

Five recipes that don't take hours of work

By **DANIEL NEMAN**
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Some days, you just don't feel like cooking lobster thermidor aux crevettes with a Mornay sauce, garnished with truffle pâté, brandy and a fried egg on top.

Some days, you want to cook something easy. Something fast.

Not throw-a-frozen-block-of-something-into-the-microwave-and-hope-for-the-best fast. I'm talking about a delicious, satisfying, homemade entrée in 30 minutes or less, from start to finish.

I happen to have five such dishes right here, and I could not be happier with any of them. They are sure to join your week-night cooking rotation — but honestly, they are all good enough for weekend cooking, too.

I should warn you, though, that some of them require a bit of time management to keep them under a half-hour. While part of the dish is cooking, you may have to be chopping or otherwise prepping some of the other ingredients.

This requirement is a deviation from the standard *mise en place* method of cooking, in which all the ingredients are prepared before the cooking begins. That method works best, in general, and ensures there will be no unforeseen problems. But it does not save as much time as prepping while cooking.

For instance, I made poached salmon. The fish gets much of its flavor from the liquid in which it is simmered, the court bouillon, and that gets its flavor from a number of ingredients that have to be prepped.

So you just have to put it together methodically. While you're gently cooking chopped onions, peel and chop a carrot. Add it to the pan, and chop a rib of celery. While that cooks, peel and chop a few cloves of garlic, and so on. Before you know it, you'll have a highly flavored court bouillon to bring a complex depth to a luscious piece of salmon.

But don't stop there. The salmon only takes a few



Fast, not fancy

Easy Honey Garlic Pork Chops with pan fried potatoes.

Colter Peterson/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS



Chuckwagon Chili, a variation of a Betty Crocker recipe.

Colter Peterson/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

minutes to cook, and you can take that time to make a wonderful flavored mayonnaise to serve with the fish. Either dill mayo or lemon will do. I made both; it's nice to have a choice.

One key to making dinner in less than 30 minutes, of course, is to choose food that doesn't take long to cook. For pork, that means the tenderloin or chops.

I made chops, but not just any chops. I made Easy Honey Garlic Pork Chops, which are seared, then glazed, then broiled.

It still takes less than 30 minutes, guaranteed.

There isn't a particular secret to this dish, but if

there were one it would be that the chops are first fully cooked on the stovetop before the glaze is applied — or even before it is assembled, if you choose — and before it is broiling. It is broiled for just a minute or two, enough time to make the honey glaze adhere to the meat and to char the edges just a bit.

The pork comes out blissfully juicy, with a delightful sweet-and-sour edge.

For my vegetarian option, I chose a pasta dish that looks as good as it tastes, and it tastes absolutely amazing. The pasta almost glows with a vibrant red sauce — but it doesn't

have any tomatoes.

Instead, the extraordinary color of Bucatini With Bell Pepper Sauce comes from red bell peppers, though you could also use yellow for a different, equally appetizing appearance. Frankly, I'd stay away from green bell peppers for this one.

While a big pot of water for your pasta heats to a boil, you can chop the peppers, onions and garlic. You can chop them roughly, which will save some time, because after they are sautéed they will all be blitzed together in a blender or food processor. Meanwhile, you can be cooking the bucatini or

other long pasta that holds sauce well.

Did I mention that the sauce also has a good splash of cream in it? The sauce also has a good splash of cream in it. And if you've never had red peppers and cream, now is the time to start.

Chicken piccata was next. In my relative youth, it used to be my go-to order at Italian restaurants. It was as superb as I remember.

It also comes together in almost no time at all. You simply pound chicken fillets flat, until they are an even thickness. Dredge them lightly through flour, pan-fry them lightly in just enough olive oil, and then whip up a quick sauce with garlic, white wine, capers, butter and lemon juice.

It's a simple dish, and sometimes simple is best. My final entrée is Chuckwagon Chili, a liquid-free variation on one of my own favorite recipes for chili. The version I make is an adaptation of a Betty Crocker recipe, I'm embarrassed to say, and one of the biggest adaptations I make is to add liquid. So the liquid-free version is actually pretty close to Betty Crocker's, with the addition of smoked paprika and a much shorter cooking time.

I am perfectly aware that she never existed, but that Betty Crocker sure knew what she was talking about. This is a hearty,

meaty chili, with a perfect balance of spices. And the ingredients create enough liquid of their own, so you don't even have to add the liquid I've been adding all this time.

POACHED SALMON

Yield: 4 servings

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 onion
- 1 carrot
- 1 rib of celery
- 4 garlic cloves
- 6 sprigs parsley
- 3 sprigs thyme
- 4 sprigs dill, plus 1 optional tablespoon
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 4 (5-ounce) fillets of salmon
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice, optional

1. Heat oil over medium-high heat in large pan deep enough to hold salmon. Cut onion in large pieces and add to pan, stirring occasionally. Peel carrot, cut into large pieces and add to pan. Chop celery into large pieces and add to pan. Smash garlic cloves and add to pan. Cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables become just a little tender, about 5 minutes.

2. Add parsley, thyme and 4 sprigs of dill. Stir in bay leaf and peppercorns. Add enough water to cover salmon, when it is added. Add wine, raise heat, and bring to a simmer. Gently lower in salmon (you may have to do this in batches) and cook at a light simmer until fish is opaque and flakes easily, about 5 minutes or longer, depending on the thickness of the fish.

3. Meanwhile, make a sauce by combining mayonnaise with remaining tablespoon of dill or with lemon juice.

4. When fish is done, gently remove from liquid with a spatula and serve with mayonnaise sauce on top or on the side.

Recipe by Daniel Neman

CHICKEN PICCATA

Yield: 4 servings

- 2 large skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- Salt
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 4 garlic cloves, smashed
- 1/3 cup dry white wine
- 1 tablespoon drained capers
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- Chopped parsley and lemon wedges (for serving)

See, *Fast/Page B2*

For the love of vegetables

By **JEANMARIE BROWNSON**
The Daily Meal

It's a grand time to be a vegetable lover. Local supermarkets highlight fresh, crisp greens and slender summer squashes from nearby farms. Signs advertise weekend farmers markets selling heirloom tomatoes, baskets of rainbow carrots, peppers and farm-fresh eggs. Come August, enterprising teens sell sweet corn from makeshift stands.

Overflowing stalls at farmer's markets create the illusion that folks in the United States have always enjoyed maitake mushrooms, leeks and fingerling potatoes; older cookbooks tell a different story.

A 1997 community cookbook tucked on a shelf in our cabin near Galena, Illinois, offers a glimpse into vegetable cooking of the era. "Cooking With A' Peal" features mostly frozen vegetables flavored with tinned soup and shredded cheese. Only a few recipes call for fresh vegetables, mostly cucumbers and carrots. No doubt there's "a' peal" in the readiness of bags of shucked peas and frozen broccoli florets.

To lure cooks away from

frozen vegetables, fresh vegetable recipes need to deliver big taste and texture.

A post-market sandwich can set the tone. The simplest is butter-slathered bread topped with sliced radishes and salt. When the leaf lettuce and tomatoes peak, a slightly more complex ELT sandwich beckons. I stir fresh basil into mayonnaise before slathering it on toasted bread. Then layers of fresh lettuces and vine-ripened tomato are ready for a fried egg.

A sheet pan of colorful curried carrots and potatoes lends itself to a celebratory vegetable-based dinner. The whole tray can be cooked in advance and served warm or at room temperature as a main course accompanied by a cheese platter and good bread. Or, grill a couple of lamb or pork chops for a meat side.

Sweet corn pudding, with its soufflé-like lightness, will stand out at a barbecue. I make it with fresh eggs purchased from the farmers market or the honor stand near our cabin. Cold leftovers taste delightful at lunch with sliced ripe tomato.

Assorted fresh mushrooms, sautéed with the sweetest onions, make a fine accompaniment to

almost anything from the grill. I save a few spoonfuls to stir into softly scrambled eggs the next morning. Same with a skillet full of sautéed chard!

Fresh herbs boost the flavor of everything they touch, even those retro frozen veggie-based dishes. Shower your hash brown casseroles and frozen vegetable soups with fresh chives and basil for a real taste of summer farm stand goodness. After all, cooking with the season is one of the 50 foodie things you need to do this summer.

ELT SANDWICHES WITH BASIL MAYONNAISE

Prep: 10 minutes
Cook: 5 minutes
Makes 2 servings
Egg, lettuce and tomato sandwiches, yum. Bacon is certainly welcome, as are slices of smoked ham or paper-thin prosciutto.

- Ingredients:
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh basil leaves
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard



Kristen Mendiola for The Daily Meal; Shannon Kinsella/food styling

ELT sandwiches with basil mayonnaise.

- 1/4 teaspoon coarse salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 large eggs
- 4 slices hearty whole grain country-style bread
- 4 leaves red-tipped or green leaf lettuce
- 1 large or 2 medium-sized heirloom tomato, ends trimmed, thinly sliced

Directions:

1. Mix 3 tablespoons mayonnaise, 3 tablespoons basil, 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon

pepper in a small bowl. Set aside.

2. Heat a small nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot. Spray with nonstick spray or olive oil. Crack 2 eggs into the skillet. Reduce heat to low, cover the pan and cook until egg yolks are medium set, 3 to 4 minutes.

3. While the eggs cook, toast 4 bread slices.

4. Spread mayonnaise mixture on one side of each piece of toasted bread. Top 2 bread slices with 2 lettuce leaves and half of the tomato slices. Top with fried egg

See, *Veggies/Page B2*