

Son of
**Stupid
Recipes**

1993

The Best of the Tasteless
“Stupid Recipes” Column
by Leslie Strom

plus

additional recipes for the Holidays including tortuous
Swedish peasant food, arterial threats, and recipes so
Stupid even we can make them.

Sunless Tea

Proudly presenting the Stupid Recipe that started it all:

INGREDIENTS:

3 tea bags with strings
hot water
1 bottle
1 refrigerator

In light of today's diet awareness, we present this handy recipe, which, though not earthshaking, provides a refreshing thing to reach for when checking to see if the refrigerator light still operates.

Take a glass half-gallon bottle, like what apple juice comes in at the market. Fill the bottle with hot tap water. (Don't get fussy and boil it or anything.) Take three tea bags of anything, twist the strings together, push the bags into the bottle, and screw the lid on so the strings stick out. (Don't let the tea bag companies give you that bugle juice about ten tea bags per gallon. You yourself may one day have children to put through college as they apparently do.) Place the jar on the counter for about fifteen minutes, then take the tea bags out. When the jar is cool enough so it doesn't melt the plastic shelf in your refrigerator, put the jar in the frig.

You can make this tea with cold water and just put it in the frig, and this works, but with hot water you can watch the tea leach out of the bags, form little tea tendrils, drift down and form a gradient at the bottom of the bottle. (If you often spend time observing such things, you should probably either get a hobby or become a government worker.)

Any contributions to "Stupid Recipes" welcome. No recipe too stupid. Obviously.

Kim's Carrot Cake

While browsing through Glamour magazine several years ago, I ran across an uncharacteristically flowery article describing in great detail the wedding of model Kim Alexis. One extremely generous thing Ms. Alexis did was to share her wedding cake recipe. Some months later, Glamour's Letters to the Editor column was full of grouchy comments about the article and almost without exception, raves about the cake recipe. And so here it is, a cake fit for a supermodel and all her skinny supermodel friends.

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease and flour a 9"x13" baking pan.

2 cups sugar
4 eggs
1 cup oil
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp cinnamon
2 cups whole wheat flour
3/4 cup walnuts
3/4 cup raisins
3 cups grated carrots

Frosting:
1/2 stick butter
4 oz cream cheese
1/2 pkg confectioner's sugar
Dash vanilla

In large bowl, mix sugar, eggs and oil. Add baking powder, soda, cinnamon and flour. Fold in walnuts, raisins and carrots. Bake for one hour. Cool; blend frosting ingredients and spread over cake.

Monday Night Teevee Turkey Soup

Thanksgiving dinner was always something I suffered through in order to get to the thing I loved most two days later: Turkey Bone Soup. The recipe was never embellished or improvised; you boiled the turkey carcass with onions and celery tops, then labored to separate the meat from the bones as the family Schnauzer wistfully observed, then added some more onions and celery and a bunch of barley to the pot for the final simmer.

So now that this cooking game is in my ball park, I circumvent the whole Thanksgiving dinner thing any time I feel like it. Several of my friends who are daunted by cooking in general have learned to make this recipe and though I like to act like this is some kind of holy family secret just to impart a little glamour to the proceedings, it's really pretty easy. With my own modifications, it is amazingly cheap, low in fat, refrigerates and microwaves well, and is really tasty.

(I also have added the convenience of using the television instead of a timer as the "stupid" component of the recipe.)

INGREDIENTS:

2 or 3 turkey thighs
a wad of celery with leafy tops
two good-sized onions
a can of chicken broth
Pearl Barley
green herb-ish things
A big beer
A big soup pot, big colander, big bowl
A big television
A Barcalounger or equivalent

At the grocery store, buy turkey thighs either fresh or frozen. If you get turkey breast you'll pay a fortune, and legs are full of tendons and take forever to pick clean. Thighs are a great bargain. Two or three per pot will do. This seems like a lot of turkey, but it tends to disappear during the cutting up stage.

6:00 p.m.: *Go to the grocery store and pick up the ingredients. For health reasons, be sure you get both your turkey and your Moosehead Beer ice cold.*

Put some water in a soup pot. Remove the skin from the turkey and put it in the pot. Cut the wad of celery in half and toss in the leafy weird parts. Cut an onion into a few big pieces and pile that on. Toss in a bunch of green herbs; just smell the little jars and decide if you think it goes with turkey. (I like sage and basil and oregano, but have been told that only degenerates combine herbs by color).

Cook the soup on medium-low for about an hour. Cut up the rest of the celery and another onion and set this aside.

Put the colander in a big bowl and pour the whole cookpot into it. It's hot as a three-dollar pistol, so wait a few minutes, then pour the liquid back into the soup pot, and add some more water. Put the turkey on a cutting board, and discard all the limp vegetation from the colander.

Cut the turkey up in smallish pieces. Try not to eat too much of it and save the bones for chewing on later. Toss the meat back in the pot.

Add a can of chicken broth if you wish. Add a quarter cup of pearl barley. This stuff expands like you wouldn't believe, so don't add more thinking how much you like barley and how much turkey is in the pot, or you'll wind up with stew or even gruel. Cook for another hour.

If you believe in meals with more than one food in it, you could be doing something about biscuits and salad during the commercials.

The soup will be done when the barley is.

7:00: Switch on "Wheel of Fortune" which you don't really have to watch. Just remember that you're not really learning anything constructive from this dumbest of game shows, except how long half an hour is, and how many people actually have trouble completing "_NE NATL_N UNDER G_D."

7:30: You'll cry profusely from the onions, tears which may actually coincide with one of Alex Trebek's more moving categories like 19th Century Fishing Lures or Antiseptics of the Northern Hemisphere. Drink your beer. Leap up during the "Evening Shade" closing credits and run back to the kitchen.

8:25: Okay, okay. Even if you move pretty fast, you'll miss the first few minutes of "Hearts Afire," which is really no loss. Take your cutting board and turkey to the teevee tray in front of the Barcalounger.

8:30: This step takes a while if you really get into it.

8:45: By the middle of "Hearts Afire" you should have a heap of turkey pieces. You can leave the teevee set before the end because I can tell you the ending of the show. They have sex. Oh, sorry. Did I ruin it for you? "Murphy Brown" and "Love and War" are about to start so make haste with the can opener.

During the various commercial breaks and dumb parts, tear up some lettuce, put on some biscuits, put the napkin rings on the fine linen, and adorn the Teevee Tray with a proper place setting.

10:00: Have a nice big bowl and watch "Northern Exposure."

Spam Flakes

I got a dehydrator several years ago when I was naive enough to believe the Puyallup Fair lady when she said that this device could save me money. I guess it could, in the deft hands of Ron Popeil, but a month after a binge making little round chewy things out of a bumper crop of strawberries, I got my electric bill, and trust me, I didn't save myself a dime over buying dried stuff from the store. Dehydrating foods became more an expensive art form for dehydrating canned spaghetti sauce and making celery worms. I did end up inventing one very unique thing, namely Spam Flakes, which recently won Best of the First Annual Spam-a-rama held at Metro's West Point Sewage Treatment Plant. The design of this dish is a calculated balance of yin and yang of the pure and profane, bland and salty, cool and hot, green and brown, fresh and mucky. On an odd culinary level, this actually works.

INGREDIENTS: A nice cucumber, a can of Spam Lite (Classic Spam and Smoked Spam are too fatty), a knife, paper towels, a dehydrator and a silver platter.

- Thinly slice the can of Spam Lite and cut slices into 1/2" squares .
- Place in dehydrator for 12 hours at 145 degrees, after which they should look like Bacos From Hell.
- Blot them with paper towels until you get tired of it. They should actually be kind of crispy with a tough but not unyielding texture.
- Peel, score with a fork, and thinly slice a cucumber.
- Reheat the Spam Flakes, chill the cucumber slices.
- Serve neatly arranged on a platter as an appetizer. God knows, presentation is everything.

Your entire house, everything in your linen closet, and your house pets will smell of Spam for weeks, but this seems to be the only way to dignify the stuff. And are Spam Flakes worth all the trouble? Try it yourself and see.

Well, okay. They're not worth it more than once. Consider this a simple lesson I am passing on to you, much like the experience I had once with a recipe from Esquire magazine for Shaker Lemon Pie, where the guy writing this thing waxed poetic about the Zen of thinly slicing the lemons, and the religious experience of waiting 24 hours for the lemons and sugar to do some magical thing in the fridge, and the nearly sexual finale of cutting the first perfect slice. Well, I did all these things. This pie took a day and a half, and upon cutting it, it stood there like some kind of beautiful monumental reward to all my toil. And then I took a bite. It was bitter as a stick, because in the author's thrall, he completely forgot to mention that you have to take the white part out of the lemon.]

Omelette in A Cup

INGREDIENTS: An egg, a Styrofoam cup, some pepperoni, some cheese, salt, pepper, and whatever other things you think might go with eggs.

- Break the egg into the Styrofoam cup. Slosh it around with a fork. Toss in some of the other stuff.
- Microwave it for 30 seconds. If it explodes, you didn't stir it well enough.
- Stir it some more.
- Don't undercook. Just as with hamburger and e. Coli connection, undercooked eggs can give you Salmonellosis, which I have personally had (not from eggs, but from a large box turtle) and it's no picnic.
- If Environmental Guilt keeps you from enjoying your Omelet In A Cup, use a ceramic cup, and then
- Enjoy washing the dishes.

Omelet In A Cup is not actually my own invention. I could not possibly come up with such obvious Bachelor Food. This recipe was invented by a guy I used to work with at Kenworth Truck Company, who was given a little cardboard desk calendar by a tool vendor one Christmas, which featured a topless Polynesian woman. For the sake of mock propriety, a female co-worker fashioned a tiny yellow tee-shirt out of a Post-it note and affixed it to the picture. This only served to make the calendar all the more provocative, giving the casual passer-by something to lift up and peek under. My theory about the Styrofoam cup in this guy's recipe is that, like that Post-it shirt, it is the one important "naughty" ingredient.

Banana Overload Bread

Just to prove that an affinity for Stupid Recipes runs in the family, my mom offers the following recipe for banana bread. It is suspected that she thinks all cyclists have a constant parade of blackening bananas as part of their kitchen landscape, just because one cyclist she knows does.

This is a great recipe for bananas damaged in bike crashes or traumatized all day in a rack carrier, or otherwise stupidly treated.

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 over-ripe bananas
- 1 egg (or 1/4 cup Egg-Beaters)
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 Tablespoon oil or melted butter

Mash bananas with a fork. Mix in egg. Mix in dry ingredients. Add the oil or butter. Bake in a greased 5x9 loaf pan at 375° for 45 minutes.

Banana bread travels much better than actual bananas.

Spaghetti Sauce That's Better Than You Can Buy and Easier Than You Think

- 1/2 medium onion, chopped
- 1 clove minced garlic
- 2 T oil
- 1/2-1 lb hamburger
- 2 cans tomato sauce
- 1 can tomato paste
- 2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp sugar
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsely
or 1 T dried parsely
- 1 bay leaf

Saute onion, garlic and hamburger in oil. Add remaining ingredients and simmer for 1/2 hour or so. Serve over spaghetti with Parmesan cheese.

Fudge That Actually Works

I have tried making fudge optimistically for years, and finally was told by enterprising truffle-making friends that the reason my fudge goes either grainy or never sets up three times out of four is due to the damp Pacific climate we live in. We recently discovered a recipe that has worked the ninety or so times we have tried it, and besides setting up reliably, it tastes good. The recipe is reputedly from the See's candy company. Though I am repeating here unadapted, I find this recipe pretty sweet, and substitute bitter chocolate for half the chocolate chips.

INGREDIENTS:

1/2 cup butter

1 6 ounce package semi-sweet chocolate pieces

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 cups sugar

5 ounce can evaporated milk (try evaporated non-fat milk for that touch of irony)

10 large marshmallows

1 cup chopped nuts (we like walnuts, but pecans fit better into the high-fat theme of this recipe, so why fight it?)

Combine the butter, chocolate pieces and vanilla in a medium bowl that can take some heat (I use an 8 cup Pyrex measuring cup). Set it aside.

Place sugar, evaporated milk and marshmallows in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to low and cook 6 minutes, stirring constantly.

Pour hot mixture over ingredients in bowl. Beat with electric mixture until fudge is thick and dull. Stir in nuts. Pour into buttered 8 inch square pan. Refrigerate several hours to firm. Makes anywhere from 4 to 64 squares.

A word about real vanilla and the artificial flavoring known as vanillin: Once when I was doing some facilities work at the Kenworth plant in the Duwamish Industrial area, I noticed the adjacent Rhone Poulenc plant smelled like wood pulp near the road, and like vanilla near the waterway. I thought this might be some kind of olfactory illusion, since I always noticed the vanilla smell when I came staggering out of the fiberglass molding building (after which, under the influence of resin fumes, my co-workers seemed glamorous and the wharf rats seemed kinda cute). It was later explained to me that this was no illusion, that vanillin is some kind of wood by-product, utilizing the liquor from pulp mills and turning into a close facsimile of America's Favorite Flavor. The moral of this story is, always use real vanilla. Less danger of splinters.

Sweet Potato Pear Bake: At Last, A Good Reason to Go to the Liquor Store

Invited to a Vegetarian gathering and all you have on hand is Spam Flakes? This recipe is courtesy of the lovely Marilyn Ray, who introduced us to this dish just in time for Thanksgiving a few years ago, and just in time for a round of potlucks with highly offendable people. It was a hit, and spared me the dilemma of what I could bring that would give the erroneous impression that I actually knew how to cook.

The pear brandy that really makes this recipe distinctive is somewhat expensive. A small bottle goes a long way. Suggested uses for the bottle you buy to make this are: Make this recipe about ten times, taking it to many parties during the holidays, give away a Sweet Potato Pear Bake casserole as a door prize every day of Advent or Hanukkah, or sample the pear brandy for reliability during your baking efforts.

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 large sweet potatoes, boiled, peeled and sliced 1/4" thick**
- 5 large pears cored and sliced 1/4" thick**

Alternate layers in a baking dish. Prepare sauce below and pour over layers. Cover dish with plastic and cook in microwave 8 minutes until pears are tender and heated through, or bake in 350 degree oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

SAUCE: Heat in sauce pan

- 3 tablespoons butter**
- 1/2 cup orange juice**
- 1/3 cup pear brandy or pear nectar**
- 1/2 cup brown sugar**
- 1/4 tsp salt**
- 1 Tablespoon grated orange rind**

When sauce is hot, blend in

1 Tablespoon cornstarch

using a whisk. Cook until sauce is clear and thick.

Country French Seven-Can (Plus a Jar Plus Some Other Stuff) Soup

Mom's friend Hazel Church provided us with her famous Seven Can Soup recipe, and we have modified it a little bit, hence the overly-long title above. If you keep the cans of stuff on hand, you have the makings of a good dinner when you run out of imagination or time. This is also a good thing to feed large numbers of people cheaply with; when I was working on a low budget feature film, several of us in the production office formed a "lunch co-op" taking turns making lunch for the others, and this soup fared well in the crock pot.

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 6 slices thick cut lean smoked bacon
- 1 T. olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced

Cut bacon into 1" pieces. Saute in soup pot until soft but not crisp. Add olive oil, minced garlic and onions. Cook until onions are transparent but not brown.

- 2 cans chicken broth
- 1 can stewed Cajun tomatoes, undrained
- 1 can black beans, undrained
- 1 can chili beans, undrained
- 1 can small white beans, undrained
- 1 can large white beans, undrained
- 1 8-oz jar chunky salsa
- 1/2 C white wine or dry vermouth.

Combine the rest of the ingredients. Heat and enjoy. Can be frozen. Serves eight generously.

Spanakopita: My Dramatic Escape From Owego With the Ultimate Spinach Pie

The lady who ran a lovely tearoom in Owego, New York made me swear I'd leave town if she gave this recipe to me. It was her big lunchtime seller, which I consumed often during my lunch breaks at IBM. My other co-workers frequented a bar next door that served ribs and beer, and this was my way of returning to the computers more or less sober.

This dish takes a bit of doing to make. You need two big cookie sheets or better yet, two shallow pans, lots of counter room, and a couple of hours. I have yet to try this with fresh spinach, mostly because I dread the idea of failure on such a large undertaking.

INGREDIENTS:

3 pkg frozen chopped spinach, cooked and drained well

2 onions, chopped, sauteed in

2 T veg. oil.

1/2 cup chopped parsely

dash of cinnamon

1/2 lb feta cheese, crumbled

1 cup Swiss cheese, shredded

1/2 cup grated Parmesan

3 eggs

Mix well, add to above four ingredients.

1 lb phyllo dough

1/2 pound butter, melted

Butter two 9"x13" pans. Follow the instructions on the Phyllo dough on thawing it out. Cut dough in half. Layer 10 to 14 phyllo leaves, buttering each with melted butter with your hand. Work fast, and place a damp cloth on the Phyllo when not using it.

Add filling to top of last layer and smooth. Top with 6 to 8 more phyllo leaves, brushing every other one with melted butter. Butter top and bake at 250 degrees for about 30 minutes until golden. Cut into 6 squares per pan, then diagonally into triangles.

Krup Kakor

These two following dishes should probably be filed under “Traditional Dishes” because nothing but tradition would compel most people to make them. They are traditional Swedish foods, usually made in obscene quantities, and sometimes viewed as not worth the work by those who have to make it without benefit of craving it as well. Family members may have a perverse historical interest in these foods, and non-family may find it amusing to see how some people mis-spend their time in the kitchen.

(Panni makes a dehydrated potato dumpling mix which you can get at import stores and better groceries, which approximates the real thing pretty well. Be sure to get the raw potato dumpling mix.)

INGREDIENTS

3 pounds raw Idaho Russet potatoes
1-1/2 pounds cooked Idaho Russet potatoes
2 lbs raw pork
1 cup chopped raw onions
Salt and pepper

Grate the raw potatoes on a fine grater. Put the raw potatoes in a clean dishcloth and wring out all the water. Grate the cooked potatoes on a fine grater. Mix the raw potatoes and cooked potatoes together. Add salt to the potato dough.

Dice up the meat small, chop the onion in small dice, mix the meat and onions together.

Form a 3” meat-filled dumpling by making a patty of the potato dough, putting a bit of the meat and onion mix in the middle, and rolling it into a ball.

Drop the balls into gently boiling salted water. Cook about 45 minutes.

Serve with a stick of butter.

Leftover balls can also be cut in half, browned in butter, milk added and heated, and served in a soup bowl.

Korv

(Swedish Potato Sausage)

Picture this: Butte, Montana, 1924: The Womenfolk stuffing sausages in 20 pound lots with cow horns, Sonny at the boiling pot with a darning needle poking air bubbles in the cooking links, a real family event. The tradition carries on today, though more grudgingly and in smaller batches. Sonny still does the darning needle duty.

This recipe is for a modest amount of sausage. I personally have never seen Korv made in batches smaller than ten pounds, because after all, there's a whole pig's worth of casing to use up.

Korv can be eaten right away, and leftovers can be cut lengthwise and fried the next day. They freeze pretty well, so make plenty while you're at it.

INGREDIENTS:

1 lb ground round
1/2 lb ground pork
1-1/2 lbs potatoes (russets)
1 small onion
2 soda crackers
1-1/4 tsp salt
1/2 tsp pepper
1/4 tsp allspice
about 2 small glasses cold water

Casing: Buy pork casing at a butcher shop. Soak the casing in water and rinse. Run water thru the casing and check for holes. If you come across a hole, cut it out or the sausage will split during cooking.

Mix the above ingredients and stuff into pork casing. Tie a knot in each end of the sausage. Boil for 45 minutes in salt water with

3 whole allspice.

After sausage has been cooking for about 15 minutes, pierce any air bubbles with a darning needle to let the air out.

Eggplant Parmesan

Bart Bartolillo's Grandma Mangiamele's recipe

Another family favorite, though not my family. We were too busy with the potatoes.

It took me almost a year to extort this recipe out of Bart, who was both reluctant to share the old family secret, and didn't have the time to translate the hands-on process to paper for me. I had to write this down as he made a batch.

Bart spent a lot of time with his grandmother in Brooklyn, and his duty as a child was to get the big stone out of the garden to put on top of the eggplant discs to "press the poisons out." So persistent a notion was this toxic-control measure, that Bart's younger brother Mike, when told that we didn't use a stone on one particular batch of eggplant Parmesan that we made, refused to eat any of it. So, the stone has been added to the recipe in case Mike, their grandmother, and half of Sicily are right.

INGREDIENTS:

1 eggplant - approx 5" dia. x 12" long

**A big flat rock, preferably clean
seasoned bread crumbs**

1 egg

milk

1 lb ground beef, pork or veal

tennis-ball sized onion

oregano, garlic, pepper

1 qt. spaghetti sauce, heated.

1 lb. mozzarella cheese

grated Parmesan cheese

Peel the eggplant with vegetable peeler, chop off stem end. Slice it into discs 1/8 - 1/4" thick. Put eggplant discs on paper towels and press dry under the big flat rock.

Mix egg and milk, coat eggplant with this and bread with crumbs, fry in oil until brown. Lay on paper towels. Fry ground meat, with some onion, oregano, garlic, pepper.

In 9x13 glass baking dish, put some heated sauce in bottom, then layer of eggplant, all of meat, some more sauce, Parmesan cheese, half of the mozzarella. Then another layer of eggplant, rest of the sauce, Parmesan cheese, rest of mozzarella.

Preheat to 350 F, bake for half an hour, take a look after 20 minutes... Mozzarella should be brown but not burned.