

Seasonal Eating
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Harvest Your Pantry
January 2012

Winter is the perfect time for comfort foods. Hearty and flavorful dishes that warm you to the soul in meat and potatoes style. While there isn't much growing outside to fill these dishes, your pantry holds the key to creating great dinners packed with nutrition and produce. Actually, January is canned food month so let's celebrate with recipes from the pantry.

A University of Illinois study done in 1997 showed that there is little difference nutritionally among canned, frozen and fresh produce so any of these forms contribute to a healthy diet. In fact, canned tomatoes actually are higher in lycopene, a phytochemical being studied for its cancer fighting potential, than fresh tomatoes.



Keep in mind, however, that canned vegetables often have added salt. So if you are watching your sodium intake, consider the lower sodium or no salt added products. In canned fruits, look for those packed in their own juices or water instead of heavy syrup which adds a lot of sugar. Frozen fruits come sweetened and unsweetened so look at the labels. Frozen vegetables are best bought plain without any added sauces. You can make your own sauce and control the fat and sodium better.

Make sure your canned goods don't have any dents or bulges which can create small holes and spoilage. Use them by the date on the can, usually 2-5 years from the manufacturing date. Home canned goods should be used within a year for best quality and thrown out after 2 years. After opening, if you have leftovers, store them in a glass or plastic container in the refrigerator and use within 3 days or so.

A favorite recipe for January is one given to me by the Extension office's Gay Ervin for Chili Vegetable Soup. This is quick to make and warm and hearty for a great family dinner. The base is tomato juice, which gives it a rich, cooked-all-day taste and body and canned mixed vegetables are added. You can use the cans of mixed vegetables or pick three cans of your favorite vegetables such as carrots, peas, potatoes, green beans, etc. and make your own mixture. When you get home just brown the beef and onion and pour in the other ingredients. Let simmer about 30 minutes and you have a hearty main soup to serve with a salad and bread. Quick, easy and delicious – look in your pantry to see what you can use from the summer harvest this winter.

For more ideas on using canned and frozen produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website Seasonal Eating page. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstrations will start again on the third Wednesday in February at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Extension Office at 684-5971 to sign up and bring \$5.00 to cover the samples.

Chili Vegetable Soup

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 (46-fluid ounce) bottle tomato juice
- 2 (15-ounce) cans chili beans
- 3 (15-ounce) cans mixed vegetables
- 1 (8-ounce) can tomato sauce

In large Dutch oven or stock pot, brown ground beef and onion until no longer pink. Drain excess fat and add salt, chili powder, tomato juice, undrained beans, undrained vegetables and tomato paste. Simmer 30 minutes or so to allow flavors to blend.