

MUSHROOM BARLEY SOUP

We're deep into soup season now, so I'm always looking for variations on a theme. Every week I make a big batch of bone broth and I'm always trying different ways to use it. My husband is a big barley and mushroom fan, so this one is for him. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS (serves 6-8)

1 cup of hulled barley

3 cups of water

2 tablespoons of olive oil

1 onion, sliced

1 cup of cooked chicken, turkey, or beef cubed

8 cremini mushrooms, sliced

3 cloves of garlic, minced

2 quarts of bone broth, turkey or chicken stock

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

salt and freshly ground pepper

fresh dill for garnish

PREPARATION

Rinse the barley through a strainer. Place in a large pot and add the water. Add 1 teaspoon of salt. Bring up to boil, then down to a simmer. Simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Strain out any remaining water and set aside.

Wipe out and dry the large pot. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the onion and sauté until translucent, about 7

minutes. Add the chicken, mushrooms and garlic and cook for another two minutes.

Add in the cooked barley, bone broth or stock, and red pepper flakes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil and then simmer for 20 minutes.

Ladle the soup into bowls, garnish with a fresh dill.

GARLIC BREAD

Whenever I need a quick side dish that everyone loves, I default to garlic bread. It's great with steak or pasta dishes. I've also used it as the base for a really decadent sandwich.

Rather than melting butter, I like to infuse olive oil with minced garlic. I strain the oil before using to avoid eating raw garlic, yet the flavor remains.

INGREDIENTS (serves 6-8)

3 cloves of garlic, minced

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil

1 large baguette

salt

fresh thyme or chives for garnish (optional)

PREPARATION

Mix the minced garlic and olive oil in a bowl and let rest on counter for at least one hour. Then strain out flavored olive

oil and discard the garlic.

Cut the baguette lengthwise in half. Generously brush the flavored oil on the soft side of the bread, allowing the oil to drip down into the holes. Lightly season with salt.

Place on a baking sheet and broil on high. Keep an eye on it and remove once the edges start to brown. Depending upon your oven and how far away the bread is from the heating element, this can take between 30 seconds to two minutes. Don't walk away because it can easily burn.

Cut loaf into 2-inch sized pieces. Garnish with fresh thyme or chives.

DRAGON FRUITINI

The dragon fruit is an odd, yet fascinating fruit. At first glance, it's a bit scary looking with its spikes jutting out of its skin as if it's a holdout from prehistoric times. Once cut open, its beautiful white flesh dotted with tiny black seeds is a surprising juxtaposition against its redish-pink exterior.

It's a popular fruit in parts of Asia, as well as Mexico and Central America where it's also known as a pitaya. You've probably passed them by in markets not knowing what to do with them. Well, next time you see one, buy it and try this cocktail. The fruit itself has a mild, sweet flavor – just enough to balance the botanicals in a good gin.

INGREDIENTS (1 Cocktail)

½ dragon fruit, flesh removed from skin and chopped into small pieces

2 oz gin

1 oz Cointreau

1 slice dragon fruit for garnish

Ice

PREPARATION

In a shaker, muddle the dragon fruit flesh with the gin and Cointreau. Fill the shaker with ice $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way full.

Shake vigorously.

Using a large mesh strainer, pour everything – except the ice cubes – into a martini glass. You'll want some of the pulp and the black seeds for flavor and presentation.

Garnish with a half slice of dragon fruit. Enjoy!

CHOCOLATE WALNUT CAKE

I had the most delicious chocolate walnut cake in of all places, Penang Malaysia. I'm not a huge chocolate cake fan, but this one was fudgy, chocolatey and very moist. I've tried a million recipes to try to recreate it and finally found one that comes very close. I can't take any credit for it – it's by [Pastry Wishes](#) but hopefully they won't mind me sharing it. I rarely use other people's recipes, but this one is so good, I couldn't improve on it and it needs to be shared.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE CAKE

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup + 1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup hot strong coffee

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon baking soda

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

1 medium egg, room temperature

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup light vegetable oil

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped walnuts + 1-2 tablespoons extra for garnish

FOR THE FROSTING

4.4 oz semisweet chocolate

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup unsalted butter, room temperature

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup + 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons powdered sugar

2 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon milk

PREPARATION

FOR THE CAKE

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Grease an 8-inch pan and line it with parchment paper.

In a small bowl, mix the cocoa powder and hot coffee together.
Set it aside to cool.

In another medium bowl, mix together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Set it aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together the egg, milk, oil and the cocoa/coffee mixture. Make sure everything is well combined.

Add the dry ingredients and whisk until it's smooth.

Fold in the chopped walnuts, but don't overmix.

Pour the cake batter into the prepared pan and bake for about 30-40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Let the cake cool completely before topping it with the fudge frosting.

FOR THE FROSTING

Chop the dark chocolate and then melt it either over a double boiler or in 10-15 increments in the microwave. Set it aside to cool.

In another bowl, beat the butter together with the cocoa powder and sugar using a hand mixer until it's creamy, about 2-3 minutes.

Add the cooled, melted dark chocolate and beat again until it's smooth.

Add the milk and continue beating until it's creamy and your desired consistency. For thicker frosting, add more powdered sugar, for thinner frosting, add more milk, half a tablespoon at a time.

Then dollop the cooled cake with the frosting and make swirls using the back of a spoon or an offset spatula.

Sprinkle some more chopped walnuts all over the frosting.

G'S POTATO CHIP FISH KEBABS

Here's an oldie, but a goodie—circa 1968. My childhood and dear friend Janis had the most beloved father on the block. He was a man way ahead of his time. I remember spending countless hours at their house as he introduced us to everything from Fred and Ginger dancing in *Top Hat* to Mahler's *Symphony No. 9*. His enthusiasm for the things he loved was infectious and it made us love them too.

He also knew his way around a kitchen in the days when it was strictly the woman's domain. He even won a cooking contest sponsored by the Potato Chip Institute International for this dish—not kidding!



But what's really a hoot is the article that was written about him when he won. My, how times have changed. If you can enlarge the picture below, it's worth reading the article! (Thanks Janis for sending it to me!)



Men's cooking champion Gerald Fox works in the kitchen of his Bethpage home as daughters Rena Dianne, left, Janis Heidi, center, and Shari Anne look on.

Wizard in the Kitchen

Male Cook Is 'State Champ'

By TOBY CHUA

From a potpourri of seafood, vegetables, spices and potato chips, Gerald S. Fox of Bethpage, by profession an electrical engineer, has concocted a prize recipe which has brought him the titles of New York State Men's Cooking Champion and Wizard Cook . . . both ungrudgingly granted him by women.

The state title represents the triumph of his recipe Potato Crisp Fish Kebab, along with 49 others over 510,000 submitted nationally and scrutinized, tested and tasted by leading women food authorities in state run-offs in a competition sponsored by the Potato Chip Institute International.

The competition, which brought entries from 455,000 amateur male cooks, calls for recipes for a main dish using potato chips as an ingredient.

Mr. Fox's second title of "Wizard Cook" is an added honor from his wife Florence, a teacher, and

three daughters, who have granted him a permanent place in the kitchen of their Bethpage home.

THE STATE title gives Mr. Fox a gold trophy and a crack at the Eastern regional championship, after which he could go to Miami Beach to prepare his recipe personally before a panel of critical women judges selecting Men's National Cooking Champion. "Wizard Cook" represents victory in a decade-old battle with his wife for equal status in the kitchen.

In an interview, while Mr. Fox dabbled with another favorite original recipe, Mocha Souffle Graham Cracker Crust Pie, he explained, "My wife's been trying to drive me out of the kitchen for years. She thought her opportunity to defeat me had come when she noticed an advertisement for the competition in a newspaper.

"She challenged me," he continued, "to enter the contest and said I could

maintain a place in the kitchen if I won." Now that he has, Mrs. Fox, who thought him "impossible" in the kitchen, has smilingly said, "He'll be insufferable now."

THE WINNING recipe which Mr. Fox described as a "family favorite for years" and which samplers describe as "superb," grew out of his liking for a dish he tasted while on a business trip to Yorktown, Pa.

Other ventures into the kitchen involve preparation of lunches for his fussy brood of three when his wife is unable to, and concoction of sumptuous dinners as host for the local Gourmet Club of which he and his wife are members.

Mr. Fox confessed that his culinary capers go back to his childhood when he worked alongside his mother of Hungarian descent, in the kitchen of their Brooklyn home.

A music lover and active member of the Syosset Concert Association and the Bruckner Society of Amer-

ica, Mr. Fox defined a good cook as one who "can establish a recipe and follow it, yet allow for creativity and know when to deviate from the specifics." He is a graduate of City College, with a master's degree from the Newark College of Engineering, and is associated with Grumman in Bethpage.

Mr. Fox has furnished his winning recipe with ingredients designed to serve six.

POTATO CRISP FISH KEBAB Marinade

- 10 ounces Italian dressing,
 - 1 clove garlic crushed
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white cooking wine
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lime juice
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh parsley
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon thyme
- Other Ingredients**
- 12 jumbo shrimps-shelled,
 - 1 pound scallops
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ pound fillet of sole
 - 12 cherry tomatoes
 - 6 small white onions
 - 1 green pepper
 - bacon strips
 - 1 package potato chips—approximately 5 ounces.

Prepare marinade by combining all ingredients listed. Cut up fillets and green pepper into neat pieces for skewering. Par-boil peeled onions for $\frac{1}{4}$ minutes. Drain. Add all fish and vegetables to marinade. Cover bowl and marinate two hours. Gently stir occasionally.

Crush potato chips . . . this can be done with a rolling pin while chips are still in bag. Coat each marinated shrimp, scallop and piece of fillet with crushed potato chips by pressing chips onto each piece of fish with the heel of a hand. Carefully lay coated fish on a plate.

Skewer fish and vegetables in a pleasing pattern, wrapping alternate fish pieces in bacon before serving. Broil to taste in electric broiler or outdoor barbecue, turning each skewer $\frac{1}{4}$ turn every few minutes until done (usually until bacon is properly done and potato chip edges are dark brown—approximately 15 minutes). Serve over bed of rice.

Mr. Fox recommends boiling the rice with two parts clam juice and one part water.

This recipe is being reprinted in honor of what would have been G's 97nd birthday. We miss you G!

INGREDIENTS

MARINADE

10 oz Italian dressing
1 clove garlic, crushed
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white cooking wine
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lime juice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh parsley
salt and pepper to taste

KEBABS

12 jumbo shrimps, deveined and shelled
1 pound scallops
 $\frac{3}{4}$ pound fillet of sole
12 cherry tomatoes
6 small white onions, peeled
1 green pepper
1 pound bacon strips
1 package potato chips (approx. 5 oz)
1 cup jasmine rice
1 cup clam juice
1 cup water
salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

Prepare marinade by combining all marinade ingredients listed. Cut up the fillets and green pepper into 2" pieces for skewering. Par-boil peeled onions for 90 seconds. Drain. Add all the fish and vegetables to the marinade. Cover bowl and marinate for two hours, gently stirring occasionally.

Cut a tiny whole in the potato chip bag to let out the air. Crush potato chips inside the bag with a rolling pin. Coat each marinated shrimp, scallop, and piece of fillet with crushed potato chips by pressing chips onto each piece of fish with the heel of your hand. Carefully lay coated fish on a plate.

Skewer fish and vegetables in a pleasing pattern, wrapping alternate fish pieces in bacon. Broil skewers on low, turning them a $\frac{1}{4}$ turn every few minutes until the bacon is cooked and the potato chip edges are dark brown—about 15 minutes.

Cook the rice as per box directions using equal parts of water and clam juice as the liquid. Serve the kebabs over a mound of rice.

CHOCOLATE ORANGE RASPBERRY CAKE

As many of you know, I'm not the baker in the family. My husband is the one that toils away with the flour and sugar...and chocolate, of course. This is his latest triumph. The cake is moist and the orange and raspberry give it a great zesty flavor. I'm not a huge chocolate cake fan, but this one has changed my mind. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

CHOCOLATE ORANGE CAKE

2/3 cup canola oil

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup whole milk

2/3 cup white sugar

2/3 cup caster sugar

1/3 cup powdered sugar

2 eggs

1 cup cocoa powder

1 2/3 cups all purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

2 oranges, zested

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh orange juice

CHOCOLATE ORANGE CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

1/2 cup butter (4 ounces), softened

2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

28 ounces powdered sugar

1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa

Zest of one orange

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raspberry jam

PREPARATION

CHOCOLATE ORANGE CAKE

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a mixing bowl, combine the oil, milk, and sugars together.

In a separate bowl, sift cocoa powder, flour and baking powder, then add in the orange zest and whisk all together.

Slowly pour the wet ingredients into the dry, and stir until combined.

Add the orange juice into the cake batter.

Grease two 8" baking pans and line with parchment paper. Divide the mixture evenly between the two pans.

Bake for 25-30 minutes until a toothpick comes out clean. Allow the cakes to cool for at least ten minutes. Move to a wire rack and cool for an additional twenty minutes.

CHOCOLATE ORANGE CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

Beat butter, cream cheese and vanilla with a stand or hand mixer until creamy, about two to three minutes.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the powdered sugar, cocoa, and orange zest. Slowly add to the cream cheese mixture. Beat on low speed until combined, then increase speed to medium and beat until fluffy—about two minutes.

FOR ASSEMBLY

Place a 9" cardboard cake round on a cake turntable. Place one of the cake layers on the board. Using a pastry bag with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " tip, pipe a boarder around the top of the cake layer. This serves as a barrier to keep the jam from spreading over the sides.

Spread the raspberry jam as evenly as possible on top of the cake layer within the piped border.

Place the second cake layer on top of the first.

Frost the cake with the remaining frosting. For decoration, use a jagged scraper along the sides and pipe small flowers on top.

I LONG TO LIVE IN A NANCY MEYERS MOVIE

Heading toward the jagged coastline, a mourning dove flies over the terracotta roof tiles that cover the elegant Spanish Colonial homes of Santa Barbara. To the east, the Santa Ynez Mountains rise dramatically from the town, offering majestic vistas of a crisp clear blue sky kissing the aquamarine waters of the Pacific Ocean. Seductive Brazilian music mixes in with the light chatter of partygoers. We are here on a breathtaking bluff to celebrate old friends.

And so begins the first few moments of Nancy Meyers' film, *It's Complicated*. Even before I see Meryl Streep banter with Alec Baldwin, I'm totally hooked and dying to see the inside of the house. I long to live the life of a Nancy Meyers character and I can easily satisfy my fantasies on any device, thanks to Netflix.

Movies offer the best armchair travel. I don't have to worry about lost luggage or getting ripped off at a tourist trap. I get to see the most romantic version of a city through the fabulous life of someone else. I can't imagine walking down the steps of Montmartre on a crisp autumn day without hearing Edith Piaf's *La Vie En Rose* blaring out from the open window of someone's posh atelier. The Eiffel Tower, lit up in all its glory, becomes my North Star as I walk alone over the Pont

Neuf, envying the Gitane smoking lovers. It becomes clear that the romance of Paris is the only thing that can mend my broken heart. Yet, I don't actually have to be there to feel as if I'm experiencing it.

Of all the filmmakers who can make me fall in love with a time and place, no one does it better than Ms. Meyers. She just doesn't take me to a location, she let's me live in it alongside her affluent, slightly neurotic characters that always seem to be looking for lasting love. The weather is as perfect and cheery as her storyline and it only rains for dramatic effect. She can make me feel the cool air rushing in as the day's heat dies away with the descent of the sun into the sea.

It's this snapshot of a charmed life that Ms. Meyers is so good at creating. It lies somewhere between truth, fantasy and longing. Take Jane, for example, Meryl Streep's character in *It's Complicated*. She's a fifty-something divorcée who has raised three nearly perfect kids, lives in a graciously appointed home with an impeccable kitchen that she thinks needs remodeling, and has Rita Wilson, Mary Kay Place and Ali Wentworth as best friends. They're the type of friends that really know and love you, not in spite of your quirks and foibles, but because of them. Instead of wearing old sweatpants and downing a pint of Haagen Dazs when things go wrong, they get together in their tunics from the chicest boutiques, eat Jane's homemade lattice topped pies, and drink Chardonnay. How bad could their problems be?

In reality, Jane's house is an hour south of Santa Barbara in Hidden Valley and the asking price is \$12 million. Only the exterior shots were filmed there. The sumptuous interiors were designed by Jon Hutman and Beth Rabino and shot on a sound stage in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. But, that's OK. I don't mind suspending my disbelief if I get to hang out in their world for two hours. I admit it, every time I watch the film – and I've seen it far too many times – I have been known to check out the current real estate prices in Santa Barbara.

In her film, *The Holiday*, Meyers creates a fantasy within a fantasy. The two lead characters, both let down by love, switch homes with hopes to escape their heartache. Kate Winslet's character, Iris, lives in a charming English cottage set quietly outside the storybook village of Surrey, just southwest of London. She's as warm and cozy as her sweet little stone house that's heated by a tiny wood-burning fireplace. It's Christmas time and there's just the right amount of snow dusting the narrow cobblestone streets. The locals make their way into quaint corner pubs with names like "The Dog and Pheasant" and "The Grumpy Mole."

By contrast, Amanda, played by Cameron Diaz, is a Hollywood movie trailer producer who lives in an Architectural Digest inspired villa complete with swimming pool and gardener. The kitchen is one of a professional chef's dreams and there's an entertainment room with multiple remotes to turn on a wall filled with state-of-the-art electronics. The shades in the bedroom even have black out curtains that can go down at the flick of a switch. It's not surprising that when the taxi turns onto Sunset Boulevard, Iris's mouth is agape as Beverly Hills comes into view. Admiring the excesses of wealth, she passes manicured gardens and palm trees hiding the lavish mansions she longs to see. As she opens the door to Amanda's house, she can't believe her good fortune, screaming gleefully as she checks out each of the many sleekly decorated rooms. Iris is living the Nancy Meyer's fantasy in a Nancy Meyer's film and I'm right there with her.

My own experience in LA was not quite the same. I was working there on a project for about four months and I needed a place to stay. Of course, with the movie in mind, I searched AirBNB, hoping to find a place just like Amanda's. It became quickly apparent that I couldn't even afford to park my car in Beverly Hills. All I could manage was a tiny one-bedroom bungalow tucked away in someone's overgrown backyard in West Hollywood. I was told that Renée Zellweger had once lived there before

she was Renée Zellweger, so that offered a touch of tinseltown allure. It almost made up for the leaking toilet and constant rattle from the nearby dry cleaner's air conditioner.

Ms. Meyer's take on Manhattan's nightlife in the first few moments of *Something's Gotta Give* makes the Upper East Side seem sexy and filled with only the young and beautiful. Long-legged girls in short dresses work their way past the bridge and tunnel riff raff as they cut the line for easy entry into the club-of-the-week. The taxis come and go, their lights reflecting in the late summer rain puddles. But I hear no honking or city cacophony, only the thumping beat of the soundtrack. In less than a minute, I am transported to the fantasy version of the city that never sleeps.

But can real life ever live up to the romance and hype created in the movies? As a native New Yorker, I spend most of my days crushed in a subway on my way to and from work. I order in Seamless for lunch and work too many hours. I step in gum on the street and get hassled for loose change. I am no different than most New Yorkers, except that I am a hopeless romantic and watch far too many rom-coms.

It's the week before Christmas, and New York is magical with holiday lights hanging over the avenues like strings of shimmering diamond necklaces. Storefront windows along Fifth Avenue are dressed with oversized ornaments and mannequins dressed as Santa's helpers. People are loaded down with shopping bags and rushing about waiting for the dazzling light show projected against the walls at Saks.

I'm on a first date and we just finished dinner at a cute French bistro in the mid-fifties and decide to walk a bit. We nudge our way past the rushing masses and find a spot at the southwest corner of Rockefeller Center to admire the magnificent 75-foot Norway spruce Christmas tree. With its thousands of twinkling lights, it is more magnificent in person than any NBC-TV special can ever show. He reaches for

my hand and the orchestra swells in my head. It is a movie moment. The smoky aroma of chestnuts roasting on the coals of the nearby street carts wafts past us as we share our first kiss.

It's been 36 years since that day and every Christmas I drag my husband into the city to stand in that very spot where our magic began. He begrudgingly indulges my flare for the romantic, never admitting that he enjoys our annual ritual just as much as I do. As if on cue, the snow starts to lightly fall from the sky as he takes my hand and pulls me close. The sound system from the ice skating rink below is playing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." As we cuddle and watch the skaters, it is in that moment I realize, I actually do live in a Nancy Meyers movie.

CHAR SIU SLICED PORK CHOP

I have been known to walk miles in search of good Char Siu (Chinese Roast Pork). Its sweet and sticky sauce is about as naughty as any food should be, but of course, that's what makes it so irresistible. My friend Grace introduced me to a great place down in NY's Chinatown (Big Wong) where you can get it to go. But I thought it might be fun to see if I could get close to replicating it and I think I came close. Give this recipe a shot and let me know what you think. (It's also a great marinade for chicken too.)

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 2)

2 bone-in pork chops

MARINADE

1/2 cup hoisin sauce
2 Tablespoon ketchup
2 Tablespoon dark brown sugar
1 Tablespoon Shaoxing rice wine
1 Tablespoon honey
1 Tablespoons soy sauce
2 teaspoons oyster sauce
1 teaspoon molasses
1 teaspoon five-spice powder
1 teaspoon grated ginger
1 teaspoon grated garlic
1 teaspoon sesame oil
½ cup canola oil

PREPARATION

Combine all the marinade ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Slit the fatty side of the pork chops with a few shallow cuts so that the edges don't curl up while cooking.

Place the pork chops in a Ziploc bag. Pour in $\frac{3}{4}$ of the marinade. Close bag and massage pork chops so that the marinade covers them. Place in fridge for 24-hours, turning over mid-way. Reserve $\frac{1}{4}$ of the marinade in a separate container and store in the fridge.

Take chops out of the fridge 30 minutes before cooking. Oil a grill pan (or outside grill grates) and bring to medium high heat.

Take the chops out of the Ziploc and lightly scrape off excess marinade. Discard Ziplock. Place chops on grill pan (or direct heat on grill) and cover for six minutes until you get a nice char. Flip over and grill another 4-6 minutes until internal temperature is 140°. Allow to rest for ten minutes before slicing.

In a small saucepan, bring the reserved marinade up to a boil and then simmer for one minute. Drizzle on top of sliced pork once plated.

Serve with fried rice and/or bok choy.

THE GREAT BARBECUE CRAWL

I'm on a mission to visit all 50 states and I'm getting fairly close. So when a family wedding brought us out of the comfort of our Brooklyn home into the backcountry of Arkansas, I saw an opportunity to scratch off a few states on my list. I convinced my husband that a road trip would be a great idea with the selling point being a barbecue crawl through the south. After all, what is the point of a road trip if you can't eat all of the delicacies of the region?



We started in Nashville where there were ample opportunities for barbecue, but we settled on Hattie B's Hot Chicken to grease our stomachs in preparation of all the pork to come. There are six levels of heat from which to choose. We got medium for fear of indigestion, but we could have gone one or two levels higher in retrospect. A side of waffles, fried pickles and mac and cheese fortified us for the four country music bars we visited, ending at Johnny Cash's Bar and BBQ where a nine-month pregnant woman sang a respectable cover of "Shallow."



Next stop was Memphis, which was surprisingly quiet downtown. It was mid-week and off-season, but we expected a bit more action. A friend insisted we check out Rendezvous for their dry-rub ribs. It's in a back alley a few blocks off the main drag. I have to say, although I liked their sauces, the ribs seemed as if they had been hanging around a few hours too long.



En route to Arkansas, we stopped in at Whole Hog. It was here that I hoped to answer that eternal question – which is better, dry or wet rub ribs?



After sampling both, I've come to the conclusion that it must be a personal preference. For me, it's definitely a wet rub.



Our final destination was Chicago to visit more family, so that gave us an opportunity to knock off Oklahoma, Kansas and

Missouri with of course, a stop at Arthur Bryant's in Kansas City for the ultimate taste test.



By this point in the trip, I could barely zip my pants, but that didn't stop me from ordering a half-rack with tons of sides. And I so wanted to just taste the burnt ends that the guy behind the counter gave me a small bowl to sample. It was a good thing I asked, because, by far, the burnt ends were the best barbecue of the trip.

So now, that just leaves seven more states for me to visit. Next trip I can knock off four – North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming. If you've got any good recommendations eating wise, send them my way! And it doesn't have to be barbecue—I'm an equal opportunity eater.

LASAGNA LOAF

If you're like me, sometimes the bargains at Costco are just too much to pass up. The other day I bought an enormous container of ricotta and a one-pound brick of mozzarella with hopes of making a big pan of lasagna. But the party plans fizzled out and as much as I like lasagna, eating twelve portions over the course of the next week didn't seem like the healthiest of ideas. And don't tell me to freeze it unless you can find some space in my freezer.

Speaking of my freezer, way in the back I noticed a container of turkey Bolognese I had made last month. Light bulb! Since it's just my husband and me, I thought I'd make a quickie mini-loaf of lasagna. It took me half the time as my usual from scratch lasagna, but it 's equally delicious.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 4)

1/2-pound oven ready lasagna noodles

2 cups leftover turkey Bolognese, heated (or your favorite jarred meat sauce)

2 cups mozzarella cheese (grated, large holes)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup Parmesan cheese (grated, small holes)

1 tablespoon butter

FOR BECHAMEL

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons flour

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of milk (warm)

Grated nutmeg

Salt & pepper

FOR RICOTTA MIXTURE

2 cups ricotta

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan cheese (grated, small holes)

1 tablespoon fresh oregano (chopped)

1 tablespoon fresh basil (chopped)

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Salt and pepper

PREPARATION

FOR BECHAMEL

In a saucepan, melt butter until it starts to foam. Add flour and whisk for two minutes until sandy colored, but not brown. Slowly pour in milk and whisk until it starts to lightly boil. Lower flame to simmer for eight minutes to thicken, whisking often. Turn off heat, season with pinch of grated nutmeg, salt and pepper, and set aside. If film forms on top, remove before using.

FOR RICOTTA MIXTURE

In a medium sized bowl, mix the ricotta, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan, oregano, basil, garlic powder, and red pepper flakes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

FOR ASSEMBLY

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter a large loaf pan. Spread $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of béchamel on bottom of pan making sure the entire bottom is

covered. Place a layer of lasagna noodles on top. (NOTE: Since lasagna noodles are oven ready and not pre-cooked, they need moisture from the béchamel and sauce to soften them while the dish bakes. Always make sure the whole noodle is covered by some liquid).

Spread a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of meat sauce on top of noodle. Spoon a layer of ricotta mixture on top. Sprinkle a layer of mozzarella, followed by a layer of Parmesan.

Repeat all of above three more times.

Place loaf pan on top of cookie sheet and bake in oven for about 50 minutes.

Allow to cool on top of stove for 30 minutes before serving.