

THE AMERICAN PLATE
A CULINARY HISTORY IN 100 BITES

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Contents

Traditional Succotash	3
Pemmican	4
Roast Beaver Tail	5
Cockaleekie Soup	6
Old Eel Pie	7
Breakfast Hoe Cakes	8
Oxtail Stew	9
Colonial Syllabub	10
Shoo Fly Pie	11
Brunswick Stew	13
Election Day Cake	14
Encarnación Pinedo's Rabbit in Chile Sauce	14
Modern Rabbit in Chile Sauce	15
Hangtown Fry	16
Classic Mint Julep	17
Mary Todd Lincoln's White Almond Cake	18
Fried Catfish	19
Strawberry Rhubarb Pie	20
Modern Baked Alaska	21
Hungarian Chicken Paprikash	23
Traditional Scrapple	24
Modern Scrapple	24
Red Cross War Cake	25
Oatmeal Lace Cookies	26
Gimlet	27
Mulatto Rice	27
WPA Soup	28
Ofelia Braga's <i>Picadillo Criollo</i>	29
New England Fish Chowder	30
Southern Buttermilk Fried Chicken	31
Ginger Carrot Soup	32
Mango Salsa	33
Firehouse Chili con Carne	33

Traditional Succotash

Serves 6 to 8 as a side dish

- ½ cup water
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen baby lima beans, defrosted
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen corn, defrosted
- 4 to 5 smoked duck slices
- ¼ cup roasted sunflower seeds
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- Salt to taste

Bring the water to a boil in a large saucepan with a cover. Add the beans and corn to the pot, and reduce to simmer. Cover and cook, 4 to 6 minutes. Drain. Meanwhile, dice and cook the smoked duck slices over low heat until crisp and all fat is rendered. Add the sunflower seeds, smoked duck crisps, and seasonings to the beans and corn. Combine well and serve.

If smoked duck is unavailable or too pricey, substitute 4 slices hickory-smoked bacon. I like to add 2 tablespoons olive oil, but it is more authentic to add duck or bacon fat before serving.

Pemmican

Makes 1 dozen bars

Pemmican is a densely nutritious, portable food with an ancient history. It is the American Indian version of an energy bar. Pemmican traditionally includes some kind of meat and animal fat. So you can also make this from dried venison, duck, moose, or turkey, and it will still be authentic.

- 1 pound natural (unflavored) buffalo jerky, finely minced
- 1 cup dried blueberries
- ½ cup toasted hickory nuts, pecans, or sunflower seeds, finely chopped
- 2 to 3 tablespoons warm buffalo fat

Mix the buffalo jerky, blueberries, and nuts together thoroughly. Using a pastry cutter or two knives, slowly cut in 1 tablespoon of soft fat at a time, stirring after each addition. Test the mixture after each addition, and stop adding fat once the mixture stays together in a clump. Spread mixture in a rectangular pan, 11 by 7 inches. Slice into bars when cool. Place in individually decorated rabbit-skin pouches, or wrap in waxed paper. Store in a cool, dry place. Take along on hunting trips or anytime you are going on long journeys on foot.

Substituting venison fat for the buffalo fat would also be authentic, or try using beef suet instead. Pemmican is good for you if your life requires that you burn enormous amounts of calories. Otherwise, the fat is detrimental to your health.

Roast Beaver Tail

Serves 4 as a main course or 8 as a side dish

You will need an open fire to cook the beaver tail, which is covered with a rough, scaly skin. If you happen to have a beaver tail on hand, I am sure that an open fire is no problem for you.

- 1 beaver tail, well washed
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Use long-handled forks or skewers to hold the tail over the fire until the skin blisters all over both sides. Remove the tail from the heat, allow it to cool, and then peel the skin off. Roast the remaining fatty slab over glowing coals until thoroughly cooked, using a long-handled fork or a long-handled metal tool for cooking hamburgers over coals. Brown the tail; don't blacken it. This will take about 4 minutes for each side, depending on the heat of the coals and size of the tail. Slice the browned tail into 2-inch strips across its width. Season generously. Serve hot.

The long-handled tool for cooking hamburgers can be found at camping equipment stores. As for finding a beaver tail, you are on your own.

Cockaleekie Soup

Serves 8 as a main dish

Scotland claims cockaleekie soup as a homeland dish, although a chicken and leek stew could easily be associated with Wales, where leeks serve as a regional symbol. Traditionally, pearl barley would thicken the broth, but you may prefer rice. Incidentally, if you opt for the latter, white rice would be more historically accurate than healthier, modern brown rice. Go ahead and improvise—add brown rice if you want. That would be the authentic seventeenth-century attitude.

- One 2- to 3-pound chicken
- 8 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 1 cup white wine
- ½ cup minced celery
- 2 teaspoons allspice
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1½ cups pearl barley or white rice
- 4 leeks
- 1 cup diced, pitted prunes
- ½ cup fresh parsley, minced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 cup heavy cream

Place the chicken, chicken stock, carrots, white wine, celery, allspice, thyme, and bay leaf in a Dutch oven or heavy pot. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce to simmer, cover, and cook over low heat for 50 minutes. Remove the chicken carcass and let it cool.

Stir the pearl barley or rice into the broth, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, rinse the leeks well under cool water. Trim tops and ends and remove outside leaves, then chop up the remaining 4 inches of the midsection. Add the leeks, prunes, and parsley to the mixture, and simmer covered for about 20 minutes, keeping the heat low. Make sure the barley is thoroughly cooked and soft. Add salt and pepper.

Cut the meat off the chicken carcass, discarding the skin, and chop meat into bite-sized pieces. Stir chicken pieces into the soup, and heat thoroughly over low heat. Adjust seasonings. Serve with a splash of heavy cream in heated bowls, and with brown bread and butter alongside.

Rather than using a whole chicken, you can substitute 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts and 4 thighs. Chop them up, and cook them in the pot if the whole chicken carcass routine is overwhelming. You'll miss some rich flavor and authenticity, but that's up to you. Also, you can stop before adding the meat off the chicken carcass and refrigerate the soup overnight or for up to two days. To serve, reheat the soup over low heat, adding more chicken stock if it is too thick. Then continue to add the chicken and adjust the spices. The soup freezes well and makes a nice gift for New Year's Day.

Old Eel Pie

Englishman John Murrell published a cookbook in 1615 that included this recipe for eel pie. While we don't know for sure that any colonists owned a copy of A New Booke for Cookerie, food historians believe that housewives and cooks might have used this type of recipe or "receipt."

To Bake Eeles.

Cut your Eeles about the length of your finger: season them with Pepper, Salt, and Ginger, and so put them into a Coffin, with a good piece of sweet Butter. Put into your Pye great Razins of the Sunne, and an Onyon minst small, and so close it and bake it.

(Excerpted from John Murrell: A New Booke of Cookerie. London: London Cookerie, 1615.)

"Coffin" simply means box here; it does not refer to a place for a corpse, so don't worry. (Though in a sick sense, it is a coffin for the eels.) In the 1600s, a coffin was a deep pie shell, often made of whole-wheat flour pastry, which could be a little tough. The pastry would line a 3- or 4-inch deep pan that could be covered and set among the coals to bake. The coffin was more important for cooking than for eating, unless you were an Old World beggar. In that case, you were lucky to get the coffin crust.

Breakfast Hoe Cakes

Serves 6

George Washington, a native Virginian, enjoyed French wine and imported brandy, but he was a born-and-bred British American who loved cornmeal pancakes. Called “hoe cakes,” they were his favorite breakfast, especially when served swimming in butter and honey. These traditional flat cakes were fried on a flat griddle or the iron plate from a large hoe, hence the name hoe cakes.

Historic cooking expert Nancy Carter Crump provides an authentic and delicious recipe for hoe cakes in Dining with the Washingtons. It is also quite time-consuming for today’s cook. My modern version is easier and quick to make, relying on baking powder instead of yeast to make the batter rise. This is essentially your own hoe cake mix, and it keeps in a sealed container or zippered plastic bag for a long time. I hope George and Martha Washington would approve.

- 1½ cups white cornmeal
- ½ cup unbleached white flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs
- 1⅓ cups whole milk
- 2 tablespoons canola oil or melted butter
- Butter, if desired, and honey, molasses, or maple syrup for serving.

Stir the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a large bowl. Beat the eggs in a separate bowl, and stir in the milk and oil. Add the liquid ingredients to the dry ingredients, and stir well. Add a little more milk if the batter is too thick, thinning it to the consistency of any pancake batter.

Preheat oven to 200°F, and have a nice platter or large plate ready so you can keep the first hoe cakes warm while you prepare the rest of the batter.

Drop batter by scant ¼ cup (I use a soup ladle) onto a lightly greased hot griddle. Turn when bubbles form on the top of each hoe cake. Cook until medium brown on both sides. Add each finished hoe cake to the platter, and keep warm in the low oven. I like to warm our individual plates at the same time, especially in the winter. Serve on warm plates with butter and honey, molasses, or maple syrup.

Alternatively, you can visit Mount Vernon on February 22, when the knowledgeable staff serves fresh hoe cakes in honor of our first president’s birthday.

Oxtail Stew

Serves 6 to 8 as a main dish

This adaptation of a traditional oxtail stew is similar to what would have been served at a home or tavern in the British American colonies. Spanish settlers in what is today's American Southwest ate oxtail stew as well. To make this a historically authentic dish, leave out the celery and the white potato. The Spanish colonists used more garlic than the northern Europeans and added red pepper, so you can choose the variation you prefer and present your creation in all its deliciousness as English Oxtail Stew or Spanish Oxtail Stew. Corn bread is a nice offering alongside either version.

- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 3 pounds oxtails with separated joints, bone in
- 2 tablespoons butter or olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ½ cup chopped celery
- 3 cups beef stock
- 2 cups red wine
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme, or 1 tablespoon fresh thyme
- 1½ cups peeled and chopped carrots
- 1 cup peeled and chopped parsnips
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1 medium white potato, peeled and chopped
- ½ cup minced parsley
- 2 teaspoons dried sage

Salt and pepper the oxtail pieces generously. Brown them in the butter or oil in a heavy 6-quart Dutch oven over medium-high heat for 2 minutes on each side. Do this in batches so all pieces have a nicely browned exterior. Remove meat from the pot and set aside. Reduce heat to low, and add the onion and celery to the pot, stirring occasionally until translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the stock, wine, bay leaf, thyme, and oxtail segments. Bring to a low boil, cover, and simmer 2 to 3 hours over very low heat. Allow the pot to cool, and place it in the refrigerator or a cold shed overnight.

Remove the hardened fat from the surface of the stew the next day. Return the Dutch oven to the stove top. Add the carrots, parsnips, potatoes, parsley, sage, salt, and pepper. Bring to a low boil, then reduce the heat to simmer, and cover and cook for 1 to 2 hours, or until the meat and vegetables are very tender. Serve in soup plates, leaving the bone in each oxtail segment.

For the Spanish version, add 5 minced garlic cloves with the bay leaf and thyme, and then 2 teaspoons chipotle powder or red pepper flakes with the carrots, parsnips, and potatoes.

Colonial Syllabub

Makes about 6 servings

This syllabub recipe would be the same in England and in the British colonies. You can use a hand whisk to be truly authentic when you whip the cream, but I stick to an electric mixer. Either way, the syllabub benefits from a sprig of rosemary in each glass.

- 1½ cups heavy cream
- ½ cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons finely grated lemon peel
- Juice of 2 lemons
- ¾ cup white wine or dry sherry, or a mixture of the two equaling ¾ cup
- 6 sprigs rosemary

Pour cream into the bowl of an electric mixer and beat on medium until the cream holds soft peaks. Add the sugar, lemon peel, and juice of the lemons, with all seeds removed. Beat these ingredients briefly, and pour in the wine or sherry. Continue beating on medium for about 3 minutes. Pour the mixture into parfait glasses or wineglasses. The mixture will separate. Refrigerate overnight and serve with a sprig of rosemary in each glass.

Shoo Fly Pie

Serves 8

I attended the Moravian school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where the little cafeteria in the basement lunchroom occasionally served the marvelously named Shoo Fly Pie. At home, I add chopped walnuts to the crumble on top, which is not exactly authentic but I like the texture. Colonial cooks were less apt than we are to follow “receipts” word for word, partly because most recipes were not written down and also because a little experimentation was perfectly okay.

Modern recipes for this pie use light molasses. I use dark molasses here for a more traditional taste. For another touch of authenticity, use a lard-based recipe for the crust. Incidentally, the name “Shoo Fly Pie” was not recorded until the nineteenth century, but the Pennsylvania Dutch served a molasses-based pie in the 1700s.

Crust

- 1 unbaked pie shell

Crumbs

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- 2 tablespoons cold butter
- ½ teaspoon salt

Filling

- ¾ teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ cup boiling water
- 1 cup dark molasses
- 1 whole egg, beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts for topping

Crust: Preheat oven to 425°F. Make pie crust, using your own recipe. Line a pie pan with the crust to create a pie shell. Bake crust unfilled for 10 minutes, using pie weights if you have them. Remove the pie shell from the oven.

Crumbs: Place the sugar, flour, walnuts, butter, and salt into the bowl of a food processor, using the metal blade. Process until crumbs form. Remove ⅓ cup of the crumbs, which will serve as the topping. The rest of the crumbs will be stirred into the filling.

Filling: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place the baking soda in the middle of a mixing bowl and pour in boiling water so that the soda will combine thoroughly with the other ingredients. Add

the molasses and whisk to mix thoroughly. Add the egg, vanilla, ginger, salt, and cloves. Now fold in the crumbs, except for the reserved $\frac{1}{3}$ cup. Pour this mixture into the pie shell.

Mix the remaining crumbs with the chopped walnuts. Sprinkle the crumb and walnut mixture on top of the pie. Bake for 45 minutes.

The pie may puff and start to crack a little as it bakes. This is fine; Shoo Fly Pie is not about perfect beauty. It's about homemade deliciousness.

Brunswick Stew

Serves 12 to 14 as a main dish

- 6 pieces thick-cut smoked bacon, diced
- 2 young chickens, about 3 pounds each, cut into pieces
- 2 squirrels, dressed, cut into pieces
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 3 medium potatoes, peeled and chopped
- ½ cup chopped onions
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1½ cups corn, fresh or frozen
- 1½ cups lima beans, fresh or frozen
- 1 cup peeled and chopped tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon crushed or powdered sage
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- Salt, cayenne, and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Sprinkle the bacon into a large frying pan at room temperature. Place the pan on medium heat, turning the bacon occasionally until crispy. Remove the bacon from pan, drain on a paper towel, and reserve. Brown chicken and squirrel pieces in batches in bacon fat. Place the browned meat pieces in a large stew pot or Dutch oven. Cover with chicken broth, and simmer gently, covered, for 1 hour. Remove meat pieces from the pot with a slotted spoon or tongs, set aside, and let cool.

Meanwhile, cook potatoes, onions, and garlic in remaining bacon fat in the large frying pan until onion is transparent, and reserve until the cooked chicken has been removed from the pot. Add the potatoes, onions, and garlic to the pot. Simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Add the meat pieces and reserved bacon to the pot, along with the corn, lima beans, tomatoes, sage, and thyme. Cook for an additional 10 minutes, keeping the heat low. The potatoes should be quite tender. Add salt, cayenne, and black pepper.

If you are using squirrel, do not include the brains. One rabbit, cut into pieces, can substitute for the squirrel. It's traditional to leave the bones in the meat, but suit yourself. For the tomatoes, I use Muir Glen Organic fire-roasted crushed tomatoes. This stew is even better served the next day.

Election Day Cake

This recipe for a traditional Election Day cake comes from the second edition of Amelia Simmons's American Cookery, the first cookbook written by an American, a historical event in itself.

Thirty quarts of flour, 10 pound butter, 14 pound sugar, 12 pound raisins, 3 doz eggs, one pint wine, on quart brandy, 4 ounces cinnamon, 4 ounces fine colander seed, 3 ounces ground allspice; wet flour with milk to the consistence of bread overnight, adding one quart yeast; the next morning work the butter and sugar together for half an hour, which will render the cake much lighter and whiter; when it has rise light, work in every other ingredient except the plumbs, which work in when going to the oven.

Encarnación Pinedo's Rabbit in Chile Sauce *(Liebra enchilada)*

Pinedo published her cookbook, El cocinero español (The Spanish Cook), in 1898, fifty years after California's gold rush began. Including one of her recipes in this section seems appropriate because the recipe reflects a bygone era, and did so even at the time of publication. The recipe also represents her family's strong Hispanic cultural identity and her personal memory and sophisticated knowledge of food and cookery. Here are her own words describing how to cook this dish:

Cut the rabbit in small pieces. Fry in very hot lard with small pieces of pork fat. Fry over a quick fire, and when it begins to brown, add some chopped onion, garlic, and salt. Let it cook. Then add tomatoes, olives, chopped mushrooms, one or two spoonfuls of flour, and powdered oregano. Cover it with a chile sauce, leaving the casserole covered, and cook it over a moderate flame.

Modern Rabbit in Chile Sauce

Serves 4 to 6 as a main dish

Note on equipment: *You will need a large, deep frying pan, or a paella pan, with a tightly fitting lid.*

- 3 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 tablespoon bacon fat
- 1 rabbit, cut into pieces
- ½ pound (8 ounces) coarsely chopped mushrooms
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- ⅔ cup diced tomatoes
- 4 black olives, pitted and minced
- 4 green olives, pitted and minced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- 1 cup chicken broth, plus ¼ cup as needed
- ½ cup good red wine
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons rubbed sage
- 2 teaspoons crushed thyme
- 1 cup green chile and tomatillo sauce

Melt oil with the fat in a large, deep frying pan or a paella pan. Add the rabbit pieces and brown on both sides over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and let cook for about 10 minutes. Remove the rabbit pieces and reserve, covering with aluminum foil.

Sauté the mushrooms and onions together in the same frying pan over medium heat. Add more oil if needed, stirring frequently. Stir in the tomatoes, olives, garlic, salt, and cayenne, and cover and simmer for 5 to 8 minutes more over low heat. Add the chicken broth and wine, stir, then cover and let simmer slowly together for 5 minutes so the flavors mix. Mix in the oregano, sage, and thyme. Place the rabbit pieces back into the frying pan. Cover and cook over low heat for 15 minutes, occasionally turning the meat and coating with the sauce. Add more chicken broth if the sauce is too thick.

Serve the green chile and tomatillo sauce on the side.

Try using cremini mushrooms for extra flavor and authenticity. Roasted potatoes and zucchini accompany this very nicely. This is really tasty, with lots of flavor layers, so it's great served with a simple salad of fresh greens and slices of crusty semolina bread. (You can find recipes for the bread online or buy it already prepared.)

Hangtown Fry

Serves 1 but can be doubled

Tadich Grill in San Francisco serves this dish with bacon and green onions crumbled into the omelet, along with breaded, panfried oysters, which is more traditional. In my version, I warm the oysters instead of breading and frying them, which makes it a lighter dish. Even if I were a condemned desperado, I think I'd like my oysters prepared very simply—although the breading and frying does take longer!

Advice: If you have never made an omelet, I recommend going online and watching a how-to video, or asking someone to show you, because it's not as easy as it looks. Generally speaking, a bad-looking omelet tastes fine (unless you've let it burn). For a two-egg omelet, you'll need an 8- or 10-inch pan.

- 2 strips bacon
- 3 to 4 raw oysters, shucked and drained
- 1 pinch dried thyme
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 slice whole grain or sourdough bread for toast
- 1 to 2 teaspoons hot sauce

Place the bacon in an unheated, seasoned cast-iron frying pan or Teflon pan, and fry over medium-low heat until crispy. Keep an eye on the bacon so it doesn't burn. You want the fat to be rendered and the meat browned. Remove the strips and drain on a paper towel. Pour off most of the fat, leaving just a little for flavor. Generously spray the pan with cooking spray, or add butter, to keep the surface well lubricated.

Gently put the oysters in the pan over medium-low heat. Cook about 1 minute on each side to warm them through. Do not overcook or they may get rubbery and the taste changes. They may lose a little liquid as they cook, which is fine. Remove oysters from pan and reserve.

Preheat pan to medium high. Sprinkle the thyme, salt, and pepper into the eggs. Pour egg mixture into the hot pan and distribute evenly by swirling the pan a little. Lift the cooked edges of the omelet with a spatula so that the raw egg in the center can run underneath and cook.

Place the oysters down the middle of the omelet. Loosen one side of the eggs from the pan edge with a spatula. Add butter or cooking spray to the bottom of the pan, as needed, to make this process easier. Gently fold the loosened side over the middle of the omelet. Repeat with the second side. Slide or lift the omelet off the pan and place on a warm plate.

Place the strips of bacon on the omelet, like oars on a boat, and serve. Accompany with toast and hot sauce, if you like that. I prefer Sriracha brand hot sauce.

If your omelet is a mess, the toast and bacon can make it look a lot better. The omelet makes a meal in itself, but from my point of view all this protein cries out for vegetables. Try a side salad of baby spinach, arugula, and some chopped apple, tossed with a lemony vinaigrette.

I get thick-sliced bacon from my butcher. This lets me pretend that it's healthy because it's hand-sliced, not prepackaged. I'm not much on shucking my own oysters, so I ask the nice guys at Jeff's Seafood, my neighborhood fish store, to do it for me. Whether you buy your oysters at the fishmongers or at your supermarket, make sure they are fresh. For this recipe, I used our local Long Island Peconic oysters, which are small and sweet, tasting like an ocean breeze at high tide.

Classic Mint Julep

Makes 1 mint julep

- 4 fresh mint sprigs
- 2 teaspoons water
- 1 teaspoon confectioners' sugar
- 6 ounces cracked or crushed ice
- 2½ ounces bourbon whiskey

Strip leaves from 3 mint sprigs and put them in the bottom of your mint julep cup or an attractive 8-ounce glass. Muddle (mix together while squishing the leaves with the back of a spoon) the leaves, water, and confectioners' sugar. Fill the glass with the ice, and add bourbon. Garnish with the remaining mint sprig. Serve with a straw.

I use less than a teaspoon of confectioners' sugar because I think bourbon tastes sweet anyway. If you are making mint juleps for a party, add the bourbon to the muddled mint mixture and pour into glasses filled with cracked ice. Make sure you have a mint sprig to garnish each glass. Don't forget the straw. And now is the time to use those cute cocktail napkins you have in that crowded kitchen drawer.

Mary Todd Lincoln's White Almond Cake

Makes about 8 slices

Thanks to Donna McCreary for sharing this recipe from her book Lincoln's Table.

- 1 cup blanched almonds
- 1 cup butter (2 sticks)
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup whole milk or half-and-half
- 6 egg whites (best when eggs are at room temperature)
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons sliced almonds
- 1 to 2 scoops cherry ice cream

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease and flour two 9-inch layer-cake pans. Pulverize the almonds until they resemble coarse flour. Cream the butter and sugar with an electric beater or stand mixer until light yellow in color and fluffy. Sift flour and baking powder three times. Fold flour mix into creamed butter and sugar, alternating with milk, until well blended. Stir in almonds and beat well.

In a separate bowl, beat egg whites until they have stiff, firm peaks. Fold egg whites gently into batter with a rubber spatula. Add almond and vanilla extract. Pour batter into prepared pans and bake for 25 minutes, or until a skewer inserted comes out clean.

Cool for at least 20 minutes before inverting, then allow to completely cool before serving. Sift confectioners' sugar on top of each cake, or frost with a hard white icing, and create a layer cake, decorating the top with sliced almonds. Serve alone or with cherry ice cream.

Baking powder could be purchased in a shop by the 1850s, which made cake baking much easier. A food processor works best for pulverizing the nuts. Make sure beaters are washed and dried thoroughly before beating the egg whites, or the whites will not stiffen properly. The egg yolks are not used in this recipe, so save them for another purpose.

Fried Catfish

Serves 4 as a main dish

This very simple recipe would have been a welcomed main dish on any plate during the Civil War, particularly in the South. Salt and pepper were luxuries on the Southern home front, although cornmeal was available. A platter of steaming white rice and stewed tomatoes served alongside the fresh catfish would make this a feast during the war years.

- 4 tablespoons lard
- Two ½-pound catfish fillets
- 1 cup flour or cornmeal
- 1 pinch thyme
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Melt the lard in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Roll the catfish in cornmeal with thyme added, shake off excess, and fry in the lard. Cook on each side for 4 minutes and season with salt and pepper.

Serve with white rice and 2 cups stewed tomatoes to which 1 tablespoon vinegar, 1 teaspoon brown sugar, and a pinch of cayenne pepper have been added.

Strawberry Rhubarb Pie

Serves 6 to 8

Americans ate pie at every meal in the nineteenth century. To be historically accurate, I heartily encourage you to do the same. You will need a double-crust pastry recipe for this pie, or just buy two premade pie-dough circles. I get the kind that is sold in rolls, so I can use my own pans. Another option is to create a kind of crumble topping by mashing together oats, sugar, and butter in a bowl with a pastry blender and sprinkling on top of the rhubarb mixture before popping it into the oven.

- 2 pie-dough circles
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- ¼ cup orange juice or water
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon allspice
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2½ cups diced rhubarb stalk
- 2½ cups fresh strawberries, hulled and sliced
- 2 tablespoons butter, sliced into 6 pieces

Preheat oven to 425°F. Line a 9-inch pie pan with pastry dough. Use pie weights (or dried beans), if you can, to keep the dough from puffing while it bakes. Bake the pie crust for 10 minutes. Remove from oven.

Dissolve the cornstarch in the orange juice or water until very smooth. Mix with the sugar, salt, allspice, and cinnamon until well blended. Combine the cut-up fruit with the sugar mixture in a large bowl. Let sit for 15 minutes.

Pour mixture into the pie shell, and dot with butter slices. Cover with the pie dough, and cut steam holes into the top pastry. Cover the edges of the pie crust with foil so they don't burn. Place the pie pan on a cookie sheet lined with parchment or aluminum foil, so your cookie sheet and oven are protected from the mess if your pie bubbles over. Reduce heat to 350°F once the pie is in the oven. Bake for 1 hour. Serve warm with ice cream or for breakfast with a great cup of coffee.

Do not use any of the rhubarb leaves, which you now know are toxic. For the steam holes, try slicing in your kids' or a guest's initials—this is always a hit. Or weave a lattice top if you are feeling ambitious. Did you buy your pie crust? Then really, you should make the effort to try this. It looks super impressive, and it's not difficult if you plan it out and use a ruler or a careful eye. (Watch a how-to video online if you've never done this or witnessed it being done. Howdini has a good video on YouTube.)

Modern Baked Alaska

Serves 8, if 2-quart bowl is used

This is more about assembling ingredients and timing it right than showcasing your culinary finesse. My daughter Lucy, now a professional chef, made this dessert when she was nine, although I assisted with the meringue. You can alter the flavors of the cake, the ice cream, and any liqueur according to your taste. I used strawberry ice cream because it is strawberry season as I write this, and I bought lovely fresh strawberries for a garnish. I used traditional butter cake, but you could use any flavor that goes well with the ice cream you have chosen. I think chocolate cake would be delicious with coffee or mint ice cream. I froze the cake in a 2-quart bowl, which makes about 8 servings. You make this bigger or smaller by the size of the bowl you choose. Just make sure the bowl isn't shallow and fits into your oven.

Note on timing: *Real work time is about 35 minutes, but the cake needs to be frozen at least 2 hours. It can stay in the freezer, well-wrapped, for up to a week before meringue is applied and browned.*

Note on equipment: *2-quart glass or ceramic mixing bowl, heavy-duty baking sheet or broiler pan, aluminum foil, electric mixer.*

- 2 moist loaf-shaped pound cakes
- 2 tablespoons rum, brandy, or flavored liqueur (optional)
- 2½ pints highest-quality ice cream
- 4 egg whites, ideally at room temperature
- 1 pinch cream of tartar
- ¾ cup confectioners' sugar plus 3 tablespoons for finishing

Generously line a 2-quart bowl with aluminum foil, allowing enough foil to hang several inches over the edges, so that it can fold over the top of the bowl and cover it once the bowl is filled. Spray the inside of the foil-lined bowl with cooking spray to make the frozen cake easier to get out of the bowl. Remove the ice cream from the freezer so it will be soft enough to scoop once the cake prep is complete.

Slice one loaf cake into half-inch slices. Line the bowl with these, starting with the bottom and overlapping the slices a bit. Cut more slices from the second loaf as needed to fill in gaps and completely line the bowl, with no foil visible. Press the slices into the sides of the bowl with your hands so the inside of the bowl looks like it is made of cake.

Sprinkle or brush the rum or other liqueur onto the sides of the bowl-shaped cake. Use the liqueur sparingly because the cake will not be cooked, meaning the alcohol will be strong.

Scoop the ice cream into the cake-lined bowl and pack in place firmly. Fill the bowl with ice cream, making sure there are no air holes, and smooth the top so that it is flat. Carefully place one layer of half-inch cake slices on top of the ice-cream-filled bowl. Cut wedged pieces to fill in corners, making sure there are no gaps. Press down with fingers or spatula to completely cover ice cream.

Draw up the loose ends of the foil and fold over the bowl. If needed, wrap more foil over the top of the bowl and seal tightly. Freeze for 2 hours minimum or up to one week. Put the broiling pan or cookie sheet in the freezer (if it will fit) the day you plan to serve the dessert.

Before Serving:

Preheat oven to 450°F. Place the rack in the lower third of the oven to allow enough room for your creation. Beat the egg whites with a mixer at medium speed until white and frothy. Increase the speed to high, and add the pinch of cream of tartar and confectioners' sugar 1 tablespoon at a time. Beat until the egg whites hold stiff peaks.

Remove the ice cream cake from the freezer and unwrap the foil. Lift the cake out of the bowl by pulling up on the sides of the foil. Invert the bowl over the baking sheet, and the cake should come out easily. (Wrap the outer sides of the bowl with a hot, damp dish towel if the cake is stuck. The meringue will hide any imperfections.)

Frost the cake with the meringue, working quickly. Coat the cake with one layer, covering it completely. Add swirls or another layer. The meringue should be very thick. Put the meringue-coated cake in the oven and bake for 3½ minutes or until the meringue is a golden brown. Slide the cake carefully onto a serving platter, using two spatulas if necessary.

Garnish with fresh berries, or if you know your way around a kitchen and enjoy drama with your spirits, present Baked Alaska flambéed with burning rum.

Serve immediately to great applause and enjoy Gilded Age luxury.

To flambé any brandy, rum, bourbon, or liqueur: Add ½ cup spirits to a small saucepan and heat. Have a pack of long matches or a grill lighter at hand. Have a helper dim the lights around the table while you work on the sauce. Just when the liquor starts to steam, light a match and touch it to the vapors at arm's length. Stand back. Bring the flaming pan to the table and theatrically pour it over the Baked Alaska or other pudding. Expect marriage proposals from either gender.

Hungarian Chicken Paprikash

Serves 4 to 6

- ¼ cup unbleached white flour
- 4 tablespoons sweet Hungarian paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon hot paprika or cayenne pepper
- One 3-pound chicken cut into pieces (reserve wings for another use)
- 5 tablespoons olive oil (not extra virgin)
- 1½ medium yellow onions, peeled and thinly sliced lengthwise (about 1 cup onion slices; do not chop)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
- 2 cups flavorful chicken broth
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup sour cream

Mix the flour, 3 tablespoons sweet paprika, salt, and hot paprika in a shallow bowl. Dredge each chicken piece lightly in the flour mixture, and knock off the excess. Reserve the flour mixture. Add the oil to a heavy pot or Dutch oven, and bring to medium-high heat. Add the chicken pieces and brown about 5 minutes on each side. Remove the chicken and set aside. Stir in the onions, garlic, and remaining 1 tablespoon sweet paprika. Sauté over medium heat until onion is tender, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Lower heat to a simmer. Add the chicken pieces, chicken broth, and bay leaf. Cover tightly and allow to simmer about 30 minutes over very low heat, which will keep the chicken from getting tough. Mix ½ cup sour cream thoroughly with the reserved flour. Add a ladle full of liquid (about ¼ cup) from the pot to the sour cream mixture, and whisk until smooth. Stir the mixture into the pot slowly and simmer for 5 minutes.

Remove from the heat. Stir in the remaining ½ cup sour cream. Keep warm! Serve on noodles or Hungarian-style dumplings, known as *nokedli*.

Traditional Scrapple

Take a Pig's haslet (edible organs such as the heart, liver, etc.) and as much offal, lean and fat pork as you wish to make scrapple; boil them well together until they are tender; chop them fine, after taken them out of the liquor; season as sausage, then skim off the fat that has arisen where the meat was boiled; to make all soft, throw away the rest of the water and put this altogether in the pot and thickening it with ½ buckwheat and ½ Indian. Let it boil up, then pour out in pans to cool. Slice and fry it in sausage fat.

Modern Scrapple

Serves 6 to 8

You can find many recipes for scrapple online today, most of which require pig organs and a meat grinder. Here is an easier way for today's hurried cook.

- 1½ pounds bulk pork sausage, preferably without fennel seeds
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup or honey (optional)
- 1 teaspoon powdered sage
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup maple syrup for serving

Brown the sausage meat over medium-low heat in a large, deep skillet, breaking up the clumps as it cooks. Drain fat. Add the milk to the sausage and bring to a low simmer. Pour in the cornmeal slowly, stirring it into the sausage mixture. Simmer and stir for about 5 minutes. Add the maple syrup or honey, sage, and pepper, stirring to incorporate. Mixture will be very thick. Generously grease one 8- by 4-inch loaf pan. Spoon scrapple into the pan. Wrap tightly in aluminum foil or clear wrap and refrigerate overnight.

The next day, slice the scrapple into ¼- to ½-inch-thick slices. Fry the slices in a lightly greased pan until golden brown on both sides. Serve with eggs for breakfast or simply by itself, with warm maple syrup on the side.

Red Cross War Cake

Serves 4 to 6

The American Red Cross promoted this cake recipe, promising that the end product could reach the western front and retain its freshness. The dried fruit helps keep it moist if it has to be shipped across the Atlantic. Try soaking the raisins in rum for a few days or a week before you make the cake. Your doughboy will thank you.

The original recipe comes with a recommendation: "Cake keeps fresh for a long time and can be sent to men at the front."

- 2 cups brown sugar
- 2 cups hot water
- 8 ounces raisins (about 1 package), chopped
- 2 tablespoons lard
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda

Put sugar, hot water, raisins, lard, cinnamon, cloves, and salt in a large pot. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring frequently, then reduce the heat to medium low and cook at a low boil for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and cool. Preheat oven to 350°F. Stir in flour and baking soda. Mix well. Grease 2 mini-loaf pans. Pour batter into the pans and bake for 45 minutes.

Oatmeal Lace Cookies

This recipe is similar to directions found in the suffrage cookbooks sold to raise money for the cause.

- 1 cup light brown sugar
- ½ cup butter (1 stick)
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup oatmeal (not instant)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix the sugar and butter; cream well. Add the egg and vanilla. Mix the flour, baking powder, salt, and oatmeal in a separate bowl, and stir into the butter mixture, making sure all ingredients are well combined. Cover a cookie sheet with parchment paper or aluminum foil. Drop ½ tablespoon of batter per cookie onto the sheet. Leave plenty of room between cookies because they spread a lot. Bake 8 minutes; edges should be brown. Slice cookies apart, if necessary, while they are still warm on the cookie sheet. Cool well before removing cookies from foil. They should be thin, crispy, and delicious.

Store in tins, which you can bring to the election booths and share with your fellow voters.

Gimlet

Makes 1 gimlet cocktail

The first gimlet, a gin cocktail made with Rose's lime juice, made its appearance in 1928, and a good bartender can make one today in the blink of an eye. A gimlet is a hand tool with a sharp piercing point, used for drilling small holes, and a judgmental individual is said to have a "gimlet-eyed" stare if he or she disapproves of some action or expression. So the gimlet drink should be sharp, not sweet, although hopefully it won't drill holes in your head.

- 1½ ounces gin
- 1 ounce Rose's lime juice
- 1 generous twist of lime
- ¾ cup cracked ice

Place the gin, lime juice, lime twist, and ice in a cocktail shaker and shake vigorously. Strain into a glass and serve.

Mulatto Rice

Serves 8 as a side dish

Harriet Ross Colquitt introduced this recipe with the snooty and overtly racist comment, "This is the very Chic name given to rice with the touch of the tar brush."

Fry squares of breakfast bacon and remove from the pan. Then brown some minced onion (one small one) in this grease, and add one pint can of tomatoes. When thoroughly hot, add a pint of rice to this mixture, and cook very slowly until the rice is done. Or, if you are in a hurry, cold rice may be substituted, and all warmed thoroughly together.

I would add 3 cups of water or chicken broth to the onion and tomato mixture, which I think the original author left out by mistake. If you use leftover cooked rice, leave out this extra liquid. Also, I would add the crumbled bacon and 2 tablespoons freshly minced parsley to the rice before serving.

WPA Soup
(Potato Sausage Soup)

Makes 10 gallons

This soup received its name because the WPA provided the necessary funds to pay for the sausage. This should serve about 125 people with a bowl each, or 150 with a cup each.

- 28 quarts (7 gallons) of water
- 4 quarts potatoes, scrubbed and chopped
- 2 to 4 quarts carrots, scraped and chopped
- 2 quarts celery, diced
- 2 quarts onion, diced
- 16 pounds pork sausage, browned and chopped if link, or just browned if bulk.
Use money from the government for the sausage and get as much as you can.
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Divide the water, potatoes, carrots, celery, and onion into two 6-gallon vats. Bring each to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cover. Add more water as needed to keep the potatoes from sticking on the bottom and scorching, since those large vats are often thin metal. Cook until the potatoes are fork tender. Add the sausage and continue simmering until meat is done.

It's good to let this sit in a cold place for a few hours or overnight before serving, so you can skim the pork fat off the top. If you have access to fresh or dried herbs, add these at the beginning but mince them first or tie in bundles with twine: rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano. Any combination will be okay, but don't let it overpower the soup. Use about 1 tablespoon per gallon if dried.

Ofelia Braga's Picadillo Criollo

Serves 6 as a main dish

Ofelia Braga arrived in Miami in 1960. She learned to cook growing up in a farm family that had become desperately poor under the Batista government. When the Cuban Revolution came, she hoped her life would change, but Castro's new policies did not offer her the opportunities she was looking for as a young woman. She settled in the Little Havana neighborhood of Miami, and with her husband, raised a large family. Today, Ofelia still cooks Cuban food and runs her kitchen like a warm-hearted commandant. Her daughter, Marlene, is a TV producer and a dear friend of mine.

Marlene says this is a traditional dish in her family. It includes sofrito, the onion, green pepper, and garlic mixture that adds basic flavor to many Cuban dishes. Sometimes sofrito includes oregano or cumin, but Mrs. Braga's recipe leaves those seasonings out. Typically, the picadillo is served with a big pile of white rice. Rice is another basic component of a Cuban meal. Marlene recommends a simple salad of avocado and iceberg lettuce as a nice accompaniment.

If it were my recipe, I'd brown the beef before I added the other ingredients and I'd chop up the olives. Maybe I'd add cumin and oregano. But it is not mine. It's the resilient Mrs. Braga's, so don't mess with it!

- 2 pounds lean ground beef
- 1 small yellow onion, peeled and chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- ¼ seeded green bell pepper, chopped
- ½ cup tomato puree
- ½ cup dry vermouth or white wine
- ½ cup pitted green olives, preferably with the pimento center
- ½ cup raisins
- ¼ cup ketchup
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Mix the ground beef, onion, garlic, bell pepper, tomato puree, vermouth, olives, raisins, ketchup, salt, and pepper together in a large pot over low heat. Cover and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes. Stir frequently.

Serve with a big pot of white rice and a platter of sliced plantains you fried in hot oil while the picadillo was simmering gently.

New England Fish Chowder

Serves 6 to 8

This recipe for fish chowder is similar to the one JFK enjoyed for lunch at the White House. He also liked the ever-popular clam chowder, but the timing on that can be tricky. If you've never cooked fish chowder, give this recipe a try.

- 1½ pounds haddock fillets
- 1 pound other fish fillet, such as salmon, cod, skate, or a mixture
- 2 cups water
- 4 slices smoked bacon, diced
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, if needed
- 4 large potatoes, diced
- ½ cup diced celery
- ½ cup diced and peeled carrots
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1 cup fish stock or clam juice
- 4 cups 2 percent milk or whole milk
- 2 tablespoons butter

Simmer the fish fillets in water for 6 minutes in a covered pan. Drain, reserving broth. Cook the bacon in a large pot over low heat until crispy and the fat is rendered. Remove the bacon, leaving the fat in the pot, and drain on paper towel. Set aside.

Sauté the onions in bacon fat until golden. Add olive oil if needed. Do not brown. Stir in the potatoes, celery, carrot, bay leaf, thyme, salt, and pepper. Add the reserved fish broth plus fish stock or clam juice. Bring to a boil and then immediately lower the heat to simmer. Cover pot and let the chowder simmer about 20 minutes or until potatoes are tender.

Cut the fillets into small pieces. Add to soup. Simmer 5 more minutes. Add the milk and butter, and heat thoroughly over low heat. Do not bring to a boil. Adjust seasonings.

Serve chowder in warm bowls, with crispy bacon crumbles on top of each bowl. Enjoy while playing a game of Risk.

Southern Buttermilk Fried Chicken

Serves 6

Deep-fried food is another example of a southern kitchen tradition influenced by African roots. The Scots and English settlers in the British colonies did not use a lot of oil in their cooking. Enslaved Africans, however, had a long tradition of deep frying in palm oil.

If you are in Montgomery, Alabama, I hear that you should eat at Martha's Place, run by a talented southern chef, Martha Hawkins, who is one of the heirs to Georgia Gilmore's gastronomic legacy. The menu on her paper place mats says that she serves southern fried chicken every day. But if you can't get there, here is a recipe that I think is pretty good.

- 3¾ cups buttermilk
- 2⅔ tablespoons salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 3 pounds chicken pieces (breasts, legs, and thighs)
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon ground sage
- 8 cups peanut oil, or enough to fill about ¾ inch of skillet

Combine 3 cups buttermilk, 2 tablespoons salt, and sugar in a mixing bowl. Pour the marinade into a 2-gallon zipper-lock bag. Add the chicken pieces, seal bag, and shake to coat. Make sure all chicken is coated. Chill for at least 3 hours or overnight.

Remove the chicken from brine and drain, then wipe dry with paper towels. Throw out the buttermilk marinade. Stir the flour with the remaining ⅔ tablespoon salt, pepper, thyme, and sage in a large bowl. Put the remaining ¾ cup buttermilk in a shallow pan. Coat each chicken piece with the flour mixture, shake off excess, and dip into buttermilk. Then dip back into the flour mixture. Let the coated chicken pieces stand for 20 minutes or so if possible.

Heat the oil to 350°F in a 12- to 14-inch heavy skillet or a deep-fat fryer. Using tongs, place a few pieces of chicken into the fryer and fry for about 15 minutes, until the coating is golden brown and the meat is no longer pink. Turn once during the cooking. The oil should be kept around 325° to 350°F. Drain the pieces on paper towels. Keep pieces warm in a 275°F oven while you are cooking the other pieces.

It's better to use smaller pieces from younger chickens. Cut the breasts in half so that they cook evenly. Note that the thighs take a little longer to cook than the breasts.

Ginger Carrot Soup

Serves 8 to 10 as a first course or alongside a nice salad

Even when you are robustly healthy, ginger carrot soup is pure, silky deliciousness. Try it as a first course for a party, or serve it alongside a fresh mesclun salad with goat cheese and toasted walnuts. You will need a blender for this recipe because the soup has to be smoothly pureed. If you have a professional-grade immersion blender, you may use that, but make sure you get all the lumps out. I'd also recommend using a Microplane grater to grate the orange peel.

- 8 cups stock (chicken or vegetable)
- 2 medium white potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 pounds carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 to 3 tablespoons grated fresh ginger
- 1 cup white wine
- 1½ cups orange juice
- 3 tablespoons finely grated orange peel
- 1 tablespoon salt or to taste

Pour the stock into a high-sided pot. Add the potatoes. Cover and bring to a rapid boil. Add the carrots, and lower heat to medium. Cook until tender, about 15 minutes. Stir in the ginger. Remove pot from heat and let mixture cool slightly. Puree the potatoes, carrots, and stock in a blender, working in batches. Make sure each batch is completely smooth before you move on to the next. Return the puree to the pot.

Add the wine and let simmer for 10 minutes so you won't taste any alcohol. Add the orange juice and peel. Add salt. Soup should be the consistency of cream, not baby food. Thin it with more stock if needed.

Serve very hot. Top each bowl with toasted chopped hazelnuts or pepitas, or add a dollop of heavy cream.

You may need to thin leftover or frozen soup with ½ cup stock and ½ cup orange juice.

Mango Salsa

Lots of people have a favorite salsa, regardless of their ancestry. Mine is chopped fresh mango mixed with liberal amounts of minced cilantro, 2 tablespoons of minced red onion, juice from one small lime, and a touch of that fabulous all-American Sriracha hot sauce to give it a kick. It may not be authentically Latin, but it is authentically good. From my point of view, the future of our cuisine lies in fusion.

Serve it with grilled duck breast or a swordfish steak. Grill either one medium rare on a summer night. Delicioso!

Firehouse Chili con Carne

Serves 8 to 10

Bryan Gomoka said that several of the firefighters at the Great Jones Street firehouse have contributed to this recipe. They have a great kitchen at the firehouse and some excellent cooks too. Here is the original recipe. I guess the firehouse likes its chili super spicy, or Bryan was teasing me, because ½ cup chili powder seems like a boatload to me. I would start with 2 to 3 tablespoons of chili powder and build up from there. Otherwise, this recipe definitely qualifies as a four-alarm fire.

- 2 pounds ground beef (or turkey or bison)
- 1 green pepper
- 1 head garlic
- 4 (14½-ounce) cans diced tomatoes
- 2 (14½ ounce) cans kidney beans
- ½ cup chili powder
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- Salt, freshly ground black pepper, and cayenne pepper to taste

Brown the meat in a large frying pan. Chop the green pepper and peeled garlic cloves. Put the meat, green pepper, garlic, tomatoes, beans, chili powder, cumin, thyme, salt, and pepper in a big pot and cook over low heat for 2 to 3 hours, covered. Check on this and stir once in a while.

You also can add 2 minced jalapeños. Remove the seeds, or leave them in if you like chili even more hotly spiced.