

First-time cooks consult motherly types when shopping

By Ben T. Shamshor

The matrons of Lincoln always seem to know when the new school year begins. Every September they are approached in grocery stores by lean, hungry and utterly confused young men and women forced to shop for the

notes from table 8

first time in their lives. Deprived of the guidance of mom's shopping list, and faced with the imminent disaster of eating their own cooking, they turn to the first motherly type they find.

The conversation usually goes like this:
Student: "Um, excuse me ma'am. What type of bean goes into chili?"

Matron: "Well, most people use either red beans or kidney beans. They both work just fine."

Student: "Okay. Thanks." (After calculating that the red beans are .00057 cents cheaper per bean than kidney beans, he tosses a sack into his cart and begins to move off.)

Matron: "Son, don't forget to soak them overnight first."

Student: "Oh. Well, can't I just tenderize them by adding more Tabasco sauce?"

Potential cook

Our cast of characters is fairly typical. The student shows potential for becoming a good cook. He is willing to prepare a dish for which a can opener is not a prerequisite.

He is willing to ask advice. He probably has some

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experience as a cook, though he may have forgotten the time he creatively garnished the mud pie with juniper berries. He probably also stated that lousy food was one of the reasons for moving out of the dorm, but that was when he fantasized about a refrigerator loaded with midnight snacks of fried chicken and homemade apple pie.

The Matron has had experience with his type before. Those lines around her eyes aren't from age; they were caused by five sons who consistently refused broccoli and liver.

We all are faced with similar difficulties at some times in our lives. Usually, the nucleus of a kitchen exists. Armed with the family's discarded frying pan, two sauce pans, three dull paring knives, the indispensable can opener and assorted Harper Hall cutlery, one must learn to cook. Slow learners' sufferings range from the ridicule of one's roommates to being listed as a statistic in food and nutrition textbooks.

Arming for the battle

While this is a good start, it won't get you very far. Your next essential purchase should be a good cookbook. Don't worry about the specialty works on ethnic cuisines, or collections of 453 souffle recipes. I suggest purchasing a time-proven classic such as the latest edition of Irma Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking*, available in paperback for \$4.95. Not only is it an impressive compendium of tested recipes, it also teaches one how to cook.

Next you should invest in a modest collection of seasonings. If you must limit yourself to five, choose

salt, pepper, cinammon, thyme and rosemary. Once you master these, keep expanding.

Don't forget to purchase a knife and cutting board. The paring knife you brought from home won't work for carving the roast you want to make. The cutting board is the first step toward having your rental deposit returned.

Mistakes inevitable

You still will need more advice, and you can't avoid a few disasters in the first weeks. But hopefully, you won't be catching the fried eggs on the first bounce, and your potato dumplings won't crack the linoleum.

Remember the pleasant matrons when shopping. They always are good for advice and probably had some of the same frustrations you suffer. Another good source of advice is your little black book. Find a new color of star for those folks who already know how to make a meatloaf. If all else fails, you can send queries to me, accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope, care of the *Daily Nebraskan*.

Whatever you do, please, please don't become a slave to your can opener.

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