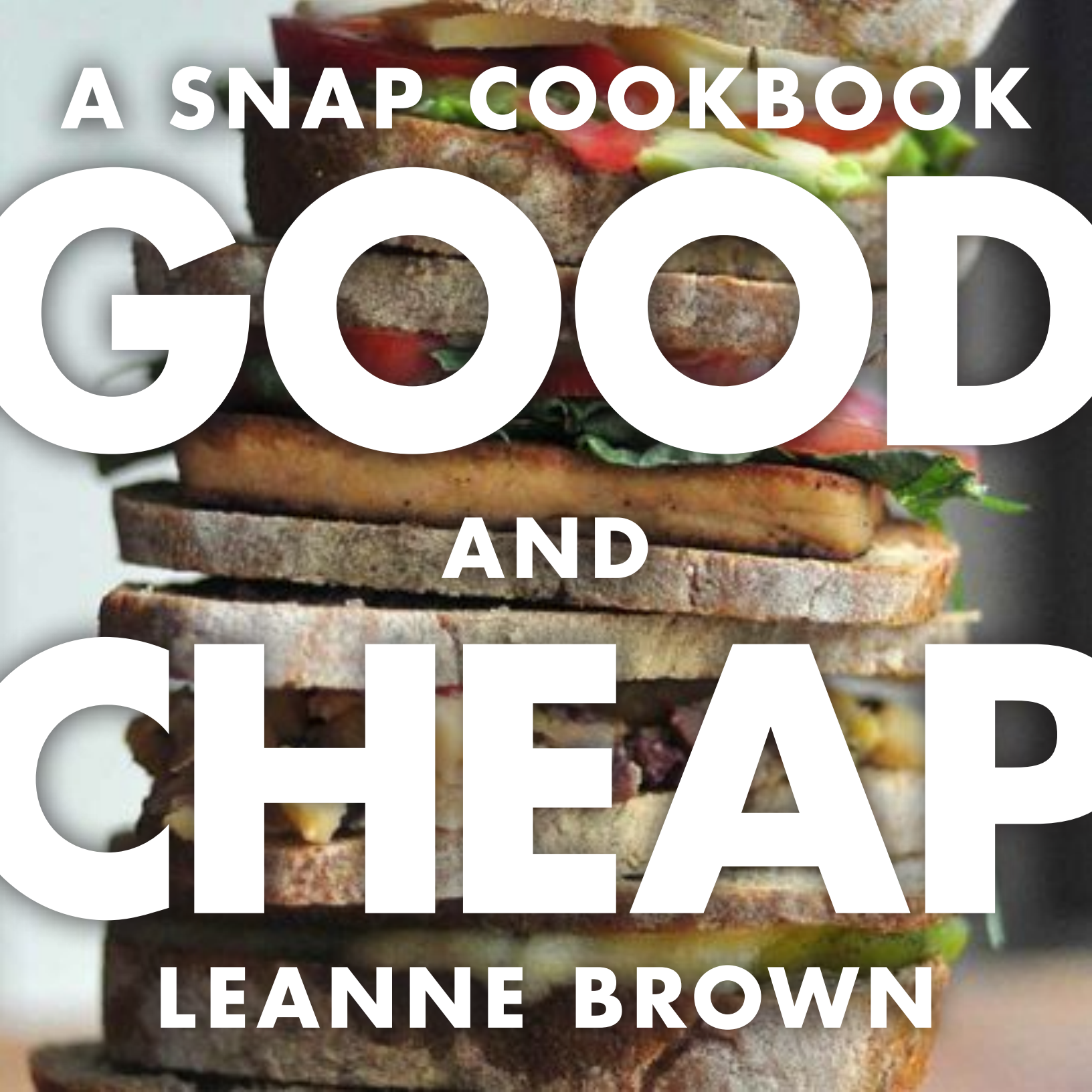

A SNAP COOKBOOK

GOOD AND CHEAP

LEANNE BROWN

Text, recipes, design, and photographs by Leanne Brown, in fulfillment of a final project for a master's degree in food studies at New York University.

I am indebted to other cooks whose recipes have guided me, and all those friends, professors, and classmates who supported me.

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Introduction

Eating is one of life's greatest pleasures. In a perfect world, healthy and delicious food would be all around us. It would be easy to choose and easy to enjoy.

But of course it's not a perfect world. There are thousands of barriers that can keep us from eating in a way that nourishes our bodies and satisfies our tastes. Money just needn't be one of them.

Kitchen skill, not budget, is the key to great food. This cookbook is a celebration of the many delicious meals available to those on even the most strict of budgets.

Cooking on a limited budget is not easy, and there are times when a tough week can turn eating into a chore. I hope the recipes and techniques in this book help make those times rare and tough choices a little more bearable.

Learning to cook has a powerfully positive effect. My hope is that this book will empower people to become better, more conscious cooks, able to conjure deliciousness in any kitchen, anytime, anywhere. Good cooking alone can't solve hunger in America, but it can make life happier—and that is worth every effort.

This Book

I created this book at the capstone project for my MA in Food Studies at New York University. After I posted a free PDF on my website, it went viral on Reddit, Tumblr, and elsewhere—almost 100,000 downloads in the first few weeks! All the supportive feedback gave me the courage to launch a Kickstarter campaign to get printed copies *Good and Cheap* into the hands of people who don't have computers or who wouldn't otherwise see it.

About My Choices

These recipes are designed for the budget of people on SNAP (the US program that used to be called Food Stamps). The meals are generally healthy and use ingredients common to most low-income New York City neighborhoods. More than in most cookbooks, the recipes are flexible and encourage substitution based on availability, taste, and price. I *want* you to tailor things to your taste. That is the joy of cooking!

My intent was to create satisfying food that doesn't require you to supplement your meals with cheap carbohydrates to stave off hunger. I strove to create recipes that use money *carefully*, without being purely slavish to the bottom line. For example, many recipes use butter rather than oil. Butter is not cheap, but it creates flavor, crunch, and richness in a way that cheap oils never can.

To encourage people to eat fruits and vegetables, these recipes do not feature large amounts of meat. Many recipe collections created for Americans use meat as the central feature of most meals. My recipes celebrate the vegetables rather than the meat.

A few recipes call for fancy kitchen equipment, but in my work with low-income families in New York, I have found that items like blenders, food processors, and electric mixers are not as rare as you might think. I did not, however, attempt to tackle the very real situation of people who have no kitchen, no equipment, and no space to prepare food. I simply cannot hope to do those issues justice in the bounds of this project.

A Note on Prices

The prices in this book come from two sources. The first is data I collected from four grocery stores in Inwood, a relatively low-income neighborhood on the north tip of Manhattan, where I surveyed prices for the pantry items on the opposite page. For non-pantry items like specific spices and a wider variety of fruits and vegetables, I consulted an online grocery store. Naturally, prices in other cities—even other neighborhoods—will vary, so please think of the numbers as a guideline.

Pantry Basics

With these commonly available items in your pantry, you'll always have a wide variety of meals on the table within minutes. Keeping a well stocked pantry is the key to easy, fast cooking at home. When you're living on a budget, building up supplies does take time, but just keep adding each week and you'll get there in time.

VEGETABLES

Vegetables can (and should!) be the base of most meals. Other than greens, which should be used quickly, these can be stored for a few days to a few weeks. Try the new seasonal vegetables as they cycle through the markets and go on sale.

Garlic, onions, carrots, celery, peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, hot peppers, hardy greens, salad greens, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, winter squash

FRUITS

Citrus fruits are cooking essentials and they keep well. The zest and juice can liven up just about any dish and they always make a great dressing. Bananas, apples and melons are great quick snacks, but try them all!

Apples, melons, oranges, limes, lemons, bananas

GRAINS

There is great variety to be had in whole grains. Try new ones frequently, cooking based on the package instructions. You can substitute almost any of them for rice or toss them in a salad.

Bread, tortillas, pasta, all-purpose flour, whole-wheat flour, oats, popcorn, short-grain rice, long-grain rice, brown rice, cornmeal, dried whole grains

DAIRY

Butter is just as good to cook with as it is on toast.

Butter, milk, yogurt, queso fresco, Romano or Parmesan, sharp cheddar, mozzarella

PROTEIN

These items are easily stored, cheap, and have multiple uses. Whenever possible, buy your favorite meats fresh instead of frozen.

Eggs, dried beans, lentils, tofu, nuts, peanut butter

CANNED VEGETABLES

Well priced and essential for making sauces.

Whole tomatoes, tomato paste, whole corn

FROZEN FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Great for smoothies and for a quick addition to soups and rice dishes.

Berries, peas, and other small vegetables

FLAVOR AND COOKING

You can explore an extraordinary number of cuisines with these items. They add depth and excitement to the most simple dishes.

Olive oil or vegetable oil, wine vinegar, anchovies, sardines, olives, fish sauce, canned coconut milk, miso paste, mustard, soy sauce, chili sauce, fresh herbs, dried spices, brown sugar

TREATS THAT GO A LONG WAY

Although these items can be expensive, a little goes a long way; when you can, pick up an item or two and enjoy the results.

Dried fruits, dried mushrooms, frozen shrimp, maple syrup, bacon, prosciutto or pancetta, vanilla

Tips for Eating and Shopping Well

BUY FOODS THAT CAN BE USED IN MULTIPLE MEALS
Versatile ingredients save meals. If you buy cornmeal, you can make polenta (p. 82), corn bread, and polenta fries (p. 46). If you buy yogurt (or make your own), you can have it with fruit (p. 22), make raita (p. 121) and tzatziki (p. 122), or use it in a drink (p. 110).

THINK WEEKLY
Each week, mix things up by buying different varieties of staple foods like grains and beans. This week, you might have oatmeal every morning (p. 12) with black bean chili or black bean tacos later in the day, but next week you'll have yogurt for breakfast and chana masala (p. 72) or hummus for lunch and dinner. If you have time to shop frequently, pick up smaller amounts of produce every couple of days to ensure everything is fresh. It's a lot more inspiring to pull crisp, vibrant greens out of the fridge than to unstick a wilted mess from the bottom of the veggie drawer.

START BUILDING A PANTRY
If possible—and admittedly this can be difficult for people living on their own—reserve part of your budget to buy one or two semi-expensive pantry items each week. Things like olive oil, soy sauce, and spices (p. 126) are pricey at first, but if you use just a little with each recipe, they go a long way. With turmeric, coriander, cumin, and fresh ginger, you'll suddenly you'll have a world of flavor on your shelf. Check out the next section for specific items to build your pantry.

MORE VEGETABLES MEANS MORE FLAVOR
Nothing livens up a bowl of rice like summer squash and corn! Vegetables make the best sauces: they're earthy, bright, tart, sweet, bitter, savory, rich. Give them a treasured spot at the top of your grocery list and you'll never be bored.

ALWAYS BUY EGGS
With these babies in your fridge, you're only ever minutes away from a satisfying meal. Scramble an egg with some leftovers or drop an egg on top of a salad, a bowl of grains, or a plate of stir-fried vegetables, and deliciousness is guaranteed.

DON'T BUY DRINKS
All the body needs drink-wise is water. Except for milk, most packaged drinks are overpriced and deliver a lot of sugar without filling you up the way a piece of fruit or a bowl of yogurt does. If you want a special drink, make an agua fresca (p. 109), smoothie (p. 110), or tea.

BUY A PEPPER GRINDER
Seriously, banish pre-ground pepper from your life; it loses all flavor when it sits around. Pepper is not just some dusty, crunchy black stuff that people seem to think is important; it's essential to bringing out the best in everything. Fresh pepper creates pops of intense flavor on the tongue and lights up bland dishes. One of the most popular dishes in Rome is just pasta with butter and pepper: give it a try!

Breakfast

Fast, healthy and cheap is usually the game plan for breakfast—with as much pleasing flavor as I can manage in my grouchy morning state. Whether you have hours or minutes, there's a great breakfast to be had for little.

Tomato Scrambled Eggs

FOR TWO

$3.60 TOTAL
$1.80 / SERVING

For today's breakfast, fluffy, creamy eggs hold together a mass of tangy, juicy, sweet tomatoes.

½ tbsp butter
4 cups tomatoes, chopped
4 eggs
salt and pepper
basil or other herbs, chopped (optional)

Put a small pan on medium heat and melt the butter, then swirl it around to coat the pan. Add the tomatoes. Cook until the tomatoes release their juice and most of the juice evaporates, about 5 to 7 minutes.

Meanwhile, crack the eggs into a bowl and add a generous pinch of salt and pepper. Beat the eggs lightly with a fork.

Once most of the juice has cooked out of the tomatoes, turn the heat down to low and add the eggs to the pan. Using a spatula, gently mix the eggs and tomatoes. Carefully stir the eggs to keep them from forming chunks. Turn down the heat as low as possible; the slower your eggs cook, the creamier they'll be.

Once the eggs are done, turn off the heat and add any chopped herbs you have around. Basil is the best with tomatoes.

If you have some around, serve over toast or a tortilla.

$0.25 TOTAL
$0.13 / SERVING

IDEAS

Oatmeal

This basic recipe can be dressed up in so many ways, you'll never get bored. Oatmeal makes a hot and comforting breakfast; it'll give you energy for a great morning. It's also extremely inexpensive, so you can spend a bit more on lunch and dinner.

1 cup rolled oats
2 cups water
¼ tsp salt

In a small pot, add the oats, water and salt. Place it on medium-high heat, just until the water comes to a boil. Immediately turn the heat to low and place a lid on the pot. Cook for 5 minutes, until the oats are soft and tender and most of the water has cooked off. You can add more water if you like your oatmeal smooth and thin, or use slightly less if you want a thick oatmeal.

This is just the basic recipe; several ideas for how to make it your own follow on the next pages. Whether it's milky and sweet or savory and salty, I'm sure you can find a favorite way to enjoy a hot bowl of oats in the morning!

COCONUT AND LIME OATMEAL: Add the coconut and sugar to the oatmeal, water, and salt. Cook as normal. Turn off the heat and squeeze the juice of half a lime over the top.

¼ cup coconut, shredded
2 tbsp sugar
½ lime, juiced

$1.50 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

BERRY OATMEAL: Cook the oatmeal as usual, but 2 minutes before it's ready, add some fresh or frozen berries and the sugar, then stir to combine. There's nothing more to the recipe than that, but it's surprising how many variations you can come up with just by trying a new type of berries or combining several varieties.

½ cup berries, fresh or frozen
1 tbsp sugar

$1.10 TOTAL
$0.55 / SERVING

$1.50 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

PUMPKIN OATMEAL: Whisk the pumpkin, milk, and water in a pot. Add the oats, salt, sugar, and spices, but omit the normal 2 cups water. Cook on medium-low until it bubbles. Turn to low for 5 more minutes. Add syrup or more sugar to taste.

½ cup canned pumpkin
¾ cup milk (or almond / soy milk)
1¼ cups water
2 tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp cinnamon

OPTIONAL
¼ tsp ginger powder
¼ tsp clove powder
maple syrup

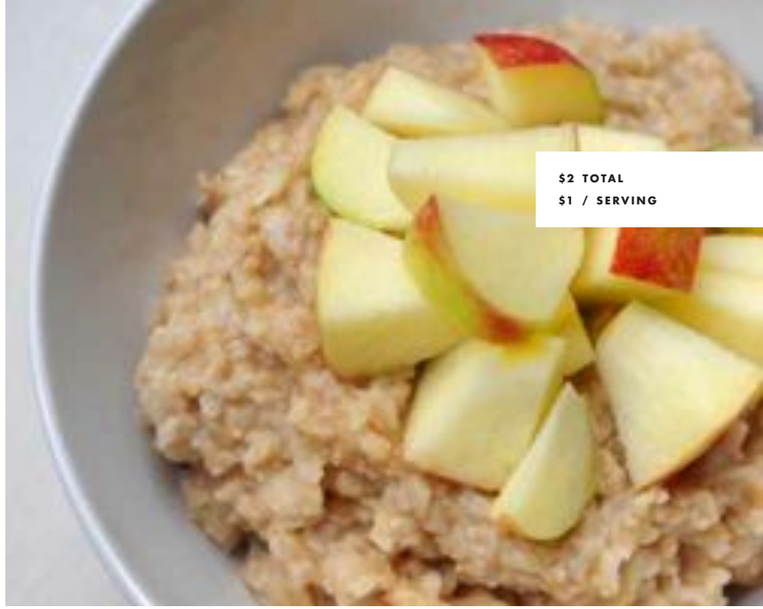
$1.50 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

BAKLAVA OATMEAL: Before cooking the oatmeal as normal, add the cinnamon, orange zest and 2 tablespoons of honey. Once it's cooked, top each bowl with another tablespoon of honey and a tablespoon of nuts.

1 tsp cinnamon
1 tbsp orange zest, finely grated
4 tbsp honey
2 tbsp almonds or pistachios, chopped

APPLE CINNAMON OATMEAL: Cook the oats in juice and cinnamon instead of water. Top with the apple. If you want the apple to be soft and warm, cook it along with the oats.

2 cups apple juice or cider
1 tsp cinnamon
1 apple, cored and chopped



$2 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

SAVORY OATMEAL: Cook the oatmeal with scallions. Just before it's done, add cheese. Melt the butter in a pan on medium heat. Crack in the eggs, then cover. Fry until the yolks are runny but the whites are cooked, then top each bowl of oats with one fried egg!

2-3 scallions, finely chopped
¼ cup sharp cheddar, grated
1 tsp butter
2 eggs

$1.50 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

$2 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

Broiled Grapefruit

FOR TWO

If your oven has a broiler, this is a fast and fun way to liven up a standard, healthy breakfast of grapefruit. This method produces a hot and sticky treat.

2 grapefruit
2 tbsp brown sugar
salt

Turn on the broiler in your oven.

Split a grapefruit in half and place it on a baking tray or in an oven-proof pan. Sprinkle the pink halves evenly with sugar and top with just a tiny bit of salt to bring out the flavor.

Place the grapefruit halves under the broiler until they turn bubbly and a little brown (or even black) around the edges. This usually takes about 3 minutes, but monitor it because every broiler is different. Don't get distracted! Overbroiling ruins a good meal fast.

If you have maple sugar on hand, use it instead of sugar for even more flavor.

This breakfast will make a grapefruit lover out of you!

$1.60 TOTAL
$0.80 / SERVING

Omelette

FOR TWO

I make this omelette at least once a week. It's insanely delicious, whether laden with veggies or kept simple. I love it with dill, but it's good with almost any herb or scallions. Once you are a pro at making this, add any other cooked veggies you have around.

4 eggs
2 tbsp fresh dill, finely chopped
salt and pepper
butter for the pan
1 shallot or ½ small red onion, finely diced
¼ cup grated cheese

Crack the eggs in a bowl. Add the dill, salt, pepper, and beat with a fork.

Put a big saucepan on medium-high heat. Melt a small blob of butter in the pan. Once the butter is sizzling, add the onion and sauté for about two minutes, until it's translucent and smells great.

Add the egg to the hot pan and swirl it around to coat the surface evenly. If the center of the omelette cooks more quickly than the edge, use a spatula to pull any raw egg into the middle. Then stop touching it.

After about 30 seconds, toss the cheese on top along with any other raw or cooked vegetable you feel like adding. Once none of the egg remains translucent, fold the omelette in half with your spatula, then lift it out of the pan. You don't want any brown on your eggs.

If I'm serving two people, I usually cut one large omelette in half rather than making two omelettes. However, when you feel like being fancy, you can make a pair of two-egg omelettes simply by using half the ingredients for each. For extra fanciness, roll up the omelette instead of folding it—that's how the French do it, traditionally. The result will be quite thin and tender.

Banana Pancakes

MAKES TEN TO FOURTEEN PANCAKES

With the creamy texture and delicious flavor of bananas, these pancakes are stunningly good. You will be seriously popular if you feed these to your family or friends. Another plus: this is a great way to get rid of mushy bananas (that doesn't involve making banana bread).

2 cups all-purpose flour
¼ cup brown sugar
2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
2 bananas, mashed
2 eggs
1½ cups milk
1 tsp vanilla
2 bananas, sliced
butter for cooking

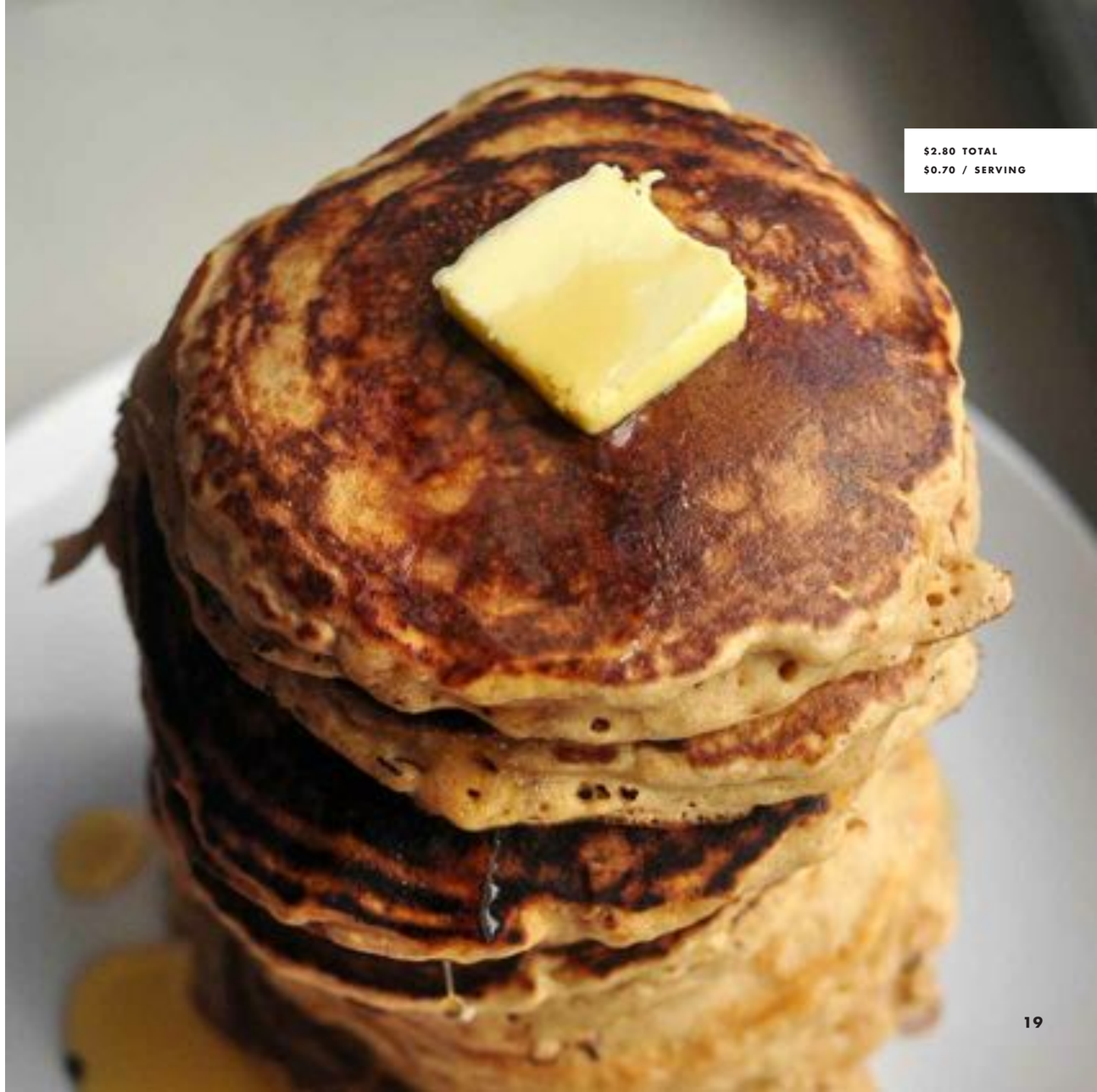
In a medium bowl, add the flour, brown sugar, baking powder, soda and salt. Mix thoroughly with a spoon.

In another bowl, add the mashed bananas (or just mash them in the bowl), eggs, milk, and vanilla, then mix. Add the dry mixture from the other bowl into the second bowl. Gently stir it with a spoon until everything just comes together. Tender pancakes come from not over-mixing the batter. If there are still a few pockets of flour, don't worry about it. Let the mixture sit for 10 to 15 minutes.

Place a non-stick or cast-iron pan on medium heat. Once it's hot, melt a small amount of butter, about ½ teaspoon, then ladle some pancake batter into the center of the pan. You can make your pancakes as large or small as you like. A normal amount is about ⅓ to ¼ cup of batter. If it's your first time making pancakes, make them smaller: they'll be easier to flip.

As soon as the batter is in the pan, place 3 to 4 banana slices atop of the uncooked side of the pancake. Once the edges of the pancake start to dry up and you can see the middle start to bubble, flip the pancake over. Cook until it is browned on both sides. Stack the finished pancake on a plate in a warm oven and repeat the above process until you run out of batter.

Serve hot, with butter and syrup.



$2.80 TOTAL
$0.70 / SERVING

Whole-Wheat Jalapeño Cheddar Scones

MAKES SIX

These are delicious for breakfast or with a plate of beans, a pile of vegetables, or alongside a chili or stew. Spicy, cheesy, flaky—these are best eaten straight out of the oven.

½ cup butter
2½ cups whole-wheat flour
1 tbsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
4 oz sharp cheddar, diced
1 jalapeño, finely diced
2 eggs, lightly beaten
½ cup milk

EGG WASH

1 egg
salt and pepper

Place the butter in the freezer for 30 minutes.

Turn the oven to 400 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, or lightly grease the pan if you don't have the paper.

In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt.

Prepare your jalapeño and cheese. Cutting the cheese into cubes rather than grating it means you'll have pockets of gooey cheese that contrast nicely with the scone. If you want the spice of the jalapeño, leave the seeds and membrane; if you like it milder, remove them and chop up only the pepper itself.

Remove the butter from the freezer and grate it directly into the flour mixture. (Use a cheese grater—it's the best way to break up butter without melting it.) Using your hands, gently squish the butter into the flour until everything is incorporated but not smooth. The chunks of butter will create flaky scones. Add the jalapeño, cheese, eggs, and milk to the bowl, then use your hands to gently mix everything until it just comes together. It will probably be a little shaggy, but that's just fine.

Sprinkle flour on a clean countertop and dump the dough onto it. Gently shape the dough into a disc about 1½" thick. Cut the dough into six triangles, like a pizza, and move them to the cookie sheet.

In a small bowl, gently beat the egg for the egg wash. Brush it over the scones, then sprinkle salt and pepper over each one. Bake for 25 minutes or until the scones are golden brown.

$4.50 TOTAL
$0.75 / SCONE

IDEAS

Yogurt Smash!

There are so many types of yogurt in the grocery store: some low in fat and high in sugar, some with cute animal pictures. Some are Greek. Some have chocolate shavings and candy. Some have names like "key lime pie."

Now forget about all of that. The best value for your money are the big buckets of plain yogurt. The fat content is your choice—just check that it doesn't contain gelatin and you're all set. Starting with plain yogurt, you can make super flavors in your own kitchen, where you know exactly what's going into it.

If you have kids, ask them what flavors they can imagine and go make it! It's a lot more fun than letting the supermarket choose for you. Try something new and smash it in! Check out the ideas on the adjoining page.

If you want a thicker Greek-style yogurt, all you have to do is strain regular American yogurt through cheesecloth to remove the extra water.

Yogurt's versatility makes it a great staple to keep in the fridge. Mix it with some of the items you see on the next page or turn it into a savory sauce like raita (p. 122) or tzatziki (p. 123).

Soup

It's a cliché, but as soon as the weather gets cold, my apartment fills with the smell of vegetables simmering for soup. Vegetable soups are so simple that you can easily invent your own, using the stuff you and your family like. Start with some onion, carrot, celery, maybe a pepper; then add broth and a large amount of, say, spinach, and suddenly you have spinach soup! It's a great way for new cooks to gain some confidence. Just remember to season it enough. Dunk a grilled-cheese sandwich in it and even mediocre soup tastes great.

Dal

FOR FOUR

$2.40 TOTAL
$0.60 / SERVING

This thick lentil soup is a flavor-packed staple of the Indian table. There are a ton of ways to prepare dal, but the core—beyond the lentils themselves—is usually ginger, garlic, and chili, along with some dry spices.

2 cups lentils
1 tbsp butter
1 onion, finely chopped
1 tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp black mustard seeds
1 tsp turmeric powder
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 green chili, finely chopped
½ inch ginger root, grated
salt and pepper

You can use any type of lentil you like. If you're using larger lentils (like chana dal, french lentils, or split mung beans), soak them for 30 minutes to start. If you're using the small orange lentils, then don't bother soaking them; they cook very quickly.

Melt butter in a saucepan on medium heat. Add the onion and let it cook for 1 minute, then add the cumin and mustard seeds and stir them around with the onions until they sizzle. Toss in the turmeric powder, garlic, and chili and cook for 3 to 4 more minutes. Add the ginger root and stir fry quickly for about 30 seconds.

Add the lentils along with enough water to cover them, then place a lid on top. Let everything cook for 20 to 45 minutes, or until the lentils are tender. Taste the dal and add salt and pepper. You'll probably need a fair bit of salt to bring out all the flavors—a teaspoon or so.

If you have them available, top the dish with a splash of cream or some chopped fresh cilantro.

Corn Soup

FOR FOUR TO SIX

This thick, sweet, satisfying soup is a favorite of kids and adults. This is wonderful to make at the beginning of autumn when corn on the cob is at its peak, but canned corn can also make it a warm reminder of summer in the depths of winter.

4 cups corn, fresh, canned, or frozen
1 tbsp butter
1 onion, finely chopped
2 sticks celery, finely chopped
1 green or red bell pepper, finely chopped
1 small potato, diced
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 chili pepper, finely chopped (optional)
1 tbsp cornmeal or flour
salt and pepper

CORN BROTH

4 to 8 cobs corn, with corn removed
2 bay leaves (optional)
salt

ALTERNATE BROTH

5 cups vegetable broth or chicken stock

If you're making this soup with corn on the cob, the first step is to make corn broth. If you're using canned or frozen corn, you'll also need chicken or vegetable broth instead. In that case, skip the next paragraph.

To make corn broth, place the cobs and bay leaves in a large stockpot and cover with water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then turn the heat down to medium and let the water boil for about 30 minutes. Taste the broth and add salt and pepper until it tastes lightly corny. Boil it down until you have about 5 cups of liquid. The broth will keep for several months if frozen, or a few weeks in the refrigerator.

To make the soup, melt the butter in a large pot or Dutch oven on medium heat. Add onion, celery, bell pepper, and potato, then stir. Cover the pot and let everything fry and steam for about 5 minutes.

Take the lid off the pot and add the garlic and chili pepper, if using. Stir the vegetables, using a splash of water or broth to free any that get stuck to the bottom of the pot.

Let the vegetables cook, stirring occasionally, for another 5 minutes. They should be lightly browned and soft, although the potatoes will not be fully cooked yet.

Add the corn and cornmeal or flour to the pot and stir. Cover with about 5 cups of broth and bring to a boil, then turn the heat down to low and simmer for about 30 minutes. The broth will thicken and become opaque.

Add salt and pepper to taste. If you made your own corn broth, you'll probably need at least a teaspoon of salt; if you used store-bought broth, you'll need less.

Serve with a slice of garlic bread or add a hard-boiled egg for extra protein.

$5 TOTAL
$1.25 / SERVING

Lightly Curried Butternut Squash Soup

FOR FOUR

Squash is almost the perfect vegetable for soup: it's flavorful and has a divinely smooth texture when cooked and pureed. Serve this soup to people who think they don't like squash or curry, and you'll change some minds. You can substitute any winter squash for the butternut; I just like butternut because it's faster to peel and chop than its many cousins.

1 butternut squash
or other winter squash
1 tbsp butter
1 medium onion, diced
1 green bell pepper, diced
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp coriander powder
1 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 can coconut milk
3 cups water
salt and pepper

OPTIONAL
sour cream
scallions
cilantro

To prepare the squash, peel off the tough skin with a potato peeler. Cut the squash in half lengthwise with a sharp chef's knife, then scoop out the seeds and gloop. (You can save the seeds for a tasty snack later, if you like: just clean the gloop off, then toast them.)

Next, slice off the stem and very bottom of the squash and throw them away. Take each half of the squash and place it face-down on a cutting board. Slice each across into ½" sticks, then turn each slice into cubes.

Put a large pot or Dutch oven on the stove on medium heat. Melt the butter and let the pot get hot. Add the onion, pepper, and garlic, then sauté for two minutes.

Add the cubed squash and spices and stir it all together. Put a lid on the pot and let it cook for another two minutes. Add the coconut milk and water and stir.

Bring the soup to a boil, then turn down the heat to low and let it cook for about 30 minutes, or until the squash is tender.

Once the squash is tender, taste the soup and add salt and pepper as needed. Soup usually needs a fair bit of salt, so be generous.

If you have an immersion blender, you can purée the soup in the pot. If you have a normal blender, wait until the soup has cooled before transferring it to the blender. Purée until smooth, then taste again and add any more salt and pepper it might need.

You can enjoy the soup as-is or serve it with another drizzle of coconut milk or a dollop of sour cream, plus some chopped scallions or cilantro.

$6 TOTAL
$1.50 / SERVING

Salad

There isn't much to a great salad: just fresh vegetables, crunchy stuff, plus a little something rich like cheese, nuts, a buttery crouton, or a creamy dressing. The dressing should be well seasoned with salt and have a nice hit of vinegar or citrus to bring out the other flavors. Don't bother with store-bought dressing. It usually tastes lousy and is full of cheap oils and chemicals; you can make better and cheaper dressing at home with just a few pantry items. Salad shouldn't be something you choke down or grudgingly serve as an afterthought. Make it something you look forward to by adding your favorite flavors to it.

Broiled Eggplant Salad

FOR TWO

Even if you aren't a big eggplant fan, you might enjoy this despite yourself. Broiled eggplant has a crunchy and meaty texture, and the tahini dressing makes the salad rich and creamy.

1 medium eggplant, sliced into circles
1 tbsp lemon juice
1 tbsp tahini
sprinkle of chili flakes (optional)
fresh dill, finely chopped (optional)
salt and pepper

Turn on your oven's broiler. Arrange the slices of eggplant on a baking sheet, then place them under the broiler for about 3 minutes. Watch them carefully. Once they begin to blacken, remove them from the oven and flip the slices over. Repeat the process on the other side. Once your eggplant is nicely charred, chop it into bite-sized pieces.

In a bowl, mix the tahini, lemon juice, and chili flakes (if using), plus plenty of salt and pepper. Add the eggplant and stir it around. Add more salt or lemon juice according to your taste, then top it with dill if available, and serve!

$4.50 TOTAL
$2.25 / SERVING

Kale Salad

FOR TWO, OR FOUR AS A SIDE

This kale is treated like romaine lettuce in a Caesar salad. The bitterness of the greens is delicious alongside the rich, fatty dressing. You could also use Swiss chard.

1 large bunch kale
2 cups bread cubes
2 tbsp butter (more as needed)
salt and pepper
Romano or Parmesan, freshly grated

DRESSING

1 egg yolk
2 tsp lemon juice
2 tsp Dijon mustard
1 clove garlic, finely grated
1 anchovy, finely chopped
3 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper

Start by making croutons (p. 106).

To make the dressing, drop the egg yolk into a large mixing bowl. Add the lemon juice, mustard, garlic, and anchovy. Whisk briskly until the dressing is light and frothy. Slowly add the olive oil, whisking the whole time. Once everything is incorporated, add the salt and pepper, then adjust to your taste. I like it very lemony.

Cut the kale leaves to remove the large stem from the center. (Lacinato kale, sometimes called Tuscan kale, has the easiest stems to remove.) Slice the leaves in half lengthwise, then cut into thin ribbons. Chopping the kale into small pieces disguises its tough texture.

Toss the kale in the bowl to coat it with dressing. Set aside for 10 minutes or leave in the fridge for a few hours. The kale will become tender as it marinates.

Before serving, toss in the croutons and top with Romano cheese.

$4.50 TOTAL
$2.25 / SERVING

$5.20 TOTAL
$2.60 / SERVING

Taco Salad

FOR TWO

This salad is a great use for leftover beans (or pulled pork)—crunchy, fresh, yet satisfying enough to be a whole meal. I like to make taco salad in a week where I've made a large batch of beans and I'm craving something fresh.

4 cups lettuce, chopped
1 cup beans, pulled pork, or ground beef
2 small tomatoes, chopped
½ cup corn, canned or fresh
2-3 scallions, finely chopped
1 cup tortilla chips, roughly crushed
sharp cheddar or queso fresco, for sprinkling

DRESSING

¼ cup sour cream or yogurt
juice of one lime
salt and pepper

ADDITIONS

cucumber
jalapeño
bell peppers
grated carrots
salsa

Mix up the dressing and taste it. Adjust the salt, pepper, and lime to your liking.

Mix the other ingredients in a large bowl. Pour the dressing over just before serving and toss to coat the salad evenly. Eat immediately, maybe with a few extra tortilla chips on the side.

Beet and Chickpea Salad

FOR TWO

This dish is spicy, crunchy, and almost certainly the pinkest salad you'll ever eat! Don't be scared.

2 to 3 beets, peeled and grated
1 cup chickpeas, cooked or canned
3 tbsp peanuts

DRESSING

1 tbsp lime juice
1 tsp chili sauce
1 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper

Peel the beets, removing the stems if necessary, then shred the beets with a box grater. Place the beets in a bowl along with the chickpeas and nuts.

Mix up the dressing ingredients in another small bowl and stir to combine. Taste and adjust the salt and pepper to your liking.

Add the dressing to the other bowl and mix up all the ingredients. Let it sit for about 5 minutes so that the flavors can soak into the vegetables and the beet juices can mingle with the dressing.

$3.50 TOTAL
$1.75 / SERVING

Cold (Spicy?) Noodles

FOR FOUR

On a hot day, this is all I want to eat. Cold but spicy food is refreshing and delicious in the summer. If you have some spice oil on hand, be sure to add it. It's amazing in this.

12 oz noodles (spaghetti, soba, or any Asian noodles)
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 bunch scallions, chopped
1 cucumber, finely chopped
salt and pepper

ADDITIONS:
spice oil (p. 120)
peanut sauce (p. 125)
grated carrot
shredded cabbage
bean sprouts
hard-boiled egg
chopped tomato

Prepare the noodles according to the package instructions. Rinse them under cold water and put them in a colander to drain.

Put the noodles in a bowl and add the soy sauce, spice oil if you have it, scallions, and cucumber (and any other additions). Mix it all together with a fork or a tongs. Taste it and add salt and pepper or more spice oil as needed.

Let the noodles sit in the fridge for about an hour if you can. The flavors will mingle and become more intense.

Think of this as a recipe that you can really make your own. Use whatever sauce or dressing you like and whatever vegetables you have around, or just a few scallions.

$5 TOTAL
$1.25 / SERVING

$3.20 TOTAL
$0.80 / SERVING

Broccoli Apple Salad

FOR FOUR

The texture of thinly sliced apple and broccoli is wonderfully crunchy, and the bitterness of the broccoli with the sweet and tart apples is delicious.

1 large crown and stem of broccoli
2 apples

DRESSING

1 lemon, juiced
1 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper

ALTERNATE DRESSING

1 tbsp yogurt
1 tsp olive oil
1 tsp lemon juice
1 tsp chopped fresh dill
salt and pepper

Slice the stem of the broccoli into ⅛" discs. If you can't get them that thin, don't worry, but the thinner the better if you have the patience! Once you reach the crown of the broccoli, cut each of the florets off and slice each of them as thinly as you can as well. Set the broccoli in a bowl.

Halve and core the apples, then place the apples flat side down on your cutting board to make them easier to slice. Slice the apples into ⅛" pieces as well, then dump them into the same bowl.

Choose either of the dressing options and prepare it by simply mixing the ingredients together in a small bowl. Taste it and season with more salt and pepper to match your preferences.

Pour the dressing over the bowl of vegetables and mix it all together. If you want to make the presentation nice, put a plate in the fridge for 10 minutes, then serve the salad piled as high and tight as you can manage.

Snacks & Small Bites

When cooking on a budget, snacks are often the first thing you shave away. If you're creative, though, you can make plenty of cheap, healthy and delightful snacks to enjoy in all seasons and on any occasion. (And remember, leftovers make great snacks, too!)

$1.50 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

IDEAS

Things On Toast

4 slices bread
2 tbsp butter
salt and pepper
topping
fried egg (optional)

I love bread, and toast in particular is my comfort food—I crave it when I'm sick or worn down. Here, I would like to suggest that you take some toast and put something tasty on it. That's it!

Certainly toast can feed a crowd, but I like this meal for times when I'm on my own and want a quick meal or snack. It's a great way to use leftovers or turn a side dish into a full meal.

What makes this more like a special dinner than a quick snack is the way you treat the bread—toasting it in the pan like a nice piece of fish.

A pile of sautéed or raw veggies over buttered, toasty bread is the perfect meal for one and a great way to try a new vegetable. I've suggested a few other toast variations on the following pages, but you can use pretty much any veggie dish from this book or invent your own. Add a fried egg on top if you're extra hungry.

Melt ½ tablespoon of butter in a small pan on medium heat. Place the two slices of bread in the pan and let them cook for about 2 minutes, then lift them with a spatula to check whether they're golden brown underneath. When they are, flip 'em over.

Add the rest of the butter to the pan to make sure the second side of the toast becomes just as golden as the first. Sprinkle the top of the bread with salt and pepper. Once the second side is golden, set the bread on a plate to await its topping.

For the toppings, you can go raw or, as I most often do, sauté veggies or beans with flavors like garlic and chilies, olives and and dill, ginger and turmeric, or any other classic combination (p. 126).

Instead of toast, the topping ideas on the next few pages would also be great over rice or any other grain, in a tortilla, tossed with pasta, or even on a pizza. It's up to you!

$2 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

PEAS AND LEMON: This is like a less-salty, more-rustic version of the British classic mushy peas. Add a bit of olive oil to a pan on medium heat. Drop in the peas along with 2 tablespoons of water so that they can steam a bit. Leave them until they turn bright green. Sprinkle with lemon zest and Parmesan, then remove the peas from the heat and mash them a bit with the back of a fork, either in the pan or in a bowl. Pile onto toast and enjoy!

1 tsp olive oil
1 cup peas, fresh or frozen
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp lemon juice
Romano or Parmesan, freshly grated
salt and pepper

$5 TOTAL
$2.50 / SERVING

ASIAN GREENS GRA PROW: This works with any Asian green, from bok choy to tatsoi to gai lan. Splash the oil in a pan on medium heat. Sauté the garlic for 2 minutes, then add the ginger, soy sauce, and the stem part of the greens. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes, until almost tender. Add the leafy part of the greens and cook for 2 more minutes. Turn off the heat and mix in the Thai basil. Taste and add salt and pepper, unless the soy sauce is salty enough on its own.

1 bunch Asian greens, stem separated from leaves
1 tsp vegetable oil
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp fresh ginger, grated
2 tsp soy sauce
1 handful Thai basil
salt and pepper

CARAMELIZED ONIONS AND CHEDDAR: Melt the butter in a pan on low heat. Add the onions and let them cook slowly, about 20 minutes. As the onions darken, stir them occasionally, adding a bit of water to loosen up the sticky onion bits on the bottom and keep them from burning. Leave the onions until they're dark purple. They will now be sweet and caramelized. Spread them over toast and top with slices of aged cheddar, salt, and pepper. Put the toast back in the pan and cover with a lid until the cheese is bubbly, then serve it up.

1 tbsp butter
1 red onion, thinly sliced
sharp cheddar, thinly sliced
salt and pepper

$2 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

ROASTED VEGETABLES: This is one of my favorite ways to eat leftover roasted vegetables. Simply create a ridiculously tall pile of vegetables like the winter squash and leeks pictured here, then sprinkle with grated Romano or Parmesan and fresh pepper. You can also add any sauce you have on hand or sprinkle crushed nuts on top.

roasted vegetables (p. 88)
Romano or Parmesan, freshly grated
pepper

$2 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

$3 TOTAL
$1.50 / SERVING

SALTY BROCCOLI: Warm up the oil in a pan on medium heat. Add the garlic and chili flakes and cook for 2 minutes, until they smell great but are not yet brown. Add the anchovy and cook for another minute. Add the broccoli and about ¼ cup of water. Cover the pan to steam for 3 minutes, then toss and cook for 2 more minutes, until the broccoli is tender and the water is gone. Spoon onto toast; top with cheese, salt, and pepper!

1 tsp olive oil
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp chili flakes
1 anchovy, finely chopped
1 crown and stem of broccoli, chopped
Romano or Parmesan, freshly grated
salt and pepper

$3.50 TOTAL
$1.75 / SERVING

BROILED EGGPLANT SALAD: Here's yet another use for leftovers—or just a way to make a great salad more substantial. Simply dollop the broiled eggplant salad onto toast, then add some herbs or greens to the top for a fresh counterpoint, along with a bit of cheese.

broiled eggplant salad (p. 31)
fresh herbs or greens
any cheese, crumbled or grated

BLACK-EYED PEAS AND COLLARDS: Oh man, is there anything more comforting than beans on toast? Friends and family will be delighted even if you're secretly using up leftovers. To make the meal a little more fancy, use jalapeño-cheddar scones instead of toast.

black-eyed peas and collards (p. 74)
jalapeño-cheddar scones (p. 20) (optional)

$2 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

SPINACH AND CHICKPEA: This is a popular tapas dish in Spain. The recipe makes a little more topping than you need for two pieces of toast—but hey, leftovers are tasty. Melt the butter in a pan on medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for 2 minutes. Add the chickpeas and spinach, then cook for 2 to 5 minutes, until the spinach cooks down but is still bright green. Taste and add salt and pepper, then spoon it over toast. If you have it, sprinkle with smoked paprika.

1 tsp butter
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup cooked chickpeas
1 bunch spinach
salt and pepper
smoked paprika (optional)

$4.50 TOTAL
$2.25 / SERVING

METHOD

Leftover Polenta Fries

This is more of a method than a recipe. These are so crunchy and savory that you just might find yourself making batches of polenta just for the leftovers.

polenta (p. 82)
1-2 tsp vegetable oil
salt

The night before, take your leftover cooked polenta and put it in a baking pan or flat piece of Tupperware. Anything with a flat surface on the bottom will do. Smooth the polenta down so it's even and flat like you would if you were making brownies. Cover and leave it in the fridge over night.

The next day take the polenta out of the fridge. It should be one hardened mass. Carefully remove it from the pan. Slice the polenta into strips like french fries, of about 2" in length.

Put a pan on medium-high heat. Add some vegetable oil to the pan and let if get hot for about 30 seconds. Add the polenta strips. Sprinkle with salt to your taste. Fry until golden brown on all sides, using tongs or a spatula to gently flip them.

Serve with salsa (p. 121) and sour cream, ketchup, raita (p. 122), tzatziki (p. 123), bean dip or anything you like. They're great with a bowl of chili too in place of corn bread.

$3.50 TOTAL
$1.75 / SERVING

Green Chili and Cheddar Quesadillas

FOR TWO

These are a great snack or a quick meal, and you can add pretty much anything to them!

4 tortillas
½ cup sharp cheddar, grated
½ cup green chilies, canned or fresh, chopped
1 tbsp cilantro, chopped

Spread ¼ cup of green chilies evenly over one tortilla. Sprinkle ¼ cup of cheese over the chilies, then top with half the cilantro. Place another tortilla on top of each prepared tortilla to form a quesadilla. Repeat!

Place a large, non-stick pan on medium heat. Once it's hot, add a quesadilla and toast for about 1 minute. Flip it over and brown the second side, then do the same for the other quesadilla. Slice into triangles and enjoy with some fresh salsa (p. 121) and sour cream.

Poutine

FOR TWO, OR FOUR TO SIX AS A SIDE

Poutine isn't an everyday meal, but it's a favorite. Since I don't like deep-frying at home, I bake the fries; they still get crispy without the fuss of frying.

Montreal-style poutine is made with vegetable gravy, as in this recipe, but you can also make your favorite beef or turkey gravy.

Of course, proper poutine uses cheese curds, and if you can find them do use those, but fresh mozzarella works for me. It has the same spongy quality, just maybe with a little less squeak. This recipe does comes out a little more expensive than you would think because of the fresh mozzarella. If you use less or skip the cheese entirely, you can cut the price in half.

2-3 medium Russet potatoes, sliced into sticks
2 tbsp vegetable oil
salt and pepper
scallions, chopped
6 oz fresh mozzarella, diced

GRAVY

2 tbsp butter
1 shallot or 3 scallions, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 tbsp all-purpose flour
1½ cups vegetable broth
1 tsp soy sauce
½ tsp cayenne pepper
salt and pepper
6 leaves fresh sage, finely chopped (optional)

Set the oven to 400 F.

Pour 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil onto a baking sheet. Spread the oil around, then spread out the sticks of sliced potato. Pour the rest of the oil over the top and sprinkle generously with salt and pepper. Use your hands to ensure the potatoes are coated with oil, salt, and pepper, and evenly spread across the pan. Place them in the oven and bake for 20 minutes.

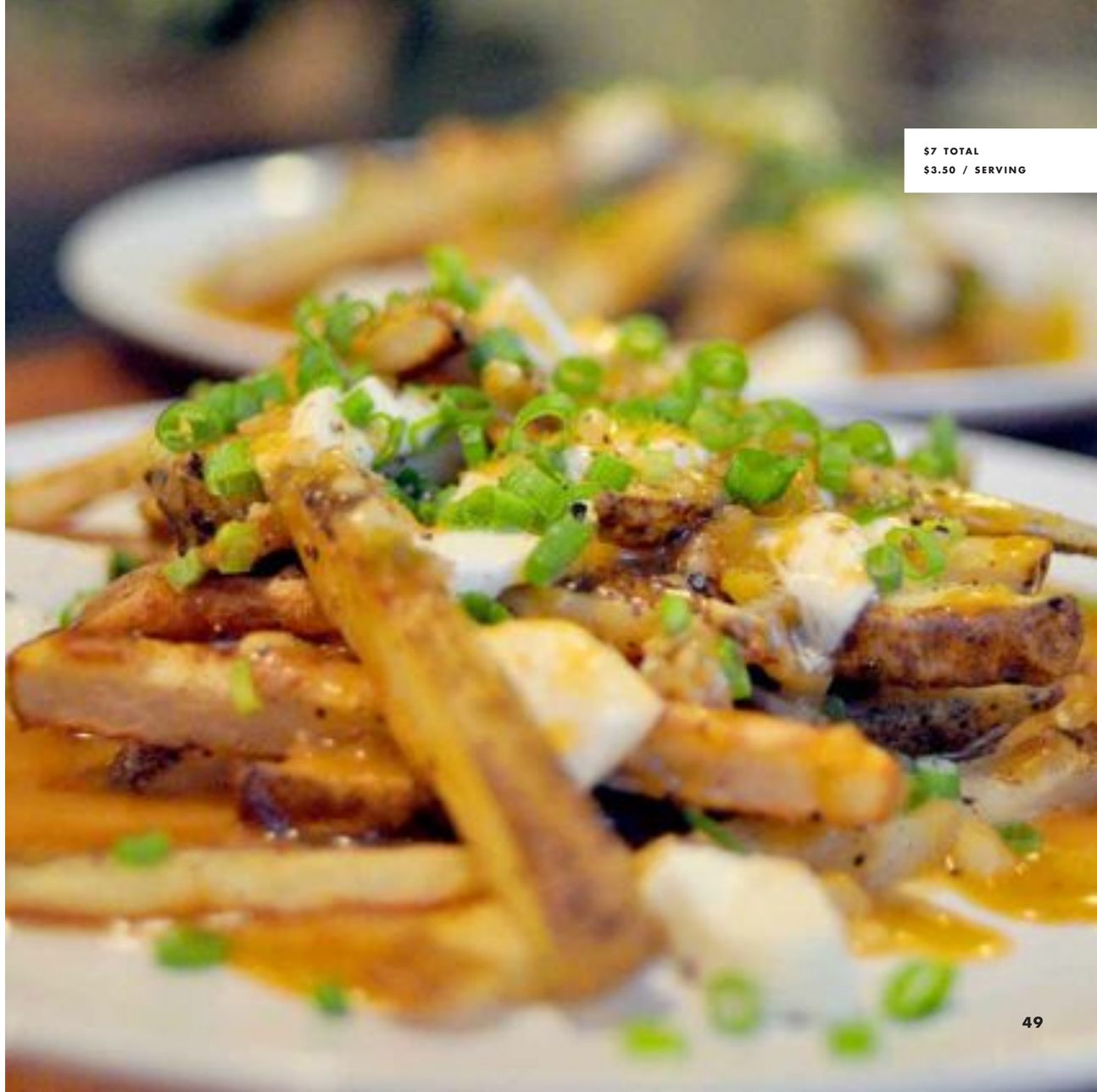
Meanwhile, prepare the gravy. Melt the butter in a saucepan on medium heat. Add the shallot and garlic. Let them cook for 2 minutes until translucent, but not brown. Add the flour and quickly stir with a spoon. Add a little broth if gets too clumpy.

Let the mixture cook until it turns light brown. Add the vegetable broth, soy sauce, and cayenne pepper. Bring the gravy to a boil, then turn down the heat and let it cook for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Taste it, adding salt and pepper as needed. Turn down the heat to very low, just enough to keep the gravy warm until the fries come out of the oven.

Dice the mozzarella.

After the fries have baked for 20 minutes, remove them from the oven. Lift them with a spatula and test their tenderness with a fork. If it goes through easily, the fries are ready. If you want them a little more crispy, flip them over and put them back in the over for a few more minutes.

Once they're done, pile one layer of fries onto a plate. Top with cheese and then the hot gravy. Repeat with a second layer before sprinkling with scallions and more freshly ground black pepper.



$7 TOTAL
$3.50 / SERVING

$1 TOTAL
$0.25 / SERVING

IDEAS

Popcorn!

Popcorn is such a great snack. It's easy to forget how easy and cheap it is to prepare at home. Try some different toppings! I've suggested a few on the opposite page.

1/3 cup popcorn
2 tbsp vegetable oil
2 tbsp butter, melted
salt

Place a large pot with a tight-fitting lid on the stove. Pour in the vegetable oil, then the popcorn kernels. Put the lid on and turn the heat to medium.

Using pot holders or oven mitts, occasionally shake the pot from side to side to make sure the kernels are evenly distributed in the oil. Once the popcorn begins to pop, turn the heat down to medium-low and gently shake again.

Once the popping slows down to 5 to 10 seconds between pops, turn the heat off. Wait until you're sure the corn has stopped popping and remove the lid.

Move the popcorn to a bowl and pour butter, salt, and other spices or toppings overtop. Gently toss to coat it evenly.

This recipe makes about 10 to 12 cups of popped popcorn—enough for four people. Eat it while it's hot!

SCALLION AND CILANTRO

TURMERIC AND CORIANDER

SPICE OIL (P. 120)

PARM AND BLACK PEPPER

CAYENNE AND SMOKED PAPRIKA

BROWN SUGAR AND ORANGE ZEST

CHILI POWDER AND LIME

PARM AND OREGANO

Brussels Sprout Hash and Eggs

FOR TWO

This is a great light lunch or side dish. The Brussels sprouts get salty and tangy from the olive and lemon, then crispy and caramelized on the bottom. Mix in the little bit of fat from the egg yolk, and wow is this delicious.

4 cups Brussels sprouts, finely chopped
salt and pepper
1 tbsp butter
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
6 olives, finely chopped
lemon juice
2 eggs

Chop off the ends of the sprouts. Slice them in half, then finely shred each half. Place the shreds in a bowl and sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Melt the butter in a non-stick pan on medium-high heat. Swirl it around to coat the pan. Add the Brussels sprout shreds and garlic, then leave it to cook for about 1 minute. Mix it up and toss it around. Add the olives and mix again.

Crack the eggs into opposite sides of the pan. Sprinkle them with salt and pepper. Pour in 2 tablespoons of water and cover with a lid. Let the eggs steam, undisturbed, for 2 minutes.

Once the whites of the eggs are cooked through, turn off the heat and sprinkle everything with lemon juice.

$2.80 TOTAL
$1.40 / SERVING

$4 TOTAL
$1 / SERVING

Mexican Street Corn

FOR FOUR

This recipe takes fresh, sweet summer corn—already amazing—and adds salt, tang, and spice to the experience. If you have an outdoor grill, prepare the corn that way, but for those without, a broiler is a great shortcut!

4 cobs corn
4 tbsp mayonnaise
½ cup cojita, queso blanco, feta, Romano or Parmesan, grated
chili powder
1 lime, sliced into wedges

Turn your oven's broiler up to high.

Peel off the outer layers of the corn and clean off all the corn silk. Leave the green ends attached for a convenient handhold.

Place the cobs on a baking pan under the broiler for 2 to 3 minutes, then rotate them and repeat until they're brown and toasty all the way around. The broiling shouldn't take more than 10 minutes total.

Working quickly, spread a tablespoon of mayonnaise over each cob, lightly coating every kernel. Next, sprinkle the cheese all over the corn. It should stick fairly easily to the mayonnaise, but you'll probably get a little messy coating them thoroughly.

Sprinkle chili powder over the corn, but not too heavy or it'll be gritty. Use any chili powder you like; ancho or cayenne are great.

Lastly, squeeze lime juice all over and serve hot!

I like to serve these with all kinds of toppings, usually leftovers from other meals. Give it a try—fill them with a bit of roast chicken, beans and cheese, corn and tomatoes, whatever you have around. This can be a great meal for one or a fun experience with a group.

4 large sweet potatoes
salt and pepper
¼ cup sour cream
½ bunch scallions, finely chopped

Turn the oven to 400 F. Wash and scrub your sweet potatoes and stab them a few times with a fork. Place them on a baking sheet and slide it into the oven.

Let them bake for 60 to 75 minutes. Because the sizes of sweet potatoes differ greatly, check them after an hour by stabbing them with a long knife. If there's no resistance, they're ready. If not, give them extra time.

Let cool for 15 minutes. Make a long cut along the top of each potato and open them gently, beating with a fork to fluff up the soft, orange middle.

Sprinkle salt and pepper on each potato and serve. Let each person add sour cream and scallions (or more salt and pepper) to their taste.

$4.80 TOTAL
$1.20 / SERVING

Jacket Sweet Potatoes

FOR FOUR

Cornmeal Crusted Veggies

FOR FOUR TO SIX AS A SIDE DISH

These are kind of like having veggie french fries. The cornmeal makes them super crunchy, and they're great with a dipping sauce. Might I suggest peanut sauce (p. 125)? This breading process can be done with almost any vegetable; some of my favorites include zucchini wedges, green peppers, and cooked winter squash. It's sort of like fried green tomatoes or okra, but this baked version skips the expense and mess of the oil, yet keeps the crunch.

½ lb green beans, stems cut off
½ cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs
¼ cup milk
1 cup cornmeal
1 tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp paprika
½ tsp garlic powder

ALTERNATIVES

zucchini
green pepper sticks
winter squash
cauliflower florets
broccoli florets
okra
carrot sticks

Heat the oven to 450 F.

Set up your breading station! On one plate, spread out the flour. Crack both eggs into a bowl, add the milk, and mix lightly with a fork. On another plate, spread the cornmeal, salt, black pepper, paprika, and garlic powder. Mix the plate with your fingers.

Spread a small amount of oil or butter across a baking sheet.

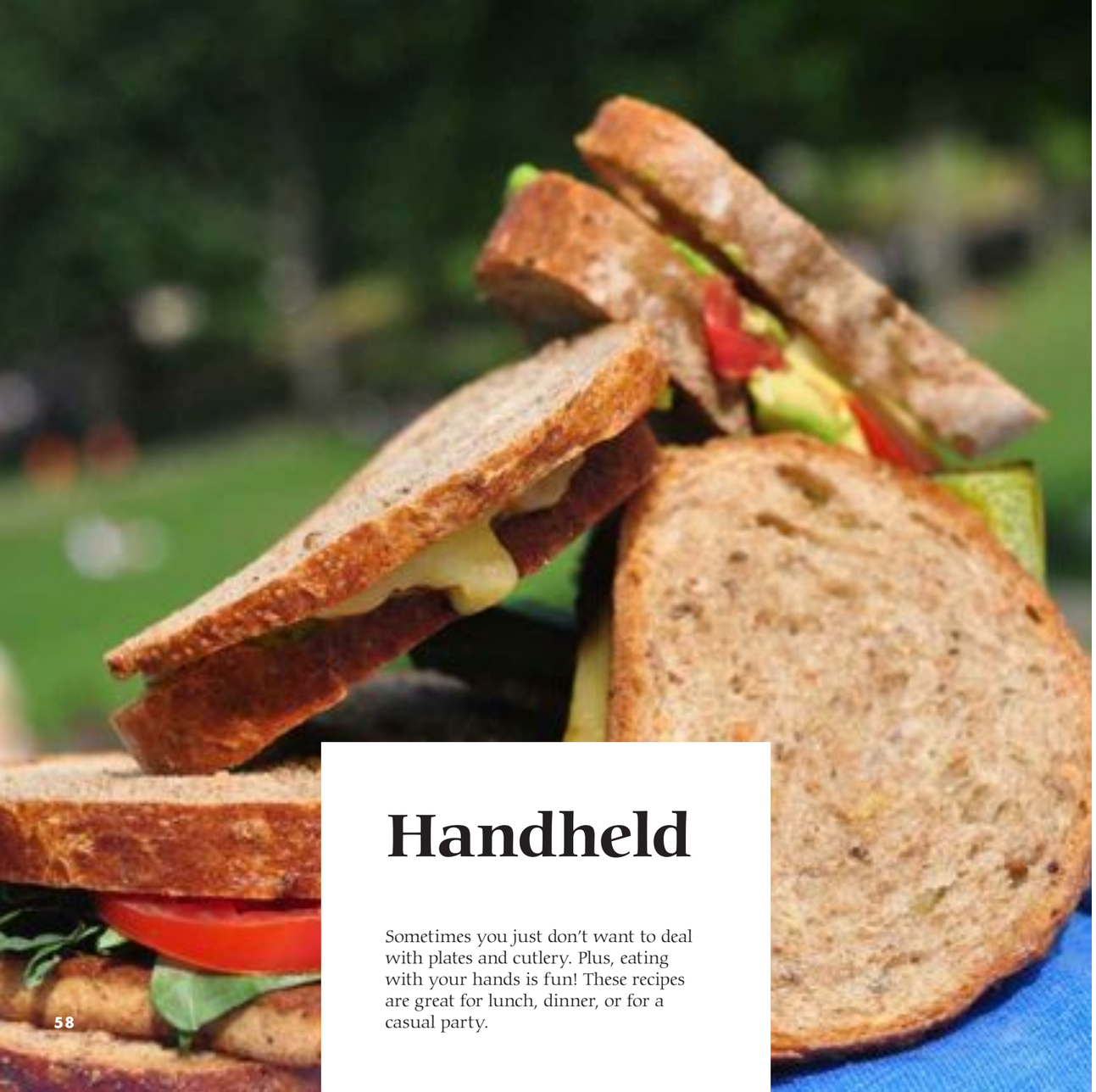
A few at a time, take the green beans and dredge them in the flour. Next, transfer the flour-covered beans to the egg mixture. Cover the beans lightly with egg mixture, being careful to shake off any excess egg. Then transfer to the cornmeal mixture and coat them evenly.

Carefully spread the crusted green beans onto the baking sheet. Repeat until you've done them all. If you run out of any of the three mixtures, just mix up a bit more.

Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until golden and crispy. Enjoy hot with your favorite dipping sauce!

Pictured are green peppers and green beans.

$2.50 TOTAL
$0.60 / SERVING



Handheld

Sometimes you just don't want to deal with plates and cutlery. Plus, eating with your hands is fun! These recipes are great for lunch, dinner, or for a casual party.

Cauliflower Tacos

FOR TWO TO THREE

This is one of my favorite ways to use roasted cauliflower other than eating it straight. It's a delicious change from the usual vegetable taco offerings. Just look at all those crunchy bits!

- roasted cauliflower (p. 92)
- 6 tortillas
- ½ cup cheese, grated
- ½ to 1 cup salsa (p. 121) or sauce of choice

Warm up the tortillas in the microwave for 20 to 30 seconds, or put them in a warm oven covered with a towel while you prepare everything else.

Place two to three tortillas on each plate and fill with a generous serving of cauliflower.

Sprinkle the grated cheese overtop and drizzle with salsa or sauce of your choice. Enjoy!

$6 TOTAL
$2 - $3 / SERVING

Potato and Kale Rolls with Raita

FOR FOUR

These are a great meal to make when you have leftover roti and raita. The filling comes together in minutes and could be anything, but potatoes and greens are tasty and filling.

8 roti (p. 104)
2 large or 4 medium potatoes, chopped
1 bunch kale or spinach, chopped with stems removed
1 tbsp ghee or butter
1 tsp cumin seeds
½ cup onion, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tbsp ginger, finely grated
1 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp coriander powder
1 tsp cayenne powder
raita (p. 122)
cilantro

Put a skillet on medium heat and add the ghee or butter. (Ghee, which is traditional in Indian cooking, is just butter with the milk solids removed, and it can withstand higher temperatures than butter without burning.)

Once the butter is hot, add the cumin seeds and let them sizzle for 5 seconds before adding the diced onion. Let the onion cook for 2 minutes, stirring occasionally.

In a small bowl, mix the garlic, ginger, turmeric, coriander, cayenne powder, salt, and 1 tablespoon of water.

Add the spices to the onion mixture and mix, cooking for another 2 minutes. It will smell strongly aromatic. This step is important because the spices become toasted and release their flavor.

Next, add the potatoes. Stir to coat them with the onions and spices. Add about a cup of water and cover the pan with a lid. Let it cook for about 10 minutes, checking occasionally to stir and make sure nothing is burning. Add more water as needed. You want the final mixture to be only a bit moist, but the water helps everything cook evenly.

Test the potatoes with a fork: if you can easily pierce them, they're ready. Once they are, add the kale and stir until the kale is wilted. Taste and add more salt if needed.

To assemble the rolls, scoop ⅛ of the mixture into the center of a roti, distributing it in an even line. Roll it up.

Serve two roti per person with cilantro and a generous dollop of raita, either over the top or on the side.

$5.25 TOTAL
$0.66 / ROLL

$9 TOTAL
$2.25 / PIZZA

Potato Leek Pizza

MAKES FOUR PIZZAS

Obviously you should just make all kinds of pizza. Seriously, do it. Make it a Thursday-night tradition and an excuse to use up leftovers. *This* pizza, for one, is a fun variation that confounds expectations—proof that, indeed, anything is good on pizza!

- pizza dough (p. 105)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 Russet potato or 3 small potatoes, sliced into thin circles
- 3 leeks, sliced into circles
- salt and pepper
- 1 lb fresh mozzarella, shredded

Turn the oven to 500 F.

Put a large pan on medium heat and add 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Once the oil is hot, add the potato slices evenly to the pan, making sure each slice is touching the bottom. (If you slice them thin enough, they'll turn out almost like little chips.)

Let them cook until they start to crinkle around the edges and turn brown. Flip them over and brown the other side, then move them to a bowl. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, then toss with your hands (after they cool down!) to make sure they're evenly coated.

Heat up another tablespoon of oil in the same pan, then toss in the leek slices, stirring occasionally until they're soft, about 5 minutes. Toss them with the potato slices and add a bit more salt and pepper.

Clear a space on the counter and sprinkle with flour. Divide your dough into 4 equal pieces. One at a time, stretch the doughs into crusts. You can use a rolling pin or just slowly use your fingers and hands. I like to make mine really thin and big, but it's up to you how thick to make it.

Once the crust is the desired shape and thickness, dust the back of a cookie sheet with flour or cornmeal to keep the crust from sticking, then place it the dough on the sheet.

Now layer it with ¼ of the potato and leek mixture and ¼ of the shredded mozzarella. Bake for 5 to 8 minutes. If it's your first time, simply keep an eye on the oven to see when the pizza's done. The crust should be light brown and the cheese melted.

Repeat the process until you've baked all your pizzas. If your oven is big enough, you can of course do more than one pizza at a time.

Broccoli Rabe and Mozzarella Calzones

MAKES FOUR CALZONES

Calzones are pizza in a slightly different form—a form that lets you get stuff in more filling without weighing down the crust. Broccoli rabe is great, but you can use any bitter green, or even broccoli or cauliflower. You'll love these crusty pockets full of oozy goodness!

pizza dough (p. 105)
1 tbsp olive oil
1 large bunch broccoli rabe, chopped
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp chili flakes
2 anchovies, finely chopped (optional)
salt and pepper
2 cups grated mozzarella cheese

Turn the oven on to 500 F (or as hot as your oven gets). Sprinkle a small amount of flour or cornmeal over a baking sheet and set aside.

Place a large pan on medium heat and add the olive oil. Once the oil is hot, add the tough stem ends of the broccoli rabe and cook for 2 minutes. Next, add the rest of the broccoli rabe, including the leafy parts, along with the garlic, chili flakes, and anchovies. Give the ingredients a stir and let it cook for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add salt and pepper to taste. The broccoli rabe is done when the stems are tender. Set the filling aside.

Divide the pizza dough into 4 equal pieces. Sprinkle flour over the countertop and place one of the four pieces of dough on it. Using your hands or a rolling pin, roll out the dough as you would for pizza (p. 62).

Roll the dough out quite thin. Pile ¼ of your broccoli rabe mixture and ½ cup of mozzarella onto one side of the circle, leaving a lip around the edge.

Gather up the half of the dough that isn't weighed down with filling and fold it overtop. Pinch the edges of the dough together to create a half-moon shape. Place it carefully on the prepared baking sheet and repeat until you have four calzones.

Bake for 6 to 8 minutes or until the calzones are golden-brown on the outside. Be careful when you bite into them—they'll be hot!

$6 TOTAL
$1.50 / CALZONE

IDEAS

Leftovers

Leftovers are convenient, but can seem unappealing, limp, and cold after sitting in the fridge for a couple of days. That's why the sandwich, the wrap, and the taco are your friend. Here are just a few ideas for how to give leftovers a makeover very quickly for a whole new meal!

TOMATO SCRAMBLED EGGS WRAP (P. 11)
Throw the tomato eggs into a wrap and add some roasted potatoes or rice for bulk.

TOAST TOPPINGS ON ANYTHING (P. 42-45)
Any of the toast toppings would work in a wrap, as a calzone filling, or as a pizza topping.

BAKED SWEET POTATOES SPREAD (P. 55)
Mash up leftover baked sweet potatoes, then spread them in a bacon sandwich for a sweet counterpoint.

CAULIFLOWER TACOS (P. 59)
Tacos are the perfect re-use of roasted cauliflower.

CHANA MASALA WRAP (P. 72)
Sounds strange, but spread some herbed mayo on the wrap and then pile in the chana masala.

BLACK-EYED PEAS AND COLLARDS WRAP (P. 74)
Fold the black-eyed peas and collards into a wrap with a little hot sauce or some tzatziki.

VEGETABLE JAMBALAYA BURRITO (P. 76)
Add some salsa or any leftover beans.

CAULIFLOWER CHEESE SANDWICH (P. 81)
Add some crunchy greens and mustard. Yum!

ROASTED VEGETABLES SANDWICH (P. 88)
Add some extra spices or sauces to liven up the vegetables and grill the bread for some crunch.

ROASTED POTATOES AND CHILIES (P. 90)
This dish is great in a taco—just add a little salsa and grated cheese. I like green salsa here.

TILAPIA TACO (P. 96)
For a makeshift fish taco, chop up some crunchy cabbage and cilantro.

Dinner

My favorite meal of the day. For me, eating dinner indicates that the hard work is done: it's time for family, relaxing, and the more optional endeavors. A great dinner is an opportunity to show love to those you are cooking for and to yourself.

$3.50 TOTAL
$1.17 / SERVING

Creamy Zucchini Fettuccine

FOR THREE

Zucchini and summer squash are so abundant in the summer months. This simple pasta is like a lighter, brighter fettuccine alfredo. It also comes together in no time—the veggies will be ready by the time your pasta is cooked. You'll love it, I promise.

- ½ lb fettuccine
- 4 tbsp butter
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ½ tsp chili flakes
- 2 small zucchini, finely diced
- 1 lemon, zested
- ¼ cup cream
- ½ cup Romano or Parmesan, grated
- salt and pepper
- basil, finely chopped (optional)

Bring a pot of water to boil over high heat. Salt the water liberally. This is how pasta gets salted, so don't be shy! Most won't end up in the pasta.

Cook the pasta according to the package directions. I prefer my pasta with some bite, so I drain the pasta just before it's finished so it doesn't get mushy when I add it to the vegetable pan to cook slightly more.

Meanwhile, melt a tablespoon of butter in a pan on medium heat. Add the garlic and chili flakes. Let them sizzle for 30 seconds to a minute, then add the zucchini. Stir the vegetables to coat them. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until some of the water has cooked off and the veggies are tender when stabbed with a fork. Young summer zucchini doesn't need much cooking. Add the lemon zest. Stir!

Drain the cooked fettuccine and add it to the zucchini pan along with the rest of the butter, the cream, and most of the Romano cheese. Toss the fettuccine around the pan to get everything mixed. Add salt to taste and lots of freshly ground pepper. Top with a bit more cheese and serve immediately.

Pasta with Eggplant and Tomato

FOR TWO

This is similar to a traditional pasta alla norma, but without anchovies and ricotta salata. I like to use a tubular pasta for this dish, but you can use anything, even spaghetti. The eggplant and tomatoes come together into a sauce that is thick and jammy and savory.

½ lb pasta (rigatoni or similar)
2 tbsp olive oil
1 large eggplant, cubed
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
½ tsp chili flakes
2 cups canned tomatoes, finely diced
¼ cup Romano or Parmesan, freshly grated
salt and pepper
basil, finely chopped (optional)

Put a pot of water on high heat and add a good shake of salt. Bring it to a boil and cook the pasta according to the package instructions.

While the water is coming to a boil, splash the olive oil into a wide pan on medium-high heat. Let it get hot. Add the eggplant cubes and sprinkle them with salt, then cook for about 5 minutes. If the eggplant starts to look too dry, add a bit of water.

Once the cubes are a little brown on all sides, add the garlic and chili flakes and stir. Add the tomatoes and cook for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Again, if it looks too dry, add a bit of water. Everything will shrink up and become a sort of loose, thick sauce. Add half the cheese and half the basil, if you have it.

Once the pasta is cooked, drain it and add it to the saucepan. Toss everything together, then turn off the heat. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve it in bowls sprinkled with more Romano and basil.

$5 TOTAL
$2.50 / SERVING

$3 TOTAL
$1.50 / SERVING

Chana Masala

FOR TWO

This Indian chickpea dish is a staple in my home. If you don't have cooked chickpeas around, you can use canned, but it will cost about $1 more.

- ½ tbsp ghee or ½ tbsp butter plus a splash of olive oil
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- ½ cup onion, diced
- 1 tsp garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tsp ginger, grated
- ½ jalapeño, finely diced
- 3 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp turmeric
- ¼ tsp cayenne powder
- ½ tsp garam masala powder
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 cup canned, puréed tomatoes
- 2½ cups cooked chickpeas, drained
- ½ cup water

GARNISH

- cilantro
- yogurt

Measure out all the spices except the cumin seeds and put them in a small bowl.

Let the ghee (clarified butter) melt in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. (Ghee is the traditional Indian choice, but you can substitute butter and a splash of olive oil if you can't find ghee.) Once the ghee begins to sizzle, add the cumin seeds and stir for about 5 seconds. Add the onion and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the ginger and jalapeño and cook for 1 more minute. Add the spices and then the puréed tomatoes. Mix, then put a lid on the pan and let everything cook down for 5 to 10 minutes.

Once the tomato has reduced and the ghee starts to separate from the sauce, add the chickpeas and water. Mix, then bring it to a boil before reducing to a simmer. Cook for 10 minutes, then squish a few chickpeas with a spoon to thicken the sauce. Garnish with yogurt and cilantro. For a full meal, serve over rice or with roti.

Black-Eyed Peas and Collards

FOR FOUR

This is similar to the southern classic Hoppin' John. If you have them, you can add more vegetables to the base along with the onion—celery, carrot, green pepper, and some canned tomato would all be great in this. If you want to skip the bacon, just add smoked paprika to replace the smoky flavor.

1 cup dried black-eyed peas
1 tbsp butter
1 large onion, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
3 strips bacon, cut into small pieces
1 bay leaf
1 large bunch collards
salt and pepper

Soak the black-eyed peas overnight in 4 cups of water.

Melt the butter in a large saucepan on medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, bacon, and bay leaf. Cover the pan with a lid and leave it for 2 minutes. Stir occasionally and cook until the onions are translucent and the bacon is starting to be crispy. Drain the peas and pour them into the saucepan. Cover them with water and turn the heat down to medium-low. Cook for 30 minutes to 2 hours. The cooking time will depend on how old the peas are, which is difficult to predict. The peas are done when you can easily squish them on the countertop with the back of a spoon. Check on them every half hour or so, and if water boils off, add more to cover them.

While the peas cook, line up several collards leaves on your cutting board and slice the tough central stem away from the leaves. Discard the stems. Thoroughly wash the collards, then chop them into bite-sized pieces. Alternately, use your hands to tear the collards into small pieces.

Once the peas are cooked, add the collards to the pot and put the lid back on. Add 1 teaspoon of salt and some freshly ground pepper, then stir. Taste the liquid and peas and add more salt as needed. Cover the pan with a lid and leave for about 10 to 15 minutes. Once the collards are tender, turn off the heat.

Serve this over rice or any other grain, or with some toast or flatbread.

$5 TOTAL
$1.25 / SERVING

$3.90 TOTAL
$0.65 / SERVING

Vegetable Jambalaya

FOR SIX

I don't make jambalaya exactly the way they do down south, but this vegetable-heavy version is faster and just as good—a great, throw-everything-in-the-pot kind of meal. It's spicy, savory and deeply satisfying. The leftovers are great for making burritos or warmed up with a fried egg on top.

Start with the oil in a large high-sided saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onion, pepper, and celery, then cook for about 5 minutes, until they become translucent but not brown.

Add the rest of the ingredients except for the rice and broth. Let everything cook for about 1 minute to let some of the tomato juices release.

Add the rice and slowly pour in the broth. Reduce the heat to medium and let the dish cook until the rice absorbs all the liquid. It should take about 20 to 25 minutes.

If you're using any of the additions, throw them in at about the 15-minute mark to let them warm up.

2 tbsp vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 green bell pepper, chopped
3 stalks celery, chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
½ small green chili, finely chopped
2 large tomatoes, chopped
2 bay leaves
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp cayenne pepper
½ tsp dried thyme
½ tsp dried oregano
1 tsp salt
1 tsp freshly ground pepper
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce or soy sauce
¾ cup long grain rice
3 cups vegetable broth or chicken stock

ADDITIONS

slices of fried sausage
shrimp
leftover meat, tofu, or beans

Savory Summer Cobbler

FOR FOUR

Celebrate summer's most ubiquitous vegetables, tomato and zucchini, with a crunchy Southern biscuit topping.

3-4 medium zucchini or summer squash, chopped into bite-sized pieces
3-4 large tomatoes, canned or fresh, chopped into bite-sized pieces
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
4 scallions, finely chopped
1 lemon, zested
¼ cup fresh basil (optional)
1 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper

TOPPING

1½ cups all-purpose or whole-wheat flour
½ cup cornmeal
3 tbsp baking powder
½ tsp salt
1 tsp freshly ground pepper
1 tsp smoked paprika
½ cup sharp cheddar, grated
½ cup butter
1 cup milk

Put the butter for the topping in the freezer for 30 minutes. Set the oven to 425 F.

Lightly oil an 8" x 10" baking dish (or any baking dish that will fit the mixture) and pile the vegetables, garlic, scallions, lemon zest, and basil into the dish. Pour the olive oil, salt, and pepper overtop and mix everything together with your hands. Bake the vegetables for 25 minutes while you prepare the biscuit topping.

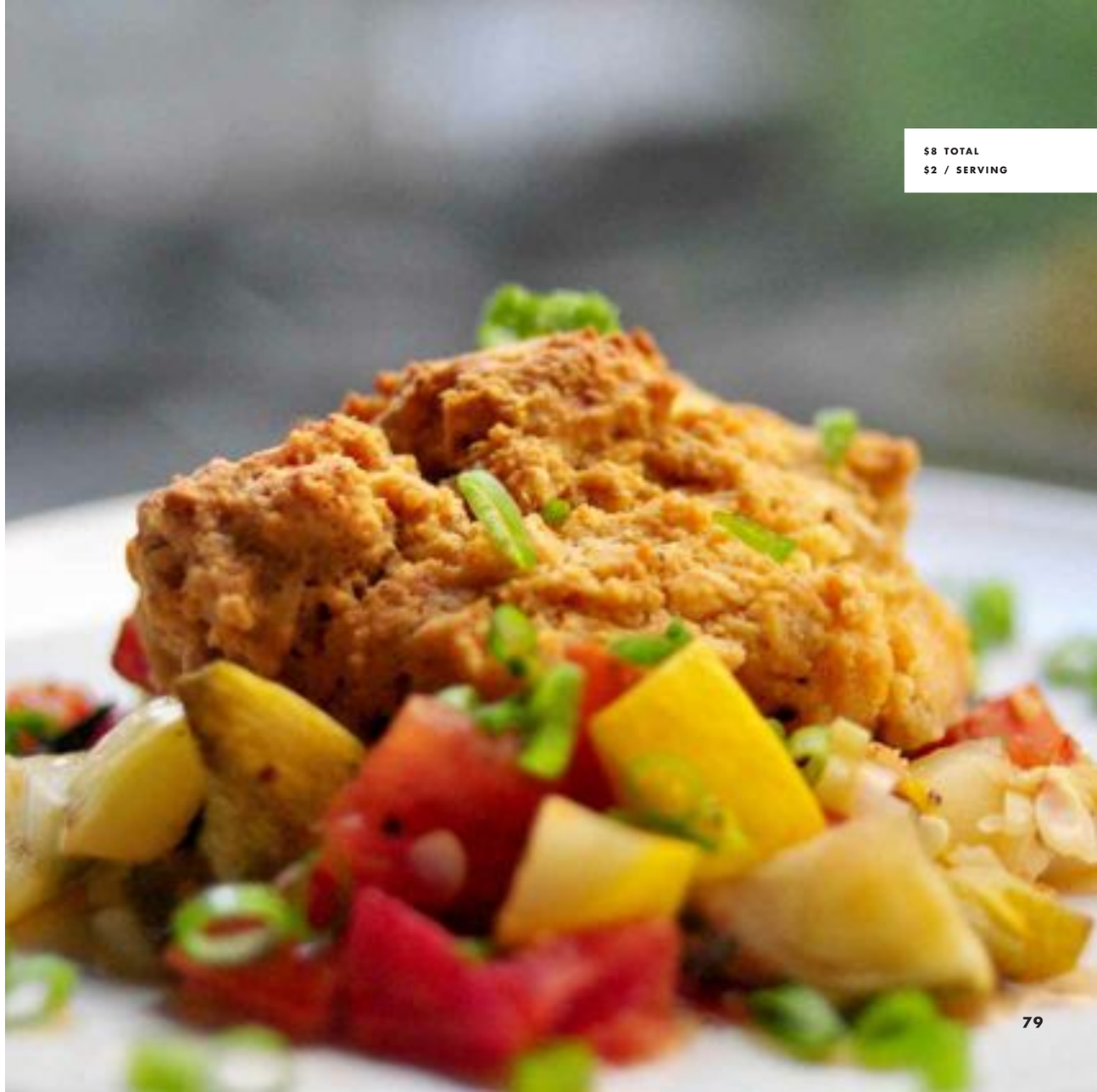
For the topping, measure out the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, salt, pepper, paprika, and cheese into a bowl. Mix it up!

Once the butter is frozen, use a box grater to flake the butter into the flour mixture. Gently massage the butter into the flour with your fingers until it's crumbly but still clumpy. Add the milk and quickly bring the dough together. Don't knead the dough: lumpiness is fine and results in flaky topping. Put it in the fridge until the vegetables come out of the oven.

Once the vegetable mixture has cooked for 25 minutes, quickly top it with small clumps of biscuit dough. The vegetables should still be visible in some areas.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until the vegetables are bubbly and the topping is lightly browned. Top with some more cheddar and some chopped herbs, then enjoy!

For a variation, swap the zucchini for eggplant. Chop the eggplant into bite-sized pieces, salt them, and set them aside for 30 minutes before continuing with the recipe as you would with the zucchini.



$8 TOTAL
$2 / SERVING

$6.60 TOTAL
$1.65 / SERVING

Cauliflower Cheese

FOR FOUR

This is a classic side dish in Great Britain: creamy, cheesy sauce over cauliflower, baked in the oven until the edges get crunchy and bubbly. It's like a healthier and more flavorful version of macaroni and cheese. Alternately, try this with broccoli or cooked winter squash—everyone will love it.

- 1 head cauliflower, cut into bite-sized florets
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp butter
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ½ tsp chili flakes
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups milk
- 6 oz sharp cheddar, grated
- salt and pepper

ADDITIONS

- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 4 scallions, finely chopped
- 1 lemon, zested
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- ½ tsp thyme

Set the oven to 400 F.

Bring a large pot of water to boil over high heat. Add the salt and the cauliflower, then leave it for 4 minutes.

Meanwhile, butter a baking dish large enough to comfortably fit all the cauliflower. I usually use a pie dish. Drain the water from the cauliflower and pour it into the baking dish.

To make the sauce, melt the butter in a saucepan on medium heat. Add the garlic, chili flakes, and bay leaf, then cook for about 1 minute. Add the flour and stir quickly. The flour-butter mixture is called a roux. You want the roux to get just a little brown; this will probably take another minute. Slowly add the milk to the pot, stirring all the while to incorporate the roux. Bring the sauce to a boil, stirring every now and then to make sure the sauce doesn't get scorched on the bottom. Once it comes to a boil, turn off the heat and stir in the cheese. Drop in any additions at this point. Taste the sauce and add salt and pepper as needed. You should have a creamy, smooth, savory sauce.

Pour the sauce over the cauliflower. Place the dish in the oven for 40 minutes, or until the top is brown and bubbly. You can also add some breadcrumbs to the top of the dish before baking if you like extra crunch.

Enjoy with a green salad. I also like mine with salsa.

Spicy, Crunchy, Creamy Polenta

FOR TWO

Polenta plus vegetable plus egg equals satisfying and delicious. You can also add a can of corn to the polenta for deep, rich, corny flavor. Or go a little different by adding frozen peas, scallions, olives, or (my favorite) green chilies to the polenta. Or skip the Romano and add ¼ cup of grated cheddar to the polenta.

½ cup polenta or cornmeal
2 cups water
½ tsp salt
1 tbsp olive oil
4 cups broccoli rabe, roughly chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 anchovy finely chopped
½ tsp chili flakes (or fresh chili)
2 eggs
Romano or Parmesan, freshly grated
salt and pepper

Bring the water and salt to a boil in a medium-sized pot, then turn the heat down to low and slowly pour in the polenta while stirring briskly with a wooden spoon. Stirring while pouring is a crucial to keep the polenta creamy and smooth—no lumps! Once the cornmeal becomes smooth and a little thicker, place the lid on the pot with the spoon still in it so that steam can escape.

Let the polenta cook while you prepare the rest of the meal, checking in occasionally to give it a stir. The total cooking time should be about 25 to 30 minutes, but if you're in a rush, you can eat it after 15.

Meanwhile, chop the broccoli rabe, garlic, and anchovy. Set them aside. Add a bit of olive oil or butter to a pan on medium heat. Let the pan heat up until it sizzles when you flick it with water. Add the garlic, anchovy, and chili flakes. Let them cook until you can smell it, about 1 minute. Add the broccoli rabe and toss it around with a spoon or tongs, or just swirl the pan to coat the rabe with the garlic mixture. Let everything cook for 3 to 5 minutes, until the rabe is tender. Remove the pan from the heat and move its contents to a bowl to wait for the polenta and eggs.

When the polenta is about 2 minutes from done, start with the eggs. Wipe the pan quickly with a cloth, then put it back on medium heat. Splash a bit more olive oil in the pan and wait for it to get hot. Crack the two eggs into the pan and cover with a lid. This will steam them, making sunny-side-up eggs with fully cooked whites.

Scoop the polenta into a pair of bowls. Add some Romano and lots of salt and pepper. Layer about half the vegetables over the polenta.

Once the whites of the eggs are cooked, remove them from the pan with a spatula and lay them over the polenta and vegetables. Top with the rest of the vegetables and further sprinklings of cheese.

$3.50 TOTAL
$1.75 / SERVING

$12 TOTAL
$3 / SERVING

Shrimp and Grits

FOR FOUR

This is far from an authentic Southern version of this dish, but it is absolutely delicious. Southerners will demand you use white stone-ground corn for this, and I won't quibble, but feel free to use yellow if it doesn't offend you.

GRITS

1 cup grits
4½ cups vegetable or chicken stock
½ cup sharp cheddar, grated
3 scallions, finely chopped

TOPPING

1 lb shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 tbsp butter or vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 bell pepper, chopped
2 sticks celery, chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 green chili, finely diced (optional)
1 tomato, chopped

Bring the stock to a boil in a medium-sized pot, then turn the heat down to low and slowly pour the in the cornmeal while stirring briskly with a wooden spoon. Stirring while pouring is a crucial to keep the grits creamy and smooth—no lumps! Once the grits become smooth and a little thicker, place the lid on the pot with the spoon still in it so that steam can escape.

Let the grits cook while you prepare the rest of the meal, checking in occasionally to give them a stir. The total cooking time should be about 25 to 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the shrimp and vegetables. Add the butter or oil to a large pan on medium heat and let it get hot. Add the onion, pepper, and celery. Sauté until the onion is just translucent, about 2 minutes. Add the garlic, as well as the green chili if you like things spicy. Let everything cook for another minute. Add the tomato and cook for 3 or 4 minutes, until the tomato releases its juice and the vegetables resemble a thick and chunky sauce. Add a dribble of water to keep everything loose and saucy, then toss in the shrimp. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp are pink all over. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Once the grits are ready, take them off the heat and add the cheese and most of the scallions, then stir. Ladle the grits into bowls and top with the shrimp, vegetables, and a few more scallions.

Roast Chicken

FOR SIX

A whole chicken is usually less expensive than buying single pieces like breasts or thighs—plus you can make stock later from the bones and any meat too difficult to get off. The leftovers can be used in sandwiches, tacos, over a salad, or tossed with sauce and mixed into pasta. This is a base recipe: add spices to the butter or sprinkle over the surface of the chicken to change up the flavor in any way you like.

1 whole chicken
1 tbsp butter
2 cloves garlic
1 lemon
salt and pepper

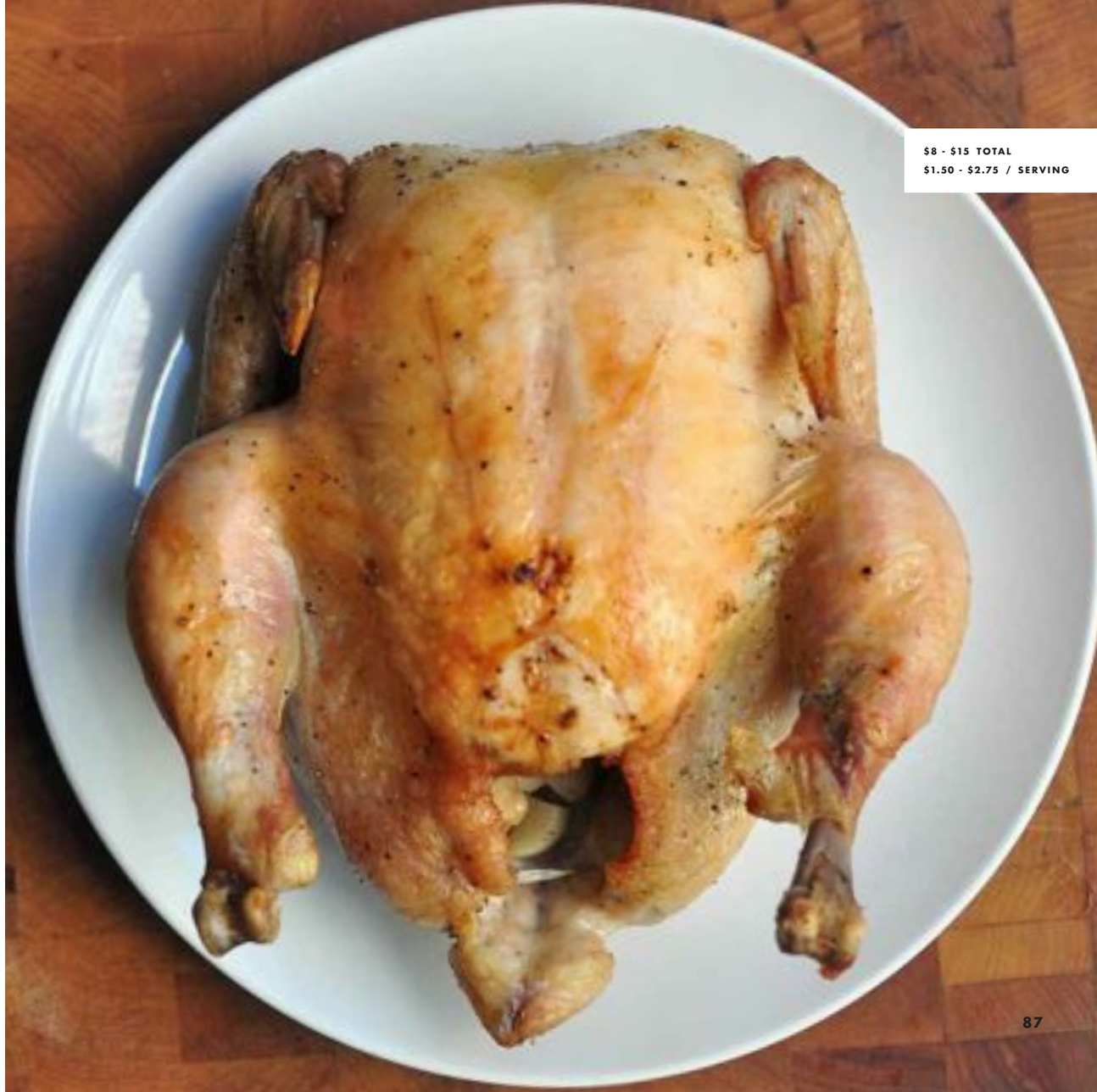
Heat the oven to 400 F.

Remove the giblets and neck from the chicken. Keep them for stock later. Rub the entire bird with butter, then sprinkle it with salt and pepper.

Smash the garlic cloves with the back of your knife and slice the lemon in half. Stuff the garlic and lemon into the chicken's body cavity.

Place the chicken in a roasting pan or an oven-proof skillet. Let it cook for 1 hour. If you have a meat thermometer, check to make sure the chicken is at 165 F, the temperature when chicken is completely safe to eat. But 1 hour should be long enough to fully cook it.

Let the chicken rest for at least 10 minutes before you carve it to make sure you don't lose any of the tasty juices.



$8 - $15 TOTAL
$1.50 - $2.75 / SERVING

METHOD

Roasted Vegetables

When the weather turns cool, I want only to eat warm, flavorful food. Roasting is easy, it warms up the kitchen, and it makes the house smell like the holidays. If you're uncertain how to prepare a new vegetable, you usually can't go wrong with roasting—most things end up sweeter, with nice crunchy bits. If you roast a bunch of vegetables at the beginning of the week, you can eat them throughout the week in various ways: with eggs at breakfast, folded into an omelette, as a side dish, in a taco or sandwich, on toast, or with any grain.

vegetables
olive oil or butter
salt and pepper

ROOTS

potatoes, sweet potatoes, beets, turnips, onions, parsnips, carrots, sunchokes, kohlrabi, fennel

NON-ROOTS

bell peppers, winter squash, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, asparagus, eggplant

EXTRAS

whole garlic cloves (unpeeled), lemon slices or lemon zest, anything you would pair with roast chicken, tough herbs like sage, oregano, thyme, bay leaves, any dry spice combination (p. 126)

Set the oven to 400 F.

Clean and chop your vegetables. Generally, I prefer to leave the skin on for the following reasons: skin tastes nice and gets crispy; there's a lot of nutrition in the skin; peeling is slow! Just be sure to wash the vegetables thoroughly.

It's up to you how you want to chop your vegetables. Many are nice roasted whole, like new potatoes or little sunchokes or turnips—they will be crispy and salty on the outside and bursting with fluffy, starchy goodness inside. The general rule is that the smaller you chop things, the faster they cook, so try to keep everything about the same size so nothing cooks faster than anything else.

Dump your vegetables into a roasting pan. Drizzle everything with olive oil or melted butter—about 2 tablespoons per medium-sized roasting pan. Season generously with salt and pepper and add any other extras from the list at left. Use your hands to coat the vegetables thoroughly with the oil and spices.

Pop the pan in the oven for 1 hour or longer, but check on the vegetables after 45 minutes. Test them by poking them with a knife. If it meets no resistance, they're finished; if not, let them cook longer. Don't worry: it's not much of a problem if you overcook them. Unlike vegetables overcooked through boiling or steaming, overcooked roasted vegetables may dry out a bit, but still retain their shape and flavor.

After you pull the vegetables out of the oven, push them around with a spatula to free them from the pan. Remove any garlic cloves and smash them into a fine paste (removing the skins at this point), then put the garlic back in the pan and mix together.

Squeeze the juice out of any lemons and discard the woody bits of any cooked herbs. Add a little more butter, a bit of favorite sauce, a little soft cheese or mayonnaise, and serve.

The following pages show more great roasted veggies.

Roasted Potatoes with Chilies

FOR FOUR

It doesn't get much simpler or more satisfying than this. You can use any pepper you like—from large, dark poblanos, to Hungarian wax chilies, to bell peppers.

4 medium potatoes, chopped into bite-sized pieces
4 medium chilies, chopped into bite-sized pieces
2 cloves garlic, unpeeled
1 tbsp butter
salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a large roasting pan, tumble together the potatoes, peppers, and garlic. When you chop the peppers, be sure to get rid of the seeds and white placenta inside.

Pour the butter overtop and sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper. Potatoes need quite a bit of salt! Use your hands to mix everything up.

Roast for 1 hour, or until you can spear the potatoes easily with a fork and everything is a little crispy. Squish the garlic cloves, discard their skins, and spread the roasted garlic throughout.

In addition to being a great side dish, this makes a delicious taco filling. At right, it's pictured on a tortilla topped with chopped tomato and queso blanco.

Alternately, try it alongside some black beans and rice or piled high on a plate with an egg on top.

$3 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

$3.40 TOTAL
$0.85 / SERVING

Smoky and Spicy Roasted Cauliflower

FOR FOUR

Roasted veggies are always delicious, but there's something magical that happens to cauliflower in the oven. It gets so crispy and nutty, and that flavor is brought out even more with the spices here. I'm happy to just eat a bowl of this for dinner, maybe with an egg on top.

1 head cauliflower, cut into small pieces
2 cloves garlic, unpeeled
1 tbsp butter, melted
1 tsp smoked paprika
½ tsp cayenne pepper
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Turn the oven to 400 F.

In a medium-sized roasting pan, arrange the cauliflower pieces and the unpeeled cloves of garlic. Pour the butter over the cauliflower and then sprinkle the spices overtop. Use your hands to thoroughly coat the cauliflower with butter and spices.

Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on how crispy you like the florets. Squeeze the roasted garlic throughout and trash the skins.

Spicy Green Beans

FOR TWO

Whenever I make these, I think, "why don't I have this every day?" Throw a fried egg on top, serve with rice, and you have a delicious meal.

1 tsp vegetable oil
½ lb green beans, ends trimmed, chopped into bite-size pieces
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp soy sauce
1 tsp sambal oelek (or 2 tsp chili flakes)

ADDITIONS
1 tsp ginger, grated
1 tsp lemon juice

Add the vegetable oil to a frying pan on medium heat. Once it's hot, add the green beans. Let them cook undisturbed for about 1 minute.

Mix the garlic, soy sauce, and sambal oelek in a bowl (and the ginger and lemon juice, if using).

The beans should have turned bright green. Add about ¼ cup of water to the pan. Cook another 2 minutes, until the water is mostly gone. Pour the sauce into the pan and toss gently to coat. Cook another 2 minutes, until everything is fragrant and most of the liquid is gone. Poke the beans with a fork: if it goes through easily, they're done. They should take about 5 minutes.

Taste and add more chili sauce or soy sauce if you want the beans hotter or saltier.

$1.30 TOTAL
$0.65 / SERVING

Vegetable Quiche, Hold the Crust

FOR FOUR

Much as I love this quiche hot, I like it even better cold out of the fridge the next day. It makes a great fast breakfast or lunch. The quiche in the picture uses broccoli, but you can make it with pretty much any kind of vegetable. Some of my favorites are roasted green chilies and cheddar, winter squash with goat cheese, zucchini and tomato, or spinach and olive.

1 tbsp butter
1 large onion, sliced into half moons
3-4 cups chopped vegetables
8 eggs
1 cup milk
1 cup cheese
1 tsp salt
black pepper, freshly ground

Set the oven to 400 F.

There are two ways to make this quiche. If you have a cast-iron or other oven-proof skillet, you can make the quiche right in the skillet. This cuts down on dishes. Otherwise, start with a regular skillet and later transfer everything to a pie plate to bake.

Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add your onion slices and sprinkle a bit of salt and pepper over them. Cook the onions until they are golden brown and starting to caramelize. If your pan is oven-proof, simply remove it from the heat and spread the onions evenly across the bottom. Otherwise, butter a pie plate and scoop the onions into it, creating an even layer on the bottom. The onions add a crust-like texture and a bit of crunch.

A note on vegetables: For things like broccoli, cauliflower or winter squash, I suggest steaming or cooking them before adding them to the quiche to ensure they'll be fully cooked. For tomatoes, zucchini, spinach or any other quick-cooking vegetable, just use them fresh.

Spread the vegetables evenly overtop of the onions. The dish or pan should look fairly full.

In a bowl, use a fork to lightly beat the eggs with the milk, cheese, salt, and pepper, just enough to break up the yolks and whites. This is a savory custard mixture. Pour the custard over the vegetables and onions and enjoy watching it fill in all the free spaces.

Bake the quiche in the oven for 1 hour. Once the surface is lightly brown all the way across, it's fully cooked.

Let the quiche cool for about 20 minutes, then slice into wedges and serve with a side salad.

$6 TOTAL
$1.50 / SERVING

$9 TOTAL
$4.50 / SERVING

Spicy Broiled Tilapia with Lime

FOR TWO

This meal comes together so quickly it's astonishing. Broiled fish is crispy on the outside and flaky and moist on the inside. You can quickly sauté some vegetables while the fish cooks and have dinner on the table in minutes.

- 2 fillets tilapia or other white fish
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp cumin powder
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp oregano
- ½ lime, juiced

Turn the broiler on to high.

Mix the spices together in a small bowl. Sprinkle them over both sides of the fish and massage gently with your fingers to cover thoroughly in the spices.

Lay the spiced fillets on a baking pan lined with aluminum foil.

Broil for 4 to 7 minutes. They will cook very quickly, so after 4 minutes, check to see if they are done by gently inserting a butter knife into the thickest part of the fillet. If it goes through easily and the fish flakes apart, you're done. If the knife meets resistance and the fish stays together, put the fillets back under the broiler for another few minutes. Once you've done this once or twice, you'll be able to tell when your fish is done at a glance.

When the fish is cooked, squeeze a lime overtop. Serve with rice or a favorite vegetable side dish like spicy green beans (p. 93).

Big Batch

It's simple economics: usually making a large amount of something is cheaper and more efficient than making lots of different small dishes. You can blow a whole batch all on a big celebration or portion these dishes out and freeze them for later use. You'll be extremely grateful to your past self when you pull delicious home-made food out of the freezer on a busy Monday evening!

Spicy Pulled Pork

SERVES EIGHT TO TEN

$14 TOTAL
$1.40 / SERVING

Pulled pork is a celebration, worthy of a special day. It's incredibly flavorful, rich, spicy, and remarkably versatile. Although it seems expensive, it's quite a bargain when you look at the price per serving. As with most celebratory meals, this one takes quite a long time to prepare. Most of the time, however, is just spent waiting for it to cook "low and slow."

5 lb pork shoulder

DRY RUB

1/3 cup brown sugar
2 tbsp coffee, ground
2 tbsp kosher salt
4 tsp smoked paprika
3 tsp sweet paprika
2 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp coriander powder
1 tsp clove powder
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp black pepper, freshly ground

Mix the rub ingredients together. Apply liberally to the pork shoulder, pressing it gently into the meat until you've covered every side. Set any leftover rub aside for later. Place the pork shoulder in a large pot with a tight lid or a Dutch oven. Cover with a towel or lid and leave in the fridge for a few hours or overnight.

Pour enough water into the pot to cover the bottom. This will keep the juices from burning. Put the lid on and place the pot in a 200 F oven for 10 to 12 hours. I find it's easier if I cook the pork overnight and pull it out in the morning, but you can put it in early in the morning and have it ready for dinner as well.

The supposed rule is that cooking takes 1.5 to 2 hours per pound of pork, but I find it usually takes a little longer than that. You are waiting for the internal temperature to reach 200 F. The meat is edible at 160 F, but at higher temperatures the tough connective tissues break down to create the flavor and texture that make pulled pork a delicious and unique treat.

If you don't have a meat thermometer, figuring out the internal temperature is obviously difficult, but you can test it by feel. Poke the meat with a finger: when it's so soft that it falls apart on its own, take it out of the oven.

To pull the meat, remove it from the juices and gently tear the pork apart with two forks or with your hands. Discard any larger bits of fat that you don't wish to eat. If any section is hard to tear apart, the meat hasn't cooked enough to break down the connective tissue. If you have the time to spare, put it back in the oven for another couple of hours.

Once you've pulled all of the pork, mix in any remaining rub and move it to a casserole dish or a large plate. If you aren't eating the meat right away, stash it in the fridge.

Optionally, if you want to make a sauce from the pot full of drippings, bring it to a gentle boil on the stovetop over medium-high heat. Let the juices thicken for 20 to 30 minutes. The fat will rise to the top: it's the clear, thick layer, not the thin, red liquid below. Skim off as much of the fat as possible. Mix a few spoonfuls of the pan drippings with the pork before serving.

Feel free to add a little barbecue sauce to the pork if it isn't flavorful enough for you, but try it first—I think you'll be surprised!

There are a million ways to eat pulled pork, but I like it over squishy hamburger buns or in tacos with crunchy vegetables. Traditionally, pulled pork sandwiches have cabbage slaw on them, but anything crunchy will do. (A diner near my apartment does a great slaw with apple and celery root.)

Don't forget some veggies on the side to round out the meal—a simple green salad, corn on the cob, steamed green beans, or any other summery vegetable.

$14 TOTAL
$0.20 / PEROGY

Perogies

MAKES SIXTY TO SEVENTY-TWO

This is a huge recipe that will feed you for days. It takes time and effort, but the results are worth it. The most fun approach is to invite a couple of friends over for a perogy-making party. Everyone takes home a bag or two for the freezer, and it's a great time!

DOUGH

4½ cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp salt
2 cups yogurt or sour cream
2 eggs
1 tbsp water, as needed

FILLING

5 Russet potatoes, roughly cubed
1½ cups sharp cheddar, shredded
salt and pepper

ADDITIONS

2 tbsp scallions, chopped
4 cloves roasted garlic, minced
2 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 tsp paprika

TO SERVE

sour cream
scallions, chopped

In a large bowl, mix the flour and salt. Pour in the yogurt, eggs, and a tablespoon of water. Mix it slowly and carefully. The dough will be quite sticky. Cover it with a towel or plastic wrap while you make the filling.

Put the chopped potatoes in a pot and cover with water, then add a bit of salt. Cover with a lid and bring to a boil over medium-high heat before removing the lid. Let the potatoes cook until tender, about 20 minutes. Test them with a fork: if it goes through easily, they're done.

Drain the potatoes and add shredded cheese, salt, pepper, and any additions you might enjoy. I like strong aged cheese because you don't have to use as much. I usually use several additions, and you should play around with some of your favorite things—there aren't many flavors that don't work in potatoes! Next, mash the potatoes with an electric mixer or just two forks. Once the filling is ready, gather some friends because shaping takes some time!

Flour your countertop liberally. Split the dough in half. Keep one half covered, but place the other half on the floured surface. Use a rolling pin to flatten the dough, about ¼" thick. Punch out as many 3" to 4" dough circles as possible, using a round cookie cutter or a drinking glass. Squish the scraps into the remaining covered half of the dough.

Drop about a tablespoon of filling in the center of one circle of dough. Fold the dough over the filling and press the edges to create a dumpling. The stickiness should ensure a tight seal. Lay the dumpling on a floured surface and use a fork to squish the edges together. Repeat until you run out of circles, then repeat everything with the remaining dough.

Once you have all your perogies formed, boil a pot of water and add about 12 perogies. Let them cook until they rise to the top, about 1 minute. Pull out the boiled perogies with a spoon, then repeat with the remainder in the same pot of water.

If you're planning to freeze some of the perogies, let them cool down and then put them in freezer bags with the air squeezed out. I usually do 12 to a bag, but you can portion them out in whatever way suits you. They will keep for at least 6 months in the freezer.

You can eat the perogies just boiled, but if you're anything like my family, you'll prefer them fried afterwards. Melt a tablespoon of butter in a pan on medium heat, then fry up as many perogies as you want. (Six per person is plenty.) Flip them every few minutes until they're browned on all sides. Serve with scallions and a dollop of sour cream.

Staples

These are the building blocks of great meals. Freshly made flatbreads are amazingly cheap to produce and taste fabulous. They can take a bit of time to make at first, but you'll get faster with practice and the flavor is absolutely worth it. Large batches of grains and beans can be cooked at the beginning of the week, then used in different meals each day, saving both time and money. Staples are where the possibilities begin!

Flour Tortillas

MAKES TWENTY-FOUR SMALL

Homemade flour tortillas are a bit of work, but if you have some time, they are totally worth it. With practice you'll get quicker and enjoy the process as much as the results.

1¼ cups all-purpose flour
1¼ cups whole-wheat flour
2½ tsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
⅓ cup clarified butter or lard
1 cup hot water

In a large bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients. Add clarified butter or lard. Lard is more traditional, but I prefer clarified butter. Even regular butter is fine. Using your fingers, squish the butter against the flour until the mixture looks like moist crumbs. Add the hot water—not boiling, just hot—and form into dough with your hands. Leave the dough in the bowl for an hour, covered by plastic wrap or a moist towel.

Separate the dough into 24 small pieces and roll each into balls. Keep the balls covered with the towel so they don't dry out.

Lightly flour your countertop. Gently flatten out one dough ball with your palm, then roll it out on the counter with a rolling pin. Flip it over as you roll to make sure it isn't sticking to the counter. Be sure to add more flour as needed. Once you have the ball rolled out nice and thin, set it aside under a moist towel.

Once you've rolled out one or two tortillas, put a non-stick or cast-iron pan on medium-high heat. Let it get nice and hot. Place a tortilla in the pan. Once it starts to dry up around the edges, flip it over with a spatula, then gently press the tortilla down to make sure it gets some color underneath. Once the tortilla has brown spots on both sides, remove it from the pan and continue with the next. Work quickly! As you wait for each tortilla to cook, roll out more. You'll get better at this part with practice.

If you're serving the tortillas immediately, place them in a warm oven so that they stay pliable. If using them later in the day, pile them under a cloth while you finish making them. When they're ready, wrap them in aluminum foil and place them in the fridge. Heat in the oven before serving.

$1.70 TOTAL
$0.07 / TORTILLA

Roti

MAKES SIXTEEN

These are a staple flatbread in many parts of India. They're quick to make and very tasty when fresh. Enjoy them with a curried filling, dip them in soups or stews, or fill them with eggs at breakfast.

2 cups whole-wheat flour
1 tsp salt
1 cup water

In a small bowl, mix together all the ingredients using one clean hand. It should form a fairly moist dough. Knead until smooth and form into a ball. Cover with a damp towel or paper towel and set aside for 10 minutes to an hour.

Divide the dough into 16 small balls.

Sprinkle a countertop with flour and place one piece of dough in the middle. Cover the ball with flour on all sides so that it doesn't stick to the surface, then gently roll it out with a rolling pin (or a bottle if you're in a pinch) until it's thin and flat, about ⅛" thick. As you roll the dough, be sure to unstick it from your counter and flip it over. To make it round, roll straight in front of you, then turn the dough 90 degrees and roll out again.

Place a non-stick skillet on medium heat. Once the pan is hot, add the roti and cook until the dough lifts away from the pan around the edges and small bubbles form. Flip the bread over and cook the other side. Usually it goes very quickly. You want to see light-brown bubbles all over the dough. Don't let it get too dark, though, as this will make the roti too crunchy to use for rolls. Repeat this process until you're finished with the dough.

Once you have practiced, you can roll out one roti while another cooks in the pan to make the process quicker.

Keep them under a towel on the counter or in a warm oven until ready to serve.

$0.50 TOTAL
$0.03 / ROTI

Pizza Dough

MAKES FOUR INDIVIDUAL PIZZAS

There are two ways to make pizza dough: the fast way and the slow way. They're the same amount of work, just with different waits. The slow method is convenient for a weekday if you make it before bed the night before, pop it in the fridge, then pull it out to rise before dinner.

3 cups all-purpose or bread flour
1½ tsp salt
½ to 1 tsp instant yeast
1 tbsp olive oil
1¼ cup water

FAST METHOD

Measure out the flour, salt and a teaspoon of yeast into a big bowl. Mix the oil into the flour with your hands, crumbling it until the texture is a bit sandy, then add the room-temperature water. Keep mixing with your hands until it comes together.

Knead the dough on a lightly floured countertop for 5 to 7 minutes, until it becomes a smooth elastic ball. The dough will be smooth but quite wet.

Add a small amount of oil to a bowl. Place your dough ball in the bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let it rise for 1½ to 3 hours, depending on the warmth of your kitchen. It's done rising when it has doubled in size. Then it'll be ready to shape into your favorite pizza!

SLOW METHOD

If you're organized enough to make the slow dough, I recommend taking the extra time: it's the best.

Use the same process as at left, but add only ½ teaspoon of yeast to the flour mixture. Rather than room temperature, the water should be very cold.

After you place the dough ball in a bowl and cover it, leave it into the fridge overnight. Letting the yeast work overnight creates a better flavor; it also makes the dough more elastic and easier to work with.

The next day, 2 to 3 hours before you want to bake your pizzas, remove the dough from the fridge to return to room temperature.

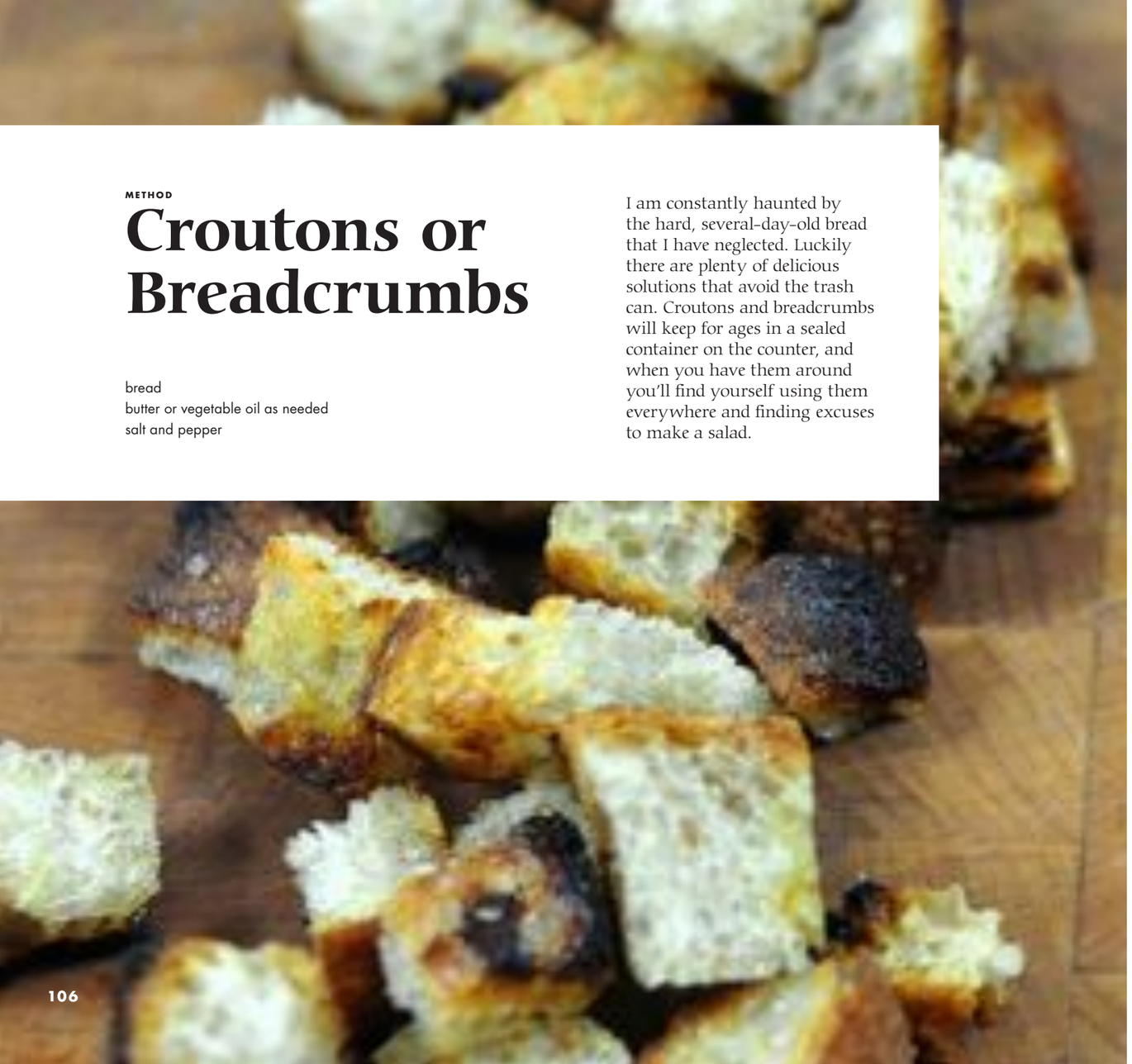
$0.80 TOTAL
$0.20 / CRUST

METHOD

Croutons or Breadcrumbs

bread
butter or vegetable oil as needed
salt and pepper

I am constantly haunted by the hard, several-day-old bread that I have neglected. Luckily there are plenty of delicious solutions that avoid the trash can. Croutons and breadcrumbs will keep for ages in a sealed container on the counter, and when you have them around you'll find yourself using them everywhere and finding excuses to make a salad.



This is a method more than a recipe since you'll have a random amount of bread. If making croutons, start by cutting the bread into cubes. If making breadcrumbs, mince the loaf with a knife, or just tear it apart, or throw small chunks of bread into a food processor. If the bread is too hard to cut, wrap it in a kitchen towel, sprinkle some water on the towel, and microwave for 20 to 30 seconds. This will restore just enough moisture to let you cut the bread easily.

Choose a sufficiently large pan for the quantity of bread cubes or crumbs—or work in batches if you have a lot—and place it on the stovetop on medium heat. Add enough butter or vegetable oil to coat the bottom of the pan. I prefer the flavor of butter, but use whatever you have.

Let the butter melt or the oil get hot. Add the bread and toss gently until coated. Let the bread sit for 2 minutes, then flip the pieces over. Keep tossing and turning until the bread is brown all over. Add oil or butter as needed and sprinkle with salt and pepper. It is basically impossible, unless you are very patient (which I am not) to get every side of the cubes browned, so just get them generally looking good and toasty and then take them off the heat.

For breadcrumbs, if you like, you can go oil-free: just toast whole slices and then crush it into small pieces.

Use the breadcrumbs or croutons immediately, or place them in a sealed container after letting them cooling off. Later, use them later in salads or over anything you want to add crunch to.

$0.10 - $0.50 TOTAL

Drinks

You don't need a special drink at every meal (unless of course it is the meal!) but when you do, let fruit play a leading role, and make it yourself. It'll be so much better than the overpriced bottles in the supermarket.

Agua Fresca

SERVES FOUR TO SIX

Refreshing and hydrating, these beautiful drinks are great at a party, and they can help you use up any fruit that you won't be able to eat before it goes off. This is certainly not the master recipe, just a good starting point.

2 cups fruit, chopped
4 cups water

ADDITIONS

1 tsp vanilla
squeeze of lemon or lime juice
sugar
mint leaves
other herb leaves

VARIATIONS

blueberry and lemon
cucumber and lemon
mango and lime
melon
orange
papaya
peach and vanilla
pineapple
strawberry and mint

For a very lightly flavored agua fresca, just mix the water and fruit together. Done! Obviously, if you want more fruit flavor, then use less water; if you want less flavor, then use more water.

I usually run my agua fresca through the blender, however. If you want the drink to be clear, strain the pulpy leftovers of the fruit after blending. If you're using blueberries or oranges or other fruit with a skin, you'll almost certainly want to strain it.

For some fruits, you can also choose to leave the pulp: it's particularly great when making a melon agua fresca since it mostly disappears.

Serve over ice. Try some of the variations I've suggested or whatever fruits you like!

Smoothies

FOR TWO

I have four types of smoothies here, but of course there are many more. Give these a try when you have overripe fruit that you eat otherwise. Add a teaspoon of vanilla to any of these and they will seem incredibly professional. The frozen melon drinks, in particular, are the most refreshing treat on a hot summer day.

DRINKABLE YOGURT: If you like the grocery store's yogurt drinks, try making these at home for less! You don't even need to blend them—just add the juice and yogurt to a jar, then shake.

½ cup plain yogurt
½ cup fruit juice

MELON SMOOTHIE (TWO PICTURED): When you buy a melon, dice and freeze whatever you don't eat. Pull it out and blend it with a bit of water or juice to thin it out. It's like a better slushy!

1 cup frozen melon
½ cup water or juice
1 tsp vanilla

BERRY SMOOTHIE: Blend until smooth, then adjust with more berries or milk to your taste.

½ cup yogurt
1 cup frozen berries
milk or juice to thin as needed

MANGO LASSI (NOT PICTURED): Blend the mango and yogurt together. If it's too thick to drink with a straw, add some milk to thin it out. A ripe and juicy mango combined with thin yogurt is often all you need. Be warned: if you make this for children, they will request it over and over.

1 mango, diced
1 cup yogurt
milk to thin as needed

$1 - $2 TOTAL
$0.50 - $1 / SERVING

Desserts

Whether it's been a rough day, it's time to celebrate, or just because it's Wednesday, these sweets are totally worth it.

Caramelized Bananas

FOR TWO

These bananas—cooked in just a bit of caramel—are crispy and gooey on the outside and almost like a soft pudding inside. Sweet, messy, and irresistible.

2 bananas, peeled and split in half
1 tbsp butter
2 tbsp brown sugar

Melt the butter in a non-stick or cast-iron pan on medium-high heat. Add the sugar and let it melt into the butter for about 2 minutes. Place the bananas face down in the butter-sugar mixture, then cook for 2 minutes or until they become brown and sticky. Carefully flip them over and do the same to the other side.

Serve them whole or split them into quarters. Drizzle any caramel left in the pan over the bananas. Serve with ice cream or on their own.

$0.70 TOTAL
$0.35 / SERVING

$10 TOTAL
$0.25 / COOKIE

Coconut Chocolate Cookies

MAKES FORTY

A just-chewy-enough, just-crispy-enough, just-gooey-enough cookie that's perfect for a special treat.

- ⅔ cup shaved, unsweetened coconut, toasted
- 1½ cups chocolate chips
- ½ lb unsalted butter (2 sticks)
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1½ cups dark brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla

Heat the oven to 350 F.

Spread the coconut into a thin, even layer on a cookie sheet. Place it in the oven for 5 to 8 minutes, until it's light brown, toasty, and aromatic.

Melt the butter in a heavy-bottomed saucepan over low heat. Once it's melted, leave it to cool in the pan for a few minutes.

In a medium-sized bowl, stir together the flour, salt, and baking soda.

In another bowl, beat the brown sugar and melted butter together for 5 minutes. Add the eggs and vanilla and beat for another 2 minutes. Mix the flour mixture with the brown sugar mixture, a third at a time, until it forms a dark brown, homogeneous mass. Add the chocolate chips and coconut and stir until just combined.

Place the dough in the fridge for 20 minutes.

Afterwards, scoop tablespoons of dough onto a lightly buttered cookie sheet, leaving large spaces between each cookie so they have space to spread out. I usually do about 6 cookies per sheet. Just before putting the cookies into the oven, sprinkle them with salt.

Let the cookies bake for 8 to 10 minutes. After you take them out of the oven, leave them on the sheet to set for 2 minutes, then move them to plates to cool further. Don't stack the cookies while they're cooling.

Continue the process until the dough is gone.

Store the finished cookies in an airtight container.

Peach Coffee Cake

FOR TWELVE

This is adapted from the apple cake often served during Rosh Hashanah. It's simple and wonderful for dessert, with tea, or as a sweet breakfast. The juicy peaches add a ton of flavor to this simple cake. If you buy peaches in season, the cost can be quite reasonable.

6 peaches, pitted and cut into 8 slices each
1 tsp cinnamon
½ lemon, juiced
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp baking powder
½ lb unsalted butter (2 sticks), at room temperature
1⅓ cups brown sugar
⅛ tsp salt
2 large eggs
1 tsp vanilla

Turn your oven to 350 F.

Using the paper wrapping from the butter, lightly butter an 8" x 11" glass baking dish or 9" springform pan. Any shape will do so long as it is large enough. This cake doubles in size when it bakes.

In a large bowl, mix the peach slices, lemon juice, and cinnamon together with your hands, making sure the peaches are well coated in cinnamon.

In a medium bowl, stir the flour with the baking powder, getting rid of any lumps.

In another large bowl, beat the butter, brown sugar, and salt, either with a wooden spoon or an electric mixer. Stop when the mixture is fluffy and has slightly lightened in color. Add the vanilla, then the eggs one at a time, fully mixing in the first before adding the second.

If using an electric mixer, switch to a wooden spoon and add the flour mixture into the butter mixture, gently incorporating it until it's smooth. The batter will be quite thick.

Spread half the batter over the bottom of the buttered pan. Evenly distribute 12 of the peach slices overtop. (There should be 24 in total.) Spread the other half of the batter over the peaches, then top with the remaining peaches. Sprinkle with a tablespoon or so of sugar and place the cake in the oven.

Bake for 1 hour or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.

$9 TOTAL
$0.75 / SERVING

$2.40 TOTAL
$0.60 / SERVING

Fast Melon Sorbet

FOR FOUR

- 2 cups frozen melon
- ½ cup plain yogurt
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla or lime juice (optional)

When you see lovely watermelons, honeydews, and cantaloupes on sale, buy them up. Eat half, then cube and freeze the other half. When you want a quick dessert or smoothie, pull out a bag of frozen melon and whip this up.

Add all the ingredients to a food processor or blender until just smooth. Don't blend too much, or the sorbet will become oversoft. Serve immediately or stick it into the freezer to enjoy later.

Flavor

If you have a great sauce or a few spices in your kitchen, you'll never have to tolerate bland food. Most of these recipes require surprisingly little effort and time, pack a ton of flavor, and can be stored for use in any dish you choose.

$7 TOTAL
$3.50 / CUP

Spice Oil

MAKES TWO CUPS

Use this spice oil on salads, in cold noodle dishes, or on roasted or sautéed vegetables. If you have trouble finding the spices, you can get all of them at most Asian grocery stores.

2 cups olive or vegetable oil
¼ cup chili flakes or dried red chilies
2 tsp Sichuan or regular peppercorns
1 star anise
1 tsp cumin seeds
½ tsp salt
2 cloves garlic, peeled and squished

Use the side of a knife to crush the garlic cloves until they crack open. Add all of the ingredients to a small pot.

Put the mixture over low heat for about 10 minutes, until it starts to bubble gently and you can hear a bit of a sizzle, then turn off the heat. You want to heat it just enough to let the spices infuse into the oil, without getting so hot that the spices start to cook or fry.

Remove the pot from the stovetop. Put a lid on it and let the spices infuse for 4 to 8 hours.

Taste the oil. If it isn't strongly spicy, let it infuse for a few more hours. Once it's ready, strain the oil through a sieve to remove the spices, then store it in a jar in the fridge.

$2.25 TOTAL
$0.75 / CUP

Salsa

MAKES THREE CUPS

Summertime salsas combine a load of fresh tomatoes with smaller amounts of choice vegetables and fruit. In the winter, cook canned tomatoes for a few minutes first.

2 cups tomatoes, chopped
½ medium onion, finely diced
1 jalapeño pepper, finely diced
1 lime, juiced
¼ cup cilantro, finely chopped
salt and pepper

ADDITIONS

mango, peach, plum, or pineapple
beans
corn
garlic

Apart from its usual use on tortilla chips and tacos, this salsa is a wonderful topping for fish or chicken, as a sauce for cold noodles, or as a finishing touch on a savory breakfast.

If you like raw onion, go right ahead. Otherwise, take the edge off by sautéing the onion with a bit of water in a pan over medium heat. The onion is ready once the water has boiled off. If you aren't a fan of cilantro, substitute another herb: mint, savory, or lemon balm work well.

Mix the onion, tomato, and the rest of the ingredients in a bowl. Be sure to add enough salt and pepper!

Taste the salsa. You're looking for a balance of spicy from the peppers, sweet from the tomatoes, and bright and fresh from the herbs and lime juice. If something's out of balance, add the appropriate ingredient to bring it back into balance.

Store in an air-tight container in the fridge. Fresh salsa won't last as long as store-bought salsa because it doesn't have any preservatives, but it's so tasty that I'm sure you'll finish it fast!

$2.50 TOTAL
$1.25 / CUP

Raita

MAKES TWO CUPS

Raita is a traditional Indian sauce served with all kinds of things. It's simple and surprisingly tasty. Spoon it onto chana masala (p. 72), the potato and kale rolls (p. 60), or anything spicy to cool things down.

1 cup cucumber, chopped
½ cup tomato, chopped
¼ cup red onion, chopped
1 cup yogurt
1 tsp cumin powder
½ tsp cayenne powder
2 tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped
salt and pepper

ADDITIONS
1 tbsp ginger, grated
2 tbsp mint
¼ cup chickpeas
cooked spinach

This recipe is extremely loose. Basically, just stir some of your favorite chopped vegetables into yogurt and add salt and pepper. Use this as a stepping stone to develop your own.

After you stir all the ingredients together, store the raita in a covered container in the fridge until you're ready to use it.

$3.50 TOTAL
$1.75 / CUP

Tzatziki

MAKES TWO CUPS

If you're in a hurry, you don't have to strain this at all: you can just mix the ingredients together. However, removing the water from the cucumber and yogurt intensifies the flavor. Your patience will be rewarded by a thick sauce that gives you a new perspective on cucumbers.

2 cups yogurt
1 large cucumber, grated
1 tsp salt
2 tbsp dill, chopped
2 scallions, finely chopped
salt and pepper

Grate the cucumber and place it in a sieve over a large bowl. Salt the cucumber and mix it around. Leave it for 30 minutes to 2 hours, occasionally pressing the cucumber gently into the sieve to get the liquid out. The salt will help leach the water out of the cucumber.

Line another sieve (or the same one, cleaned) with paper towel or cheesecloth and pour the yogurt into it. You can leave it for as little as 1 hour on the counter or overnight in the fridge. The longer you leave it, the thicker it will get. This is how Greek yogurt is made!

Mix the strained cucumber with the yogurt and the other ingredients, then taste. Adjust the salt and pepper and add any more dill or onion.

Enjoy on sandwiches, as a dip, with pita or tortilla chips, or over meatballs, kebabs or anything spicy.

Best Tomato Sauce

MAKES TWO CUPS

There are many ways to make tomato sauce. I don't find that the more complex recipes taste any better; this one is boldly tomatoey and works on just about anything. It also takes 5 minutes to make. Can't beat that.

1 tbsp olive oil
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
½ tsp chili flakes
16 oz can tomatoes, crushed or diced
½ lemon, zested (optional)
salt and pepper

Add the olive oil to a saucepan on medium heat. Sauté the garlic for 1 minute, until it smells great and becomes translucent. Add the chili flakes and cook for 30 seconds. Add the can of tomatoes, mix, and cook until warmed through. Add a little lemon zest, then salt and pepper to taste. Since canned tomatoes are often already salted, you may not need to add any.

If you want a thicker sauce that will stick to pasta better, cook for 10 to 20 minutes to evaporate more of the liquid. Use immediately or keep in a jar in the fridge for later use.

$2.50 TOTAL
$1.25 / CUP

Peanut Sauce

MAKES ONE CUP

1 jalapeño or other chili, finely chopped (or 2 tbsp chili paste)
3 garlic cloves
1 shallot (or equivalent of any onion)
cooking oil
1 tsp turmeric (optional)
½ to 1 cup coconut milk
½ cup sugarless peanut butter
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp brown sugar (optional)
½ tsp sesame oil

Finely chop the pepper, garlic, and shallot, or a food processor to make them into a paste. (If you're using chili paste instead of a fresh pepper, hold off on it for now.)

Splash some oil in a saucepan on medium heat. Once it's warm, add the chili, garlic, and shallot and sauté until everything's translucent. Add the turmeric, coconut milk, and chili paste if applicable.

Let it come to a boil, then turn the heat down. Add the peanut butter and soy sauce and stir to combine. Once it's all combined, taste it and add whatever you think it needs—but think about the salt and spice in particular.

$3 TOTAL
$3 / CUP

Spices and Aromatics

So many of the recipes in this collection can be easily modified to your taste. Learning to cook with different spices, herbs, and aromatics will instantly elevate your cooking and open up new and interesting possibilities.

Spices can be expensive, but since you use them in small amounts, they end up costing pennies per recipe. If you have the opportunity to shop around, inexpensive spices can often be bought in bulk from ethnic markets.

If you become interested in spices, try buying them whole and grinding them yourself at home. They're far tastier and more aromatic when freshly ground.

Try these suggested combinations on anything from rice to roasted chicken to vegetables. Mix them into butter and add them to popcorn, toast, or vegetables. In short, experiment!

lemon zest and garlic

oregano, cumin, and chili powder

cumin seeds, mustard seeds, and coriander seeds

onion, garlic, and ginger

anchovy, garlic, and chili

salt, pepper, and Romano or Parmesan

onion, chili, and cilantro

sage, rosemary, and thyme

lemon, olives, and garlic

chipotle powder and lime

pickling spices

dill and paprika

parsley and garlic

fennel seeds and parsley

orange, lemon, and lime zest

ginger, cinnamon, and black pepper

cardamom, coriander, and bay leaf

coconut, chili, and lime

scallions and cilantro

basil and garlic

Thanks

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