

December 2022

CONVENIENCE – SOMETIMES IT IS ALL IMPORTANT:

Creamed Boiling Onions with *Alfredo* Sauce

Cream of Squash Soup with Rice

Creamy Baked Mushroom *Risotto*

German-Style Sauerkraut and “Pork”

Indian Simmer Sauce with Vegetables

Meatballs with Mustard, *Chili*, and Cranberry Sauces

Spaghetti with “Pork” and Broccoli

In addition to those important holiday meals with complicated finishes and special desserts, there are everyday meals that have to be addressed. As I have said before, convenience items need not be shunned; we all appreciate convenience and amidst the holiday pressure a little help with menu planning can make life a whole lot less stressful. However, they do need to be examined carefully. [see *recipe archives, February 2018*] Excessive sodium should be considered and avoided. Saturated fats should be limited and trans fats should be positively avoided. When I was a young homemaker, I joined the fight against food companies. All we demanded was to know what was in their product. Some companies were downright nasty in their responses. Winning this fight was a triumph for you and me. Those labels we fought for may not always be accurate and, of course, that is a problem but they are a far, far cry from the trust that the complete lack of ingredient information required.

Watch out for the soothing, but meaningless, designation of a product as natural. For vegetarians and vegans, the word “natural” can be an especially treacherous term since “natural coloring and flavoring” is a collective term which can include animal products. For instance, the ground carapaces of female cochineal insects have been used to provide the deep red coloring after red dye #2 was withdrawn by the FDA in 1976 and this animal product is allowed under the umbrella term “natural coloring and flavoring”; no warning to consumers is necessary under the regulations of the FDA. Castoreum, extracted from beaver and muskrat genitals, is used to make certain artificial vanilla flavoring products. The enzymes pepsin and rennet, used to make cheese, comes from calves’ and pigs’ stomachs. The addition of vitamins A and D3 to foods may sound like a healthful innovation but when these vitamins are obtained from fish liver oil, they are not an option for vegetarians or vegans. USDA Certified organic, vegan, vegetarian, paleo, and dairy-free are words that can have real meaning but do check those labels! It is jarring to find changes on food labels just when you’ve gotten comfortable with a product.

Advance menu planning can be a holiday season survival essential and do ahead recipes are insurance like cookie dough in the freezer, if you know what I mean. Life during the Covid-19 pandemic demanded fewer trips to the store and an increased awareness of the contents of our pantry shelves and freezers. It may seem strange to say but it is true that the same situation is just a part of our life at the end of the year, every year.

Finally, search through your recipes and collect some of the skillet meals your family loves. Skillet meals usually are either quickly assembled and cooked or just simmered slowly while other things are attended to. The squash soup with rice, included here, is one of those slowly simmered treasures I turn to when I reach a “Chicken Little” moment. Choose the recipes from your files that fit your schedule.

CREAMED BOILING ONIONS WITH *ALFREDO* SAUCE

TPT - 16 minutes

The convenience of frozen boiling onions that don't need to be peeled and trimmed is really convenience. Every year for decades I peeled and trimmed tiny pearl onions to prepare this dish for the holidays. It was a job to which I never looked forward. I could change the menu, I could keep peeling, or I could try frozen boiling onions. The frozen boiling onions turned out to be the answer for me but then came another change when I decided to eliminate the béchamel sauce my grandmother always used. Now I cream onions without flour using an alfredo sauce.

2 teaspoons butter

8 ounces frozen boiling onions

1/2 cup light cream or half and half

2 tablespoons heavy cream

**1 1/2 tablespoons grated pecorino Romano or
parmesan cheese**

Freshly ground white pepper, to taste

Pinch freshly grated nutmeg

In a saucepan set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, melt butter. Add frozen boiling onions. Cook, stirring constantly, until onions defrost.

Add light cream or half and half. Simmer, stirring frequently, until it forms a sauce.

Add heavy cream, grated cheese, white pepper, and nutmeg. Stir to combine. Cook, stirring frequently, until thickened to your liking. Turn into a heated serving bowl.

*Serve at once.**

Yields 4 servings



Notes: *Refrigerate leftovers. Thin with milk or cream when reheating over *LOW* heat.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 2.4 g.; FAT = 7.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 6.0 g.;
CALORIES = 102; CALORIES FROM FAT = 68%

CREAM OF SQUASH SOUP WITH RICE

TPT - 28 minutes

Instead of just settling for a can of soup when you're in a hurry, zip it up a bit. This is a filling and sufficiently satisfying main course that takes away any guilt that might suggest that you were desperate for time.

1 can (14.5 ounces) organic cream of squash soup
1/4 cup dry Arborio or sushi short grain rice
1/4 cup diced butternut squash
1/4 cup light cream or half and half

In a saucepan set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, combine cream of squash soup, rice, diced squash, and cream. Stir to combine well. Cover and allow to simmer for 20-25 minutes, or until rice and squash are tender. Divide between two soup plates.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 4.3 g.; FAT = 0.05 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 3.5 g.;
CALORIES = 304; CALORIES FROM FAT = 38%



CREAMY BAKED MUSHROOM RISOTTO *Risotto al Fungo*

TPT - 1 hour

While surfing Internet book sites, I was flabbergasted and filled with amusement to find the red, cardboard-covered soup cookbooks, the very same cookbooks for which I had saved soup labels as a teenager. These commercial product-specific cookbooks are now considered “rare books.” Amused as I was, I did have to admit that these books showed that soups can be useful. Today, with low-sodium canned soups, low-fat canned soups, vegetarian canned soups, and organic canned soups available, maybe using canned soups as a convenience ingredient deserves a second look. This rice bake employs short-grained Arborio rice, resulting in a creaminess that is very comparable to that of a classic risotto without all of the work and it is not as salty as many soup-based dishes can be.

Our isolation during the covid-19 pandemic led us to rely on our in-house larder and on foods that could be delivered safely and that would keep well in basement pantry storage between the infrequent opportunities to resupply resources.

7 ounces (1/2 can) partially-condensed, low-sodium, organic cream of mushroom soup
1/4 teaspoon herbed Italian seasoning mixture*

1/2 cup water
2 tablespoons heavy cream**
1 tablespoon white wine

6 tablespoons Italian Arborio rice

Freshly grated pecorino Romano cheese, to taste

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Prepare a **5-inch soufflé dish** by coating with non-stick lecithin spray coating.

In a mixing bowl, combine canned soup and seasoning mixture. Mix well.

Using wire whisk, gradually whisk water, cream, and wine into the soup base. Whisk until quite smooth.

Add rice. Stir to combine. Turn into prepared soufflé dish. Bake in preheated 325-degree F. oven for 50 minutes, or until all moisture has been absorbed and casserole is set.

Serve at once, with grated cheese.

Yields 2 servings

Notes: *My herbed Italian seasoning mixture can be found in the recipe archives on this site (*See May 2018.*)



**Fresh heavy cream can be used, if you have it on hand. 1 1/2 tablespoonfuls of dry heavy cream mixed with 1 1/2 tablespoons of cold water can be substituted.

This recipe can be doubled, when required. Use a 1 1/2-quart soufflé dish when doubling.

1/2 SERVING (exclusive of cheese) –
PROTEIN = 6.8 g.; FAT = 7.6 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 45.9 g.;
CALORIES = 524; CALORIES FROM FAT = 13%

GERMAN-STYLE SAUERKRAUT AND “PORK”

TPT - 2 hours and 10 minutes

If you grow up in a German-American family or if you live in Central Pennsylvania, sauerkraut and pork is often on the menu all year long and especially at the New Year. I make this casserole in my Moroccan tagine in a slow oven but a Dutch oven or other heavy oven-to-table casserole can certainly be used. Made from my larder staples, it was one of my menu back-ups during the months of isolation we endured during the recent coronavirus pandemic.

1 can (14.4 ounces) sauerkraut

1/2 cup *thinly* sliced onion

1 tablespoon *light* brown sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons *cold* butter—*diced*

3 tablespoons white wine

1 1/2 teaspoons tomato paste

1/2 teaspoon caraway seeds

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 5-ounce soy or grain sausage—sliced

3 soy bacon slices—cut crosswise into 1/2-inch pieces

Turn sauerkraut into a sieve. Rinse well with cold water. Drain. Turn into the bowl of the *tagine* or into the oven-to-table casserole selected.

Add *thinly* sliced onion, brown sugar, butter pieces, wine, tomato paste, caraway seeds, and pepper. Stir to combine. Then, add sausage and chopped soy bacon slices. Stir to combine. Cover. *Place in cold oven*. Turn oven on to 200 degrees F. Bake for 2 hours.



Serve directly from tagine or casserole. Refrigerate leftovers and reheat in a 200-degree F. oven to prevent drying out.

Yields 4 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 10.0 g.; FAT = 3.4 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 17.7 g.;
CALORIES = 159; CALORIES FROM FAT = 19%

INDIAN SIMMER SAUCE WITH VEGETABLES *Aloo Gobi Matar*

TPT - 30 minutes

Indian simmer sauces are now widely available in convenient pouches in the international aisles of most grocery stores and from online groceries sources. Of course, if you have well-stocked spice shelves, you can make your own sauces but when time is a consideration, one of these sauces can be the base of a good, nourishing meal. Vegetables, legumes, meat analogue products, and tofu can be added. Sometimes, I soak dried mushrooms overnight and add those mushrooms to the sauce with the other vegetables below. Sometimes I replace the peas in this recipe with baby spinach leaves. Often I add lentils. It is a product of what's on hand and whim . . .



1/2 cup water

1/2 cup light, sulfite-free coconut milk



1 pouch (7 ounces) coconut *korma* simmer sauce
1 cup fresh cauliflower florets
6 pee wee potatoes—well-scrubbed and quartered

1/4 cup frozen peas

In a saucepan set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, combine water and coconut milk. Cook, stirring frequently, until the mixture begins to bubble. Reduce heat to *LOW*.

Add simmer sauce, cauliflower florets, and potato chunks. Stir. Cover. Simmer over *LOW* heat until potatoes are tender.

Add *frozen* peas. Allow to simmer for about 7 minutes more. Turn into a heated serving bowl.

Serve at once over rice.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 6.3 g.; FAT = 8.6 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 36.5 g.;
CALORIES = 240; CALORIES FROM FAT = 32%

MEATBALLS WITH MUSTARD, CHILI, AND CRANBERRY SAUCES

TPT - 40 minutes

A flavorful sauce can be created from three commercial sauces you probably have in your refrigerator. It is a quick, extraordinarily complex treatment for soy meatballs. Trust me, no ho-hum here.

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard with white wine
2 tablespoons commercially-available chili sauce
1/4 cup jellied cranberry sauce

1/3 cup water

6 frozen vegetarian meatballs

Into a skillet set over *LOW* heat, spoon the mustard, the chili sauce, and the jellied cranberry sauce. Cover and allow to heat for about 20 minutes.

Increase heat to LOW-MEDIUM. Add water. Cook, stirring, until a uniform sauce is formed.

Add meatballs. Cook, stirring frequently, until meatballs are heated through. Turn into heated serving bowl. Spoon sauce over.

Serve at once.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 16.3 g.; FAT = 4.9 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 25.7 g.;
CALORIES = 197; CALORIES FROM FAT = 22%



SPAGHETTI WITH “PORK” AND BROCCOLI

TPT - 30 minutes

During our pandemic isolation, meal preparation depended on what we had on hand. Computer ordering was one thing; what was in the bag at pickup was another. Many very tasty recipes were created with what was on our pantry shelves or what we had managed to get in our last grocery pickup. This is a light entrée that fills the bill on those early fall evenings when the warmth of the day gives way to cooler and cooler nights. Olive oil adds real character to this dish but be careful to keep the heat low.

SEASONED BREADCRUMB GARNISH:

**2 tablespoons fine, dry whole wheat
breadcrumbs**
**1 tablespoon grated Parmesan or
pecorino Romano cheese, as preferred**
1/2 teaspoon crushed, dried parsley
1/2 teaspoon crushed, dried oregano
Pinch granulated garlic
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
4 ounces frozen meat analogue porkless pork

3 quarts boiling water
3 ounces high protein or whole wheat spaghetti
1 cup frozen broccoli florets

2 teaspoons butter
1 1/2 teaspoons grated pecorino Romano cheese
1/2 teaspoon organic fennel pollen
Dash or two or three powdered sage
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

3 tablespoons well-drained canned, diced tomatoes
—brought to room temperature

In a small bowl, combine breadcrumbs, grated cheese, crushed, dried parsley, crushed, dried oregano, granulated garlic, and pepper. Mix well. Set aside briefly.

In a **10-inch skillet** set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, heat oil. Add “porkless pork” and cook, stirring frequently, until all surfaces are lightly browned. Remove from heat until required.

In a kettle set over *MEDIUM-HIGH* heat, cook spaghetti in *boiling* water according to package directions. Three minutes before the *pasta* is cooked, add broccoli florets. When done, drain well. Add to “pork” in skillet. Set over *MEDIUM* heat and, while stirring constantly, allow to heat through.

Add butter, grated cheese, fennel pollen, powdered sage, and black pepper. Toss gently. Turn out onto a heated platter.

Scatter *well-drained*, diced tomatoes over. Sprinkle prepared seasoned breadcrumbs over.

Serve at once.

Yields 3 servings
adequate for 2 people



Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/3 SERVING – PROTEIN = 12.3 g.; FAT = 5.2 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 26.9 g.;
CALORIES = 211; CALORIES FROM FAT = 23%

*I set out to include a variety of ideas this month.
Somewhere along the way I guess I did get somewhat carried away . . .
but I do know how often holiday schedules can set you back on your pins.
Next month we'll slow down a bit and consider bay leaves
and how they can nuance flavors
from pickled apricots to bay custard ice cream.*

Happy New Year,

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

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