

A Summer Chicken Dinner

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

by Lydia Lovell

How many of us can remember when nearly every family in the village kept a small flock of chickens, when we waked every morning to a rooster's crow, and when a neighbor-visiting-neighbors announced at four o'clock in the afternoon, "Well, I must be getting home; it's most time to feed the hens," and nobody thought he was being funny?

When I was growing up, keeping hens was becoming the exception, but in Aunt Olivia's day, it was a common practice. How else, in fact, could folks keep their families supplied with eggs? And how else, pray tell, to count on having a chicken dinner now and then?

Aunt Olivia, when she wanted to serve chicken, asked Uncle Henry to prepare a bird from the flock in the hen yard. If she wanted a fryer, he selected a young one; if she wanted a roaster, he took a more mature bird; if she told him she planned to make stew, Uncle Henry culled the flock and disposed of an older hen, one that no longer produced many eggs. No sentimentality surrounded flock-members; when it came to feeding the family, no consideration was wasted on the animal's preferences. Uncle Henry delivered a dressed, cleaned chicken, ready to be prepared for dinner.

But times have changed. We can now plan to serve chicken almost at a moment's notice. Most housewives keep chicken parts in their freezers, ready to be thawed and baked, fried, or broiled. Whole ones are available at the meat counters, ready to be stuffed and roasted whenever wanted. Chicken, we are advised, is healthier for us than beef, pork, or lamb and (together with fish) should make up an important part of our diet. As a result (and also because chicken is economical), most of us welcome new and different ways to prepare the bird.

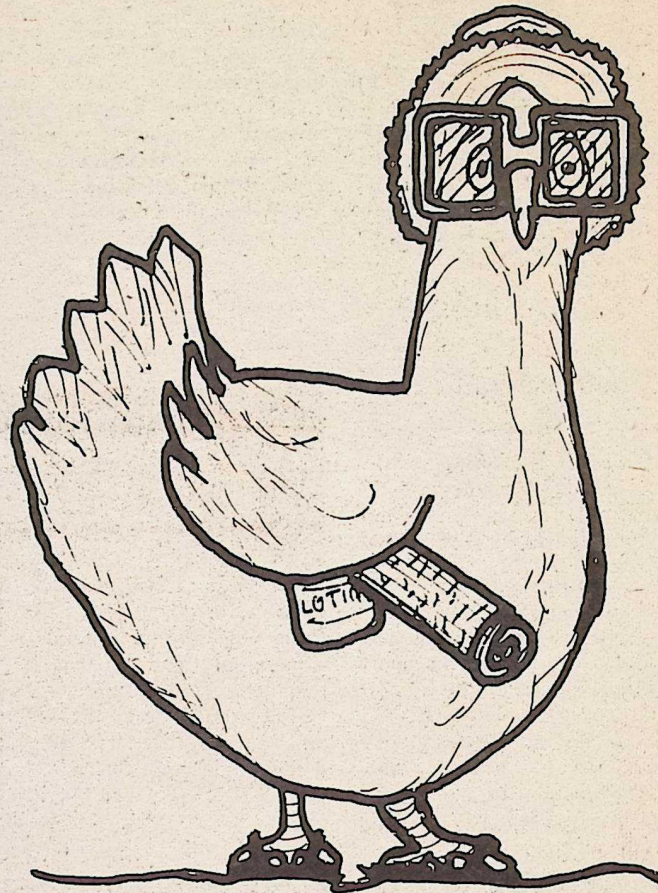
In early summer when new peas were plentiful, Aunt Olivia often made **Chicken and Peas in Sour Cream**; I use fresh peas when available and frozen ones at other times of the year.

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| 6 T. margarine | 4 T. chopped parsley |
| 1 3-lb. pkg. chicken legs & breasts | 1 C. sour cream |
| 1-1/2 lbs. small red potatoes | 1 t. thyme |
| salt and pepper | 1/2 lt. salt |
| 6 scallions, including tops | 1/4 t. pepper |
| 3 lbs. (or 2 10-oz. frozen) peas | |

Disjoint legs and divide breasts. Scrub potatoes thoroughly; do not peel. Melt margarine in large electric skillet; brown potatoes and chicken parts slowly on all sides. Season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle chicken pieces with lemon juice; reduce heat, cover pan, simmer 30 minutes. Meanwhile slice scallions on the diagonal into 1/4" pieces; chop parsley; combine with peas; add to chicken. Cover again and simmer ten minutes more until all are tender. Remove chicken and vegetables to a platter and keep warm. Pour off excess fat, leaving about two T. Stir sour cream and seasonings into pan drippings. Heat but do not boil. Pour gravy into bowl and let folks help themselves.

Zucchini squash, an easy-grow vegetable and a versatile one, is preferred, in the Lovell family, to yellow or summer squash. Either one, though, is super-delicious cooked in oil and lemon-flavored. Aunt Olivia prepared **Zucchini with Oil and Lemon** this way.

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| 4 zucchini (1-1/2 to 2 lbs.) | Salt and pepper to taste |
| 3 T. olive or corn oil | Juice of half a lemon. |



Trim ends from zucchini. If large, quarter lengthwise, then cut into 2-inch lengths; if small, half lengthwise before cutting into short lengths. Heat oil in skillet; add zucchini. Cook 15 minutes, shaking skillet and turning occasionally until squash is golden brown on all sides. Shake salt and pepper over squash; add lemon juice, and cover pan. Allow to steam five minutes. Vegetable should be crispy on the outside and tender, but not mushy, in the center. Serves six.

Cold soups are popular in many cultures and cuisines; some that come immediately to mind are gazpachos from Spain, borschts from the Russian steppes, and consomme and Vichyssoise from France. These soups refresh in hot weather and are, of course, nutritious.

Gazpacho, a popular Spanish soup, usually has a tomatoe base to which various other finely-chopped or pureed raw vegetables and herbs are added, together with bread, olive oil vinegar, and spices. Some potential ingredients include green peppers, onion, garlic, cucumbers, pimento, peas, parsley, and chives. Any or all may be incorporated in the soup prior to serving or may be passed separately so each diner may help himself to only those he prefers. In addition, vegetables, sliced hard-boiled eggs, cooked and shredded shrimp, crab, lobster, or baby squid are sometimes offered as additions to gazpacho.

When Aunt Olivia prepared it, she chopped each vegetable separately. When I make **Gazpacho**, I use a food processor or blender.

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| 1 can (46-oz.) tomatoe juce, iced |
| 3 large ripe tomatoes, coarsely chopped |
| 2 cucumbers, unpeeled if garden fresh, finely chopped |
| 3 T. chopped parsley |
| 3 cloves garlic, crushed |
| 1/2 medium green pepper, quartered |
| 1/2 medium onion, quartered |
| 1 T. prepared mustard |
| 1/4 C. olive oil |
| dash of Tabasco |
| 1/2 C. lemon juce |
| 1 t. salt |
| 1/4 t. fresh-ground black pepper |
| 3 slices whole wheat or oatmeal bread, frozen |

Pour tomatoe juce into a large gowl; add coarsely-chopped ripe tomatoes and finely-chopped cucumber, parsley, and crushed garlic. Process green pepper, onion, mustard, olive oil, Tabasco, lemon juce, salt and pepper in blender or food processor. Stir into tomatoe juce. Before rinsing blender jar, process frozen slices of bread until finely crumbed. Add to soup. Finally, process four ice cubes to clean bowl. Add to soup. Refrigerate until ready to serve (at least three hours). Pass bowls of chopped shrimp, shredded crab meat, diced lobster, or a small bowl of hard-boiled eggs pressed through a sieve and tossed with chopped parsley and chives for garnish.

Gazpacho's many versions depend, for the most part, on what happens to be available from the garden or the produce counter. radishes, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, and almost any left-over cooked vegetable may be included when processing in gredients. Some people substitute dry white wine for lemon juce. Some prefer vinegar.

The French call cold potato soup **Vichyssoise**. Aunt Olivia made it this way and I follow her rule and am pleased with the results.

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| 4 peeled boiled potatoes | 2 C. chicken stock |
| 1 medium onion | 2 T. butter |
| 4 leeks, sliced very thin | 2 T. flour |
| 1 C. celery, chopped fine | salt and pepper |
| 1 quart milk | finely chopped chives |

Peel and cube potatoes and boil in 2 Cups water together with sliced leeks, chopped celery, and quartered onion until soft (20 minutes). Drain in a sieve, reserving a cup of cooking water. While vegetables are still hot, rub them all through the sieve into one quart of heated (but not boiled) milk. Add reserved cooking water to milk. Bring chicken stock to boil, remove from heat. Melt butter, remove from heat, stir in flour and cook, stirring, until smooth; gradually add hot chicken stock. Stir and cook until it thickens. Combine milk and chicken stock mixtures in a large bowl and season to taste. Refrigerate until very cold; at least two hours. Sprinkle with chopped chives after ladling into individual soup bowls. Yield: about eight cups.

Serve Vichyssoise as a first course; follow with Chicken and Peas in Sour cream; top off the meal with Peach Shortcake and a choice of iced or hot coffee.

Bon appetit.