

Thanks to the freezer

by Lydia Lovell

1 cut-up 3-lb. frying chicken
1 large onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 C. olive oil
1 8-oz. can whole tomatoes, undrained
1-1/2 qts. water or chicken broth
1 bay leaf
1 T. salt
1 lb. raw long-grained rice
1 t. dry mustard
1 chopped green pepper
1/2 C. sherry
1 C. small frozen peas
2 whole pimentos, cut in strips

In a Dutch oven, fry chicken with onion and garlic in olive oil over medium heat until lightly browned, about 15 minutes. Remove chicken and spread out to cool. To pan, add tomatoes and water or broth. Bring to a boil, add bay leaf, salt, rice, dry mustard and green pepper. Cover closely and reduce heat to simmer. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, remove and discard skin and bones. Cut large pieces of meat in 2" dice. Add meat to rice mixture. Stir. Continue simmering until rice is tender. Remove from heat and pour into freezer-to-oven casserole. Cool quickly, seal, and freeze.

With adequate advance notice, move from freezer to refrigerator the day before you plan to serve it; in an emergency, remove, unseal, and thaw in a warm oven. Twenty minutes before serving time, stir thoroughly, and reheat, covered, in a pre-heated 350° oven. Just prior to serving, stir in sherry, peas, and pimentos. With a tossed green salad, this complete one-dish meal serves six to eight.

Equally as convenient and delicious, and equally as freezable, is Aunt Olivia's shrimp and cheese casserole. We like either steamed rice, or boiled fettuchini (tossed with butter, garlic powder, salt and pepper), and an orange, grapefruit, and green grape salad with **Shrimp au Gratin**.

1/4 C. chopped scallions
1/4 C. coarsely chopped celery
1/2 lb. processed Cheddar cheese
1 C. milk
2 T. sherry wine
1 lb. medium shrimp
2 T. chopped parsley
dash Tabasco
1-1/2 C. fresh, soft bread crumbs
Paprika
3 T. melted butter

Cook scallions and celery together in 2 T. boiling water, stirring, until water boils away. Slowly stir in milk, shredded cheddar, sherry, parsley, and Tabasco. Stir until cheese melts and sauce is smooth. Add cooked, shelled shrimp. Divide evenly into six oiled baking shells. Place shells in a shallow pan and freeze. Remove from pan and stack for storage, wrapping well in heavy foil or freezer paper. When wanted, arrange in a single layer on a cookie sheet. In a small saucepan, stir paprika and bread crumbs with melted butter, and sprinkle over tops. Bake 20 minutes at 375° until bubbly and golden. Garnish with parsley sprig.

In the Lovell household, roast beef for Sunday dinner appeared seldom; we were far more likely to have chicken, pork, lamb, or even fish, if someone brought us a fine strip-er or blue. Meals following those rare Sundays that roast

beef was served centered around left-over beef, and ranged from sliced cold, to open-faced sandwiches with hot gravy, and from hash to stroganoff which, of all the choices, became my favorite. After acquiring my own freezer and discovering how quickly **Beef Stroganoff** is readied, I sometimes purchase sirloin or round steak for that express purpose.

2 lbs beef, cut into strips
2 T. margarine
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 C. tomato juice
1/2 C. mushrooms, sliced
1/2 t. salt
1/8 t. pepper
1 can cream mushroom soup
1 C. sour cream
1/4 C. red wine

In a large skillet, heat margarine and cook meat strips (1/2"x 1/4"x4") in margarine until browned. Stir in minced garlic, cook one minute. Add tomato juice. Simmer 40 minutes until meat is tender. Add mushrooms, seasoning, and soup. Bring to a boil, remove from heat, and pour into freezer container. Keep frozen until ready to use. Reheat and cook only a few minutes. Remove from stove, add sour cream and wine, and serve immediately over steamed rice or cooked wide noodles. A simple salad of sliced tomatoes and cucumbers with an oil-and-vinegar dressing is a good choice.

With any of these frozen entrees, a frozen dessert is the logical answer to hosting the perfect company meal. Aunt Olivia would turn over in her grave were I to attribute this dessert to her, for she held such wonders as prepared pie crusts and containerized toppings in great disdain. But then, she never worked outside the home. I find them enormously convenient and perfectly suited to whipping up **Yogurt Pie**.

1 egg, separated
3 8-oz. cartons fruit yogurt
1 container whipped topping
1 ready-made graham-cracker crust

Spread egg yolk over pie crust; bake 5 minutes in 400° oven. Cool. Place a large mixing bowl in your refrigerator until thoroughly chilled. Whip egg white stiffly. Empty topping into the bowl. Fold in yogurt — lime-flavored is particularly nice — and egg white, blending thoroughly. Spoon into crust. Freeze at least four hours or longer. An hour or two before serving, move from freezer to refrigerator. Freeze leftovers, if any.

With at least one company meal scheduled each weekend for the next two months, and with my freezer stocked in advance with quick-frozen entrees and desserts, I'm looking forward to enjoying my guests and spending remarkably few hours in the kitchen during their visits. At the same time, we'll be sitting down to a good hearty dinner at least once a day. Thanks to the freezer.

Bon appetit.

Hardly a week passes that I don't turn to Aunt Olivia's recipe files for inspiration; this is particularly so in the summertime when we welcome a steady stream of company. The only way to enjoy all the comings and goings is to be well-stocked with food that's easy to prepare and serve. A fully packed freezer is not only an energy-saver as far as electricity goes, but it's an energy-saver for me, as well.

Frozen foods began to appear in local groceries when I was a teenager; Aunt Olivia greeted them happily because they meant that, for the first time in her life, she could depend upon serving fresh-tasting green vegetables no matter what the season. Just as frozen foods have become for us, canned goods were staples for Aunt Olivia. Frozen foods introduced a new dimension she was quick to incorporate into her meal-planning.

Although among the first to abandon her trusty old ice box for an electric refrigerator, Aunt Olivia never did make the full transition to a home freezer. The last fridge she owned boasted only a small compartment in which she made ice cubes, kept fruit juice concentrate, or held ice cream in semi-solid state for a week or so. Not until visiting me after I was grown up and running a kitchen of my own did she fully come to appreciate the miracle that home freezing offered to those of us who combined housewifery with careers.

Fortunately, while I depend primarily upon Aunt Olivia's lessons and recipes, it was her creative approach to every dish she prepared, her spirit of adventure, that applied with the acquisition of my home freezer. For a while I froze almost everything, just to find out what happened. I learned that fresh salad vegetables don't freeze successfully; in fact, most frozen vegetables are best if purchased after they have been commercially processed. Quality is retained when they are processed and flash-frozen. Flash freezing requires equipment unavailable to the average homemaker.

That doesn't mean we prefer frozen vegetables to garden-fresh. On the contrary! But when garden-fresh are out-of-season, the frozen varieties are excellent choices. The same applies to fruits. And to fish. If fresh fish can't be obtained but frozen filets are at hand, use them, by all means.

What then, do we use the freezer for, other than storing commercially processed foods? Here Aunt Olivia's recipes prove a rich source of quick meals. From her basic Chicken and Rice Casserole has evolved an **Arroz con Polla** that moves from freezer to oven to table in one of those baking dishes made from ceramic developed for nose-cones of rockets to be shot into space.