

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

It started with the teakettle. A potful of boiling water, always on the stove, was a household convenience I'd grown up with. It was lost when the electric range moved into the kitchen and, by now, almost forgotten.

Although the electric range is still in the kitchen, a woodstove has moved into the dining room. Along with thousands of other New Englanders with oil burners in the cellar, I turned back to wood.

Keeping a kettle of water simmering, full time, was the next step. Not only is the extra humidity in the air good for the furniture, but the soft singing of the kettle is a friendly little noise to live with.

Creature of habit that I am, I continued to use the kitchen range until one evening there wasn't a free burner for the vegetables. It was natural, then, to set the pan atop the woodstove. That was the second step.

In a matter of weeks I was doing most stove-top cooking in the diningroom. I was also searching for a stove-top oven; I'm still doing that. My stove is small. Its top surface measures 17½" x 11½" and the stovepipe to the chimney occupies the rear 6"; still, it will hold two sauce pans at the same time, or one Dutch oven.

By chance, rather than design, my stove is flanked by rough stone shelves, for the dining room was once a screened porch which sported a grill for cooking steaks and hamburgers.

The niche where the grill had been became the home of the woodstove. A brick chimney forms the wall behind it, a brick floor lies beneath and in front; and the stone shelves on either side provide not only working space but also a heat-retaining mass that, once warm, radiates comfort for hours.

Once sparked, the idea of cooking on the woodstove spread in all directions. Obvious possibilities were soups, stews and spaghetti sauces. All these have been successful. In fact, the same foods, cooked on the kitchen range, seem to lack an indefinable something that cooking on the woodstove gives them. The slow steady heat enhances flavors and provides, at no extra cost, the extra time these dishes need to be at their best.

Spaghetti sauce is not only versatile, but there are as many varieties as there are cooks. Tomato may form the base and some sauces are enriched with ground meat. Clam or tuna in tomato sauce are a nice change.

Fish sauces are traditionally served with linguini, a narrow strip of pasta similar to the thinnest spaghetti. Linguini is especially delicious with white or clam sauce, made without tomatoes. Fresh rather than canned clams, olive oil, onion and garlic are all that's needed.

Steam enough clams to yield two cups of chopped meat and two cups of broth. Saute half a cup of chopped onion and three crushed garlic cloves in three tablespoons of olive oil. When translucent, stir in two tablespoons of flour and cook a few minutes before adding broth and clam meat. Cook only til slightly thickened and serve over linguine or thin spaghetti. Serves four.

You can serve spaghetti sauce other than with pasta and pizza. Another way is on crepes. Crepes are very thin pancakes; they can be filled, and rolled or folded in different ways, and offer all sorts of delectable possibilities.

Cook the sauce on your woodstove, of course; use your own favorite recipe or try mine, if you like. Brown a pound of hamburger or meatloaf combination in a Dutch oven, stirring occasionally to break up lumps. When the fat has cooked out, scratch the meat to one side and add a large chopped onion, half a green pepper, chopped, and few stalks of chopped celery. Cook 'til tender.

Add the following seasonings: 1 t. salt, ¼ t. pepper, 1 t. oregano, ½ t. dry mustard, ½ t. nutmeg, 1 T. sugar, 1 clove crushed garlic, 2T. parsley flakes. Stir together.

Add one 28-ounce can of whole tomatoes and one 8-ounce can of tomato sauce. Cover and simmer three or four hours until thick and creamy. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking.

For the crepes themselves, use either your kitchen range or an electric frying pan. Temperature regulation is important. Over medium heat on the range or at 375° in the electric skillet, you can make the crepes in about 15 minutes. Once made, they may be refrigerated, frozen (filled or unfilled), or used immediately.

Mix crepe batter an hour before you plan to make them. Combine three whole eggs, one cup sifted flour, ¼ t. salt, 1¼ cup milk, ¼ cup water, and 2 T. melted butter. Beat all ingredients together gently with a wire whisk until smooth. Cover and let stand at room temperature for one hour.

Preheat frying pan for ten minutes. Pour a scant quarter-cup of batter into pan and quickly, with a swirling motion, spread the batter over the entire surface of the pan. Cook 1 minute or so, until the crepe appears dull on top and begins to brown at edges. With a plastic flipper, turn to cook the other side, about 30 seconds. Remove from pan; stack crepes between waxed paper. To refrigerate, place stack in plastic bag; to freeze, seal in plastic; defrost completely before filling.

A delicious filling for crepes to be served with spaghetti sauce can be stirred up in a few minutes. Combine a largeurd cottage cheese, one T. parsley flakes, 1 t. oregano, half-cup of grated hard cheese, one well-beaten egg, and ½ t. each, salt and pepper.

Fill each 8" crepe with two tablespoons of filling; for 12" repes use about a quarter of a cup of filling. Roll crepes,

fold ends under, and place seam-side-down in a baking pan. Spread spaghetti sauce over the top. Bake 20 minutes at 325°. These freeze well, too. Defrost before reheating.

Now, you're saying, you're not using the woodstove exclusively. Right you are. The part that takes the longest and uses the most gas or electricity, though, is the spaghetti sauce. The rest of the dish is prepared with a minimum of conventional cooking.

The same is true of stews and soups; and once the word gets out that woodstove-owners will purchase small ovens for stove-top cooking, we can add baked beans, Indian pudding, baked potatoes and all sorts of casseroles to our repertoire of woodstove cookery. Old-fashioned baked beans, made at home, are a treat few of us have enjoyed since the modern range moved into the kitchen. Lots of people have never tasted any but the kind that comes in a can, poor dears.

It's surprising, once you develop the mind-set for cooking on a woodstove, how often it's possible to use it instead of the kitchen range. And, whether you try it or not, I hope you enjoy the crepes. Bon appetit!

VILLAGE ADVERTISER March 6, 1980