjustments work best with your oven. The main thing is to explore and enjoy the options.

Clip and Keep Holiday Hotlines

Here's the insider's list of toll-free telephone numbers and Web sites for quick answers to last-minute questions about roasting turkeys, baking, and food safety issues.

- USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline: 1-800-535-4555

- FDA Center for Food Safety: 1-888-723-3366
- Butterball Turkey Talk Line: 1-800-288-8372 or www.butterball.com
- The Reynolds Kitchen Tips Line: 1-800-745-4000 or www.reynoldskitchens.com
- Fleischmann's Yeast: 1-800-777-4959 or www.fleischmanns.com
- Betty Crocker (General Mills): 1-888-275-2388 or www.bettycrocker.com
- Nestlé Baking: 1-800-637-8537 or www.verybestbaking.com
- Ocean Spray: 1-800-662-3263 or www.oceanspray.com

Oven Alternatives

If your oven can't accommodate everything on your menu, consider replacing some recipes with ones that rely on a slow cooker, microwave, or cooktop. Steam vegetables or cook potatoes in the microwave, or sauté fresh vegetables on the cooktop. You can also microwave hard squashes such as acorns and butternut. Make casseroles ahead of time in microwave-safe dishes (make sure they fit your microwave), and reheat them just prior to serving.

When using the slow cooker, set it on a cutting board to protect your countertop from heat fluctuations that might cause it to crack. Also, make cleanup easy with new slow-cooker liners (like a plastic bag inside your slow cooker) available at the supermarket. Just lift the bag out of the slow cooker after the food is removed, and toss it.

About Desserts

Good cooks take several approaches. The first is to offer selections that can be made ahead of time, such as cakes, some pies, and chilled desserts. Other

dessert items, such as cobblers and bread puddings, go into the oven just before you sit down to eat and come out hot just as you finish the meal. Either approach works.

If you prefer something more showy such as a crème brûlée or soufflé, do as much prep work beforehand as possible, leaving the final mixing, stirring, broiling, or blow-torching until the last minute. Invite your guests to help you; they'll love being a part of the show.

Source: southernliving.com

Recipe Corner



Pumpkin Dip

Ingredients:

- 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 2 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 (15 ounce) canned solid pack pumpkin
- 1-tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 1-tablespoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1-teaspoon frozen orange juice concentrate

Directions:

In a medium bowl, blend cream cheese and confectioners' sugar until smooth. Gradually mix in the pumpkin. Stir in the cinnamon, pumpkin pie spice, and orange juice until smooth and well blended. Chill until serving.

Source: allrecipes.com