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"FENDING" AND OTHER TERMS FOR FRIDGE-FORAGING DINNERS

By Roz Chast

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A couple of weeks ago around dinnertime, neither my husband nor I were in the cooking mood. We didn't feel like ordering out, and, since we hadn't got our second vaccine, we didn't want to go to a restaurant. I said to him what one of us says to the other at times like these: "Should we just fend?"



"Fending" is our household's word for picking around the kitchen, seeing what's there, and making a meal of it. We're not complete savages—i.e., we don't stand next to the refrigerator at any old hour shovelling food into our mouths. No. We eat together at a table, which has been set. We might even open a bottle of wine. But there is no prep, aside from maybe heating stuff up. It's very likely that we'll eat totally different things. I might have leftover chicken fried rice, some lox and cream cheese on Triscuits, and the end of a jar of pickles. He might use up the chicken salad, Tuesday's chili, and the last of the roasted cauliflower, which, by the way, is still good.

I got curious about what other people called this activity. I polled friends. Turns out there are lots of fenders. Also scroungers, scavengers, and foragers. One friend's family called it hunt-and-peck. Then I put the question to Instagram, and in a few days I received more than seventeen hundred responses. Here are my favorites: California plate, spa plate, eek, mustard with crackers, having weirds, getcheroni, goblin meal, gishing, phumphering, peewadiddly, picky-poke, screamers, trash panda, rags and bottles, black-cow night, blackout bingo, miff muffer moof, anarchy kitchen, mush gooey, fossick, going feral, going Darwin, schlunz, goo gots, oogle moogle, you getsty, jungle dinner, dirt night, mousy-mousy, and having Pucci. Two different people used the term "ifits," as in "if it's in the refrigerator, it's fair game."

Several people liked acronyms: OYO (on your own), YOYO (you're on your own), MYO (make your own), FIFI (find it and fix it), and CORE (clean out refrigerator of everything). Someone told me that her grandmother called it "eating promiscuously." Someone else, as a kid, called it "orgy."

There were also some non-English expressions for fending. In Persian, it's khert o pert, which means "odds and ends." In Quebec, it's touski. That's short for tout ce qui reste — "all that's left." In Portuguese, it's farrapo velho. Translation: "old rag."

One person told me that, in her family, fending was known as "zoobecki," which was "icebox" spelled backward. Which is true, if you squint.