

EASY-DINNER RESOURCES

Busy cooks find plans for supper swapping, menus by the month

By TERESA J. FARNEY THE GAZETTE May 2, 2007

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It's the age-old question: What's for dinner?

Through the years, the answer has gotten more complicated, what with an increase in single-family households and households where both parents work, and kids whose after-school activities keep them going till long after the sun has set. There's barely time to think about what to fix for dinner, much less find time for preparing it.

That's where two new Colorado Springs-bred cookbooks come to the rescue: "The Great American Supper Swap — Solving the Busy Woman's Family Dinnertime Dilemma," by Trish Berg, and "Menu Maid," by Nonnie, aka Loretta Bocast.

Berg's concept, a variation of an idea that's been around for a while, requires you to gather like-minded friends to share cooking responsibilities. One day a week, you cook enough food for everyone in your group of three to five families. You keep one meal for your family and deliver the other meals to the families in your group. The rest of the week, they deliver supper to you.



Berg, a weekly newspaper columnist and mother of four, lives in Ohio, but her book was published by Colorado Springs-based Cook Communications Ministries. When her manuscript hit the desks of editors at Cook Communications, they were taken by the concept and decided to give the supper swapping idea a test drive.

A group of six employees followed Berg's outline for January. Because they all work at the same place, they were able to take the completed meals to work with them, instead of delivering it to each home. At the end of the

day, they would gather at the employee cafeteria to get their meals before heading home.

“We loved the idea of having a meal ready to go at the end of the day, but we decided we didn’t want to have meals every day,” said Patty Ralston. “So we divided up into two groups. One group cooks two days a week, and another group cooks three days a week.”

Amy Quicksall, who gets credit for getting the groups started, said, “We took (Berg’s) idea and tweaked it. Most of us are moms with kids, and the idea is great since you don’t have to cook every day. Two nights a week, dinner is almost ready. It’s great to get a breather.”

The swapping groups get together toward the end of the month to plan menus for the next month. For Tammy Horvath, the plan is as much about saving money as it is about saving time.



“I usually can fix enough food to feed the 13 people in my group for under \$30,” she said.

“Buying in bulk is cheaper. I normally wouldn’t do that for just my husband and I. There would be too much food and leftovers.”

Then there’s the bonus of getting new recipes.

“Getting the meals are great,” said Mary Critchfield, “but new recipes are even better.”

Another big advantage, said Jan Maniatis, “is not having to keep running to the store.”

Charlene Powilleit joined the swapping group with some hesitations.

“I was concerned that there would be repeat meals,” she said, “but there hasn’t been one yet — except for the ones like (group member Michele Tennesen’s) corn chowder that we all loved and wanted to have again.”

Berg’s book, which will hit shelves this month at Christian bookstores (and by order at general bookstores), will cost \$14.99. It has a step-by-step plan for getting started with a supper-swapping group, as well as loads of recipes. It’s not heavy-handed with Christian references, but Berg cites scripture as one reason for producing the cookbook.

“My hope and prayer is that The Great American Supper Swap will bring families back to the dinner table together, every night of the week,” Berg

said in an interview at [www .christianbook.com](http://www.christianbook.com).

If you're not in the mood to form a club to get food on the table, there's another method: Nonnie's "Menu Maid." After retiring from a job as a financial officer three years ago, Loretta Bocast of Colorado Springs started writing a nearly 450-page meal planner for a year's worth of meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was an idea she'd had for years but never had time to work on.

"When I was first married in 1949, food plans were popular," she said. "It involved buying a freezer and then ordering the food to fill it. I used the plan for a year and really liked it. However, when the first baby came, we got busy and stopped doing the plan."

So when she left her job, her dream became a reality.

Here's how it works: Open the book to, say, April, and you'll find menus for each day of the week — with recipes. Then at the end of the month, there's a grocery list for everything you'll need have on hand to prepare the meals. So, in theory, you have to shop only once a month.

"I always tell readers to use the grocery list to check their pantry first," she said. "A lot of things, like spices, won't need to be replaced each month. And fresh produce and milk will need to be shopped for more often."

The recipes are simple and family friendly: tacos, ovenfried chicken, sesame-seed hamburgers and the like. All are designed for families of four.

And, yes, it helps to have extra pantry space, a big freezer and a couple of refrigerators.

"I have a 16- to 18-cubic-foot freezer and two refrigerators," she said. "Stick with the plan and all the food gets used up by the end of the the month."

Her plan, like Berg's, can be tweaked to fit your family.

"If you don't want to do the breakfasts and lunches, just skip them," she said. "Just using the book for dinners will help families have nutritious meals together."

Elaine Gardner of Colorado Springs liked Bocast's book so much she bought another one for her 40-something daughter and is planning to buy one for a niece getting married in June.

"It's good for an experienced or an inexperienced cook," Gardner said. "I like the old-fashioned recipes and how everything is so well organized."

The book is published by Mother's House Publishing and costs \$47.85, plus tax and shipping. To place an order call 266-0437 or visit [www.mothers housepublishing.com](http://www.mothershousepublishing.com).

CREOLE GUMBO Yield: 6 servings

1/2 cup chopped onion 1 clove garlic, minced 3 tablespoons butter 3 tablespoons flour 1 (16-ounce) can tomatoes, cut up 1 1/2 cups water 1/2 cup chopped green bell pepper 2 bay leaves 1 teaspoon dried oregano, crushed 1 teaspoon dried thyme, crushed 1/2 teaspoon salt 1/2 teaspoon bottled hot pepper sauce 1 (10-ounce) package frozen okra 2 (4.5-ounce) cans shrimp, drained 1 (7-ounce) can crab meat, drained and flaked Cooked rice (optional)

Cook's note: Substitute cut-up kielbasa and breakfast sausage for okra and crab.

Procedure: 1. In large saucepan, cook onion and garlic in butter until onion is tender. Blend in flour and cook, stirring constantly, until flour is golden brown. Stir in tomatoes, water, green pepper, bay leaves, oregano, thyme, salt and hot sauce. Bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 20 minutes. 2. Remove bay leaves. Stir in frozen okra. Bring mixture to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes. Stir in shrimp and crab meat. Cook about 5 minutes, or until heated through. 3. Serve gumbo mixture over hot cooked rice, if desired, in soup plates.

Nutrition data per serving, made with okra and crab (not including rice):

Calories 183.6 (37.4 percent from fat); fat 7.6 g (sat 4.1 g, mono 2 g, poly 0.8 g); protein 17 g; carbohydrates 12.7 g; fiber 2.67 g; cholesterol 107.1 mg; sodium 547 mg; calcium 132.3 mg. Source: Sharon Gilbert

LOBSTER NEWBURG

Yield: 4 servings

3 tablespoons butter 1 1/2 cups cut-up, cooked lobster 1 tablespoon sherry 1/2 tablespoon cognac 1 cup heavy cream Dash nutmeg Dash cayenne pepper 1/2 teaspoon salt 2 egg yolks, lightly beaten

Procedure: 1. Melt butter in skillet. Add lobster meat and cook about 3 minutes. 2. Add sherry and cognac; cook 1 minute. Add cream, nutmeg, cayenne, salt and egg yolks. Cook until slightly thickened. 4. Serve immediately.

Nutrition data per serving: Calories 382.7 (80.7 percent from fat); fat 34.3 g (sat 20.4 g, mono 10.1 g, poly 1.6 g); protein 14.4 g; carbohydrates 2.8 g;

fiber 0.03 g; cholesterol 256.6 mg; sodium 601.3 mg; calcium 88.3 mg.
Source: "Menu Maid," by Nonnie

CHICKEN TETRAZZINI Yield: 4 servings

8 ounces thin spaghetti 2 tablespoons butter 2 tablespoons flour 1 cup chicken broth (or 1 bouillon cube dissolved in 1 cup hot water) 2 cups cubed cooked chicken 1 (7-ounce) can mushrooms, undrained 1 cup cream (or lower-fat milk) 1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Procedure: 1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease an oblong baking dish. 2. Cook spaghetti according to package directions. Drain and place in baking dish. 3. Melt butter in saucepan over very low heat and sprinkle in flour. Stir constantly to blend without any lumps. Gradually pour in chicken broth. Cook gently, stirring, until sauce is thick and smooth. 4. Add diced chicken, mushrooms (including juice in can) and cream or milk. Stir and allow to heat through, but do not let boil. Add salt to taste. 5. Add this mixture to spaghetti in baking dish, sprinkle top with Parmesan cheese, and bake 25 minutes, or until top is nicely browned.

Nutrition data per serving (made with cream): Calories 649.5 (51.5 percent from fat); fat 37.2 g (sat 20.6 g, mono 11.1 g, poly 2.9 g); protein 32.7 g; carbohydrates 46.4 g; fiber 2.33 g; cholesterol 166.8 mg; sodium 1,162 mg; calcium 162 mg. Source: Amy Quicksall

WHIPPED-CREAM PIE

Yield: 8 servings

18 graham crackers 1/3 cup butter, softened 1 tablespoon sugar 1 1/2 cups heavy cream

Procedure: 1. Preheat oven 425 degrees. 2. Crumble crackers. Set aside 1/2 cup for combining with whipped cream. 3. Combine butter with crumbs and sugar. Press crumb mixture firmly against bottom and sides of a buttered 8- or 9-inch pie pan. Bake 10 minutes; cool on rack. 4. Whip cream until stiff peaks form. Fold in remaining 1/2 cup crumbled crackers. Fill cooled pie crust. Serve. Refrigerate leftover pie.

Nutrition data per slice: Calories 298.6 (79.2 percent from fat); fat 26.3 g (sat 15.7 g, mono 7.9 g, poly 1.2 g); protein 2.1 g; carbohydrates 14.9 g; fiber 0.43 g; cholesterol 83.4 mg; sodium 194.1 mg; calcium 35.2 mg.
Source: "Menu Maid," by Nonnie

DRESSING ‘A LA BO’

Yield: About 3/4 cup

1/4 cup vinegar 2 teaspoons dry mustard 1 teaspoon onion powder 1/2
teaspoon salt 1/2 cup olive oil 2 teaspoons garlic powder 2 teaspoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon pepper

Procedure: 1. In small container or jar with tight lid, combine all ingredients. Shake well until emulsified. 2. Store in refrigerator.

Nutrition data per 1-tablespoon serving: Calories 87.3 (94.5 percent from fat); fat 9.2 g (sat 1.2 g, mono 6.7 g, poly 0.8 g); protein 0.2 g; carbohydrates 1.5 g; fiber 0.06 g; cholesterol 0 mg; sodium 89.1 mg; calcium 3.9 mg.

Source: “Menu Maid,” by Nonnie

SMOTHERED PORK CHOPS

Yield: 4 servings

1/2 cup all-purpose flour 1 tablespoon onion powder 1 tablespoon garlic
powder 1/2 teaspoon salt 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper 4 pork
chops 1/4 cup olive oil 1/2 cup chicken broth 2 roasted green chiles (skinned
and chopped) 1/4 cup buttermilk

Procedure: 1. In shallow bowl, place flour, onion powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Mix with fork. Dredge pork chops in seasoned flour to coat; shake off excess seasoned flour. Reserve remaining seasoned flour. 2. Heat large saute pan over medium heat and coat with oil. When oil is hot, lay pork chops in pan and fry 5 minutes on each side until golden brown. Remove pork chops from pan and add about 1 teaspoon seasoned flour to remaining oil. Whisk flour into oil to dissolve, then pour in chicken broth and add chopped green chiles. Let liquid cook down 5 minutes to reduce and thicken slightly. Stir in buttermilk to make a creamy gravy and return pork chops to pan, covering them with sauce. Simmer 10 minutes, or until pork chops are cooked through.

Nutrition data per serving: Calories 683.1 (70.4 percent from fat); fat 53.5 g (sat 16.4 g, mono 26.8 g, poly 5.7 g); protein 33 g; carbohydrates 16.5 g; fiber 1.35 g; cholesterol 121.3 mg; sodium 535 mg; calcium 67.9 mg.

Source: Charlene Powilleit