



# MARY'S MEMO

*Recipes • Menu Ideas • Shopping • Cooking Tips*

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Chief and Rays Supermarkets

## FROM THE COOKBOOK SHELF

*Mary's Memo* has been around since 1968 when it first appeared in the Bryan Chief. By now I certainly know my readers and their preference for recipes. First of all, in this economy you want reasonably priced ingredients. I hear you loud and clear on that! Also, you want something tasty with a minimum of ingredients and time to make it.

So when I perused the pages of *300 Best Casserole Recipes* by Tiffany Collins, I looked for a recipe that fit my criteria for *Mary's Memo* recipes. Tiffany Collins is a nationally recognized culinary professional and spokesperson on food, fitness, entertaining and fitness. She is also Culinary Director of the Texas Beef Council.

I've chosen Easy Taco-Mac to share.

### EASY TACO-MAC

- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 1.25-oz. envelope taco seasoning mix
- (1) 14.5-oz. can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 8-oz. elbow macaroni
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- (1) 8.5-oz. package cornbread mix (like Jiffy®)
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese

(my preference is always sharp Cheddar)

In large nonstick skillet, over medium-high heat, cook beef and taco seasoning, breaking beef up with the back of a spoon, for 8 to 10 minutes or until the beef is no longer pink. Drain off fat. Stir in tomatoes, macaroni, water and celery; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes. In medium bowl combine cornbread mix, egg and milk, stirring with a fork until just combined. Fold in cheese. Spoon beef mixture into 2.5-quart casserole dish. Spoon dollops of batter on top. Bake in preheated 400°F oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until bubbling.

*Source: 300 Best Casserole Recipes* by Tiffany Collins; Robert Rose Publisher, October 2010, \$24.95/softback.

## PET PEEVE GETTING WORSE, NOT BETTER!

I am sick and tired of food companies reducing package and can sizes and that includes Kraft's reduced-fat shredded sharp Cheddar cheese that I needed for a recipe recently! Raise the price if you must but stop changing the amount in the container! I do use reduced-fat cheese whenever I can but I'm not going to buy it in a 7-oz. package when I need an 8-oz. one and I told that to a Kraft representative on their

consumer hot line this morning. If you are as displeased about package and can changes as I am, let food companies know it. Kraft's hotline number is 1-800-323-0768 and to their credit, you do get a live person to talk to right off the bat.

## IMPROVISATION COOKING

The price of gasoline is making me ask the question more often:

"Is this trip necessary?" When petrol was cheap I thought nothing of jumping in the car to get an ingredient for a recipe. Now I think about what I can make with what I have on hand. That's called improvisation cooking. Testing recipes, I end up with dabs of food that I am sorry to say have become fossil food. By doing improvisation cooking I utilize the "stuff" while it's still identifiable. It's actually fun and challenging to make something tasty. The easiest thing to make is a soup. I jotted down the amounts of everything I used and ended up with a tasty soup. Improvise if you don't have all the ingredients!

### IMPROVISATION SOUP - ITALIAN STYLE

- 1/3 lb. of bulk Italian sausage
- 1 cup chopped onion  
(I always have onions in the refrigerator)
- 2/3 of a 28-oz. can of stewed tomatoes
- (1) 14.5-oz. can diced tomatoes with garlic and onion
- 3 small carrots, peeled and sliced
- 1 cube of frozen pesto (2 tablespoons)
- 1/2 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 cup frozen cheese-filled tortellini
- 1/2 cup frozen peas
- Fresh ground pepper
- Shredded Romano or Parmesan cheese for garnish

In a Dutch oven, sauté sausage and onion together until meat is no longer pink. Add carrots, pesto and Italian seasoning. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to low and simmer covered until carrots are tender. Add peas and tortellini and cook until tortellini is al dente but not enlarged (if it is, you've cooked it too long). Serve with a sprinkling of shredded Romano or Parmesan on top. My soup was a little too thick so I added a 12-oz. can of V-8 Juice. Anything goes when you're improvising. For example, if you don't have sausage, ground beef can be used. Replace tortellini with the same amount of another pasta. Go ahead and use a 28-oz. can of stewed tomatoes. (I didn't have a whole can because I ate a serving from it). If you don't have pesto, use a half teaspoon of dried basil. Get the drift? The point is that when you improvise you use what you have on hand and don't go out and buy a darned thing. Bon Appetite!