Time for Lenten Food Thinking

Lent is quickly coming and I need to give some thought to our Lenten menu. For five years, I've been such a slacker in regards to making Lent special and making it more of what it should be. But this year I am bound and determined to put some thought into our menus and plans!

Creamy Mac N Cheese

Ingredients:
16 ounces elbow macaroni or small shell pasta
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 teaspoon granulated garlic or garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon mustard seeds, crushed*
20 cranks of black pepper (or 1/8-1/4 teaspoon ground)
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
3 cups milk
1 cup heavy whipping cream
1/2 tablespoon dried parsley
1 teaspoon salt
2 eggs
12 ounces (3 cups) shredded cheddar cheese
8 ounces (2 cups) shredded mozzarella cheese

8 oz (2 cups) gruyere cheese
Additional cheddar, parmesan, or bread crumbs** for topping

Instructions:
1. Cook pasta according to package instructions. Drain and rinse with cool water. Place pasta in a large mixing bowl and set aside.

2. In a large sauce pan, combine cayenne, garlic, crushed mustard, black pepper, and butter over medium heat. When butter starts to sizzle, add the flour and stir until mixed and bubbly.

3. Add 2 cups of the milk and whisk with the butter mixture over medium heat until thick and bubbly. Whisk constantly to avoid lumps or scorching.

4. Turn off heat and whisk in remaining 1 cup of milk and the cup of cream, along with the parsley and salt.

5. Crack eggs into a separate mixing bowl and whisk briskly, until they are no longer very “stringy”. Whisking constantly, pour a half cup of the hot creamy sauce in with the eggs. Continue whisking and adding sauce to the eggs, until you’ve added about 2 cups of the sauce in with the eggs. Then pour the eggs into the saucepan with the rest of the sauce, whisking to incorporate.

6. Pour the sauce over the pasta in the large mixing bowl. Stir to combine. Stir in shredded cheeses. Spread into a lightly greased baking dish.

This recipe makes a very full 9×13-inch dish, so you can also divide it between a couple dishes for a thinner layer (I like to do a 9×13 dish and an 8×8 dish).

7. Sprinkle top with parmesan cheese, shredded cheddar cheese, or bread crumbs. Bake uncovered at 325 degrees for about 45 minutes, until hot and bubbly.

This casserole can be made ahead and stored in the fridge for a couple days before baking. If it’s been in the fridge a couple days, however, you may need to drizzle about 1/2 cup of additional milk over top before baking, as the pasta tends to absorb more liquid as it sits.

Harvest Helpers I Want to Try

Potato and Onion Storage baskets: www.gardeners.com

Orchard Rack: www.gardeners.com

Berry Cartons: www.ahamodernliving.com

Jute-Lined Bin: www.gardeners.com

Just some notes to myself to take a look at some items I might want in my pantry!

Maple Cookies

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 cup real maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar for rolling cookies in before cooking

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease cookie sheets.

2. In a large bowl, cream the butter and brown sugar. Add the egg, syrup and vanilla. Mix until well blended. Sift together the flour, salt and baking soda. Stir into mixture until well blended. Shape into 1 inch balls and roll in sugar. Place on cookie sheets about 2 inches apart and flatten slightly.
3. Bake 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven. Let cool on wire rack.

Black Beans and Sausage

2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound kielbasa or other smoked sausage, cut into 1-inch pieces
3 medium carrots, diced small
2 shallots, diced small
Coarse salt and ground pepper
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 cans (15.5 ounces each) black beans, rinsed and drained
2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, plus more for serving
1/4 cup plain yogurt, for serving

Directions

In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high. Add sausage and cook until browned on all sides, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a plate. Add carrots and shallots to skillet and cook until beginning to soften, about 4 minutes; season with salt and pepper. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add black beans and broth and bring mixture to a boil. Add sausage, reduce heat to a rapid simmer, and cook until carrots are tender, about 12 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in

parsley. Serve with more parsley and a dollop of yogurt.

Homemade Pancakes

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon white sugar
- 1 1/4 cups milk
- 1 egg
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted

Directions

1. In a large bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. Make a well in the center and pour in the milk, egg and melted butter; mix until smooth.
2. Heat a lightly oiled griddle or frying pan over medium high heat. Pour or scoop the batter onto the griddle, using approximately 1/4 cup for each pancake. Brown on both sides and serve hot.

Glazed Winter Squash

5 cups butternut squash, cut into 1 inch cubes
1/3 cup butter
1/2 cup maple syrup
2 garlic cloves, minced

2T fresh parsley, minced
1T fresh chives, minced
1/2t salt
1t black pepper

Preheat oven to 375 degrees

Butter 2 quart baking dish

In a large bowl, add squash. In small pan over medium heat melt butter. Once melted whisk in syrup, garlic, parsley and chives. Add squash and season with salt and pepper, toss to coat. Transfer mixture to prepared baking dish, cover with foil and bake for 40 minutes. Uncover, bake for another 30 minutes or until squash is tender.

Lentil Soup

2 cups dry lentils, washed and drained and looked over for small stones
10 cups water

1 rib of celery, minced

1 small onion, minced

2 small carrots, minced

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

2 cloves minced garlic

1 tablespoon chicken bouillon

1 to 1 1/4 teaspoons salt (or more to taste)
Instructions:

1. In a stock pot over medium heat, combine the lentils, water, pepper, garlic, and 1/2 teaspoon of the salt. Bring to a boil and then simmer over low heat for 45 minutes.

2. While lentils are starting to cook, saute carrots, onion, and celery until tender. Add them to the cooking lentils and finish the 45 minutes.

3. When lentils are tender (after about 45 minutes), stir in chicken base. Add more salt to taste.

Be sure to taste this soup before serving….those lentils needs a lot of salt.

Chicken a la King

Bake a whole chicken breast with just salt & pepper in the oven and set aside to cool.

If using homemade chicken broth, defrost. If using homemade cream of mushroom soup, also defrost, if frozen…obviously.

Diced one whole onion, 3 stalks of celery, and 3 carrots.

Saute in a large pan with salt and pepper and 1/2 stick of butter until soft.

Add 1 cup of flour to the sauteed vegetables and cook until flour is not visibly white anymore.

Add 4 cups of chicken broth (or 4 cups of boiling water and 4 bullion cubes) to the vegetable/flour mixture. Stir in a can of cream of mushroom soup and 1 cup of milk.

Just stir regularly for a few minutes, put in shredded or diced chicken breast.

Spoon over flaky biscuits and enjoy!

Chicken Barley Soup

Stock:

1 whole chicken breast (skin and bones too!)

1 whole onion (slice root end off, but leave on the onion skins, gives color to the stock)

2 whole celery stalks

salt & pepper

I put these items in a cast iron pot I have, just covered everything with water and let it simmer away with the lid on for about 2 hours. Using tongs I lifted the chicken out, lifted out & squeezed the onion, did the same with the celery. I put the chicken in the refrigerator to cool and left the pot with the stock in it on the stove top to cool as well. After about an hour, I strained the stock through a little mesh strainer and set it aside in the refrigerator.

Ingredients for the actual soup:

1 whole onion, peeled and chopped into small pieces

5″-6″ sliced right off the top of a whole bunch of celery, leaves and all. Then chopped into small pieces

2 large carrots, peeled and cut into small pieces

Salt & Pepper

Canola Oil

3/4 cup uncooked barley

1 whole chicken breast, de-boned and diced (from stock preparation above)

Stock from above preparation

I sauteed the onions, carrots and celery in a small amount of canola oil for about 5 minutes, then added the chicken, the stock and barley. Salt & pepper to taste. I let this simmer for 1.5 hours. Serve hot. Refrigerate any leftovers.