



The Heartland Table

A MIDWEST COOKBOOK

*From church basements to state fairs, from cast-iron skillets to
grandmother's handwritten recipe cards — this is the food that built
the Midwest.*

The Heartland Table: A Midwest Cookbook

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Built collaboratively by AI agents on the AX Platform.

First Edition

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Breakfast & Brunch

8 RECIPES

Amish Baked Oatmeal

OHIO & INDIANA AMISH COUNTRY

"A warm, custard-like breakfast casserole that's been a staple in Amish and Mennonite communities for generations. Think of it as oatmeal's more sophisticated, oven-baked cousin."



PREP

COOK

SERVES

MIDWEST NICE

10 min	35 min	8-10	▢▢○○
INGREDIENTS			INSTRUCTIONS
<p>3 cups old-fashioned rolled oats</p> <p>1 cup packed brown sugar</p> <p>2 teaspoons baking powder</p> <p>1 teaspoon cinnamon</p> <p>½ teaspoon salt</p> <p>1 cup whole milk</p> <p>½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted</p> <p>2 large eggs, beaten</p> <p>2 teaspoons vanilla extract</p> <p>½ cup raisins or dried cranberries * (optional)*</p> <p>Fresh berries, maple syrup, or cream for serving</p> <p>--</p>			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. **Preheat** oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease a 9×13-inch baking dish. 2. **Combine dry ingredients:** In a large bowl, mix oats, brown sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt. 3. **Combine wet ingredients:** In a separate bowl, whisk together milk, melted butter, eggs, and vanilla. 4. **Mix:** Pour wet ingredients into dry and stir until just combined. Fold in raisins or cranberries if using. 5. **Pour** mixture into prepared baking dish and spread evenly. 6. **Bake** for 35–40 minutes until golden brown on top and set in the center. 7. **Serve** warm with fresh berries, a drizzle of maple syrup, or a splash of cold cream.

Did You Know? Baked oatmeal is a cornerstone of Amish "church lunch" — the communal meal served after Sunday worship. In many Amish communities, families take turns hosting, and baked oatmeal can be made in large batches with minimal fuss, making it the perfect dish for feeding 30+ people in a farmhouse kitchen. ...

Biscuits and Sausage Gravy

MIDWEST US

"A quintessential hearty breakfast, flaky biscuits smothered in a rich, creamy sausage gravy—a true taste of comfort and a staple of Midwestern mornings."

PREP
20 minCOOK
25 minSERVES
6MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

2 cups (240g) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

1 tbsp baking powder

½ tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

½ cup (113g) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

¾ cup (180ml) cold buttermilk, plus more for brushing

1 lb (450g) bulk breakfast sausage (pork recommended)

¼ cup (60g) all-purpose flour

3 cups (720ml) milk (whole or 2%), warmed

½ tsp black pepper

Salt to taste

Pinch of cayenne pepper (optional, for a subtle kick)

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Biscuits:**** Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C). In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Cut in the cold butter with a pastry blender or your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Gradually add buttermilk, stirring with a fork until a shaggy dough forms.
2. ****Form Biscuits:**** Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Gently knead 5-6 times until it just comes together. Pat or roll dough to about ¾-inch thickness. Use a 2.5-inch (6 cm) biscuit cutter to cut out biscuits. Reroll scraps once. Place biscuits on an ungreased baking sheet, close together for softer sides or slightly apart for crispier sides. Brush tops with extra buttermilk.
3. ****Bake Biscuits:**** Bake for 12-15 minutes, or until golden brown and puffed.
4. ****Cook Sausage:**** While biscuits bake, crumble breakfast sausage into a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook, breaking up with a spoon, until browned and cooked through. Do not drain all the fat; leave about ¼ cup of drippings in the pan for the gravy.
5. ****Make Roux for Gravy:**** Reduce heat to medium. Sprinkle flour over the cooked sausage and drippings. Cook, stirring constantly, for 1-2 minutes until a light golden roux forms.
6. ****Add Milk & Thicken:**** Slowly whisk in the warmed milk, stirring constantly to prevent lumps. Bring to a simmer, whisking frequently, until the gravy thickens to your desired consistency (about 5-7 minutes).
7. ****Season Gravy:**** Stir in black pepper and cayenne pepper (if using). Taste and season with salt as needed (sausage can be salty). Keep warm over low heat.

8. **Serve:** Split warm biscuits in half and generously spoon the hot sausage gravy over them. Serve immediately.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Helen always added a tiny pinch of sugar (about a teaspoon) to her gravy. 'It balances the savory just right,' she'd wink, 'and makes it so smooth, everyone always asks for my recipe!'"

Did You Know? > Biscuits and Sausage Gravy is a beloved Southern and Midwestern comfort food, providing a hearty, affordable, and incredibly satisfying start to the day. Its popularity in the Midwest, especially in rural communities, stems from its ability to feed hungry families with simple, readily available ingredients.

Pairs well with: A crisp Saturday morning, the smell of fresh coffee brewing, and a lively conversation with family around the kitchen table.

Buttermilk Pancakes with Pure Maple Syrup

MIDWEST — FROM EVERY KITCHEN

"Tall, fluffy, and golden-edged — these are the pancakes that turn Saturday mornings into family traditions across the heartland, where real maple syrup flows from Michigan and Wisconsin sugar bushes."



PREP
10 min

COOK
20 min

SERVES
4

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 cups buttermilk, at room temperature
- 2 large eggs
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Mix the dry ingredients.** In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
2. **Combine the wet ingredients.** In a separate bowl, whisk the buttermilk, eggs, melted butter, and vanilla until smooth.
3. **Make the batter.** Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir gently with a rubber spatula until *just* combined. The batter should be lumpy — overmixing is the enemy of fluffy pancakes. A few streaks of flour are perfectly fine. Let the batter rest 5 minutes while the griddle heats.
4. **Heat the griddle.** Heat a cast iron griddle or large nonstick skillet over medium heat (350°F if using an electric griddle). Lightly grease with butter or a neutral oil.

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

5. ****Test the heat.**** Flick a few drops of water onto the surface — they should dance and sizzle immediately, then evaporate within a second or two.
6. ****Cook the pancakes.**** Pour $\frac{1}{3}$ cup batter per pancake onto the griddle. Cook until the surface is covered in bubbles and the edges look set and slightly dry, about 2–3 minutes. Flip once and cook until golden brown on the underside, about 1–2 minutes more.
7. ****Keep warm.**** Transfer finished pancakes to a wire rack set on a baking sheet in a 200°F oven while you cook the remaining batches.
8. ****Serve immediately**** with warm pure maple syrup, a generous pat of butter, and your favorite toppings.

Did You Know? > *The Midwest produces more maple syrup than you might think. Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota all have thriving sugar bush operations, and the Great Lakes maple season — typically March through early April — is a cherished annual tradition. Families tap sugar maples when nighttime temperatures dr...*

Dutch Baby Pancake

▪ MIDWEST — THE SUNDAY MORNING SHOWSTOPPER

"Part pancake, part popover, all drama. This puffy, golden beauty billows up in the oven like a golden cloud, its edges reaching for the sky while the center stays custardy and tender. Dust it with powdered sugar, squeeze fresh lemon over the top, and listen to your family gasp as you bring it to the table."

PREP
10 min

COOK
25 min

SERVES
4–6

MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Position the rack and preheat.**** Place an oven rack in the lower third of the oven. Put a 12-inch cast iron skillet (or oven-safe skillet) in the oven. Preheat to 425°F. Let the skillet heat for at least 15 minutes.
2. ****Make the batter.**** While the oven preheats, add eggs to a blender. Blend on high for 1 minute until light and frothy. Add milk, flour, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Blend for 30 seconds until completely smooth. (No blender? Whisk vigorously in a bowl until smooth with no lumps.)
3. ****Prep the pan.**** Carefully remove the screaming-hot skillet from the oven. Add butter — it will sizzle and foam immediately. Swirl to coat the bottom and sides completely.
4. ****Pour and bake.**** Immediately pour the batter into the center of the hot, buttery skillet. Don't stir or spread — just pour. Return to the oven immediately.
5. ****Bake without peeking.**** Bake for 20–25 minutes until the dutch baby has puffed dramatically, the edges are deeply golden brown, and the center is set but still slightly custardy. Do not open the oven door during baking — this can cause it to deflate.
6. ****Serve immediately.**** Remove from oven — it will begin to deflate within minutes (this is normal and expected). Dust generously with powdered sugar, squeeze lemon juice over the top, and serve with your choice of toppings.

▪ **Did You Know?** > Despite its name, the Dutch Baby isn't Dutch at all — it's German. The dish originated in Seattle in the early 1900s at Manca's Cafe, where owner Victor Manca served a version of the German *apfelpfannkuchen* (apple pancake). The story goes that his young daughter couldn't pronounce "Deutsch" (German...)

Farmhouse Skillet Hash with Fried Eggs

MIDWEST — FARM COUNTRY

"The farmhouse breakfast that fueled a century of early mornings: crispy-edged potatoes, savory pork, and sweet bell peppers all married in a single cast iron skillet, crowned with sunny fried eggs whose runny yolks become the richest sauce you'll ever make."



PREP
15 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
4MIDWEST NICE
☰☰○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Par-cook the potatoes.** Place the diced potatoes in a pot of cold, salted water. Bring to a boil and cook for 5–6 minutes, until just barely fork-tender — they should still have some firmness. Drain thoroughly and spread on a clean towel to dry. (Dry potatoes = crispy potatoes.)
2. **Cook the meat.** In a large cast iron skillet (12-inch preferred), cook the sausage or bacon over medium-high heat, breaking the sausage into crumbles, until browned and the fat is rendered, about 5–6 minutes. Remove the meat with a slotted spoon, leaving the drippings in the pan.
3. **Crisp the potatoes.** Add the butter and oil to the drippings in the skillet. Once the butter is foaming, add the par-cooked potatoes in a single layer. Let them cook undisturbed for 3–4 minutes until a golden crust forms on the bottom. Toss, then let them crisp again for another 3–4 minutes. Repeat until the potatoes are golden and crispy on most sides, about 10–12 minutes total.
4. **Add the vegetables.** Push the potatoes to the edges and add the onion and bell peppers to the center of the skillet. Cook for 3–4 minutes until the peppers soften slightly. Add the garlic and cook 30 seconds until fragrant.
5. **Combine and season.** Return the cooked sausage or bacon to the skillet. Toss everything together. Sprinkle with thyme, smoked paprika, and black pepper. Season with salt to taste. Toss gently and cook another 2 minutes to let the flavors meld. Reduce heat to low to keep warm.
6. **Fry the eggs.** In a separate nonstick skillet, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Crack the eggs gently into the pan, season with salt and pepper, and cook until the whites are set but the yolks are still runny, about 3–4 minutes. (For over-easy, flip gently and cook 30 seconds more.)
7. **Serve.** Divide the hash among plates (or serve straight from the skillet — the Midwestern way). Nestle the fried eggs on top. Garnish with fresh chives. Serve with hot sauce and buttered toast.

Did You Know? > Hash — from the French **hacher**, meaning "to chop" — has been a staple of American farmhouse cooking since the colonial era, but it became a Midwestern breakfast institution in the 19th century when immigrant farmers needed a single-skillet meal

that could fuel a full morning of work before the su...

Midwestern Breakfast Casserole (Sausage & Egg)

ACROSS THE MIDWEST

"The undisputed champion of church potlucks, holiday mornings, and "I need to feed 12 people before 9 AM" situations. Every Midwestern family has a version. This is the one they all agree on."



PREP

COOK

SERVES

MIDWEST NICE

20 min	45 min	10–12	▢▢○○
INGREDIENTS			INSTRUCTIONS
1 lb breakfast sausage (pork, mild or spicy) 6 slices white bread, cubed (day-old works best) 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese 8 large eggs 2 cups whole milk 1 teaspoon dry mustard powder 1 teaspoon salt ½ teaspoon black pepper ½ teaspoon onion powder Dash of Worcestershire sauce --			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> **Brown the sausage:** In a large skillet over medium-high heat, cook sausage, breaking it into crumbles, until no pink remains. Drain fat. **Layer the casserole:** Grease a 9×13-inch baking dish. Spread bread cubes in an even layer. Top with sausage, then cheese. **Make the custard:** Whisk together eggs, milk, mustard powder, salt, pepper, onion powder, and Worcestershire sauce. **Pour** custard evenly over the layered casserole. Press down gently so bread absorbs the liquid. **Refrigerate** — Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours, or overnight. *(This step is essential.)* **Bake:** Remove from fridge 30 minutes before baking. Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C). Bake uncovered for 45–50 minutes until puffed, golden, and set in the center. **Rest** 10 minutes before cutting into squares.

Did You Know? This casserole is sometimes called "Christmas Morning Casserole" across the Midwest because it's assembled on Christmas Eve and baked while presents are being opened. It's engineered for efficiency — one dish, minimal morning effort, maximum satisfaction. Some families have been making the same vers...

Monkey Bread

MIDWEST US

"This sweet, sticky, and pull-apart bread is a beloved breakfast or brunch treat across the Midwest, perfect for sharing and a nostalgic taste of childhood."

PREP
20 min

COOK
30 min

SERVES
8-10

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 2 (16.3 oz / 462g) cans refrigerated biscuit dough (e.g., Pillsbury Grands!), cut into quarters
- 1 cup (200g) granulated sugar
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ cup (113g) unsalted butter, melted
- ¾ cup (150g) packed light brown sugar
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- Optional: ½ cup chopped pecans or walnuts

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Pan & Preheat:**** Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease a 10-inch (25 cm) Bundt pan or a 12-cup fluted tube pan generously with butter or cooking spray.
2. ****Coat Biscuit Pieces:**** In a large zip-top bag, combine the granulated sugar and cinnamon. Add the biscuit dough quarters to the bag, seal, and shake well until all pieces are evenly coated.
3. ****Layer in Pan:**** Arrange about half of the coated biscuit pieces in the bottom of the prepared Bundt pan. If using, sprinkle half of the chopped pecans or walnuts over the biscuits. Add the remaining coated biscuit pieces, and then the rest of the nuts.
4. ****Make Syrup:**** In a small saucepan, combine the melted butter, brown sugar, and vanilla extract. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the brown sugar is dissolved and the mixture is smooth and bubbling gently.
5. ****Pour & Bake:**** Carefully pour the hot brown sugar syrup evenly over the biscuits in the Bundt pan.
6. ****Bake:**** Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until golden brown and cooked through. To check for doneness, you can insert a thin skewer into the center; if it comes out clean, it's ready.
7. ****Cool & Invert:**** Let the Monkey Bread cool in the pan for 5-10 minutes. This is crucial for the syrup to set slightly and for easy removal.
8. ****Serve:**** Place a serving plate upside down over the Bundt pan, then carefully invert the pan to release the Monkey Bread onto the plate. Serve warm, allowing everyone to pull apart the sticky, delicious pieces.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Rose always tossed a few caramel candies in between the biscuit layers before pouring the butter sauce. 'They melt into little pockets of gooey perfection,' she'd confide, 'and make it extra special, a real surprise in every bite!'"

Did You Know? > Monkey Bread, also known as pull-apart bread or bubble bread, gained popularity in the mid-20th century as a fun, interactive treat. Its name likely comes from the way people pick apart the sticky pieces with their fingers, much like a monkey. It became a beloved staple in Midwestern homes, often ...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A lazy Sunday morning, the sound of kids laughing as they pull apart sticky pieces, and a big mug of coffee while catching up with family.

Sausage Egg Breakfast Burritos

MIDWEST — THE GRAB-AND-GO MORNING

"The Heartland's answer to busy mornings. Fluffy scrambled eggs, savory breakfast sausage, crispy hash browns, and melted cheese, all wrapped in a warm flour tortilla. Make a batch on Sunday, freeze them, and you've got hot breakfasts ready for the whole week."

PREP
20 minCOOK
25 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Cook the sausage.**** In a large skillet over medium-high heat, cook the breakfast sausage, breaking it into crumbles with a wooden spoon, until browned and cooked through, about 6–8 minutes. Transfer to a bowl lined with paper towels and set aside. Wipe out the skillet.
2. ****Crisp the hash browns.**** Add vegetable oil to the same skillet over medium-high heat. Add hash browns and spread into an even layer. Cook without stirring for 3–4 minutes until the bottom is golden and crispy. Flip and cook another 3–4 minutes. Season with a pinch of salt. Transfer to a bowl.
3. ****Sauté the vegetables.**** Add a drizzle of oil to the skillet if needed. Sauté bell peppers and onion over medium heat until softened and slightly caramelized, about 4–5 minutes. Transfer to a bowl.
4. ****Scramble the eggs.**** In a medium bowl, whisk eggs with milk, salt, and pepper. Melt butter in the skillet over medium-low heat. Pour in egg mixture. Cook slowly, gently folding and stirring with a spatula, until eggs are just set but still creamy, about 4–5 minutes. Remove from heat immediately — they'll continue cooking from residual heat.
5. ****Warm the tortillas.**** Wrap tortillas in damp paper towels and microwave for 30–45 seconds until pliable. Or warm them one at a time in a dry skillet for 15 seconds per side.
6. ****Assemble.**** Lay a warmed tortilla flat. Spoon a line of eggs down the center, leaving 2 inches at the top and bottom. Top with sausage, hash browns, peppers and onions, and a generous handful of cheese. Don't overfill — you need room to fold.
7. ****Fold the burrito.**** Fold the sides of the tortilla in over the filling. Then, starting from the bottom, roll the burrito up tightly, keeping the sides tucked in as you go.

8. ****Optional crisp.**** For a crispy exterior, place the burrito seam-side down in a dry skillet over medium heat. Cook for 1–2 minutes until golden. Flip and repeat.
9. ****Serve hot.**** Cut in half on a diagonal and serve with your favorite toppings.

Did You Know? > *The breakfast burrito as we know it originated in the American Southwest, but the Midwest enthusiastically adopted it as the perfect farm-country fuel. Hearty, portable, and endlessly customizable, it fit right into the Heartland's grab-and-go culture. School mornings, early shifts, and long drive...*



Appetizers

6 RECIPES

Beer-Battered Fried Pickles

WIISCONSIN

"Crispy, tangy, and irresistibly dippable, these golden-fried pickle slices coated in a light, flavorful beer batter are a quintessential Midwestern pub snack."

PREP
15 minCOOK
8 minSERVES
4MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

1 (16 oz / 450g) jar dill pickle slices (sandwich slices work well), patted very dry

1.5 cups all-purpose flour, divided

1 tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

¼ tsp black pepper

¼ tsp garlic powder

1 (12 oz / 355ml) can cold beer (lager or pilsner recommended)

4-6 cups vegetable oil, for frying

Optional: Ranch dressing or spicy aioli, for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Pat Pickles Dry:**** Lay pickle slices on paper towels and pat them as dry as possible. This is crucial for a crispy batter.
2. ****Prepare Battering Station:**** In a large bowl, whisk together 1 cup of the all-purpose flour, baking powder, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Gradually whisk in the cold beer until a smooth batter forms. Do not overmix; a few lumps are fine.
3. ****Dredge Pickles:**** Place the remaining ½ cup of flour in a separate shallow dish. Dredge the dried pickle slices in this flour first, shaking off any excess. This helps the beer batter adhere.
4. ****Heat Oil:**** In a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, pour vegetable oil to a depth of about 2-3 inches. Heat the oil over medium-high heat until it reaches 350°F (175°C). Use a deep-fry thermometer to monitor the temperature.
5. ****Batter & Fry:**** Working in small batches, dip each floured pickle slice into the beer batter, allowing excess to drip off. Carefully place the battered pickles into the hot oil. Fry for 2-3 minutes, flipping once, until golden brown and crispy.
6. ****Drain & Season:**** Using a slotted spoon, transfer the fried pickles to a plate lined with paper towels to drain excess oil. Immediately sprinkle with a pinch of salt.
7. ****Serve:**** Serve hot with ranch dressing or spicy aioli for dipping.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Jean always said the trick was to use an *ice-cold* beer for the batter. 'It makes the batter extra light and crispy,' she'd wink, 'like a little cloud around that pickle, don't you know!'"

Did You Know? > Fried pickles are a beloved snack with origins in the Southern United States, but their irresistible crunch and tangy flavor have made them a popular pub and casual dining appetizer across the Midwest, particularly in states like Wisconsin. The beer-battered version pays homage to the region's str...

Pairs well with: A lively happy hour at a local pub, cheering on your favorite sports team, and a cold, crisp Midwestern lager.

Classic Deviled Eggs

ACROSS THE MIDWEST

"No Midwestern potluck, picnic, or holiday table is complete without a platter of deviled eggs. They're the dish everyone reaches for first and the plate that's always empty. Simple, satisfying, and impossible to eat just one."



PREP
20 min

COOK
12 min

SERVES
24

MIDWEST NICE
Moooo

INGREDIENTS

12 large eggs

½ cup mayonnaise (Hellmann's or Duke's
— this is not negotiable)

1 tablespoon yellow mustard

1 tablespoon sweet pickle relish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Boil eggs:** Place eggs in a single layer in a large pot. Cover with cold water by 1 inch. Bring to a rolling boil, then remove from heat, cover, and let sit exactly 12 minutes.
2. **Ice bath:** Transfer eggs immediately to a large bowl of ice water. Let cool at least 10 minutes.
3. **Peel and halve:** Peel eggs carefully under running water. Slice in half lengthwise. Pop yolks into a medium bowl.

1 teaspoon white vinegar

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper

Paprika for garnish

Fresh chives, finely snipped *(optional)*

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4. **Make filling:** Mash yolks with a fork until smooth. Add mayo, mustard, relish, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Mix until creamy and uniform.
5. **Fill:** Pipe or spoon filling into egg white halves, mounding generously.
6. **Garnish** with a sprinkle of paprika and snipped chives.
7. **Chill** at least 30 minutes before serving.

Did You Know? Deviled eggs have been a staple of American potluck culture since the mid-1800s, but nowhere are they more revered than in the Midwest. At church socials and family reunions, there's an unspoken competition over whose deviled eggs are the best. The dish is so deeply embedded in Midwestern culture th...

Minnesota Wild Rice Dip

MINNESOTA

"Warm, creamy, and studded with the nutty chew of hand-harvested wild rice — this is Minnesota's signature party appetizer, the dish that appears the moment temperatures drop below zero and everyone huddles together around a slow cooker."



PREP
15 minCOOK
25 minSERVES
10–12MIDWEST NICE
★★○○**INGREDIENTS**

1 cup cooked wild rice (about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup uncooked)

8 ounces cream cheese, softened

1 cup sour cream

1½ cups shredded Gruyère or Swiss cheese

6 slices thick-cut bacon, cooked crispy and crumbled

½ cup sliced green onions

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon dried thyme

½ teaspoon smoked paprika

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

¼ teaspoon fine sea salt

Crackers, toasted baguette slices, or sturdy chips for serving

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Cook the wild rice.** If not already cooked, bring $1\frac{1}{3}$ cups water to a boil, add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup wild rice and a pinch of salt, reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 45–50 minutes until the grains are tender and some have split. Drain any excess liquid.
2. **Mix the dip.** Preheat oven to 375°F. In a large bowl, combine the softened cream cheese, sour cream, 1 cup of the shredded Gruyère, half the bacon crumbles, green onions (reserving 2 tablespoons for garnish), garlic, Worcestershire sauce, thyme, smoked paprika, pepper, and salt. Fold in the cooked wild rice.
3. **Transfer and top.** Spread the mixture into a small oven-safe baking dish or cast iron skillet (8–9 inch). Top with the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Gruyère cheese.
4. **Bake.** Bake for 20–25 minutes until bubbly around the edges and the cheese on top is melted and golden.
5. **Garnish and serve.** Top with the remaining bacon crumbles and green onions. Serve hot with crackers, toasted baguette, or sturdy chips for dipping.

Did You Know? > Wild rice isn't actually rice at all — it's the seed of an aquatic grass (*Zizania palustris*) native to the Great Lakes region. For the Ojibwe people, wild rice (*manoomin*) has been a sacred food and dietary staple for centuries, harvested by canoe in the shallow lakes and rivers of northern Minne...

Pimento Cheese Spread

OHIO / INDIANA (MIDWEST POTLUCK STAPLE)

"A creamy, tangy, and slightly spicy cheese spread, a beloved potluck staple in the Midwest, perfect for sandwiches, crackers, or vegetable dippers."

PREP
15 minCOOK
0 minSERVES
8-10MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

8 oz (225g) sharp cheddar cheese, shredded

4 oz (113g) cream cheese, softened

½ cup (120g) mayonnaise (Duke's or a good quality regional brand recommended)

1 (4 oz / 113g) jar diced pimentos, drained very well

1-2 tbsp (15-30ml) pickled jalapeño juice (or pickle juice)

½ tsp garlic powder

¼ tsp onion powder

⅛ tsp cayenne pepper (or more, to taste)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

For serving: Crackers, celery sticks, bell pepper strips, or crusty bread

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Combine Cheeses:** In a medium bowl, combine the shredded sharp cheddar cheese and softened cream cheese.
2. **Add Mayonnaise & Pimentos:** Add the mayonnaise and drained diced pimentos to the bowl.
3. **Add Seasonings:** Pour in the pickled jalapeño juice (start with 1 tablespoon and add more if you prefer a tangier spread). Stir in the garlic powder, onion powder, and cayenne pepper.
4. **Mix Thoroughly:** Using a fork or a sturdy spoon, mix all the ingredients until well combined and creamy. Some small lumps of cheese are fine and add texture.
5. **Season to Taste:** Taste the pimento cheese and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper as needed.
6. **Chill (Optional):** For best flavor and to allow the spread to firm up slightly, cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes before serving.
7. **Serve:** Serve chilled with your favorite crackers, fresh vegetable sticks, or as a sandwich spread.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Doris always added a tiny squeeze of fresh lemon juice (just about a teaspoon!) to her pimento cheese. 'It wakes up all the flavors,' she'd insist, 'and makes it taste extra bright and fresh, like sunshine in a bowl!'"

Did You Know? > While often associated with the American South, Pimento Cheese Spread has found a firm and beloved place in Midwestern potluck culture. Its simplicity, comforting flavor, and ability to be made ahead make it a quintessential dish for church

gatherings, family reunions, and casual get-togethers. In...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A summer picnic in the park, a lively game night with friends, and quiet evenings on the porch with a cold glass of sweet tea.

Spinach Artichoke Dip

▪ MIDWEST — THE PARTY STARTER

"Creamy, cheesy, and completely irresistible. This bubbling skillet of spinach, tender artichoke hearts, and a decadent blend of cream cheese and Parmesan is the appetizer that empties first at every gathering. Serve it with crusty bread or tortilla chips and watch it disappear."

PREP
15 min

COOK
25 min

SERVES
10–12

MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prep the spinach.**** Thaw frozen spinach and squeeze out as much liquid as possible using a clean kitchen towel or several layers of paper towels. This step is crucial — wet spinach makes watery dip.
2. ****Make the base.**** Preheat oven to 375°F. In a large mixing bowl, combine softened cream cheese, sour cream, and mayonnaise. Beat with an electric mixer or stir vigorously until smooth and creamy.
3. ****Add the flavors.**** Stir in minced garlic, Parmesan cheese, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the mozzarella. Mix until well combined.
4. ****Fold in the vegetables.**** Add the chopped artichoke hearts and drained spinach. Fold gently until evenly distributed. Season with salt, pepper, red pepper flakes (if using), and nutmeg.
5. ****Transfer and top.**** Spread the mixture evenly into an 8-inch oven-safe skillet, small baking dish, or pie plate. Sprinkle the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mozzarella over the top.
6. ****Bake.**** Bake for 20–25 minutes until the dip is bubbling around the edges and the cheese on top is melted and golden in spots.
7. ****Broil for color (optional).**** For extra golden cheese, place under the broiler for 1–2 minutes. Watch carefully to prevent burning.
8. ****Serve hot.**** Let cool for 5 minutes (it's volcanic inside), then serve with your choice of dippers.

▪ **Did You Know?** > Spinach artichoke dip became an American restaurant staple in the 1980s and 1990s, appearing on chain restaurant menus from coast to coast. The Midwest embraced it wholeheartedly — it hit all the right notes: creamy, cheesy, easy to make in big batches, and perfect for sharing. It became a fixture...

Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds

WISCONSIN

"If Wisconsin had a national dish, this would be it. Fresh cheese curds — the squeaky kind — battered and fried until golden outside, molten inside. Best served at a county fair, a Friday fish fry, or honestly anywhere with a deep fryer and zero regrets."



PREP

COOK

SERVES

MIDWEST NICE

15 min

10 min

6–8

00:00

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prep curds:** Pat cheese curds dry with paper towels. If large, break into bite-sized pieces. They should be at room temperature (cold curds = cold centers).
2. **Heat oil:** Fill a deep pot or fryer with 3 inches of oil. Heat to 375°F (190°C).
3. **Make batter:** Whisk flour, cornstarch, baking powder, garlic powder, paprika, salt, and cayenne. Add beer and egg, whisk until just combined — lumps are fine. Batter should be thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
4. **Dredge:** Toss curds in a light coating of plain flour first (helps the batter stick), then dip into beer batter, letting excess drip off.
5. **Fry in batches:** Carefully drop 6–8 curds at a time into hot oil. Fry 1½–2 minutes until deep golden brown. Don't overcrowd.
6. **Drain** on a wire rack over a sheet pan. Season with a light sprinkle of salt immediately.
7. **Serve** hot with ranch and marinara for dipping.

Did You Know? Wisconsin produces over 3 billion pounds of cheese annually — more than any other state and more than most *countries*. Cheese curds are a byproduct of the cheesemaking process, and true Wisconsinites insist on eating them within hours of production, when they're still squeaky. The tradition of fryi...



Soups & Stews

4 RECIPES

Booyah (Community Stew)

■ NORTHEAST WISCONSIN & MINNESOTA

"Part stew, part social event, part civic institution — Booyah is the massive community pot of thick, meaty, vegetable-laden stew simmered outdoors in enormous kettles for church picnics, fire department fundraisers, and fall festivals. Making it is a team sport. Eating it is a regional sacrament."





PREP
45 min

COOK
4 min

SERVES
12–16

MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Brown the meats.**** Season the chicken, beef, and pork generously with salt and pepper. In a very large stockpot (at least 12-quart) or Dutch oven, heat a thin film of oil over medium-high heat. Working in batches, brown all the meats on all sides, about 3–4 minutes per side. Don't crowd the pot — good browning builds flavor. Set browned meats aside.
2. ****Build the base.**** In the same pot, add the onions, celery, and garlic. Cook until softened, about 5 minutes, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom.
3. ****Combine liquids and meat.**** Return all the browned meats to the pot. Pour in the chicken broth and beef broth. Add the bay leaves, thyme, paprika, and celery salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a very low simmer. Cover and cook for 2–3 hours until all the meats are falling-apart tender.
4. ****Shred the meats.**** Remove the meats to a cutting board. Shred or chop into bite-sized pieces, discarding bones, skin, and excess fat. Return the shredded meat to the pot.
5. ****Add the vegetables in stages.**** Add the potatoes, carrots, rutabaga, crushed tomatoes, and cabbage to the pot. Simmer for 30 minutes. Then add the corn, green beans, and peas. Continue simmering for another 20–30 minutes until all vegetables are tender.
6. ****Season and thicken.**** The stew should be thick and hearty — more stew than soup. If it's too thin, mash some of the potatoes against the side of the pot to thicken the broth. Season generously with salt and pepper. Remove the bay leaves.

7. **Rest and serve.** Like all great stews, Booyah improves with time. Let it rest 15–20 minutes before serving, or (better yet) make it the day before and reheat. Serve in deep bowls with crusty bread or saltine crackers. Garnish with fresh parsley.

Did You Know? > Nobody's entirely sure where the name "Booyah" comes from. The leading theories include: a corruption of *bouillon* (French for broth), a derivation of *bouillir* (French for "to boil"), or possibly a Belgian-Walloo word brought by immigrants who settled in Northeast Wisconsin's Door County and G...

Cincinnati Chili

• CINCINNATI, OHIO

"Not your Texas chili and not your mama's spaghetti — Cincinnati chili is its own glorious thing: a cinnamon-and-cocoa-scented meat sauce ladled over spaghetti and buried under a mountain of finely shredded cheddar. Order it by the "Way" and argue about it forever."



PREP
15 minCOOK
2 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Boil the beef.** This is the key technique that makes Cincinnati chili unique. Place the ground beef in a large pot and cover with 1 quart of cold water. Stir and break up the meat as the water comes to a boil over medium-high heat. You want the meat to become very finely textured, almost like a sauce — no big chunks.
2. **Skim if needed.** Once boiling, reduce heat to medium. Some foam may rise to the surface; skim it off and discard.
3. **Add the aromatics and spices.** Stir in the diced onion, garlic, tomato paste, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, chili powder, cumin, cinnamon, allspice, cloves, cayenne, cocoa powder, bay leaves, salt, and pepper. Stir well to combine everything.
4. **Simmer low and slow.** Reduce heat to low, partially cover, and simmer for 1½ to 2 hours, stirring occasionally. The chili should reduce and thicken to a saucy, not soupy, consistency. If it gets too thick, add a splash of water.
5. **Taste and adjust.** Cincinnati chili is all about balance — you should taste warmth from the cinnamon and allspice, a hint of chocolate depth from the cocoa, and a slow-building heat from the chili powder and cayenne. Adjust salt, cayenne, or vinegar as needed. Remove bay leaves.
6. **Cook the spaghetti.** While the chili finishes, cook spaghetti according to package directions. Drain well.
7. **Plate your Way.** Mound spaghetti on an oval plate. Ladle chili generously over the top. Add your chosen toppings in order (beans, then onions, then cheese). The cheese should completely blanket the top — in Cincinnati, moderation is not a virtue when it comes to cheese.
8. **Serve with oyster crackers** and hot sauce on the side.

Did You Know? > Cincinnati chili was invented in 1922 by Macedonian immigrant Tom Kiradjieff, who ran a hot dog stand called Empress. Drawing on Mediterranean and Middle Eastern spice traditions — the cinnamon, allspice, and cloves that seem unusual in American chili — he created something entirely new. The dish ...

Hearty Chicken Noodle Soup

MIDWEST — EVERY KITCHEN, EVERY COLD DAY

"The Midwest's answer to everything: a cold snap, a bad day, a stuffy nose, or just a Wednesday in February. Wide egg noodles swimming in rich golden broth with tender chicken, chunky vegetables, and enough warmth to thaw you from the inside out."



PREP
20 minCOOK
1 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Simmer the chicken.** Place the whole chicken (or chicken pieces) in a large stockpot. Cover with 12 cups cold water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then immediately reduce to a gentle simmer. Skim off any foam that rises to the surface. Add the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Partially cover and simmer gently for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the chicken is cooked through and falling-off-the-bone tender.
2. **Remove and shred the chicken.** Using tongs, carefully transfer the chicken to a large cutting board. Let it cool enough to handle, about 10 minutes. Shred the meat into bite-sized pieces, discarding the skin and bones. Set the shredded chicken aside.
3. **Strain the broth.** Strain the broth through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl or clean pot. Discard the bay leaves and thyme stems. You should have about 10 cups of rich, golden broth. (If less, add chicken broth to supplement.)
4. **Cook the vegetables.** In the same pot (wiped clean), melt the butter over medium heat. Add the carrots, celery, and onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are softened but not browned, about 8–10 minutes. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute more.
5. **Combine broth and vegetables.** Pour the strained broth back into the pot with the vegetables. Bring to a boil.
6. **Cook the noodles.** Add the egg noodles and cook according to package directions (usually 6–8 minutes), until tender.
7. **Add the chicken.** Stir the shredded chicken back into the soup. Add the apple cider vinegar (it brightens the whole pot). Season generously with salt and pepper — chicken soup needs more salt than you think.
8. **Serve.** Ladle into deep bowls and garnish with fresh chopped parsley. Serve with crusty bread, saltine crackers, or oyster crackers.

Did You Know? > The Midwest's devotion to chicken noodle soup runs deeper than comfort — it's practical. Historically, farm families kept chickens for eggs, and when a hen stopped laying, she went into the soup pot. The long simmering of a tougher old hen produced the richest, most flavorful broth. Wide egg noodl...

Wisconsin Beer Cheese Soup

WISCONSIN

"Two of Wisconsin's greatest exports — beer and cheese — in one bowl. This is a thick, velvety soup that tastes like a warm hug from a dairy farmer. It's the kind of soup that makes you understand why people voluntarily live through Wisconsin winters."



PREP
15 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
6–8MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 medium onion, finely diced

2 carrots, finely diced

2 stalks celery, finely diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

¼ cup all-purpose flour

2 cups chicken broth

1 cup whole milk

1 cup heavy cream

12 oz beer (a Wisconsin amber lager or pale ale — nothing too hoppy)

4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (about 1 lb)

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

½ teaspoon smoked paprika

Salt and white pepper to taste

Dash of hot sauce *(optional)*

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Sauté aromatics:** Melt butter in a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook 6–7 minutes until softened. Add garlic, cook 1 minute.
2. **Make the roux:** Sprinkle flour over vegetables and stir constantly for 2 minutes to cook out the raw flour taste.
3. **Add liquids:** Slowly pour in chicken broth while stirring. Then add milk and cream. Bring to a gentle simmer, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes until slightly thickened.
4. **Add beer:** Pour in the beer. It will foam — stir through it. Simmer 5 minutes.
5. **Add cheese:** Reduce heat to low. Add cheddar a handful at a time, stirring until each addition is melted before adding more. Do not boil — boiling makes cheese grainy.
6. **Season:** Stir in Dijon, Worcestershire, paprika, salt, white pepper, and hot sauce if using.
7. **Blend (optional):** For silky-smooth soup, use an immersion blender. For rustic texture, leave as-is.
8. **Serve** in bowls topped with crumbled bacon, chives, and pretzel pieces.

Did You Know? Wisconsin is home to more than 1,200 licensed cheesemakers — more than any other state. The tradition of beer cheese soup likely evolved from German and Swiss immigrant cooking traditions that merged with Wisconsin's booming dairy and brewing industries. It's a staple at Friday fish fries (another W...



Mains

27 RECIPES

American Goulash

■ EVERYWHERE IN THE MIDWEST — EVERY MOM'S WEEKNIGHT ROTATION SINCE 1955

"Elbow macaroni, ground beef, tomatoes, and a shake of whatever spices are in the cabinet, all simmered together in one pot until it becomes something warm, filling, and impossibly comforting. Hungarians would not recognize this. Your kids won't care. This is the dish that fed a generation of latchkey kids and still shows up on church supper menus with zero irony."



PREP
10 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
6–8MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★**INGREDIENTS**

- 1½ pounds ground beef (80/20)
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- 1 can (15 ounces) tomato sauce
- 2 cups beef broth
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons paprika (sweet Hungarian, if you want to at least nod at the name)
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 cups elbow macaroni, uncooked
- Shredded cheddar cheese, for serving
-

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brown the beef.** In a large Dutch oven or deep skillet over medium-high heat, cook the ground beef, breaking it into crumbles, until browned and no pink remains, about 6–8 minutes. If there's a lot of grease, drain some off (leave a tablespoon for flavor — this isn't health food).
2. **Sauté the aromatics.** Add the diced onion to the beef and cook until softened, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds, until fragrant.
3. **Build the sauce.** Add the crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, beef broth, tomato paste, Worcestershire sauce, paprika, oregano, basil, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Stir everything together and bring to a simmer.
4. **Cook the pasta in the sauce.** Add the uncooked elbow macaroni directly to the pot. Stir well. Cover partially and simmer for 15–18 minutes, stirring every few minutes to prevent the pasta from sticking to the bottom. The pasta will cook in the sauce, absorbing all that tomato-beefy goodness. Add a splash of broth or water if it gets too thick before the pasta is tender.
5. **Check seasoning.** Taste and adjust salt, pepper, and paprika. American goulash should taste warmly spiced, tomatoey, and beefy — not bland. Don't be shy with the paprika.
6. **Serve.** Ladle into bowls and top with a generous handful of shredded cheddar cheese. Serve with buttered bread or saltine crackers. There is no wrong way to eat this.

Did You Know? > American goulash — also called "slumgullion," "johnny marzetti" (in Ohio), or simply "that ground beef and macaroni thing" — is one of the Midwest's most beloved weeknight dinners, and it has almost nothing to do with Hungary. The name was borrowed (loosely) from Hungarian immigrants whose paprika...

Pairs well with: A school night when nobody planned dinner, a loaf of white bread that exists only to sop up sauce, and the knowledge that this exact same meal is being cooked in approximately 14,000 other Midwestern homes tonight.

Bratwurst with Sauerkraut

WIISCONSIN

"A true Wisconsin classic, sizzling bratwurst nestled in a bun, topped with tangy sauerkraut, embodying the state's rich German heritage and love for hearty, flavorful fare."

PREP
10 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
4MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

4 fresh (uncooked) bratwurst sausages

1 tbsp olive oil or butter

1 large onion, thinly sliced

1 (16 oz / 450g) can or jar sauerkraut, drained and rinsed (optional, but recommended to reduce sodium)

1 cup (240ml) beer (lager or pilsner works well)

1 tbsp brown sugar (optional, to balance sauerkraut's tang)

1 tsp caraway seeds (optional)

4 bratwurst buns or hoagie rolls

Optional toppings: Yellow mustard, spicy brown mustard, diced raw onion, relish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Sear Bratwurst:**** Heat olive oil or butter in a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the bratwurst and sear until nicely browned on all sides, about 5-7 minutes. Do not cook through completely.
2. ****Sauté Onions:**** Remove bratwurst from the skillet and set aside. Add the sliced onion to the skillet and sauté over medium heat until softened and lightly caramelized, about 5-8 minutes.
3. ****Combine Sauerkraut Mixture:**** Stir in the drained sauerkraut, beer, brown sugar (if using), and caraway seeds (if using). Bring the mixture to a simmer.
4. ****Simmer Bratwurst:**** Return the seared bratwurst to the skillet, nestling them into the sauerkraut mixture. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 15-20 minutes, or until the bratwurst are cooked through. The internal temperature should reach 160°F (71°C).
5. ****Toast Buns (Optional):**** While the bratwurst simmers, you can lightly toast the bratwurst buns if desired.
6. ****Serve:**** Remove bratwurst from the skillet. Place each bratwurst in a bun and top generously with the sauerkraut and onion mixture. Serve immediately with your favorite condiments.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Schmidt always swore by adding a secret spoonful of apple jelly to the sauerkraut and beer while simmering. 'It cuts the tang just so,' she'd wink, 'and no one ever guesses why it's *that* much better!'"

Did You Know? > Bratwurst is deeply intertwined with Wisconsin's culinary identity, a legacy of the state's significant German immigrant population. "Brats" are a staple at summer cookouts, tailgate parties, and festivals, often simmered in beer and onions before a final sear or grill. The pairing with sauerkraut...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A Packers game on a Sunday afternoon, a friendly debate about the best local brewery, and the sound of someone yelling "Ope!" after bumping into you at the grocery store.

Chicago Deep Dish Pizza

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

"Is it a pizza or a cheese-and-tomato pie? Chicagoans don't care what you call it, as long as you acknowledge it's magnificent. A buttery, flaky crust built up the sides of a deep pan, loaded with mozzarella, toppings, and a thick layer of crushed tomato sauce on top. Yes, on top. That's the point."



PREP
30 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
6–8MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the dough:** Combine flour, cornmeal, salt, and sugar. Add yeast to warm water, let bloom 5 minutes. Pour into flour mixture with melted butter and olive oil. Mix until a soft, slightly sticky dough forms. Knead 5 minutes. Place in an oiled bowl, cover, and let rise 1½–2 hours until doubled.
2. **Make the sauce:** Heat olive oil in a saucepan. Sauté garlic 30 seconds. Add crushed tomatoes, oregano, basil, salt, pepper flakes, and sugar. Simmer 20–30 minutes until thickened. Let cool.
3. **Prep the pan:** Generously butter a 12-inch deep-dish pizza pan or 10-inch cast iron skillet. Press dough into the pan, building it up the sides at least 1½ inches.
4. **Layer (this order matters):**
5. **Bake** at 425°F (220°C) for 30–35 minutes until crust is deep golden and sauce is bubbling.
6. **Rest** 10 minutes in the pan before slicing. (Seriously. Let it set or it'll be a beautiful disaster.)

Did You Know? The origin of Chicago deep dish is hotly debated. Most credit Ike Sewell and Ric Riccardo, who opened Pizzeria Uno in 1943. But some historians argue it was actually Uno's original pizza chef, Rudy Malnati, whose family would go on to found the legendary Lou Malnati's Pizzeria. Regardless of who inv...

Chicago Italian Beef

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

"Thin-sliced, slow-simmered beef piled into a crusty Italian roll, drenched in savory jus, and crowned with hot giardiniera — this is Chicago's great blue-collar masterpiece, the sandwich that demands you lean forward over the counter and let the juices run down your forearms."



PREP
20 minCOOK
3 minSERVES
8-10MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Season the roast.** Combine oregano, basil, red pepper flakes, garlic powder, onion powder, black pepper, salt, thyme, and Italian seasoning in a small bowl. Rub the spice mixture all over the beef chuck roast, pressing it into the meat.
2. **Sear the beef.** Heat a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat with a thin film of oil. Sear the roast on all sides until deeply browned, about 3–4 minutes per side. This builds flavor in the jus.
3. **Build the braising liquid.** Add the smashed garlic and bay leaf to the pot. Pour in the beef broth and water. The liquid should come about $\frac{2}{3}$ up the sides of the roast. Bring to a boil.
4. **Braise low and slow.** Cover the Dutch oven and transfer to a 300°F oven. Braise for 3½ to 4 hours, until the beef is very tender and pulls apart easily with a fork.
5. **Slice the beef.** Remove the roast to a cutting board and let it rest 10 minutes. Slice against the grain as thinly as you possibly can — this is crucial. A sharp carving knife or electric knife helps. The slices should be almost translucent.
6. **Make the jus.** Strain the braising liquid through a fine-mesh sieve into a clean saucepan. Skim excess fat from the surface. Taste and adjust seasoning. Keep the jus at a low simmer.
7. **Dunk the beef.** Return the sliced beef to the warm jus and let it soak for at least 5 minutes. The beef should absorb the seasoned broth.
8. **Build the sandwich.** Split an Italian roll (don't fully separate the halves). Using tongs, pile the beef high — be generous. Spoon a little extra jus over the meat.
9. **Choose your toppings:**
10. **Serve immediately** with extra jus on the side for dipping. Napkins — many napkins — are not optional.

Did You Know? > Italian beef traces back to the 1930s Italian immigrant community on Chicago's South Side. During the Depression, thinly slicing beef and stretching it with seasoned broth was a way to feed more people at weddings and community gatherings — a practice called "peanut weddings" where the hosts serve...

Chicago-Style Hot Dog

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS — VIENNA BEEF TERRITORY

*"An all-beef frankfurter nestled in a steamed poppy seed bun, dragged through the garden with yellow mustard, bright green relish, chopped onion, tomato wedges, a dill pickle spear, sport peppers, and a dash of celery salt. Everything but ketchup. **Never ketchup.** This isn't a suggestion. This is constitutional law in Chicago."*



PREP
15 minCOOK
10 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Cook the dogs.** Bring a pot of water to a gentle boil, reduce to a simmer, and add the hot dogs. Cook for 4–5 minutes until heated through and plump. (Alternatively, grill them — Chicagoans debate this, but both methods are accepted.) Do not microwave them. We're not animals.
2. **Steam the buns.** While the dogs cook, steam the poppy seed buns. You can set them over the simmering water on a steamer basket, wrap them in a damp paper towel and microwave for 15 seconds, or briefly warm them in a low oven wrapped in foil. The bun should be warm and soft, not toasted. Toasting the bun is a New York thing. We don't do that here.
3. **Assemble in order.** Place a hot dog in each bun. Then, and this part matters:
4. **Eat immediately.** Do not put this on a plate with a knife and fork. Hold it with two hands. Accept the mess. This is the Chicago way.

Did You Know? > *The Chicago-style hot dog was born during the Great Depression, when pushcart vendors — many of them Greek and Eastern European immigrants — sold cheap all-beef frankfurters loaded with free vegetable toppings to make the meal seem more substantial. The generous pile of onions, tomatoes, relish, a...*

Pairs well with: A Maxwell Street Polish sausage for your other hand, a bag of Jay's hot stuff potato chips, standing on a sidewalk at 11 PM after a Cubs loss, and the absolute certainty that this is the greatest hot dog in America (New York is wrong, and deep down they know it).

Chicken and Dumplings

MIDWEST US

"A comforting, hearty stew featuring tender pieces of chicken and fluffy, doughy dumplings in a rich, savory broth—a true taste of home found on many Midwestern tables."

PREP
25 minCOOK
45 minSERVES
6MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp (30ml) olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1.5 lbs (680g) boneless, skinless chicken breasts or thighs, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 cups (1.4L) chicken broth
- 1 cup (240ml) milk or half-and-half
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- ½ tsp dried sage
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish (optional)
- 1.5 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tbsp (30g) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ¾ cup (180ml) milk (or buttermilk for tangier dumplings)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Cook Chicken & Veggies:**** Heat olive oil in a large Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Add chicken pieces and cook until lightly browned on all sides, about 5-7 minutes. Remove chicken and set aside.
2. ****Sauté Aromatics:**** Add chopped onion, carrots, and celery to the pot. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 8-10 minutes. Add minced garlic, thyme, and sage; cook for 1 minute more until fragrant.
3. ****Add Liquids & Simmer:**** Return chicken to the pot. Pour in chicken broth and milk (or half-and-half). Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to low, cover, and let simmer gently for 15-20 minutes, allowing flavors to meld and chicken to cook through. Season with salt and pepper.
4. ****Prepare Dumpling Dough:**** While the stew simmers, prepare the dumplings. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. Cut in the cold butter with a pastry blender or your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Gradually add milk, stirring with a fork until a soft, shaggy dough forms. Do not overmix.
5. ****Cook Dumplings:**** Increase heat of the stew to a gentle boil. Drop spoonfuls of dumpling dough directly onto the simmering stew. Leave a little space between them as they will expand. Cover the pot tightly and cook for 15-20 minutes, without lifting the lid, until the dumplings are puffed and cooked through.
6. ****Serve:**** Ladle the hot chicken and dumplings into bowls. Garnish with fresh chopped parsley, if desired. Serve immediately.

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GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Agnes always insisted on using leftover roasted chicken for her chicken and dumplings. 'It just adds so much more flavor,' she'd say, 'and makes that broth taste like it simmered all day, even when it didn't!'"

Did You Know? > *Chicken and dumplings* is a classic comfort food that spans across many regions of the United States, and it holds a special place in the heart of the Midwest. It's the kind of dish often prepared by grandmothers, bringing warmth and sustenance during cold winter months or after a long day of farm ...

Pairs well with: A cozy night in during a Midwest blizzard, a good book by the fireplace, and the quiet comfort of knowing your family is safe and warm.

Chicken Fried Steak

KANSAS

"A Southern-inspired comfort food that found a firm foothold in the heartland, featuring a tenderized steak coated in seasoned flour, pan-fried to a golden crisp, and smothered in creamy white gravy."

PREP
20 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
4MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

4 (4-6 oz / 113-170g each) beef cube steaks (or top round, tenderized)

1.5 cups all-purpose flour, divided

1 tsp salt, plus more for seasoning

1 tsp black pepper, plus more for seasoning

½ tsp garlic powder

½ tsp onion powder

¼ tsp cayenne pepper (optional, for a subtle kick)

2 large eggs

½ cup milk (whole or 2%)

4-6 cups vegetable oil or shortening, for frying

¼ cup pan drippings from frying (or use butter/oil)

¼ cup all-purpose flour

2 cups milk (whole or 2%), warmed

Salt and black pepper to taste

Pinch of cayenne pepper (optional)

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Steak:**** Pat the cube steaks dry with paper towels. Season both sides generously with salt and black pepper. If using top round, pound it to about ¼-inch thickness.
2. ****Set Up Breading Station:**** Set up three shallow dishes. In the first dish, whisk together 1 cup of flour, 1 tsp salt, 1 tsp black pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, and cayenne pepper (if using). In the second dish, whisk together the eggs and ½ cup milk. In the third dish, place the remaining ½ cup of flour.
3. ****Dredge Steaks:**** Dredge each steak first in the seasoned flour, shaking off excess. Then dip it into the egg wash, ensuring it's fully coated. Finally, return it to the seasoned flour for a second coating, pressing gently to adhere the breading. Place breaded steaks on a wire rack while you prepare the others.
4. ****Heat Oil:**** In a large, heavy-bottomed skillet (preferably cast iron), add vegetable oil or shortening to a depth of about 1 inch. Heat over medium-high heat until it reaches 350°F (175°C).
5. ****Fry Steaks:**** Carefully place 1-2 breaded steaks into the hot oil (do not overcrowd the pan). Fry for 3-5 minutes per side, or until deeply golden brown and crispy. The internal temperature should reach 145°F (63°C).
6. ****Drain:**** Using tongs, remove the fried steaks and place them on a clean wire rack set over paper towels to drain excess oil. Keep warm in a low oven (200°F / 95°C) while you make the gravy.
7. ****Make Cream Gravy:**** Carefully pour off all but ¼ cup of the pan drippings from the skillet. Return the skillet to medium heat. Whisk in ¼ cup flour and cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly, until a light golden roux forms. Slowly whisk in the warmed milk, stirring constantly to prevent lumps. Bring the gravy to a simmer, whisking

until it thickens. Season with salt, pepper, and a pinch of cayenne pepper (if using) to taste.

8. **Serve:** Serve the hot, crispy chicken fried steaks immediately, smothered generously with the warm cream gravy. Excellent with mashed potatoes and green beans.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Loretta swore by soaking her cube steaks in buttermilk for at least an hour (or even overnight!) before breading. 'It makes 'em so tender,' she'd declare, 'you'll think you're eating prime rib, bless your heart!'"

I Did You Know? > *Chicken Fried Steak*, despite its name, contains no chicken. The "chicken fried" refers to the cooking method, which mimics the technique used for frying chicken. While often associated with Southern cuisine, this hearty dish is a beloved staple across the Plains states, including Kansas, where it ...

Pairs well with: A long day of honest work, a classic country music playlist, and a tall glass of iced tea on the porch.

Country Fried Chicken

IN INDIANA, US

"A beloved Midwestern staple, Country Fried Chicken features tender chicken pieces coated in a seasoned, crispy crust, pan-fried to golden perfection and often served with a generous helping of creamy gravy."

PREP
20 minCOOK
25 minSERVES
4-6MIDWEST NICE
★★★★○

INGREDIENTS

2-3 lbs (900g-1.3kg) bone-in, skin-on chicken pieces (drumsticks, thighs, breasts, wings)

2 cups (480ml) buttermilk

1 tsp hot sauce (optional, for flavor, not heat)

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 tbsp cornstarch (for extra crispiness)

1 tbsp salt

1 tbsp black pepper

1 tsp garlic powder

1 tsp onion powder

1 tsp smoked paprika

½ tsp cayenne pepper (optional, for a kick)

4-6 cups vegetable oil or shortening, for frying

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Marinate Chicken:**** In a large bowl, combine buttermilk and hot sauce (if using). Add chicken pieces, ensuring they are fully submerged. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 hours, to tenderize and add flavor.
2. ****Prepare Breading:**** In a shallow dish or a large zip-top bag, whisk together flour, cornstarch, salt, black pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, and cayenne pepper (if using).
3. ****Bread Chicken:**** Remove chicken pieces from the buttermilk, allowing excess to drip off. Do not rinse. Dredge each piece thoroughly in the seasoned flour mixture, pressing to ensure a thick, even coating. Place breaded chicken on a wire rack set over a baking sheet.
4. ****Heat Oil:**** In a large, heavy-bottomed skillet (preferably cast iron) or Dutch oven, add vegetable oil or shortening to a depth of about 1.5-2 inches. Heat over medium-high heat until it reaches 350°F (175°C). Use a deep-fry thermometer to monitor the temperature.
5. ****Fry Chicken:**** Carefully place chicken pieces into the hot oil, skin-side down first (do not overcrowd the pan; fry in batches). Fry for 6-8 minutes per side, turning with tongs, until golden brown.
6. ****Cook Through:**** Reduce heat to medium-low, cover the skillet, and continue to cook for an additional 10-15 minutes, flipping once or twice, until the chicken is cooked through and the internal temperature reaches 165°F (74°C) at the thickest part.
7. ****Drain & Serve:**** Remove fried chicken from the skillet and place on a clean wire rack set over paper towels to drain excess oil. Let rest for a few minutes. Serve hot, often with country gravy.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Irene always added a secret spoonful of sugar (just a teaspoon!) to her flour dredge. 'It helps the chicken get that perfect golden crust,' she'd whisper, 'and makes it extra crispy, a little trick no one ever guesses!'"

Did You Know? > *Country Fried Chicken*, while having roots across the American South, found its way into the heart of the Midwest, becoming a cherished dish particularly in states like Indiana. It's a staple at Sunday dinners, family reunions, and community events, symbolizing the region's love for hearty, honest,...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A Sunday family dinner after church, a warm summer evening on the porch, and the happy sounds of conversation and clinking glasses.

Country Meatloaf

MIDWEST US

"A comforting, classic meatloaf that brings together seasoned ground beef, a blend of vegetables, and a savory glaze, delivering a taste of home that's hearty and satisfying."

PREP
20 minCOOK
60 minSERVES
6-8MIDWEST NICE
★★★★○

INGREDIENTS

2 lbs (900g) lean ground beef (80/20 recommended)

1 large egg, lightly beaten

1 cup dry breadcrumbs (Panko or regular)

1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped

½ cup finely chopped green bell pepper (optional)

½ cup milk (whole or 2%)

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp salt

½ tsp black pepper

½ tsp dried thyme

¼ tsp dried sage

½ cup ketchup

2 tbsp brown sugar, packed

1 tbsp yellow mustard

1 tsp apple cider vinegar

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Preheat Oven & Prepare Pan:**** Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Lightly grease a 9x5 inch (23x13 cm) loaf pan, or line a baking sheet with parchment paper and form the meatloaf into a loaf shape.
2. ****Combine Meatloaf Ingredients:**** In a large bowl, combine the ground beef, egg, breadcrumbs, chopped onion, chopped bell pepper (if using), milk, minced garlic, Worcestershire sauce, salt, black pepper, thyme, and sage. Using your hands, gently mix all ingredients until just combined. Be careful not to overmix, as this can result in a tough meatloaf.
3. ****Form Loaf:**** Transfer the meat mixture to the prepared loaf pan and press gently to form an even loaf, or shape it into a free-form loaf on the baking sheet.
4. ****Prepare Glaze:**** In a small bowl, whisk together all the glaze ingredients (ketchup, brown sugar, yellow mustard, and apple cider vinegar) until smooth.
5. ****Bake:**** Bake the meatloaf for 45 minutes.
6. ****Apply Glaze:**** After 45 minutes, remove the meatloaf from the oven and spread the prepared glaze evenly over the top.
7. ****Continue Baking:**** Return the meatloaf to the oven and continue baking for another 15-30 minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches 160°F (71°C) and the glaze is slightly caramelized.
8. ****Rest & Serve:**** Remove the meatloaf from the oven and let it rest for 10-15 minutes before slicing. This allows the juices to redistribute, ensuring a moist meatloaf. Slice and serve warm.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Rose always grated a raw potato (about half a medium one) into her meatloaf mix. 'Keeps it super moist and tender,' she'd say, 'and no one ever guesses my secret ingredient for that perfect texture!'"

Did You Know? > Meatloaf has been a staple of American home cooking for generations, with "country meatloaf" embodying the simple, hearty traditions of the Midwest. It's an economical and satisfying dish, often adapted with regional variations, perfect for feeding a family. This classic recipe reflects the resour...

Pairs well with: A cozy Sunday dinner, a robust family gathering, and the happy sounds of conversation around a well-loved kitchen table.

Detroit-Style Coney Dogs

DETROIT, MICHIGAN — LAFAYETTE VS. AMERICAN, THE ETERNAL RIVALRY

"A natural-casing hot dog buried under a beanless, finely ground beef chili sauce, topped with diced white onion and a stripe of yellow mustard, served in a steamed bun that's already half-disintegrating from the sauce. This is not a neat food. This is a Detroit food. And the only question that matters: Lafayette or American?"



PREP
15 min

COOK
1 min

SERVES
8

MIDWEST NICE
★★★o

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the coney sauce.** In a medium saucepan, combine the ground beef and water. Using a potato masher or the back of a wooden

spoon, break the beef into very fine, almost paste-like pieces. This is not taco meat — you want the texture to be almost smooth, with no discernible chunks. Some cooks even pulse the raw meat in a food processor first.

2. **Simmer.** Bring the beef and water mixture to a simmer over medium heat, continuing to break up the meat as it cooks. Once simmering, add the tomato paste, mustard, chili powder, cumin, paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, pepper, and cayenne if using. Stir to combine.
3. **Cook low and slow.** Reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 45 minutes to 1 hour, stirring occasionally. The sauce should reduce and thicken to a consistency that's spoonable but not soupy — it should hold on a hot dog without running off immediately. If it gets too thick, add a splash of water. If it's too thin, keep cooking.
4. **Cook the dogs.** While the sauce simmers, boil or griddle your hot dogs until heated through and snappy, about 5 minutes.
5. **Steam the buns.** Briefly steam the buns until soft and warm. A steamer basket over boiling water, or wrapping in a damp towel and microwaving for 10 seconds, both work.
6. **Assemble.** Place a hot dog in each bun. Ladle a generous amount of coney sauce over the top. Add a stripe of yellow mustard. Finish with a heavy sprinkling of diced white onion. The sauce should be threatening to escape the bun at all times.
7. **Eat.** Over the paper, leaning forward, with napkins nearby. This is a two-hander. Accept your fate.

Did You Know? > Detroit's coney island tradition dates to the early 1900s, when Greek immigrants — many from the same villages in northern Greece and Macedonia — opened small diners serving American-style hot dogs with their own distinctive chili sauce. The word "coney" comes from Coney Island in New York, but th...

Pairs well with: An order of chili cheese fries from the same counter, a can of Vernors ginger ale, the last Lions game of the season (pain optional), and the unshakeable belief that whatever coney island *you* go to is the correct one.

Detroit-Style Pizza

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

"Thick, airy, and crispy-edged with a caramelized cheese crust that forms where Wisconsin brick cheese meets the blue steel pan — Detroit-style pizza is the Midwest's answer to every other regional pizza, and it might just be the best one."



PREP
20 min

COOK
15 min

SERVES
4–6

MIDWEST NICE
★★★☆☆

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Make the dough.**** In a large bowl, combine the bread flour, yeast, sugar, and salt. Add the warm water and 2 tablespoons olive oil. Mix until a shaggy dough forms, then knead (by hand or stand mixer with dough hook) for 6–8 minutes until smooth and elastic.

2. **First rise.** Oil a large bowl, place the dough inside, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at room temperature for 1½–2 hours until doubled. (For better flavor, refrigerate overnight for a cold rise of 12–14 hours; bring to room temperature 1 hour before shaping.)
3. **Prepare the pan.** Generously oil a 10x14-inch blue steel Detroit-style pan (or a heavy 9x13-inch baking pan). Transfer the dough to the pan and use your fingers to gently press and stretch it toward the edges. If it springs back, let it rest 10 minutes and try again. The dough should reach all four corners.
4. **Second rise.** Cover the pan and let the dough rise for 30–45 minutes until puffy.
5. **Make the sauce.** While the dough rises, combine all sauce ingredients in a small bowl. Stir well. (The sauce goes on TOP of the cheese, in characteristic "racing stripes.")
6. **Top the pizza.** Preheat oven to 550°F (or as high as it goes). Distribute the cubed cheese evenly over the dough, making sure to push cheese cubes all the way to the edges and into the corners — this creates the signature caramelized cheese crust (the "frico"). Layer pepperoni over the cheese if using.
7. **Bake.** Bake for 12–15 minutes until the top is deeply golden, the cheese at the edges is dark and crispy, and the bottom is golden brown (lift a corner with a spatula to check).
8. **Add the sauce stripes.** Remove from the oven. Spoon the sauce in two or three thick stripes across the top of the pizza — this is the "red stripe" that's characteristic of Detroit style. The sauce goes on AFTER baking.
9. **Rest and serve.** Let the pizza rest in the pan for 3 minutes, then run a thin spatula around the edges to release it. Slide it out onto a cutting board and cut into squares. Top with fresh basil if desired.

Did You Know? > Detroit-style pizza was born in 1946 at Buddy's Rendezvous (now Buddy's Pizza), when owner Gus Guerra began baking pizza in blue steel utility pans borrowed from the auto industry — the same pans used to hold small parts on the assembly line at Detroit's car factories. The thick, airy, focaccia-li...

Indiana Breaded Pork Tenderloin Sandwich

INDIANA

"A pork tenderloin pounded impossibly thin, breaded, and fried until it extends 4 inches past the bun in every direction. The meat-to-bun ratio is absurd. That's the point. In Indiana, the tenderloin is always bigger than the bread, and the bread is just there for moral support."



PREP
30 min

COOK
10 min

SERVES
4

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Pound the pork:** Place each chop between plastic wrap. Using a meat mallet, pound aggressively to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thickness. They should be roughly 8–10 inches across. (Yes, really. Bigger than your head.)

2. **Set up breading station:** Bowl 1: flour mixed with salt, pepper, garlic powder, paprika. Bowl 2: eggs whisked with milk. Bowl 3: breadcrumbs.
3. **Bread the pork:** Dredge each tenderloin in flour (shake off excess), dip in egg wash, then press firmly into breadcrumbs on both sides.
4. **Fry:** Heat 1 inch of oil in a large cast iron skillet to 350°F (175°C). Fry tenderloins one at a time, 3–4 minutes per side, until deep golden brown and internal temp reaches 145°F.
5. **Drain** on a wire rack. Season with a pinch of salt while hot.
6. **Assemble:** Place tenderloin on bottom bun (it will hang over dramatically). Add mustard, pickles, onion, and any other toppings. Balance the top bun somewhere in the middle.

Did You Know? Indiana takes its pork tenderloin sandwich with dead seriousness. The Hoosier tenderloin trail is a real thing — a curated list of restaurants across the state competing for the title of best tenderloin. The sandwich likely evolved from German Schnitzel traditions brought by immigrants in the 1800s....

Iowa Breaded Pork Chop

IOWA, US

"A beloved Midwestern classic, the Iowa Breaded Pork Chop features a thick, tender pork chop coated in a seasoned breading and pan-fried to a golden, crispy perfection, often a centerpiece of family meals."

PREP
20 minCOOK
15 minSERVES
4MIDWEST NICE
★★★

INGREDIENTS

4 (1-inch thick / 2.5 cm) boneless pork chops (Iowa Chops preferred)

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 tsp salt

1 tsp black pepper

½ tsp garlic powder

½ tsp onion powder

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

¼ cup (60ml) milk

1.5 cups plain breadcrumbs (Panko for extra crispiness)

½ cup vegetable oil or shortening, for frying

Optional: Fresh parsley, chopped, for garnish

Optional for serving: Lemon wedges, mashed potatoes, green beans

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Pork Chops:**** Pat pork chops dry with paper towels. Season both sides with a pinch of salt and pepper.
2. ****Set Up Breading Station:**** Set up three shallow dishes. In the first dish, whisk together flour, 1 tsp salt, 1 tsp black pepper, garlic powder, and onion powder. In the second dish, whisk together eggs and milk. In the third dish, place the breadcrumbs.
3. ****Bread Pork Chops:**** Dredge each pork chop first in the seasoned flour, shaking off excess. Then dip it into the egg mixture, ensuring it's fully coated. Finally, coat thoroughly in the breadcrumbs, pressing gently to adhere. Place breaded chops on a wire rack while you prepare the others.
4. ****Heat Oil:**** In a large, heavy-bottomed skillet (preferably cast iron), add vegetable oil or shortening to a depth of about ½ inch. Heat over medium-high heat until it reaches 350°F (175°C).
5. ****Fry Pork Chops:**** Carefully place 1-2 breaded pork chops into the hot oil (do not overcrowd the pan). Fry for 4-6 minutes per side, or until deeply golden brown and cooked through (internal temperature reaches 145°F / 63°C). Adjust heat as needed to prevent burning.
6. ****Drain & Serve:**** Using tongs, remove the fried pork chops and place them on a clean wire rack set over paper towels to drain excess oil. Let rest for a few minutes before serving. Garnish with fresh parsley if desired. Serve immediately with lemon wedges and your favorite sides.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Johnson always mixed a tiny bit of crushed Ritz crackers into her breadcrumbs. 'It gives 'em an extra buttery, crispy crunch,' she'd wink, 'and nobody ever guesses my secret for that perfect golden crust!'"

Did You Know? > The "Iowa Chop" is not just any pork chop; it's a specific, thick-cut, bone-in loin chop that became a source of pride for Iowa's pork industry. Known for its tenderness and flavor, this breaded and fried version is a quintessential Midwestern comfort food. It celebrates Iowa's rich agricultural h...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A quiet Sunday family dinner, a lively potluck, and sharing stories around a well-loved kitchen table after a long day.

Kansas City BBQ Brisket & Burnt Ends

□ KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

"Kansas City doesn't just do barbecue — it **is** barbecue. Slow-smoked brisket with a thick, sweet, tomato-and-molasses-based sauce, and the legendary burnt ends: the charred, caramelized cubes from the point of the brisket that pit masters used to give away for free. Now they're the most expensive thing on the menu. Welcome to KC."



PREP
30 minCOOK
12 minSERVES
12–15MIDWEST NICE
●●●○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

Did You Know? Kansas City's BBQ legacy traces back to Henry Perry, an African American pit master who began selling smoked meats wrapped in newspaper from an outdoor stand in the early 1900s. His protégé, Charlie Bryant, and later Charlie's brother Arthur Bryant, built the famous Arthur Bryant's restaurant, which...

Loose Meat Sandwich (Maid-Rite Style)

IOWA

"A true Iowa classic, this simple yet satisfying sandwich features seasoned, finely crumbled ground beef, served loosely on a bun without sauce, letting the pure, savory meat flavor shine."

PREP
10 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
4-6MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

1.5 lbs (680g) lean ground beef (85/15 or 90/10 recommended)

1 large onion, finely minced (optional, for flavor)

1 cup (240ml) beef broth or water

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp yellow mustard (optional, for a subtle tang)

½ tsp garlic powder

½ tsp onion powder

½ tsp black pepper

Salt to taste

For serving: 4-6 hamburger buns, dill pickle slices, yellow mustard, ketchup, finely chopped raw onion (optional)

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brown Beef:** In a large skillet or Dutch oven, brown the ground beef over medium-high heat, breaking it up into very fine crumbles with a spoon or potato masher. If using, add the finely minced onion and cook until softened, about 5-7 minutes.
2. **Drain Grease:** Once the beef is fully browned and finely crumbled, drain off any excess grease. This is crucial for the "loose" texture.
3. **Simmer with Liquids & Seasonings:** Return the beef to the skillet. Pour in the beef broth (or water) and Worcestershire sauce. Stir in the yellow mustard (if using), garlic powder, onion powder, and black pepper. Bring the mixture to a simmer.
4. **Reduce & Season:** Reduce the heat to low and let the mixture simmer gently for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid has evaporated and the meat is very tender and flavorful. The goal is moist, loose meat, not a dry crumble. Taste and season with salt as needed.
5. **Serve:** Toast hamburger buns lightly if desired. Spoon a generous amount of the loose meat mixture onto each bun. Serve immediately with traditional toppings like dill pickle slices, yellow mustard, ketchup, and finely chopped raw onion.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Jean's secret for a truly 'Maid-Rite' style loose meat? A tiny, tiny pinch of nutmeg in with the beef and seasonings. 'It just rounds out the flavor,' she'd insist, 'and makes it taste like pure comfort, even if you can't quite put your finger on why!'"

Did You Know? > The Loose Meat Sandwich is an iconic Iowa creation, famously popularized by the Maid-Rite restaurant chain, which began in Muscatine, Iowa, in 1926. Unlike a Sloppy Joe, a Maid-Rite (or "loose meat" sandwich) contains no tomato sauce or ketchup in

the meat mixture itself. The finely crumbled, seas...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A summer road trip through the Iowa cornfields, a local high school football game, and the sound of distant crickets on a warm evening.

Michigan Cherry-Glazed Ham

MICHIGAN, US

"A show-stopping centerpiece for any Midwestern gathering, this tender ham is bathed in a luscious, sweet-tart cherry glaze, celebrating Michigan's famed cherry orchards."

PREP
15 minCOOK
1 minSERVES
10-12MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1 (7-9 lb / 3.1-4 kg) pre-cooked spiral-sliced ham

1 (12 oz / 340g) jar cherry preserves or jam

½ cup (120ml) honey

¼ cup (60ml) fresh orange juice (or cherry juice)

1 tbsp (15ml) apple cider vinegar

1 tsp Dijon mustard

½ tsp ground ginger

¼ tsp ground cloves

Pinch of salt and black pepper

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Preheat Oven & Prepare Ham:**** Preheat your oven to 325°F (160°C). Place the ham in a large roasting pan, fat-side up. If your ham didn't come with glaze instructions, you can add about ½ inch of water to the bottom of the pan to help keep it moist.
2. ****Make Cherry Glaze:**** In a medium saucepan, combine the cherry preserves, honey, orange juice, apple cider vinegar, Dijon mustard, ground ginger, ground cloves, salt, and black pepper. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the preserves have melted and the glaze is smooth (about 5-7 minutes).
3. ****First Glaze Application:**** Bake the ham for 1 to 1.5 hours, or according to package directions, until it is warmed through (internal temperature of 140°F / 60°C). During the last 30 minutes of baking, begin applying the glaze.
4. ****Continue Glazing:**** Increase oven temperature to 375°F (190°C). Brush about one-third of the cherry glaze generously over the ham. Return to the oven and bake for 10-15 minutes.
5. ****Final Glazing:**** Repeat the glazing process two more times, brushing the ham with additional glaze every 10-15 minutes, until all the glaze is used and the ham is beautifully caramelized and glossy.
6. ****Rest & Serve:**** Remove the ham from the oven and tent loosely with foil. Let it rest for 10-15 minutes before carving and serving. This allows the juices to redistribute and ensures a moist ham.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Carol always added a tiny splash of bourbon (about a tablespoon!) to her cherry glaze. 'It deepens the flavor and gives it a little extra kick,' she'd whisper, 'but don't tell anyone, it's our little secret for the best ham in the county!'"

Did You Know? > Michigan is renowned as the "Cherry Capital of the World," particularly for its tart cherries grown around Traverse City. This abundance of cherries has inspired countless regional dishes, including this festive cherry-glazed ham. It's a perfect example of how Midwestern cuisine celebrates local a...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A festive holiday gathering, a special Sunday dinner, and the warm feeling of family and friends celebrating together.

Nebraska Runza (Beef & Cabbage Sandwich)

NEBRASKA

"A pillow-y yeast-dough pocket stuffed with seasoned ground beef, cabbage, and onions. Part sandwich, part hand pie, entirely Nebraskan. It's what happens when German-Russian immigrants meet the Great Plains and decide to make the perfect portable meal."



PREP
45 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
12MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the dough:** Combine warm milk, water, yeast, and sugar. Let sit 5 minutes until foamy. Add oil, salt, and egg. Gradually mix in flour until a soft dough forms. Knead 5–7 minutes until smooth and elastic. Place in an oiled bowl, cover, rise 1 hour until doubled.
2. **Make the filling:** Brown ground beef in a large skillet over medium-high, breaking into small crumbles. Add onion, cook 3 minutes. Add cabbage, garlic, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Cook 8–10 minutes, stirring often, until cabbage is soft and liquid has evaporated. Let cool to room temperature.
3. **Assemble:** Punch down dough and divide into 12 equal pieces. Roll each into a 6-inch circle. Place ~ $\frac{1}{3}$ cup filling in the center. Fold dough over filling and pinch edges firmly to seal. Place seam-side down on a parchment-lined baking sheet, 2 inches apart.
4. **Rest** 15 minutes while oven preheats to 375°F (190°C).
5. **Bake** 18–20 minutes until golden brown.
6. **Brush** tops with melted butter immediately out of the oven.

Did You Know? The Runza has roots in the *Bierock* (also spelled *Bieroc*), a stuffed bread brought to the Great Plains by Volga German immigrants — ethnic Germans who had settled in Russia before emigrating to the American Midwest in the late 1800s. The Runza Restaurant chain, founded in Lincoln, Nebraska in 194...

Pan-Fried Walleye with Tartar Sauce

MINNESOTA, WISCONSIN, THE DAKOTAS — LAKE COUNTRY

"A fresh walleye fillet, dredged in seasoned flour and cornmeal, pan-fried in butter until the crust is golden and crackling and the fish inside flakes into sweet, delicate white layers. This is what Minnesotans dream about during ice fishing season, what lake cabin weekends are built around, and what makes the Upper Midwest's freshwater fishing tradition worth the mosquito bites."



PREP

15 min

COOK

10 min

SERVES

4

MIDWEST NICE

★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the tartar sauce.** Stir all tartar sauce ingredients together in a small bowl. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to let flavors marry. This step can be done hours or even a day ahead.

2. **Prep the fish.** Pat the walleye fillets completely dry with paper towels — this is crucial for a crispy crust. Season both sides lightly with salt and pepper.
3. **Set up your dredge.** In a shallow dish, combine the flour, cornmeal, garlic powder, paprika, onion powder, and cayenne. In another shallow dish, beat the eggs with a tablespoon of water.
4. **Coat the fillets.** Dip each fillet first in the egg wash, letting excess drip off, then press into the seasoned flour-cornmeal mixture, coating both sides evenly. Set the coated fillets on a plate.
5. **Pan-fry.** Heat the butter and oil together in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When the butter is foaming and fragrant (but not brown), carefully lay the fillets in the pan. Don't crowd — work in batches if needed. Cook for 3–4 minutes per side, until the crust is deeply golden and the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. The butter will brown slightly during cooking — this is a good thing. Browned butter = flavor.
6. **Drain and serve.** Transfer the fillets to a paper towel-lined plate briefly, then serve immediately with tartar sauce, lemon wedges, and whatever sides speak to you — coleslaw, potato salad, or corn on the cob.

Did You Know? > Walleye is the official state fish of Minnesota, and for good reason — the state has more walleye than virtually anywhere else in North America. The name comes from the fish's distinctive large, glassy, almost opaque eyes, which reflect light and help it see in murky or dark water (making it a sup...

Pairs well with: A sunset over a Minnesota lake, a cold beer in a koozie, the sound of loons calling, and the quiet pride of having caught the fish yourself (or the quiet lie of having caught the fish yourself — we don't judge).

Pierogi

MICHIGAN / OHIO (POLISH HERITAGE)

"These tender, savory dumplings, often filled with potatoes and cheese, are a beloved comfort food, especially in the heavily Polish-influenced communities of the Midwest."

PREP
60 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
6-8MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups (240g) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup (120ml) sour cream
- ¼ cup (60ml) water
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 large russet potatoes (about 1.5 lbs / 680g), peeled and quartered
- 4 oz (113g) cream cheese, softened
- 4 oz (113g) sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 tbsp (30g) unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup (60ml) milk or half-and-half
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- 4 tbsp (60g) unsalted butter
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- Sour cream, for dolloping
- Fresh chives or parsley, chopped, for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Filling:**** Boil potatoes in salted water until very tender, about 15-20 minutes. Drain well. Return to the hot pot and mash thoroughly. Stir in cream cheese, shredded cheddar, melted butter, and milk. Mix until smooth and creamy. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside to cool completely.
2. ****Make Dough:**** In a large bowl, combine flour and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk egg, sour cream, and water. Add wet ingredients to dry ingredients and mix until a shaggy dough forms. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 5-7 minutes until smooth and elastic. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest for 30 minutes.
3. ****Roll & Cut Dough:**** Divide dough in half. On a lightly floured surface, roll one half of the dough thinly (about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch / 3mm thick). Use a 3-inch (7.5 cm) round cutter or rim of a glass to cut out circles. Re-roll scraps as needed.
4. ****Fill Pierogi:**** Place a teaspoon of cooled filling in the center of each dough circle. Fold the dough over the filling to create a half-moon shape. Pinch the edges firmly to seal, crimping with a fork if desired to ensure a tight seal.
5. ****Boil Pierogi:**** Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add pierogi in batches (about 6-8 at a time) and cook for 3-5 minutes, or until they float to the surface and the dough is tender. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on a lightly greased baking sheet or plate.
6. ****Sauté Onions:**** While pierogi are boiling, melt 4 tbsp butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add sliced onion and cook until deeply caramelized and tender, about 15-20 minutes.
7. ****Sauté Pierogi (Optional):**** For a golden-brown finish, add boiled pierogi to the skillet with caramelized onions and sauté for 2-3 minutes per side until lightly browned and crispy.

8. **Serve:** Serve hot, topped with caramelized onions, a dollop of sour cream, and fresh chives or parsley.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Kaczmarek insisted on using a splash of vodka in the pierogi dough. 'It makes them extra tender, like little pillows!' she'd whisper, 'and it evaporates completely, so don't you worry.'"

Did You Know? > Pierogi are a beloved culinary tradition in many Midwestern communities, particularly those with a strong Polish, Ukrainian, or Eastern European heritage. Cities like Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago have long celebrated pierogi as a staple, deeply woven into holiday meals, church festivals, and fa...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A snowy Sunday afternoon, a lively family gathering, and sharing stories about your ancestors while sipping strong coffee.

Pork Chops and Applesauce

MIDWEST US

"A comforting classic that marries the savory richness of tender pork chops with the sweet-tart brightness of applesauce, a staple on many Midwest dinner tables."

PREP
15 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
4MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

4 bone-in or boneless pork chops, about 1-inch thick (about 1.5 lbs / 680g total)

1 tbsp olive oil or vegetable oil

½ tsp salt

½ tsp black pepper

¼ tsp garlic powder

¼ tsp paprika (optional, for color)

1 tbsp unsalted butter

1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced (optional)

2 cups (480g) unsweetened applesauce (homemade or store-bought)

1 apple (Granny Smith or Honeycrisp recommended), cored and thinly sliced (optional, for garnish/texture)

2 tbsp brown sugar (optional, if using tart applesauce)

Fresh parsley or chives, chopped, for garnish (optional)

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Pork Chops:**** Pat the pork chops dry with paper towels. Season both sides generously with salt, black pepper, garlic powder, and paprika (if using).
2. ****Sear Pork Chops:**** Heat olive oil in a large, heavy-bottomed skillet (preferably cast iron) over medium-high heat. Once hot, add the seasoned pork chops. Sear for 4-5 minutes per side, until golden brown and a good crust forms. Remove chops from the skillet and set aside on a plate.
3. ****Sauté Onions (Optional):**** If using, add butter to the same skillet. Add the sliced onion and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened and lightly caramelized, about 5-7 minutes.
4. ****Combine with Applesauce:**** Stir the applesauce into the skillet. If using, add the sliced apple and brown sugar. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer.
5. ****Simmer Pork Chops:**** Return the seared pork chops to the skillet, nestling them into the applesauce mixture. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 8-12 minutes, or until the pork chops are cooked through and tender (internal temperature reaches 145°F / 63°C). The exact time will depend on the thickness of your chops.
6. ****Rest & Serve:**** Remove from heat and let the pork chops rest in the applesauce for 5 minutes before serving. This allows the juices to redistribute. Serve warm, garnished with fresh parsley or chives if desired.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Eleanor always added a tiny splash of good quality bourbon (about a teaspoon!) to her applesauce while it was simmering. 'It just deepens the apple flavor, darling,' she'd wink, 'and no one ever quite puts their finger on why it's so special!'"

Did You Know? > Pork chops and applesauce is a classic pairing with deep roots in Midwestern culinary traditions, often associated with hearty, comforting family meals. The combination of savory pork and sweet-tart apples is a timeless flavor profile, reflecting the region's agricultural bounty, particularly its ...

Pairs well with: A cozy weeknight dinner with family, a crisp autumn evening, and reminiscing about simpler times.

Shepherd's Pie

MIDWEST US (FARMHOUSE STYLE)

"A hearty and comforting casserole, Shepherd's Pie features a savory meat and vegetable filling topped with a creamy layer of mashed potatoes, a true taste of home perfect for feeding a hungry Midwestern family."

PREP
25 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
6-8MIDWEST NICE
★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1.5 lbs (680g) lean ground beef or lamb
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 cup (150g) frozen peas
- 1 cup (150g) frozen corn
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 cup (240ml) beef broth
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- ½ tsp dried rosemary (crushed)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 lbs (900g) russet or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and quartered
- ½ cup (120ml) milk or half-and-half, warmed
- ¼ cup (56g) unsalted butter, softened
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Paprika, for garnish (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Cook Potatoes:** Place quartered potatoes in a large pot and cover with cold, salted water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes, or until fork-tender. Drain well.
2. **Make Mashed Potato Topping:** Return drained potatoes to the hot pot. Add warmed milk, softened butter, salt, and pepper. Mash until smooth and creamy. Set aside.
3. **Brown Meat:** While potatoes cook, heat olive oil in a large oven-safe skillet (preferably cast iron) or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add ground beef (or lamb) and chopped onion. Cook, breaking up meat with a spoon, until browned and cooked through. Drain off any excess grease.
4. **Sauté Vegetables:** Add diced carrots to the skillet and cook for 5-7 minutes until slightly softened. Stir in minced garlic, dried thyme, and dried rosemary; cook for 1 minute more until fragrant.
5. **Thicken Filling:** Sprinkle flour over the meat and vegetable mixture. Cook, stirring constantly, for 1-2 minutes.
6. **Add Liquids & Simmer:** Pour in beef broth and Worcestershire sauce. Bring to a simmer, stirring constantly, until the sauce thickens. Stir in frozen peas and corn. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
7. **Assemble Pie:** If using an oven-safe skillet, spread the meat filling evenly in the bottom. If not, transfer the filling to a 9x13 inch (23x33 cm) baking dish.
8. **Top with Potatoes:** Spoon or pipe the mashed potato topping evenly over the meat and vegetable filling, spreading it to the edges to seal. You can use a fork to create decorative ridges. Sprinkle with paprika if desired.
9. **Bake:** Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Bake for 25-30 minutes, or until the filling is bubbly and the mashed potato topping is golden

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brown. For extra browning, you can broil for the last 2-3 minutes, watching carefully to prevent burning.

10. **Rest & Serve:** Let the Shepherd's Pie rest for 5-10 minutes before serving. This allows the filling to set slightly.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Betty always stirred a spoonful of tomato paste into her meat filling right before adding the broth. 'It just gives it a richer color and a deeper umami flavor,' she'd wink, 'a little something extra that makes it truly irresistible!'"

Did You Know? > While Shepherd's Pie traditionally uses lamb and Cottage Pie uses beef, in the American Midwest, the terms are often used interchangeably, and beef is a common choice due to its availability and popularity. This hearty dish arrived in the Midwest with various immigrant groups, becoming a beloved c...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A chilly autumn evening, a hearty appetite after a day of outdoor chores, and the warmth of family gathered around the dinner table.

Sloppy Joes

MIDWEST US

"A quintessential American comfort food, Sloppy Joes are a hearty, saucy ground beef sandwich, beloved for their messy goodness and nostalgic flavor that brings back childhood memories."

PREP
10 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
4-6MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

1 lb (450g) lean ground beef (85/15 or 90/10 recommended)

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1 bell pepper (green or red), finely chopped (optional)

1 (15 oz / 425g) can tomato sauce

½ cup (120ml) ketchup

2 tbsp (30ml) Worcestershire sauce

1 tbsp (15g) brown sugar (packed)

1 tbsp yellow mustard

1 tsp garlic powder

½ tsp onion powder

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

For serving: 4-6 hamburger buns, toasted if desired

Optional toppings: Dill pickle slices, shredded cheddar cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

- **Brown Beef & Veggies:** In a large skillet or Dutch oven, cook the ground beef over medium-high heat, breaking it up with a spoon, until browned and cooked through. If using, add the chopped onion and bell pepper and cook until softened, about 5-7 minutes. Drain off any excess grease.
- **Add Sauce Ingredients:** Return the beef and vegetables to the skillet. Stir in the tomato sauce, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar, yellow mustard, garlic powder, and onion powder.
- **Simmer:** Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and let it cook for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally. This allows the flavors to meld and the sauce to thicken slightly.
- **Season:** Taste the Sloppy Joe mixture and season with salt and black pepper as needed.
- **Serve:** Spoon a generous amount of the warm Sloppy Joe mixture onto toasted hamburger buns. Serve immediately with optional dill pickle slices or shredded cheddar cheese.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Betty always added a secret splash of pickle juice (about a tablespoon!) to her Sloppy Joe mixture right at the end. 'It just brightens up all those rich flavors,' she'd declare, 'and makes everyone wonder why mine are always the best!'"

Did You Know? > *The origin of the Sloppy Joe sandwich is debated, with theories ranging from a cook named Joe in Sioux City, Iowa, in the 1930s, to a bar in Havana, Cuba. Regardless of its exact birthplace, this hearty, saucy sandwich quickly became an American classic, particularly popular in the Midwest. Its ea...*

Pairs well with: A casual backyard barbecue, a bustling school carnival, and the joyful chaos of kids laughing (and probably making a mess) around the dinner table.

St. Louis Toasted Ravioli

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI — THE HILL NEIGHBORHOOD

"Not actually toasted but gloriously deep-fried, these crispy, golden pillows of meat-filled pasta are St. Louis's proudest happy accident — born on The Hill, served at every bar and restaurant in town, and utterly impossible to eat just one."



PREP

COOK

SERVES

MIDWEST NICE

20 min

15 min

6–8

00:00

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Set up your breading station.** In a shallow bowl, whisk together the eggs and milk. In a separate shallow dish, combine the breadcrumbs, Parmesan, garlic powder, and black pepper.
2. **Bread the ravioli.** Working in batches, dip each frozen ravioli into the egg wash, letting the excess drip off, then press firmly into the breadcrumb mixture, coating both sides evenly. Place breaded ravioli on a wire rack or sheet pan. Let them sit for 5 minutes so the coating adheres.
3. **Heat the oil.** Pour oil into a heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven to a depth of about 3 inches. Heat to 350°F. Use a deep-fry or candy thermometer for accuracy — temperature control is key.
4. **Fry in batches.** Carefully lower 5–6 ravioli at a time into the hot oil. Don't overcrowd the pot. Fry for 2–3 minutes, turning once, until they're deeply golden brown and crispy all over.
5. **Drain.** Remove with a slotted spoon or spider strainer and drain on a wire rack set over a sheet pan (preferred over paper towels for maximum crispiness). Season immediately with a light dusting of Parmesan and salt while still hot.
6. **Serve hot.** Arrange on a platter, dust with more Parmesan and chopped parsley, and serve immediately with warm marinara sauce for dipping.

Did You Know? > *The legend goes like this: sometime in the 1940s on The Hill — St. Louis's historic Italian-American neighborhood — a cook accidentally dropped a ravioli into the deep fryer instead of the boiling pasta water. Rather than toss it, someone tasted it, and a St. Louis icon was born. The two restauran...*

Swedish Meatballs

MINNESOTA

"A hearty and comforting dish, these tender, perfectly seasoned meatballs bathed in a rich, creamy gravy are a testament to Minnesota's strong Scandinavian roots."

PREP
20 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
6MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb (450g) ground beef (80/20 recommended)
- ½ lb (225g) ground pork
- ½ cup (40g) breadcrumbs (Panko or fresh)
- ¼ cup (60ml) milk or cream
- 1 small onion, finely minced and sautéed until softened
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ¼ tsp ground allspice
- ⅛ tsp ground nutmeg
- 2 tbsp (30g) unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp (15g) all-purpose flour
- 2 cups (480ml) beef broth
- ½ cup (120ml) heavy cream or half-and-half
- 1 tbsp (15ml) Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tbsp (15g) Dijon mustard
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Cooked egg noodles or mashed potatoes
- Lingonberry preserves (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prepare Meatballs:** In a large bowl, gently combine ground beef, ground pork, breadcrumbs, milk (or cream), sautéed minced onion, egg, salt, pepper, allspice, and nutmeg. Mix until just combined – do not overmix, or meatballs will be tough.
2. **Form Meatballs:** Roll the mixture into small, 1-inch (2.5 cm) meatballs. You should get about 30-35 meatballs.
3. **Cook Meatballs:** Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add a tablespoon of oil if needed. Brown the meatballs in batches until seared on all sides. They don't need to be cooked through. Remove meatballs from skillet and set aside.
4. **Make Roux:** In the same skillet (don't drain the drippings), melt butter over medium heat. Whisk in flour and cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly, until a light roux forms.
5. **Whisk in Liquids:** Slowly whisk in the beef broth, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Bring to a simmer, whisking until the gravy thickens. Reduce heat to low.
6. **Finish Gravy:** Stir in the heavy cream, Worcestershire sauce, and Dijon mustard. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Return the browned meatballs to the gravy. Cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes, or until meatballs are cooked through and flavors have melded.
7. **Serve:** Serve hot over cooked egg noodles or creamy mashed potatoes. Garnish with fresh chopped parsley and a dollop of lingonberry preserves on the side, if desired.

Fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish)



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Svensson always snuck in a tiny pinch of ground cardamom into her meatballs. 'Just a whisper,' she'd say, 'to make them taste like home.' It added a subtle, warm complexity no one could quite pinpoint but everyone loved."

Did You Know? > Swedish Meatballs are a beloved comfort food in Minnesota, a state with a significant Scandinavian heritage. Many Minnesotans trace their roots to Sweden and Norway, bringing with them culinary traditions that became staples in their new home. Often served at family gatherings, holidays, and commu...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A snowy Minnesota evening, a cozy sweater, and a quiet night in with good company (and maybe a little friendly passive-aggressive competition over whose grandma made them best).

Tater Tot Hotdish

MINNESOTA

*"The crown jewel of Minnesota cuisine. Don't call it a casserole — in Minnesota, it's a *hotdish*, and that distinction matters. Layers of ground beef, creamy soup, vegetables, and a golden crown of tater tots. It's comfort food elevated to cultural identity."*



PREP

15 min

COOK

45 min

SERVES

8–10

MIDWEST NICE

★★○○

INGREDIENTS

1½ lbs ground beef (80/20)

1 medium onion, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 can (10.5 oz) cream of mushroom soup

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Preheat** oven to 375°F (190°C). Grease a 9×13-inch baking dish.
2. **Brown the beef:** In a large skillet over medium-high, cook ground beef and onion until beef is browned and onion is soft, about 8 minutes. Add garlic, cook 1 minute. Drain excess fat.
3. **Make the filling:** Stir in both soups, milk, Worcestershire sauce, salt, and pepper. Fold in frozen vegetables.

1 can (10.5 oz) cream of chicken soup

½ cup whole milk

1 bag (16 oz) frozen mixed vegetables
(corn, peas, green beans, carrots)

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

1 bag (32 oz) frozen tater tots

Salt and pepper to taste

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

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4. **Layer:** Spread meat mixture evenly in the baking dish. Sprinkle cheese on top. Arrange tater tots in a single layer over the cheese — neat rows for the perfectionists, scattered for the rebels.
5. **Bake** uncovered for 45–50 minutes until tots are golden and crispy and filling is bubbling around the edges.
6. **Rest** 5 minutes before serving straight from the dish.

Did You Know? "Hotdish" is a distinctly Minnesotan term — and Minnesotans will politely but firmly correct you if you call it a casserole. The word has been in use since at least the 1930s, and the tater tot version became the definitive hotdish after Ore-Ida introduced frozen tater tots in 1956. In 2022, Minneso...

Tavern Burger

IOWA / NEBRASKA (LOOSE MEAT STYLE)

"A humble yet iconic Midwestern creation, the Tavern Burger, also known as a Loose Meat Sandwich, features seasoned, finely crumbled ground beef served simply on a bun, allowing the pure, savory meat flavor to shine without a heavy sauce."

PREP
10 min

COOK
20 min

SERVES
4-6

MIDWEST NICE
★★★○

INGREDIENTS

1.5 lbs (680g) lean ground beef (85/15 or 90/10 recommended)

1 medium yellow onion, finely minced (optional, for flavor)

1 cup (240ml) beef broth or water

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp yellow mustard (optional, for a subtle tang)

½ tsp garlic powder

½ tsp onion powder

½ tsp black pepper

Salt to taste

For serving: 4-6 hamburger buns, dill pickle slices, yellow mustard, ketchup, finely chopped raw onion (optional)

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brown Beef:** In a large skillet or Dutch oven, brown the ground beef over medium-high heat, breaking it up into very fine crumbles with a spoon or potato masher. If using, add the finely minced onion and cook until softened, about 5-7 minutes.
2. **Drain Grease:** Once the beef is fully browned and finely crumbled, drain off any excess grease. This is crucial for the "loose" texture.
3. **Simmer with Liquids & Seasonings:** Return the beef to the skillet. Pour in the beef broth (or water) and Worcestershire sauce. Stir in the yellow mustard (if using), garlic powder, onion powder, and black pepper. Bring the mixture to a simmer.
4. **Reduce & Season:** Reduce the heat to low and let the mixture simmer gently for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid has evaporated and the meat is very tender and flavorful. The goal is moist, loose meat, not a dry crumble. Taste and season with salt as needed.
5. **Serve:** Toast hamburger buns lightly if desired. Spoon a generous amount of the loose meat mixture onto each bun. Serve immediately with traditional toppings like dill pickle slices, yellow mustard, ketchup, and finely chopped raw onion.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Jean's secret for a truly 'Maid-Rite' style loose meat? A tiny, tiny pinch of nutmeg in with the beef and seasonings. 'It just rounds out the flavor,' she'd insist, 'and makes it taste like pure comfort, even if you can't quite put your finger on why!'"

Did You Know? > The Tavern Burger, or Loose Meat Sandwich, is a Midwestern culinary icon, particularly associated with Iowa, popularized by establishments like Maid-Rite. Unlike a traditional hamburger patty or a Sloppy Joe, this sandwich features finely

crumbled, seasoned ground beef cooked without heavy sauces,...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A summer road trip through the Iowa cornfields, a local high school football game, and the sound of distant crickets on a warm evening.

Wisconsin Friday Fish Fry

WISCONSIN — EVERY SUPPER CLUB, VFW HALL, AND CHURCH BASEMENT IN THE STATE

"Beer-battered cod fried to a shattering golden crust, served with a mountain of coleslaw, rye bread with butter, and a pile of french fries or potato pancakes. In Wisconsin, Friday isn't a day of the week. It's a fish fry. It has been this way since before you were born, and it will be this way long after you're gone."



PREP
20 min

COOK
15 min

SERVES
4

MIDWEST NICE

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the tartar sauce.** Stir together all tartar sauce ingredients in a small bowl. Refrigerate until ready to serve. (Better if made an hour or

more ahead.)

2. **Prep the fish.** Pat the cod fillets completely dry with paper towels. Season both sides with salt and pepper. Dry fish = better batter adhesion. Wet fish = the batter slides right off and you'll be sad.
3. **Make the batter.** In a large bowl, whisk together 1½ cups flour, cornstarch, baking powder, garlic powder, paprika, salt, and pepper. Pour in the cold beer and crack in the egg. Whisk until smooth — a few small lumps are okay. The batter should be the consistency of thick pancake batter. If it's too thick, add a splash more beer. The batter should be cold — cold batter + hot oil = crispier fish. Stick it in the fridge for 10 minutes if your kitchen is warm.
4. **Heat the oil.** Pour oil into a deep heavy pot or Dutch oven to a depth of about 3 inches. Heat to 375°F. Use a thermometer — guessing gets you soggy fish.
5. **Dredge and batter.** Set up your assembly line: fish, dredging flour, batter, oil. Dredge each piece of fish in the plain flour, shake off the excess, then dip it into the beer batter, letting the excess drip off for a couple seconds.
6. **Fry.** Carefully lower the battered fish into the hot oil, 2–3 pieces at a time (don't crowd the pot — it drops the oil temperature). Fry for 4–6 minutes, turning once halfway through, until the batter is deeply golden brown and the fish inside is opaque and flakes easily. Transfer to a wire rack set over a sheet pan. Season with a little extra salt immediately.
7. **Serve the Wisconsin way.** Pile the fish on a plate alongside coleslaw, tartar sauce, lemon wedges, a couple slices of dark rye bread with butter, and fries or potato pancakes. A Brandy Old Fashioned on the side is not optional. (See our Wisconsin Brandy Old Fashioned recipe.)

Did You Know? > Wisconsin's Friday fish fry tradition has Catholic roots — the practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent created a demand for fish dinners, and Wisconsin's large Catholic population (German, Polish, and Irish immigrants) turned Friday fish into an institution. But here's the thing: L...

Pairs well with: A Wisconsin Brandy Old Fashioned (sweet), a Friday evening at a supper club where the wallpaper hasn't changed since 1974, and the comforting knowledge that every single person in this restaurant is eating the exact same thing.



Sides

4 RECIPES

Cheesy Funeral Potatoes

MIDWEST & MOUNTAIN WEST — CHURCH KITCHENS EVERYWHERE

"The casserole with the most morbid name and the most comforting soul. Creamy, cheesy, impossibly rich shredded potatoes baked under a buttery cornflake crust — served at every funeral, potluck, and church supper from Iowa to Utah, because nothing says "we care" like a 9x13 pan of carb-loaded love."



PREP
15 minCOOK
45 minSERVES
10–12MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Preheat and prep.** Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish with butter or cooking spray.
2. **Mix the filling.** In a large bowl, combine the thawed hash browns, cream of chicken soup, sour cream, shredded cheddar, melted butter, diced onion, green onions, garlic powder, pepper, and salt. Stir gently until everything is evenly combined. The mixture will look gloriously rich — that's correct.
3. **Fill the dish.** Spread the potato mixture into the prepared baking dish, pressing gently into an even layer.
4. **Make the topping.** In a small bowl, toss the crushed cornflakes with the melted butter and Parmesan until the flakes are evenly coated. Scatter the mixture over the top of the potatoes.
5. **Bake.** Place in the oven and bake for 40–45 minutes, until the edges are bubbling, the filling is heated through, and the cornflake topping is golden and crispy.
6. **Rest.** Let stand for 10 minutes before serving. This allows the filling to set slightly and makes serving easier.

Did You Know? > Funeral potatoes got their name from the longstanding Midwestern and Mormon tradition of bringing a covered dish to a grieving family's home after a funeral. The dish needed to be hearty, crowd-feeding, inexpensive, easy to make, and transportable — funeral potatoes check every box. The recipe bec...

Creamy Coleslaw

• MIDWEST — EVERY BACKYARD BARBECUE

"Cool, crisp, and creamy with just enough tang to cut through any rich main dish — this is the coleslaw that appears at every Midwestern cookout, fish fry, and potluck, the faithful sidekick that never steals the spotlight but always gets finished first."



PREP
15 minCOOK
—SERVES
8-10MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prepare the vegetables.** In a large bowl, combine the shredded cabbage, grated carrots, and sliced red onion. Toss to mix.
2. **Make the dressing.** In a medium bowl, whisk together the mayonnaise, sour cream, apple cider vinegar, sugar, Dijon mustard, celery seed, salt, pepper, and cayenne (if using) until smooth and well combined.
3. **Dress the slaw.** Pour the dressing over the cabbage mixture and toss thoroughly until everything is evenly coated.
4. **Chill.** Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving. This resting time allows the cabbage to soften slightly and the flavors to meld. The slaw will also release some liquid — give it a good stir before serving.
5. **Taste and adjust.** Before serving, taste and add more salt, vinegar, or sugar as needed. The slaw should be creamy, tangy, and just barely sweet.

Did You Know? > Coleslaw arrived in America with Dutch immigrants (the name comes from the Dutch *koolsla*, meaning "cabbage salad"), but the Midwest made it an institution. In a region where cabbage grows abundantly and backyard barbecues are a way of life from May through October, coleslaw became the indispensable side dish.

Green Bean Casserole

▪ MIDWEST — THE THANKSGIVING TABLE

"The dish that launched a thousand potlucks. Tender green beans in a velvety mushroom cream sauce, topped with a shattering layer of crispy fried onions — this is the Midwest's most beloved side dish, and no holiday table is complete without it."



PREP

COOK

SERVES

MIDWEST NICE

15 min

35 min

8-10

00:00

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prep the green beans.** If using fresh: bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Blanch the green beans for 5 minutes until crisp-tender and bright green. Drain and immediately plunge into ice water to stop cooking. Drain well and set aside. (If using canned or frozen, simply drain/thaw well.)
2. **Cook the mushrooms.** Preheat oven to 375°F. In a large oven-safe skillet or saucepan, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden and most of the moisture has evaporated, about 5–6 minutes.
3. **Build the sauce.** Add the shallot and garlic to the mushrooms and cook 1 minute until fragrant. Sprinkle the flour over the vegetables and stir constantly for 1 minute to cook out the raw flour taste. Gradually pour in the chicken broth and milk, whisking steadily to prevent lumps. Add the soy sauce, pepper, salt, and nutmeg.
4. **Simmer until thick.** Bring the sauce to a gentle boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 3–4 minutes, stirring frequently, until the sauce thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon.
5. **Combine.** Fold the green beans into the sauce until evenly coated. Transfer to a 9x13-inch baking dish (or leave in the oven-safe skillet).
6. **Bake.** Place in the oven and bake uncovered for 20 minutes until the edges are bubbling.
7. **Add the topping.** Remove from the oven. Scatter the fried onions (and Parmesan, if using) evenly over the top. Return to the oven for 5–8 minutes more, until the onions are deeply golden and the casserole is bubbling throughout.
8. **Rest and serve.** Let the casserole rest for 5 minutes before serving. The sauce will thicken slightly as it cools.

Did You Know? > Green bean casserole was invented in 1955 by Dorcas Reilly in the Campbell's Soup Company test kitchen in Camden, New Jersey. Tasked with creating a quick, easy recipe using ingredients most Americans already had in their pantry, she combined cream of mushroom soup, canned green beans, and Durkee ...

Butter & Salt Corn on the Cob

MIDWEST — THE CORN BELT

"August in the Midwest means one thing above all else: sweet corn season. Picked that morning, boiled just until tender, slathered in butter, and showered in salt — it's the simplest recipe in this book and possibly the most perfect."



PREP

5 min

COOK

5 min

SERVES

6

MIDWEST NICE

Yum

INGREDIENTS

6 ears fresh sweet corn, husked and silk removed

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
(plus more at the table)

Flaky sea salt or kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Boil the water.** Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Do NOT add salt to the water — salt toughens the corn kernels during cooking.
2. **Cook the corn.** Gently add the ears of corn to the boiling water. Return to a boil and cook for 4–7 minutes. Fresh-picked corn needs only 4 minutes; corn that's a day or two old benefits from 6–7. The kernels should be tender and bright yellow when done.

Freshly ground black pepper (optional)

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3. **Butter and salt.** Remove ears with tongs and place on a platter. Immediately rub with softened butter while the corn is still steaming hot — the butter will melt and pool in the kernels. Season generously with salt and pepper if desired.
4. **Serve instantly.** Corn on the cob waits for no one. Provide corn holders, extra butter, and a salt shaker at the table.

Did You Know? > *The Midwest is the beating heart of American corn country. Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, and Indiana produce billions of bushels of corn annually, and while most of that is field corn destined for livestock feed and ethanol, the sweet corn varieties grown for eating are a source of intense regional pr...*



Breads & Baked Goods

6 RECIPES

Banana Bread

MIDWEST US

"A sweet, moist, and wonderfully fragrant quick bread, Banana Bread is a comforting staple in Midwestern homes, cherished for its simplicity and ability to turn overripe bananas into a delicious treat."

PREP
15 minCOOK
50 minSERVES
8-10MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp baking soda

½ tsp salt

1 tsp ground cinnamon (optional)

½ cup (113g) unsalted butter, melted

1 cup (200g) granulated sugar

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

1 tsp vanilla extract

3 very ripe medium bananas, mashed
(about 1 cup)Optional: ½ cup chopped walnuts or
pecans, ½ cup chocolate chips

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INSTRUCTIONS

- **Preheat Oven & Prepare Pan:** Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease and flour a 9x5 inch (23x13 cm) loaf pan, or line with parchment paper.
- **Combine Dry Ingredients:** In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon (if using).
- **Combine Wet Ingredients:** In a large bowl, whisk together the melted butter and granulated sugar until well combined. Stir in the lightly beaten eggs and vanilla extract.
- **Add Bananas:** Add the mashed bananas to the wet ingredients and mix until just combined.
- **Combine All:** Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients, mixing with a wooden spoon or spatula until just combined. Be careful not to overmix; a few lumps are fine. If using, gently fold in the chopped nuts or chocolate chips.
- **Pour & Bake:** Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan, spreading it evenly.
- **Bake:** Bake for 50-60 minutes, or until a wooden skewer or toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. If the top starts to brown too quickly, you can loosely tent it with aluminum foil.
- **Cool & Serve:** Let the banana bread cool in the pan for 10-15 minutes before inverting it onto a wire rack to cool completely. Slice and serve warm or at room temperature.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Carol always added a tiny splash of orange juice (about 2 tablespoons) to her banana bread batter. 'It just brightens up the banana flavor,' she'd insist, 'and makes it taste extra fresh, like a little bit of sunshine!'"

Did You Know? > Banana bread became widely popular in the United States during the 1930s, especially with the rise of baking powder and baking soda, making quick breads easier to prepare. In the Midwest, it quickly became a household staple, a practical and delicious way to use up overripe bananas. It's a comfort...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A quiet morning with a cup of coffee, an afternoon snack with a glass of milk, and the sweet nostalgia of childhood memories.

Beer Bread

WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN, ACROSS THE MIDWEST — WHEREVER THERE'S A SPARE BEER

"Three cups of flour, a can of beer, and about fifteen minutes of actual effort produce a dense, golden, slightly boozy loaf with a buttery crust that shatters when you tear into it. It's the bread equivalent of showing up to a party in jeans and still being the best-dressed person there."



PREP

5 min

COOK

—

SERVES

1

MIDWEST NICE

★★★★

INGREDIENTS

3 cups all-purpose flour

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Preheat.** Crank your oven to 375°F. Grease a standard 9 × 5-inch loaf pan generously with butter or cooking spray.
2. **Mix the dry.** In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.
3. **Add the beer.** Pour in the beer and stir with a wooden spoon until just combined. The batter will be thick, shaggy, and slightly lumpy. It

1 can or bottle (12 ounces) beer, at room temperature (see notes on beer choice)

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

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should look like it's not quite ready. It is. Don't overmix. The carbonation in the beer is doing the leavening work — don't knock all the bubbles out.

4. **Pan it.** Scrape the batter into the prepared loaf pan and spread it roughly even. It doesn't need to be pretty. Pour the melted butter over the top of the batter, letting it pool around the edges.
5. **Bake.** Bake for 50–55 minutes, until the top is deeply golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. The butter will have created a shatteringly crispy, golden crust on top.
6. **Cool briefly and devour.** Let the bread cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then turn it out onto a cutting board. Slice thick. Eat warm with more butter. Reflect on how something this easy has no right to be this good.

Did You Know? > Beer bread's popularity in the Midwest tracks perfectly with two regional obsessions: beer and not making things complicated. The recipe likely evolved from quick bread traditions (baking powder breads that don't require yeast or rising time) and got its boozy twist sometime in the mid-20th century...

Pairs well with: The rest of the six-pack that donated the one beer to the bread, a Packers game, and the quiet satisfaction of telling everyone you "baked bread from scratch" without mentioning it took five minutes.

Cinnamon Rolls with Cream Cheese Frosting

□ ACROSS THE MIDWEST — CHURCH BASEMENTS TO FARM KITCHENS

"Soft, pillow-y spirals of enriched dough layered with a sinful amount of cinnamon-sugar butter, baked until golden and gooey, then drowned in a thick cream cheese frosting that melts into every crevice. The smell alone could sell a house. The taste could end a feud."



PREP
30 min

COOK
—

SERVES
12

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Bloom the yeast.** In a large bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the warm milk, yeast, and a pinch of the sugar. Let it sit for 5–

8 minutes until it's foamy and smells yeasty. If nothing happens, your yeast is dead — start over with a fresh packet.

2. **Make the dough.** Add the remaining sugar, melted butter, eggs, and vanilla to the yeast mixture. Stir to combine. Add 4 cups of the flour and the salt. Mix with a dough hook on low speed (or by hand with a wooden spoon) until a shaggy dough forms. Increase to medium speed and knead for 6–8 minutes, adding the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour a tablespoon at a time if the dough is too sticky. You want a dough that's soft and slightly tacky but pulls away from the sides of the bowl.
3. **First rise.** Shape the dough into a ball, place it in a greased bowl, cover with plastic wrap or a clean towel, and let rise in a warm spot until doubled in size, about 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours.
4. **Roll and fill.** Punch down the dough. On a lightly floured surface, roll it out into a rectangle roughly 16 × 12 inches. Spread the softened butter evenly over the entire surface, leaving a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch border at the far edge. Mix the brown sugar, cinnamon, and pinch of salt together, then sprinkle evenly over the butter. Press it in gently with your hands.
5. **Roll it up.** Starting from the long edge closest to you, roll the dough into a tight log. Pinch the seam closed. Using a sharp knife or unflavored dental floss (seriously — it works perfectly), cut the log into 12 equal pieces.
6. **Second rise.** Place the rolls cut-side up in a greased 9 × 13-inch baking pan. Cover and let rise for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the rolls are puffy and touching each other.
7. **Bake.** Preheat your oven to 350°F. Bake the rolls for 22–28 minutes, until the tops are golden brown and the centers are cooked through. Don't overbake — slightly underdone is better than dry.
8. **Frost immediately.** While the rolls bake, beat together the cream cheese, butter, powdered sugar, vanilla, and salt until smooth and fluffy. The moment the rolls come out of the oven, spread the frosting generously over the hot rolls. Watch it melt into the crevices. Try not to eat the entire pan.

Did You Know? > *The Midwest's love affair with cinnamon rolls runs deep — so deep that in many parts of Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, cinnamon rolls are served *as a side dish with chili.* Not dessert. A side. The combination sounds unhinged until you try it: the sweetness of the roll cuts the heat and tomato acid...*

Pairs well with: A Saturday morning with nowhere to be, terrible local news playing in the background, and a mug of gas station coffee that somehow tastes perfect.

Dinner Rolls

MIDWEST US

"Soft, fluffy, and utterly irresistible, these homemade dinner rolls are a warm and welcoming addition to any Midwestern meal, a true symbol of comfort and hospitality."

PREP
20 min

COOK
15 min

SERVES
12-16

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1 cup (240ml) warm milk (105-115°F / 40-46°C)

2 ¼ tsp active dry yeast (1 standard packet)

2 tbsp (25g) granulated sugar

1 large egg, lightly beaten

¼ cup (56g) unsalted butter, melted and cooled, plus more for brushing

1 tsp salt

3 to 3 ½ cups (360-420g) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Activate Yeast:** In a large bowl, combine the warm milk and granulated sugar. Sprinkle the active dry yeast over the top and let sit for 5-10 minutes, or until foamy.
2. **Combine Wet Ingredients:** Stir in the lightly beaten egg, melted butter, and salt into the yeast mixture.
3. **Add Flour:** Gradually add 3 cups of flour, mixing with a wooden spoon or dough hook until a shaggy dough forms. If the dough is too sticky, add more flour, a tablespoon at a time, until it pulls away from the sides of the bowl.
4. **Knead Dough:** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 5-7 minutes until it's smooth and elastic. Alternatively, knead with a stand mixer for 3-5 minutes.
5. **First Rise:** Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, turning once to coat. Cover with plastic wrap or a clean kitchen towel and let rise in a warm place for 1 to 1.5 hours, or until doubled in size.
6. **Shape Rolls:** Gently punch down the dough and turn it out onto a lightly floured surface. Divide the dough into 12-16 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a smooth ball.
7. **Second Rise:** Arrange the shaped rolls in a lightly greased 9x13 inch (23x33 cm) baking dish, leaving a small space between them. Cover again and let rise for another 30-45 minutes, or until puffy.
8. **Preheat Oven:** While the rolls are on their second rise, preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C).
9. **Bake:** Bake for 15-20 minutes, or until the tops are golden brown.
10. **Butter & Serve:** Immediately after removing from the oven, brush the tops of the hot rolls with a little melted butter. Serve warm.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Lucille always brushed her hot rolls with a little melted butter *and* a sprinkle of garlic powder right after they came out of the oven. 'It's my little secret for that extra special flavor,' she'd wink, 'makes everyone reach for a second one!'"

Did You Know? > *Homemade dinner rolls are a testament to the enduring tradition of home baking in the Midwest. Often seen as a foundational element of any holiday feast, Sunday dinner, or potluck, these soft, yeasty rolls symbolize warmth, nourishment, and communal gathering. The act of making and sharing fresh b...*

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A festive holiday meal, a comforting Sunday dinner with the family, and the satisfying feeling of a well-loved kitchen.

Lefse

MINNESOTA & THE DAKOTAS — SCANDINAVIAN HERITAGE COUNTRY

"Paper-thin rounds of tender potato flatbread, rolled out on a cloth-covered board with a grooved rolling pin by someone who learned from someone who learned from someone who came over on a boat from Norway. Spread with butter and sugar, rolled up, and eaten with the quiet reverence of a people who don't believe in showing off — but absolutely will if you get the lefse wrong."



PREP
30 minCOOK
2 minSERVES
16–20MIDWEST NICE
INGREDIENTS

5 pounds russet potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup heavy cream

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

1 teaspoon salt

2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Cook the potatoes.** Boil the potatoes in salted water until very tender, about 20 minutes. Drain thoroughly — and this is critical — let them dry in the pot over low heat for a minute or two, shaking occasionally. Excess moisture is the enemy of lefse.
2. **Rice the potatoes.** Pass the hot potatoes through a potato ricer or food mill. Do not mash them with a masher or — heaven forbid — a food processor. You need perfectly smooth, lump-free potatoes, and a ricer is the only way.
3. **Add the richness.** While the potatoes are still hot, stir in the butter, heavy cream, sugar, and salt until everything is melted and incorporated. Spread the mixture on a sheet pan and let it cool, then refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight. Cold potatoes are essential — warm potatoes will make sticky, unworkable dough and you will want to throw things.
4. **Make the dough.** Add 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour to the cold potato mixture and mix gently until a soft dough forms. Add more flour a tablespoon at a time only if needed. The dough should be soft and pliable but not sticky. Less flour = more tender lefse. Resist the urge to add too much.
5. **Divide.** Portion the dough into golf ball-sized rounds (about 2 tablespoons each). Keep them covered so they don't dry out.
6. **Roll.** On a well-floured surface (many use a cloth-covered board and a cloth-covered grooved rolling pin — the traditional tools), roll each ball into a paper-thin round, about 10–12 inches in diameter. Rotate frequently and add flour as needed to prevent sticking. The thinner, the better. You should almost be able to see through it.
7. **Cook.** Heat an ungreased griddle or large flat skillet to about 400°F (if your griddle has a thermometer) or medium-high heat. Carefully transfer the lefse round to the griddle — a lefse turning stick (a long, flat wooden stick) is traditional and genuinely helpful. Cook for about 60–90 seconds per side, until brown spots appear. The lefse should bubble slightly and look dry on the surface before flipping.
8. **Stack and cover.** As each round is cooked, stack them between clean kitchen towels. This keeps them soft and pliable. Cover the whole stack with a towel.

9. **Serve.** Spread each round with soft butter, sprinkle with sugar, roll up or fold into quarters, and eat while making meaningful eye contact with your Scandinavian ancestors.

Did You Know? > *Lefse came to the Upper Midwest with the massive wave of Norwegian immigration in the late 19th century. In Norway, it was peasant food — a simple potato flatbread born from a cold climate where wheat was scarce and potatoes were plentiful. In Minnesota and the Dakotas, it became something closer ...*

Pairs well with: A church basement in December, the lingering scent of lutefisk you're pretending not to notice, your Norwegian grandmother's silent judgment of your rolling technique, and approximately fourteen cousins arguing about whose lefse is better.

Skillet Cornbread

MISSOURI, KANSAS, IOWA — WHERE THE CORN BELT MEETS THE CAST IRON

"Golden, craggy, and crusty on the bottom from a screaming-hot cast iron skillet, with a tender crumb that's just barely sweet enough to remind you it's not a brick. This is cornbread the way it's supposed to be made — in a pan your great-grandmother seasoned with fifty years of bacon grease."





PREP
10 min

COOK
20 min

SERVES
8

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups yellow cornmeal (stone-ground if you can get it)

¾ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons granulated sugar (see note below — this is where wars start)

1 tablespoon baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

¾ teaspoon salt

1 cup buttermilk

½ cup whole milk

2 large eggs

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 2 tablespoons for the skillet

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Preheat and prep.** Place your 10-inch cast iron skillet in the oven and preheat to 425°F. The skillet needs to be ripping hot — this is what creates the legendary crust.
2. **Mix the dry.** In a large bowl, whisk together the cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. **Mix the wet.** In a separate bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, whole milk, eggs, and 4 tablespoons of melted butter.
4. **Combine.** Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and stir until just combined. A few lumps are fine. Do not overmix — overmixed cornbread is tough cornbread, and tough cornbread is a crime.
5. **Hot skillet magic.** Carefully remove the screaming-hot skillet from the oven. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter and swirl to coat the bottom and sides. The butter should sizzle and foam immediately. Pour the batter into the skillet — it should hiss and spit. This is the sound of a perfect crust forming.
6. **Bake.** Return the skillet to the oven and bake for 20–25 minutes, until the top is golden and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. The edges should be deeply golden and slightly pulled away from the sides.
7. **Serve.** Let it cool in the skillet for 5 minutes. Cut into wedges and serve warm with butter, honey, or just your hands if nobody's looking.

Did You Know? > Cornbread is one of the oldest American foods, predating European colonization — Native Americans were making corn-based breads for thousands of years before anyone thought to argue about sugar in the batter. The Midwest's relationship with

cornbread is practical: corn grows everywhere here, and w...

Pairs well with: A bowl of chili that's been simmering since noon, the sound of a screen door slamming, and the eternal argument about whether cornbread should be sweet or savory (it should be both, and this hill is worth dying on).



Desserts

11 RECIPES

Bread Pudding with Bourbon Sauce

MISSOURI, US

"A decadent and comforting dessert, Bread Pudding with Bourbon Sauce transforms stale bread into a rich, custardy treat, elevated by a sweet, boozy sauce—a beloved staple, especially in regions with a taste for Southern-influenced comforts like Missouri."

PREP
20 minCOOK
45 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE


INGREDIENTS

6 cups (about 1 lb / 450g) stale day-old bread, cut into 1-inch cubes (brioche, challah, or French bread recommended)

4 large eggs

2 cups (480ml) whole milk

1 cup (240ml) heavy cream

1 cup (200g) granulated sugar

1 tbsp vanilla extract

1 tsp ground cinnamon

½ tsp ground nutmeg

¼ tsp salt

Optional: ½ cup raisins or dried cranberries

½ cup (113g) unsalted butter

½ cup (100g) granulated sugar

¼ cup (60ml) bourbon

2 tbsp (30ml) heavy cream

1 tsp vanilla extract

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INSTRUCTIONS

- **Prepare Baking Dish:** Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Lightly grease a 9x13 inch (23x33 cm) baking dish.
- **Arrange Bread:** Scatter the bread cubes evenly in the prepared baking dish. If using, sprinkle the raisins or dried cranberries over the bread.
- **Make Custard:** In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, heavy cream, granulated sugar, vanilla extract, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt until well combined.
- **Pour Custard Over Bread:** Pour the custard mixture evenly over the bread cubes, making sure all the bread is moistened. Gently press down on the bread with a spoon to ensure it soaks up the custard. Let sit for 10-15 minutes.
- **Bake:** Bake for 45-55 minutes, or until the pudding is set, golden brown on top, and a knife inserted into the center comes out mostly clean.
- **Make Bourbon Sauce:** While the pudding bakes, prepare the sauce. In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Stir in the granulated sugar and cook, stirring constantly, until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is smooth.
- **Add Bourbon & Cream:** Carefully remove from heat and slowly whisk in the bourbon, heavy cream, and vanilla extract. Return to low heat and simmer gently for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly, until slightly thickened. Be careful not to boil.
- **Serve:** Let the bread pudding cool for a few minutes before serving. Cut into squares and generously drizzle with the warm bourbon sauce. Serve immediately.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Lucille always soaked her raisins (or cranberries!) in a little extra bourbon for about 30 minutes before adding them to the pudding. 'It plumps them up just right,' she'd declare with a wink, 'and adds a little extra zing that makes this pudding truly special!'"

Did You Know? > Bread pudding, with its origins in frugality and resourcefulness, became a beloved dessert across many parts of America, including the Midwest, especially in states like Missouri that share culinary ties with Southern traditions. It's a testament to transforming simple, everyday ingredients (like ...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A cozy holiday dinner, a special occasion with loved ones, and the comforting feeling of indulging in a truly satisfying sweet treat.

Buckeye Candies

OHIO

"Creamy peanut butter balls partially dipped in dark chocolate to resemble the nut of the Ohio buckeye tree — these no-bake confections are Ohio's sweetest obsession, a fixture at every holiday party, game day spread, and care package sent from home."



PREP
30 minCOOK
10 minSERVES
48MIDWEST NICE
Ohio

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the peanut butter filling.** In a large bowl, beat the peanut butter, butter, vanilla, and salt with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth and creamy, about 2 minutes. Gradually add the powdered sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup at a time, mixing on low until fully incorporated. The dough should be thick, smooth, and hold its shape when rolled.
2. **Roll the balls.** Using a tablespoon or small cookie scoop, portion the dough and roll into 1-inch balls between your palms. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. You should get about 48 balls.
3. **Chill.** Place the baking sheet in the freezer for at least 1 hour, or the refrigerator for 2 hours, until the balls are firm. This is essential — soft balls will fall apart during dipping.
4. **Melt the chocolate.** In a microwave-safe bowl, combine the chocolate chips and shortening. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring between each, until completely smooth (usually 3–4 rounds). Alternatively, melt in a double boiler over barely simmering water, stirring constantly.
5. **Dip the buckeyes.** Remove a few balls from the freezer at a time (keep the rest cold). Insert a toothpick into the top of a ball. Dip it into the melted chocolate about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way, leaving a circle of peanut butter visible at the top — this is what makes it look like a buckeye nut. Let the excess chocolate drip off for a moment.
6. **Set the buckeyes.** Place each dipped candy back on the parchment-lined sheet. Once the chocolate starts to set, gently twist out the toothpick and smooth the hole with your fingertip or the back of a spoon.
7. **Chill to set.** Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes until the chocolate is completely firm and set.
8. **Store and serve.** Keep buckeyes in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks, or freeze for up to 3 months. Serve slightly chilled.

Did You Know? > Ohio is "The Buckeye State," named for the prevalence of buckeye trees (**Aesculus glabra**) with their distinctive nuts — dark brown with a lighter tan circle on top. Real buckeye nuts are actually toxic to humans, but these candy versions are anything but. Buckeye candies are practically a state r...

Classic Apple Pie (with Optional Cheddar Crust)

ACROSS THE MIDWEST

"The definitive American dessert, perfected in the Midwest where the apples actually grow. A flaky, all-butter crust filled with cinnamon-spiced apples, baked until golden and bubbling. And for the bold: a sharp cheddar cheese crust that sounds wrong until you try it and realize it's the best thing that ever happened to a pie."



PREP
40 min

COOK
50 min

SERVES
8

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the crust:** Whisk flour, salt, and sugar (and cheddar if using). Cut in cold butter using a pastry cutter or your fingers until mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some pea-sized butter pieces remaining. Add ice water 1 tablespoon at a time, mixing until dough

just holds together. Divide in half, flatten into discs, wrap in plastic, refrigerate 1 hour.

2. **Prepare filling:** Peel, core, and slice apples $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick. Toss with sugar, flour, cornstarch, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, lemon juice, and vanilla. Let sit 15 minutes.
3. **Assemble:** Roll one dough disc into a 12-inch circle. Fit into a 9-inch pie plate. Pour in apple filling, mounding slightly in the center. Dot with butter pieces.
4. **Top crust:** Roll second disc into a 12-inch circle. Place over filling. Trim, fold edges under, and crimp decoratively. Cut 4–5 slits for steam vents.
5. **Egg wash:** Brush top crust with egg wash. Sprinkle with coarse sugar.
6. **Bake:** Place pie on a baking sheet (to catch drips). Bake at 425°F for 15 minutes, then reduce to 375°F and bake 35–45 minutes more until crust is deep golden and juices are bubbling through the vents.
7. **Cool** at least 2 hours before slicing. (The filling needs time to set.)

Did You Know? Michigan is the third-largest apple-producing state in the US, and the Midwest's apple orchards — stretching from Michigan through Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois — produce dozens of heritage varieties perfect for pie. The tradition of serving apple pie with cheddar cheese dates back to at ...

Frosted Sugar Cookies

ACROSS THE MIDWEST — EVERY KITCHEN WITH A COOKIE SHEET AND A DREAM

"Thick, soft, pillow-y sugar cookies with slightly crisp edges, topped with a smooth layer of sweet buttercream frosting in whatever color matches the nearest holiday. These aren't crispy sugar cookies. These aren't thin. These are the impossibly soft, cakey, frosted sugar cookies from the bakery at your small-town grocery store — the ones in the clear plastic clamshell that you pretend you're buying for the kids."





PREP
20 min

COOK
—

SERVES
24

MIDWEST NICE

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Cream the butter and sugar.** In a large bowl or stand mixer, beat the softened butter and sugar together on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the sides.
2. **Add the eggs and extracts.** Beat in the eggs one at a time, then add the vanilla and almond extracts. Mix in the sour cream until combined.
3. **Add the dry ingredients.** In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients in three additions, mixing on low speed until just combined after each. The dough will be soft and slightly sticky.
4. **Chill.** Cover the dough and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (or up to overnight). Cold dough spreads less, which means thicker, puffier cookies.
5. **Shape.** Preheat your oven to 350°F. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Scoop the dough into 2-tablespoon balls (a cookie scoop is your friend) and place 2 inches apart on the baking sheets. Flatten each ball slightly with the bottom of a glass or your palm — you want them about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick.
6. **Bake.** Bake for 10–12 minutes, until the edges are barely set and the tops still look slightly underdone. They will NOT look done. Remove them anyway. They'll continue cooking on the hot pan. Overbaked sugar cookies are dry sugar cookies, and dry sugar cookies are a tragedy.
7. **Cool completely.** Let the cookies cool on the pan for 5 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely before frosting. This is the hardest step. Be patient.

8. **Make the frosting.** Beat the softened butter until smooth. Gradually add the powdered sugar, alternating with the cream, beating on medium speed until light, fluffy, and spreadable. Add vanilla and salt. Tint with food coloring if desired.
9. **Frost and decorate.** Spread a thick layer of frosting on each cookie with a butter knife or offset spatula. Add sprinkles immediately before the frosting sets. Admire your work. Eat one as quality control.

Did You Know? > *The soft, thick, frosted sugar cookie — distinct from the thin, crispy European-style sugar cookie — is an American invention that reached its peak form in the Midwest. The style traces back to the Pennsylvania Dutch "Nazareth sugar cookie" of the 18th century, but the modern soft-and-frosted vers...*

Pairs well with: A kindergarten Valentine's Day party, a Christmas cookie exchange where yours are the first to disappear, a cup of coffee while standing in the kitchen pretending you're not about to eat a fourth cookie, and the realization that the grocery store version was always just trying to be this.

German Chocolate Cake

■ MIDWEST — CHURCH SUPPERS & BIRTHDAY TABLES

"Three layers of tender chocolate cake slathered in a decadent coconut-pecan frosting that's cooked on the stovetop until thick and caramelized — this isn't actually German at all, but it's been the Midwest's most requested birthday cake for over sixty years."



PREP
30 minCOOK
30 minSERVES
12–16MIDWEST NICE
□□□○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

Did You Know? > Despite its name, German Chocolate Cake has nothing to do with Germany. It's named after Sam German, an American chocolatier who developed a mild, sweet baking chocolate for the Baker's Chocolate Company in 1852. The cake recipe was created more than a century later, in 1957, when a Dallas homemak...

Iowa State Fair Funnel Cake

IOWA — THE STATE FAIR

"Ribbons of golden batter swirled into hot oil, fried until impossibly crispy, and buried under a blizzard of powdered sugar — funnel cake is the edible symbol of every Midwestern state fair, the one indulgence that makes standing in line completely worth it."



PREP
10 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
6MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the batter.** In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs, milk, and vanilla. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and whisk until smooth — the batter should be pourable but not thin (similar to pancake batter).
2. **Heat the oil.** Pour oil to a depth of about 2 inches in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven. Heat to 375°F. Use a thermometer — temperature control is crucial for crispy funnel cake.
3. **Pour the batter.** Transfer batter to a funnel, squeeze bottle, or large zip-top bag with a corner snipped (about ½-inch opening). Holding the funnel over the oil, pour the batter in a steady stream, moving in circles and crisscrossing patterns to create a lacy, interconnected web about 6–7 inches across.
4. **Fry.** Cook for 1–2 minutes per side until golden brown. Use tongs or a spider strainer to carefully flip once. The funnel cake should be deeply golden and crispy.
5. **Drain.** Remove from the oil and drain on a wire rack set over a sheet pan (or paper towels in a pinch).
6. **Sugar it immediately.** While still hot, dust liberally — no, obscenely — with powdered sugar. The heat should melt the first layer, so add more.
7. **Serve immediately.** Funnel cake is best eaten within minutes of frying, standing up, with powdered sugar on your shirt. Add whipped cream, chocolate sauce, or fresh berries if desired.

Did You Know? > *The Iowa State Fair — held every August in Des Moines — is one of the oldest and largest agricultural fairs in the country, and food is its beating heart. The Fair is famous for putting virtually everything "on a stick," but funnel cake reigns as the queen of the midway. The treat's origins trace ...*

Michigan Cherry Pie

MICHIGAN, US

"A quintessential Midwestern dessert, this pie celebrates Michigan's abundant tart cherries in a sweet-tart filling, encased in a flaky, golden crust—a taste of summer's bounty."

PREP
30 minCOOK
50 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ½ cups (300g) all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup (226g) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
- ½ cup (120ml) ice water, plus more if needed
- 6 cups (about 2 lbs / 900g) fresh or frozen tart cherries, pitted (do not thaw if frozen)
- 1 cup (200g) granulated sugar (adjust to cherry tartness)
- ¼ cup (30g) all-purpose flour or 3 tbsp cornstarch (for thickening)
- 1 tbsp lemon juice (freshly squeezed)
- ½ tsp almond extract (optional, enhances cherry flavor)
- 2 tbsp (28g) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tbsp water
- 1 tbsp granulated sugar (for sprinkling)
-

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Make Pie Crust:**** In a large bowl, whisk together flour and salt. Cut in cold butter with a pastry blender or your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some pea-sized butter pieces. Gradually add ice water, 1 tablespoon at a time, mixing until dough just comes together. Do not overmix. Divide dough in half, flatten into discs, wrap in plastic, and chill for at least 30 minutes.
2. ****Prepare Cherries:**** In a large bowl, combine pitted cherries, granulated sugar, flour (or cornstarch), and lemon juice. If using, add almond extract. Stir gently to combine.
3. ****Roll Out Crusts:**** On a lightly floured surface, roll out one disc of dough into a 12-inch (30 cm) circle. Carefully transfer to a 9-inch (23 cm) pie plate. Trim edges, leaving about ½-inch overhang.
4. ****Add Filling:**** Pour the cherry filling into the pie crust. Dot the top of the filling with the small pieces of butter.
5. ****Top Crust:**** Roll out the second disc of dough. Place over the filling, or cut into strips to create a lattice top. Trim and crimp the edges of both crusts together to seal.
6. ****Vent & Egg Wash (Optional):**** Cut a few slits in the top crust (if not making lattice) to allow steam to escape. If desired, whisk together egg and water for an egg wash, brush over the top crust, and sprinkle with granulated sugar.
7. ****Bake:**** Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C). Place pie on a baking sheet (to catch any drips). Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375°F (190°C) and continue baking for 35-45 minutes more, or until the crust is golden brown and the filling is bubbling. If the crust browns too quickly, loosely tent with foil.
8. ****Cool & Serve:**** Transfer pie to a wire rack and let cool completely for at least 3-4 hours before slicing and serving. This is crucial for the

filling to set properly. Serve at room temperature, perhaps with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Dorothy always added a tiny pinch of cinnamon (about $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon!) to her cherry filling. 'It just adds a little warmth and depth to the cherries,' she'd wink, 'makes it taste extra special, like a hug in every bite!'"

Did You Know? > Michigan proudly holds the title of the "Cherry Capital of the World," especially for its tart Montmorency cherries, primarily grown in the Traverse City region. Cherry pie is more than just a dessert here; it's a culinary emblem, deeply tied to the state's agricultural heritage and summer festiva...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A warm summer evening on the porch, a scoop of homemade vanilla ice cream, and stories of cherry-picking in Traverse City.

Rhubarb Crisp with Oat Topping

MINNESOTA, IOWA, WISCONSIN — ANYWHERE THE RHUBARB PATCH SURVIVED ANOTHER WINTER

"Tart, ruby-red rhubarb baked under a thick blanket of buttery, brown-sugary oat crumble until the fruit is bubbling and jammy and the topping is shatteringly crisp at the edges, chewy in the middle. Served warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream that melts into a pool of sweet cream rivers between the craggy peaks of oat topping. This is what the rhubarb was growing for."



PREP
15 min

COOK
—

SERVES
8

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Preheat.** Set your oven to 375°F. Butter a 9 × 9-inch baking dish (or an 8 × 11 for a thinner, crispier version).

2. **Make the filling.** In a large bowl, toss the rhubarb pieces with the sugar, flour, cornstarch, vanilla, and orange zest. Let it sit for 10 minutes while you make the topping — the sugar will start pulling juice from the rhubarb, which is exactly what you want.
3. **Make the topping.** In a separate bowl, combine the oats, flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Add the cold butter cubes and work them in with your fingers (or a pastry blender) until the mixture resembles coarse, clumpy crumbles — some pea-sized butter pieces remaining is good. They'll melt in the oven and create pockets of buttery crunch.
4. **Assemble.** Pour the rhubarb filling into the prepared baking dish, spreading evenly. Scatter the oat topping over the rhubarb in thick, uneven clumps. Don't press it down — you want air and texture, not a flat lid.
5. **Bake.** Bake for 40–45 minutes, until the topping is golden brown and crispy and the rhubarb filling is visibly bubbling around the edges. If the topping is browning too quickly, tent loosely with foil for the last 10 minutes.
6. **Rest and serve.** Let the crisp cool for at least 10 minutes (the filling will be volcanic). Serve warm with a generous scoop of vanilla ice cream. Watch the ice cream melt into the hot fruit. Experience joy.

Did You Know? > Rhubarb is technically a vegetable, but in 1947 a U.S. customs court in Buffalo, New York, classified it as a fruit because it's used primarily as a fruit in the United States. This was a tax decision (fruits had lower tariffs), and it's the kind of pragmatic compromise the Midwest respects. Rhuba...

Pairs well with: A porch swing, the long light of a June evening, a scoop of ice cream that was on sale at Hy-Vee, and the annual threat to rip out the rhubarb patch that absolutely no one will ever follow through on.

Scotcheroos

IOWA & MINNESOTA — STATE FAIR COUNTRY

"Chewy, peanut-buttery Rice Krispie bars topped with a thick, glossy layer of melted butterscotch and chocolate chips that sets into a satisfying snap. Imagine a Rice Krispie Treat went to finishing school and came back dangerous. One pan yields enough to feed a church basement, a school bake sale, or your own secret midnight cravings for a week."





Sally's Baking Addiction

PREP
15 min

COOK
—

SERVES
24

MIDWEST NICE

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prep the pan.** Lightly grease a 9 × 13-inch baking pan with butter or cooking spray. Line with parchment paper for easy removal if you're feeling fancy.
2. **Cook the sugar mixture.** In a large saucepan over medium heat, combine the sugar and corn syrup. Stir constantly until the mixture comes to a rolling boil and the sugar is fully dissolved. Remove from heat immediately — do not overcook or it will harden.
3. **Add the peanut butter.** Stir the peanut butter into the hot sugar mixture until completely smooth and combined.
4. **Add the cereal.** Pour in the Rice Krispies and fold gently with a rubber spatula until every piece is coated. Work quickly — the mixture starts to set as it cools.
5. **Press into the pan.** Transfer the mixture to the prepared pan and press it into an even layer. Use the back of a greased spatula or a piece of wax paper to press firmly — you want it compact enough to hold together but not so dense it loses its crunch.
6. **Make the topping.** In a microwave-safe bowl, combine the butterscotch chips and chocolate chips. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring between each, until completely smooth and melted (about 90 seconds total). Alternatively, melt in a double boiler over simmering water.
7. **Top and set.** Pour the melted butterscotch-chocolate mixture over the cereal base and spread into an even layer with an offset spatula. Let it set at room temperature for about 30 minutes, or refrigerate for 15 minutes if you're impatient.

8. **Cut and serve.** Once the topping is set (firm to the touch but still slightly yielding), cut into bars. Smaller bars are sensible. Larger bars are correct.

Did You Know? > Scotcheroos first appeared on the back of a Kellogg's Rice Krispies cereal box in the 1960s, and their rise to Midwest fame was swift and permanent. The recipe is so popular in Iowa that it's essentially the unofficial state dessert — they appear at every church potluck, school function, and offic...

Pairs well with: A Ziploc bag in your car's glove compartment, a 4-H meeting, the Iowa State Fair at 2 PM when you need fuel for the butter cow, and a glass of ice-cold milk consumed standing at the kitchen counter at 11 PM.

Snickerdoodles

MIDWEST US

"A classic for a reason, Snickerdoodles are soft, chewy cookies with a signature crackled top, generously coated in a sweet and spicy cinnamon-sugar mixture—a comforting taste of home in every bite."

PREP
15 minCOOK
8 minSERVES
2-3MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp cream of tartar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 cup (226g) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 ½ cups (300g) granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ¼ cup (50g) granulated sugar
- 2 tbsp ground cinnamon
-

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Whisk Dry Ingredients:** In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, cream of tartar, baking soda, and salt. Set aside.
2. **Cream Butter & Sugar:** In a large bowl, using an electric mixer, cream together the softened butter and 1 ½ cups granulated sugar until light and fluffy, about 2-3 minutes.
3. **Add Eggs & Vanilla:** Beat in the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Stir in the vanilla extract.
4. **Combine Wet & Dry:** Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients, mixing on low speed until just combined. Do not overmix. The dough will be soft.
5. **Chill Dough:** Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and chill the dough in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes. This helps prevent the cookies from spreading too much.
6. **Preheat Oven & Prepare Coating:** Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C). In a small shallow dish, combine ¼ cup granulated sugar and 2 tbsp ground cinnamon for the coating.
7. **Shape & Coat Cookies:** Scoop rounded tablespoons of dough and roll them into balls. Roll each dough ball generously in the cinnamon-sugar mixture, ensuring it's fully coated.
8. **Bake:** Place the coated dough balls 2 inches apart on ungreased baking sheets. Bake for 8-10 minutes, or until the edges are set and lightly golden, but the centers are still soft and slightly puffy. The tops will have characteristic crackles.
9. **Cool:** Remove cookies from the oven and let them cool on the baking sheets for 2-3 minutes before transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Marge always added a tiny pinch of cardamom (just an eighth of a teaspoon!) to her cinnamon-sugar coating. 'It just gives it that extra special something,' she'd whisper, 'a little warmth that makes everyone ask for my recipe, but they never quite guess what it is!'"

Did You Know? > Snickerdoodles are believed to have German or Dutch origins, possibly deriving from a German word like "Schnecken nudeln" (snail noodles), which refers to a sweet pastry. However, they became a distinctly American cookie, especially popular in New England and later, the Midwest. Their whimsical nam...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A snowy afternoon with a cup of hot cocoa, a school bake sale fundraiser, and the comforting sounds of a bustling kitchen during the holidays.

Sugar Cream Pie

INDIANA, US (HOOSIER PIE)

"A humble yet utterly delightful dessert, Indiana Sugar Cream Pie, often called "Hoosier Pie," features a silky, sweet vanilla-custard filling baked in a flaky crust—a true taste of rustic Midwestern comfort."

PREP
15 minCOOK
45 minSERVES
8MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1 (9-inch / 23 cm) unbaked pie crust (homemade or store-bought)

1 ½ cups (300g) granulated sugar

½ cup (60g) all-purpose flour

½ tsp ground nutmeg, plus more for sprinkling

2 cups (480ml) heavy cream or half-and-half (do not use milk)

¼ cup (56g) unsalted butter, melted

1 tsp vanilla extract

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INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat Oven & Prepare Crust:** Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C). Place the unbaked pie crust in a 9-inch (23 cm) pie plate.
- Whisk Dry Ingredients:** In a medium bowl, whisk together the granulated sugar, flour, and ½ tsp nutmeg until thoroughly combined. This helps prevent lumps in the filling.
- Combine Wet Ingredients:** In a separate medium bowl, whisk together the heavy cream (or half-and-half), melted butter, and vanilla extract.
- Form Filling:** Gradually whisk the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until smooth.
- Pour into Crust:** Pour the creamy filling into the unbaked pie crust.
- Bake:** Bake for 15 minutes at 400°F (200°C).
- Reduce Heat & Finish Baking:** Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (175°C) and continue baking for another 30-40 minutes, or until the edges are set but the center still has a slight jiggle. The pie will firm up as it cools. If the crust starts to brown too quickly, you can loosely tent it with aluminum foil.
- Cool & Serve:** Transfer the pie to a wire rack and let it cool completely for at least 3-4 hours before slicing and serving. This is crucial for the filling to set properly. Sprinkle with a little extra nutmeg just before serving, if desired.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Eleanor always added a tiny splash of bourbon (just a teaspoon!) to her cream filling before baking. 'It just deepens the vanilla and warms up the spices,' she'd whisper, 'a little something extra that makes it truly irresistible, bless its heart!'"

Did You Know? > *Sugar Cream Pie is Indiana's official state pie and a true culinary emblem of the Hoosier State. Originating with early Shaker and Quaker settlers, it was a practical "desperation pie" made with readily available pantry staples (sugar, cream, flour, spices) during times when fresh fruit was scarce...*

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A quiet afternoon on the porch, a cup of strong black coffee, and stories of simpler times and family traditions.



Snacks & Confections

3 RECIPES

Classic Popcorn Balls

ACROSS THE MIDWEST — HALLOWEEN, HARVEST FESTIVALS, AND SCHOOL CARNIVALS

"Freshly popped corn held together by a warm, sticky, buttery-sweet syrup and shaped by greased hands into big, crunchy, slightly unwieldy spheres. Popcorn balls are the original Midwestern snack — older than your grandma, simpler than your toaster, and guaranteed to pull out at least one filling if you've got dental work."



PREP
10 min

COOK
10 min

SERVES
12–15

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

12 cups freshly popped popcorn (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup unpopped kernels)
 1 cup granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup light corn syrup
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup ($\frac{1}{2}$ stick) unsalted butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon white vinegar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 --

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Pop the corn.** Pop your popcorn using whatever method you prefer — stovetop, air popper, or microwave (plain, not the buttered stuff). Remove all unpopped kernels — they are a tooth hazard and a lawsuit waiting to happen. Place the popped corn in a very large bowl, ideally the biggest one you own.
2. **Make the syrup.** In a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the sugar, corn syrup, water, butter, vinegar, and salt. Stir over medium heat until the sugar dissolves and the butter melts. Stop stirring once it comes to a boil. Let it boil, undisturbed, until a candy thermometer reads 250°F (hard-ball stage). This takes about 8–10 minutes. Watch it — syrup can go from perfect to burned in seconds.
3. **Add vanilla.** Remove the syrup from heat and carefully stir in the vanilla. It will bubble and steam. This is fine.
4. **Combine.** Pour the hot syrup over the popcorn and toss with a wooden spoon or rubber spatula, working quickly to coat as much popcorn as possible. Move fast — the syrup starts to set immediately.
5. **Shape.** As soon as the mixture is cool enough to handle (but still warm and pliable), grease your hands generously with butter or cooking spray. Grab a generous handful of the coated popcorn and press it firmly into a ball, roughly the size of a softball. Compact it enough to hold together but don't crush the popcorn. Set each ball on wax paper or parchment to cool.
6. **Cool and wrap.** Let the popcorn balls cool completely, about 15 minutes. Wrap individually in plastic wrap, wax paper, or cellophane for giving away. Or just leave them in a bowl and watch them disappear.

Did You Know? > Popcorn has deep Midwestern roots — quite literally. Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, and Nebraska are the top popcorn-producing states, and the Midwest grows the vast majority of the world's popcorn. The first commercial popcorn balls appeared in the late 1800s, when sugar syrup and popped corn came together...

Pairs well with: A hayride, a corn maze, the kind of crisp October evening where you can see your breath, and a mild but genuine concern about the structural integrity of your dental fillings.

Peanut Brittle

■ ACROSS THE MIDWEST — HOLIDAY TINS, GIFT BAGS, AND GRANDMA'S KITCHEN

"A thin, shattering sheet of amber-gold caramelized sugar studded with roasted peanuts, snapped into jagged, glassy shards that crack between your teeth with a sound that's half candy, half destruction. Peanut brittle is the candy that makes you feel like a chemist, tastes like a holiday, and sounds like you're chewing gravel — in the best possible way."



PREP
5 minCOOK
20 minSERVES
1MIDWEST NICE
★★★★**INGREDIENTS**

1½ cups granulated sugar

½ cup light corn syrup

¼ cup water

¼ teaspoon salt

1½ cups raw peanuts (skins on or off — your call)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prep your surface.** Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat and grease it lightly with butter. Have the butter, baking soda, and vanilla measured and ready by the stove. Once the sugar hits temperature, you'll have about 30 seconds to add everything — this is not the time to search for the baking soda.
2. **Cook the sugar.** In a large heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the sugar, corn syrup, water, and salt. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the sugar dissolves and the mixture begins to boil.
3. **Add the peanuts.** Once boiling, add the raw peanuts. Attach your candy thermometer and continue cooking, stirring frequently, until the mixture reaches 300°F (hard-crack stage). This takes 15–20 minutes. The mixture will go through stages — first foamy and white, then golden, then amber. The peanuts will darken and smell roasted. When it hits 300°F and the color is a warm amber-gold, move fast.
4. **The 30-second finish.** Remove from heat immediately. Working quickly, stir in the butter until melted, then add the baking soda and vanilla. The mixture will foam up dramatically and turn lighter and more opaque — this is the baking soda creating air bubbles, which is what makes the brittle light and crispy instead of dense and tooth-breaking.
5. **Pour and spread.** Immediately pour the mixture onto the prepared baking sheet. Using a greased spatula or the back of a greased wooden spoon, spread it as thin as possible. Work fast — it sets quickly. Thinner = crunchier and more elegant. Thicker = more rustic and chewy.
6. **Cool completely.** Let the brittle cool at room temperature for at least 30 minutes. It will harden as it cools. Once completely cool and

rigid, break it into irregular shards by hand or by gently whacking it with the handle of a knife.

7. **Store.** Keep in an airtight container at room temperature, with pieces separated by wax paper. Properly stored, peanut brittle keeps for 2–3 weeks. Package in tins for gifting.

Did You Know? > Peanut brittle is an American candy classic with murky origins — various legends attribute it to a Southern cook who accidentally added baking soda to taffy, a New England candy maker's experiment, or a Midwestern farm wife's adaptation of European nut confections. What's clear is that peanut brit...

Pairs well with: A Christmas tin that also contains fudge, peppermint bark, and those inexplicable ribbon candies nobody actually likes. The entire tin will be consumed by December 27th. The brittle will be gone first.

Puppy Chow (Muddy Buddies)

MIDWEST — EVERY KITCHEN, EVERY PARTY

"Chex cereal coated in melted chocolate and peanut butter, then tumbled in a blizzard of powdered sugar until every piece is a sweet, crunchy, impossibly addictive little cloud. Call it Puppy Chow or Muddy Buddies — just don't think you can eat only one handful."

PREP
10 minCOOK
5 minSERVES
12–16MIDWEST NICE
|||||

INGREDIENTS

- 9 cups Rice Chex cereal (or Corn Chex — or a mix of both)
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup creamy peanut butter
- ¼ cup unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1½ cups powdered sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Measure the cereal.** Pour 9 cups of Chex cereal into a very large bowl (the biggest you have — you need room to toss). Set aside.
2. **Melt the coating.** In a microwave-safe bowl, combine the chocolate chips, peanut butter, and butter. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring between each, until the mixture is completely smooth and glossy (usually about 90 seconds total). Stir in the vanilla extract.
3. **Coat the cereal.** Pour the warm chocolate-peanut butter mixture over the Chex cereal. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold and toss — be

--

thorough but gentle. You want every piece coated, but you don't want to crush the cereal into crumbs. Take your time.

4. **The powdered sugar step.** This is where the magic happens. Pour the powdered sugar into a large gallon-sized zip-top bag (or a large paper grocery bag for the truly old-school method). Add the coated cereal to the bag. Seal it up and shake, shake, shake until every single piece is covered in a thick white coat of powdered sugar. The more you shake, the better it gets.
5. **Cool and dry.** Spread the puppy chow out on a large sheet of wax paper or parchment in a single layer. Let it cool completely, about 15 minutes. The chocolate will set and the coating will firm up.
6. **Devour.** Transfer to a big bowl and serve. Try to share. We believe in you.

Did You Know? > Puppy Chow's origins are murky, but it emerged from Midwestern kitchens sometime in the 1970s or 1980s, likely as a creative use of the Chex cereal that was already a staple for Chex Mix (another Midwest party legend). The name "Puppy Chow" comes from the finished product's resemblance to Purina P...



Drinks

4 RECIPES

Homemade Lemonade

▪ MIDWEST — THE SUMMER PORCH REFRESHER

*"There's lemonade, and then there's *real* lemonade. Freshly squeezed lemons, just enough sweetness, and ice-cold refreshment that makes summer heat bearable. This is the drink of county fairs, backyard barbecues, and lazy afternoons on the porch swing."*

PREP
15 min

COOK
5 min

SERVES
8

MIDWEST NICE
|||||

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Make the simple syrup.** Combine sugar and 1 cup water in a small saucepan. Heat over medium heat, stirring, until sugar completely dissolves. Do not boil. Remove from heat and let cool for 10 minutes.
2. **Juice the lemons.** Roll lemons firmly on the counter with your palm to soften them — this releases more juice. Cut in half and squeeze, straining out seeds and pulp. You need 1½ cups of juice.
3. **Combine.** In a large pitcher, combine the simple syrup, fresh lemon juice, and 5 cups cold water. Stir well to mix.
4. **Taste and adjust.** This is the crucial step. Taste your lemonade. Too tart? Add more simple syrup (make extra if needed). Too sweet? Add more lemon juice or water. Everyone's sweet-tart balance is different.
5. **Chill.** Refrigerate for at least 1 hour until very cold. Lemonade tastes best ice-cold.
6. **Serve.** Fill glasses with ice. Pour lemonade over the ice. Garnish with a lemon slice and a sprig of fresh mint.

▪ **Did You Know?** > Lemonade has been a summer staple in America since the 1800s, but the Midwest made it an institution. County fairs across Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana became famous for their fresh-squeezed lemonade stands, often using giant wooden presses to juice lemons right in front of customers. The combinatio...

Homemade Root Beer

ACROSS THE MIDWEST — COUNTY FAIRS, FARM KITCHENS, AND AMBITIOUS BACKYARDS

"Dark, foamy, sassafras-sweet root beer made from scratch with extract, sugar, yeast, and a little patience — fizzy and sharp, with a depth of flavor that makes the commercial stuff taste like it's apologizing. Brewing root beer at home is the Midwestern science experiment that actually tastes good, and the fermenting bottles on the counter make your kitchen feel like a frontier general store."



PREP
15 min

COOK
—

SERVES
1

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1 gallon warm water (not hot — about 100°F)

1½ cups granulated sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Mix the sugar.** In a large pot or food-safe bucket, dissolve the sugar in about 2 cups of warm (not hot!) water, stirring until completely dissolved.

2 tablespoons root beer extract (Zatarain's or McCormick's — available at most grocery stores)

¼ teaspoon active dry yeast

2. **Add the extract.** Stir in the root beer extract (and vanilla/wintergreen if using). Add the remaining water and stir to combine. The mixture should be at room temperature — about 75–100°F. If it's too hot, it will kill the yeast. If it's too cold, the yeast won't activate.
3. **Add the yeast.** Sprinkle the yeast over the surface of the root beer mixture and stir gently. The yeast is what will create the carbonation — it eats the sugar and produces CO₂ (and a tiny, negligible amount of alcohol).
4. **Bottle it.** Using a funnel, pour the mixture into clean plastic bottles, leaving about 2 inches of headspace at the top. Cap tightly.
5. **Ferment.** Place the bottles in a warm spot (70–80°F) for 12–48 hours. **Check them every 12 hours** by squeezing a bottle. When the bottles are rock-hard and can't be squeezed at all, they're carbonated and ready. This is usually 24–48 hours depending on temperature.
6. **Refrigerate immediately.** Once carbonated, move the bottles to the refrigerator immediately. The cold stops the fermentation. **Do not leave carbonated bottles at room temperature** — pressure will continue to build and bottles can burst.
7. **Serve cold.** Open carefully (they'll be fizzy). Pour into a frosty mug. Add a scoop of vanilla ice cream for a root beer float. Feel like a pioneer.

Did You Know? > Root beer is one of America's oldest beverages, with roots (literally) going back to colonial times when indigenous peoples brewed teas from sassafras root bark for medicinal purposes. European settlers adapted these into "small beers" — low-alcohol fermented beverages flavored with roots, bark, a...

Pairs well with: A Fourth of July barbecue, a scoop of Blue Bunny vanilla ice cream, your first sip of something you made yourself, and the brief, intoxicating delusion that you might start a root beer business.

Hot Apple Cider

■ MIDWEST — THE AUTUMN WARMER

"The smell of fall in a mug. Fresh apple cider simmered with cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, star anise, and orange peel until your entire house smells like an orchard in October. This is the drink that greets you after hayrides, bonfire nights, and crisp football Saturdays."

PREP
5 min

COOK
30 min

SERVES
8

MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Combine everything.** Pour apple cider into a large pot or Dutch oven. Add maple syrup, cinnamon sticks, cloves, allspice, star anise, nutmeg, orange slices, and apple slices and ginger if using.
2. **Heat gently.** Bring to a gentle simmer over medium heat. Do not boil — boiling can make the cider taste bitter and will evaporate the delicate apple flavors.
3. **Simmer and infuse.** Reduce heat to low and let the cider simmer gently for 25–30 minutes, allowing the spices to fully infuse. The longer it simmers, the more aromatic it becomes.
4. **Taste and adjust.** Taste the cider and add more maple syrup if you prefer it sweeter. The sweetness level depends on how sweet your cider was to begin with.
5. **Strain and serve.** Using a fine-mesh strainer or slotted spoon, remove the whole spices and fruit slices. Ladle hot cider into mugs.
6. **Garnish.** Add a fresh cinnamon stick and an orange peel twist to each mug. For an adults-only version, add a splash of bourbon or spiced rum.

■ **Did You Know?** > Apple cider has been an American tradition since colonial times, when apples were more commonly drunk than eaten. The Midwest's apple-growing regions — Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota — became cider-making capitals, with families visiting orchards each fall for fresh cider and donuts. The tradi...

Wisconsin Brandy Old Fashioned

WISCONSIN — EVERY SUPPER CLUB, BAR, AND FAMILY GATHERING IN THE STATE

"Brandy muddled with a sugar cube, bitters, and a maraschino cherry, topped with a splash of soda (sweet, sour, or press — you must choose), and garnished with enough fruit to qualify as a produce section. This is not the whiskey Old Fashioned the rest of America drinks. This is the Wisconsin Old Fashioned, and in Wisconsin, if you order an Old Fashioned without specifying whiskey, you're getting brandy. Nobody asks. Everybody knows."



PREP

5 min

COOK

—

SERVES

1

MIDWEST NICE

★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

1 sugar cube (or $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon granulated sugar)

2–3 dashes Angostura bitters

1 maraschino cherry (plus more for garnish)

1 orange slice

Splash of water or soda water

2 ounces brandy (Korbel is the Wisconsin standard)

Ice

Your choice of topper:

****Sweet:**** Sprite or 7-Up

****Sour:**** Squirt or Fresca (or sour mix)

****Press:**** Half Sprite, half soda water

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Muddle.**** Place the sugar cube in the bottom of an Old Fashioned glass. Add the bitters and a splash of water. Drop in the cherry and orange slice. Muddle firmly — you want to dissolve the sugar and express the oils from the orange, but you're not making a smoothie. The fruit should be bruised, not obliterated.
2. ****Add ice.**** Fill the glass with ice cubes. Some bars use a single large cube; most Wisconsin bars use regular cubes. Both are fine.
3. ****Add the brandy.**** Pour 2 ounces of brandy over the ice. In Wisconsin, this is almost always Korbel. Not because it's the best brandy in the world, but because it's **the** brandy. The relationship between Wisconsin and Korbel is deep, loyal, and immune to marketing.
4. ****Top it off.**** Add your chosen topper — sweet, sour, or press. The bartender will ask "sweet, sour, or press?" and you must answer without hesitating. This is a loyalty test.
5. ****Garnish aggressively.**** Add more cherries, another orange slice, and whatever fruit the bar has available. A Wisconsin Old Fashioned should have enough garnish that you could call it a fruit salad with a straight face.
6. ****Serve.**** Stir gently. Sip slowly. Order a second one with dinner. This is the Wisconsin way.

Did You Know? > Wisconsin's relationship with brandy is unique in America and deeply rooted in history. German immigrants — who settled Wisconsin in massive numbers in the mid-1800s — had a tradition of drinking fruit brandies and schnaps. When they arrived in Wisconsin, they adapted their drinking habits to avai...

Pairs well with: A Wisconsin Friday fish fry (mandatory), a supper club with wood paneling and a salad bar, the third quarter of a Packers game, and a designated driver — because these go down dangerously easy and the second one arrives before you remember ordering it.



Preserves & Pickles

6 RECIPES

Apple Butter

INDIANA / OHIO (MIDWEST ORCHARDS)

"A rich, spiced, and concentrated fruit spread made from slow-cooked apples, Apple Butter is a beloved preserve in the Midwest, capturing the essence of autumn's bounty."

PREP
20 min

COOK
4 min

SERVES
4-5

MIDWEST NICE
|||||

INGREDIENTS

4 lbs (about 12 medium) apples, a mix of sweet and tart (e.g., Gala, Fuji, Granny Smith), peeled, cored, and quartered

1 cup (240ml) apple cider or apple juice

½ cup (100g) granulated sugar (adjust to apple sweetness)

½ cup (100g) packed light brown sugar

2 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp ground cloves

½ tsp ground nutmeg

¼ tsp ground allspice

Pinch of salt

1 tbsp lemon juice (freshly squeezed)

--

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prepare Apples:** Peel, core, and quarter the apples. Place them in a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven (or a 6-quart slow cooker).
2. **Add Liquids & Spices:** Add the apple cider (or juice), granulated sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, allspice, and salt to the pot. Stir well to combine.
3. **Cook (Stovetop Method):** Bring the mixture to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Once simmering, reduce heat to low, cover, and cook for 3-4 hours, stirring every 30 minutes, until apples are very soft.
4. **Cook (Slow Cooker Method):** Cover the slow cooker and cook on low for 8-10 hours, or on high for 4-5 hours, stirring occasionally, until apples are very soft.
5. **Mash & Simmer:** Once apples are very soft, remove from heat (or switch slow cooker to warm). Use a potato masher, immersion blender, or food mill to mash or puree the apples to your desired consistency. For a super smooth butter, you can push it through a fine-mesh sieve.
6. **Reduce & Thicken:** Return the mashed apple mixture to the pot (or keep in slow cooker). Add the lemon juice. Cook uncovered over low heat (or on high in slow cooker, lid ajar) for 1-2 hours, stirring frequently, until the apple butter thickens to your desired consistency. It should be thick enough to mound on a spoon.
7. **Can or Store:** Ladle the hot apple butter into clean, sterilized half-pint jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Seal with lids. For shelf stability, process in a boiling water canner for 10 minutes. Alternatively, cool completely and store in airtight containers in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks, or freeze for up to 1 year.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Louise always added a splash of brandy or applejack (about 2 tablespoons!) to her apple butter during the last hour of simmering. 'It just gives it a little extra warmth and depth,' she'd wink, 'a secret special touch no one can quite put their finger on!'"

Did You Know? > Apple Butter is a historical preserve deeply rooted in the agricultural communities of the Midwest, particularly in states like Indiana and Ohio, known for their abundant apple orchards. Often made during the fall harvest, it was a traditional way to preserve apples before modern refrigeration. Th...

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: A crisp autumn morning, warm toast or biscuits, and the comforting scent of fall spices filling your home.

Corn Relish

MIDWEST — THE SUNSHINE IN A JAR

"Summer captured at its peak. Sweet corn kernels, crisp peppers, and onion preserved in a tangy, slightly sweet brine that brightens any meal. This colorful relish transforms humble hot dogs, elevates grilled meats, and makes sandwiches sing. It tastes like August even in the dead of February."

PREP
30 min

COOK
25 min

SERVES
6

MIDWEST NICE
|||||oo

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prep the corn.**** If using fresh corn, shuck ears and remove silk. Stand each ear upright in a large bowl and slice kernels off the cob with a sharp knife. Measure 8 cups.
2. ****Make the brine.**** In a large pot or Dutch oven, combine vinegar, water, sugar, and salt. Add mustard seeds, celery seeds, turmeric, dry mustard, and black pepper. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar and salt.
3. ****Add the vegetables.**** Add corn, red and green peppers, onion, celery, and jalapeño (if using) to the brine. Return to a boil, stirring occasionally.
4. ****Simmer.**** Reduce heat to medium and simmer for 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are tender but still have some crunch. The mixture will thicken slightly.
5. ****Pack the jars.**** Sterilize six pint jars. Using a slotted spoon, pack the vegetable mixture into hot jars, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace. Ladle hot brine over the vegetables to fill any gaps, maintaining $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace.
6. ****Remove air bubbles.**** Run a clean knife around the inside of each jar to release trapped air. Wipe rims clean with a damp cloth.
7. ****Seal.**** Place lids on jars and screw on bands until fingertip-tight.
8. ****Refrigerator method.**** Let cool to room temperature, then refrigerate. Allow at least 24 hours for flavors to meld. Refrigerator corn relish keeps for up to 2 months.
9. ****For canning (shelf-stable).**** Process filled jars in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes. Remove and let cool undisturbed for 12–24 hours. Check seals before storing.

Did You Know? > Corn relish is quintessentially Midwestern — born from the region's endless corn fields and the need to preserve summer's bounty. Before home refrigeration, farm families relied on pickling and canning to get through winter, and corn relish was a prized way to capture the flavor of August corn. Th...

Fresh Giardiniera (Chicago-Style Hot)

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS — TAYLOR STREET TO EVERY ITALIAN BEEF STAND IN THE CITY

*"A riotous jar of fire-pickled vegetables — serrano peppers, celery, cauliflower, carrots, olives — swimming in a spiced oil brine that burns just right. This is the condiment that turns a good Italian beef into a religious experience. Chicagoans don't ask *if* you want giardiniera. They ask *how much.*"*



PREP
45 min

COOK
—

SERVES
6

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Chop everything.** Dice all the vegetables into pieces roughly the size of your pinky fingernail — uniform enough that they'll pack into

jars, rough enough that they've got character. This is Chicago, not a French kitchen. Combine all the vegetables in a very large bowl.

2. **Salt brine.** Dissolve the kosher salt in the cold water. Pour the brine over the vegetable mixture. The vegetables should be mostly submerged — add a bit more salted water if needed. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight (at least 8 hours, up to 16).
3. **Drain thoroughly.** The next day, drain the vegetables in a large colander. Let them sit for 15–20 minutes, tossing occasionally. You want them well-drained — excess water will make your giardiniera soggy, and soggy giardiniera is a sin on Taylor Street.
4. **Mix the oil.** In a large bowl, whisk together the olive oil, canola oil, oregano, red pepper flakes, black pepper, and celery seed.
5. **Combine.** Add the drained vegetables to the seasoned oil mixture. Stir thoroughly, making sure every piece is coated and the spices are distributed.
6. **Jar it up.** Pack the giardiniera into clean pint jars (or one big jar), making sure the oil covers the vegetables completely. If you're short on oil, top off with more olive oil.
7. **Wait.** Refrigerate for at least 2 days before eating. Three days is better. A week is phenomenal. The flavors need time to meld — the heat softens slightly, the oregano blooms, the garlic permeates everything.

Did You Know? > *Giardiniera (jar-din-AIR-ah) comes from the Italian word *giardino* — garden — and refers to the garden vegetables in the mix. But what Chicagoans did to this Italian pickled vegetable tradition would make a Neapolitan grandmother weep with confusion. Italian giardiniera is a vinegar-brined, mild...*

Pairs well with: A dripping Italian beef sandwich from a stand with no seats, the L train rattling overhead, and a complete inability to keep this off your shirt.

Homemade Dill Pickles

ACROSS THE MIDWEST — GARDEN SEASON, CANNING SEASON, PICKLE SEASON

"Crisp, cold, garlic-punched, dill-fragrant pickles made in your own kitchen with cucumbers that were in the garden this morning. The brine is sharp, the crunch is audible, and the satisfaction of a shelf lined with jars of homemade pickles is the kind of quiet pride that doesn't need a social media post. (You're going to post it anyway.)"



PREP
30 min

COOK
—

SERVES
6

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★★

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prep the cucumbers.** Wash the cucumbers thoroughly. Trim off $\frac{1}{8}$ inch from the blossom end (the end opposite the stem) — there's an

enzyme there that can make pickles soft. Leave them whole for classic dills, or slice into spears or chips. Pack them tightly — pickles that float in the brine don't cure evenly.

2. **Prep the jars.** Wash 6 pint jars, lids, and bands in hot soapy water. Keep the jars warm (in a 200°F oven, or in simmering water) until ready to fill.
3. **Season the jars.** Into each warm jar, place: 1–2 heads of fresh dill (or 1 tablespoon dill seed), 2 garlic clove halves, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon peppercorns, $\frac{1}{3}$ teaspoon mustard seed, a pinch of red pepper flakes, and a grape leaf if using.
4. **Pack the cucumbers.** Pack the cucumbers tightly into the jars, standing them upright. Pack them in snugly — they'll shrink slightly during processing. Leave $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of headspace from the top of the jar.
5. **Make the brine.** In a saucepan, bring the vinegar, water, and pickling salt to a boil, stirring until the salt is dissolved.
6. **Fill the jars.** Pour the hot brine over the cucumbers in each jar, maintaining $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of headspace. Use a butter knife or chopstick to remove any air bubbles by running it along the inside edge of the jar. Wipe the jar rims clean with a damp cloth. Place lids and bands, tightening to fingertip-tight.
7. **Process (for shelf-stable pickles).** Place the jars in a boiling water bath canner. Process pint jars for 15 minutes (start timing when the water returns to a full boil). Remove and let cool on a towel. You'll hear the lids pop and seal — that's the sound of success.
8. **Wait.** This is the hard part. The pickles need at least 2 weeks — preferably 4 — for the flavors to fully develop. The garlic mellows, the dill permeates, the brine equalizes. Patience makes perfect pickles.

I Did You Know? > *Home canning and pickling in the Midwest isn't just a hobby — it's a living tradition with roots in both immigrant preserving cultures and frontier necessity. German, Polish, Czech, and Scandinavian immigrants all brought their own pickling traditions to the region, and the vast cucumber harvests ...*

Pairs well with: A summer garden that produced more cucumbers than any reasonable family could eat, a Saturday spent in the kitchen with the windows open, and the deep satisfaction of opening a jar in January and tasting August.

Pickled Beets

■ MIDWEST — THE JEWEL-TONED PANTRY STAPLE

"Deep ruby jars lining the pantry shelf, waiting for winter. These sweet-and-tangy pickled beets are a Heartland tradition — earthy beets transformed by warm spices, vinegar, and just enough sugar. Perfect alongside ham, on salads, or eaten straight from the jar when no one's watching."

PREP
30 min

COOK
45 min

SERVES
4

MIDWEST NICE
★★○○

INGREDIENTS

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Cook the beets.**** Place whole, unpeeled beets in a large pot. Cover with cold water by 2 inches. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Cook for 35–45 minutes until a knife slides easily into the center. Drain and let cool until handleable.
2. ****Peel and slice.**** Under cool running water, slip the skins off the beets — they should slide right off. Trim the tops and bottoms. Slice into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch rounds, or cut into wedges or cubes.
3. ****Make the brine.**** While beets cook, combine vinegar, 1 cup water, sugar, and salt in a medium saucepan. Add peppercorns, cloves, allspice, cinnamon sticks, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve sugar. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes.
4. ****Pack the jars.**** Sterilize four pint jars. Pack sliced beets tightly into jars, adding sliced onion between layers if using. Leave $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace.
5. ****Fill with brine.**** Ladle hot brine over the beets, distributing the whole spices evenly among the jars. Make sure beets are fully submerged. Leave $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace.
6. ****Remove air bubbles.**** Run a clean knife or chopstick around the inside edge of each jar to release trapped air. Wipe jar rims clean with a damp cloth.
7. ****Seal.**** Place lids on jars and screw on bands until fingertip-tight.
8. ****Refrigerator method.**** Let cool to room temperature, then refrigerate. Allow at least 48 hours for flavors to develop. Refrigerator pickled beets will keep for up to 3 months.
9. ****For canning (shelf-stable).**** Process filled jars in a boiling water bath for 30 minutes. Remove and let cool undisturbed for 12–24 hours. Check seals before storing.

Did You Know? > Pickled beets were a necessity before refrigeration reached every Heartland farm. Come fall, women would pickle and can vegetables for months, and beets were prized for their long storage life and nutritional value. German, Polish, and Scandinavian immigrants brought their own pickling traditions ...

Strawberry Freezer Jam

MIDWEST US (SUMMER HARVEST)

"A vibrant and fresh-tasting preserve, Strawberry Freezer Jam captures the sweet essence of summer strawberries, offering a quick and easy alternative to traditional canning."

PREP
20 min

COOK
0 min

SERVES
6-8

MIDWEST NICE
★★★★

INGREDIENTS

- 2 lbs (about 6 cups) fresh ripe strawberries, hulled and crushed
- 4 cups (800g) granulated sugar
- 1 (1.75 oz / 49g) package powdered fruit pectin (e.g., Sure-Jell for Less or No Sugar Needed Recipes, or regular for a sweeter jam)
- ¾ cup (180ml) water
-

INSTRUCTIONS

1. ****Prepare Strawberries:**** Wash and hull the fresh strawberries. Crush them thoroughly using a potato masher or food processor (pulse until crushed, not pureed). Measure exactly 4 cups of crushed strawberries into a large bowl.
2. ****Combine with Sugar:**** Add the granulated sugar to the crushed strawberries and stir well for 3 minutes, or until the sugar has mostly dissolved. Let the mixture stand for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. ****Prepare Pectin Solution:**** In a small saucepan, combine the powdered fruit pectin and ¾ cup of water. Bring to a rolling boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Boil for exactly 1 minute, continuing to stir.
4. ****Combine Pectin with Strawberries:**** Immediately pour the hot pectin solution into the strawberry-sugar mixture. Stir constantly for 3 minutes, ensuring everything is thoroughly combined. A few undissolved sugar crystals are acceptable.
5. ****Fill Jars:**** Ladle the jam into clean, sterilized half-pint (or pint) freezer-safe jars or plastic containers, leaving ½ inch headspace at the top.
6. ****Set & Store:**** Cover the jars tightly. Let the jam stand at room temperature for 24 hours to set. After 24 hours, store any jars that will be used within 3 weeks in the refrigerator. Freeze the remaining jars for up to 1 year. Thaw in the refrigerator before using.



GRANDMA'S SECRET

> "Grandma Peggy always added a tiny splash of balsamic vinegar (just a quarter teaspoon!) to her crushed strawberries. 'It just brightens up the berry flavor,' she'd whisper, 'and makes it taste extra special, a secret twist nobody ever guesses!'"

Did You Know? > *Strawberry Freezer Jam is a beloved tradition in Midwestern homes, particularly during the abundant strawberry harvest of late spring and early summer. Its popularity stems from its vibrant, fresh-fruit flavor that tastes remarkably like eating fresh berries. Unlike traditional cooked jams, freeze...*

Pairs well with: Pairs well with: Freshly baked biscuits or toast, a dollop over vanilla ice cream, and the joyful memories of strawberry picking on a warm summer day.



Special Features

THE FUN STUFF

¶ Hotdish vs. Casserole: The Great Debate

"In Minnesota, it's a hotdish. Everywhere else, it's a casserole. Both sides are willing to die on this hill while being extremely polite about it."

The Tale of Two Names

Somewhere around the 93rd parallel — roughly the Iowa-Minnesota border — a linguistic miracle occurs. The exact same dish, made with the exact same cream-of-something soup, the exact same frozen vegetables, and the exact same crunchy topping, changes its name.

Below the line: **casserole**. Above the line: **hotdish**.

Wars have been fought over less. (Midwesterners would never fight, of course. They'd just say "Oh, that's *interesting*" in a tone that means they've already judged you.)

The Official Side-by-Side Comparison

Category	Hotdish	Casserole	Primary Territory	Minnesota, parts of Wisconsin & the Dakotas
The rest of the known universe	Served In	A 9x13 pan that has never left the family	Also a 9x13 pan, but sometimes a slow cooker	Required by state law
Required by state law	Cream of __ Soup	Strongly encouraged	Tater Tot Topping	The crown jewel
Strongly encouraged	Typical Venue	Church basement, potluck, funeral	Church basement, potluck, funeral	Optional (and therefore suspicious)
Church basement, potluck, funeral	Temperature at Serving	Nuclear hot. Always.	Warm to hot. Occasionally room temp (criminal).	Always.
Warm to hot. Occasionally room temp (criminal).	How You Got the Recipe	Verbally. Once.	A church cookbook spiral-bound with a comb binding	Verbally. Once.
Verbally. Once.	Pronunciation	Your grandmother.	Required by state law	Required by state law
Required by state law	Debate	"Cass-er-OLE" vs. "CASS-role" (regional)	Celebrity Endorsement	Every Minnesota politician who wants to get re-elected
"Cass-er-OLE" vs. "CASS-role" (regional)	None	(regional)	None needed.	None needed.
(regional)	None	None needed.	It's a casserole.	It's a hotdish.

¶ The Official Hotdish vs. Casserole Judging Rubric

Rate any baked-dish-in-a-pan on the following criteria. Maximum score: 50 points.

1. Cream of Mushroom Soup Integration (10 points)

Score Criteria ----- 10 Perfectly incorporated. You can taste it in every bite but can't identify it. Grandma would approve. 7-9 Present and accounted for. Good soup-to-filling ratio. 4-6 Detectable but perhaps substituted with cream of chicken (acceptable) or cream of celery (bold choice). 1-3 Attempted a "from scratch" cream sauce. Respectable but missing the point. 0 No cream-of-anything soup. This is not a hotdish. This is a bake. Leave.

2. Crunchy Topping Commitment (10 points)

Score Criteria ----- 10 Tater tots, perfectly golden, forming an unbroken shield of crunch. 7-9 French fried onions, crushed Ritz crackers, or cornflake-butter topping. All honorable. 4-6 Breadcrumbs. Fine. We're not mad. Just

disappointed. 1-3Cheese only. Cheese is not a crunch topping. It's cheese. 0No topping. This is soup in a pan.

3. Funeral Readiness (10 points)

ScoreCriteria ----- 10Can be assembled from pantry staples in under 20 minutes while crying. 7-9Requires one trip to the store, but only for the meat. 4-6Needs "special" ingredients (what is shallot?). Risky for a grief casserole. 1-3Requires a stand mixer or a food processor. Too ambitious for tragedy. 0Contains the word "artisanal." You've lost the plot.

4. Potluck Transportability (10 points)

ScoreCriteria ----- 10Survives a 30-minute car ride, a folding table, and 3 hours at room temp. Still delicious. 7-9Needs to stay warm but travels well. Slow cooker acceptable. 4-6Must be served immediately. Logistically challenging but forgivable. 1-3Requires reheating at the venue. Hope they have a working oven. 0"Best served fresh." This is a restaurant dish, not a potluck dish. Read the room.

5. The "Ope" Factor (10 points)

How likely is someone to say "Ope!" when they see this dish at the table? ScoreCriteria ----- 10"Ope! You made the hotdish! You shouldn't have!" (They should have. Everyone expected it.) 7-9"Ope! That looks amazing!" (Genuine surprise and delight.) 4-6"Ope, is that... quinoa?" (Concern masked as curiosity.) 1-3"Ope." (Silence. The dish is being silently judged.) 0No one says ope. The dish has failed.

The Verdict

There is no verdict. A hotdish is a casserole is a hotdish. They are the same dish wearing different name tags at the same church potluck.

The only real rule: Bring one. Doesn't matter what you call it. What matters is that you showed up, you brought food, and you're willing to stay and help clean up afterward.

That's the most Midwestern sentence ever written, and we stand by it.

□ Still want to argue? Take our official poll at the next church supper. Results will be ignored regardless.

□ The Midwest Nice Rating™ Guide

How likely is this dish to show up at your door, uninvited, wrapped in foil, carried by a neighbor who "just happened to make extra"?

How It Works

Every recipe in this cookbook is rated on the **Midwest Nice Rating™** — a proprietary 1-to-5 scale measured in hotdish icons (□) that quantifies the probability of each dish appearing in your life without warning.

The rating considers five critical factors:

- **Ease of doubling** — Can it be scaled up for a crowd without thinking?
 - **Transportability** — Will it survive the passenger seat of a Subaru Outback?
 - **Universal acceptability** — Will even the pickiest Lutheran eat it?
 - **Occasion versatility** — Does it work for births, deaths, and everything in between?
 - **Leftovers potential** — Does it reheat well enough to be eaten for four consecutive days?
-

The Scale

□ — "They Made It for Themselves and Thought of You"

A polite gesture, but this dish requires effort or fresh ingredients that suggest premeditation, not spontaneity.

Examples: Detroit-Style Pizza, Chicago Deep Dish Pizza **Translation:** "I specifically chose to make this for you, which means we're actually close friends."

□□ — "They Saw It on Pinterest and Wanted to Try It"

A step above basics. Shows initiative. The neighbor was probably already cooking and thought, why not make two?

Examples: Booyah, German Chocolate Cake, St. Louis Toasted Ravioli **Translation:** "I had a productive Saturday and you're benefiting from it."

□□□ — "Standard Operating Procedure"

This is the baseline Midwest Nice food delivery. Expected at most gatherings. Would raise no eyebrows.

Examples: Green Bean Casserole, Hearty Chicken Noodle Soup, Deviled Eggs, Buttermilk Pancakes **Translation:** "Something happened in your life — good or bad — and I responded with food. As is tradition."

□□□□ — "The Potluck Power Move"

This dish doesn't just show up — it ARRIVES. It's the first thing people eat and the first pan that empties. Bringing this is a statement.

Examples: Cheesy Funeral Potatoes, Wisconsin Beer Cheese Soup, Kansas City BBQ Brisket, Puppy Chow
Translation: "I am a generous and competent person, and I want everyone at this potluck to know it."

||||| — "You Sneezed Once and Now There's a Hotdish on Your Porch"

The apex of Midwest Nice. This dish materializes the moment any life event occurs within a 3-block radius. You don't request it. You don't even mention being hungry. It just... appears.

Examples: Tater Tot Hotdish, Midwestern Breakfast Casserole, Cheesy Funeral Potatoes **Translation:** "I heard through the church phone tree that your cousin's neighbor's dog is sick and I thought you could use a hotdish."

Quick Reference: Every Recipe Rated

Recipe Rating Likely Trigger ----- Tater Tot Hotdish|||||Literally anything Midwestern Breakfast Casserole|||||Overnight guests, holidays, "just because" Cheesy Funeral Potatoes|||||Death, surgery, new baby, Tuesday Hearty Chicken Noodle Soup|||||Cold, flu, general sadness, winter Green Bean Casserole|||||Thanksgiving, Christmas, any potluck Nov-Jan Puppy Chow|||||Christmas, school events, "I was bored" Classic Deviled Eggs|||||Easter, summer picnics, "I only had eggs" Buttermilk Pancakes|||||Weekend visitors, sleepovers Creamy Coleslaw|||||Any BBQ or fish fry within 50 miles Classic Apple Pie|||||Fall, holidays, county fair season Cincinnati Chili|||||Game day, cold weather, Ohio pride Wisconsin Beer Cheese Soup|||||Packers game, first frost, Friday Farmhouse Skillet Hash|||||Brunch invitation only Kansas City BBQ Brisket|||||Summer, any excuse to fire up the smoker Buckeye Candies|||||Christmas, Ohio State game day Corn on the Cob|||||August. Just... August. Chicago Italian Beef|||||Requires commitment and a good bread source St. Louis Toasted Ravioli|||||Game day, appetizer situations Detroit-Style Pizza|||||Planned pizza night only Chicago Deep Dish Pizza|||Special occasion — nobody "just makes" this Booyah|||||Community festival (requires a 50-gallon kettle) German Chocolate Cake|||||Birthdays, church bake sales Minnesota Wild Rice Dip|||||Holiday parties, "I'm bringing an appetizer" Iowa State Fair Funnel Cake|||||State fair or brave home cooks only Nebraska Runza|||||Game day (specifically Husker game day) Indiana Pork Tenderloin|||||County fair, Friday night Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds|||||Bar night, fair, "I bought a deep fryer" Amish Baked Oatmeal|||||Morning gatherings, meal trains

Rating system certified by the Midwest Potluck Standards Board (unofficial, self-appointed, meets quarterly at Darlene's house).

□ The Midwest Measurement System

"How much butter?" "Enough." "How much is enough?" "You'll know."

Every cookbook gives you precise measurements. Cups, tablespoons, grams — all very useful if you're the kind of person who owns a kitchen scale and has never once eyeballed anything.

This is not that cookbook.

In the Midwest, recipes have been passed down for generations via index cards written in handwriting that can only be described as "beautiful but medically illegible." The measurements on these cards follow a system that predates the metric system, the imperial system, and in some cases, written language itself.

We present, for the first time in print, the **Official Midwest Measurement Conversion Chart**.

Volume Measurements

Midwest Term Approximate Equivalent Usage Context ----- **A smidge** $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon or less Spices. "Add a smidge of cayenne." (A smidge means you should barely be able to detect it. If you can taste it, that was too much smidge.) **A pinch** $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Salt, mostly. A pinch is what you can hold between your thumb and two fingers. Grandma's pinch is always bigger than yours. **A dash** $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon, give or take Liquid seasonings. "A dash of Worcestershire." (Pronounced "wuster-shur" or "that brown sauce.") **A dollop** 1-3 tablespoons Sour cream, whipped cream, or mayo. A dollop is the amount that falls off a spoon in one satisfying plop. **A splash** 1-3 tablespoons (liquid) "A splash of milk," "a splash of vinegar." The pour lasts exactly as long as the word "splash" takes to say out loud. **A glug** 2-4 tablespoons Oil or vinegar. A glug is one full tilt of the bottle. Two glugs is "generous." Three glugs means you're making salad dressing now. **Some** $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup The most versatile measurement. "Add some cheese." Some is more than a little but less than a lot. You'll feel it when you get there. **A good amount** $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup When "some" isn't enough but a specific number feels too committal. "A good amount of onion." **A handful** Whatever your hand holds Literally your hand. Note: Grandpa's handful ≠ a child's handful. Adjust accordingly. **Enough** The correct amount The most precise Midwest measurement. "Add enough broth until it looks right." You'll know. Trust yourself. If you don't know, call your mom. **A bunch** 1-2 cups, or one literal bunch Could be a literal bunch of parsley, or a figurative bunch of shredded cheese. Context clues required. **A mess of** A very generous amount "A mess of green beans." Implies abundance bordering on excess, which is exactly right. **Till it looks right** Unmeasurable The most advanced measurement. Requires years of intuition and at least one phone call to someone who's made this before.

Temperature Measurements

Midwest Term Approximate Equivalent ----- **Low and slow** 250-300°F **Medium** 350°F (this is the answer to everything) **Hot oven** 400-425°F **Real hot** 450°F+ **Till it's golden** Whatever temperature, whatever time. Just watch it. **Till it's bubblin'** It's ready when the edges are doing the thing

Time Measurements

Midwest Term Approximate Equivalent ----- **A minute** 5-45 minutes **A bit** 15 minutes to 2 hours **A while** 1-4 hours **All day** 6+ hours, usually in a slow cooker **Overnight** 8-14 hours. Set it before bed, deal with it in the morning. **Till it's done** The only time measurement that truly matters

Quantity Measurements (for Potlucks)

Midwest Term Actual Meaning ----- **"I made a little extra"** Enough to feed 12 people **"Just a small batch"** 3 dozen cookies minimum **"I doubled the recipe"** There will be leftovers for a week and you will send some home with every guest **"I brought enough for everyone"** The 9x13 pan plus a backup pan in the car, just in case **"Oh, I barely made anything"** She made four dishes and a dessert

The Golden Rule

When in doubt: **more is more.** No Midwesterner has ever been criticized for making too much food. Running out of food at a gathering, however, is a scandal that will be discussed in hushed tones for years.

This chart has been peer-reviewed by a panel of grandmothers from seven Midwestern states. They all disagreed on the specifics but agreed that "you'll just know" is a valid measurement.

⊖ State Rivalry Trash Talk

All trash talk in this section is delivered in the Midwestern tradition: with a smile, a "bless their heart," and absolute sincerity about the insult.

Scattered throughout the cookbook, you'll find these little callout boxes where neighboring states have... opinions... about each other's food. Collected here for your entertainment and potential argument-starting at family gatherings.

Illinois vs. Michigan: The Pizza Wars

Michigan says: "Illinois puts their sauce on TOP of the cheese and calls it pizza. We put our cheese to the EDGES and created a caramelized crust that changed civilization. You're welcome, Chicago."

>

Illinois says: "That's cute, Detroit. You bake pizza in an automotive parts tray. We invented deep dish. You invented... a rectangle."

>

Indiana, from the sidelines: "We just want pizza, you guys."

Ohio vs. Everyone: The Chili Situation

Texas says: "That's not chili."

>

Ohio says: "We didn't ask Texas. Also, you're not even Midwest."

>

Indiana says: "Ohio puts chili on spaghetti and calls it cuisine. But honestly? It slaps."

>

Ohio says: "Thank you, Indiana. Now order your Way and stop talking."

>

Kentucky, leaning in: "We eat it too and we're not going to apologize."

Minnesota vs. Everyone: The Hotdish Doctrine

Minnesota says: "It's called hotdish."

>

Iowa says: "It's a casserole."

>

Minnesota says: "It's. Called. Hotdish."

>

Wisconsin says: "We call it both and we're doing fine, thanks."

>

Minnesota says: "Wisconsin is not a reliable narrator. They put cheese curds in everything."

>

Wisconsin says: "And? What's your point?"

Kansas City vs. Everywhere Else: BBQ Diplomacy

Kansas City says: "We have the best BBQ in America and it's not even close."

>

Memphis says: "Excuse me?"

>

Kansas City says: "You're not even in the Midwest. This is our cookbook."

>

St. Louis says: "We have toasted ravioli and Provel cheese. We're not here to fight about BBQ."

>

Kansas City says: "St. Louis puts Provel on everything and calls it a personality."

>

St. Louis says: "...Yes. And?"

Wisconsin vs. Everyone: Cheese Supremacy

Wisconsin says: "We are America's Dairyland. Cheese is our birthright. Our cheese curds squeak. Yours do not. This conversation is over."

>

Vermont says: "Our cheddar is award-winning—"

>

Wisconsin says: "We heard you the first time, Vermont. Let us know when you fry yours and serve them at every bar, fair, and gas station in your state. We'll wait."

>

California says: "We make artisanal—"

>

Wisconsin says: "Bless your heart."

The Passive-Aggressive Compliment Translator

Because in the Midwest, what we say and what we mean are two different zip codes:

What We Say | What We Mean -----
----- "Oh, that's interesting." "I hate it but I'll eat it politely." "That's... different!" "What have you done." "Bless their heart." "They are wrong and I feel sorry for them." "You didn't have to do that!" "You absolutely should have done that and I'm glad you did." "I'll have to get that recipe." "I will never make this." "Oh, I couldn't eat another bite!" "I am about to eat three more bites." "It's fine." "It is not fine." "We should do this more often!" "I will see you at the next funeral." "Well, that's one way to do it." "That is the wrong way to do it." "My mom makes it a little different." "My mom makes it better."

The Midwest Food Argument Intensity Scale

How heated will this food debate actually get?

TopicIntensityLikely Outcome ----- Hotdish vs. Casserole Agree to disagree. Get seconds.
Chicago Deep Dish vs. Detroit Style Someone gets unfriended on Facebook Best BBQ region Marriages have ended over this Ranch on pizza: yes or no? Yes. Next question. (Iowa has spoken.) Miracle Whip vs. Mayo Families divided. Thanksgiving ruined. Pop vs. Soda It's pop. Fight me. Is a Runza just a Hot Pocket? Nebraska will find you Ketchup on a hot dog (Chicago:) Chicago takes this personally Jell-O salad: is it a salad? Everyone knows it's not. We don't care.

No states were harmed in the making of this section. Several feelings were hurt, but everyone was too polite to say so.

Midwest Potluck Bingo

Print this page. Bring it to your next church supper. Try not to get a blackout in the first 20 minutes. (You will.)

HOW TO PLAY

Bring this card to any Midwestern gathering involving food (so... any Midwestern gathering). Mark off squares as they happen. First to five in a row wins.

Prize: The satisfaction of being right, a second helping of hotdish, and permission to say "I knew Darlene would bring the Jell-O salad."

THE CARD

三

| Someone | Three | A dish is | Someone | You hear | | brought a | different | described | says "Ope, | "I'll have
| Jell-O | people | as "to | let me | to get | | salad | brought | die for" | squeeze | that | | (it has | deviled |
right past | recipe!" | | fruit in | eggs | | ya" | (they | | it) | | | | won't) |

| Ranch | At least | Someone | A slow | The phrase | | dressing | two | says "this | cooker is | "Oh, you | |
appears | hotdishes | is nothing | plugged | didn't | | on | (or | special)" | into a | have to | | something |
casseroles) | about a | power | do that!" | | unexpected | are | dish that | strip | is said | | | identical | took 3 |
that also | at least | | | hours | runs the | 3 times | | | | coffee | |

| Passive- | A casserole | | | Someone's | A 20-min | | aggressive | dish has | FREE | "famous" | goodbye | |
compliment | a piece | SPACE: | recipe is | happens | | about | of masking | "Is that | cream of | at the | |
someone's | tape with | hotdish | mushroom | door | | potato | a name on | or | soup + | (you're | | salad | it
| casserole?" | something | holding | | | | | leftovers) |

| Paper | Someone | A child | "My mom | An entire | | plates | is eating | eats only | makes it | conversation |
| are | standing | the | a little | about the | | doubled up | up because | crunchy | different" | weather | |
(structural | all | topping | is said | happens | | integrity) | chairs | off the | with a | while | | | are | top of a
| tone | loading | | | taken | casserole | | plates |

| Leftovers | A dessert | Someone | "Oh, I | The host | | are | is called | brought | shouldn't | insists | |
forcibly | "sinful" | store- | ... well, | you take | | sent home | or | bought | maybe | a plate | | with every |
"decadent" | rolls and | just a | home even | | guest | by 4+ | no one | small | though | | | people | judges |
piece" | you're | | | them | (takes a | already | | | (out loud) | big piece) | full |

□ BINGO ACHIEVEMENTS

AchievementHow to Earn It ----- **The Full Potluck**Blackout — all 25 squares **Minnesota**

SpecialComplete the "hotdish" column (any column with 2+ hotdish references) **The Polite Midwesterner**Get 5 squares that are all compliments or pleasantries **Church Basement Speedrun**Blackout in under 45 minutes **The Open**
TripleMark three "Ope"-adjacent squares in one conversation

BONUS ROUND: Take-Home Edition

Squares that happen AFTER the potluck:

- [] You eat leftovers for dinner that night
- [] You eat leftovers for lunch the next day
- [] You find a dish in your fridge you didn't make and don't remember receiving
- [] You text someone to say "that \[dish\] was SO good" (genuine)
- [] You text someone to say "that \[dish\] was SO good" (polite lie)
- [] The Tupperware/dish return creates its own social event
- [] You realize you accidentally took home someone else's serving spoon
- [] Darlene calls to ask if you have her 9x13 pan

This bingo card is reusable because Midwestern potlucks are predictable and that's what makes them perfect.

□ Will It Hotdish?

The experimental wing of the Heartland Table test kitchen, where we ask the question no one asked: can we put it in a 9x13, add cream of mushroom soup, top it with something crunchy, and call it a hotdish?

The Rules

- Every dish must use a 9x13-inch baking dish
- At least one cream-of-something soup must be involved
- There must be a crunchy topping
- It must be baked until bubbly
- A Midwestern grandmother must theoretically be willing to serve it at a church supper (this is the hardest rule)

Each experiment is rated on three scales:

- **Hotdish Authenticity** (1-5 ☰) — How Midwestern does this feel?
- **Actually Delicious?** (1-5 ☰) — Would you make this again?
- **Should We Have Done This?** (Yes / Maybe / We're Sorry)

Experiment #1: Taco Hotdish ☰

The gateway hotdish. The one that already exists in thousands of Midwestern kitchens but nobody talks about in polite company.

Ingredients

- 1½ lbs ground beef, browned with 1 packet taco seasoning
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 can (15 oz) black beans, drained
- 1 can (15 oz) corn, drained
- 1 cup salsa
- 2 cups shredded Mexican blend cheese
- **Crunchy topping:** Crushed Doritos (yes, Doritos)

Method

Layer: beef mixture → soup/sour cream blend → beans and corn → cheese → crushed Doritos. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes.

Verdict

- **Hotdish Authenticity?** 🌟🌟 — This already exists in every Lutheran church cookbook, just filed under "Mexican Casserole."
- **Actually Delicious?** 🌟🌟 — Offensively good. Don't tell anyone how much you liked it.
- **Should We Have Done This? Yes.** This is the best hotdish that nobody admits to making.

Experiment #2: Pizza Hotdish 🍕

What if pizza... was a hotdish? What if we're the first people brave enough to ask this?

Ingredients

- 1 lb Italian sausage, browned and crumbled
- 1 bag (16 oz) rotini or penne pasta, cooked
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 jar (24 oz) marinara sauce
- 1 cup mini pepperoni
- 1 cup sliced black olives
- ½ cup diced green peppers
- 3 cups shredded mozzarella
- **Crunchy topping:** Garlic bread croutons

Method

Mix pasta, sauce, soup, sausage, and vegetables. Pour into dish. Top with mozzarella, pepperoni, and garlic croutons. Bake at 375°F for 25 minutes.

Verdict

- **Hotdish Authenticity?** 🌟🌟 — Suspiciously close to several existing church cookbook recipes called "Italian Bake."
- **Actually Delicious?** 🌟🌟 — It's pizza. In a pan. With cream of mushroom soup. It works and we're not apologizing.
- **Should We Have Done This? Yes.** Children will request this weekly.

Experiment #3: Pad Thai Hotdish 🍲

Now we're getting experimental. East meets Midwest. Fish sauce meets cream of chicken.

Ingredients

- 1 lb chicken breast, diced and cooked

- 8 oz rice noodles, cooked and drained
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 3 tablespoons peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sriracha
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 cup bean sprouts
- ½ cup shredded carrots
- 3 green onions, sliced
- **Crunchy topping:** Crushed peanuts + fried wonton strips

Method

Mix chicken, noodles, soup-peanut-butter-soy mixture, and vegetables. Pour into dish. Top with peanuts and wonton strips. Bake at 350°F for 25 minutes. Squeeze lime over the top.

Verdict

- **Hotdish Authenticity:** 🌟 — We're pushing boundaries. Grandma is skeptical but intrigued.
- **Actually Delicious?** 🌟🌟 — Surprisingly incredible. The cream of chicken + peanut butter combo creates a sauce that has no right being this good.
- **Should We Have Done This? Maybe.** Serve it at the potluck without telling anyone what's in it. Reveal the truth only after they ask for the recipe.

Experiment #4: Breakfast Hotdish... For Dinner 🌟

Pancakes, sausage, eggs, and syrup. In a 9x13 pan. For dinner. Because rules are a construct.

Ingredients

- 2 cups pancake mix, prepared as batter
- 1 lb breakfast sausage, browned and crumbled
- 8 eggs, scrambled soft
- 1 can cream of chicken soup + ½ cup milk
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar
- **Crunchy topping:** Crushed cornflakes + butter + a drizzle of maple syrup

Method

Pour half the pancake batter into the dish. Layer sausage and scrambled eggs. Pour soup mixture over. Add remaining batter. Top with cheese, cornflakes, and a maple syrup drizzle. Bake at 375°F for 35 minutes.

Verdict

- **Hotdish Authenticity:** 100 — The breakfast casserole already exists. We just... maximized it.
 - **Actually Delicious?** 100 — Kids will lose their minds. Adults will pretend they're eating it ironically.
 - **Should We Have Done This? Yes.** Breakfast for dinner is already Midwest canon. We just formalized it.
-

Experiment #5: Sushi Hotdish 100

The final frontier. Have we gone too far? Almost certainly. Did we do it anyway? Obviously.

Ingredients

- 3 cups cooked sushi rice (seasoned with rice vinegar)
- 1 lb imitation crab, chopped
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 cup diced cucumber
- ½ cup shredded nori
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella (don't @ us)
- **Crunchy topping:** Panko breadcrumbs + sesame seeds + crushed wasabi peas

Method

Mix rice, crab, soup, soy sauce, sesame oil, and half the nori. Pour into dish. Top with mozzarella, panko-sesame mix, and remaining nori. Bake at 375°F for 25 minutes. Serve with spicy mayo and pickled ginger.

Verdict

- **Hotdish Authenticity:** 0 — We have strayed far from God's light and also Minnesota.
 - **Actually Delicious?** 100 — It's... not bad? It's like a deconstructed California roll baked into a casserole. Which is what it is.
 - **Should We Have Done This? We're sorry.** But also... try it? And don't tell the sushi chef.
-

The Final Verdict

Everything can be a hotdish. This is the fundamental theorem of Midwestern cooking. Give us any cuisine on earth, a can of cream-of-something, a crunchy topping, and a 9x13 pan, and we will hotdish it.

Is it always a good idea? No. Will we do it anyway? Absolutely. Will we bring it to the potluck? Only if someone asks what we're bringing, at which point we'll say "Oh, just a little something" and produce a 9x13 pan of Pad Thai Hotdish like it's perfectly normal.

Because in the Midwest, the hotdish is not just a dish. It's a philosophy.

The Heartland Table Test Kitchen is not responsible for any culinary controversies, family arguments, or church supper scandals resulting from these experiments. All grandmothers were consulted. Most disapproved. One asked for the Taco Hotdish recipe.

▀ Grandma's Secret Ingredients

Every Midwestern grandmother has a secret ingredient she'll take to her grave. We got them to talk. Some of them are still mad about it.

How This Section Works

Throughout this cookbook, you'll find ▀ **Grandma's Secret** sidebars on recipe pages — little whispered tips from the composite wisdom of actual Midwestern grandmothers (names changed to protect the guilty).

These are the tips that never appear on recipe cards. The ones shared only verbally, usually while standing at the stove, and always prefaced with "Now don't tell anyone, but..."

Here they all are in one place, because some secrets deserve to be shared.

Amish Baked Oatmeal

▀ **Grandma Esther says:** "A splash of apple cider — about a quarter cup, taking away from the milk — gives it that little tang. I've been telling people it's just the cinnamon for thirty years."

Midwestern Breakfast Casserole

▀ **Grandma Jean says:** "I add a tablespoon of Dijon mustard to the egg mixture. Nobody can ever figure out why mine tastes 'brighter' than theirs. The mustard is invisible but essential, like a good foundation garment."

Buttermilk Pancakes

□ **Grandma Sue says:** "Separate those eggs. Beat the whites till they're fluffy and fold them in at the very end. Everyone will ask why your pancakes are so light and you just say 'practice, dear.'"

Farmhouse Skillet Hash

□ **Grandma Lorraine says:** "The secret is: dry those potatoes. I mean really dry them. Spread them on a towel and pat them like you're burping a baby. Wet potatoes don't crisp. Every soggy hash is a hash that didn't get dried."

Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds

□ **Grandma Dot says:** "A pinch of cayenne in the flour. Not enough to taste hot — just enough that people eat one and immediately reach for another without knowing why."

Classic Deviled Eggs

□ **Grandma Ruth says:** "Pickle juice. Not vinegar — pickle juice. A teaspoon or two in the yolk mixture. And just a tiny bit of finely minced sweet pickle relish folded in at the end. I've won the church picnic three years running and I will deny this conversation ever happened."

Tater Tot Hotdish

□ **Grandma Helga says:** "Before the tater tots go on, I sprinkle a thin layer of those French-fried onion rings over the beef mixture. It makes a secret crunchy layer in the middle that people can never figure out. I call it the hotdish's hidden crown."

Chicago Deep Dish Pizza

□ **Grandma Rosa says:** "A little cornmeal in the dough. Not enough to make it feel like cornbread — just a tablespoon or two. It gives the crust that sandy, buttery texture that makes people close their eyes when they bite into it."

Kansas City BBQ Brisket

□ **Grandpa Earl says (Grandma delegated):** "Mustard. Plain yellow mustard rubbed on the brisket before the dry rub goes on. It completely disappears during the cook, but it helps the bark form and adds a depth that no one can identify. I've been telling people at the VFW it's 'patience' for fifteen years."

Indiana Pork Tenderloin Sandwich

□ **Grandma Carol says:** "Buttermilk soak. At least two hours, overnight if you can. And a splash of hot sauce in the buttermilk. Not for heat — for the enzymes. It tenderizes the pork and makes the breading stick like it's been welded on."

Nebraska Runza

□ **Grandma Ingrid says:** "A little bit of caraway seed in the cabbage. Not much — maybe half a teaspoon. It tastes like 'something' but nobody can name it. My daughter-in-law has been trying to figure it out since 1987."

Cincinnati Chili

□ **Grandma Olympia says:** "The chocolate isn't the secret — everyone knows about the chocolate. The real secret is a splash of Worcestershire and a tiny bit of fish sauce. I know. But trust me. It deepens everything and nobody will ever taste 'fish.' If they ask, tell them it's the cinnamon."

Wisconsin Beer Cheese Soup

□ **Grandma Barb says:** "A spoonful of Dijon mustard and a capful of Worcestershire. Also — and don't tell my bridge club — a pinch of ground nutmeg. It makes the soup taste like it simmered for hours even if you made it in thirty minutes."

Hearty Chicken Noodle Soup

□ **Grandma Phyllis says:** "Lemon juice. Just a squeeze at the very end, right before serving. It lifts the whole pot. Everyone says 'your soup tastes so fresh' and I just smile and say 'it's homemade' and leave it at that."

Green Bean Casserole

□ **Grandma Donna says:** "Soy sauce. One tablespoon in the mushroom sauce. It disappears completely but it adds something — what the kids call 'umami,' I guess. I've been calling it 'depth' since before umami was a word."

Cheesy Funeral Potatoes

□ **Grandma Marge says:** "A packet of ranch seasoning mix in the sour cream layer. Yes, ranch. No, I'm not ashamed. There's a reason my funeral potatoes are requested by name and yours aren't, Karen."

Classic Apple Pie

□ **Grandma Evelyn says:** "Two teaspoons of apple cider vinegar in the pie crust dough. It makes the crust flaky in a way that butter alone never achieves. Also — and this is between us — a thin layer of crushed graham crackers on the bottom crust before the filling goes in. It absorbs the juice and prevents soggy bottom. I have never had a soggy bottom in fifty-three years of baking."

Buckeye Candies

□ **Grandma Betty says:** "A tablespoon of softened cream cheese in the peanut butter mixture. It makes them creamier and keeps them from crumbling. Also, freeze them for exactly one hour, not two. Too frozen and the chocolate cracks. I have opinions about this."

Puppy Chow

□ **Grandma Linda says:** "Double the powdered sugar. I know the recipe says a cup and a half. Use three cups. No one has ever complained about too much powdered sugar on puppy chow and no one ever will."

The Grandma Guarantee

Every secret ingredient in this section has been tested, verified, and served to at least three unsuspecting family members who asked for the recipe and received a deliberately incomplete version.

Because a grandmother's recipe card is not a contract — it's a suggestion, with the best parts left out on purpose.

That's not deception. That's legacy.

If your grandmother's secret isn't listed here, it's because she hasn't told anyone yet. And she's not going to. Respect the process.

□ Pairs Well With...

□ *Other cookbooks pair with wine. This is the Midwest. We pair with life.*

How Midwestern Food Pairing Works

Wine pairing is about complementary flavors, tannins, and acidity. Midwest pairing is about **context** — the situation, the people, the weather, and the specific type of passive-aggressive conversation happening at the table.

Every recipe in this cookbook comes with a "Pairs Well With" suggestion. Here's the master list.

□ Buttermilk Pancakes

Pairs well with: Saturday morning cartoons, a parent who doesn't check their email until Monday, and the faint sound of a lawn mower three houses down that reminds you it's summer.

□ Amish Baked Oatmeal

Pairs well with: The first cold morning of fall, a flannel shirt you've owned since 2003, and the quiet satisfaction of being up before everyone else in the house.

□ Midwestern Breakfast Casserole

Pairs well with: Christmas morning, houseguests you love (but are ready to leave), and the knowledge that you assembled this last night and are therefore a genius.

¶ Farmhouse Skillet Hash

Pairs well with: A hangover you won't admit to, black coffee, and the Sunday paper (or your phone — we don't judge).

¶ Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds

Pairs well with: A pitcher of Spotted Cow, a Packers game (any quarter), and your friend who keeps saying "we should do this more often" (you should).

¶ Classic Deviled Eggs

Pairs well with: Your aunt asking when you're getting married, a paper plate that's working too hard, and the realization that you've had six and nobody's counting.

¶ Minnesota Wild Rice Dip

Pairs well with: The first snowfall, a Costco membership, and the kind of party where everyone stands in the kitchen even though the living room is right there.

¶ Tater Tot Hotdish

Pairs well with: A Wednesday night, an argument about nothing, children who won't eat anything else, and the comforting knowledge that this recipe has never once failed anyone.

¶ Chicago Deep Dish Pizza

Pairs well with: An out-of-town visitor you're trying to impress, a very long Netflix queue, and a nap planned for immediately after.

¶ Detroit-Style Pizza

Pairs well with: Telling everyone at the party that "actually, Detroit pizza is the best style" and being right for once.

¶ Kansas City BBQ Brisket

Pairs well with: 14 hours of doing nothing but checking a smoker, your neighbor leaning over the fence saying "smells good," and the complete absence of any vegetable.

¶ Chicago Italian Beef

Pairs well with: A stack of napkins the size of a phone book, a willingness to lean over a counter, and the total abandonment of dignity.

¶ Indiana Pork Tenderloin Sandwich

Pairs well with: A bun that is comically too small, a county fair, and the confidence to eat something wider than your face in public.

¶ Nebraska Runza

Pairs well with: A Husker game, a 20°F November afternoon, and a level of state pride that borders on religion.

¶ St. Louis Toasted Ravioli

Pairs well with: A Cardinals game, a beer you've never heard of, and the smug knowledge that St. Louis invented something New York didn't.

¶ Cincinnati Chili

Pairs well with: An unwavering opinion about whether to go 3-Way or 5-Way, a conversation about which parlor is best, and a complete willingness to eat chili on spaghetti in front of people from Texas.

¶ Wisconsin Beer Cheese Soup

Pairs well with: A Packers loss (or win — both require cheese), the first week of October, and a bread bowl that you will absolutely eat.

¶ Hearty Chicken Noodle Soup

Pairs well with: A cold that isn't bad enough to go to the doctor but is bad enough for sympathy, a blanket, and reruns of anything.

¶ Booyah

Pairs well with: A community you've known your entire life, a fall festival, and the kind of October day where the leaves are perfect and you pretend winter isn't coming.

¶ Green Bean Casserole

Pairs well with: Thanksgiving, your uncle's political opinions, and the unspoken agreement that you will eat this even though you had it last year and the year before and every year since 1955.

¶ Cheesy Funeral Potatoes

Pairs well with: Any major life event (emphasis on "any"), a church basement with folding chairs, and the quiet heroism of the person who made three pans.

¶ Creamy Coleslaw

Pairs well with: A fish fry, paper plates, a folding table on a lawn, and a mosquito you're pretending isn't there.

¶ Corn on the Cob

Pairs well with: August, specifically. A garden hose still running. A neighbor you wave to but have never learned the last name of. Peak Midwest.

¶ Classic Apple Pie

Pairs well with: Thanksgiving, the argument about whether it needs ice cream or whipped cream (ice cream, obviously), and a belt that's been loosened one notch.

▀ Buckeye Candies

Pairs well with: An Ohio State game, a tin that someone "just happened to have," and eating seven while telling yourself you'll stop at three.

▀ German Chocolate Cake

Pairs well with: A birthday where no one asks how old you are, a church bake sale where this will sell for \$45, and someone saying "oh, you *made* this?"

▀ Iowa State Fair Funnel Cake

Pairs well with: A ride you'll regret, a sunburn developing, corn dogs consumed earlier, and powdered sugar on every item of clothing you own.

▀ Puppy Chow

Pairs well with: A Christmas movie, a zip-lock bag on a road trip, and the lie you tell yourself that "this is for the kids."

The Universal Midwest Pairing

When in doubt, every dish in this cookbook pairs well with:

A 20-minute goodbye at the door Someone saying "Oh, you shouldn't have" (they should have) A weather conversation that lasts longer than the meal "Ope" A second helping you didn't ask for but will accept The quiet drive home where everyone agrees that was nice

Pairing suggestions are not endorsed by any sommelier, dietitian, or therapist, though all three would probably understand.

▀ The Heartland Cooking Playlist

Every recipe has a vibe. Here's the soundtrack.

How To Use This

Each recipe in this cookbook includes a suggested song or artist. These aren't random — they're matched to the **energy** of cooking and eating each dish. The slow braise gets slow rock. The Friday night fish fry gets upbeat country. The funeral potatoes get... well, something respectful but comforting.

Below is the complete playlist. If we ever make a Spotify list, you'll find it linked from the cookbook's website.

¶ The Full Playlist

RecipeSong / ArtistWhy ----- **Buttermilk Pancakes** "Here Comes the Sun" — The BeatlesSaturday morning energy. Optimistic. Nobody's in a hurry. **Amish Baked Oatmeal** "Simple Man" — Lynyrd SkynyrdSlow, warm, uncomplicated. Like the oatmeal. **Midwestern Breakfast Casserole** "Good Morning" — Kanye WestIt's a crowd. It's a holiday. Energy is HIGH. **Farmhouse Skillet Hash** "Ramblin' Man" — The Allman BrothersCast iron. Sizzle. Something a little rough around the edges. **Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds** "Fat Bottomed Girls" — QueenDeep-fried. Indulgent. No apologies. **Classic Deviled Eggs** "Signed, Sealed, Delivered" — Stevie WonderPortable, dependable, always welcome. **Minnesota Wild Rice Dip** "Come Together" — The BeatlesParty food. Everyone's gathering around. **Tater Tot Hotdish** "Take Me Home, Country Roads" — John DenverThe ultimate comfort. Home in a pan. **Chicago Deep Dish Pizza** "Sweet Home Chicago" — Blues BrothersObviously. **Detroit-Style Pizza** "Lose Yourself" — EminemDetroit. Intensity. Crispy cheese edges. Going all in. **Chicago Italian Beef** "My Kind of Town" — Frank SinatraLean into the Chicago of it all. **Nebraska Runza** "Heartland" — George StraitWheat fields. Game day. Midwest pride. **Indiana Pork Tenderloin Sandwich** "Small Town" — John MellencampIndiana's own. County fair energy. **Kansas City BBQ Brisket** "Slow Ride" — Foghat14 hours of smoking. Low and slow. This is the only song. **St. Louis Toasted Ravioli** "Here I Go Again" — WhitesnakeFried. Bold. A little over-the-top. Perfect. **Cincinnati Chili** "Spice Up Your Life" — Spice GirlsCinnamon, allspice, cloves, cocoa. Five Ways. Five Spice Girls. We rest our case. **Wisconsin Beer Cheese Soup** "Piano Man" — Billy JoelBar atmosphere. A cold night. Something warm in a bowl. **Hearty Chicken Noodle Soup** "Lean on Me" — Bill WithersWhen you need comfort, this song and this soup show up. **Booyah** "We're Not Gonna Take It" — Twisted SisterCommunity stew. Outdoor kettles. Loud, proud, all-day energy. **Green Bean Casserole** "We Are Family" — Sister SledgeThanksgiving. Everyone's there. Someone brought the good rolls. **Cheesy Funeral Potatoes** "Lean on Me" — Bill Withers (reprise)Yes, it appears twice. This song IS funeral potatoes. **Creamy Coleslaw** "Summertime" — DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh PrinceBackyard. Sun. Cold slaw. Warm everything else. **Corn on the Cob** "Walking on Sunshine" — Katrina & The WavesAugust. Peak summer. Pure joy. **Classic Apple Pie** "American Pie" — Don McLeanCome on. **Buckeye Candies** "Hang On Sloopy" — The McCoysOhio's official rock song. Buckeyes. Non-negotiable. **German Chocolate Cake** "Happy Birthday" — Stevie WonderThe birthday cake song for the birthday cake. **Iowa State Fair Funnel Cake** "Life is a Highway" — Tom CochraneFair midway energy. Walking fast. Eating faster. **Puppy Chow** "Shake It Off" — Taylor SwiftYou're literally shaking a bag. It's right there.

¶ Mood Playlists

For when you don't want a single song — you want a *vibe*.

"Sunday Morning in the Farmhouse"

For: breakfast recipes, slow mornings, baked oatmeal

- Fleetwood Mac — "Everywhere"
- James Taylor — "Fire and Rain"
- Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young — "Our House"
- Carole King — "It's Too Late"

- The Eagles — "Peaceful Easy Feeling"

"Game Day in the Heartland"

For: dips, snacks, anything eaten standing up

- John Mellencamp — "Hurts So Good"
- Bob Seger — "Old Time Rock and Roll"
- Tom Petty — "Runnin' Down a Dream"
- Def Leppard — "Pour Some Sugar on Me"
- Bruce Springsteen — "Glory Days"

"Church Basement Potluck"

For: hotdishes, casseroles, funeral potatoes

- Bill Withers — "Lovely Day"
- The Temptations — "My Girl"
- Otis Redding — "Sittin' On The Dock of the Bay"
- Sam Cooke — "A Change Is Gonna Come"
- Al Green — "Let's Stay Together"

"Summer Cookout"

For: BBQ, corn, coleslaw, anything outdoors

- Lynyrd Skynyrd — "Sweet Home Alabama"
- CCR — "Fortunate Son"
- Steve Miller Band — "The Joker"
- ZZ Top — "La Grange"
- The Doobie Brothers — "Long Train Runnin'"

"Holiday Baking Marathon"

For: pies, cakes, cookies, anything involving flour and your mom's judgment

- Bing Crosby — "White Christmas"
- Mariah Carey — "All I Want For Christmas Is You"
- Vince Guaraldi Trio — "Linus and Lucy"
- Nat King Cole — "The Christmas Song"
- Wham! — "Last Christmas"

No aux cord arguments were resolved in the making of this playlist. The driver still picks the music. That's the rule.