

JUST THE BASICS

THE SURLY GOURMET

TONI CHIOTTI

■ The columnist gives some helpful cooking advice to students on ways to avoid gout and scurvy this year

The human body cannot exist on flavor-packets and noodles alone. The first year in their own houses, most college students are bound to stock the shelves with Top Ramen and Costco-size boxes of mac 'n cheese and fill their freezer with gourmet coffee, tater tots and microwave burritos.

Goiter and gout are their reward.

An entire household of medical students was recently diagnosed with scurvy. It takes months on a ship without vegetables or citrus fruit to come down with this disease, but these chukleheads managed to pull it off in the comfort of a college town.

The idea that student chow is either cheaper or quicker than actually cooking is a falsehood. This column, initially, will focus on the absolute basics. I'll go over pasta sauces, soup stocks and how to cut up a chicken — all things you should have learned from watching your momma, but probably didn't.

If your shelves are full of cheap crap that you don't like, you're not going to eat it. This is the false economy of the student diet. Tightening the belt while at the grocery store doesn't work if you just end up swinging through a drive-through and blowing all the money you saved.

Keep good, instant chow around the house for when you don't feel like cooking (Trader Joe's is great for this), but buy decent ingredients that will inspire you to actually make something.

Setting up your kitchen requires a bit of an investment, but once you're there, you can get by on close to nothing each week. I think the best place to start is to give a quick overview of the essentials needed to stock your kitchen. Get ye to a thrift

store. It should be possible to find most of the hardware you need secondhand, especially dishes, pans and silverware.

I recommend buying an assortment of cheap, disposable storage containers. Plastic holds odors, and the odds of your letting that lasagna develop its own ecosystem in the back of your fridge are high. Save plastic and glass food containers and use those as well. Make too much of everything and freeze the rest for later.

Good knives are essential, and hard to find used. The only ones I use are a small paring knife and an eight-inch chef's knife. These are worth buying new and should be available for less than \$10 each. Bread knives are also good to have around and are a dime-a-dozen.

As for ingredients, keep your kitchen well-stocked with the basics, and you will always be able to throw something together. Augment this basic list with fresh veggies, meats, fish, cheeses and fresh herbs.

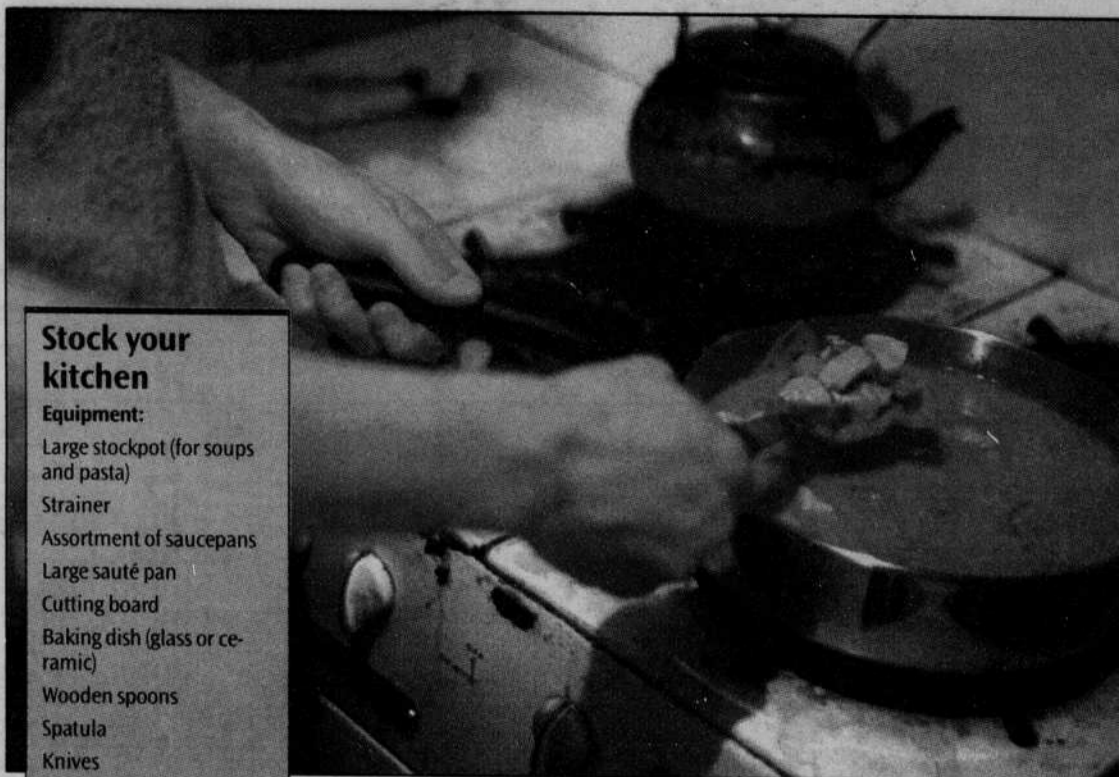
Ever notice how most Mexican food is made of the exact same stuff, just arranged differently? When shopping, it makes a lot of sense to focus on one corner of the world at a time, preferably the poorer corners — they know how to stretch it. Eat Mexican for a week, then go stock up at an Asian grocery for the next couple of weeks. Don't shop for one specific meal but rather for a week's worth of whomping.

For emergencies, you can keep some frozen veggies around, or even a box of Pasta Roni, if you must. Just don't skimp. With good ingredients, you can pass on a lot of the preparation.

Make cooking part of your daily routine. When you get home, crack a beer and start chopping. And remember, five bucks thrown away at Pizza Planet is five fewer beers in your fridge.

If you shop smart, learn to improvise and approach cooking with the dedication of a recovering addict, you will save money and keel over a lot less.

Tony Chiotti's column is written every other week for Pulse.



Stock your kitchen

Equipment:

- Large stockpot (for soups and pasta)
- Strainer
- Assortment of saucepans
- Large sauté pan
- Cutting board
- Baking dish (glass or ceramic)
- Wooden spoons
- Spatula
- Knives
- Measuring cup

Ingredients:

- Pasta
- Rice
- Flour
- Sugar
- Canned whole tomatoes
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Onions
- Potatoes (waxy reds or Yukon golds are most versatile)
- Garlic
- Butter (don't even think about buying margarine)
- Boxes or cans of soup stock (preferably unsalted)
- Canned tuna (in olive oil)
- A box of Franzia wine, dry
- Blitz Weinhard beer
- Assorted condiments
- Dried spices and herbs (bulk)

Tony Chiotti for the Emerald

It doesn't take a professional chef, or a professional kitchen, to cook up tasty, nutritious meals. All it takes are the right ingredients and a few strategies, and you'll be eating more than just ramen.



Spook a friend with a howl-o-ween gram!

Howl-o-grams will run in the Emerald on Tuesday, October 31st

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