

Across the Fence

Recipes on a Budget – February 2020

Marco Ayala's Recipes

Cilantro Lime Chicken

4 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
Juice of 2 limes
¼ cup freshly chopped cilantro
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ tsp. cumin
Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
Salt and pepper to taste
Cooked white rice, for serving

Whisk together 2 tablespoons oil, lime juice, cilantro, garlic, cumin, and red pepper flakes. Add chicken and toss to coat. Let marinate in fridge 30 minutes and up to 2 hours. When ready to cook, preheat oven to 425°. In a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat, heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Season chicken with salt and pepper, then add to skillet skin-side down and pour in remaining marinade. Sear until skin is golden and crispy, about 6 minutes. Flip and cook 2 minutes more. Transfer skillet to oven and bake until chicken is cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes. Serve over rice drizzled with pan drippings.

Easy Taco Casserole

1 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil	1 cup corn, canned and drained or frozen
½ onion, chopped	12 corn tortillas, 6 halved
2 cloves garlic, minced	2 cups shredded Monterey jack
1 lb. ground beef	1 cup shredded cheddar
1 Tbsp. taco seasoning mix	1 cup crushed corn chips
Salt and pepper, to taste	2 green onions, thinly sliced
1 can (15.5 oz.) black beans, ¼ cup reserved	Sour cream, for serving
2 cups chopped cherry tomatoes, divided	

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a large skillet over medium heat, heat oil. Add onion and cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute more. Add ground beef, breaking up the meat with a wooden spoon. Cook until beef is no longer pink, about 6 minutes. Drain fat. Stir in taco seasoning, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in all but ¼ cup black beans, 1 ½ cups cherry tomatoes, and corn. Spread a small amount of the beef mixture on the bottom of your baking dish, then top with a layer of tortillas. Add a third of the cheeses, 1/3 of the meat mixture, then repeat with another layer of tortillas, cheese and beef. Top with remaining tortillas and remaining meat mixture. Top with crushed corn chips, remaining cheese, and reserved beans. Bake until cheese is melty, and casserole is warmed through, 20 to 25 minutes. Garnish with remaining cherry tomatoes and green onions. Serve with sour cream.

Peanut Butter Pretzel Bars

1 pkg. (16 oz.) miniature pretzels
1½ cups butter, melted
1½ cups peanut butter
3 cups confectioners' sugar
2 cups (12 oz.) semisweet chocolate chips
1 Tbsp. shortening

Line a 13x9-in. baking pan with foil, letting ends extend up sides. Set aside 1½ cups pretzels for topping. Pulse remaining pretzels in a food processor until fine crumbs form. In a large bowl, mix butter, peanut butter, confectioners' sugar and pretzel crumbs. Press into prepared pan. In a microwave, melt chocolate chips and shortening; stir until smooth. Spread over peanut butter layer. Break reserved pretzels and sprinkle over top; press down gently. Refrigerate, covered, until set, about 1 hour. Lifting with foil, remove from pan. Cut into 48 bars.

Slow Cooker Ham and Bean Soup

1 medium yellow onion	2 whole bay leaves
3 stalks celery	1 tsp. dried thyme
4 med carrots	1 tsp. dried oregano
4 cloves garlic	1½ Tbsp. chicken base or bouillon
2 medium smoked ham hocks	Salt and pepper to taste
1lb. dry 16 bean mix	

The night before, rinse the beans, pick through and remove any stones or debris. Place in a large container, cover with double the amount of water and refrigerate overnight. Dice the onion, carrot, and celery. Mince the garlic. Place all four in the bottom of the slow cooker. Nestle two ham hocks down into the vegetables. Pour the soaking water off of the beans and rinse again. Pour the drained beans into the slow cooker on top of the vegetables and ham hocks. Add the seasoning (2 bay leaves, 1 tsp. thyme, 1 tsp. oregano, 1.5 Tbsp. chicken base and a few cranks of black pepper). Add 6 cups of water, give everything a light stir to distribute the seasoning a bit but don't disturb the vegetables or ham hocks. Secure the lid on top of the slow cooker and cook on high for 4 to 6 hours or until the beans are soft and have absorbed most of the water. Stir the soup and remove the ham hocks. Pick any meat off of the ham hocks and return it to the soup. Taste the soup and adjust the seasoning to your liking. Serve hot with any garnishes you like.

Money saving tip: Don't let food expire. If you find yourself having to toss out food items that are not used or eaten, then you are tossing money in the garbage. Stock the fridge the right way: make sure you put any item that has a shorter expiration date towards the front of the fridge and things that last longer in the back.

Budget Friendly Goulash

1 Tbsp. oil	1 Tbsp. chili powder
1 onion, chopped	1 tsp. paprika
4 cloves garlic, minced	1 Tbsp. tomato paste
1 lb. ground beef	2 cans (14.5 oz. each) diced tomatoes
1 tsp. salt	8 oz. macaroni
½ tsp pepper	2 Tbsp, chopped fresh parsley
1 green bell pepper, chopped	

Fill a pot with some water for the pasta; cover, and set over high heat. Start heating 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the onion and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute longer. Add the ground beef, 1 teaspoon kosher salt, and 1/2 teaspoon black pepper; cook until fully browned. Drain. While still over medium heat, add the bell pepper, chili powder, paprika, and tomato paste to the ground beef and cook for a couple of minutes. Add the diced tomatoes, 1/2 teaspoon of kosher salt, and 1/4 teaspoon of black pepper, then stir to combine. Cover and bring to a gentle simmer. When the meat mixture has come to a full simmer, add a good amount of salt to the boiling water. Add the pasta, then stir to combine. Cook the pasta for two minutes less than the shortest cooking time listed on the box. You want it undercooked. While the pasta is cooking, stir the meat mixture periodically. Drain the pasta and immediately add it to the meat mixture, then stir to combine. Allow the pasta and meat mixture to simmer together for about 3 to 4 minutes or until the pasta is as done as you like it. Taste for seasoning and adjust as needed. Add the parsley and stir to combine. If desired, serve with some cheddar cheese or parmesan cheese.

Quick Asian Skillet

2 pkgs. chicken or beef flavored ramen
16 oz. frozen vegetable blend of your choice
2 boneless skinless chicken breasts or 1 lb. pork tenderloin
¾ cup honey
¼ cup soy sauce

Prepare Ramen noodles according to package directions and set aside. Pour one tablespoon oil in a large nonstick skillet and place over medium high heat. Add frozen vegetables and cook, stirring often, until tender - about 5-7 minutes. Set aside. In same skillet, place meat. Cook until just browned on both sides, 6-8 minutes. Meat will not be fully cooked, but just browned on the outside. While meat is browning, stir honey and soy sauce together until well combined. Remove meat from skillet and slice into strips or medallions. Return to skillet and pour honey soy sauce over. Lower heat to medium and cook, flipping once or twice, until meat is no longer pink in the center and sauce is reduced slightly, about ten minutes. Add noodles and vegetables back to skillet and stir to coat well with sauce. Serve hot.

Chicken Piccata

2 large chicken breasts (10 oz. each,
boneless, skinless)
1 tsp. salt (optional)
½ tsp. black pepper
¼ cup whole wheat flour
1 egg
1 tsp. lemon juice

½ cup bread crumbs
1 tsp. Italian seasoning
1 tsp. olive oil plus cooking spray
2 Tbsp. capers, drained and rinsed
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
½ cup low sodium chicken broth
¼ cup parsley, chopped

Preheat the oven to 475F. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray and set aside. Slice the chicken breast in half lengthwise and then pound to 1/4-inch thickness. Season each chicken breast with salt (optional) and ground black pepper. Set up three wide bowls or flat-bottom containers. Fill the first bowl with the whole wheat flour, the second bowl with the egg and lemon juice, and the third bowl with the breadcrumbs and Italian seasoning. Whisk the egg and lemon juice together. Combine the breadcrumbs and Italian seasoning and mix well. Dredge one chicken breast in the flour and shake off the excess. Then dip the chicken breast in the egg, and then coat in the breadcrumb mixture. Place on the baking sheet. Repeat this process for the remaining three chicken breasts. Spray the top of each chicken breast with cooking spray and bake for 8 minutes. Turn the chicken breasts over and bake for 5 more minutes. Ensure that the chicken is cooked to an internal temperature of 165F. While the chicken is baking, heat the oil and a generous amount of cooking spray over medium heat in a small nonstick skillet. Add the capers and sauté for 2-3 minutes. Add the lemon juice and cook until the lemon juice is completely reduced. Add the chicken broth and simmer until reduced by half. Stir in the parsley. Remove the chicken from the oven and serve with 1 Tbsp. of sauce drizzled over the chicken.

Oreo® Pudding Cake

1 box (15¼ oz.) devil's food cake mix
Vegetable oil and eggs as needed for the cake mix
2 pkgs. (4 oz.) cookies 'n' cream instant pudding mix*
Milk as needed for the pudding mix
1 container (8 oz.) frozen whipped topping, thawed
8 Oreos® for topping the cake

Prepare and bake the cake mix in a 9 x 13-inch baking dish, according to the package directions. When the cake is done baking, use the end of a wooden spoon to poke several holes all over the cake. Whisk the pudding with the milk for 2 minutes. Let sit for 2 minutes. Pour the pudding over the cake and press into the holes. Chill in the fridge for 2 to 3 hours. Spread the whipped topping evenly over the cake and top with the crushed Oreos®. Scoop and serve.

***Note:** A combination of 1 (4 oz.) box of instant cookies 'n' cream pudding and 1 (3.4 oz.) box of instant chocolate pudding can be used.

Money saving tip: Choose store brand products when looking to save money. Store brands tend to be cheaper and in most cases, produced by the same company, just packaged differently.

Carolyn Peake's Recipes
Amish Country Casserole

1 lb. box of your favorite pasta
1 Tbsp. olive oil
1 large onion, chopped
1½ lbs. lean ground beef
1 can tomato soup

1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 cup milk
Salt and pepper to taste
½ tsp. paprika
½ tsp. dried parsley

Preheat the oven to 350°F and spray a 9x13-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Cook the pasta as per instructions on the box. Meanwhile, sauté the onion in the olive oil until soft. Add the ground beef and cook until done. As soon as the pasta is done, drain and return to the pot. Add the cooked meat, tomato and mushroom soups, and milk to the pasta, stir completely and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to the prepared baking dish, sprinkle with paprika and parsley and bake for 35 to 40 minutes.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings.

Chocolate Banana Muffins

½ cup butter, softened
1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 medium bananas, mashed

1½ cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
¼ cup unsweetened baking powder

In a large mixing bowl, beat butter with sugar until creamy. Add egg and vanilla. (If you are using a stand mixer, just add the bananas whole and let the mixer mash them. Add flour, baking powder, and baking soda. Divide the batter in half. To one half of the batter, mix in the baking cocoa. Prepare cupcake pans with non-stick spray. Drop 2 Tbsp. of the plain batter in each muffin cup. Add 2 Tbsp. of chocolate batter into each cup. Bake in a 350°F oven for 16 to 18 minutes. Remove and cool on wire rack. Store in air tight container for up to 4 days or freeze in zipper freezer bags for a month. A nice change for breakfast. **Yield:** about 18 muffins.

Broccoli-Cheese Tater Tots

2 cups broccoli florets
1 small shallot, minced
2/3 cup shredded cheddar cheese

½ cup panko bread crumbs
2 eggs
Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Steam the broccoli for 2 minutes and chop well into small pieces. In a large bowl, mix the broccoli with the rest of your ingredients until totally combined. With your hands, shape a large spoonful so it resembles a tater tot. Place on your baking sheet and continue until all mixture has been used. Bake for 20 minutes and enjoy warm from the oven.

Almond Joy Cookies

1 bag (14 oz.) sweetened coconut flakes
2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
2/3 cup lightly salted almonds
1 can (14 oz.) can sweetened condensed milk (can use either regular or fat-free)

Preheat oven to 325°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. In a large bowl, combine all ingredients until well combined. With a cookie scoop, place dough onto prepared baking sheet. Moisten the tips of your fingers with water and pat the tops flat. Bake cookies for 12 to 14 minutes or until tips of the coconut are just starting to turn golden brown. Let cool on baking sheet. Store in an air-tight container. **Yield:** About 3 dozen.

Tips on saving money on groceries:

Plan your meals ahead of time

This is at the top of the list because it should be a no brainer on the biggest way to save money on groceries. By planning out your meals for the week, you know exactly what ingredients you will need each shopping trip.

Create a list and stick to it!

Do not derail from the list if you really want to save money on groceries and see a difference in your monthly spending. I know how tempting it can be to just grab an extra item here or there, but those can add up quick if you are not careful.

Grab an ad

Almost every grocery store has them sitting right at the entrance. Grab an ad as you walk in and do a quick scan to see if any items from your list are on sale in the ad. What you shouldn't do is end up buying something that is on sale if it isn't on your list! The only exception would be if it's something that will in fact be used or needed and doesn't expire soon.

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Contact us at: atfence@uvm.edu, phone: (802) 656-5059, toll free at: 1-888-283-3430
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