

Cooking is something that is increasing in popularity. People are beginning to realize that preparing food at home is healthier, less costly and better for the family. Cooking is one of those tasks that everyone in the family can be involved with and the process of preparing the meal can create additional family time together. Cooking is a fun way for children to learn to follow directions and also to use their math skills in a practical application. The menus for family meals do not have to be elaborate, but it is a good opportunity to introduce children to different foods. Children are often more willing to try a new or unusual food if they have been involved in the purchase or preparation of the food.

You do not have to have an elaborate set of cookware or utensils, but having some basic pots and pans will help to make things easier. Every kitchen should have a large covered skillet, a large pasta pot, a small and medium sauce pan, and a selection of basic spices and of course a good pepper mill. Basic spices should include those that the family enjoys as well as a good kosher salt, which adds less sodium to the foods and enhances the taste of the food more than regular salt. The use of a pepper mill provides a fresher pepper taste without having to use as large of an amount. Black and white pepper tends to lose their taste rather quickly once ground. By using a pepper mill and grinding the peppercorns at the time it is being added into the recipe the maximum amount of flavor is achieved.

My mother used very few savory spices in her cooking. She used salt and pepper and sage for stuffing. She used cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg in baking and that was the extent of her spice cabinet. We like to use a wide variety of spices, especially in preparing the wild game meats that my husband fills our freezer with each year. We grow spices year round in pots on our window sills. Our children love to watch the plants grow and they help in the drying process when the plants are ready. We buy many peppercorns not only for the pepper mill, but also to crack with a meat mallet and then pound them into steaks. The cracked pepper makes a tasty crust on the meat as it is seared. I have found that it pays to purchase a high quality pepper mill so that the grinder continues to work. The cheap mills tend to break after a few uses. I also find that the mills that are filled with peppercorns usually have low quality pepper. It is best to buy the peppercorns separately and load them in the pepper mill yourself.