



Because more wives and mothers than ever before in the nation's history are trying to do justice to two full-time jobs without short-changing either, they need all the help they can get.

Homemakers carrying a job outside the house are always looking for ways to save time because time has become their most precious commodity.

One of the ways some of us save time is by cooking two or three meals at once. If that sounds burdensome, consider this: while dicing onions for one meal, you can save time by doing enough for two or three dishes, and while the one you plan to serve for supper is cooking, you can be putting together the ingredients for the one you'll set before the family tomorrow night.

Like most people today, I use a lot more hamburger than a year or so ago; I've dug out recipes I haven't used since the late '40s when the grocery budget was only \$12 a week. That's no longer sufficient, of course, but food expenses can still be brought into manageable ranges by practicing the same economies.

About a year ago I invested in an inexpensive crockpot and it's been the year's best bargain for it cooks for tomorrow and the next day while I'm preparing for tonight.

In fact, given a couple of hours, I can plan half-a-dozen suppers at once (counting leftovers) and still serve dinner at 6:30.

Marketing for the working housewife is a Saturday chore. My shopping list includes a meatloaf combination, several pounds of hamburger, some chicken parts -- we like thighs just fine and get more meat than bone for the money as a "best buy", -- a pork shoulder or pre-cooked ham and perhaps some sirloin tip steaks.

I plan rice with the chicken; macaroni and cheese with the ham or pork shoulder; baked potatoes with meatloaf, and a hamburger casserole dish called Texas Hash contains rice as well.

Each of these dishes serves four people once or two twice, if you plan ahead.

Monday we have baked ham, macaroni and cheese casserole, sliced tomatoes and cole slaw. Scoring the ham and sticking it with whole cloves takes just about as long as it takes the oven to preheat. Usually I give a few extra seconds to mixing some brown sugar with a bit of mustard to glaze the ham. Pop it into a 325° oven an hour-and-a-half before dinnertime.

It takes about 10 minutes to mix and cook the sauce for macaroni and cheese; while it's thickening in a double boiler (so it won't burn if I forget it), boil the macaroni, grease the casserole, and grate the cheese. After blending in the casserole, it goes into the oven with the ham.

While dicing onions for that sauce I chop up four or five more onions. Some goes into the Texas Hash and some into the meatloaf. Texas

Hash starts with a couple of pounds of hamburger cooked til it crumbles apart in the crockpot. While at it, I chop up three or four green peppers as well.

As soon as the meat in the crockpot is cooked through, some of the onions and green pepper go into that pot to stew in the meat juices.

The meatloaf mixture goes into a large bowl along with a beaten egg, the rest of the onions, and the green peppers. Some tomato soup or juice or sauce, whatever's handy, a cup of breadcrumbs, a bit of seasoning -- salt, pepper, celery, mushrooms, what's on hand -- are added.

Part of the meatloaf, after mixing well, is packed into a small loaf pan; the rest divided into a six or eight-hole muffin tin. These are sealed with foil and go into the freezer for use later in the week.

Meanwhile the ham is baking and the macaroni and cheese is bubbling. You now have time to shred raw cabbage, add a bit of grated or finely chopped raw onion, some celery seed, a dash or two of tarragon vinegar and a dollop of mayonnaise. Salt and pepper to taste completes the cole slaw.

If this happens to be a company dinner, grab a can of refrigerator rolls, arrange in a ungreased cake tin, increase the oven temperature to 425, and remove the ham. The rolls bake while the cheese topping on the casserole browns nicely for about 12 minutes.

Check the crockpot. If the onions and green peppers are soft, it's time to pour in a couple of cans of whole tomatoes, and salt and pepper to taste. Once this has come to a boil -- it may not be until you've gotten the supper dishes under way -- you can turn off the heat entirely; when cool, refrigerate.

The last ingredient in the Texas Hash, a cup of uncooked white rice, you'll add when you reheat it. Rice is best when fresh-cooked, not all soggy and mushy.

Now -- where are you? Oh, yes, the chicken. The day you bought it, it was re-wrapped, four thighs to a package for easy servings, in waxed paper and then a plastic baggie, and frozen. Before you leave for work the morning of the day you want chicken for supper, you'll move it from the freezer to the refrigerator; by the time you get home, it's defrosted enough so you can separate the pieces.

Arrange skin side up in a shallow baking pan and drizzle some olive oil on top. Shake some salt, pepper, celery flakes, a pinch of dry mustard and a generous amount of garlic powder over the pieces and bake in a 325° oven for an hour and a quarter.

Meanwhile, boil 2 cups of water, add 1 cup of brown rice, a lump of butter and a teaspoon of salt. Lower heat and simmer rice, tightly covered, while chicken bakes. Turnip, squash or corn niblets are good vegetables with chicken, and so is left-over slaw.

All this activity sounds complicated, but it's really not that difficult to do all these things at once.

You have a ham dinner for tonight that will serve four handsomely, plus leftovers. There's macaroni and cheese enough for two meals. Warm it up in a double boiler with additional milk to moisten.

You've meatloaf enough for three meals; the loaf hot, the loaf cold, and the muffin-tin servings which bake quickly when you're rushed.

You can vary the ways you serve the rice if you want. A curry sauce, if you like curry, takes about five minutes to make. Melt a couple or three tablespoonsful of butter, saute half a sliced onion; when tender, blend in a teaspoon or two of curry powder and two tablespoons of flour.

Stir constantly while heating a cup of milk; pour hot milk into butter, curry and flour mixture while stirring, salt and pepper. As soon as the mixture thickens remove from heat. It's ready to serve over chicken, shrimp or steamed (fresh) cod fish.

Any leftover rice can be mixed with leftover macaroni and cheese and heated with some milk in a double boiler to serve with leftovers of ham, chicken or meatloaf.

Ham and chicken leftovers, if you have both at once, are marvelously compatible; just make a cream sauce of melted butter, thickened with flour and laced with hot milk (or make a curry sauce), and dice the chicken and ham into the sauce. Serve over rice or noodles.

Thrifty and nutrition-wise working wives will vary these meals with ones of braised beef liver, Swiss steaks, pepper steak, beef stew (or lamb when available at reasonable prices). Occasionally broiled filet of sole with lemon juice and butter accompanied by parsleyed potatoes and a tossed green salad is a good meal.

There's a good recipe for Poor-Man's pot roast that yields a delicious sweet-sour roast plus a scrumptious onion soup that's enhanced by grated cheese and a crust of dry bread. The roast is a company meal the first time, is great sliced cold, and for a finale can make a good hash, ground and mixed with boiled potatoes, formed into cakes and pan fried til brown and crisp on the outside.

With part of the savings these multi-meals provide, you can splurge on a pint of scallops -- enough to feed two people a hearty dinner. Quick too, since you broil them only five or six minutes after rolling them in yellow corn meal.

Bon appetit! And count your change.....