

MICROWAVE MINUTES

By **JOYCE BATTCHER**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Joyce Battcher is on vacation. This is a repeat from past readers' favorites.

You may be surprised that your microwave can cook Chinese style. Whether you celebrate Chinese New Year or not, you'll like the speed and convenience of stir-frying and steaming in your microwave oven.

Microwave stir-frying is neater and easier than using a wok on the range-top. There's no spattering oil, no standing over the hot flame, and less stirring. Cooking time is

about the same.

For micro-stir-frying, use a microwave-safe two- to three-quart casserole. Marinate meat or poultry; then cover with waxed paper and microwave. Stir in and microwave long-cooking vegetables; add quicker-cooking vegetables toward end of cooking. No cooking oil is needed.

Cook firm vegetables first — such as broccoli stems, cauliflower flowerettes, carrot rounds, onion slices and celery. More tender vegetables are added next — like shredded cabbage, snow peas

(edible pea pods), broccoli flowerettes and zucchini slices. Fresh vegetables that are cut into shreds (thin matchsticks or paper-thin) and canned or frozen vegetables need only brief cooking — usually only 30 to 90 seconds of heating — so should be added toward end of cooking.

Do not overcook. Stop microwaving before vegetables are the doneness you prefer. In micro-stir-frying, vegetables are usually cooked loosely covered with waxed paper to give a tender-crisp texture, rather than covered with plastic wrap or a tight-fitting casserole lid as in steaming.

Micro-steaming of vegetables, poultry or fish can be done on a rack over hot water, with a tight cover. The water slows cooking. In some special microwave steamers, a metal cover protects food from fast-cooking microwaves and boils the water to create steam.

When microwaving vegetables in a tightly covered container with liquid — as in Sweet-Sour Carrots (below) — vegetables are actually

steaming without the bother of a rack and longer cooking time. For Steamed Pork Buns, simply microwaving buns on a flat tray works well. Microwaving, like steaming, is moist heat, so the buns are cooked but not browned, like the traditional Chinese-style delicacies.

For a Chinese meal, prepare Steamed Pork Buns, but cook them right before serving for an appetizer. Cook rice conventionally. Microwave the carrots and let them stand, covered, while preparing the beef dish.

Chinese Beef With Oyster Sauce

1 pound boneless beef sirloin or top round steak, cut in 2x½ x¼ -inch strips
1 medium onion, thinly sliced
1 clove garlic, minced
¼ -inch slice fresh ginger, minced, or ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
3 tablespoons oyster sauce*
½ pound broccoli: stems, thinly sliced, and flowerettes, cut into 1-inch pieces

Hot cooked rice

In microwave-safe 2-quart casserole, stir together beef strips, onion, garlic, ginger and oyster sauce. Let stand about 10 minutes at room temperature. Refrigerate if necessary to marinate longer.

Cover casserole with waxed paper. Microwave (High) 2½ to 3½ minutes or until beef is rare to medium-rare, stirring after each 1½ minutes. Stir in broccoli stems. Re-cover and microwave (High) 1 to 1½ minutes, stirring after each 30 seconds. When done, beef is the doneness you prefer and broccoli flowerettes are bright green. (Beef is most tender when cooked to medium-rare or medium.) Serve on rice. Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Each serving — ¼ of recipe, without rice: 278 calories, 26g protein, 15g fat, 7g carbohydrate, 793mg sodium, 77mg cholesterol.

* Oyster sauce is found by Oriental foods in large supermarkets. If you can't find oyster sauce, you may substitute 2 tablespoons dark soy sauce, 1 teaspoon instant beef bouillon granules, 1 teaspoon cornstarch, and 1 teaspoon sugar. Taste will not be exactly the same as when using oyster sauce.

Sweet-Sour Carrots

4 carrots, slant-cut into thin rounds
2 tablespoons chicken broth or water
2 tablespoons vinegar
3-4 teaspoons sugar
¼ teaspoon cornstarch
Dash garlic powder

Stir together all ingredients in microwave-safe 1-quart casserole. Cover tightly with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 3 to 4 minutes, stirring after each minute, until carrots are just about done and sauce is thick. Let stand, covered, about 5 minutes. Makes 4 servings.

Each serving: 40 calories, 1g protein, 0 fat, 10g carbohydrate, 53mg sodium, 0 cholesterol.

Steamed Pork Buns

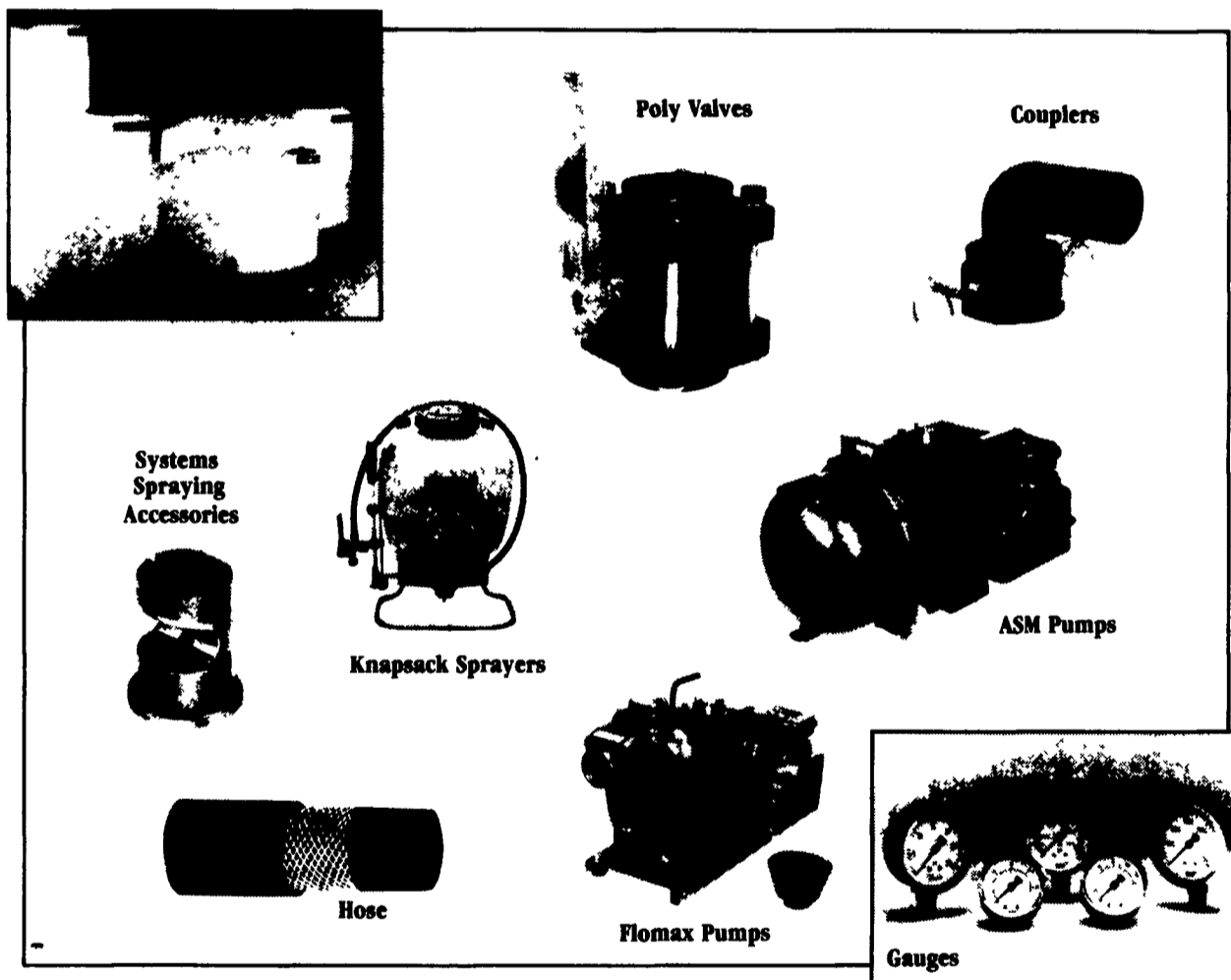
¼ pound unseasoned ground lean pork
½ cup finely chopped onion
½ cup drained and finely chopped canned water chestnuts
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon packed brown sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch
2 cans (8 ounces each) refrigerated biscuits

Place ground pork and onion in microwave-safe 1-quart measure or casserole. Microwave (High) 2½ to 3½ minutes, stirring once, or until pork is no longer pink. Drain if a large amount of fat is present. Stir in water chestnuts; set aside. In small dish stir together soy sauce, brown sugar and cornstarch until smooth; stir into pork mixture. Microwave (High) 45 to 60 seconds or until thick. Chill well.

With lightly oiled fingers, flatten each biscuit into a 3- to 4-inch diameter round. Place a scant tablespoon of pork mixture in center; gather edges together and pinch to seal dough. Place filled-side down on microwave-safe tray, arranging 10 buns in a circle with the center open. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) 2½ to 3½ minutes, rotating dish once, until buns no longer look and feel doughy. Remove to a wire rack. Repeat with remaining pork filling and biscuits. Serve warm. Makes 20 buns (20 appetizer or snack servings or about 5 main-dish servings).

Each bun: 88 calories, 3g protein, 4g fat, 11g carbohydrate, 210mg sodium, 5mg cholesterol.

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