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QUESTION BOX

Cooking low-cost vegetables?
How prepare eggplant?
What makes gravy greasy?

ANSWERS FROM:

Home economists of the U.S.
Department of Agriculture

--ooOoo--

Food questions fill the mailbox today,-- and that's natural, with so many people thinking about food for freedom, and trying not to waste a thing that comes into the kitchen. The letters ask about cooking low-cost vegetables, eggplant, and gravy. The answers are from home economists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The first writer asks: "Can you tell me some ways to cook the low-cost vegetables like cabbage and kale, so the family will like them better?"

Well, here are several ideas from the home economists: You might first try "5-minute" cabbage, which is simply cabbage chopped fine just before you're ready to cook it and then cooked uncovered, in milk, for 5 to 8 minutes. Of course, you cook it over low heat so the milk won't scorch. Cooked this way, the cabbage still has some of the crisp texture of the raw cabbage, and most of the vitamin content. The milk gives extra flavor and food value.

Then how about trying cabbage cooked with apple? One good-sized tart apple to a pound and a half of cabbage will be about right. Peel, quarter, core and slice the apple and mix it with the chopped cabbage; cook in barely enough water to cover. Rather sour apple is particularly good with red cabbage, and helps to keep the color bright; but you can use it with any kind of cabbage. For extra good seasoning, cook 2 tablespoons of minced onion in a little butter or other fat until the onion is tender, and mix with the cooked cabbage and apple when you season the dish for the table.

Serve cabbage "au gratin" sometimes. That's cooked cabbage in a white sauce, topped with buttered bread crumbs and often a little grated cheese. Brown the dish lightly in the oven.

Or try scalloped cabbage. Put the chopped cabbage in a baking dish in layers. Sprinkle each layer lightly and evenly with flour, salt, and pepper, and dot with butter. Fill the dish with milk and bake in a moderate oven. The flour thickens the milk.

Panning is another good way of preparing both cabbage and kale. Chop the cabbage or kale, put a little fat into a flat pan,-- just enough fat to keep the vegetable from sticking,-- add the cabbage or kale, and cover. The water that cooks out evaporates, or "boils off" and none of the food value of the vegetable is lost. You can add a little milk when the cabbage or kale is tender, but don't make the dish too moist. For extra flavor you can add some crisp bits of salt pork, bacon, or ham.

Well, there are some ideas for cooking cabbage and kale-- 5-minute cabbage, panned cabbage and kale, cabbage with apple, scalloped cabbage, cabbage au gratin, and either with salt meat flavor. Now for a question about eggplant.

"My mother says you have to sprinkle salt on slices of eggplant, put a weighted plate on them and let them stand several hours to draw out the juices before you cook them. But one of my friends never bothers to salt and press her eggplant-- just fries it as soon as it is peeled and sliced. Which is right?"

Home economists say your friend is right. The old-fashioned idea that eggplant must be salted down to "draw out the juices" is a mistake. Eggplant is a pleasant tasting, food just as it is, and the sooner you get it into the pan, the higher its vitamin value. And by the way, frying is not the only method of cooking eggplant. You can also broil it, boil it, bake it, or serve it stuffed. For frying in deep fat, you first dip the slices in a thin batter, or egg-and-crumb them.

You can also simply flour them and sauté in a little fat. For a tasty variation, sprinkle grated cheese over the hot slices of fried or broiled eggplant as they come from the pan.

To make stuffed eggplant, cut the vegetable in half lengthwise, scoop out the center, cut it in small blocks, and boil till just tender in a little water. You can use any stuffing you like, but a very good combination is a mixture of about equal parts of bread crumbs and drained canned tomatoes, seasoned with onion, a few drops of tabasco, salt and pepper. Drain the boiled eggplant, and mix with the stuffing. Fill the two shells, sprinkle with buttered crumbs, and brown.

Now for a question about making gravy. "How can I make gravy that is not greasy?"

The home economists say that too much fat in proportion to flour makes a gravy greasy. In making gravy it's a good idea to measure the pan drippings, the flour, and the liquid into a separate skillet as you put them together. For each 2 tablespoons of fat or pan drippings, allow 1 and one-half to 2 tablespoons of flour and 1 cupful of liquid. The liquid may be meat stock, water, or a vegetable water such as potato water. Stir the fat and flour together until they are well blended. Let them brown lightly for color and flavor. Then add the liquid very gradually, stirring all the time. Some of the liquid may be the hot water used to rinse out the roasting pan.

There's another way to make gravy, but it won't make it as brown. You measure the ingredients. Then heat the liquid with the drippings. Mix the flour with a little cold water and stir gradually into the hot liquid and fat. Whichever way you make gravy, be sure to cook it long enough to get rid of any raw flour taste. And keep on stirring.

And now, wishing you good luck in all your cooking, we'll sign off for today.

