

Della Reese shares her cooking secret

Cooking always has been a tradition in Della Reese's family. After learning to cook at her mother's elbow at a young age, Della is now passing along the same sound advice to her daughter, Dumpsey.

"I have been cooking forever," said Della. "My mother was a chef in an East Indian restaurant... and I was her chief vegetable chopper. Cooking always has been a part of my life."

But how does a newly-married lady (Della recently married Franklin Lett, an executive entertainment producer) and guest star of ABC-TV's new series, "It Takes Two," find the time to cook?

"You make the time to do things that matter to you, and cooking for the people I care about is important to me," she said. "What better compliment could someone ask for than to know you've taken the time to prepare something special for them?"

A working woman for over 25 years, Della Reese has developed short cuts in the kitchen that save anyone time.

"One key factor is what you do on a shopping day," said Della. "Instead of just putting away the groceries when I come home from the supermarket, I season my meats and then freeze them."

"My secret, though, is to keep a well-stocked kitchen," she said. "I have a spice rack and a soup rack, so I can create any flavor I want, any time."

"Canned soups help me save time," added Della. "When I come home from a long day, I want something good to eat. And no one can cook for me as well as I can. So I pull out some vegetables or chicken, select the soup that suits my taste, mix them together and let it cook. The oven does the work, not me. While the food is cooking, I can relax, take a shower and change my clothes. When the food is ready, I'm ready, too. I haven't spent time chopping and peeling."

But what about the evenings spent in hotel rooms across the country when she's performing?

"There was a time when I collected 15 electric skillets from being on the road so much," she said. "Rather than eat out or order room service, I'd buy an electric skillet, a few staples, some soup and make dinner in my room. People used to wonder where that wonderful smell was coming from!"

"I'm a creative cook, not a gourmet cook," Della continued. "If you don't like an ingredient that is called for in a recipe, use your imagination and substitute a favorite vegetable or seasoning. You have to have faith in your abilities. Once you have that, you can do anything."

Always reaching for new horizons, Della's latest challenge is teaching a course on metaphysics in Los Angeles.

"Teaching is a very rewarding experience for both the student and teacher," she said. "It's thrilling to share ideas that are important to you and can have a positive effect on someone's life."

And Della is cookin' on the music scene, too! Her latest album, "I Sure Like Lovin' You," reflects the contentment she is enjoying as a married woman.

"January 12th, 1983 was one of the best days of my life," she said smiling. "Franklin is a wonderful man with a terrific sense of humor. We work together, cook together and play together. What more could anyone want?!"

RHAPSODY RATATOUILLE

- 2 tablespoons salad or olive oil
- 3 small zucchini, sliced (3 cups)
- 2 medium green peppers, cut in strips
- 1 cup sliced onion
- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon basil leaves, crushed
- 1 can (10 3/4 oz.) condensed tomato soup
- 1 medium eggplant (about 1 pound), peeled and cubed
- Grated Parmesan cheese

In 2-quart saucepan over medium heat, in hot oil, cook zucchini, green pepper, onion, garlic and basil 5 minutes. Stir in soup and eggplant. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer 15 minutes; stir occasionally. Uncover; continue cooking 5 minutes. Serve with Parmesan cheese. Makes about 6 cups.



Rhapsody Ratatouille

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