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A skilled chef I am not. But even as a self-proclaimed kitchen dunce, I've been amazed to discover how simple it is to prepare from scratch so many of the readymade items we buy from the store. Obviously things like cake mixes and pasta sauce *can* be made at home – although you may have gotten so used to buying those things that making them seems much more inconvenient than it actually is – but I've been surprised to discover that things like chocolate syrup and sour cream can be too!

Making homemade versions of your kitchen staples not only saves you money; it also eliminates many of the questionable ingredients that make those same items shelf-stable for long periods of time. Which means it's good for the wallet *and* your family's health.

I am a busy mom of four girls and one baby boy – who works full time *and* homeschools – so I'm not spending hours in the kitchen every day. But with a little pre-planning and a few handy kitchen items (see my favorites on page 83), most of these things can be made without sacrificing a lot of time. There's also something really empowering about watching your homemade mayonnaise emulsify and ladling your homemade spaghetti sauce into jars for future meals.

The more I do it, the more I enjoy making those things from scratch and knowing that my kids are learning how to make them as well.

taco/chili seasoning

time needed: < 5 minutes

ingredients:

- 1/4 cup chili powder
- 2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 4 teaspoons sea salt
- 4 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

directions:

Combine all ingredients in a jar with a tight lid. Shake until well mixed. Store in a cool, dry place.

to use:

- Use 2-1/2 tablespoons in place of a packet of taco or chili seasoning.
- Sprinkle on nachos with cheese or popcorn.

yield: 2/3 cups

shelf life: 6-12 months



EASY CHICKEN ENCHILADAS

ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup sour cream (see page 55)
- 2-1/2 tablespoons taco seasoning
- 10 soft taco shells
- 2 cups cooked shredded chicken
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

directions:

In a small saucepan, melt butter. Whisk in flour and cook for 1 minute. Whisk in broth and cook over medium heat until thick and bubbly. Stir in taco seasoning and sour cream. Turn heat to low and simmer.

In a small bowl, mix chicken and 1 cup cheese. Spoon mixture into the center of each tortilla and roll up burrito-style. Place a single layer in the bottom of a 9x13 pan and top with a small amount of sauce (just enough to wet the tops of the enchiladas). Add a second layer and cover with the remaining sauce. Top with 1 cup of cheese.

Bake at 350° F for 25 minutes.

butter

time needed: 15-20 minutes

ingredients:

- 2 cups heavy cream
- sea salt to taste

directions:

Combine heavy cream and salt in the mixing bowl of your stand mixer, food processor or blender.

Start mixer at a slow speed and work your way up to high to avoid splashing. Mix for approximately 10 minutes. Cream will form whipped cream, then stiff peaks, then become grainy. Eventually, it will separate into buttermilk and butter. Once the liquid forms and it starts to splatter, you're done.

Set a fine mesh strainer or cheese cloth over a bowl and transfer everything to the strainer. Knead the butter over the bowl until you think all of the buttermilk has drained into the bowl. Then rinse under cold water and repeat to remove any remaining buttermilk.

TIP: It's important to get as much of the buttermilk out as possible because it will go rancid quicker in the presence of buttermilk.

Transfer to a clean container with a tight lid and refrigerate.

variations:

After draining all of the buttermilk from the butter...

- Add 3 tablespoons honey and mix well for honey butter.
- Add 1 clove of garlic, 1/2 tablespoon fresh basil, 1 tablespoon fresh chives, 1 teaspoon fresh parsley (mince all herbs), 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice & 1/4 teaspoon sea salt and mix well for herb butter.

yield: 1/2 cup butter, 1 cup old-fashioned buttermilk

shelf life: 2 weeks in the refrigerator, 4 months in the freezer.



BUTTER: SALTED VERSUS UNSALTED

A stick of salted butter is 1/2 cup butter plus 1/4 teaspoon salt.

When your recipe calls for a certain type of butter -- salted or unsalted -- and you only have the other type in your fridge, it's easy to convert the recipe by adjusting the added salt.

Here's how:

If you need salted butter and only have unsalted, add an additional 1/4 teaspoon salt to your recipe.

If you need unsalted butter and only have salted, decrease the amount of salt in the recipe by 1/4 teaspoon.

If the recipe doesn't specify which type, use unsalted butter.

{poor man's} cobbler

time needed: 75 minutes

ingredients:

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup milk
- 1-1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 cups sliced fruit or pie filling

directions:

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Put stick of butter in a 9x13 pan and place in oven to melt.

In a medium bowl, mix flour, sugar, milk, baking powder and salt.

Pour batter on top of melted butter. Spoon fruit on top of the batter.

Return to oven and bake for 60 minutes until the cobbler is golden brown.

variations:

- For breakfast, cut sugar to 3/4 cup and use unsweetened fruit.
- Use self-rising flour and omit the baking powder.
- Try different fruits for a variety of flavorful cobblers!

yield: (1) 9x13 cobbler

