



MindStormPhoto Recipies

Burt and Evelyn Johnson

Recipies

Table Of Contents

Cooking Made Easy	2
Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad	4
Fall-Off-The-Bone Ribs	10
Graham Cracker Crust	12
Key Lime Pie	14
Pasta With Spicy Shrimp	17
Eggs Benedict	22
Locra Papa	25
Chicken Tetrazini	29
Sirloin Steak	32
Pie Crust (dough)	35
Apple Pie	37
Bacon Wrapped Shrimp	39
Spinach Cream Soup	42
Breakfast Sausage	44
Buffalo Wings (hot!)	46
Coconut Balls	48
Tuscan Chicken	51
Stuffed Bell Peppers	53
Honey-Coca Cola Chicken	55
Burt's 3 Years of Cooking	58
Hard Boiled Eggs	63

Cooking Made Easy

Cooking Made Easy



[Update Aug 24, 2014: I have just been told that this Instant Pot can be bought at the SuperStock on Las Americas in Cuenca.]

In 2002, it seemed that I should learn to cook. I won't go into the whole story here, but there were tears -- of WTH, joy *and* laughter -- in the process of those first months. Suffice it to say that we are still alive, so I didn't poison us. Once it was determined that I really could boil water, Evelyn declared that I was the Official Johnson Family Cook. She had cooked for the first 30 years of our marriage, so it is now my turn for the next 30. I am 12 years into my practice session so far.

Cooking Made Easy

On our first extended trip to Ecuador in 2012, we discovered there are some differences to cooking here. First up was the dearth of spices I was accustomed to using. That was easily solved by buying a ton of spices in California prior to returning to Ecuador. Of course spices get stale, so will need to be replaced at some point, but we are already seeing some of those spices showing up in the local stores, only a year later. I expect that most of what I use will either be available by the time I need to refresh my supplies, or I will find local alternatives.

Since we now live at an altitude of 8250 ft, we expected some cooking times would need to be modified. Instead I have found a couple tricks that let us cook just as if we are at sea level. When I boil water, I now add some salt, which raises the boiling point of water, bringing it closer to the sea level boiling temperature. I also find that if I cover the pot while cooking, the completion times are pretty much the same as at sea level without the cover. Problem easily solved.

The last problem was the most difficult -- the meat here is pretty tough and not very tasty. It was a surprise to us in 2012, but I was determined to find a solution.

Enter the [Instant Pot](#)! We bought this on Amazon and put in our container being shipped here, without ever trying it in California. This is an electric combination pressure cooker, slow cooker, and rice cooker.

I have now made three recipes over the past two weeks with it, and the results are stunning! First up was a slow cook chili. I took a standard internet chili slow cook recipe, added a lot more fresh chili, hot sauce and cayenne pepper, and let it cook for 6 hours. Turned into one of the best chilies we have had -- definitely a keeper for my recipe book. (Actually I use [A Cooks Book](#) app on my Mac)

Next up was a slow cooked stew. Meat here is tough, as I've said, and stew meat is always so. Another slow cook recipe modified from the internet (I added carrots, potatoes and chilies), cook for 6 hours, and an excellent meal.

Cooking Made Easy

Last night was the capper though. We haven't had good BBQ ribs since coming here, so I decided to try our magic Instant Pot for a pressure cook recipe. First time I have ever used a pressure cooker.

Evelyn stopped by the deli that had been recommended by friends, and bought 3 pounds of a St Louis cut of ribs. The recipe was:

1. Put ribs in pot in a circle, standing on end
2. Pour in 1 bottle of Hunt's Honey BBQ sauce
3. Pour in 1/2 cup water
4. Turn on pressure cooker for 50 minutes.

Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad



Stuffed Avocado has become a favorite appetizer, and often serves as a full breakfast too

Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad

I mentioned in my email a couple days ago that I have started cooking more at home, and going out to restaurants less. In that message I mentioned that I might start including some of my recipes in my blog. Quite a few of you wrote back encouraging me to do exactly that, so this is the first of an occasional series. I will always preface the title of these blogs with [Recipe], so you can easily skip over it if the subject does not interest you. Conversely, you can search on the title or keyword of 'recipe' if you want to see what else I have cooked up (the first being today though).

I'd like to hear your reaction to both the topic (that is, do you want more of my recipes), and the format for the blog entry (start with finished result, then ingredients, then process). That feedback can either be in the comments section below, or via email to me.

As with many of the recipes I will post, this is done almost entirely with fresh foods -- a benefit of living here in Cuenca, where a mercado is about 4 blocks away. A couple days ago I went there to buy the ingredients for a party we were having with six people, plus some general ingredients for other meals over the next few days. I walked out with a cloth bag I carry into the mercado, stuffed so full I could barely carry it home -- which cost me a total of \$8.50...

We ate at a local favorite restaurant a couple months ago ([Santorino](#)), and chose a "stuffed avocado" as an appetizer. I liked it so much that I picked it apart and figured out how to make it myself. After a few experiments, it is now a favorite we eat pretty much every week.

Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad



Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad

Ingredients of salad. I don't show the uncut chicken, simply because the photograph was awful... Note that this is double the stated recipe -- set for 8 portions.

The ingredients for 4 servings is:

- 1 cup diced chicken
- 2 tbsp mayonnaise (or more, to taste)
- 1 small chili pepper
- 1/4 small onion
- 1/4 small red bell pepper
- 1/4 small yellow bell pepper
- 2 or 3 limes, squeezed fresh
- 2 avocados, sliced in half with pit removed
- pepper to taste
- chili powder to taste

As you can see above, I usually prep each ingredient into separate bowls. Then, as I mix them, I can judge if perhaps I want a little less of one item or another. That will sometimes change based on the tastes of the guests (I always ask if they like it *hot* before making a meal for them!), or even the pungentness of the ingredients that week.

Optionally you can first saute the onions, peppers and chilies in butter before mixing. I have been skipping that step the last few times, and find I prefer everything (except the chicken...) raw. Sometimes I will fry some boneless, skinless chicken thighs in hot sauce and pepper for this meal. More often though, I just use the store-bought broiled chicken that I pick up each week for snacks. I simply rip off the breast meat, remove the skin, dice it, and it is ready to go.

Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad



Mixed ingredients, ready to pile into the waiting avocados.

Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad

Simply mix all the ingredients, saving the lime juice for last. I tend to use more mayonnaise in Cuenca than I would in California, because it doesn't have as much body here. I put the rest of the ingredients into a bowl, then add mayonnaise, mix, add more mayonnaise, and mix more until I am happy with the consistency. Next I add the pepper and chili powder, again adding, mixing, tasting, adding until I am happy. Last comes the lime juice. How many limes are needed will vary depending on their size and amount of juice they produce, so again -- add, taste, add, taste until the result is just to your liking.

Now scoop it into the hollows of the split avocados and you are ready to go. I usually make this a couple hours before the guests arrive, and put in the fridge. I can then pull it out and serve, without having to be taken from the guests during preparation. I don't recommend leaving it in the fridge more than a couple hours though, or the avocado will start to oxidize and turn brown.

Avocado Stuffed With Chicken Salad

Fall-Off-The-Bone Ribs



This recipe is almost cheating. I hesitated to even list it, but these ribs have become a favorite around here, so I thought it only fair to share my secret.

I start with the *San Luis* cut of pork ribs from the La Italiana deli on Solano Ave. These really do seem to be the best ribs in town, and several other friends that like to BBQ ribs say they use the same starting package.

Fall-Off-The-Bone Ribs

I then use whatever BBQ sauce I want to try -- the *Hunts Hickory* sauce seems pretty good. Coil the ribs into a crown in a pressure cooker, and empty a bottle of the sauce over it.

Close, set the pressure cooker for 50 minutes, and go enjoy your guests while it cooks.

Really, there isn't anything more to it than that. The simplest recipe I have found, the results are very repeatable, and produce the best ribs I have been able to make for years.



In case you missed the "[Cooking Made Easy](#)" blog post, this is the pressure cooker I use. Electric and fully automatic. Just set the time you want to cook (50 minutes in this case), and it goes to work, turning itself to 'warm' after the assigned time.

, May 9, 2014

Fall-Off-The-Bone Ribs

Graham Cracker Crust



It is not possible to purchase pre-made graham cracker crusts in Ecuador, which leads us to learn how to make our own. In the process, I discovered that mine taste one heck of a lot better than those store-bought ones, so I am glad to have been forced into this.



Graham Cracker Crust

Since graham crackers are unknown here, we use honey bran cookies instead. A friend suggested belVita brand, and they work very well, though it is likely that other brands would also work. The list of ingredients is pretty short:

- Graham cracker or Honey bran cookies -- 8 to 10 of them, totalling around 2 cups crushed
- 1/3 cup white sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 10+ tsp melted butter

You can put the crackers into a zip lock bag and use a rolling pin, or (for smoother and finer texture) use a food blender. If using a blender, mix the full cookies, cinnamon and sugar and mix until smooth. If using a roller pin, crush the crackers first, then transfer to a bowl and mix in the cinnamon and sugar.

Once that is mixed, add the melted butter and mix completely. The resulting mix should hold a rough ball shape when compressed. If not, then add more butter or water (only a tablespoon of water at a time until it is the right consistency -- you don't want it too wet).

Press into the pie mold, flattening the bottom and up the sides.

If your pie recipe wants a cooked crust, then bake at 350 deg for 10 minutes. Do not overcook, or it will dry out and taste like cardboard.

If your pie calls for an uncooked shell (such as the Key Lime pie recipe coming next to the blog), then chill in the fridge for one hour before adding pie filling.

, May 10, 2014

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Graham Cracker Crust

Key Lime Pie



A couple days ago I posted my recipe for a [graham cracker crust](#) (using honey bran cookies). This key lime pie is what I use that crust for.

Key Lime Pie

My sister-in-law (Pauline) gave me a "4 ingredient cookbook" as a joke gift for Christmas 2002. Never having successfully done more than boil water before then, I laughed and promised to make whatever recipe was found where I randomly opened the book and pointed with my eyes closed. Key Lime Pie turned out to be my very first successful recipe as a result of that evening. The making of that pie had several humorous points, such as when I tried to figure out how to separate the egg yolk from the white (that recipe just wanted the yolk), and the mess that resulted from my inserting a hand electric mixer into the ingredients when turned on full speed...

Fast forward 12 years, and I am now the sole dinner cook in the house -- Evelyn still makes breakfasts, we switch off for lunch, but dinner is now my domain. She cooked for the first 30 years, and she (we??) agreed that I would cook for the next 30, so I guess I still have a few years to work out new recipes.

All of which is to say that Key Lime Pie is one of the simplest recipes around, yet is almost always loved as a desert.



Key Lime Pie

As with that first recipe I made back in 2002, there are only four ingredients needed:

- 20 oz Condensed Milk
- 2 eggs
- 4 or 5 limes (depending on size and amount of juice in each)
- graham cracker crust (preferably [freshly made](#), but store-bought will work)

Place the eggs and condensed milk in a bowl. Add the squeezed lime (about 1/2 cup juice). Mix well. Pour into the pie shell.

Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes, then place in fridge for 2 hours. Best if served within 24 hours of baking (I usually serve within 2 to 4 hours of baking for best flavor).

, May 13, 2014

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Key Lime Pie

Pasta With Spicy Shrimp



I had lunch with a local restaurant owner last week, and took the opportunity to ask him where he buys meat and seafood. I mentioned that I had bought some shrimp for paella from the local mercado, and he immediately piped in "*I'll bet it was bland, soggy and tasteless, right?*" And yes, he was right, so obviously I asked where to get the best shrimp in town.

Pasta With Spicy Shrimp

"I get mine at the freezer section of SuperMaxi," he replied.

"Huh???" was my immediate intelligent question... He told me that the frozen shrimp are flash frozen on the boat, and therefore as fresh as possible. On the other hand, the shrimp at the mercado came to shore, was trucked from the coast to Cuenca, and then sat in a pot on the counter waiting for me to buy it. The flash frozen wins hands-down every time.

Of course, this had to be put to the test, so I bought a bag of frozen shrimp the next day at SuperMaxi, and decided to make some spicy shrimp pasta with it.

Gotta say, this is the best pasta I have ever made, and the shrimp was indeed far better than the mercado. This recipe quickly found itself into my 'favorites' list, and will be made again for guests in the future. I got the original recipe from the Food Network website, but as always, have made my own modifications.



Pasta With Spicy Shrimp

This recipe does have quite a lot of ingredients. However, the primary spice mix can be made in a larger batch and then the unused portion can be stored for future meals. The main spice mix consists of:

- Paprika, 2-1/2 tbsp
- Salt, 2 tbsp (I use "*Slap Ya Mama*" spice mix in lieu of plain salt)
- Pepper, 1 tbsp
- Garlic Powder, 1 tbsp
- Onion Powder, 1 tbsp
- Ceyene Pepper (aka "red pepper"), 1 tbsp
- Thyme, 1 tbsp
- Oregano, 1 tbsp

Mix all the ingredients in a small bowl. I then store this in a small spice bottle, which I label "spicy shrimp mix."

The main ingredient list then includes:

- Spicy Shrimp Mix, 2 tbsp (see above for how to make this)
- Olive Oil, 2 tbsp
- Butter, 4 tbsp
- Minced Garlic, 1 tbsp
- White Wine, 1/2 cup
- Lime Juice, 1/4 cup (here in Cuenca, I always use fresh-squeezed)
- Salt, 1/2 tsp (I again use "*Slap Ya Mama*" here)
- Pepper, 1/4 tsp
- Red Pepper Flakes, 1 tsp
- Spaghetti, 1 pound

Pasta With Spicy Shrimp

1. Cook spaghetti according to its directions. Meanwhile:
2. Start by tossing the shrimp in the Spicy Shrimp Mix until coated.
3. Place olive oil and half the butter in a large skillet over high heat.
4. Add the shrimp in a single layer. Cook for 2 minutes. Turn shrimp over.
5. Add garlic. Cook for 30 seconds.
6. Add wine, lime juice and remaining butter. Cook for approx 1-1/2 min, or until shrimp is pink.
7. Season the shrimp with salt and pepper to taste.
8. Add the pasta and red pepper flakes. Toss well and serve hot.

Pasta With Spicy Shrimp



We have also found that this meal is fantastic as left-overs. We add a small amount of water, then microwave covered until hot. Tastes almost as good as the first day.

, May 22, 2014

[\[Recipe\] Pasta With Spicy Shrimp](#)

Pasta With Spicy Shrimp

Eggs Benedict



A favorite Sunday brunch indulgence of ours is eggs Benedict. We haven't found a good one here in Cuenca, so I decided to give it a try. I was surprised by just how easy it is to make. Of course, it has enough calories and fat that we will still hold it back for special occasions...



Eggs Benedict

The image above-left shows the ingredients for the hollandaise sauce, while above-right shows what is needed for the rest of the eggs Benedict. Notice how many eggs are in those two photos?

Hollandaise Sauce

Ingredients:

- 3 egg yolks
- 1/4 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp lemon (or lime) juice
- 1 dash hot sauce (such as Tabasco)
- 1/2 cup butter



If you are lucky enough to have a niece like Kerry that buys cooking aids as a Christmas gift, you might have a handy yolk extractor like this too!

If you follow Julia Childs, you will build up your arm muscles in making the sauce. I prefer a simpler way -- using a blender.

Eggs Benedict

1. Heat the butter in a microwave until very hot -- about a minute.
2. Combine everything except the butter into a blender. Cover and blend for about 5 seconds.
3. Remove the blender cover and pour the butter in a small stream into the blender while running on high.

The sauce should thicken almost immediately, as the hot butter cooks the egg yolks. Remove the blender container and place it in a pan of hot water to warm it up before serving.

Eggs Benedict

Ingredients:

- 2 English muffins
- 3 tbsp white vinegar (optional)
- 4 large eggs, fresh as possible and at room temperature
- 4 slices ham or Canadian bacon
- Hot batch of Hollandaise sauce (see recipe above)

Slice the muffins and toast them. Place a slice of ham on each open face side.

The only tricky part here is the poaching of the eggs. There are several gadgets to make it easy, but those aren't really needed. Crack each egg carefully into separate coffee cups. Boil a pot of water, at least two liters (half gallon). When the water is boiling, swirl the water, creating a vortex. Slide one egg into the vortex and cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on the muffin and ham. Repeat with each egg.

Pour the hot Hollandaise sauce over the top and serve immediately.

, May 25, 2014

Eggs Benedict

Locra Papa



"Locra" means "thick soup", so one should never say "Locra Papa Soup." Rather, it is simply "Locra Papa -- the best soup you've ever tasted!"

On May 23, I published a blog entry talking about a [cooking class I took at La Warmi](#) for locra papa. I promised I would post the recipe once I had tried it at home. Here is the fulfillment of that promise.

Locra Papa



Locra Papa

The ingredient list includes Achiote. I have never heard of this before coming to Ecuador, and I doubt it can be purchased in most grocery stores in the US. It looks like a dark oily liquid. The teaching chef said that its main purpose is to create the final color. As such, if you can't find it, try making the locra without it. Perhaps something else could be used to create the color if you really want the authentic appearance.

Ingredient List:

- 3 cups potatoes -- peeled and cubed
- 1 red onion -- chopped
- 1 clove garlic -- minced
- 1 tsp Achiote
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 tsp cumin seed
- 1/2 tsp oregano
- 1 tsp salt (or I substitute [Slap Ya' Mama](#) for salt in almost all recipes)
- 1 cup milk
- 1/4 cup cheese (NOTE: The photo above shows 'taco cheese.' This didn't work as well as hoped. Now I use 'queso fresco', which works much better.)
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1-1/2 cup water (important to measure!)
- 1 avocado

Note: Be sure to measure the water used. If you use a different amount of water than the 1-1/2 cup indicated, adjust the milk, cream and cheese accordingly.

Locra Papa

1. Wash the potatoes once cubed. Rinse until water is clear.
 2. Heat the oil and achiote. Add onion, garlic, cumin, oregano and salt. Cook until onion is soft (about 5 min).
 3. Add potatoes and cover with water (this is where you measure how much water you use, and adjust all later ingredients if needed).
 4. Cook for 15 min.
 5. Add the milk and simmer for 5 more minutes.
 6. Remove from heat. Add cheese and cream.
 7. Add salt and pepper to taste.
 8. Add avocado to serving bowl before placing on table.
-

, June 18, 2014

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Locra Papa

Chicken Tetrazini



This is a pasta dish that Evelyn used to make in California using the leftover turkey from Thanksgiving or Christmas. When I started cooking, this is one of the recipes I got her to teach me. Of course, I made a few modifications in the subsequent years. For one thing, I no longer wait until we have turkey. Since we often have chicken in Ecuador, but rarely turkey, one simple change was to now use chicken as a base.

Chicken Tetrazini



The shopping list includes:

Chicken Tetrazini

- Spaghetti, 10 oz
- Mushrooms, 10 oz sliced thin
- Chili, 2 small, chopped
- Butter, 5 tbsp
- Flour, 1/4 cup
- Milk, 2 cup
- Chicken Broth, 2 cup
- White wine, 1 cup
- Chicken or Turkey, 3 cup coarsely ground
- Peas, 1 cup
- Parmesan Cheese, 2/3 cup
- Bread Crumbs, 1/3 cup

1. In a large saucepan, cook the mushrooms in the butter over moderate heat, stirring for 2 minutes.
2. Stir in the flour and cook the mixture over low heat for about 3 minutes.
3. Add in the milk, broth and wine, while stirring.
4. Bring the mixture to a boil, then simmer the sauce for 5 minutes. If the mixture is too thick, you can add more broth.
5. Mix in the turkey, chili, bread crumbs and peas.
6. Meanwhile -- cook the spaghetti in a pot until al dente, then drain well.
7. Mix the spaghetti, sauce and parmesan cheese in the saucepan well.

I usually double the recipe, using a full package of pasta, giving us plenty of left-overs. Those are packaged in meal-sized containers. When ready to reheat, add a little water and microwave until hot. Tastes just good as the first day, as the juices get absorbed by the pasta.

, July 7, 2014

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Chicken Tetrazini

Sirloin Steak



Ecuador has lots of good food, but beef is rarely listed as a favorite. It tends to be tough, and since BBQ's are rare, we can't cook it our favorite way. We therefore mostly do without steak. I recently discovered a way to make delicious tender sirloin steak though.

Obviously, you want to start off with the best meat you can find. I buy mine at [Valley Farm Butchers](#), at their new store on Gran Columbia, in Cuenca. As of this writing, they charge \$4.50/lb. Being butchers, they will cut it to any thickness you want. The image above shows 1 pound, sliced into 4 pieces of approx 3/4" each.

Ingredients:

Sirloin Steak

- Sirloin Steak -- cut into 3/4" slices
- Salt to taste
- Pepper to taste
- Chili Powder to taste
- Herb Butter

You can season the steak as you prefer. As noted above, I use salt, pepper and chili powder. We happen to like the spicy taste, so are heavy on the pepper and chili powder. Salt brings out the flavor, but I go pretty light on it, as I don't want to actually taste the salt itself.

Wash off the steaks, then pat dry with paper towels. Add the seasoning, and return to the fridge for an hour. This hour gives the seasoning time to permeate the meat, and really does make a big difference in the final flavor.

Remove from fridge and let come to room temperature -- about half an hour.

Place a small amount of oil in the bottom of a pan, and heat until very hot. Make sure the pan is large enough for all the steaks to fit without crowding. Cook in batches if necessary.

Once the pan is very hot, put the steaks in. Turn them every 30 seconds until done. Rare only takes a total of 3 min, or medium in 5 min.

DO NOT overcook! That is a sure way to get tough meat.

When done, place the steaks on a plate, drizzle herb butter over them, and let them sit for 3 or 4 min before serving. That lets the juices settle in the meat, and also allows it to finish cooking.

Sirloin Steak

PS: For my herb butter, I mix 4 tsp Oregano and 4 tsp Thyme into a 250g (6 oz) stick of butter. I then place the mixture in the fridge, pulling out as needed for future recipes.

By the way, I didn't get a photo of the finished cooked steaks because fireworks started outside our window again, just as I was finishing cooking this meal. I rushed over to the window to take some photos, and by the time the fireworks were over, it was time to eat...



Sirloin Steak

Pie Crust (dough)



It has been awhile since I have posted any recipes. There have been a lot of new recipes developed over the past few months, so let's try to catch up. I have been particularly busy working with recipes for desert and appetizers, so we will start with what has become a favorite of dinner guests -- apple pie.

There are two parts of any pie -- the crust and the filling. I had some monumental failures when I first tried to make a dough crust for a fruit pie. I now have it down so that it turns out excellent every time, so we will start this series of posts with a dough-based crust, suitable for an apple pie. (I posted a [graham cracker crust](#) last year)

By the way, I am trying a new recipe plugin, which should make it easier to print the recipe if you wish. Let me know what you think of this approach to presenting recipes.

Pie Crust (dough)

[Recipe] Pie Crust (dough)

Recipe type: Desert

Prep time: 15 mins

Total time: 15 mins

Serves: 1 pie

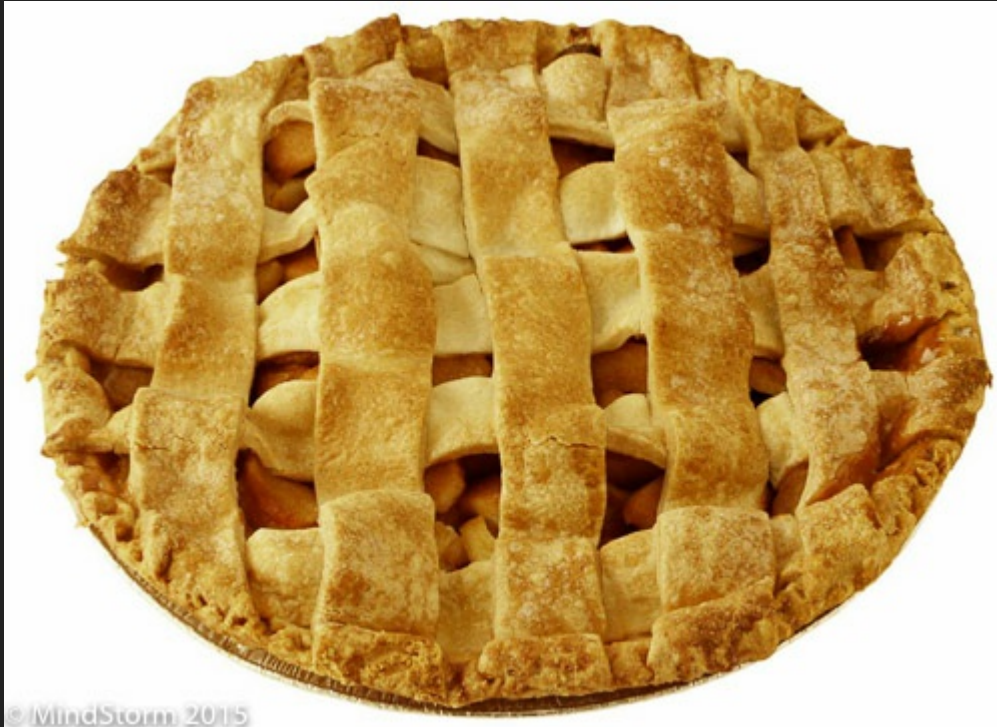
- 1 Egg
- 3 cups Flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp Salt
- 1-1/2 cup Shortening (COLD - at least refrigerator cold)
- 1 tbsp vinegar
- 5 tbsp water (VERY COLD - use ice water)

1. NOTE!! The shortening and water must be VERY COLD -- freezer cold is best, or this won't work!
2. In a bowl, mix salt and flour
3. With pastry blender, mix in cold shortening until the size of peas
4. In a small cup, beat egg with a fork, add in vinegar and water, whisk until well blended.
5. Add the water/egg mixture gradually to the flour mixture.
6. Shape into a ball.
7. Refrigerate 1 or more hours
8. Roll out dough for pie.

3.3.3070

Pie Crust (dough)

Apple Pie



Yesterday we saw how I make a dough-based pie crust for fruit pies. Today we will make the pie itself. After a few spectacular failures, I finally have this down to a process that comes out delicious every time.

[Recipe] Apple Pie

Recipe type: Desert

Prep time: 20 mins

Cook time: 40 mins

Total time: 1 hour

Serves: 8 slices

Apple Pie

- 1 Pie Crust (see yesterday's "dough-based pie crust" recipe)
- ½ cup unsalted Butter
- 3 tbsp Flour
- ¼ cup Water
- ½ cup Sugar
- ½ cup Brown Sugar
- 8 Granny Smith Apples

1. Core and slice the Granny Smith apples
2. Preheat oven to 425 deg.
3. Melt the butter in a saucepan. Stir in flour to form a paste.
4. Add water, white sugar and brown sugar, and bring to a boil. Reduce temp and let simmer.
5. Place bottom crust in pan. Fill with apples, mounded slightly. Cover with a lattice work crust. Gently pour sugar and butter liquid over the crust (pour slowly so that it does not run off)
6. Bake 15 min in the pre-heated oven. Reduce temp to 350 deg F. Continue baking for 35-45 min, until apples are soft.

3.3.3070

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, May 4, 2015

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Apple Pie

Bacon Wrapped Shrimp



This is our new favorite appetizer for when friends come over. It is SO delicious that everyone who has had it raves about it. Since it combines three of my favorite treats -- bacon, shrimp and jalapenos -- it had to be a hit!

There are two parts to this recipe. First, we'll make the butter sauce that is used for basting while cooking the final combination:

Bacon Wrapped Shrimp

[Recipe] Basting Butter Sauce

Recipe type: Appetizer

Cook time: 5 mins

Total time: 5 mins

- ½ cup melted Butter
- ½ oz Tequilla
- 1 tsp Lime Juice
- ½ tsp Black Pepper
- ½ tsp Paprika
- ½ tsp Oregano
- ¼ tsp Cayenne Pepper
- ¼ tsp Cilantro (dried)

1. Melt the butter in a small sauce pan
2. Add the spices and stir

3.3.3070

Now we come to the main piece:

[Recipe] Bacon Wrapped Shrimp

Author: Burt Johnson

Bacon Wrapped Shrimp

Recipe type: Appetizer

Prep time: 10 mins

Cook time: 7 mins

Total time: 17 mins

Serves: 16 pieces

- 1 lb Shrimp (cleaned and deveined)
 - 2 Red Jalapenos (veins and seeds removed, sliced into thin slivers)
 - 16 Slices Bacon (I prefer Peppered Bacon, but any will work)
1. Pre-cook bacon until it is almost done, but still flexible
 2. Butterfly the shrimp. Place 1 or 2 strips of jalapeno in each. Wrap with piece of bacon, and secure with toothpick. Place in a single layer in a large pan.
 3. Brush butter sauce over all shrimp in pan.
 4. Cook over medium heat for 6 to 8 min, turning once and basting again with butter sauce.
 5. Serve immediately.

3.3.3070

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, May 5, 2015

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Bacon Wrapped Shrimp

Spinach Cream Soup



Last week I took three cooking classes from [Maite Eusebio](#), here in Cuenca. She is Peruvian-born, and her recipes are highly influenced by that origin. She has been living in Ecuador with her artist husband, Alberto Soriano since the 1970's. Alberto has been Evelyn's art instructor since we arrived here. There was an interesting article about the couple recently in [Zero Latitude Magazine](#).

Maite had made spinach cream soup for us when we visited them in the past. I remember seeing the green goo and thinking "this looks like one of those health food drinks that tastes like crap." One spoonful changed my mind though -- it was delicious! Last week, she taught us how to make it ourselves.

[Recipe] Spinach Cream Soup

Recipe type: Soup

Cuisine: Peruvian

Prep time: 5 mins

Spinach Cream Soup

Cook time: 10 mins

Total time: 15 mins

Serves: 4 servings

- 8 oz (250 g) Spinach leaves
 - 3 spoons Corn Starch (can substitute boiled potatoes if desired)
 - 3 cups Semi Skim Milk
 - Salt to taste
 - Pepper to taste
1. Cook spinach leaves until tender. Drain water and discard.
 2. Blend spinach with milk, corn starch, salt and pepper in blender until smooth.
 3. Return to pot and boil for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring constantly.
 4. Serve immediately.
 5. NOTE: If you do not have corn starch, you can substitute some boiled potatoes to thicken the soup.

3.3.3070

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, May 6, 2015

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Breakfast Sausage

Breakfast Sausage



When we were living in California, we used to like Jimmy Dean spicy sausage as a frequent side for breakfast. Now that we live in Ecuador, we can no longer get Jimmy Dean. Some searching on the web, and a bit of tweaking on my own, and we now have breakfast sausage whenever we want them. I think I like this version even better than Jimmy Dean. Easy to make, and quite cheap too. Nice combo!

Breakfast Sausage

[Recipe] Breakfast Sausage

Recipe type: Breakfast

Prep time: 1 min

Total time: 1 min

- 1 lb Ground Pork
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp Sage
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp Thyme
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp Salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp Parsley
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp Red Pepper Flakes
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp Nutmeg

1. Blend everything evenly into the pork.
2. Best if left in fridge overnight before cooking.
3. NOTE: I usually make enough mix of the seasonings for 10 batches and store it in a jar. I can then spoon out 3-1/2 tablespoons of the mix into one pound of ground pork.

3.3.3070

Buffalo Wings (hot!)

Buffalo Wings (hot!)



This is another of the appetizers that I now make for parties. Very easy to make, though there is a fair amount of elapsed time for this recipe. These are for those that like their wings hot and spicy!

[Recipe] Buffalo Wings (hot!)

Recipe type: Appetizer

Prep time: 10 mins

Cook time: 3 hours

Total time: 3 hours 10 mins

Buffalo Wings (hot!)

- 1 lb Chicken Wings
- 2 cups Water
- ½ cup Vinegar
- 1 cup White Sugar
- 7 tbsp Hot Pepper Sauce
- 1-1/2 tsp Red Pepper Flakes
- 2 cup Yellow Mustard
- 4 tbsp Ketchup
- 1 Orange (peeled and pithed)

1. Cut chicken wings, and throw away tips
2. Steam wings for 10-15 min in double boiler Pat wings dry and set aside.
3. Bring water, vinegar, hot pepper sauce and crushed pepper to boil in heavy saucepan
4. Whisk yellow pepper and ketchup into sauce
5. Stir in orange. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer until sauce is thick -- about 2+ hours
6. Preheat oven to 375 deg F (175 deg C)
7. Arrange wings in pan and bake for 30-45 min, turning once halfway through
8. Stir the wings in the sauce and serve warm

3.3.3070

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, May 11, 2015

cooking, Food, recipe

Coconut Balls

Coconut Balls



Coconut Balls

I read lots of food blogs, and often come up with recipe ideas from them. I usually make a recipe three or four times before I decide I have it tweaked to my satisfaction, and certainly before I decide it is delicious enough, and easy enough, for adding to my blog. In the last several months, I have started following a young couple with particular interest. They create some of the most interesting -- and usually easy -- recipes I have seen for awhile. Many of those I end up using essentially unchanged, because they work so well.

The web site is [PinchOfYum](#). If you like to cook, you really should start following this couple. Today's recipe comes from them, with only a few small changes. I have made this as appetizers for a couple of parties at our house recently, and it has been a huge hit. It will start being a standard we take to pot luck dinners in the future now too.

[Recipe] Coconut Balls

Coconut Balls

Recipe type: Appetizer

Prep time: 20 mins

Cook time: 1 hour

Total time: 1 hour 20 mins

Serves: 12

- 2½ cups flaked coconut
- ¼ cup coconut oil, melted
- ¼ cup honey
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- a pinch of salt
- 4 ounces white or dark fountain chocolate for topping

Coconut Balls

1. Pulse the coconut in a blender or food processor until they are small shreds. Set aside about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the mixture.
2. Mix the coconut oil, honey, vanilla, and salt. Stir in the coconut from step one.
3. Form the mixture into small balls by squeezing until a ball forms. There will be a little bit of excess oil - that's okay.
4. Once you have the balls formed, refrigerate for 1 hour or so until they are firm. Remove from refrigerator, and improve shape of each ball, as they are now firmer and more easily formed.
5. Heat a nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the coconut and stir constantly for a few minutes until the coconut is lightly browned.
6. Melt the chocolate for a minute or so in the microwave. Stir it until it's smooth. Dip each coconut ball in the chocolate and remove, letting excess chocolate drip off. Place on baking sheet and top with the toasted coconut from step five.
7. Refrigerate to set the chocolate.

3.3.3077

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, July 20, 2015

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Tuscan Chicken

Tuscan Chicken



We eat a lot of chicken in Ecuador. It is cheap, plentiful, and can be used in so many dishes that it becomes the go-to meal, both for quickie "what do I make tonight?" meals and for guests. This is a recipe I first saw in [The Wanderlust Kitchen](#) web site, and have slightly modified for our tastes and the high altitude here in Cuenca.

We made it tonight for some Ecuadorian guests, and it was a hit with them as much as it has become a home favorite. Best to serve over rice, or as our friends suggested, with bread.

Tuscan Chicken

Prep time: 10 mins

Cook time: 30 mins

Total time: 40 mins

Serves: 4

Tuscan Chicken

- 1 Tbsp butter
- 1 lb chicken breast and/or thighs, skinless boneless
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp oregano
- ½ tsp thyme
- ½ white onion, diced
- 1 jalapeno, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 12 oz mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cup stewed tomatoes
- 1 (15 oz) can Red Beans, drained
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Cook chicken in a large skillet, browning for 3 minutes on each side.
2. Remove chicken and set aside.
3. Melt the butter in the pan. Add the sliced mushrooms and sauté. Remove from the pan and set aside.
4. Add the onion and jalepenos and sauté for 3 minutes. Add the garlic, and stewed tomatoes. Sauté for 2 more minutes. Stir in the spices, beans, and sugar.
5. Transfer the chicken back to the pan and spoon some of the sauce over top of the chicken. Cook, covered, on the stove top until the chicken is cooked through and the sauce is bubbling, about ten minutes. Return the mushrooms to the pan.
6. Taste and add salt and pepper as needed.
7. Serve hot with rice or bread.

3.3.3077

Stuffed Bell Peppers

Stuffed Bell Peppers



[Recipe] Stuffed Bell Peppers

Recipe type: Main Dish

Prep time: 30 mins

Cook time: 50 mins

Total time: 1 hour 20 mins

Serves: 4

Stuffed Bell Peppers

- 4 ea green peppers -- In salted boiling water for 5 minutes
- 1.5 lb ground beef
- 1 cup rice -- cook normally
- 1.5 tsp salt
- dash pepper
- 1.5 tsp Worchester sauce
- 3 tbsp chopped onion
- 3 ea egg
- 16 oz tomato sauce
- dash cayenne pepper -- big dash -- twice as much as pepper
- 16 oz stewed tomato

1. Cut tops off green peppers and precook in boiling salted water for 5 minutes. Drain.
2. Combine ground beef, rice, salt, pepper, Worcester sauce, onion, eggs and stewed tomatoes.
3. Stuff peppers. Pour $\frac{1}{2}$ tomato sauce over top.
4. Cover and bake at 350° for 45-50 minutes. Baste with remaining tomato sauce halfway through.

3.4.3177

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, November 21, 2015

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Honey-Coca Cola Chicken

Honey-Coca Cola Chicken



I try to make it a point to experiment with at least one new recipe each week. Sometimes I look at what is in the fridge and freezer and then choose a recipe that sounds good. Sometimes I find a recipe that sounds good, and then shop for the ingredients. A couple weeks ago, I decided I wanted a new chicken dish and looked through my (ever growing) sheets of printed recipes I gather. I had this one can of coca cola that had been in the fridge for close to a year, and came across this recipe, which would use it up.

I liked the result so much that I bought another can of coke to keep in the pantry for the next time I want a really quick, easy and delicious chicken dinner. Try it, and I think you will be as surprised as I was.

Honey-Coca Cola Chicken

This recipe originally came from The Latin Kitchen. With only minor changes, here is my version:

[Recipe] Honey-Coca Cola Chicken

Prep time: 35 mins

Cook time: 20 mins

Total time: 55 mins

Serves: 4

- 1 tbs vegetable oil
- ½ large onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 can Coca-Cola
- 1 6 oz can tomato paste
- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 tbs brown sugar
- ½ tbs black pepper
- ½ tbs onion powder
- ½ tbs garlic powder
- ½ tbs ground mustard
- ½ lemon - juiced
- 1 tsp cayenne
- 1 tbs Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tbs canola oil
- 4 chicken thighs

Honey-Coca Cola Chicken

1. Preheat oven to 350.
2. Add oil to sauce pan and place over medium/low heat. When warmed, add onion and garlic and let soften.
3. While onions and garlic are softening, add the rest of the ingredients (except for chicken) to a large bowl and whisk. Add the sauce to the pan and reduce for 30 minutes on the stove top.
4. While sauce reduces, dry the chicken thoroughly with paper towels. Be sure to dry under the skin as well. Heat 2 tbs canola oil in a heavy bottomed cast iron skillet. Just before it starts to smoke, add chicken skin side down.
5. Cook until brown and crispy. If the skin sticks, leave it. It will release on its own when it's properly browned. Flip chicken skin side up and then place in the oven.
6. Cook for 15 minutes, then remove chicken and brush with sauce. Place back in the oven and cook for 5 minutes. Pull out and reapply sauce. Continue adding more sauce and sticking back in the oven again and again until a thermometer reads 145.
7. Pull the chicken out of the oven and let rest. It will rise to the appropriate temperature while resting.

3.4.3177

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, February 22, 2016

[cooking](#), [Food](#), [recipe](#)

Burt's 3 Years of Cooking

Burt's 3 Years of Cooking



Mushrooms Stuffed With Cheese Are a Guest Favorite Appetizer

When I wrote our [3-year anniversary blog](#) yesterday, I forgot to add a section on food and the joy of cooking, which has been a major theme in our lives since we arrived in Cuenca.

Burt's 3 Years of Cooking

Mercados. From the start, I have shopped for fresh fruits and vegetables from the mercado located closest to our apartment, 12 de Agosto, about 4 blocks walking from our apartment. Fresh food is everywhere, and the lack of processed foods (ready-made) compelled me to learn how to use fresh produce. I learned that some vendors had better produce than others, most (but not all) charged the same to gringos and locals, and there are now 3-4 vendors that I buy from regularly, who offer me “yappas” (their term for adding a little extra) as a thank you. The vendors selling the large, scrumptious, strawberries are always a joy to see. When we were in Colombia, we went on an exotic fruits tour at a local mercado, giving us a chance to taste various exotic fruits we didn't have the nerve to try on our own. After the tour, I even made maracuya ice cream.



Homemade Maracuya Ice Cream

Burt's 3 Years of Cooking

Cooking. Evelyn cooked for the first 30 years of our marriage, with me barely able to boil water. During an extended unemployment period after the internet stock bust in 1999, it seemed only fair that I should try to learn to cook, since Evelyn was then the only one bringing home a salary. With some encouragement from Pauline (Evelyn's sister) who presented me with my first "[4-ingredient cookbook](#)", I discovered that I actually could cook, and, in fact, like to cook. We decided that, since Evelyn cooked for the first 30 years of our marriage, I would cook for the next 30. I am halfway through that period...

Adjusting to high altitude cooking. Some of the earliest frustration was adjusting times for cooking and baking, whether it was boiling water for pasta, or baking a pie crust. I joined a Facebook group called [Food and Cooking in Ecuador](#), where there are a number of gourmet cooks who are willing to share. Now, whenever I have a cooking question, there is always someone online who can answer the question, helping with issues of what ingredients to substitute, or changes to make due to the 8500' altitude here. I now periodically add a particularly good recipe I have developed, to my blog, already adjusted for this elevation. There are currently [22 listed there](#).

Finding expat foods. When we first came to Cuenca, we found that the bacon flavor that we loved in California did not exist. In fact, the bacon found at Supermaxi and the local supermarkets was bland. We had a similar withdrawal for other favorite food items that we were accustomed to getting in the US, such as English muffins, spicy sausage, spicy cheese, etc. In the past 3 years, many expats have started up new business enterprises producing many of the foods us expats crave, and it's only rarely we find ourselves unable to obtain a favorite food or ingredient now.

Burt's 3 Years of Cooking

Cooking schools. I make a point of trying to make at least one new meal each week. Some of these new recipes are found on various internet cooking blogs that I read. Others come from the cooking classes I now frequently attend. I have gone to a dozen or so such classes here in Cuenca, and have learned how to cook Ecuadorian dishes such a locro de papa (a thick potato soup) and seco de chivo (goat stew). Other classes have taught me how to make various American, Italian and Peruvian meals. However it's always the little hints or secrets that are not in any cookbooks that I really appreciate. When we were in Istanbul recently, we both took a **Turkish cooking class**, where we learned (among other dishes), Manti (ravioli in Greek yogurt, often eaten for breakfast). We also learned to use a "Turkish pinch" for spices -- three fingers picking up as much spice as they can hold. Since that is maybe 4 times as much spice as the "American pinch" (thumb and forefinger grabbing spice), we began to realize why many of the spices in my earlier meals were barely noticeable.

Exploring new restaurants. When we first visited Cuenca in 2012, there were only a handful of great restaurants, mostly Ecuadorean cuisines. TripAdvisor showed something like 50 restaurants in town. Since then, the diversity of the types of cuisine available has grown astronomically, and TripAdvisor currently shows 362 restaurants. The cuisines now include great seafood, sushi, Thai, Italian, Indian, Russian, fusion, and even comfort foods such as hamburgers, fried chicken and American-style pizzas. The annual turn-over of restaurants has been staggering, as the start up costs to open a new enterprise are low (under \$1K in some cases). We still regularly have "almuerzos" for lunch, which run from \$2.00 to \$4.00 for a 5-course meal. We also go out to dinner a couple times a week to experience new restaurants in town (and to help keep the better ones in business). In fact, we are heading out to Prickly Pear, another new restaurant a couple blocks from us, as soon as I finish writing this.

Burt's 3 Years of Cooking

PS: We just returned from dinner. We have always realized there were a lot of restaurants in our neighborhood, but decided to actually count tonight. Our destination was four blocks away. Enroute, along that four block stretch, we counted 41 separate restaurants! One of these days, we will make a 4-block grid and try to actually count the total number of restaurants in that range. I am betting there will be more than 150 within 4 blocks of us...!

Hard Boiled Eggs

Hard Boiled Eggs



Hard boiled eggs have been one of those things that seem so easy to make, yet are so hard to get "looking good." The yolk is often smushed to one side, and the outside white frequently looks like it was the survivor of a chain saw massacre. Yet there is hope!

[Recipe] [Hard Boiled Eggs](#)

Prep time: 15 mins

Cook time: 14 mins

Total time: 29 mins

Hard Boiled Eggs

- Eggs -- as many as you want, but don't crowd -- room temperature
 - Ice for water bath after steaming
1. Rotate eggs 180 deg for half hour prior to cooking, to center the yolk
 2. Boil water in a vegetable steamer. I have one I used for crab that I bought at Costco that works perfectly.
 3. Insert eggs into steamer basket.
 4. Steam for 12 min at sea level, or 14 min here in the Cuenca Andes of Ecuador
 5. Drop into an ice bath for 15 min. Do not leave too much longer, or the eggs will get hard.
 6. Crush the shells all the way around, and peel under running water.
 7. The results will be perfect eggs that look like they came from a cookbook (instead of the Chain Saw Massacre horror flick mine used to resemble!)

3.4.3177

The "prep time" listed is actually the ice bath time. The only prep needed is to boil the water in the steamer.

Note that I actually found this recipe online. I have been using it for the last year or so, and it comes out as near to perfect as you can get. The original can be found [here](#).

burt@mindstorm-inc.com, December 13, 2016

[cooking, recipe](#)
