



Extension News Column

University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service, www.uaf.edu/ces/fycit@uaf.edu, 907-474-5211, FAX 907-474-6885

Date: Sept. 22, 2011
To: Mary Beth Smetzer, community news editor, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), mismetzer@newsminer.com, and people@newsminer.com
From: Roxie Dinstel
Re: Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3
Additional Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

Fall is upon us and there is a definite chill in the air. As we move from fall into winter, serving nutritious meals that are hearty and filling becomes a priority. Let's face it. We are all looking for comfort food that is warm, easy to prepare and filling. Think soups with a side of cheese toast or crackers. These meals can fulfill all of these priorities and still be a food budget saver.

I love these kinds of meals because they can also be easy to prepare. My time is limited and my imagination is as well. Meals need to be either quickly prepared, or something that I can throw in my crockpot and let it cook all day. Let me share with you some of my favorites.

For easy-to-prepare soups, I rely on those staples I have in my pantry. This is a great time to open cans, throw it in a pan, bring it up to simmering and serve — meals accomplished in 30 minutes or less.

Black bean soup is a favorite at my house. Brown 1 pound of sausage (moose is my favorite), add ½ cup each of onions and peppers, and sauté. Add 1 can of tomatoes with green chilis and a drained can of black beans (or other type of bean if you prefer), then season with chili powder, cumin, salt and pepper. You can feed four people at a little over \$1 a person and still have enough leftovers for your lunch the next day.

Chicken vegetable soup is another favorite. It only takes one chicken breast or two thighs to have plenty of meat for soup. Cook your chicken in boiling water for about 20 minutes, bone and chop. Add a can of mixed vegetables or 2 cups of frozen vegetables. Add chicken broth granules and water. While this is simmering, prepare 1 cup of your favorite pasta or noodles. Drain noodles and add to the simmering soup. This is another budget-friendly meal that checks in at \$7.75 to serve 6 people.

My kids always laugh at my hunter's stew. Mama hunts through the refrigerator and everything goes in the pot! Repurposing those leftovers can make for great soups in a short time. Leftover roast or steak chopped up or ground meat (with whatever seasoning

you desire) can go straight into the broth to form the base of the soup. Add any leftover vegetables you might have or add chopped potatoes and carrots and season to taste. I keep a bag in my freezer with those small amounts of vegetables too small to serve, but too good to throw away. You might be surprised at the flavor and thickness that scalloped potatoes or spaghetti sauce adds to your soup.

One of my favorite leftover soups is jambalaya, or at least what passes for this Creole dish in my house. I usually brown chopped onions and peppers and add a can of well-seasoned tomatoes. Chopped ham, chicken, browned sausage or other leftover meats go in next along with chicken broth. Add a bag of frozen okra and cook until okra is just barely soft. The final step is to add ½ pound of cooked shrimp. You don't need the big shrimp for this dish; in fact, the little ones work best. Heat until the shrimp are hot and serve over cooked rice. This is a great dish at a cost of \$10, but you will find it easily feeds 6 to 8 people depending on whether you have one of my sons at the table.

Mixed bean soup is one of our favorite soups that is done in the crockpot. You can buy a 13 bean soup for \$2.50 a pound, or you can make your own for \$1.40 a pound. Purchase 1-pound bags of as many types of beans as your family likes — black-eyed peas, pintos, white beans, lentils, split peas, kidney beans, limas, great northern beans, cranberry beans, etc. Pour all of them in a big container and mix it up. To prepare the beans, add 3 cups of beans to 6 cups of water in a pan. Bring it to a boil, turn it off and let it set for 30 to 45 minutes. Drain the water as this has all the dissolved carbohydrates that cause those unfortunate intestinal upsets. Add fresh water and cook on the top of the stove for 1½ to 2 hours or in the crockpot for 5 to 6 hours. I add one can of seasoned tomatoes at the end and season to taste.

Try one of these ideas for a budget-friendly meal that is highly nutritious. And as our days get shorter, a little comfort food never hurts.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.