



# MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

Microwaved stuffed green peppers make an ideal entree for autumn meals. Because of quick cooking, the beautiful bell peppers stay vibrant green and fresh-tasting.

Instead of banking for an hour, turning olive green and losing flavor, stuffed peppers microwave in 10 to 12 minutes, keeping their garden-fresh looks and taste.

Some cooks just cut off the top fourth of the pepper and fill the rest with stuffing. I've always liked to cut peppers in half and mound stuffing into each half. I don't know why I do it that way — perhaps because my Mom always did — but I find my method has advantages for microwave cooking. The smaller size means peppers cook faster and more evenly.

Once the peppers are stuffed, arrange them in a ring-shape in the baking dish for the most even cooking. Rotate the dish once during cooking.

Use waxed paper as a cover with hamburger-stuffed peppers. Waxed paper holds in some heat for even cooking, yet allows some moisture to escape for a more baked result. Notice that for Chicken and Rice Stuffed Peppers (below), plastic wrap is the cover. That's because the instant rice must steam in order to tenderize.

If you prefer more tender green peppers in Pizza Meatloaf Stuffed Peppers, precook peppers according to directions following the recipe. Notice the plastic wrap cover for precooking — which

holds in heat and steams the peppers. You'll find the peppers in the rice-stuffed recipe are more tender and will not need precooking.

## Pizza Meatloaf Stuffed Peppers

- 3 medium green bell peppers
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- ½ cup oatmeal (not instant)
- ½ cup chopped fresh tomato
- ¼ cup finely chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons milk
- ½ teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon salt (optional)
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- Shredded Mozzarella cheese

Cup peppers in half crosswise; remove core and seeds. Place peppers — cut side up — in a circle, with center open, in microwave-safe 8-inch round or square dish. Set aside.

Combine ground beef, oatmeal, tomato, onion, milk, Italian seasoning, chili powder salt and garlic powder. Mix well. Fill pepper shells with meat mixture, mounding mixture on top. Cover with wax paper. Microwave (High) 9 to 12 minutes, rotating dish once. Sprinkle with cheese; cover with plastic wrap. (Cheese won't stick to the plastic wrap.) Let stand 5 minutes. Makes 3 to 6 servings.

Note: Peppers will be tender-crisp. For tender peppers, place peppers, unstuffed, in cooking dish; cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes or until tender-crisp. Add meat mixture and continue as above.

Each serving — 1/6th of recipe: 205 calories, 17g protein, 12g fat,

8g carbohydrate, 73mg sodium, 52mg cholesterol.

## Chicken and Rice Stuffed Peppers

- 2 large green bell peppers
- 1 can (6¾ oz.) chunk chicken or turkey, undrained
- 1 package (4.5 oz.) chicken-flavored rice mix\*
- 1 cup hot water
- Grated Parmesan cheese
- Paprika

Cut peppers in half crosswise; remove core and seeds. Place peppers — cut side up — in a circle, with center open, in microwave-safe 8-inch round or square dish. Set aside.

In a large bowl, using a fork, break undrained chicken into bite-size pieces. Add rice mix (with seasoning packet) and hot water; stir well. Spoon mixture into each pepper half, dividing mixture (solids and liquid) evenly among peppers. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 9 to 12 minutes, rotating dish once. Let stand 5 minutes. Sprinkle with Parmesan; then with paprika. Makes 2 to 4 servings.

\*Choose a quick-cooking rice mix that makes 4 servings and microwaves in no more than 15 minutes. Use about ¾ of the water called for on package directions and microwave slightly less time than package directs.

Note: Peppers will be fork-tender after cooking.

Each serving — ¼ of recipe: 243 calories, 17g protein, 9g fat, 25g carbohydrate, 843mg (sodium amount depends mostly on rice mix), 34mg cholesterol.

## Questions and Answers

Q. Can you tell me how to change larger recipes to two servings?

A. It's easiest to explain using a four-serving recipe as an example. Divide ingredients in half. Use a smaller cooking dish, especially for delicate foods, foods that can't be stirred, and for micro-baking. In a too-large dish, food spreads out and is likely to overcook on corners. Use same power setting and kind of cover as in original recipe.

To figure cooking time, divide the *minimum* four-serving cooking time in half. Total microwave time is usually half or slightly more than half of the original *minimum* time. There are exceptions: some foods, like rice or pasta, which need time to tenderize, may take about three-fourths of the original (four-serving) cooking time.

The first time you try a recipe, microwave slightly less than you think you should. Stop to stir, re-arrange or rotate slightly more than an original recipe. Be sure to write the cooking time and any special directions by your original recipe.

Q. How do you melt chocolate? I'm not sure what I'm doing wrong, but it doesn't seem to melt right for me.

A. The kind of chocolate can make a difference. I'm assuming you used chocolate chips or candy coating. If either are overheated they become stiff and impossible to work with. Adding a small amount of shortening (*not* butter, margarine or liquid) and stirring

can often restore the chocolate to a workable state.

If you add liquid to chocolate or if the dish for melting or spoon for stirring are moist, the chocolate will harden.

"Real" chocolate chips melt well, but imitation ones don't melt in the microwave. However, you can use part real and part imitation chips or you can melt imitation with other ingredients that melt well alone — such as peanut butter or butter.

## Questions for Joyce?

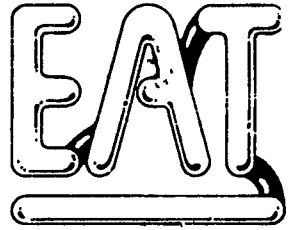
Do you have a question about microwave cooking? Send it to Microwave Minutes, % Extra Newspaper Features, P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, MN 55903. Please include a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope.

Recipes in this column are tested in 600- and 650-watt microwave ovens. With an oven of different wattage output, timings may need slight adjustment.

Joyce Battcher is an independent home economist microwave specialist. She is author of "Microwave Family Favorites" and editor of "A Batch of Ideas" newsletter.

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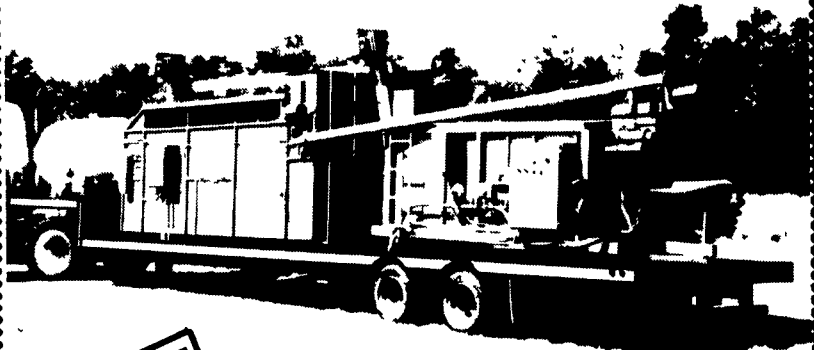
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