

Wetdryvac Cooking: A Cookbook for Household Appliance

An introduction of sorts

First things first: The vac loves cooking. It began life as your average wet/dry vacuum cleaner on a thing called a MUSH, and thus is not considered sane – as a result people are often surprised that it can cook, much less do so without bismuth 212 and a rat, but cooking does not require sanity, nor does it require more than a few basic cooking tools. Any household appliance can get started cooking with just a wok or fry pan, a baking tin of some sort, and a metal or wooden spatula.

Second things second: Much as I love the vac, and spent much of my time explicating to the kids on that multi user simulated hallucination the fine art of cooking, both the vac and I knew it would one day have to be devolved into something other than fine art. Anyone can cook, even a household appliance, and there's no reason why you shouldn't be cooking too. If you're already a great cook, more power to you – you'll hopefully forgive this interlude before the recipes.

WDV – ja, that's Wetdryvac for those of you in the know – would tell you that even rudimentary cooking tools can be skipped. So long as what you have is clean, you should be all set. Poisoning yourself and your guests is considered bad form on most social occasions and should be avoided.

The vac never tried to please anyone other than itself with its cooking, and you should do the same at first. Once you can make your own tum happy, you'll be prepared to modify stuff for other folks. I'm intentionally casual about my own cooking, and almost never stick to a recipe.

Granted, there's a learning curve here, but adding too much or too little of something to some recipees isn't an issue. In those where quantities matter somewhat, it's still not earth shattering. Just add a touch more of something else in compensation, or work in a buffer material as part of the meal – bread, for example. Or skip another ingredient. Some things can't be compensated for terribly well, such as salt, but that's OK.

Lots of people are intimidated by cooking, look at recipe books and panic, that sort of thing. Here's how it is: Recipes are guidelines. About the only thing that really gets bothered by malfing a recipe to a modest degree is a bread machine – being a lazy sausage, I've pooched this particular subject more than once – but were it not for experimentation and a casual disregard of the Geneva Convention, we wouldn't have such delightful dishes as haggis and giviak.

If you've gotten this far and still are worried, that's not a terrible surprise. A man with delusions of vac-hood is blithering at you. You're having the standard flight response. Best bet is to just hop to the cooking process, and start with things that you can taste – and keep tasting – while you're cooking it up. Raw meat and eggs should thus be for later – but there's no problem with precooking your meat to make it safe and then cooking up the rest of your meal while tasting it. Being impatient and a constant taste tester myself, I'm often guilty of cooking my meat first and then cooking it into whatever else I'm working on as I go. That way I know right away if something's going wrong. Or right. Cooking's easy that way, and anyone can do it.

Moderation! When you're getting used to spices, unknown ingredients, and so forth, cook up something you can sample as you go along. Adding a bit more ginger is cool as you go, but adding enough ginger to kill yourself right at the start is not terribly clever. I speak from experience on this one, trust the Vac! If you don't know your tolerance for peppers, or if you're cooking for people who's tastes you're not used to, go easy. Once you're getting into fire oil, tien tsin, and scotch bonnets, be aware that you have a good opportunity to seriously injure yourself.

I spent two years in Russia, and returning home bit into a scotch bonnet to see if spices still tasted spicy. When I regained consciousness – that's right, I passed out, I kid you not – I decided that today was not a day for vindaloo anything. All I remember is that I couldn't breathe

and then I came too with a headache the size of Asia Minor. Now I can happily eat the brutal peppers all day long and not blink, but the key is to work up to it. Strong flavors of any sort require acclimatization. Be patient.

Know this: I have screwed up and made inedible dishes. You probably will too, and there's no shame in it. I have had crock pots create pastry rocks from what I thought would be a nice chicken rice stew. I've burned water. Hell, I've even screwed up cold cereal. Here are the basic things that go wrong and how to avoid them.

Burning stuff: If I'm cooking something in a fry pan, low heat is better than high when starting out. Now I use high heat almost exclusively for meat and veggies in a wok, but I'm reflexively adding water, oil, and whatnot when it's necessary. Until you're used to doing it, use a lower heat, oil the pan well, and keep a bit of water in it all the time.

When baking stuff, oil, oil, oil! If your pan has a dry spot, bread burns and explodes when you try to extract it. Butter is even better than oil in most cases.

Soggy veggies: Nothing in the world is worse than a vegetable that's been cooked until it's gray. Don't be afraid to cook up veggies and meat separately until you've got the timing down. Cook vegetables until they're just a bit crunchy – floppy is OK for some, but you'll want to get the feel of it by experimentation. Toss the veggies into something else, cook the meat until it's done, toss the veggies back in, and cook another minute or so to mix the juices about. This is one reason why my primary cooking tool is a wok.

Unevenly cooked stuff: Stir damnit! Steaming works if the target is a vegetable but even then I'm generally shaking things about – my official steamer has the bottom bit bolted in place because I got tired of it upending itself every time I did cabbage. Just toss some water in a pot or your wok, put a grill or steamer over it, put the vegetables in that, toss a lid over the lot. Steam your veggies until just they're barely crunchy. Then mix 'em into your target meal, sauce, whatever. Some meats can be steamed too – but this is far more delicate, and should be checked with a knife to be sure that the meat really did get cooked.

New cooking tools: Less than a month ago I got a new wok made from cast iron. Needless to say, this has taken some getting used to. My predictable errors covered all areas from undercooking meat to burning the heck out of what would have been a most delicious Thai curried salmon. Why? Didn't follow my own rules to go slow to learn what I was doing. New cooking tools cause more errors for me than anything else. It's for this reason that I generally cook with wok, pot, crock pot, and salad bowl. New items make the brain hurt.

A note on healthy stuff

You'll discover that there are components to these things where I use some less than healthy ingredients. Skim milk cheese can be switched out for regular cheese, low fat cold cuts are easy to find – though I absolutely insist on at least a little pepperoni in the antipasto – and butter can be switched out for olive oil. My own tastes run to really rich food, but since some of you no doubt like to be healthy, the alternates are included. Odds are, if I ever stop exercising wildly, I'll need to cut back some.

Caveat

Each thing in this book should be handled with care. Some people are killed by peanuts. Some are dangerously challenged by hot spices. Know who you're cooking for. Beyond that, you will eventually find some material in this book that is clearly insane. Kittens, for example. Most Americans are not cool with kitten meals, regardless of intent. Remember that a Wetdryvac has influenced this book to a great degree, and use your judgment. Personally, I still think the WKS martini would be great, if only I could get the fur out of it.

Cooking should be approached with aggression, entertainment in mind, and a clear understanding of the macabre. If you're shocked by something here, it's probably in jest. If you're not at least worried a bit, something's clearly wrong with you. Go see a doctor.

Recipes

First: Spices. Gotta have spices.

The spices I make myself are as follow, and I use them all the time:

Pastene Pepper Leftover Vinnegar

When you've used up a jar of pastene peppers, don't chuck the vinegar. It's yummy as an additive to all manner of foods.

Chive vinegar.

1 gallon distilled white vinegar

3 small handfuls chive flowers – I consider my hands small, and guess that this would amount to a couple cups non-crushed chive flowers, with stems mostly cut off. Longer stems = sharper vinegar. More flowers = more color, more flavor. More stems does not equal more color. Flower flavor is different than stem flavor by the way.

Pour off about a cup of vinegar from the gallon jug.

Cram in the chive flowers. Let sit a month or so.

Decant into small decorative bottles if you feel like it, otherwise, just leave it in the gallon jar. You don't need to take the flowers out, but you can if you want when decanting.

Curry Paste.

If I make my own, I do it by volume, but slop'n'slave has a Thai green curry that's as good as what I make – different flavor, mind, but yummy!

5 parts fresh round green chilli peppers. Trying to remove the seeds on these is pointless, don't bother.

2 parts fresh round red chillies. Likewise un-unseedable.

2 parts oil (NOT olive oil – a peanut oil or corn oil for strong flavor, vegetable oil if you just want to taste the chillies.)

Crush, crush, crush. Make paste. Done.

Add turmeric if you want a less traditional curry, but beware – turmeric varies radically between lots. Stores well in glass. Plastic is a bad idea, even Tupperware ruins this stuff.

For more flavor add another four parts garlic, but if you do so, airtight is desperately important. Not that it isn't anyway, but when garlic oxidizes it's even less pleasant than when the chili peppers do. Faugh!

Garlic

Ideally, garlic should be cut fresh. I'm generally too lazy for this, so I occasionally use powder, minced, or whatever, but here's how to make preservable garlic that stays yummy.

10 pounds fresh garlic – whatever your favorite kind of garlic may be.

2 cups olive oil and then enough more to completely cover the garlic.

1 vast quantity of patience, or a lot of friends.

Skin garlic, smash garlic, add immediately to oil and stir. Garlic goes manky if exposed to air for any period of time.

Ten pounds of garlic later, you've probably doubled the amount of olive oil, but that's cool. However much it took – that's what it takes. Again, nice paste, stores well in glass.

Flavored Oils

There are two ways to go about this – I tend to use olive oil here, but you may feel differently about it. The goal is an oil that carries anywhere from a hint to a hankie-full of flavor. Get a nice large decorative jar. Get some or all of the spices listed below. Don't crush the spice components if you want your oil to look pure and clear. If all you care about is flavor, crush away.

Fill bottom of decorative container to about the 1/6 full mark of your spice choices, using less spice in cases where Tien Tsin peppers or scotch bonnets are the primary flavor, unless you want flaming brains later on in the year.

Fill the rest of the container with oil. Cram in a cork, wire the cork in place, and wax the bugger closed. Let sit six months. More is cool too.

In all cases, fresh picked spices are the best. Dried spices work, but the flavor is noticeably different.

My prime choices for spices are: Garlic, scotch bonnets, jalapenos, red and green chili peppers, basil, cilantro in extraordinarily small quantities unless you're insane, Tien Tsin peppers – damn hard to find 'em fresh though, sun dried tomatoes, oregano, and dried onion. Fresh tomato and onion don't work well due to high water content.

Having gotten the spices out of the way, let's get into real food.

Yum-Yum Burgers.

The key to good hamburgers is stickiness. 90% lean meat doesn't work worth a damn most of the time, and so the secondary key is grilling over charcoal, wood, or gas. I prefer charcoal.

90% meat: Making it stick. Add one egg per four pounds of meat. Stir.

Alternate method: Add glue. As this is usually fatal, or has already been fatal to a horse, I suggest the egg.

A typical yum-yum burger in my house has (Per five pounds of meat – I make 'em and freeze the patties):

2 chopped onions

2 heaves of dill – fresh or dry, and by a heave, I mean way more dill than you think you'll ever want to use – and then twice that amount. Fresh is far and away better.

Four tablespoons – If I'm feeling benevolent – of curry paste.

Sliced, not paste, for god's sake, garlic – only if you're not freezing. Garlic in meat frozen is not good. Don't ask.

A sprinkle of chive vinegar – just a touch.

To this, add a salad. Your basic sliced onions, lettuce, and tomatoes, no dressing. Stir fry the salad (That's right, toss it in a wok and cook in on high for about three minutes, or until floppy, with olive oil) If you're brave, add a bit of fresh basil and/or ginger to the salad before stir frying.

And add a bun. Plop floppy salad on bun in equal volume with burger. Tastes good, is moist, and then you don't need mayo. Alas, I use the mayo anyway, and with abandon.

I almost always buy super cheap burger meat, which is too fatty for common sense. However, since grilling extracts much of the fat, this is cool. If I do these in a frying pan, I use 85-90% lean meat or drain 'em and add water with a splash of chive vinegar or wine in it to the pan. I then cook the burgers on low for 20 minutes, pour off the water and grease, and brown them on both sides.

Alternate methods for these burgers include a whole half cup of curry paste blended with egg per five pounds of meat, ginger, garlic, garlic, and garlic, black bean sauce, soy sauce – whatever springs to mind. I cook a LOT with black bean paste, but that's hard to find out here. My aunt gets it at some specialty store in Cleveland, I think. I'm just about out, and not likely to go to Cleveland any time soon – alack-a-day, woe is me.

Salat

A wee mix up from my time in Russia brings you this: This one's very traditional – salat – and has more class than any half dozen fancy salads if you ask me.

5 tomatoes

3 cucumbers

1 pile of leeks.

Dice the cucumbers into ½ centimeter bits and repeat the process with the tomatoes – but bigger. Toss this into a bowl that matches and salt the bowl until a bit of lyme and current would lead to disaster. Pour plenty of sunflower oil into the whole lot and mix until it's even. Then chop up the leeks – enough for a double handful and more – all over the top and toss it into the fridge. Leave it there at least an hour for style and letting the salt work the juice out or eat it right away.

The cold version is for guests, and the just made version is for me when I'm hungry right now.

Since I learned this one in Russia I'd always wash the tomatoes and cukes with a good dollop of anti-bacterial soap. Market veggies are a wonderful way to get the trots if you forget this little step.

A little later in the year, onions and garlic are added to this mix, but I love the simplicity of this spring salad now that winter is out of the land, and I'm thinking I won't tire of it any time soon. Another note is that it's a culinary sin to put anything other than oil in this. Salad dressing flat kills the delicate flavors, particularly that special balance that comes after a bit of refrigeration.

My only caveat? Go easy on the salt. No one in Russia ever does.

Antipasto

1 head lettuce

1 humongous handful of sliced pepperoni

1 spanish onion or one Vidalia onion – or ½ of each kind

2 green peppers

2 big tomatoes

12 or more pastene hot peppers – you'll find 'em jarred up in the special foods isle. I don't know if that's the type of pepper or the brand name, but they're light green, mildly hot, and in vinegar. **DO NOT THROW OUT THE VINNEGAR WHEN DONE.**

3 kinds of cheese (Provalone, swiss, mozzarella. All are available as skim. If feeling decadent, try Munster!)

Cold cuts. Roast beef, chicken, whatever. NOT processed meats. Mouse loaf, olive loaf, pasta loaf, all should be burned and have their ashes spread across two separate bodies of water.

Feta cheese if you're up for it.

Anchovies if you're up for them. Little fish!

Chop lettuce into mildly large hunks, put on platter.

Slice everything else large and thin, put on top of lettuce in layers. Antipasto being a very visual feast, get decorative.

To this, observing the principal of layers, can be added any or all of the following:

Cabbage lightly cooked in butter and turmeric as an edger when you've less lettuce than you expected. Pickled beets, another edger, not intended for a full layer, nor for any volume. Shaved carrots, shaved radishes, scalloped potato edging. Anything else you've ever seen used on a salad, from salmon an blackened swordfish, curried lamb, and red caviar to mild flavored seaweed goes well with this, but strong flavors should be for the edges, while gentle flavors stay in the layers.

Antipasto dressings

The Fat and The Less

This started out as a heart stopper of a dressing, with mayo and oil in abundance. I've modified it some since I generally use antipastos at family feasts, but I'll note both versions.

2 cups mayonnaise – now two cups light sour cream and a dollop of mayo. I'm addicted to mayo, and I have to be able to taste it a little, but you may feel otherwise.

½ cup olive oil. That's right, I live on olive oil.

Chive vinegar – I use about 1/3 cups, but you may prefer less.

Garlic. Paste is cool in this, but no lumps allowed. About 1/3 cups.

Turmeric until yellow. Or very yellow, but not until you can't taste the garlic.

Very small amount of curry paste IF you feel like it. I always do, and even the spice intolerant in my family seem not to be offended.

Salt or soy sauce, but not both. Just enough that you can taste the salt.

Lots of dill. If fresh, you'll need to use the blender. If dry dill weed, just toss it in and stir.

Stir until smooth, pour over top of salad. ALL of it. That's why I said a whole head of lettuce.

Of note, if you've used two cups of mayo, this is brutally unhealthy. I love it even so, but there's an alternate route here: Grab two cups of small curd cottage cheese and use that in place of the mayo or sour cream. It's a different kick, but it's likewise yummy. My mom claims she likes the cottage cheese version best of all. I claim me mom's touched.

For a lighter version, leave the above the same, but add buttermilk to taste.

The Insane

1 pound roast beef, lean

2 cups small curd cottage cheese

1 cup butter milk

Dill, garlic, and miso to taste. Soy sauce with the roast beef is a bad idea, and even a small quantity of miso can be too salty.

A splash of chive vinegar.

Take all ingredients excepting the chive vinegar, and put them in a blender. Vroom! Make light fluffy froth. Add chive vinegar. Vroom! Done.

That's right, this is a meat dressing. Insane, and insanely tasty. And lean!

An alternate version uses corned beef and boiled cabbage, one pound of each, and should probably be illegal, but by god it's spectacular!

The Acceptable

2 cups olive oil

1 cup chive vinegar

1 small handful of fresh basil

1 tablespoon of a hot pepper of your choice. Pepper choice = major dressing flavor.

Toss it all in a blender – Vroom! When the basil is tiny enough not to clog your salad dressing spout, you're done. DO NOT pour this one all over the salad. Use sparingly.

Antipasto modifications

My favorite is taking last night's antipasto, cooking up some pasta, say, enough for four people, and stir-frying the antipasto in a wok on high for three minutes – then throwing it in the pasta with a touch of olive oil.

Toss in some soup as well if you like, and call it tasty. Ox Tail soup is NOT a good choice. Mushroom soups are.

Chicken (or other meat) Broth:

1 more or less used chicken carcass

½ pound garlic per gallon of water used

Pour water into big pot until carcass is covered. Add garlic to match. Simmer – do not boil – the pot for four hours or so. Adding the garlic later means a stronger fresher garlic flavor. Go with your instincts on this one. Being lazy, I usually just toss it in at the start.

No other spices – this is a stock/broth. You'll spice it up later with whatever you choose when you make other things.

After simmering, scrub those chicken bones clean into the stock. Simmer a half hour more, then use/freeze/look at it until you're happy.

Beef broth, pork broth, turkey broth, whatever – all can be made by the same method, but with the pork, boil the crap out of it for an hour, especially on larger bones. Then add garlic, then simmer. Parasites are bad for you.

No need to use leftovers on this if you don't want. Broth with meat in is good too – just make sure that whatever meat you use is well cooked. Enough meat on the bone and four hours of simmering may not be enough.

Vegetable Broth

Vegetable broth is really simple. Take your vegetables, whatever they may be, and simmer them a bit. I usually chop them up first, but if you've a blender and some patience, that's even better.

Good combos are:

Spinach, yellow squash, green bean

Kale, parsley, zucchini

Corn, potato, mushroom, asparagus (Light on the asparagus, or else!)

Never never never okra. Faugh! This is a personal bugaboo with the vac, as once upon a time all major filters became unusable for a period of hours – but I bloody well hate okra myself, and have to side with the vac. Being the hallucinatory creature in question makes this especially easy.

If you're using a blender, mix veggies 50/50 with water and blend until you have a paste. Simmer this down until it's thick. No real reason to add water volume here...

Add spice to taste – usually in a broth my only spice is garlic, unless you count parsley as a spice.

Simmer for 20 minutes. Freeze, use, whatever.

Mushroom Chicken Soup

As much as I love Campbell's cream of mushroom, I think the best mushroom soup I've ever had goes something like this.

1 gallon chicken broth. (Already cooked as above)

3 (at the very least) portabella mushrooms broken into big chunks.

24 ounce package of regular old plain white mushrooms broken into big chunks.

Small amount of corn starch for thickness.

Just a pinch of salt or splash of soy sauce.

Simmer just until mushrooms start to go soft – this means that you must add the portabella mushrooms first, wait until they're slippery on the outside, and then add the other mushrooms. If you get queezy tummy from uncooked mushrooms, sauté them first, then toss them in the soup for about five minutes.

Once soft, add corn starch very slowly, stirring constantly until desired thickness is obtained.

Dill, chopped chives, and basil make this soup extra yummy. Big chunks of chicken do too.

Russian Mushroom Soup

Same as above, but cook about 25 times as long on a low heat. Not cooking Russian mushrooms enough is VERY BAD. If you get yucky tummy from portabellas, the Russian mushrooms (Visit any Russian specialty shop) will make you heave in minutes, and may kill you dead. Some people have really serious reactions to these mushrooms, so be warned. If you don't, eat, enjoy!

Chicken Noodle Yummers

4 boneless chicken breasts.

2 cups rice (that's two cups before you cook it.)

2 cups noodles (After you've cooked 'em)

Olive oil

¼ cup lemon juice OR small splash of chive vinegar

1 cup water

Butter, olive oil, or cottage cheese on the side

½ Spanish onion

6 Pastene hot peppers or more

More fresh garlic than seems sane

Cook the rice. No special treatment here, unless you want it extra yummy – you can always cook the rice in a broth of some sort.

Cook the noodles in water.

Add a touch of oil to the noodles, mix 'em with the rice. Set that aside.

Add olive oil to fry pan, heat it, add chicken.

Sear chicken in the pan, then add the cup of water and everything else. You've chopped that onion into bits, right? Chicken can be done as whole breasts or in cubes. It's just as yummy either way.

When chicken is done, toss the remaining chicken water into the noodles and rice. Serve chicken over noodle rice mix with a side of cottage cheese, blue cheese sauce, or salad. Alternatively, water down some thai curry, mix it with the cottage cheese in a blender, and serve that over the top of everything.

For the lazy, this can as easily be done with packaged ramen – but trusting the flavor packs one finds in ramen can be suicidal.

Method three: Blue cheese bomb: see below.

Blue Cheese Bomb

I love blue cheese, but it's ever so rich – to make a blue cheese bomb, take one part blue cheese, 1 part buttermilk, and six or twelve parts cottage cheese. Blenderize it all like crazy. Use this in place of blue cheese – it's much milder, I admit, but the blue cheese and buttermilk compliment each other, and on liquefy, you blender has made a smooth and yummy dream sauce.

For recipes like chicken cordon bleu (No, I'm not including that here) you can stiffen this stuff up with a bit of flour or corn starch so it won't leak out the sides. Do it in the blender and add the stiffening agent slowly. Better still, and for more rigid mixes if you blender isn't robust, use a whisk and a small bowl.

In moments of weakness, I've been known to use this in place of milk in my coffee. I never fail to be ill after doing so – it's a repugnant mix – but for some reason, it seems like a good idea when I think of it. Usually around 3:00 AM. Usually on my fifth day awake.

Fruit Smoothies

Dead simple and ever so yummy.

1 pound of fruit, whatever your fruit(s) may be. If it has big pits or seeds, take 'em out or your blender will make peculiar noises

2 cups milk, or 2 cups juice, or coffee. Never use acidic fruit and coffee at the same time. It's bloody awful. For that matter, use a non-acid coffee.

Some mint, if you like mint. I waver on this, and usually opt out.

1 pound of ice

Toss fruit and liquid of choice in blender. You'll probably need to halve this at the least. My blender is beastly and doesn't care what I put in it. I'm reasonably sure it would blend gravel if I spoke nicely to it or offered it the chance of being cleaned out by a kitten.

In an aside here, since you will run into this problem later, I hereby declaim all harm you might do to your beloved pets should you be dumb enough to actually attempt cleaning a blender with a kitten. I may stray into frivolity, but if I ever find out some naff sausage has intentionally damaged their friendly furry critters as a "result" of reading this, I'll drive to wherever they may be and fundamentally supposit at least three copies of this printed on sandpaper where they least want it.

Blend into a froth. Pour it back out, chill it almost to freezing.

Blend ice into little bits – think snow cones or something.

Toss equal portions of fruity liquid yummus and ice into a big glass and stir it around some. Drink it already.

These things make reasonably good mixed drinks too – but cold and fruit cover alcohol content well. Don't smash yourself by accident. Not being a fan of mixed drinks myself, especially after the horrible watermelon vodka error, I avoid this, but you may like it.

In the winter, double the liquid content, skip the ice, and serve warm or hot. Acid content in hot fruity things is nasty – you have been warned.

Variation #3 – replace liquid content with a wheat beer (heffe weisen) of decent quality. I use the Red Hook. This is excellent, and I will drink this – but again, no acidity allowed. Regular beer is not a good idea in this particular case.

Alcohol Based Flavorings

Alcohol will take on just about any flavor you force upon it while still keeping its own flavor. Thusly, some combinations are seriously ill advised: Southern Comfort and pickling spices for example. Do not do this. That said, here are the rudiments of flavored alcohols. Most flavored alcohols should be 80 or 100 proof. They should be lacking in other flavors, though making vanilla scotch with a non-brine scotch resulted in one of my happiest special yummys.

Vanilla

Vanilla beans can be found in most health food stores and vary greatly in quality and price. It's almost worth grabbing a professional spice catalog and buying via mail unless your store is knowledgeable about their source. Vanilla is one of those items that tends to be sprayed with pesticide in vast quantities, for some reason, and thus should be purchased with care.

Vanilla should be made from well filtered unflavored or paper vodka. Most of my paper vodka experience has been Russian, and it should be noted that paper vodka made with newspapers is a touch poisonous at best. For 750 ml of vodka, add one vanilla bean. Same rule holds for 750 to 1000 ml of whatever you're flavoring. Vanilla brandy is exceptionally good, and a single malt scotch makes for the best vanilla ever – excepting that having just spent upwards of \$50 for a really good bottle of scotch, my tendency is to suggest just drinking it. Scotch neat is my major alcoholic weakness, and I've found it necessary to limit myself to one shot per experience.

Pour off about a shot or so of whatever your alcohol of choice is and carefully insert your vanilla bean into the bottle. Being able to see the vanilla bean is pretty cool too, so you may wish to use a clear bottle, or decant the alcohol into something decorative. As with spiced oils, you may also wish to cork, wire, and wax the bottle for presentation's sake.

Any flavored alcohol should sit a minimum of six months. Typically there is no upper end to how long a flavored alcohol can sit, but there are exceptions. Por ejemplo:

Coffee Brandy

Another favorite and one you can buy in the store without going to the effort – but there are degrees of goodness achievable at home that the store brands never seem to reach. First off, most store brand coffee brandies have used manky beans. Buying a top quality Kona or Blue Mountain coffee is essential to the creation of the high end coffee brandy.

Since a lot of coffee is involved here, I'd recommend buying a gallon glass jar, a pound of coffee, and enough brandy – or whatever your alcohol of choice is – to fill it right to the top. I've had wonderful luck with vodka in this department and prefer it to the more traditional brandy, but that's me. Go with your gut here...

Cold grind – that means either by hand or with a slow grind machine – your coffee. Otherwise the heat of the grinding process will burn it. Always use the lightest possible roast you can find, since the goal here is a mild flavor.

Typically, the ground coffee should sit in the alcohol for no more and no less than two months, and should be shaken once a week. Whole beans should sit about six months, and generally using whole beans is the better choice. Regardless of grinding, once the alcohol has taken on the coffee flavor, it must be decanted. Letting it sit will build acidity over time.

Coffee vodka is extremely good on ice cream and goes well with peaches for some reason, though I've been told that I'm the only person in the world who likes that particular combination.

Fruit flavors and Mints

Just about any fruit can be tossed into vodka or everclear and come out reasonably well, but with fruits, I'd recommend making a fruit syrup instead, and then add that to the alcohol. If you want to avoid oversweet liquors, simply cook the fruit down in water, smash it up some, toss it into cheese cloth so you don't get chunks, and rack it in a glass tub – available at beer supply places – for about a month. Shake it around once a day to make sure the flavors get mixed in.

For peppermint and other herbal mixes, you can use the syrup method or just toss in whole plants sans roots and call it a day. Herbal mixes can sit around just about forever without going too terribly wrong and look good on the shelf in – go figure – decorative bottles. Figure about three ounces of mint like plants per 750-1000 ml of alcoholic beverage.

Uberburger

The Uberburger is a story food, and should be taken with a grain of salt, but since I still make them regularly when I have the time, I recommend them highly. It began as a college cafeteria food, and so shall be presented in that light. For what it's worth, most people go to college and live in dorms. I lived in the basement of what the administration called a dorm and got on very well. I was a strait-edge of sorts at the time, and got out my dementia by making food. Also of note, to you cellar dwellers out there, this is for you. Hell, the whole book's for you, but this is where it started. Here's how it goes.

First of all, walk into the cafeteria. I do this sober from time to time, even today, regardless of popular basement tradition, and chat with all the cafeteria people. Cafeteria people, with a few particularly noticeable exceptions, are nice people. Read: nice per kind as well as nice per ignorance.

Walk down the cafeteria line. Think to yourself: "That looks good." Every time your eyes happen to fall upon anything that isn't moving. I know, some of the moving stuff is tasty too, but it's hard to keep it on the bun.

The, "That looks good." Philosophy was what led me to the Uberburger in the first place... I'd go down the line and want it all.

The consideration of the bun didn't really set in until later on in my freshmen year, and only then because I'd developed a minor problem with utensils. I didn't like my options. Fork, spoon, knife. Blah. I wanted something I could use to stab soup and still get it in my mouth. Something sharper than the cafeteria knives. Ok, so the spoons qualified as sharper than the knives, but stay with me a sec while I ramble. I wanted the all purpose eating device.

Maybe that's a lie.

Maybe I just wanted tubes of food I could squeeze into me. Such products are available now for climbers and are called things like "goo" and "energy paste" which never fails to nauseate me.

As a result of this I swore off silverware for a time and went in search of the perfect implement, namely a spork – which I've never found in proper stainless steel, barring one that hangs around in my humble abode today – and I think that one belongs to Shawn. Sigh. Months passed.

Needless to say, my eating habits degraded until one day Yoshi said to me, "Do all Americans eat like you?" over dinner. I examined myself – spotless. "Why?" I asked wisely, expecting some comment on vinegar choices...

"I can't see your tray."

Upon examination, it did appear that I'd forgotten my tray or perhaps buried it under a pile of plates, napkins, a bowl of soup, and something red. I remember something red, and it wasn't the tray. My tray that day was green.

I dug.

I checked.

It was indeed green.

I paused and considered. "Most Americans eat sandwiches." I responded sagely.

She pointed at my soup.

"Or use spoons," I added. "I'm on a mission from God."

Shaking her head, she calmly piled everything onto everything else. "Eat," She said. "It will do you good."

A minute later she asked me to define sandwich without using Simpsons references.

Now I'll be the first to admit that a good American hamburger is not necessarily the best food in the world. After all, the good American hamburger has been defined as:

1/4 lb of beef prior to frying at a burger joint named McDonalds.

Add pickles, onions, ketchup, mustard, and whatever it is Grandpa Simpson did to get secret sauce – I forget.

A real hamburger is cooked on an open fire at home with a bunch of relatives who are searching for the ultimate in food sensation.

"Anchovies," one might proclaim over croquet, "Are a gift. Try these on your burger..."

"What's this," Another might ask later, holding something delicately between two fingers... "Here. Put it on too. Maybe it'll cut the salt."

A real hamburger is one of the best things on earth. You bite into it, juice runs down your chin and onto your T-shirt, pickles burst onto your taste buds, and you exalt, yes! Yes! YES! This is the perfect food!

A tear rolls down my cheek.

The cafeteria, obviously, had nothing like this.

"Fit for human consumption. Meat."

That's what the boxes say, I think, but I can't be sure. The ink runs when stuff condenses on it. Regardless, the cafeteria can turn out a decent burger if their attendant – they had to fire a few – remembers two things...

1) Not raw.

2) Not incinerated.

The day after Yoshi made a pile of my food, I decided to refine the method. If I were not to use silver, I might at least use buns. For the rest of the year everything I ate came between two halves of reasonably decent bun. Cafeteria life began to look up.

UMF's ARA was chosen as a model eating establishment.

Food quality improved.

One of the chefs died. We loved you Sam.

The food got worse. I ate more burgers in self defense, putting anything I could think of on them to cut the flavor of other things I thought at first would go well on a burger.

A year passed.

The basement crowd as I currently know it began assembling on campus, interacting with one another more regularly. In the interim I tried various combinations, finally establishing what was to be the baseline for the Uberburger.

Take the following:

1 Decent bun

1 Meat patty (fit for human consumption) well done.

5 slices of cheese in the following order.

one slice American

one slice mild cheddar

two slices Swiss

two slices provolone.

Err... Make that six slices.

3 slices of tomato
1 leaf of lettuce – or more if it's not frozen
Many pickles

Assemble the burger in the following manner. First place the bottom of the bun on your plate. From the other plate, upon which sits EVERYTHING, and possibly another plate as well, if EVERYTHING doesn't fit, place the tomatoes, a slice of cheese, and the burger on the bottom piece of bun. Then alternate ingredients so that no like ingredient touches another – excepting the pickles, which would make life silly. I'm not sure why this is necessary, but it is.

Make sure you put on the top of the bun last.

You are now the proud possessor of a relatively decent burger, the likes of which will make people's eyes bug. It is not, however, an Uberburger. For this item to become an Uberburger, one must go back through the line and add at least three, and preferably more than three of the following items, all of which have at one point or another made their way onto an Uberburger.

Onions.

More pickles.

Cold cuts. All of 'em, from the bologna and salami to the pastrami and roast what in heaven's name is that...

Fish. You must smell the fish first, before you accidentally contaminate your creation.

Rice pilaf. Yum!

Chips.

Fries.

Shrimp and scallions.

Pizza by the slice. No more than two.

Steak. Not a substitute for the meat patty.

Pie. Generally a bad idea.

Anything from the salad bar. (Well, not the French dressing. I hate French dressing.)

Pork'n'beans. Really good, despite some ribbing from detractors.

Sauerkraut. Possibly the best invention since the veal, unless you hate veal.

Veal. Unless you hate veal.

Whatever non fatal seems to be the entrée. Unless the entrée happens to be veal, at which point, rinse and repeat.

Brie and smoked salmon, if you can get it.

Soup of the day. Bad idea. Just don't ask.

Once you have as much of this as possible assembled between the two bun halves, calmly distend your jaw and take a bite. Good no? The only better sandwiches I can think of come from a deli in Winslow called Big G's, and are almost twice this large.

Your Uberburger should be left to sit for at least an hour and then microwaved for best results. Make two, eat one later. Make four. Remember, a burger should be taller than it is wide!

The name Uberburger is derived from Niche, and was so called first by either Rick, Shawn, or Mike – darned if I can remember which. By way of posterity there still remains one such burger in the sink freezer of The Basement. It's been nearly a year now, and it's still there. I checked Friday.

Uberburger freezer update – Still there, 8/6/1997

Uberburger freezer update – Still there, 10/26/98 – I'm in Russia, I had to email someone to find out...

Uberburger freezer update – Freezer missing. 1/03/2000 – I cried.

And so there you have it. That particular story could easily be applied to darn near anything I cook. Just take some stuff that looks good, add some other yummy looking stuff to it, and that's all there is to it.

Modified, Completely Legal Giviak

To the best of my knowledge the traditional giviak is made in the following manner. First one catches a tubby seal. One cuts the seal's throat with one's seal throat cutting tool – importantly not clubbing the seal in the process – and carefully extracts the entire seal out of this newly inconvenient orifice. What one does with the inside of the seal is questionable, and I always assumed that the Inuit either saved it for later or gave it to the dogs.

Next, one puts up a mist net or similar bird catching device and catches one hell of a lot of very small birds. One hell of a lot can be described more comfortably as a Seal-full, but since this may vary depending upon the seal in question, I'd suggest excess. You never want a less than full giviak.

The seal's blubber should remain intact throughout the process, and one's dogs should not be permitted to chew upon the hollow shell that once romped so freely across the arctic wastes. Into the new specially modified seal orifice, as many birds as possible should be crammed. Since I know very little about the Inuit people from back when this dish was created, but suspect lack of such nuances as dill, I would guess that the majority of the flavor comes from seal and bird.

Put seal-full of birds under a pile of rocks to discourage predators, dogs, and whatever else lives up there in the wide north. Likewise, be sure not to burry Mr. Seal in snow that has been discolored by one's huskies.

Rather a while later – I believe six months was the key time – extract Mr. Seal-full from under the rocks. Ideally, the blubber from the seal has by this point permeated the birds and rendered them comfortably chewable.

Since most of us live in land very far away from the seal providing frozen north, the vac a while back decided it was necessary to provide giviak to itself in a quasi legal manner. It racked its filter – this on a vac generally stands in for brains – and eventually decided that the proper method for giviak in the lower 48 should go something like this:

Begin like so, and pretend you've killed it all yourself. Alternatively, kill it all yourself – more time consuming, but some of us remember how to hunt and farm, so it might be worth a shot. The vac tried hunting once – but alas hit the side of its own barn and made rather a large hole.

4 lbs chicken breast

2 lbs duck

2 lbs extremely fatty bacon

1 rawhide wrap

Then, since I'm addicted to flavor, add the following:

3 cloves garlic

2 tablespoons black pepper

Salt to taste

Go out and buy/harvest some of that edible seaweed – there are numerous kinds, but since this is only an excuse to have something healthy in the meal, just pick something you can pronounce. Some people actually understand seaweed usage, but I long ago gave up and had someone pick it out for me.

Pre-moisten the seaweed in light brine. While this is setting up, grab some rawhide strips and sew the giviak substitute (that's the rawhide wrap) closed, being sure to use nice even stitches. If it still looks like it might be healthy, add some lard or more bacon fat just in case.

Put some of the pre-moistened seaweed into a large crock pot – not one of those wimpy electric things. Use a huge pot, preferably made of crock. In a pinch, a five gallon lobster pot will do. About three inches of seaweed should be on the bottom. Into this cradle, take you giviak

substitute – still completely legal, notice, excepting the pork – and complete the setup by burying it in more seaweed to the depth of three inches.

On low heat, allow this to cook for about a day. Care should be taken to add water at intervals so as to keep the seaweed from burning, and to maintain moisture in the giviak itself. Once this meal is prepared, drain the seaweed into a pot – soup stock for later. Take out the seaweed and call that dish number two. Cut the giviak along the side and let that slow cooked yummy goodness pour right onto your serving plate – guaranteed to induce heart attacks in your friends in more ways than one.

Beer Bread

This is one of those examples where I'm not more or less ripping a recipe right out of me own head – this one's been in the family for a while, and owes its current iteration to Stanis, to whom many thanks are due. Now beer bread is simple bread made from self rising flour, a beer, and so forth. It's one of those breads that you can fool around with and not sausage too terribly even by adding, say, some cooked sausage at the bottom of a pan. I've made more dishes using this as a baseline than I have with any other single food product. Some people go for biscuits the same way, I'm told.

1 beer – 12 ounces
2.5 cups self rising flour
1 touch of salt – I don't use much, but then I add salted butter later.
Some sugar – I hardly use any.

Cook them sausages first, if you're going for that approach, since you don't want to die of them. Not cooking your sausages is about as clever as drinking stagnant water in Papa New Guinea.

Pour your flour into a bowl, toss in the salt and the sugar, and give a couple of brisk stirs. Not so brisk as to flour your kitchen/basement/illegal meth lab, but mix it some. Add your beer. Stir until mostly but not entirely lumpy. This bread actually works better with lumps, though lumps from your own person are right out.

Plop this mass into a 3x9 baking pan, pre-buttered.

Cook about 45 minutes at 350 – meanwhile melting some butter on the stove or on the box where you crack your meth. NEVER allow open flame around a meth lab. Remember all those horrible news stories in the eighties about exploding drug labs? Those were people who didn't understand cooking.

Take your bread out of the oven, pour ever so much butter on it, and eat it hot. Stanis, from whom this recipe's nostalgia springs, traditionally serves this with chicken and rice smothered in cream of mushroom soup. Stanis should get the credit for any interest I took in baking through my formative years. The basement – a subculture as well as an occasional bacteriological culture – should be held answerable for the latter descent into madness and illegal pizza, as well as illegal usage *of* pizza.

Directions for whole kitten serum:

Ingredients:

1 Kitten

Six to eight weeks by preference.

If younger kittens are used, reduce amount of water accordingly.

1 Liter laboratory pure water

If your mixing assembly is industrial grade, this procedure may work effectively on multiple kittens, but care should be taken during the whisking process to ensure that fur balls do not develop.

Put kitten and ½ liter water into mixing assembly.

Run mixing assembly on low for 30 minutes.

Run blade whisk for 30 minutes to break down kitten fur.

Run mixing assembly on high for four hours.

Remove contents from mixing assembly into Teflon lined container.

Rinse mixing assembly with remaining ½ liter, decant into container.

Please note that due to human/feline transmissible diseases, parasites and bacteria in the digestive tract, and the danger of toxoplasmosis to pregnant women, this is a class three health hazard. Mixed drinks made from whole kitten serum should NOT be consumed if you are pregnant or believe you may become pregnant. Freeze WKS immediately upon process completion. Remember, prior to processing, kittens should not be fed for at least two days, though water is OK. Some purists likewise argue that purging the kitten prior to processing is desirable, but many emetics have unfortunate flavors, as well as working, alas, on humans as well as kittens.

Surgeon General's Warning:

Consumption of whole kitten serum has numerous health risks, may be addictive, and can impair judgment. Do not drink and drive.

Recipes:

WKS Vodka Martini

3oz WKS

1 shot vodka

1 olive.

Serve warm. Do not allow to stand.

WKS pasta casserole

3 cups WKS

1½ pounds macaroni or manicotti

2 Onions

2 Heads garlic

4 chicken breasts

2 pounds mozzarella

(Optional – scotch bonnets, shitake mushrooms, and sausage to taste)

Reduce WKS to light paste consistency over low flame. Boil pasta until al dente. Mix WKS with equal portion of heavy cream, stirring until smooth. Chop onions and garlic, stir into WKS. Place chicken breasts on bottom of casserole dish. Pour pasta over chicken breasts, then WKS sauce over pasta. Sprinkle ALL of the mozzarella onto top of casserole, cook at 275 for one hour.

At a two to one ratio, WKS may be used to replace spam in recipes, if salt (5% by volume) or Miso (9% by volume) is added.

Whole Kitten Serum Reconstitution:

While not actually possible, much entertainment can be obtained from the attempt of whole kitten reconstitution. Despite DNA spun clone production, it is important to understand that reconstitution is not taking place. Instead, an entirely new, though genetically identical kitten, is being created.

Warning: Reconstituted kitten may explode upon application of revivification voltage.

Base for reconstitution from WKS:

Centrifuge WKS into layered kitten components, essentially hard and soft mineral and cellular matter, as well as WKS plasma. Extract plasma for later use in the “Clean” WKS martini. Remember, this process is going to fail.

Sculpt majority of heavy solids into bone shell and marrow containment structure, occasionally substituting resin as necessary. Ideally, this will be done by computer controlled laser fusing in a partial resin solution.

Inject stem cells if available into marrow receptacle, as well as into pre-seeded vessels for organ reconstruction. If you’re not really into “Clean” WKS martinis, this would be a good time to buffer the stem cell matrix with the WKS plasma.

Ideally, some form or outline should be pre-assembled for the representative organ types, either from shark cartilage lined molds or cardboard, depending on shark cartilage availability. Using seed material from initial biopsies – if you’ve remembered to biopsy your kitten before rendering the WKS – is an ideal trigger for the stem cells.

Skin should be grown either on glass or non-reactive plastic, and need not be from the original kitten, though if further WKS production is planned, secondary kitten contamination should be disallowed. When placing skin on final product, be sure to aim the hair follicles in the correct direction.

Brain matter – since there’s no way in hell to reconstruct the brain short of angelic intervention or wild luck, be sure to find a good kitten brain substitute. Bran mush has literary precedence in this area, but most WKS products discover quickly that bran mush tastes funny at best. Often times, a few hearing aid batteries in sequence and parts of an old Timex watch will work just as well – especially as these items can be sifted out of the WKS on future runs.

On completion of the various precursor stages, the whole resultant kitten components should be sutured together – ironically, the popular material for sutures, catgut, is one of the most fundamentally baffling procedures in the whole operation. Catgut should be cloned or culled from the original kitten, unless vast quantities of stem cells are available, due to the tendency of non-redundant organs to recognize each other in the lab. A quantum effect similar to the observed/changed phenomenon, in nine cases out of ten, only the stronger non-redundant organ will survive.

Why Reconstitute? Why Clone?

Everyone has a favorite tabby flavor, and stories of the one that was just right. Wise WKS producers always keep genetic stock on hand so as to enable reproduction of the perfect WKS. After all, to a true connoisseur, even differences in diet can be detected. Loosing your best Russian Blue / Siamese cross to a late night snack can be a truly demoralizing scientific downfall.

Likewise, as many home scientists know, children are often irrationally attracted to their pets – having to cope with tears from your child can be easily put off, often for years, through the process of cloning. Reconstitution, as it rarely results in a viable – or even moving – kitten, can easily be compensated for by lying. “Don’t worry Patty, little Hoosiewhatsis is just asleep. Shh! He’s had a rough day.”

Known methodological errors:

Waxed cardboard or cardboard that has been used to contain food products should not be used, as both contaminations in the genome and in the overall flavor can occur.

Older circuit components (when brain matter is unavailable) should be carefully checked for lead, gallium arsenide, and other toxins. Even after careful filtration, these metals can render your future WKS processes poisonous. More than one WKS producer has been closed down by the FDA due to improper handling of replicant brain components.

Child child syndrome, caused by repeated separation from the master genome, can and should be avoided by building a large quantity of initial stock. Remember, every clone contains errors, and cloning a clone both reinforces initial errors and adds new ones. Use fresh WKS stock!

Never mix WKS batches prior to cloning. On rare occasions a mixed batch kitten produces fantastically good results in breed and texture, but the usual result is a virus, and many viruses can cross species lines. Do not find yourself a victim of a virus you've just created in search of a smoother martini.

No Flake Cookies

Cooking wax

Oreo cookies

Baker's chocolate powder

Powdered sugar

200 minty fresh tictacs

Melt wax. Add baker's chocolate powder and powdered sugar until chocolaty and sweet.

Remember to extinguish nearly unavoidable wax fires with pot lids.

Smush all Oreo cookies and toss in all the tictacs. Pretend you're making a study of even dispersion of goldfish in a pond. The tictacs are the fish. Oreos (in vast quantity) are the pond.

Mix well.

Get some baking sheets and butter them like crazy.

Into the melted wax, heave pond and goldfish. This is where the fire usually happens. Stir for about three seconds and then pour sludge into the baking pans. Ideally this should be the consistency of roofing tar when the ice breaks in Arizona.

Importantly, nearly any crispity crunchety thing that has cake or cracker like properties can be substituted for Oreos. I'm just a fan of that particular yum. It's also worth noting that this recipe came up by accident during a candle making process at a bad halitosis moment. The resulting candles burned strangely, and being part vac, I tasted one. Delicious! But, I thought, it needs cookies.

Hamburgers, Danger Will Robinson Style

Things that have been on fire taste better. As an axiom, this fails most regularly, but one can easily discern that beef takes special note of fire, becoming better for it. Grilling then, either on charcoal or plain old wood must automatically be the proper method for burger cooking. As usual, there's a balance one must strike twixt gentle raw burger and burger ashes mingled with the charcoal, but following a few wee errors in judgment, I trust you'll come out fine.

A hamburger of flavor – well, just drop back to the section on burgers and you'll see what the idea is, but for the proper goodness of a burger done Danger Will Robinson, you'll need to go an extra mile. First, you'll be needing flavor. Nab a warm, sweet, and mild Indian curry from wherever you can find one. Five pounds of beef seems to feed five people pretty well.

Defrost your beef if frozen, then mix in about 10 tablespoons of good warm sweet curry. Chop in a cupful of the angriest onions you can find. A full head of garlic. An eighth cup of Tabasco sauce. More dill than you'd dill a pint of pickles with, fresh, of course. Crush the garlic with a press. If your meat needs more fat, toss in olive oil, but not much. If it starts to fall apart, add an egg.

Ten patties from five pounds of beef is all you're allowed to make, so be sure that you cook these puppies a long time slow on the grill. Make sure the rack is above the coals by a good distance, and if your grill has a cover, cover it.

Danger 1: Undercooked meat. Don't do it.

Danger 2: Wee small dogs. Hot dogs are nice. Wee small dogs upend grills. Fire ignites wee small dogs. Round people with much beer attempt to stomp out wee small dogs. Wee small dog owners become vexed, and often will shoot to kill.

Danger 3: This would be the intentional part, where you go dig through your cupboards for a nice scotch bonnet pepper. Slice thin strip onto the tops of the burgers when grilling is almost done. When burgers are served, add pickled jalapeno slices. On the theory that the burger probably isn't spicy enough, grab a tablespoon of fresh wasabi and coat the bun with that. Adding mayonnaise, lettuce, and tomatoes will likewise increase your pleasure, unless you happen to be allergic to tomato. Danger Will Robinson!