

Graduate School Gourmet

If you are working on a PhD, chances are you're too busy feeding your brain to plan your next meal. Particle physicists share how they managed when they needed cheap or fast meals during grad school.

by Siri Steiner



* Buffalo Wings

From Fermilab physicist Andreas Kronfeld

"I was a grad student at Cornell in upstate New York, and in 1984 my friends and I started making our own 'Buffalo' wings. Instead of beer, we washed them down with cheap Spanish 'champagne.'"

- Heat grease in a frying pan, cut up wings.
- In another pan, mix one part Frank's Original Red Hot Cayenne Pepper Sauce with one part butter in a large skillet. (The resulting sauce should come about a quarter inch from the bottom of the pan.)
- When the grease in the other pan sizzles, (about 375°F), add wings. As the wings fry, allow butter and hot sauce to simmer in the other pan until the consistency is slightly thicker (about 5 minutes).
- When bubbling from the wings in grease pan slows, remove and drain wings thoroughly.
- Place wings into margarine-hot sauce mixture. Turn wings to coat them in sauce.
- Place wings in the oven or on the grill for a few minutes to "bake in" the sauce.
- Serve with celery sticks and blue cheese.

* Broiled Pigs' Feet

From Johns Hopkins University physicist Jonathan Bagger, former co-chair of HEPAP subpanel on Planning the Future of US High-Energy Physics

"I lived with four housemates in Princeton. We had an ongoing competition to see who could make the cheapest meal. The winner, at 17 cents a serving, was pigs' feet. Not cooked the way pigs' feet normally are, but simply broiled."

Place pigs' feet in preheated broiler (or oven at 450°F)
Broil until done. Place artistically on plate and serve. Yum!



Spaghetti alla Carbonara

From CERN physicist
Francesco Knechtli

"Even if it gets late and you come back home very hungry, you might consider making spaghetti alla carbonara to celebrate a hard working day."

- Break 1 or 2 fresh eggs into a dish.
- Add a bit of salt, pepper, and milk (and maybe water) to make a sauce.
- Cut bacon (to taste) into small pieces and fry while spaghetti cooks.
- Grate Parmigiano cheese (to taste).
- Pour the sauce over the spaghetti and add the bacon and cheese.

Warning: do not try this on a hot plate!

Spaghetti ai Funghi Porcini

Knechtli adds:

"Spaghetti ai funghi porcini is great if you have good legs for collecting wild mushrooms...or a nice relative, like my uncle, who collects them for me."

Take dried porcini and put them in water so they become soft. Fry them in olive oil and garlic. Add whipping cream and parsley at the last minute to make a sauce. Pour on the spaghetti and enjoy!

Noodles à la Kephart

From Fermilab physicist Bob Kephart

"Noodles à la Kephart got me through graduate school at SUNY Stony Brook."

- Boil a large package of macaroni.
- When cooked, add a brick of Velveeta cheese and a package of the cheapest hot dogs* you can find, cut up.
- Stir.
- Empty into dish.
- Eat for lunch and dinner each day for one week.
- When finished, return to Step 1.

May be garnished with canned peas, eaten cold from can.

*Caution: Do not read ingredients on hot dog package.



Sayur Bening Bayam (Spinach Soup)

From Suharyo (Haryo) Sumowidagdo,
a Florida State University graduate student

"In Indonesian, 'sayur' means vegetable dish, 'bening' means transparent, and 'bayam' means spinach. The broth should be clear and transparent, but this is not the case with this soup. Anyway, what's in a name..."

- 1 cup of cut corn (frozen preferred—if canned, drain first).
- 4-5 oz of spinach (roughly half of a big bag of spinach, trimmed and washed).
- 1 tomato
- 1 to 1 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper
- 1/4 onion (white or yellow)
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 3 to 4 cups of water

Dice tomato and onion. At the same time, boil water in a medium pot (3 qt/4 qt). Wait until the water boils, and then add the corn. Re-boil, and add spinach. Reduce heat and simmer. Stir in chopped tomato. In a small frying pan, heat and melt butter separately. Stir-fry the diced onion for 3-4 minutes with the butter. Then put the diced onion into the soup. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serves 3-4.

Tricky things: Spinach becomes very soft and tender once it is thrown into hot water, so do not keep the water boiling after you throw in the spinach. If you have to reheat the soup, do not bring to boil. Just put in on low, watch carefully, and stir occasionally.

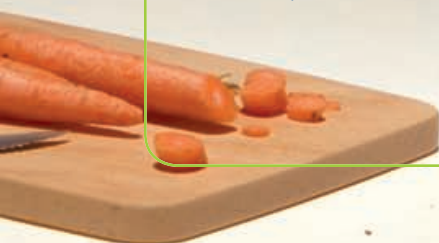
Variation and suggestions: The corn gives a somewhat sweet and natural taste to the soup, which combines perfectly with spinach. You can also use corn on the cob, chopped into short blocks. I usually eat this dish with a small amount of steamed rice, but this soup should also be great with dinner rolls, toast, garlic bread, French fries, etc.

* Hot and Sour Beef

From Robin Staffin, Associate Director
of High Energy Physics, US Department of
Energy Office of Science

"I practiced and practiced at being a gourmet Hunan cook in grad school at Stanford. Here is my grease-stained recipe for hot and sour beef."

Photo right: Robin Staffin



Hot and Sour Beef

This is a local dish which originated in my home county of Li-fing. The recipe is nowhere to be found outside of Li-fing. It was introduced into the United States for the first time by my Hunan Restaurant in San Francisco. Many American gourmets are amazed to find this dish so powerfully flavored and stunningly delicious. The recipe calls for very thin beef slices, the hottest pepper, and the best vinegar. To cook it you need high speed and high heat. Timing is the most important element: be careful not to overcook.

Ingredients

- 1/2 pound flank steak, sliced into pieces 1/2 inch thick
- marinade
 - 1/4 teaspoon cornstarch (or 1 egg white)
 - 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 - few drops vegetable oil
- 2 cups plus 2-3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh garlic
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 1/2 cup canned bamboo shoots, sliced (or 1/2 cup sliced onions)
- 8-12 peeled carrot slices (1/2-inch thick)
- 1/2-1 tablespoon hot red pepper powder
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- pinch salt
- 2 tablespoons chicken broth
- 1/2 cup leeks (or scallions), cut into 1-inch pieces (optional)
- 1 tablespoon white wine
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 tablespoon liquid cornstarch (see p. 6)
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil (or vegetable oil)

Preparation

1. Mix the beef thoroughly with the marinade ingredients and marinate for a couple of minutes.
2. Heat a wok over highest heat; then add 2 cups vegetable oil. As soon as oil is smoking hot, stir in the beef, and continue stirring over high heat until the color begins to change (about half a minute). Remove the meat immediately to a strainer to drain off oil.
3. Clean the wok thoroughly and reheat over highest heat for 1 minute. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons vegetable oil. When oil is smoking hot, add the garlic, ginger, bamboo shoots, and carrots; stir-fry vigorously for 1 minute. Add hot red pepper powder, soy sauce, salt, and chicken broth; stir-fry for 15 seconds.
4. Return beef to wok and add leeks, wine, and vinegar; stir-fry for about 10 seconds. Before removing to a serving platter, add liquid cornstarch to thicken the gravy and sesame oil to glaze the beef for better looks. Serve hot.